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Editors

Adventist Theological Society

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B Y T H E E D I T O R S

STAR WARS: THE GREAT CONTROVERSY?

In the April 26, 1999, *Time* magazine columnist Bill Moyers asked George Lucas about the religious imagery in his *Star Wars* movies. What's behind the concept of the "Force"? Are his Darth Vader and Darth Maul satanic images? Just what is Lucas trying to communicate to audiences about God and religion at the end of the millennium? Following is a digest of Lucas's observations.

The message of *Star Wars*: I see *Star Wars* as taking all the issues that religion represents and trying to distill them. . . into a more modern and easily accessible construct—that there is a greater mystery out there. I

remember when I was 10 years old, I asked my mother, "If there's 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 the religions are true.

His interpretation of religion: Religion is basically a container for faith. And faith in our culture, our world and on a larger issue, the mystical level [faith] is a very important part of what allows us to remain stable, remain balanced.

The purpose and message of the Force: I put the Force into the movie in order to try to awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people—more a belief in God than a

belief in any particular religious system. I wanted to make it so that young people would begin to ask questions about the mystery. Not having enough interest in the mysteries of life to ask the question, "Is there a God or is there not a God?"—that is for me the worst thing that could happen. I think you should have an opinion about that. Or you should be saying, "I'm looking. I'm very curious about this, and I am going to continue to look until I can find an answer, and if I can't find an answer, then I'll die trying." I think it's important to have a belief system and to have faith.

His personal belief: I think there is a God. No question. What that God is or what we know about that God, I'm not sure. The one thing I know about life and about the human race is that we've always tried to construct some kind of context for the unknown. . . .

Moyers observed: "The central ethic of our culture has been the Bible. Like your stories, it's about the fall, wandering, redemption, return. But the Bible no longer occupies that central place in our culture today.

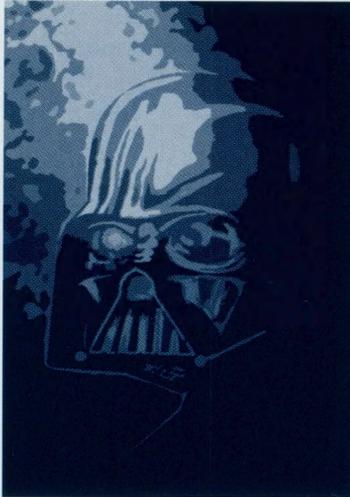
Young people in particular are turning to movies for their inspiration, not to organized religion."

Lucas's reply: Well, I hope that doesn't end up being the course this whole thing takes, because I think there's definitely a place for organized religion. I would hate to find ourselves in a completely secular world where entertainment was passing for some kind of religious experience.

On the Force as "a vast reservoir of energy that is the ground of all our being": It's a notion that's been around before. When I wrote the first *Star Wars*, I had to come up with a whole cosmology: What do people believe in? I had to do something that was relevant, something that imitated a belief system that has been around for thousands of

years, and the most people on the planet, one way or another, have some kind of connection to. I didn't want to invent a religion. I wanted to try to explain in a different way the religions that have already existed. I wanted to express it all.

On creating a new myth: I'm



Illustrations by John Knox

telling an old myth in a new way. Each society takes that myth and retells it in a different way, which relates to the particular environment they live in. The motif is the same. I'm [just] localizing it for the planet. I guess I'm localizing it for the

end of the millennium more than I am for any particular place.

On the lessons of Star Wars: [This saga] is made up of many themes. It's not just one little simple



parable. One is our relationship to machines, which are fearful, but also benign. Then there is the lesson of friendship and symbiotic relationships, of your obligations to your fellow man, to other people that are around you. This is

a world where evil has run amok. But you have control over your destiny, you have many paths to walk down, and you can choose which destiny is going to be yours. □

T H I N K

Does Lucas's view of God and religion reflect that of Western society at the beginning of the third millennium? Does *Star Wars* accurately distill "the issues that religion represents" into a "more modern construct"? What cosmic construct particularly esteemed by Adventists would seem most likely to capture the attention of *Star Wars*' audiences? If you were given an hour with Lucas, could you tell old truths in a new way while remaining faithful to the Word?—Eds.