

A TaoFu Sermon on Star Wars Original Trilogy

Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for August 22nd, 2021 (and beyond)

This happened many years ago in a shopping mall not too far away... “Star Wars IV: A New Hope” was released in theaters nationwide. The local Kinney’s Shoes store was having a themed promotion at the same mall. My caregiver took me to see the film and then to the shoe store. I was 4 going on 5 years old. Darth Vader was there. Actually, it was a shoe store employee in a Darth Vader costume. I walked over to Vader and yelled at him for what he did to Luke and Leia, then kicked him repeatedly in the shins until my caregiver ran over and apologized after which we immediately left the store. I wondered why in the hell anyone would ever apologize to Darth Vader at the time.

I’m skipping “Star Wars V: The Empire Strikes Back”, I’ve heard all the arguments claiming this is the best of the original trilogy, but the trilogy as a whole is very philosophical.

“Star Wars VI: Return of the Jedi” is my focus today. How many times does “the force” have to be called “the way” for anyone to see the religious subtext? “Ben Obi-Wan Kenobi : [to Luke] You must learn the ways of the Force, if you're to come with me to Alderaan.” The entire trilogy is #TaoFu. I’m not going to cover every scene and all the layers for you. But, I promise if you studied comparative world religion and world history, you’d both understand better and likely not need this sermon for anything other than confirmation or reinforcement.

The Ewoks are representative of superstitious, unenlightened, tribalistic societies or cultures. They are also what Judeo-Christian scripture refers to as idolaters. They prophesied and felt C-3PO confirmed their faith by being the deity they'd been waiting for while all the non-Ewoks felt it necessary to exploit that to avoid being dinner for the Ewoks that night. You can see it as Jewish in waiting for the Messiah or Christian as waiting for the second coming of Christ. And, you may then recognize C-3PO as a false prophet but the Ewoks would disagree and it is their religion regardless of what facts are known and available to us. Then we see Luke who is now a Jedi Knight that has mastered the ways of the force (which I define as Truth and All The Virtues combined most of the time) as a kind of puppet-master where C-3PO isn’t sure about it but goes along with it because he’s just a servile android and it is an emergency situation.

The Ewoks are ultimately forgiven and become allies of the rebellion. If C-3PO didn’t understand their language, things could've gone much differently and much worse. So as annoying as C-3PO is, he had his purpose too. Even though the Ewoks were a seeming feral race of mutant teddy bears, I empathized with them to the point I cried at the full scene that is partially available here: https://youtu.be/14HRo_eTUgg I do not typically cry when muppets or puppets of any sort have a death scene. So, this was unusual for me and due to many factors including the humanization of the Ewoks with that scene.

I do not believe any film in the original “Star Wars” trilogy was exhibiting prejudice. One reason is because every character in it is an alien from the perspective of an

earthling. If you overlook the beginning that says "A long time ago.....in a galaxy far, far, away...." you might identify some characters as human or equal to you and some as not human with some inequality attached. But, when I watch the films I humanize all the aliens because they speak my language and/or translate in my language where there's a difference so I understand all of them. There's only one exception for me and that's the slug version of Jabba the Hutt. Jabba the Hutt is the only alien I failed to humanize or anthropomorphize. The good news is, Lucas arguably did it for me with Episode IV or should I credit Declan Mulholland? Either way, I recognized the truth and/or virtues of all the other characters to at least a small fraction. I think of Emperor Palpatine as a grumpy old man who knows he is dying and upset by his own mortality given he knows he'll cease to exist or go to hell when he dies so is just having what he considers fun perhaps even as a death-wish, amazed he can still manipulate the ignorant with fear, coercion, and intimidation. But, you can't beat the father/son team that ultimately takes him out. So, you can see that from a Christian perspective of God as Darth Vader and Luke as Jesus where God says "You even think about it and I'll smite you, you dirty old motherfucker". And, that proves Wrath is God's and not Jesus' power to wield explaining that where Jesus was wrathful, he also suffered penalty. God feels better and returns to himself after saving his son through his own sacrifice.

Meditative Question:

Based on the above, did I kick God in the symbolic form of Darth Vader as a small child? If so, am I forgiven?

[I honestly had no way of knowing where the story was going having only seen Episode IV when I attacked a false prophet and likely idolater who had imprisoned and tortured two people that turn out to be his own children. I was thinking God should smite the entire Empire or at least Darth Vader and the military blowing up entire planets. I also was led to believe and still to this day believe Luke and Leia were on the right side of history in that galaxy so far away so long ago. And, Jabba the Hutt was way worse to Leia because Vader just menaced, threatened, and held her prisoner while threatening to inject her with something. He treated her with some dignity, Jabba the Hutt did not in any way. You could make the argument Vader was being deimatic and so unpleasant to her so others would leave her alone and leave her to him. This is kind of how you Namaste Darth Vader by the way even before his heroics in "Return of the Jedi". Vader knew his son too and may have been inspired or reminded by Luke's commitment to the virtuous side that it's a choice with which everyone struggles at any given moment. I prefer to think of it as virtuous side vs. vicious side rather than creating confusion by using more palette-based themes. What's funny though is that sometimes the Tao symbol is in "black and white" and the vicious still have potential for virtue as do the virtuous have potential for vice. I also read potential as potential to temptation. So, another way to look at it is that the vicious can be tempted by the virtuous to the same extent the virtuous can be tempted by the vicious even though nature of the temptation may vary. I also think of Emperor Palpatine as Smeagol/Gollum from "Lord of the Rings" sometimes. But, Smeagol is arguably more Darth Vader (or more so Anakin Skywalker in his afflicted/oppressed state) with Gollum more like Palpatine or do you disagree?

Either way, I believe life is good and therefore of God. So, if God actually dies, everybody dies including Lucifer, Satan, Maara, and likely any idea for a Super Bowl ad for Coca Cola featuring Charlie Sheen reviving the slogan "Have a Coke and a smile". Life goes on.]

For those interested in starting #TaoFu Self-Defense Exercises, please see <https://www.cope.church/taofu.htm> and begin at any time.

There are opportunities to send messages, receive mystery bonus blessings, and more with or without donating available now on our "Pass the Basket" page at <https://www.cope.church/basket.htm> . Thank You.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 KJV Willful blindness is an abomination.

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