Honors Undergraduate Theses   UCF Theses and Dissertations

2017

Faith in a Galaxy Far, Far Away: Star Wars as Religion

Darryl B. Hunter II
University of Central Florida

Recommended Citation

Hunter, Darryl B. II, "Faith in a Galaxy Far, Far Away: Star Wars as Religion" (2017). *Honors Undergraduate Theses*. 168.
https://stars.library.ucf.edu/honorstheses/168

FAITH IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY:
STAR WARS AS RELIGION

by

DARRYL B. HUNTER

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the Honors in the Major in Religious Studies
in the College of Arts and Humanities
and in the Burnett Honors College
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term, 2017

Thesis Chair: Dr. Sabatino DiBernardo

Abstract

Within the past three decades, Star Wars has become nothing short of a household name. The millions of dollars gained from the films and various products, as well as the enjoyment and enthusiasm generated among fans, shows that Star Wars' value and significance in the realm of entertainment is substantial.

In addition to this value, there are also many religious and mythological elements that are embedded within each of the movies. However, these elements do not carry the same prominence or interest that the plotline has with the audience. In an interview, Lucas stated that it was not his intent to use Star Wars to create a new religion or ideology. Nevertheless, the movie series has raised questions regarding its ability to attain such a devoted following. Consequently, the thesis will look into the dynamic between authorial intent and reader response.

In addition, this thesis will investigate the religious themes and mythological elements of the Star Wars series and use this analysis to corroborate the position that Star Wars both resembles traditional religion and functions as religion for the fans. This thesis will analyze the religious elements and myths that are embedded in the general story, as well as those that are unique to the individual movies, by highlighting a family resemblance/functionalist approach to religion that focuses on not only the resemblances to traditional religion but also the religious effects that Star Wars has on

its fans and society; namely, moral issues and the sense of meaning and belonging it

inculcates among the fan base.

Dedication

To my family. Thank you for your love, your encouragement, and your wisdom to help

me be who I am today.

Acknowledgments

Firstly, I would like to thank my thesis chair, Dr. Sabatino DiBernardo. He stuck with

me every step of the way. I am grateful for his sincerity, patience, and going above and

beyond to help me succeed. I could not have asked for a better thesis chair.

I would like to thank my other committee members, Dr. Ann Gleig and Dr. John

Lynxwiler, for their insightful feedback and their willingness to help guide me

throughout this process. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Vanessa McRae and

the Burnett Honors College for providing the worthwhile opportunity to undertake

Honors in the Major. Finally, I would like to thank God and His grace for making it

possible for me to be in the wonderful position that I am in.

Table of Contents

Introduction

According to religious studies scholar Jonathan Z. Smith, religion "is an anthropological not a theological category" and "is a category imposed from the outside on some aspect of native culture."[1] He echoes this sentiment saying:

> Religion is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define. It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as "language" plays in linguistics or "culture" plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon.[2]

Smith notes that there is a possibility that there are different root words that religion derives from. He states that it is possible that the word "religion" "stems from the root *leig meaning 'to bind' rather than from roots meaning 'to reread' or 'to be careful'…"[3] In addition, the modern usage of the term is not related to much of the root words' usage from the eras before the Protestant Reformation. As a result, the exact etymology for the modern form of the word religion is unknown. Smith is not saying that religion is impossible to define, but rather it can simply be defined in many different ways.[4] Consequently, there has not been a consensus reached for a universal definition of religion, and as a result, the numerous theoretical approaches to studying religion have

---

[1] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies,* ed. Mark Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004), 269.

[2] Ibid., 281-282.

[3] Ibid., 269.

[4] Ibid., 281.

produced very diverse definitions of the term. Some of these approaches, such as the sociological approach, have been instrumental in creating definitions of religion that are inclusive of popular culture.

There seems to be little doubt among academia that popular culture has the ability to influence the thoughts and actions of people that engage themselves in it. While the stories have captured the minds and hearts of the audiences, the religiosity of Star Wars is lost on the majority of its followers. Although much research has been conducted by scholars on the religious elements of the movies, as well as the connections and the parallels that they have with institutional religions, not much has been conducted when it comes to the effects that Star Wars has on its viewers and followers. Moreover, these analyses do not include the religious elements and instances that are present in recent releases of the series.

In addition to the beliefs of the scholars, the creator of this successful series appears to agree with them. In an interview conducted by Bill Moyers, George Lucas responds to the question of whether or not he sees Star Wars as being religious, saying:

> I don't see "Star Wars" as profoundly religious. I see "Star Wars" as — as taking all of the issues that religion represents and trying to distill them down into a — a more modern and more easily accessible construct that people can grab onto to accept the fact that there is a greater mystery out there. When I was 10 years old, I asked my mother — I said, 'Well, if there's only one God, why are there so many religions?' And over the years — I've been pondering that question ever since. And it would seem to me that the conclusion that I've come to is that all the religions are true, they just see a different part of the elephant. A religion is basically a — a container for faith. Faith is the — the glue that holds us together as a society. Faith in our — in our culture, our — our world, our — you know,

whatever it is that we're trying to hang on to is a very important part of, I think, allowing us to — to remain stable. Remain balanced.[5]

However, as the works of scholars have pointed out, these religious elements and its effects are present, regardless of Lucas' intent. Therefore, this thesis will serve the purpose of substantiating the claim that Star Wars may be viewed, interpreted, or understood as religion because it functions as one, as well as its resemblance to traditional religions. This will be done by engaging in a family resemblance/functionalist analysis of the movies, as well as building upon previous studies on the topic.

Literature Review

The thesis will rely on the use of multiple sources for the explanation of the elements and concepts that will be elucidated. Some of these sources will be used as the backbone for the thesis. Much of the material for the groundwork of the thesis will come from John McDowell's *The Gospel According to Star Wars: Faith, Hope and the Force*. Here he analyzes the first six Star Wars movies from a Christian perspective. In his analysis, McDowell cites a quote from a George Lucas collaborator: Gary Kurtz. He said, "What you get out of it is what you bring to the cinema, and you read into the

---

[5] George Lucas, Interviewed by Bill Moyers. "Cinema: Of Myth and Men." *Time*, April 26, 1999.

thing the things you want to read into it."[6] Kurtz is saying that the lessons learned or the insights gained are determined by the individual, the expectations that the individual has for the movie, and the response that the individual has towards said movie.[7]

This rhetoric from Kurtz confirms that the effects of Star Wars are dependent on the response from the audience, rather than any authorial intent on the part of Lucas. McDowell acknowledges that Eastern religions have had a degree of influence on Star Wars. However, he says that the elements of the Eastern religions should not be overemphasized, in order to grasp the Christian images. Consequently, the religious elements from the Eastern religions are not explored, and the commentary of the religious parallels and religious elements can appear to be suppressed and incomplete.

This is where Matthew Bortolin's *The Dharma of Star Wars* picks up the slack, although he appears to do it in a slightly different manner. Instead of using elements of a particular traditional religion to explain movie concepts, as McDowell does, Bortolin uses the movie concepts as a means of explaining the elements of a traditional religion. He uses the philosophical and religious elements of Star Wars to explain nirvana, the Dharma, mindfulness meditation, and other Buddhist concepts.

---

[6] John C. McDowell, *The Gospel According to Star Wars: Faith, Hope and the Force*, (Louisville: Westminister John Knox Press, 2007), 1.

[7] Jane P. Hopkins, *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), xi-x. This list of qualifiers shows what encompasses the reader-response criticism. Reader-response criticism focuses exclusively on the audience and its ability to add meaning to a work, in contrast to the placement of any focus on the intent of the work's author.

In his book, *Studying Religion*, Russell McCutcheon centers on approaches to defining and classifying religion. The three main approaches that he focuses on are the essentialist, functionalist, and family resemblance approaches. The essentialist approach maintains that classifying a concept or a phenomenon into a certain group can only be done if that concept or phenomenon contains all of the characteristics associated with that group.[8] In the case of religion, an essentialist would argue that there are many different characteristics that align with religions. However, these characteristics are considered to be secondary and non-sufficient for classification. Conversely, McCutheon states that there are "primary characteristics, possibly only one (its so-called essence or substance), that encompass all the religions of the world within one category."[9] Therefore, it only classifies something as religion if it carries all of the primary, essential traits of religion. The Functionalist approach classifies something as a religion if it performs functions similar to those performed by conventionally recognized religions.[10] Finally, the family resemblance approach is used to find middle ground between essentialism and functionalism. This approach claims that concepts or phenomena cannot and do not need to carry all of the characteristics of a group. Instead, allowing classification into a certain group is a "matter of degree, a matter of

[8] Russell T. McCutcheon, Studying Religion: An Introduction (Oakville: Equinox Publishing, 2007), 90.

[9] Ibid., 90.

[10] Ibid., 93

'more or less.'"[11] In other words, a concept or phenomena does not need to have all of the characteristics of religion in order to be classified as one. Only some traits need to be present, and they can vary in degree. McCutcheon points out that it is very difficult to classify or define anything, let alone religion, in a way that is neutral and objective. The reason for this is that classification is "a social act."[12] The definitions of a word and its classifications can change, depending on the situation or the agenda associated with defining the word.

The definition of words, as well as the changes in their meaning, is discussed in Dan Stiver's *The Philosophy of Religious Language: Sign, Symbol and Story*. In his book, Stiver attempts to provide an overview of the perspective and approaches used for the sub-discipline of the philosophy of religious language. While the primary focus is on religious language, it should be noted that these approaches could apply to language in general. He acknowledges that it would be very difficult to do a full-length study of each perspective in his short book.[13] Therefore, he shaped his book to be a map; he wants to guide the reader through the basics of each perspective, so that they can eventually research each perspective on their own.

---

[11] Ibid., 60-61.

[12] Ibid., 13.

[13] Dan R. Stiver, The Philosophy of Religious Language: Sign, Symbol and Story (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), x.

In explaining Ludwig Wittgenstein's view on the meaning of words, Stiver says that the naming of a word "only has meaning in a certain context."[14] The meaning could change based on the context. The use of this perspective would have a profound impact on the way that definitions are given and classified.

One attempt to classify popular culture as religion is found in Pete Ward's *Gods Behaving Badly: Media, Religion, and Celebrity Culture*, and his use of the concept of para-religion pertaining to celebrity culture. However, Ward tries to avoid calling celebrity culture a conventional religion. He states:

> … the treatment of celebrity culture as a religious tradition, or indeed as a replacement for religious tradition, does not simply do a disservice to religion-it may well also run the risk not only of misrepresenting the lived experience of celebrity worship but of failing to see the religious significance of celebrity.[15]

Para-religion is used to draw attention to religious parallels, without claiming that popular culture phenomena are religious in the conventional sense. With this concept, Ward furthers the argument of a cultural production possessing the ability to be either a kind of religion or have religious elements.[16]

In addition to Ward, Rupert Till looks at popular culture from a functionalist perspective. In his book *Pop Cult: Religion and Popular Music*, Till wants to advance the

---

[14] Ibid, 60.

[15] Pete Ward, *Gods Behaving Badly: Media, Religion, and Celebrity Culture* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 80.

[16] Ibid., 57-58.

argument of classifying these productions as "cults" or new religious movements.[17] He

refers to these productions as cults "as a joyous affirmation of their glorious

transgression of all those things that those who would use the word cult negatively

hold dear."[18] Till is using his book as a platform to call out the hypocrisy of those who

criticize cults, as well as the behaviors and actions therein. He claims that under their

own definition for cult, traditional religions would be classified as cults, due to many of

the beliefs and actions that they exhibit.[19] In addition, instead of attributing the success

of cults to individuals seeing them as a fulfillment of an individual's needs, Till

attributes their success more so to the failure of traditional religion to meet the needs of

individuals, as well as the failure to maintain relevancy. Till addresses the question of

how facets of popular culture are like religion. However, his argument is more

interested in the similarities between popular culture and cults.

Ward is in favor of recognizing religious elements in popular culture, and Till

recognizes the possibility of using the functionalist approach for popular culture.

However, neither author has this approach as the central focus of their argument. One

author, however, frames this premise as his main argument. In *Film as Religion: Myths,*

Morals, and Rituals, John Lyden advances the case of film constituting religion. He

---

[17] Rupert Till, *Pop Cult: Religion and Popular Music* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010), 12-13. As a way of keeping the focus on popular culture, Till refers to new religious movements as pop cults. He uses the term "cult" to recontextualize its conventional meaning and to redeem it from its negative cultural connotation.

[18] Ibid., 1.

[19] Ibid.

includes Star Wars as a part of his rhetoric on the science fiction genre. While he touches on the mythological inspirations of Star Wars, as well as a couple of religious elements within the films, he avoids going into significant detail about the topic. Nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that his focus is on film as a whole, instead of an analysis on a particular movie or genre.

Methodology

The thesis will use Lyden's approach to Star Wars and movies as religion as a point of reference and as a means to further develop my functionalist reading of Star Wars. In congruence with Smith's commentary on scholars being able to define religion in multiple ways, the author of this thesis will provide a stipulative definition for the term "religion." For the sake of this thesis, religion will be defined as a set of beliefs and practices that provides an individual or group with a path to the transcendent by giving them a sense of morality, meaning, and purpose. In conjunction with using Smith's argument to provide a definition of religion, this thesis will also use Smith's argument in defense of using the term "religion" to describe Star Wars. To accomplish this, the body of the thesis will be divided into four main sections, with multiple subsections for each one. The first section will focus on the religious and mythological elements that have been manifested into general ideas and plot points. These elements are present within each of the movies. An example of these elements is the Force and its ability to be manifested as a wieldable power being one of the core principles of the series. Due to

the first section focusing exclusively on the general religious themes, it will provide the foundational work for what will be explicated in the second section.

The second section will use the family resemblance approach to focus on the religious and mythological elements, instances, and parallels that are present within specific movies. Using this approach will highlight the characteristics of these religious elements and themes, as well as the resemblance that they have to traditional religions. Many of the examples of the religious themes in Star Wars are exclusive to certain movies. While the research of McDowell will provide a sufficient background in this area, it will also be essential to go through the movies themselves. This is due to uncovering potential elements that may have not been covered by McDowell. Certain events that occur within the movies will be analyzed for the parallels that they may contain concerning events throughout history that are inseparably linked to certain religious groups. For instance, the execution of Order 66 in *Revenge of the Sith* parallels the Jewish Holocaust. The fictional recreation in Star Wars of the historical reasons and circumstances of the Holocaust will be explored.

The third section will focus on the effects that these elements have outside of the story. With the popularity of Star Wars, the effects of these elements would be impactful on not only the fan base but also society as a whole. Aside from its popularity in terms of entertainment, through its influence, Star Wars has been able to give individuals a sense of purpose, as well as moral and religious concepts that they can apply to their

own lives. Effects such as these suggest a functionalist parallel in terms of the religiosity found in both institutional religion and popular culture productions.

The final section will take the analysis of the elements, as well as their effects, in order to make the case for classifying Star Wars as religion; in addition, the furthering of this case will use the work of Smith to convey that Star Wars can be classified as religion, due to its functionality as one and its resemblance to traditional religious belief systems. There are various approaches that are used by scholars to determine if certain productions should be classified as religion and how they should be classified. Based on the aforementioned approaches to classification, this thesis will use a combination of the family resemblance approach and the functionalist approach as a means of classifying Star Wars as religion. The conclusion of this section will address the authority of the author and power of the reader's response, as well as the balance between the two when it involves the interpretation and meaning of a work.

Author(ity) on Interpretation

There is one crucial issue that ties itself with the problem of religious language and classification in the areas of interpretation and meaning. Nealon and Giroux say that "…authors may or may not intend for you to perform a certain reading of their work (to 'get' a certain 'point' out of it), but there's absolutely no way to guarantee the

11

reception of that message."[20] In other words, due to the subjective nature of meaning itself, there is no way for the author to force the reader to receive a particular meaning or message from a literary work. Nevertheless, it is also imperative to show that the author's contributions to meaning is not useless, and the reader is also not delegated to being the sole authority on a work's meaning.

The Intent of the Author

Once an author finishes a literary work, regardless of their intent, the meaning and interpretation of the work is up to the reader, but only to a certain point. While this means that the author does not have an edge over the reader in the area of meaning, this is not grounds to completely refute the meaning put forth by the author. Instead, this provides a platform for the interpretations put forth by both the author and the reader to be given the same level of credence.

Historically, the author was treated as the gurantor of meaning for a work. However, the practicality of this notion is lacking. A reader will interpret a work based on their own experiences, or lack thereof, as well as their own worldview. The author does not have the power to stop this from happening. However, Nealon and Giroux see this as a positive. They say that the author's inability to enforce meaning is "an opportunity to free up the multiplicity of meanings in and around a text. Once the

---

[20] Jeffrey Nealon and Susan Giroux, *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences*. 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 16.

author's privilege has been debunked, meaning is then no longer *found* but rather *produced*."[21] In creating a work, the author gives the reader an opportunity to stimulate their thought process and come to their own conclusions. Once this notion surrounding meaning takes shape and is free from the chains of authorial intent, the reader can use not only the author's intentions but also the historical and cultural contexts surrounding the work as a way of finding how meaning was produced in said work.[22]

The Response of the Reader

Ultimately, recognizing the historical and cultural contexts of a work, as well as recognizing the power that a reader has in the area of interpretation, dismantles the notion of authorial intent being the dominant force in determining literary meaning. By no longer designating the author as the sole authority of a literary work, that work can be challenged and readers can be free to engage in literary discourse. In spite of this, this is not giving a greenlight to shifting complete authority from the author to the reader.

Nealon and Giroux warn that placing ultimate interpretive authority on the reader would lead to interpretation taking precedence over "facts." As a result, the reader would believe that their personal opinions would entitle them to their own facts. Similarly, Obi-Wan told Luke: "Many of the truths that we cling to, depend greatly on

---

[21] Ibid., 17.

[22] Ibid., 17-18.

our own point of view."[23] Instead of clinging to personal opinion, Nealon and Giroux say, "Reading or interpretation is not primarily a matter of forming or reinforcing personal opinions but rather a process of negotiation among contexts."[24] In other words, neither the author nor the reader has ultimate authority on a literary work. There has to be balance between the interpretation by the reader and accounting for the contexts and facts laid out by the author. This concept of authority is not limited to literary works, but it can also be used in other areas of the arts, including film.

Once again, while Lucas' original meaning for Star Wars cannot be completely disregarded, he is not the ultimate authority when it comes to the meaning of Star Wars. However, it is through his creation of the story and showing it to the public that Star Wars is given the opportunity to carry meaning for certain individuals and groups. For them, Star Wars can function as religion, because they identify with some concepts of the movie that are based on the historical events and cultural concepts that the movie encompasses. This, combined with Lucas's presentation of the movie series, gives them the opportunity and the platform to be affected on a religious level.

---

[23] Richard Marquand, *Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi* (1983).

[24] Nealon and Giroux, *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences*, 23.

Conclusion

It is not the aim of this thesis to be only an analysis of Star Wars' religious and mythological elements and their resemblance to traditional religions. Through Star Wars, the issue raised concerning the functionalist view of religion is a byproduct of the effects felt by the audience, regardless of any authorial intent on the part of George Lucas. Therefore, it is the goal of this thesis to use these issues in order to produce a theoretical explanation for the religious effects that Star Wars has on its followers, as well as provide some contribution to the way that the relationship between popular culture and religion is perceived. In doing so, this thesis can serve as a foundation for providing further sociological research on how Star Wars functions religiously for fans.

The Core Religious Themes and Myths in Star Wars

As consistent with the majority of movie franchises, there are themes and myths that are considered to be unique within a certain franchise. As the Star Wars franchise has grown over the decade, it has shown that it is no exception in this regard. While certain plot points in Star Wars are only used in specific situations, others are considered to be essential for maintaining the integrity of the story. As a result, these themes and concepts are present throughout the entirety of the Star Wars series. Due to the integral role that these themes and concepts have in this series, it is imperative to explore these in some detail as they relate to this thesis.

In addition to the influence of Eastern and Western religions on Star Wars, much of the inspiration for the core of the Star Wars series comes from mythology. In his interview with Bill Moyers, George Lucas declares Joseph Campbell to be his mentor and that the inspiration for many of Star Wars' themes came about from the mythology that Campbell studied. The subsequent influence of this mythology contributes not only to some of the integral plot elements but also some of the dynamics that are commonplace for the relationships between characters within the series.

The Monomyth

Joseph Campbell developed a pattern that is one the most common patterns used in stories and film. It is called "The Hero's Journey" or monomyth. Much of Star Wars'

plot elements and relationship dynamics between characters come from the monomyth. According to the monomyth, whoever the hero or heroes may be, the story of which they are a part of follows a similar pattern. The hero leaves their mundane life, in favor of going on an adventure. The hero is engulfed in a crisis, where they are victorious at the conclusion of it. Once the crisis is over, the hero returns to where their journey began, with their life forever changed.[25] This pattern has been used not only in folk mythology but also in Buddhist legends and Biblical narratives.

An example that Campbell gives comes from the Buddha's journey towards enlightenment. For much of his life, the Buddha lived a luxurious lifestyle. Ultimately, he decides to leave his dull life and confront the realities of life. He became a renunciate. While he surpassed his masters in their practices, he was not able to achieve liberation. So, he became an ascetic and lived their practices to the extreme but to no avail. One day, while under the Bodhi Tree, he accepted a young woman's offer of rice-milk. He was determined not to leave that spot until he reached enlightenment. There are numerous accounts for the Buddha's path to enlightenment. Still, a popular account involves the Buddha going through three stages. First, he received knowledge of all of his past lives. Secondly, he saw the Samsara (the continuous cycle of life, death, and

---

[25] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero of a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 23.

rebirth). Lastly, the final stage was temptation from the demon Mara. He overcame them all and was finally able to achieve enlightenment[26]

With the legend of the Buddha in mind, there are some differences between the application of the monomyth to his enlightenment and its normal application to legends and myths. With the Buddha, no outside evil force facilitates his call to adventure. Nevertheless, with the Buddha's journey from a mundane lifestyle towards enlightenment, his quest is a prominent example that Campbell uses in the explanation of the monomyth pattern.[27]

Since George Lucas greatly admired the work of Campbell, it is no surprise that Lucas used this pattern for Star Wars. Lucas used the pattern as a template for the story of the Original trilogy. The hero, Luke Skywalker, leaves his mundane life on the desert planet of Tatooine, in response to the call of adventure from Obi-wan Kenobi. Luke has to contend with multiple crises, since he accepted the call to action. Ranging from Imperial fighters, to the Death Star, Darth Vader, he overcomes them all.

In a slight deviation from the pattern, Luke does not return to his home on Tatooine after the ordeal is over. He remains with his newfound friends and his sister.[28]

---

[26] Ann Gleig, "Life of the Buddha" (presentation, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, August 9, 2015).

[27] Campbell, *The Hero of a Thousand Faces*, 24-27.

[28] Marquand, *Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi* (1983).

Having learned the ways of the Force, Luke's life would never be the same. The monomyth is also used in the Prequel trilogy with Anakin Skywalker, as well as the Sequel trilogy following a similar pattern when it comes to the main heroine, Rey.[29] Regardless of the trilogy, Star Wars does not employ the use of every stage laid out by Campbell in the monomyth. Nevertheless, this is one of the many mythological narratives that Lucas used for Star Wars.

The Force

Another one of the integral plot points of the Star Wars series is the concept of the Force. In *A New Hope*, Obi-Wan Kenobi provides to Luke a generic description of the Force, as well as its purpose. He says that the Force is "an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us, penetrates us, and binds the galaxy together."[30] This definition of the Force is incredibly similar to the Hinduist belief of Brahman. According to Hinduism, Brahman is considered to be the cause of all existence and changes, as well as an entity that binds reality and all beings together.[31]

By the same token, the Apostle Paul describes a relationship with the Christian God as including "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in

---

[29] J.J. Abrams, *Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens* (2015).

[30] George Lucas, *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope* (1977).

[31] Jeaneane D. Fowler, *Perspectives of Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Hinduism*, (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), 53.

you all."[32] Similar to the Force, Paul describes God as someone that is in people, gives

people power, and works through these people. Paul furthers this sentiment by saying,

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries,

but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who

works all in all."[33] In the films, users of the force utilize different techniques, as well as

having different levels of power and different missions to carry out. The source of their

power and wisdom comes from the same place. They all operate under the same Force.

Along with the religious comparisons of Force, it can also be compared to a

mythological concept put forth by Campbell, called the World Navel. He says that the

World Navel is "the symbol of the conscious creation the mystery of the maintenance of

the world though continuous miracle of vivification which wells within all things."[34]

In spite of these definitions and comparisons to other concepts, the origins of the

concept of the Force appear to be very vague. The aforementioned examples have

shown that different facets of the concept itself, as well as how it is used in the movies,

have origins in numerous other religions and philosophies. One of the phrases that is

repeated throughout the series is "May the Force be with you." This phrase may have

---

[32] Eph. 6:4 (New King James Version).

[33] 1 Cor 12:4-6.

[34] Campbell, *The Hero of a Thousand Faces*, 32.

its origins in the popular Christian phrase "May God be with you." John Caputo talks

about the closeness of the phrase with Christian theology. He states:

> Had St. Paul been a character in Star Wars he would have expressed his love and admiration for Jesus not by calling him the coming Son of Man but by spreading the word around the galaxies that "the Force is with him" (Emmanuel, God with us).[35]

Along with this expressed sentiment about what Paul would have done, there was also

a discussion of an entity that is similar to the concept of the Force, but it was first

exhibited before Paul came on the scene. At the end of the Gospels, Jesus told his

disciples that he would send a comforter in his place. Similar to the Force, this

comforter would be used by the disciples as a guide and a helper for what they needed

to accomplish.[36]

This description of the Force has served as an anchor for its meaning within the

entirety of the series. Even though the movies have never gone as far as to depict or treat

the Force as a deity, this does not take away from the level of reverence and trust that

the characters have for it. Instead, the characters see it as a guide, as well as a source of

power for certain individuals. These individuals are more sensitive to the Force, and, as

a result, they are able to tap into the power that the Force provides.

---

[35] John D. Caputo, *On Religion*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 82-83.

[36] Acts 1:5-8.

Good vs. Evil

An additional example of the crucial components of Star Wars is the dynamic of good versus evil. The Jedi are depicted on the side of good, while the Sith are depicted on the side of evil. The Jedi seek to bring balance to the Force. To the average moviegoer, bringing balance to the Force would be equated to the side of good triumphing over the side of evil. Not only is this the case for the average moviegoer, but this was also the case for the Jedi Council belief in Anakin's purpose. In *Revenge of the Sith*, Jedi masters Yoda and Mace Windu are having doubts about Anakin's, as a result of the latter's actions and behavior.

Mace Windu: I don't trust him

Obi-Wan Kenobi: With all due respect master, is he not the Chosen One? Is he not to destroy the Sith and bring balance to the Force?

Windu: So the prophecy says.

Yoda: A prophecy, that misread could have been.[37]

This conversation shows that they believed that destroying the Sith for good would bring balance to the Force. Looking more closely, however, this is not what bringing balance to the Force means. Having a balance in the Force means that neither the Light side nor the Dark side has infinite and definite control over the interworkings of the Star Wars universe. Throughout the series, this act of balancing manifests itself

---

[37] George Lucas, *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith* (2005).

through the constant shifts in which side wields the most control and influence over the galaxy.

Prior to the events of *The Phantom Menace*, the Jedi were the ones who wielded this control. However, the events between the beginning of *The Phantom Menace* and the end of *Revenge of the Sith* show a gradual shift in power, from the Jedi to the Sith. In a similar manner, from the beginning of the events in *A New Hope* to the end of *Return of the Jedi* there is a gradual shift in power in favor of the Jedi. Events from the end of *Return of the Jedi* to the beginning of *The Force Awakens* speak of another shift from the Light Side to the Dark Side. All three shifts have come about in the process of a military conflict. With this dynamic, one side does not maintain control for too long, and there is a balance of power over a certain period of time.

This rendering of the Force is similar to the religious philosophy of Taoism. In Taoism, there is a distinct emphasis on balance. This concept is portrayed through the popular philosophy of Yin and Yang.[38] Yin is more peaceful, hidden and passive, while yang is more active, brash, and aggressive. With these two descriptions, along with the nature of the Jedi and the Sith, the Jedi align more with yin, and the Sith align more with yang.[39]

---

[38] Hsiao-Lan Hu and William C. Allen, *Taoism*, (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2005), 30-31

[39] Douglas Brode and Leah Deyneka, *Sex, Politics, and Religion in Star Wars: An Anthology*, (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 42.

Religio-Scientific Phenomena

There has been speculation that *Episode VIII- The Last Jedi* will explore the inner

working of the Force and how it is used. Unfortunately, by the time the movie is

released, this thesis will have long been completed. In the meantime, the brains behind

the first movie of the sequel trilogy gave his own insight on the Force and the meaning

that it carries in the movies.

In an interview for *The Force Awakens*, director J. J. Abrams noted that it was not

his desire to change some of the ideas that Lucas introduced to Star Wars. However, he

appears to want to use the movie as an opportunity to bring the series back to its

spiritual, mythological roots.

> To me, Star Wars was never about science fiction — it was a spiritual story. And
> it was more of a fairytale in that regard. For me when I heard Obi-Wan say that
> the Force surrounds us and binds us all together, there was no judgement about
> who you were. This was something that we could all access. Being strong with
> the Force didn't mean something scientific, it meant something spiritual. It meant
> someone who could believe, someone who could reach down to the depths of
> your feelings and follow this primal energy that was flowing through all of us. I
> mean, that's what was said in that first film![40]

Here, Abrams is emphasizing that strength in the Force does not come from Midi-

Chlorians or genetics. Instead, it is rooted in believing in its power.

---

[40] Peter Sciretta, "Why J.J. Abrams Believes the Force is More Inclusive Than Midi-Chlorians and Bloodlines," *SlashFilm*, December 7, 2015.

Caputo has also talked about the phenomena of science and science fiction being used in congruence with religion and spirituality. According to him:

> We live in a world where the most sophisticated scientific and high-tech achievements cohabit not only with traditional religion but also with the most literal-minded fundamentalism, New-Age spiritualties, and belief in all sorts of bizarre, hocus-pocus phenomena.[41]

Since science and technology were used as tools to facilitate the decline of religion, why was it not successful? He says that "the new technologies have simply created the opportunity for a new religious imagination."[42]

Not only does Caputo talk about this religio-scientiic phenomena, he applies it to Star Wars. One example is the lightsaber. Touted by Obi-Wan as "an elegant weapon for a more civilized age" it is one of the most advanced tools in the Star Wars universe.[43] However, the Jedi and the Sith use the Light side and the Dark side of the Force, respectively, to guide their movements and their strategies. The Force and technology do not undercut each other, but instead work with each other. Caputo states:

> In the case of *Star Wars*, science… is run together with mystical passion in such a way that it is hard to sort out what is science and what is myth, what is scientific

---

[41] Caputo, *On Religion*, 70.

[42] Ibid., 78.

[43] Lucas, *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope* (1977).

imagination and what is religious imagination. The religious sense of life is not extinguished in Star Wars, but re-imagined and re-mythologized.[44]

This religio-scentific phenomenon is an example of how the religious and the mythological can work with film and the secular.

The mythological and religious concepts provided have shown how much religion and myth have influenced the core principles of Star Wars and the meanings attributed to these principles within the narrative arch of the series. Needless to say, the influence of these concepts does not stop at the core of the series. With these concepts, Caputo says that Star Wars offers "a fairly explicit 'repetition' or appropriation of elements religious structures outside the confines of the institutional religious faiths. Religious transcendence is beginning to transcend the traditional religion."[45] Therefore, instead of these religious concepts staying at the core of the series, it branches off from it and is burrowed into the plot points of the individual movies.

---

[44] Caputo, *On Religion*, 90.

[45] Ibid.

Religious Parallels in the Individual Movies

While concepts such as the Force carry a larger meaning to the overall story, there are other instances where religious parallels are designated to smaller plot points that carry greater weight in the progression of the plot. These religious parallels are found in a certain movie or movies within the series. For most of these religious parallels, they have been previously addressed by author John Caputo, starting with a kid who had a very humble, yet transcendent beginning.

A Virgin Birth

This religious parallel comes from when the tyrant of the galaxy was no one but a scrappy kid from a remote desert planet. In *The Phantom Menace*, Jedi knights Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-wan Kenobi are stuck on the planet Tattooine in search of parts for their crippled ship. In town, Qui-Gon comes into contact with little Anakin Skywalker. In further encounters with the boy, Qui-Gon tests his midi-cholrian level. Skywalker's level is incredibly high, even higher than Grand Master Yoda. Conversing with Obi-wan, he notes that it is possible that Skywalker was conceived by the Force.[46] This notion is given further credence when the boy's mother, Shmi Skywalker, stated that he never had a father. Caputo says:

> A son was conceived in her womb who would be called the chosen one, a son of the Force, conceived as he was by the power of the Force, that is by an

---

[46] George Lucas, *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace* (1999).

27

extraordinary concentration of midi-cholorians. Lucas is drawing on one of the West's most fundamental narratives.[47]

Therefore, for the Christian, this backstory would sound very similar to one of the core concepts of their faith.

Order 66 and the Holocaust

While some parallels highlight the peace, tranquility, and hope that many find themselves in throughout their lives, other parallels accentuate the tragedies and anguish that often plague this imperfect world. For example, Order 66 is recognized by fans as one of the most infamous scenes of the film series. As the directive was carried out, thousands of Jedi succumbed to the betrayal of the troops that they called their friends. This slaughter did not stop with Jedi on the battlefield. It continued on to the Jedi who were conducting their lives and teachings in peace. Even the young ones were not spared from this barbaric act.

Unfortunately, reality is not devoid of examples where groups of people were struck down on the basis of who they were and what they represent to their enemies. The Jewish Holocaust is an all too familiar example. Before any further analysis is conducted on this particular analogy, the point must be made that these two events are not being equated in terms of the methods used in the events, the severity of the events, or lasting impact of the events. It must also be stated that a fictional slaying cannot be

---

[47] Caputo, *On Religion*, 88.

equated to the effects of an actual genocide. They are only being compared to each other on the basis of why the event took place to begin with.

Both groups were seen as a threat to the power and interests of their opposition. Their opposition believed that due to the threat posed by these groups, it would serve them better if the groups were eliminated. These individuals were not killed because of what they did; they were killed because of what they were and what they represented. In addition to the parallel between a somber plot point and a historical atrocity, the series has drawn a correlation between two main figures of the Original trilogy and two main figures from the Bible.

A Parallel of Redemption

Scholars have taken the dynamic between Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker and created a parallel between it and the circumstances surrounding the original sin of Adam and the redemptive story of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul refers to the connection between Adam and Christ is his writings. He says, "And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit."[48] As depicted by Paul, the reason for the actions of Jesus was rooted in correcting the mistake that Adam made.

---

[48] 1 Cor 14:45.

According to the book of Genesis, Adam was commanded by God to "replenish the earth, and subdue it."[49] God told Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Disobeying this rule would ruin the perfect relationship that man had with God. In spite of this, Adam disobeyed the one rule that God put in place. This resulted in his fall from grace, as well as the fall of the humanity that would come after him.

A core component of the Star Wars story is the prophecy of the "Chosen One." Like Adam, the Chosen One was designated with a task, the difference being that the task of the Chosen One is bringing balance to the Force instead of subduing creation. Despite much skepticism from the Jedi Council surrounding Anakin's level of maturity, emotional attachments, and reckless actions, he is touted by his master as the Chosen One. One of the central beliefs of the Jedi is that carrying emotional attachments would bode negatively for a Jedi's connection with the Force, as well as their ability to discharge their duties. Once again, like Adam, Anakin was given this as a rule to follow in order to avoid his curiosity and personal desires from becoming his own downfall.

With his attachment to his wife, Padme, Anakin was knowingly violating this core teaching. His drive and willingness to protect her is ultimately what facilitated his transition to the dark side. After his fall to the darkness, Obi-wan believed that he had

---

[49] Genesis 1:28.

made a mistake and attempted to rectify this by training Luke and bestowing him with the destiny of his father.

In the end, Luke killed neither his father nor his father's master, Emperor Palpatine. Nevertheless, he was able to help Anakin pull away from the darkness that gripped him. Compared to the aforementioned religious parallels, the correlation between these two groups of figures is neither as strong or definitive. For instance, even though Luke was instrumental in turning Anakin back to the light, Anakin still killed Emperor Palpatine on his own. While this action facilitated his redemption, it was not "life-giving" as he died shortly afterwards. Despite the conclusions of the Original trilogy and the aforementioned Biblical narrative carrying significant differences, the overall evidence for a parallel shows that there is a connection between the two nonetheless. Furthermore, beyond the parallels of the Original and Prequel trilogies, the religious parallels carried over to the Sequel trilogy.

The Middle Path

The Force Awakens introduced a plethora of characters who have some similarities to characters from the Original trilogy. However, there is one character that emits a shining uniqueness when it comes to her power: Maz Kanata. Kanata considers herself to be neither a Jedi nor a Sith. Instead, she ascribes herself to being in the middle and attempts to exhibit a balanced approach to the Force. As a result, she is exceptionally

knowledgeable in the ways of the Force, and she is able to wield its power to great lengths.

This is akin to a belief system that does not ascribe to a religion, but there is an acknowledgement of the transcendent; namely transtheism.[50] Semi-originated by Paul Tillich, transtheism is the belief that does not ascribe to either theism or atheism. It finds itself in the middle of these two belief systems, but it attempts to go beyond both. This system of thought maintains that an individual can connect with the religious, spiritual side of reality, as well as address some of the concepts within it, without the need of addressing the issue of believing in a divine being.

The first recorded instance of Tillich using the term was in the beginning of his 1952 book, *The Courage to Be*. He uses the term in reference to Stoicism and Neo-Stoicism, saying:

> They are the way in which some of the noblest figures in later antiquity and their followers in modern times have answered the problem of existence and conquered the anxieties of fate and death. Stoicism in this sense is a basic religious attitude, whether it appears in theistic, atheistic, or transtheistic forms.[51]

Tillich does not use the term again throughout his book. Even so, towards the end of his book, Tillich speaks of the core ideas that encompass transtheism, saying:

---

[50] Trung Nguyen, *Is There a God?* (Edmonton: Trung Nguyen, 2014), 680.

[51] Paul Tillich and Peter J. Gomes, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000,) 9.

The courage to take meaninglessness into itself presupposes a relation to the ground of being which we have called "absolute faith." It is without a special content, yet it is not without content. The content of absolute faith is the "God above God." Absolute faith and its consequence, the courage that takes the radical doubt, the doubt about God, into itself, transcends the theistic idea of God.[52]

This philosophy is able to emphasize needing neither theism nor atheism, but instead forging a middle path. It is fitting that the new movie in the series was able to exhibit a relatively new and different approach to explaining a religious philosophy of the God above God.

This philosophy was one the many religious parallels found the in the Star Wars movies. There are significant religious parallels for a movie series that was not meant to be religious. If Star Wars was not meant to be religious, as Lucas claimed, why are so many of these parallels present? Was this nothing more than a personal desire, or was this purposely left for the viewer to decide? Whatever the intent, some of the viewers have taken matters into their own hands and have used the concepts of Star Wars for their own religious purposes.

---

[52] Ibid., 182

The Religious Effects on Fans and Society

Naturally, one can make the argument that simply because a phenomenon has concepts or beliefs that allude to religious themes or established religions, it does not mean that it is considered to be religion. Once again, however, we are confronted with the issues of semantic ambiguity and the use of qualifiers. While this work has its own qualifiers as to what constitutes religion, it is not to say that these qualifications are the ultimate authority on defining religion (not even close).

As previously stated, the intent of this thesis is not to simply comb through the movies for religious themes. It is also meant to show the effects that these themes have on popular culture and people in society. In order to do that, it must be shown how these themes have influenced the lives of the people through their viewing and internalizing of the film's core messages. Scholars such as Jennfier Porter acknowledge that Star Wars provides religious influence and spiritual inspiration for some fans, saying:

> …it is about finding a source of values and meaning that resonates with one's own sense of inner awareness and the development of a sense of personal integration that helps makes sense of the self and its place in the universe in the face of our fragmented, disenchanted, and commodified world.[53]

---

[53] Jennifer E. Porter, "'I Am a Jedi': Star Wars Fandom, Religious Belief, and the 2001 Census," in *Finding the Force of the Star Wars Franchise: Fans, Merchandise, & Critics,* ed. Matthew Kapell and John S. Lawrence (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006), 95.

In addition, a certain perspective must be applied to the religious effects. Looking to the origins of functionalism, this perspective has its roots in the sociological work of Émile Durkheim. As opposed to the essentialist approach, the use of functionalism leads to a better understanding of the actions and reactions that a phenomenon or concept has for the members of a society.

The effects of the series have gone as far as to inspire a group of people to create a New Religious Movement: Jediism. This group was recognized as an official religion by the British census in 2004. Even so, the movement has its skeptics, as The Charity Commission for England and Wales rejected the application of the Temple of the Jedi Order for charity status. The reasons given were that there is a lack of charitability and the movement "does not count as a religion."[54]

Star Wars as a Cult?

It appears that there are conflicting views on the status of Jediism as a religion. If it is not a religion, then it raises the question of what it should be designated as. This could prompt some concern as to whether Jediism is doomed to be relegated to the level of a cult. In the current societal climate, categorizing a belief as cultish gives it a negative connotation. Despite this, based on the arguments raised by scholars such as

---

[54] Christopher D. Shea, "Bid for 'Star Wars' Religion Is Shot Down," *The New York Times*, December 19, 2016.

Rupert Till, fans of Star Wars have popularized certain phrases and actions to the point where the behavior of the fans has manifested into something resembling a cult.

As an example of this argument, the expression "May the Force be with you" has become the most iconic phrases used when it comes to identifying the Star Wars movies. The previous chapter briefly explored a possible origin for this phrase. In spite of this potentially religious origin, the phrase is used among the fan base repetitively. As we find with contemporary associations with cults, this use of repetition reinforces the messages contained in the movie.[55] Therefore, due to the phrase's immense popularity, as well as its usage by fans, it has taken on a cultish connotation. It is repetitive behavior such as this that contributes to the functionality of cults.

Ultimately, Till's case for cults functioning as religion is based on his interpretation of what the term "religion" means. When it comes to religion, he divides the term into two: explicit religion and implicit religion. He states:

> Explicit religion is that identified by the participants as religion. Implicit religions are those that have all the hallmarks of religion, but that may be focused on elements that may be regarded as belonging within the secular realm, or include elements that are not within easily defined boundaries of the sacred and profane. Implicit religions often involve an intense level of commitment and seriousness as well as a set of beliefs and practices.[56]

---

[55] Till, *Pop Cult: Religion and Popular Music*, 23.

[56] Ibid., 21.

While he acknowledges that popular culture can be a form of implicit religion, he chooses to describe them as cults.

In Till's argument for pop cults, he states that, presently, traditional religion has largely failed to provide for the needs of individuals; this includes the need for guidance, answers, identity, and involvement. In his eagerness to justify the functionality of cults, Till implores that "mainstream religions do not convince mainstream cultures that they can address these issues…" and "Pop cults are regarded as far more able to succeed."[57] Furthermore, he says that pop cults "revolve around a small group of charismatic leaders."[58] These leaders will claim to have a way to a transcendent place, even when they do not claim to be transcendent themselves. In addition, these pop cults have a platform for recruiting new members, as well as finding ways to make money.

As a common sense business practice, Disney wants more people to know about Star Wars, watch the movies, and participate in Star Wars-related activities, as a means to generate more revenue. This is not on the same level as requesting commitment in exchange for integration into a group (especially since there is no group to integrate into). Moreover, when it comes to a movie series, neither integration into a group nor commitment to that group is required for the viewer to get something out of the movie.

---

[57] Ibid., 13-26.

[58] Ibid., 92.

When the aforementioned practices and beliefs are factored in, Jediism would be able to fit into the mold of a new religious movement. However, the same mold does not fit for Star Wars as a whole. It is possible that Till would see Jediism as a new religious movement. Not only Till, but also members of Jediism could see themselves as being a part of a new religious movement. At the same time, however, they would refuse to align themselves with a cult in the traditional sense.

When it comes to designating a belief as a cult or religion, the designation depends on what definition is used for these terms. From their conception, the definitions for these terms have been constantly debated by scholars. While society has created general definitions for these two terms, no consensus has been reached among scholars. In the case of The Charity Commission and Jediism, there is no definitive answer as to the proper definition or classification for each term. As a result, these classificatory decisions made by both scholars and the participants are a reflection of their own ideological and conceptual contexts.

Conclusion

Since its inception, Star Wars has found great success on the big screen and in the market. It has forever earned its place as one of the most striking symbols of popular culture. Not only has it become a popular culture icon, but also a religious one. This is the argument that this writing has attempted to substantiate. This thesis has served as a culmination of the narratives and plot elements that parallel themes and concepts from mythology, as well as established religions. These religious instances have proven to be crucial to the integrity of the plot.

This work has provided another example in academia that shows both the influence and limits of authorial intent and reader-response. It has shown that in the areas where religion is the least noticeable, it is in these areas where religion can be the most effective.[59] Despite the intent of George Lucas, the series has created meaning and purpose for many of those who watched it. It has shown that even the author of one of the most successful movie series in the history of the modern world is not able to claim authority to its meaning or how it is interpreted.

Most important, this thesis used the notions of family resemblance and functionalism, as well as the classification of religious language as a means to lay out a case for classifying Star Wars as religion. In his intention, it is clear that Lucas did not designate the influence of Star Wars to be exclusively from Christianity, Buddhism, or

---

[59] Mark Taylor, *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004), 4.

mythology. Regardless of faith or beliefs, there are enough plot points in Star Wars where one can find resemblance and parallels with some traditional religious belief systems. For many, dynamics such as that of good vs. evil has both influenced and affirmed their perception of reality. As a result, they are able to apply it to their practices and behaviors in their everyday life. For believers in Christianity, Buddhism, transtheism, mythology, etc., the use of religious and mythological parallels in Star Wars gives them a sense of validation in their faith in the belief system to which they adhere. Not only were the movies influenced by various established religions, but they also facilitated the growth of religious movements that mirror the beliefs and values put forth by the movies.

Society will continue to provide and perpetuate popular meanings of terms such as "religion" and "myth". At the same time, scholars will continue to use these terms by tailoring the terms to their own scholarly needs and desires. As long as there are diverse definitions of these terms, it allows scholars and others to have a healthy discussion on classification and meaning, among other issues. This concept gives credence to the argument of this thesis.

Still, the point must be made that this thesis is not the authority on the meaning of Star Wars, nor is it the desire of its author to make that claim. If George Lucas cannot claim sole authority to the meaning of his work, surely the author that analyzes Lucas' work has no claim to authority either. This also does not mean that the intent of Lucas,

as well as the historical and cultural contexts used by him, can be disregarded by the reader. Ultimately, the interpretation of this work, as well as the literature that is created afterwards, is determined by neither the one who writes nor the one who reads it. Instead, there must be a balance between the Lucas' intent and contexts that he provides, as well as how the fans use those contexts in their lives.

Admittedly, the majority of this thesis is more exploratory and theoretical than empirical. As a result, the arguments of this thesis utilized a family resemblance approach, while it also pointed towards Star Wars' functionalist possibilities for fans. If further research is to be conducted on this subject, it would put more emphasis on functionalism and search for more empirical evidence concerning the effects of Star Wars on the fan base.

Nevertheless, the religious and mythological influences and examples in Star Wars played a major part in the religiosity of Star Wars in society. Along with the cultural contexts, the influence of religion and mythology in Star Wars has contributed to the platform that the series holds today. In return, Star Wars has created a platform for new religious ideas to take shape. This shows how something that started out as a simple space opera has given birth to a meaning far greater than Lucas intended, as well as far greater than the opinions of the author of this thesis.

References

Abrams, J. J., Director. *Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens*. 2015.

Bortolin, Matthew. *The Dharma of Star Wars*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2005.

Brode, Douglas, and Leah Deyneka. *Sex, Politics, and Religion in Star Wars: An Anthology*. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2012.

Campbell, Joseph. "Appendix: Graph of Monomyth," In *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949.

—. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949.

Campbell, Joseph, and Moyers, Bill. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

Caputo, John D. *On Religion*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

Chidester, David. *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Davidsen, Markus Altena. "From Star Wars to Jediism: The Emergence of Fiction-based Religion." *Words: Religious Language Matters*. Ed. Ernst Van Den Hemel and Asja Szafraniec. Fordham UP, 2016, pp. 376-89.

Fowler, Jeaneane D. *Perspectives of Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Hinduism*. Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2002.

Gleig, Ann. "Life of the Buddha." Presentation at the University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, August 9, 2015.

Hopkins, Jane P. *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism.*

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.

Hu, Hsiao-Lan, and Allen, William C. *Taoism.* Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2005.

Kershner, Irvin, Director. *Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back.* 1980.

Lucas, George, Director. *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace.* 1999.

—. Director. *Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones.* 2002.

—. Director. *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith.* 2005.

—. Director. *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope.* 1977.

—. Interviewed by Bill Moyers. "Cinema: Of Myth and Men." *Time.* (April 26, 1999).

Lyden, John. *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals.* New York: New York

University, 2003.

—. "Whose Film Is It, Anyway? Canonicity And Authority In Star Wars Fandom."

Journal Of The American Academy Of Religion, vol. 80, no. 3, 2012, pp. 775-786.

Marquand, Richard, Director. *Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi.* 1983.

McCutcheon, Russell T. *Studying Religion: An Introduction.* Oakville, CT: Equinox

Publishing, 2007.

McDowell, John C. *The Gospel According to Star Wars: Faith, Hope and the Force.* Louisville:

Westminister John Knox Press, 2007.

Nealon, Jeffrey, and Susan Giroux. *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the*

Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences. 2nd ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield

Publishers, 2012.

Nguyen, Trung. *Is There a God?* Edmonton: Trung Nguyen, 2014.

Porter, Jennifer E. "'I Am a Jedi': Star Wars Fandom, Religious Belief, and the 2001
Census." *Finding the Force of the Star Wars Franchise: Fans, Merchandise, & Critics*,
Ed. Matthew Kapell and John S. Lawrence. New York: Peter Lang Publishing,
2006.

Sciretta, Peter. "Why J.J. Abrams Believes the Force is More Inclusive Than Midi-
Chlorians and Bloodlines." *SlashFilm*, December 7, 2015.
http://www.slashfilm.com/jj-abrams-midi-chlorians/

Shea, Christopher D. "Bid for 'Star Wars' Religion Is Shot Down." *The New York Times*,
December 19, 2016. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/19/movies/star-wars-
religion-jediism-charity-commission-for-england-and-wales.html?_r=0.

Smith, John Z. "Religion, Religions, Religious." *Critical Terms for Religious Studies,* Ed.
Mark Taylor. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004.

Stiver, Dan R. *The Philosophy of Religious Language: Sign, Symbol and Story*. Oxford:
Blackwell Publishing, 1996.

Taylor, Mark. *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004.

Till, Rupert. *Pop Cult: Religion and Popular Music*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic,
2010.

Tillich, Paul, and Peter J. Gomes. *The Courage to Be*. New Haven, CT: Yale University
Press, 2000.

Ward, Pete. *Gods Behaving Badly: Media, Religion, and Celebrity Culture*. Waco: Baylor

University Press, 2011.