

Review: JAF070

## SEARCHING FOR FAITH IN “THE FORCE”

a book review of  
*Christian Wisdom of the Jedi Masters*  
by Dick Staub  
(Jossey-Bass, 2005)

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Ever since the first Star Wars film appeared on the silver screen in 1977, Christians have had justifiably uneasy reactions to the blockbuster series. George Lucas, creator of the series, once said, “I remember when I was 10 years old, I asked my mother, ‘If there is only one God, why are there so many religions?’ I’ve been pondering that question ever since, and the conclusion I’ve come to is that all religions are true.”<sup>1</sup> This perspective hardly coincides with Christ’s words, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6 NIV). Lucas instead consciously draws upon the ideas of various individuals (e.g., Joseph Campbell), mythologies, and religions. The result is that the Star Wars films are infused with a spiritual syncretism that includes elements of Gnosticism, Hinduism, Zen Buddhism, dualism, pantheism, and more.

The philosophical and theological underpinnings of the Star Wars series, including the permeating energy Lucas calls “the Force,” have little to do with orthodox Christianity, and in some ways are antagonistic to it. It is somewhat surprising then to see Dick Staub’s book *Christian Wisdom of the Jedi Masters* attempt to glean Christian wisdom from the films. Staub, host of the radio program *The Dick Staub Show*, attempts to incorporate elements of the Star Wars films<sup>2</sup> into his Christian reflections and advice. Readers who seek a critique of Star Wars will need to look elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

Each short chapter (41 in all) begins with a quotation from a Star Wars film and a quotation from the Bible. Too often, though, the juxtaposition of quotations is awkward and the relationship between them seems contrived. A chapter on meditation, for example, opens with a quote from Yoda, which reads, “Concentrate....Feel the Force flow” (p. 59), followed by Psalm 77:6: “I commune with my heart in the night; I meditate and search my spirit” (NRSV). Another chapter quotes Qui-Gon Jinn: “Make an analysis of this blood sample I’m sending you” (159). This is followed by Ephesians 2:13, which speaks of the “blood of Christ.” Some will also find the quotes from other non-Christian thinkers, such as Buddha and Lao-Tzu, out of place as sources of Christian wisdom.

Staub’s reflections are sometimes on-target, but appear among several observations that miss the mark. Chapter 7, “Will One Thing,” for instance, contains good insights on religious philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, whereas chapter 9, “Enter the Cloud of Unknowing,” smacks of anti-intellectualism. Staub writes in chapter 9, “The Lord of the Force [his phrase for the Christian God] is beyond knowing, yet invites knowing....The way to God is the way of the mystics” (52), and “Our experience of God is beyond the intellect” (54). Other sections of the book affirm reliance on the intellect, but this particular chapter can communicate a decidedly wrong-headed approach to seeking truth; namely, that the intellect plays no important role in the process.

In chapter 2, Staub also refers to Christianity as “mythology” (10). He defended this notion in an interview with *Christianity Today* by likening his views on the matter to those of C. S. Lewis or J. R. R. Tolkien.<sup>4</sup> Staub’s rationale for this notion, however, is unclear in *Christian Wisdom*.

Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of Staub’s book is its failure to draw clear distinctions between the predominant worldview of Star Wars (pantheism) and that of Christian theism. The repeated use of the phrase “The Lord of the Force” in reference to the God of the Bible, for example, is confusing, since “the Force” is impersonal, but God is personal, and “the Force” has a light side and a dark side, but God does not. There are elements of Christian wisdom in Star Wars, but not to the extent Staub indicates, and certainly not at its core.

— reviewed by Robert Velarde

## NOTES

1. Bill Moyers, “Of Myth and Men,” *Time*, April 26, 1999.
2. Published before the release of *Star Wars: Episode III, The Revenge of the Sith*, the book does not include insights from this film.
3. See, for example, Norman L. Geisler and J. Yutaka Amano, *Religion of the Force* (Dallas: Quest Publications, 1983) and Peter Jones, *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back: An Old Heresy for the New Age* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992).
4. Stan Guthrie, “Dick Staub on the *Star Wars* Myth,” *Christianity Today*, May 16, 2005, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/120/22.0.html>.