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Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith

Vincent A. Olea
maderite33@yahoo.com

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Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith

Abstract

This is a review of *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (2005).

Taking place in a galaxy far, far away, *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* offers a depth not seen in the series since *The Empire Strikes Back*. While the love scenes are painfully contrived and the acting limited by the dialogue and direction, this mythological tale masterfully returns to the basic inner struggle between good and evil. Written and directed by George Lucas, the quintessential conflict in *Episode III* takes place in the heart of young Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker (Hayden Christensen). Three years removed from *Episode II* and the beginning of the Clone Wars, in *Revenge of the Sith* Anakin and Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) are sent by the Republic to battle Count Dooku and General Grievous, and bring back the seemingly captured Chancellor Palpatine. Haunted by visions and a premonition of the death of his wife Padme' (Natalie Portman), Anakin loses his trust in the Jedi way and is lured by the promise of a unique life-sustaining magic offered by the Dark Side. As Palpatine's plan to supplant the Republic unfolds, the Jedi Order and galactic democracy are threatened, and Anakin's Frankenstein-like transformation into Darth Vader is completed.

Drawing from the master-padawan relationship revealed in Luke Skywalker's Jedi training (*The Empire Strikes Back*), *Episode III* gives rise to the wisdom and spiritual language of the Force. Viewers are also reintroduced to the deceptive language that embodies the Dark Side. Like the pop culture image of the angel and devil who sit on opposite shoulders, we hear the soulful and alluring

mantra from each opposing master. Master Yoda echoes the ancient wisdom of "Let go," while Darth Sidious extends his invitation through the hedonistic language of "Give in." Beyond simple tropes, these sayings declare the power source of each respective view of reality.

For many religion and film enthusiasts, the connection between the *Star Wars* series and religion is primarily Eastern. While such a claim is legitimate, the mystical tradition in Christianity also reveals the depths of the Force and the Jedi way. From Paul to Theresa of Lisieux to Meister Eckhart to Thomas Merton and to the contemporary Richard Rohr O.F.M, the language of "letting go" is foundational.

Anakin reveals to Yoda his visions and premonitions. Yoda replies, "Let go of your fear," explaining that fear, attachment, and selfish desires are not the way of the Jedi, but lead to the Dark Side. For Yoda, one must "let go" of the small egocentric self so that one can enter into and trust a larger reality – the Force. This idea is easily recognized in Eastern traditions like Buddhism and Hinduism, but is also an important part of Christianity, in which the transformational invitation to "let go" is at the heart of the paschal pattern or mystery. For Paul, death to the egocentric-self is paramount so that "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." (Gal. 2:20) This mystical proclamation is also evident in Saint Theresa's self-description as the "little flower," Meister Eckhart's call for the "annihilation of the self,"

Thomas Merton's examination of "the true and false self," and Richard Rohr's initiatory truth, "your life is not about you."

In contrast, Darth Sidious focuses on what Anakin's egocentric self needs, but is not getting: affirmation, recognition, quick answers, false hope, and power. Gaining Anakin's confidence, Sidious compels Anakin to "give in to your anger." As the axis point of the Dark Side, this "giving in to anger" is equivalent to embracing one's attachment to self-image, compulsion to blame, hatred, fear, emotional dissonance, desire for isolation and hyper need for control. In Jungian terms, this archetypal dark knight heeds no boundaries, moves with every emotion, and is empowered by fear of annihilation and anger over what he is not. The sin of the Dark Side is then akin to the unforgivable "sin against the Holy Spirit," that is, the refusal to participate in life beyond the self.

From the flashpoint of Anakin's struggle and eventual transformation into Darth Vader, George Lucas creates a micro, as well as a macro, image of life's grand polarities. Steeped in spiritual language and religious overtones, this mythological tale holds together the levels of existence imagined through the invitation of "letting go" and "giving in."