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## Any Gods Out There? Perceptions of Religion from Star Wars and Star Trek

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# Any Gods Out There? Perceptions of Religion from Star Wars and Star Trek

## **Abstract**

Hollywood films and religion have an ongoing rocky relationship, especially in the realm of science fiction. A brief comparison study of the two giants of mainstream sci-fi, *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* reveals the differing attitudes toward religion expressed in the genre. *Star Trek* presents an evolving perspective, from critical secular humanism to begrudging personalized faith, while *Star Wars* presents an ambiguous mythological foundation for mystical experience that is in more ways universal.

Science Fiction has come of age in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. From its humble beginnings, "Sci- Fi" has been used to express the desires and dreams of those generations who looked up at the stars and imagined life on other planets and space travel, those who actually saw the beginning of the space age, and those who still dare to imagine a universe with wonders beyond what we have today. In all of science fiction displayed on theater and television screens, none are more popular or mainstream than *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*. These two influential franchises are the focus of this brief comparison study of their perceptions of religion.

I have chosen Sci Fi to look at religion because the genre discusses the problems and blessings of the future. It also discusses the problems of today in fantastic settings, using symbol and allegory. In this discussion of perspectives on religion, I have decided to narrow the subject matter down to the film "canons" of the two franchises, as the other source material is so vast as to require an entire book. Some references must be made to other material (such as the *Star Trek* television shows, which form the basis for the films) where applicable.

In the case of *Star Wars*, we have the five (soon six) films, including the first trilogy (1977-1983) and the prequel trilogy (1999-to the present). The *Star Trek* canon is a little more complex and much larger. Unlike George Lucas's *Star Wars*, *Star Trek's* founder, Gene Roddenberry has passed away, with other writers and directors taking over his legacy. Roddenberry originated the series, though he

is said to have exercised less creative control than he would have liked over the material created before his death in 1991, with the exception of the first film, and "*The Next Generation*." Later incarnations of *Star Trek* provide interesting contrasts and developments that shall be examined later in the discussion.

*Star Trek* encompasses five live-action television shows: the first affectionately known as "*The Original Series*," (1966-1969) followed by "*The Next Generation*" (1987-1993), "*Deep Space Nine*" (1992-1999), "*Voyager*" (1995-2001), "*Enterprise*" (2001- ) which is in its third season as of this writing; and ten theatrical films: *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979), *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (1982), *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (1984), *Star Trek IV: The Voyager Home* (1986), *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* (1989), *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* (1991), *Star Trek Generations* (1994), *Star Trek First Contact* (1996), *Star Trek Insurrection* (1998), and *Star Trek Nemesis* (2002).

The tales of the "*Original Series*" featuring Captain Kirk, Mister Spock, and Doctor McCoy with supporting characters Chekov, Sulu, Uhura, and Scotty are continued in the first six films, followed by a "passing of the torch" story to the new crew of the "*Next Generation*" in the seventh film. *The Next Generation* (TNG for short) series tells the story of a new cast of Federation explorers, with the primary focus on Captain Picard and Lt. Commander Data, with supporting characters Commander Riker, Doctor Crusher, Counselor Troi, Worf, and Geordi LaForge.

*Star Trek* first debuted in the mid 1960's and embodied what many considered progressive and liberal social values such as inter-racial equality represented by the multi-cultural crew and the ideas of fighting for freedom against injustice even when it meant disobeying orders. This was accomplished on the backdrop of the bold exploration of space and the expansion of the human mind. *The Next Generation* is said to have embodied more of Gene Roddenberry's vision of what he considered humanity's "ideal" future and put more emphasis on secular humanism and socialist collectivist values. These values were slightly modified and take on a new direction in later shows (*Deep Space Nine*, *Voyager*, and *Enterprise*) after Roddenberry's death, though the films seem to retain much of his original emphasis in *The Original Series* and *The Next Generation*.<sup>1</sup>

The various crews encounter aliens and new civilizations and try to make peaceful exchanges with them, though sometimes they have to fight against injustice or confront their own weaknesses.

*Star Wars*, in the first trilogy, in contrast to *Star Trek*'s band of explorers and diplomats, follows the tales of a band of rebels fighting against the evil Galactic Empire: Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, Han Solo, Chewbacca, Lando Calrissian, and the sentient robots R2-D2 and C-3PO. The Empire's oppression is personified in Darth Vader, the Dark Lord of the Sith, a figure in black armor, mask and cape. The second trilogy travels back in time to the period before the Empire, when Darth

Vader was a young man, then known as Anakin Skywalker, tracing his fall from grace to evil. Ultimately, the films are about the cosmic Force, which guides the destinies of the main characters, with the effect of leading Darth Vader/Anakin Skywalker to redemption after his fall.

In order to understand the philosophies and values conveyed in *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, it may help to first examine the backgrounds and beliefs of the creators, Gene Roddenberry, and George Lucas respectively.

Both men were raised in American Protestant households, Lucas's parents were Methodist, Roddenberry's Baptist. Lucas disliked Sunday school and enjoyed the Lutheran services of his family's German housekeeper far more. His religious inspiration<sup>2</sup> was perhaps sparked by his survival of a near fatal car crash when he was a young man.<sup>3</sup> After this he went on to study film and myth (following the works of Joseph Campbell). He also had a love of science fiction, comic books, and other fantasy, a hunger for stories that had meaning.

Roddenberry on the other hand was greatly inspired by his father, who urged him to be skeptical of everything, including preachers. As a teenager Roddenberry paid more attention in church, and came to realize he thought that religion, especially Christianity, was superstition and nonsense.<sup>4</sup> He also continued to observe in life that religion itself seemed to cause divisions and problems for

mankind,<sup>5</sup> reinforcing his rejection of it. This rejection seems to have led him to substitute a humanist philosophy, one that inspired people to bond together and to improve themselves through their own efforts putting aside dangerous or limiting beliefs.<sup>6</sup>

On the surface the two men sound very different, but their beliefs are too complex to summarize in a few sentences. Suffice to say that both were seeking men, who did not take what they grew up with for granted. Instead, they had to re-invent their own belief systems and attempted to put that message out in the forum of science fiction. Sci Fi, being a form of fantasy, allows for difficult subjects and controversial topics to be put into terms that are easier to understand, allowing the imagination to fill in the blanks and propose solutions that we may not have considered. Both Lucas<sup>7</sup> and Roddenberry<sup>8</sup> claimed to believe in "God" but they understood God differently, as their works help to illustrate.

First let us examine the attitudes toward religion expressed in *Star Trek*. In the *Original Series*, the principle ship, Enterprise had a Chapel. This was seen twice on the show.

The first time was in the episode "Balance of Terror" in which Captain Kirk was about to perform a wedding ceremony for two of his crew members. This chapel was unadorned with familiar religious icons. It featured a podium rather than

an altar, decorative yet strange "glyph" designs (not recognizable from any modern day tradition) and an "infinity" symbol on the door as one entered. The service was attended by all the crew in their standard uniforms, but not their dress uniforms (seen later in the show at formal hearings and on diplomatic galas). It was of note that no clergy persons were present, but Kirk himself was the celebrant, evoking popular maritime tradition. Before the ceremony is interrupted by an emergency, he mentions "our many beliefs" evoking an ecumenical flavor to the proceedings. Indeed the future bride is seen kneeling (we assume in silent prayer) while the groom is not. The second time we see the Enterprise chapel occurs in an episode where Kirk is thought to have died, and Spock and the others are gathered for a memorial for him there. Again, the chapel is an inclusive symbol of non-denominational ecumenism. However rather than express any common beliefs, we assume the crew is allowed to express themselves silently to themselves, while sharing the common bond of being human beings (with the exception of Spock of course).

The ship's chapel would not return in future series'; leading us to speculate that religion itself has been largely phased out from human society in the next century (the later shows take place in the 24<sup>th</sup> century). In *The Next Generation* we have Counselor Troi, who is not a clergy person but an empath (one who can read



a person's emotions) and a psychologist/psychoanalyst. Clergy persons have apparently been replaced by secular self-help guru's in the 24<sup>th</sup> century.

Another important encounter with religion occurs in the *Original Series* episode "Bread and Circuses," where Kirk, Spock, and McCoy discuss the Prime Directive of non-interference in primitive cultures and encounter a group of proto-Christians. In dialogue with them, one of the Christians states that "all men are brothers," to which Kirk agrees "yes, all men are brothers." This seems to be Roddenberry's way of saying that he agrees with certain aspects of religious belief, when they affirm human dignity. Of course, theology is not examined too deeply, and in fact by episodes end, Kirk and company are still confused as to why the group worships "the Sun" (as the Christians refer to themselves). Lt. Uhura informs Kirk that she has been listening to further broadcasts from the planet and believes that they are actually followers of "the Son of God." One could interpret this to mean that Christianity does not exist in the 23<sup>rd</sup> century leading to their confusion. However, Kirk expresses the sentimental wish to be there to "see how it all began." In its primitive, non-threatening (and in this case persecuted and underground) state, Christianity has some sentiments and aspects that Roddenberry agrees with.

A more important and recurring theme in the *Star Trek* shows is that of the False God or the Strongman.<sup>9</sup> The crew encounters a being that at first appears to have incredible powers, perhaps even god-like abilities, but end up being exposed

as a fraud. While the being may dazzle even some of the crew with showy tricks and apparent miracles, one person (usually the Captain) will see through the illusion and expose flaws in the society this "god" has setup or the plan they have in mind. Let us look at some of the examples of this scenario from the various shows.<sup>10</sup>

In the *Original Series* episode, "Return of the Archons," the crew encounters a society that is rigidly controlled and puritanical (with bouts of hedonism and wildness at certain times of the day). They discover that Landru, a powerful computer, reads the thoughts of the people and makes them "of the Body." Clearly this is a reference to the "mind control" nature of certain cults and oppressive social codes enforced by religious authority. Members who try to defy the will of Landru are "punished" severely, and brainwashed to obey without question while turning on those who disobey. Kirk discovers the central control center and talks Landru into destroying himself. The Prime Directive forbids interference with primitive cultures, but in this case the culture is stagnant and will never grow while it is kept under the thumb of the theocracy. Landru sees the logic of helping the culture by removing his destructive influence and the people are left to fend for themselves.

"Who Mourns for Adonais" picks up the motif again by having the crew of the Enterprise forced to land on a planet where the god Apollo from ancient Greece resides in his temple. Apollo welcomes them and invites them to live with him

forever and worship him. Kirk's initial statement of defiance towards Apollo is telling but qualified, "Mankind has no need for gods. We find the one sufficient." Scotty and the others resist but are painfully subdued by Apollo's powers. While impressed, they speculate that Apollo is an alien who visited Earth long ago masquerading as a god. When mankind stopped believing in him and his brethren, they fled to this planet and now Apollo is the only one left. Kirk and the others formulate a plan to defeat Apollo. They get the attractive female crewmember that Apollo has fallen in love with to reject him and make him angry. Then they trick Apollo into straining his power. Finally, the Enterprise destroys Apollo's temple. Devastated that his children reject him, Apollo spreads himself on the winds to join his fellow gods in oblivion. At the end of the show, Kirk expresses some regret about what they had to do. Perhaps it would not have hurt to "gather a few laurel leaves," says Kirk. To allow human progress to move forward it seems that sometimes painful steps have to be taken, even to destroy the gods.

In the fifth *Star Trek* movie "*The Final Frontier*" the cast of the *Original Series* encounters Spock's long lost brother Sybok. He is atypical of Vulcans, Spock's stoic people who suppress all emotion. Instead Sybok believes that embracing emotion is the key to enlightenment and he uses his mental powers to brainwash the crew (except Kirk) into allowing him on a mad quest to seek after God. Hijacking the Enterprise and kidnapping the Federation, Klingon, and

Romulan ambassadors they head through the "Great Barrier" of the galaxy to a mysterious planet. The ambassadors call it names for Heaven and Eden, but the planet itself is desolate and forbidding.

Once on the surface, Spock, Kirk, Sybok and McCoy encounter a being identifying himself as God. This being appears in the stereotypical Westernized figure of the "Father God" as depicted in art. He has a giant head, disembodied, depicting an older man with a kind face, flowing white hair and booming voice. This "God" claims to be all of the gods that mankind has believed in and is the one that Sybok seeks. God wishes to carry his glory to the universe in the Starship Enterprise. Kirk is punished when he asks, "What does God need with a starship?" This shocks the others out of their delusion and they see "God's" true colors. Sybok is the last to catch on when he sees his God appear with a face identical to his own. God is merely an alien who has been imprisoned in this far-away place and used the ruse to get himself out. Vengeful and angry, God tries to destroy our heroes, but is gunned down by a Klingon warship, with Spock at the controls. Formerly the villains of the series, the Klingons form a temporary alliance in order to stop the alien menace. Indeed, in later shows we learn that the Klingons in their mythology killed their own gods, as Worf says in *Deep Space Nine*, "They were more trouble than they were worth."

The idea of the Strongman ties in with the idea of the False God as a recurring theme in *Star Trek*. The Strongman is a being that is not a god per se but highly advanced and self-important, who, despite his power, is flawed and a menace to be defeated or outwitted by his supposed inferiors. The character of "Q" in *The Next Generation* is such a character, although he overlaps into both categories.

"Q" is a super-being encountered by the new Enterprise crew in the pilot episode of *The Next Generation* "Encounter at Farpoint." Humanoid in appearance, Q can snap his fingers and do all sorts of incredible things like change his shape, create illusions, transport the ship halfway across the galaxy and time travel. He is part of a "Continuum" of super beings that act like Cosmic Tricksters. Q expresses his contempt for humanity and its failings, to which Captain Picard protests that "rapid progress" is being made. It is later revealed that Q secretly envies humanity, having grown bored with his own omnipotence. The Q Continuum as a society is in decline and values human beings and their adaptability, individuality and creativity. Though Q constantly threatens and provokes human beings, he also seeks to protect them and challenge them to be better. In a way Q is more like Satan in the Biblical Book of Job ...an agent of God that provokes people to face their personal problems head on and test their faith. In *Star Trek*, the faith being tested is in the goodness of human beings and their potential to overcome problems. Q himself is flawed, and despite his claims to the contrary, not nearly omnipotent.<sup>11</sup>

Khan Noonien Singh, Kirk's nemesis from the *Original Series* episode "Space Seed" returns in the second *Star Trek* film "*The Wrath of Khan*." Khan is a genetically engineered "superman" from Earth's past when the Eugenics Wars were fought between normal human beings and genetically enhanced men like himself. Khan is consumed with his desire for revenge against Kirk, whom he blames for the death of his wife and being marooned on a desolate planet. Khan uses a doomsday weapon, the Genesis Device (originally intended as a terraforming project to create habitable worlds from barren planets), to try to destroy the Enterprise. Mr. Spock sacrifices his life to save his shipmates by fixing the Enterprise's reactor in time for them to escape destruction. Khan is finally defeated, and Kirk and company perform military burial in space as tribute to their fallen comrade.

Khan's character is mirrored in *The Next Generation* film (the tenth overall in the series) "*Nemesis*" in the person of Shinzon of Romulus. Like Khan, Shinzon is a genetically engineered man, who considers himself superior to everyone else. He blames the Federation for his predicament, a genetic disease he inherited as part of an experiment by the Romulans to clone Captain Picard for purposes of political intrigue. Shinzon hates everyone, including himself, tries to rape Counselor Troi and destroy the Enterprise, Picard, and the Earth. Ultimately Picard defeats him,

and Data is forced to sacrifice himself to save the Captain's life, transporting him out of Shinzon's ship before it explodes.

In *The Next Generation* series we encounter Lore, the identical but evil twin "brother" of Data, the android Starfleet Lieutenant. While Data respects human beings and seeks to imitate them (in order to become "more human"), almost to the point of worship, Lore seeks instead to gather power for himself. He tries several times to commit genocide against human beings and anoints himself as an overlord among a group of renegade Borg.<sup>12</sup> Lore sets himself up as a messianic leader of a fascistic cult. As a complete machine, Lore is worshipped by the Borg (who are only partly machine) as an example of the perfection and purity they can seek to emulate. Data rejects his brother's nefarious ways and reaffirms the dignity of serving and embracing mankind rather than attacking it.

In *Deep Space Nine*, the third television series of *Star Trek*, produced after Roddenberry's death, more Strongmen and False Gods appear. A race of aliens known as "The Founders" who rule a portion of space called "the Dominion" is encountered by Captain Sisko and the crew of the Federation Space station Deep Space Nine. The Founders are shape shifting aliens (whose ability to change form at will could be viewed as truly godlike if it weren't such a common thing in the Star Trek galaxy) who rule their sector of space with an iron fist. They hold other alien species, the Vorta and the Jem-Hadar as their slaves. These two slave races

worship the Founders as gods. Both races are genetically bred for servitude. The Jem-Hadar are ruthless soldiers kept under control through the use of drugs ('Ketracel White') that they are addicted to from birth. Both the Vorta and the Jem-Hadar are genetically programmed to lay down their lives for their gods. The Founders are obviously not gods in the true sense, but they, the leaders of their society, use religion as a means to control their subjects and act much like the Strongmen seen elsewhere in *Star Trek* with their megalomania and racism.

The Klingons,<sup>13</sup> a race of violent warriors and the foil for the Enterprise crew throughout the *Original Series* have their religion further developed in *The Next Generation* and beyond. It is revealed that the Klingons have a patriarchal culture based on the worship of Kahless, a male Klingon prophet. In Klingon belief there is an afterlife, a devil figure, and various blood rituals and other ceremonies. They glorify suffering, battles, and honorable death. In contrast to the enlightened principles of Federation secular humanism, the Klingons appear barbaric and backward with their warrior religion. The character of Worf on *The Next Generation* Enterprise finds himself culturally conflicted, having been raised by human parents after he was orphaned in a Romulan attack on his home at a young age. He wishes to become "more Klingon" but doubts his faith. Finally he seeks a vision of Kahless and meets him face to face. Worf doubts his senses until the man challenges him to a fight. Worf accepts that Kahless is indeed real, but has lingering



doubts about his religion. Finally it is revealed that Kahless is in fact a clone, created by the Klingon priests using blood from an ancient artifact of the historical Kahless. Worf agrees to keep the secret for the good it may do in uniting his people and the clone Kahless is crowned Emperor of the Klingons. While technologically similar to the advanced Federation, the Klingons are portrayed as morally backward, and in keeping with a theme of post-Roddenberry *Trek* shows, it expresses the notion that religion is a crutch for backward peoples. Apparently, faith in something is better than faith in nothing. Of course the more rational and enlightened faith of the Federation humans is faith in the goodness and potential of humankind, not in external deities, prophets, or ancient texts and rituals. Human beings do not convert to the religions of other aliens, but aliens may become "more human" by imitating their philosophies. Thus so-called "Human Values" such as compassion, self-sacrifice, generosity, and notions of individual liberty (tempered by social collectivist values) begin to rub off on certain worthy aliens, such as Spock, Worf, and others.

*Deep Space Nine*, in addition to further exploring Klingon religion, introduces us to the religion of the Bajorans, a humanoid race seeking Federation membership. Like many of the alien species portrayed in *Star Trek*, Bajorans certainly look and act very human, but they are portrayed as monocultural. Their society is many thousands of years old, yet their technology has only recently

caught up with the Federation and others. They worship gods known as "the Prophets" who reside in a wormhole (which the Bajorans refer to as "The Celestial Temple") in space near their home planet of Bajor. The Federation dismisses their gods as "powerful aliens." Captain Sisko goes through the wormhole and has an encounter with the aliens. At first the aliens don't seem to realize that they are being worshipped and indeed do not understand humans at all. Sisko does not believe in them and yet he comes out of the wormhole hailed as "The Emissary of the Prophets" by the Bajorans. As the show goes on, more and more Sisko comes to accept his religious role (much to the chagrin of his Star Fleet superiors) and the Prophets become increasingly integral to the plot. This turning away from the secularism of past shows demonstrates the waning influence of Roddenberry's philosophy on the franchise. However, it should be noted that the Prophets (and their demonic counterparts "the Pah-Wraiths") are ultimately advanced aliens that some backward people perceive as gods. The Bajoran religion is seen as limited to the cultural life of the Bajorans rather than a universal faith. Sisko would seem to be the exception, until it is revealed that his mother was possessed by a Prophet when he was conceived and when he dies, he goes to live with the Prophets in the wormhole.

Another issue brought up by *Deep Space Nine* is its treatment of clergy. In the Bajoran religion they have a leader called "the Kai:" essentially the Bajoran

equivalent of a Pope. This religious leader is always shown as female (although a man runs for the office, he loses). The first Kai who shows faith in Sisko as Emissary is a good and wise woman. She gives herself in the cause of easing the suffering of others even to the point of having to give up her office. The Kai who takes her place is corrupt, greedy, and self-deluded. Known as Kai Win, she is constantly shown as a selfish hypocrite seeking after power, but is eventually redeemed in the show's climax. By contrast, the main Bajoran character, Major Kira is depicted as a doubting, but honest and dedicated follower of the religion. She is devoted to helping the secular Federation and her own people, and she has constant clashes with the over-bearing and oppressive influence of Kai Win. *Deep Space Nine* shows a primitive culture that is still dealing with religious issues (since human society has apparently freed itself from religious influence) and the inherent problems with having clergy. The private practices of the individual and their beliefs are more important than an institution or hierarchy.

In the world of *Star Trek*, religion in the human realm has largely faded away, as more enlightened secular humanist principles have taken over. Even the miracles of religious faith have been achieved through technological progress. Answers once sought from heaven are now available from more mundane sources. For example several religious traditions look forward to a millennial kingdom of peace on earth, or of the gods returning to make things right. Christians of all kinds

and Muslims await the return of Jesus to usher in God's kingdom (though in different ways of course). Many Jews still await the coming of God's Messiah. The New Age Movement itself takes its name from a coming Age of spiritual enlightenment. Many Buddhists and Hindus seek an end to the cycle of death and rebirth, and even a more perfect re-creation of all that exists.

*Star Trek* however, tells us that this new age will be heralded by the invention of "warp drive," the ability to make a space ship travel many times faster than the speed of light (enabling interstellar travel and communication). The Messiah will not be Jesus, Buddha, or any divine person or prophet, but rather a race of enlightened aliens, the Vulcans. Impressed by our achievements and by our potential to better ourselves, they will share vast scientific knowledge with us. Together the human and Vulcan races forge a united "Federation" of planets that seeks to bring peace and harmony to the galaxy. Starfleet replaces the priestly castes of old, as the new ambassadors of their philosophical enlightenment. Representing the proverbial cream of the crop, they are the defenders of the humanist faith to the galaxy.

In the near future, *Star Trek* tells us, science will eventually put an end to the problems we face in our world today.<sup>14</sup> Hunger, war, poverty and class distinctions will disappear, and Earth will be united under one government and standard of living. Starfleet will protect and expand the Federation for the

betterment of all. Of course, in the story our heroes will find that the rest of the galaxy does not share our magnanimous vision of the future. Thus cultural clashes occur with totalitarian governments like the Klingons, Romulans, Borg, and the other alien races. Yet technology continues to solve problems and the characters show faith in it, despite many setbacks. Holodecks provide endless entertainment; transporters make travel fast and painless. Replicators can prepare just about any meal one could desire, without the necessity of killing animals. Warp drive allows journeys that would normally take decades or centuries accomplishable in months or years. Medical science has progressed to the point wherein scars can be removed in a matter of seconds. Artificial limbs are identical to the real thing and there is even a magical 'cure' for radiation.

*Star Trek* is not completely one sided in its appraisal of technology, there are countless episodes that depict transporter and holodeck malfunctions, starship engines exploding, and the Borg, the very embodiment of technology gone wrong. The Borg are part machine and seek to assimilate people and technology by force into their "Collective," a socialist-nightmare utopia of control. Still, through it all, there is a prevailing attitude that progress will inevitably continue. Despite the dangers, nobody gives up their transporters, their holodecks or their warp drive. A few shun technology, but these persons are portrayed as superstitious and

backward, looked down upon much like some technologically savvy people look down upon the Amish.

In the second *Star Trek* film, *The Wrath of Khan*, the eccentric southern physician Doctor McCoy says "According to myth, the world was created in six days, now watch out! Here comes 'Genesis!' We'll do it for you in six minutes!" Indeed the 'Genesis Device,' created by a team of human scientists, is capable of turning a barren planet into an Earth-like paradise, through the use of technology, wholly apart from divine intervention. However, despite science's triumph over God, the technology has a flaw. Kirk's son points out that in their rush to complete the project, they used an unstable proto-matter as a shortcut. This makes any planet created with the Genesis Device dangerously unstable. Early on the potential use of the Genesis Device as a weapon of mass destruction is realized. In the film's climactic battle, the villain Khan tries to use the Genesis Device to kill Kirk and his crew but ends up terraforming a nebula instead.

In the subsequent sequel "*Search for Spock*" another man-made miracle occurs. In the previous film, Spock had died saving his friends, echoing Vulcan philosophy with his statement that "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the one." Kirk says in his departed friend's eulogy "Of all the souls I have encountered in my travels ... his was the most human." Yet when Spock's coffin is shot into space, it is not the end of him. Kirk returns home to find Spock's father

reprimanding him for leaving Spock's "soul" behind. As it turns out, Spock had done a telepathic mind-meld with Dr. McCoy before his death, allowing Spock's spirit or essence to reside in the mind of the good doctor. On the surface of the newly born "Genesis planet," Spock's coffin has landed and been affected by the technology. His body is "reborn" as a small child, who matures to adulthood at a vastly accelerated rate. Having finally mind-melded (sharing his thoughts) with McCoy, Spock regains his sense of self. Though his personality seems slightly altered, his friends accept him as the real Spock. The Genesis planet destroys itself, but Spock emerges whole, like a chick hatching from an egg. This evokes a metaphor of the individual being worth more than an entire world. Indeed Spock's statement is reversed, in this case, "The needs of the few or the one outweigh the needs of the many." The individual's importance is affirmed alongside the Star Trek philosophy of collectivist harmony.

Through these and other examples, *Star Trek* shows that what we once considered miracles may one day be duplicated by science and the immortality we seek in religious belief perhaps does not reside in the hands of a deity or some supernatural force, but rather through natural or technological means that are in our hands. The true gods may simply be ourselves.

Another religious concept, the idea of a paradise, or heaven, has played out countless times in the shows and films. Usually the paradise is an illusion or trap, one in which a culture is stagnated.

In "The Return of the Archons" the computer Landru holds his people under his thumb until Kirk can free them. The perfect society is far from idyllic with no freedom. Apollo's promise of a paradise in "Who Mourns for Adonais" is too limiting for human beings and the god must be destroyed so that humans can prosper. Continuing with this concept and extending it to the idea of a heavenly paradise, the seventh Star Trek film and the first to feature The Next Generation crew, confronts this idea with the concept of the "Nexus."

The Nexus is an immense band of energy that appears at various times in the galaxy and travels about sucking in people and things. Great disasters herald its appearance and a man named Soran continues to appear wherever it goes. As it turns out he is a fanatic, a man obsessed with being drawn into the Nexus. Belonging to a race of long-lived humanoids, he has spent over 70 years trying to get back into the Nexus from which he was cast out (making him somewhat like Lucifer who was cast out of heaven for his disloyalty to God). Soran is willing to kill billions of people to get back into the Nexus. He plans to destroy an entire star system with a super weapon (a tri-lithium torpedo) in order to draw the Nexus close enough for him to step inside and into a blissful state of existence.



Captain Picard tries to stop Soran from launching the weapon and in the process his crew is killed and he is sucked into the Nexus. Inside he is delighted by a vision of himself with what he had always wanted but never had in life ...a loving family. Picard resists when he realizes it is "not real" and he still has a mission to accomplish. Admonished by his friend Guinan for his weakness, he seeks out and enlists the help of (the now long dead) Captain Kirk who is also residing in the Nexus (having been enveloped in it 70 years ago). Kirk too is at first enamored of the delightful visions of the Nexus, but is convinced by Picard that temporal matters are more important. They return to a point in time before the star system's destruction and stop Soran, but Kirk is killed in the process. Dying a second time, Kirk realizes that "making a difference" is what really matters. With his last breath, he mutters "oh my!" as if he sees something that we the audience cannot see. Perhaps this is a hint of a real afterlife, or perhaps it is simply Kirk coming to fully realize the moment of his own death. In any case, the audience is left to make up their own mind, perhaps as Roddenberry would want them to (in keeping with the agnostic spirit he pioneered on the show).

Moving on to the science fiction universe of George Lucas, that of *Star Wars*, we see a different picture painted of the world and the role of religion in it.

*Star Wars* does not take place in our future, but rather in a "galaxy far far away," a long time ago. Technology is seen less as a shiny new cure for all things,

but as an old and familiar part of everyday life that doesn't always work like it's supposed to (like an old car). Technology has the potential for both good and bad, but it is not a panacea.<sup>15</sup>

Traveling about the galaxy is as common a thing for people in *Star Wars* as driving the family car across the country for modern people.

Unlike *Star Trek*, with its many authors and contributors who have modified the story and characters after Roddenberry's death, *Star Wars* continues to be a franchise controlled ultimately by one man. In this discussion I will not focus on the "expanded universe" of novels, comics, interactive games or other media that form a lesser part of *Star Wars* continuity. In the canon films, we see two major threads. In the original trilogy, we see the story of a rag-tag band of idealistic Rebels fighting against an oppressive totalitarian government known as the Galactic Empire and their ultimate triumph over that evil. In the prequel trilogy (with two films completed and the last one expected by 2005), we see the events in the twilight decades of the Old Republic, a democratic but corrupt government that ruled before the Empire. The prequels tie both trilogies together by weaving a common thread, the story of the rise, fall, and redemption of Anakin Skywalker.

In the first film (story order speaking) "The Phantom Menace" a small political incident (a dissident trading faction starting a war with another planet)

occurs and some Jedi Knights are sent to resolve the issue. In the Old Republic, the Jedi Knights are a religious order of warriors. They have the innate ability (apart from technology) which lets them tap into a mysterious cosmic "Force," that grants them superhuman abilities such as telekinesis, mind control, increased stamina in battle, levitation, and other incredible skills. They wield glowing energy swords known as Lightsabers with amazing skill. While the Jedi are certainly powerful, they are not invincible, and they do not seek power for themselves. The Jedi Order is located in a Temple on Coruscant, the capital city of the Galactic Republic and is under the authority of the Supreme Chancellor of the Senate.

Thus the role of religion in *Star Wars* is established as one of service, but viewed negatively; it is the tool of the state. However, the Force itself is an interesting concept. It could allegorically be viewed as a metaphor for all religious faith, yet it is something that is universal, testable and empirically verifiable (unlike the religious beliefs of our modern world) even to unbelievers. Microscopic life forms that reside in the cells of a body known as "Midichlorians" are said to be an indicator of Force sensitivity. Qui Gon Jinn, the elder Jedi sent to negotiate the dispute says that without Midichlorians life could not exist "and we would have no knowledge of the Force."

Qui Gon Jinn is often at odds with his superiors in the Jedi Council over various matters of their faith. The Jedi Order adheres to strict rules in a "Jedi Code"

(which is not fully expounded on screen). A Master chooses a "Padawan" (apprentice) to train as a Jedi and they are all celibate. In fact, all Force sensitivity seems to be selected by nature, and Jedi are recruited soon after birth. Jedi are very rare in the galaxy, numbering about ten thousand out of hundreds of thousands of star systems. One such person is discovered on a backwater desert planet quite by accident.

Qui Gon and his party escape from an attempt on their lives by the treacherous Trade Federation but are forced to land their disabled starship on the backwater planet of Tatooine. There they encounter young Anakin, a slave who is skilled with machines. He helps Qui Gon Jinn, the Jedi apprentice Obi-Wan and Queen Amidala by giving them comfort in his mother's home (their master is Watto, a greedy alien junk dealer). Anakin shows off his impressive skills and superhuman reflexes by winning a dangerous Pod Race (reminiscent of the chariot race in the religious epic "Ben Hur") which wins him his freedom and the money that his newfound friends need to rebuild their ship and escape back to their home planet.

Seeing Anakin's potential as a Jedi candidate, Qui Gon tests his Midichlorians (which are unusually high) and decides that this boy fulfills an ancient Jedi Prophecy of "the Chosen one" who will "Bring balance to the Force." His idea is controversial among the Jedi Council, and they at first reject Qui Gon's request to have Anakin trained as a Jedi. Anakin is proven to have Force Ability,

able to see things before they happen and read the backs of cards with his mind. Yoda, an ancient Jedi Master says that he senses "much fear" in the boy Anakin. "Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, hate leads to suffering," he tells the frightened child. The Jedi philosophy is that one must be "calm, at peace, passive" and control one's emotions in order to feel the Force and use it for the service of others.

Events are set in motion so that when Qui Gon is killed in battle with a deadly "Sith Lord," Obi-Wan takes his master's dying wish that Anakin be trained to heart. Obi-Wan decides to train Anakin whether the Council allows him or not, and they grudgingly accept. During the course of the film another figure is continuously present, that of Senator Palpatine. Viewers of the original trilogy of films recognize him as Emperor Palpatine, the tyrannical ruler of the Empire years later. This ambitious man himself has control of the Force, yet he is so powerful, he can keep this fact secret from the Jedi, overshadowing their powers. We learn that Palpatine is actually a member of a rival Force sect, known as the Sith. These Sith were thought to have been exterminated a thousand years ago, around the time of the formation of the Republic. Yet they have lingered on in secret, plotting their revenge. Palpatine's secret apprentice, Darth Maul is sent to kill Qui Gon and Obi-Wan, but only succeeds in killing the Master before he is himself slain by Obi-Wan. Palpatine, like his apprentice and all Sith, uses the "Dark Side" of the Force, tapping

into emotions like anger and hatred in order to achieve power. The Senator manipulates the Trade Federation into their disastrous battle with the defenseless planet Naboo in order to cause a political crisis. This crisis generates sympathy for Naboo, Palpatine's home planet, and he gets himself elected Chancellor of the Senate. Palpatine vows to clean up the corruption that prevents peaceful planets like Naboo from being protected from the likes of the Trade Federation.

In the next prequel film, "*Attack of the Clones*," we see ten years later that Chancellor Palpatine has continued to secure power for himself, through the Dark Side of the Force. Clearly the abuse of religious and spiritual authority is shown, and the weaknesses of a stagnant and arrogant institution like the Jedi Order, who is powerless to stop it. The Sith Lord Palpatine has recruited a new apprentice, Count Dooku (known as Lord Tyrannus to his master), a Jedi Knight who has left the Order. Together they organize another plan to cause a state of emergency in the galaxy, allowing Palpatine to gain more power.

Dooku leads a Separatist movement of star systems and planets that break away from the Republic, including the Trade Federation and other galactic corporations. This begins a galactic civil war which comes to be called the Clone Wars. We know from the original trilogy that this devastating war heralds the birth of the Empire and the destruction of the Jedi Order. The Separatist threat is all the excuse Palpatine needs to gain emergency powers and create a galactic army. The

army is made up of cloned soldiers, secretly grown in a lab on the far off planet of Kamino. The Jedi, who are to lead them into battle against the Separatists, thus become soldiers and officers in the Republican army.

Meanwhile Anakin, who has become a young man, is tempted by the Dark Side of the Force. Incredibly gifted and powerful, as well as emotionally unstable, he grows apart from his master Obi-Wan due to several factors. Anakin's great power in the Force makes him increasingly arrogant and frustrated with his master, whom he feels is an impediment to his progress as a Jedi. Anakin continues to pine for his mother whom is still living on Tatooine. As a boy he vowed to return and free the slaves including his mother, but never followed up on that promise. He also falls madly in love with Amidala (now a Senator and no longer Queen) which grows out of his boyhood crush when he meets her in *The Phantom Menace*. Since the Jedi are celibate, they try to keep their affair a secret and this sense of guilt continues to erode his sanity and control of his emotions. Palpatine of course seizes full advantage of this and seeks to place them together at every opportunity.

Anakin is troubled by dreams of his mother suffering and finally disobeys the orders of his master in order to find her. He returns to discover that she has been freed and married a Tatooine farmer named Clieg Lars. Anakin encounters the man, but is told that a band of warlike tribal aliens called Sand people (or Tusks) have kidnapped her. Anakin finds his mother dying from torture and is powerless to save

her life. Enraged, he gives in to hatred and massacres the entire village, including women and children. While he tearfully confesses to Amidala this terrible act of genocide, he apparently feels little remorse except for his temporary loss of control. Headstrong and arrogant, Anakin continually loses his temper and talks back to his master. In battle, by disobeying Obi-Wan's orders he loses his right arm to Count Dooku's lightsaber. This is symbolic of Anakin's loss of self. He gains a machine arm, but has lost a part of his being through his poor choices.

At the end of *Attack of the Clones* Anakin and Amidala are married in a secret wedding and Palpatine watches as his armies march off to crush his enemies, according to the conspiracy he controls. The events of the final prequel film are not fully known, but suffice to say, Anakin's fall to the Dark Side will be completed and Palpatine's power will be secured as Emperor.

Moving ahead to the original *Star Wars* films (filmed 20 years ago) we see events taking place two decades after the prequels. In this age, the Empire is in control, but more and more star systems are breaking away in a desperate attempt to throw off the yolk of oppression. In the first film (originally titled simply "*Star Wars*" in 1977) "*A New Hope*," a super weapon, known as the Death Star has been created to destroy entire planets and thus terrorize the galaxy into submission. The plans for this weapon were originally obtained by Count Dooku from one of the alien races that had joined the side of the Separatists. Now Palpatine commands



this stolen knowledge to kill billions of people. This event galvanizes the Rebel Alliance, a community of guerilla fighters to mount an attack that destroys the hated weapon.

In this time the Jedi are all but extinct, except for three individuals. One of these is Obi-Wan Kenobi, a hermit living on Tatooine in obscurity. Obi-Wan, now known as "Old Ben," is disparagingly called "that wizard ...just a crazy old man" by Owen Lars, son of Clieg Lars. Owen and Beru are the Uncle and Aunt of Luke Skywalker, a farm boy who has been lied to about his past. He has been told his father was a spice miner when in fact his father was a Jedi Knight named Anakin Skywalker, who fought in the Clone Wars alongside Obi-Wan.

When the family purchases some droids to help out around the farm, Luke discovers one of them holds a secret message from an Imperial Diplomat who is secretly helping the Rebels, Princess Leia. This clue leads Luke to Obi-Wan Kenobi, whom Leia asks for help. Agents of the Empire also follow the clues and Luke's relatives are murdered. This prompts Luke to follow Kenobi on a mission to rescue the Princess and recover the Death Star plans to the Rebels.

Obi-Wan reveals to Luke that not only was his father actually the Jedi Knight Anakin Skywalker, but Luke himself also has potential in the Force. Kenobi begins to train the youth in the ways of the Jedi as best he can. Finally Obi-Wan is

killed in battle with Darth Vader, a Sith Lord, and the new Sith henchman of Emperor Palpatine. Darth Vader was once a Jedi, as an Imperial Official states, "The Jedi are extinct, their fire has gone out of the galaxy, and you my friend are the last of their religion." Vader is a cruel and mysterious figure, creating fear as the Emperor's representative. An Imperial general insults Vader, calling him a "sorcerer" who's "sad devotion to that ancient religion" has not helped the Empire stop the Rebels. At this Vader uses the Force to telekinetically choke the unfortunate man nearly to death until he is stopped by order of his superior, Moff Tarkin.

Obi-Wan allows himself to be killed by Vader in a lightsaber duel so that Vader and the other Imperials will be distracted long enough for Luke and his new friends, a pair of smugglers known as Han Solo and Chewbacca, the Princess and their two droids to escape the Death Star and deliver the plans to the waiting Rebel fleet. Luke is emotionally shattered when he sees Obi-Wan die, as he loses the closest person he had to a father in life, but runs when he hears the voice of Obi-Wan in his head say "Run, Luke, run!" Despite the death of his physical body, Obi-Wan's influence on galactic events through his guidance of Luke continues throughout the films, thanks to the power of the Force.

A desperate attack on the Death Star ensues, with many Rebel pilots being killed. Luke is one of the last remaining pilots. As he nears the weak-point of the

Death Star, an impossibly difficult target, he hears the voice of his dead master urging him to "use the Force" and stretch out with his feelings. Turning off his ship's computer, Luke trusts in the Force and is able to successfully hit the target and destroy the Death Star once and for all. The Rebels are victorious and escape the Empire once again. However, during the battle the Lord Darth Vader senses Luke using the Force, and takes this knowledge with him as he too escapes the Death Star's destruction.

In the next *Star Wars* film, the "*Empire Strikes Back*" we see perhaps the most overtly religious of the films. While the prophecy of the Chosen One in the prequels, and statements about "the Will of the Force" conjured up images of monotheistic and Judeo-Christian overtones, now the Force is described more nebulously. It has been compared to Buddhism, Taoism, or other eastern religious beliefs.

The Rebels continue to fight the Empire, and we learn that Darth Vader, the evil lord is actually Anakin Skywalker.<sup>16</sup> A cyborg, Vader has been wounded many times and relies on a breath mask and respirator to keep him alive. The boy who once enjoyed fixing machines has now become nearly one himself. As the man has become more machine, he has also become metaphorically less human. His voice is deep and ominous and his body is hidden beneath a black mask and cape. Vader is ruthless in his desire to crush the Rebels, killing his own men when they make

mistakes. In the *Empire Strikes Back*, he has gained a new obsession ...finding his long lost son Luke and turning him to the Dark Side of the Force. Emperor Palpatine is seen as well, and we see that he is Anakin's master, guiding him to do his bidding as an agent of evil. According to Obi-Wan it was Vader who wiped out the Jedi Knights, but he also lied to Luke, saying that Vader "betrayed and murdered your father." When Luke learns the truth, he becomes suicidal, his quest for vengeance now utterly meaningless. After losing his hand in battle with his father, he jumps from an incredible height, but is saved at the last moment by his friends.

Earlier in the film Luke encountered master Yoda, the other surviving Jedi, who trains him more fully in the Force. Yoda's platitudes include the warning to "beware the Darkside ... fear, anger, aggression, the Dark Side are they" and "A Jedi uses the Force for knowledge and defense, never for attack." In "A New Hope," Obi-Wan had described the Force as "what gives a Jedi his power ... an energy field created by all living things, it surrounds us and binds the galaxy together." Yoda tells Luke further that "life creates it, makes it grow" and that one can "feel the Force around you" between "you, me, the tree, the rock ..." This notion of a universal Force everywhere has several religious parallels, both in the notion of Brahman and karma in Hindu and Buddhist thought, as well as the omnipresence of God in various monotheistic traditions. Luke tries to use the Force to pull his crashed starship from a swamp in which it has become stuck, but gives up. His lack

of faith is admonished by Master Yoda. To Luke's statement, "I don't believe it," he says "that is why you fail." Yoda demonstrates his power by levitating the massive vehicle through the air and landing it safely on the ground. Luke is shown a vision in a cave by Yoda of Darth Vader. Luke attacks the specter and cuts off its head with his Lightsaber, only to find his own face beneath the helmet.

Luke trains with Yoda for a time, but then breaks off the training when he has a vision of his friends (Han Solo, Leia and company) "in pain." He rushes off to help them; despite Yoda's warnings that he is not yet ready. Obi-Wan's spirit admonishes Yoda that Luke's reckless nature was also a flaw he himself possesses. Yoda and Obi-Wan act in the manner of many parents who finally let their child go off into the world, to make their own decisions. They give him parting advice, to bury his feelings deep down, to remember his training "save you it can." The notion of salvation comes into play in a much greater way in the third and final film of the original trilogy and the last film in the series.

In "*Return of the Jedi*," the *Star Wars* finale, the Rebels have been steadily gaining victories against the Empire. Luke Skywalker is now nearly a fully trained Jedi and very powerful in the Force, like his father. Yet he succeeds where his father fails, much as Galahad passes the tests his father Lancelot fails in the Arthurian romances. Luke fights for the Rebellion and for their freedom. He uses the Force to fight evil but does not give in to the anger and the hatred linked to the Dark Side.

Rescuing Han Solo from an evil crime lord, they return to the Rebels to discover that another Death Star has been built. This even stronger super weapon presents an ideal target, because the Emperor himself is onboard. By assassinating the evil leader of the Empire, it is hoped that freedom can at last be won for the galaxy. Luke Skywalker is the only Jedi Knight in the Rebellion; the rest are ordinary people from various alien races, humans, and droids, all with the common goal of freedom from oppression. Interestingly enough, the phrase "May the Force be with you" is always a part of the Rebel philosophy (even going back to *A New Hope*). Though they are not Jedi, they believe that the Force is on their side, in their battle for liberty.

Of course the Force (The Dark Side of the Force) is also on the side of the Empire, in the persons of Vader and Palpatine. As the events unfold another subplot emerges, Luke's desire to save his father's soul.<sup>17</sup>

It turns out that the second Death Star is being used as bait to capture and exterminate the Rebels, by drawing them into a trap. The Emperor has foreknowledge of the events through the Dark Side of the Force and he uses Vader as a trap for Luke. Vader's son allows himself to be captured and brought before Vader, in order to bring him back "to the good side." Luke says to his father, "There is still good in you, the Emperor hasn't driven it from you fully ... I feel the good in you, the conflict." Vader responds that "there is no conflict ... I must obey my

master." Vader fatalistically tells Luke that "it is too late for me, son." A battle of wills occurs, alongside a battle of Lightsabers as the Emperor goads Luke into attacking him. Luke finally gives in, perhaps sensing that the fate of the Galaxy rests in his hands. With the Emperor dead, the war could be ended then and there. Vader is forced to defend his master and he and Luke begin a death struggle. In *Empire Strikes Back*, Vader expressed the notion that Luke could destroy the Emperor, and offered Luke the chance to join him and they would "rule the galaxy as father and son." A secret rivalry thus exists between Palpatine and Vader. Palpatine has again used the Force to manipulate his pawns into position. If Vader wins, he will have slain the last Jedi Knight and destroyed the Rebellion. If Luke wins, he will have killed his own father in anger and thus become Palpatine's new Dark Side apprentice. Plus Palpatine will be rid of the treacherous Vader and have a new young pupil to mold to his will.

Luke remembers his training and resists both options, by refusing to kill his own father. Enraged, the Emperor tortures Luke with the Force, throwing lightning at his body. The suffering of Luke willingly for the salvation of a guilty man evokes parallels with Christ. Overcome with the sight of his son's suffering, Vader finally kills his master, and in the process sustains mortal injuries himself. In his last dying moments Vader comes to terms with himself and finally allows his good side return. He allows Luke to see his true face under the mask, horribly scarred. Luke leaves

the Death Star before it is finally destroyed by the Rebel Fleet and burns his father's body on a funeral pyre.

Good triumphs over evil when the Emperor's technologically advanced army is defeated by a primitive tribe of small furry aliens, the Ewoks that the Rebels have whipped up support for against the Empire. In fact, the turning point of that battle occurs earlier when C3PO, the golden droid who has been following our heroes along since the beginning, is declared a "god" by the Ewoks. This unlikely alliance allows them to destroy the Death Star's shield generator on their planet, and destroy the invincible super weapon at last.

Luke comes away from the burning pyre of his father to rejoin the other Rebels in celebration with the Ewoks of their victory over the Empire and we see him smile, as he witnesses the ethereal Jedi spirits of Obi-Wan and Yoda joined by that of Anakin, indicating that his father has found peace and redemption after all. The sacrifice of father and son has finally brought Balance to the Force. We hold hope that a new generation of Jedi will be raised to serve the galaxy when we learn that Luke's sister Leia also has the Force. Finally we see the various planets liberated from the Empire, including the image of a statue of the Emperor falling over in Coruscant, ironically a statue that had been erected in his honor when he was elected Chancellor after the events of *The Phantom Menace*.



*Star Wars* portrays religion in vague, allegorical terms. In the prequels it seems to be saying that religion does have a role in the affairs of the world, including in government, as a service to the people, but that it can also be abused by those who seek power over others. The Jedi represent those who use spiritual gifts for the benefit of mankind, while the Sith show the abuse of those same gifts to oppress others. The Jedi are shown as flawed individuals who are too set in their ways to see the danger of the Sith until it is too late. But in the end "The Force" triumphs and sorts out the problems of the galaxy by empowering individuals to do good in the face of evil. It allows ordinary people like Han Solo, a smuggler who cared only about money to accept responsibility and help the Rebels achieve their goals. It helps a man like Lando Calrissian, another criminal who was desperately seeking to become a legitimate business man, to throw off the Imperials who were bullying him and try to make up for the people he hurt by cooperating with the corrupt authorities. It also guided a tribe of primitive aliens to defeat a much more powerful foe, even if the means to achieving that end was an accidental deception (C3PO the droid as their god).

The message of *Star Wars* is in more ways universal<sup>18</sup> in that it does not evoke a particular sectarian belief, but espouses the notion that there is another dimension to life and that spirituality has a place in achieving good in the world, and not just for a select few. *Star Trek* disregards religious matters for the most part

as a crutch that may help primitive people, but is ultimately something that should be outgrown in favor of more mature secular humanist principles.<sup>19</sup> Though later *Star Trek* in the post-Roddenberry era continues to be more "pro-faith" it still attacks institutions as corrupt and portrays religious beliefs as something that may be positive for some, but not for most. It teaches us to be suspicious of institutions, miracles and deities, and rather to trust in the goodness of humankind and our potential to use science and secular philosophies to solve our problems.<sup>20</sup> *Star Wars* shows the potential for both good and evil to come from religious practice and belief, but it tends to emphasize the good (especially in the original films, and the ultimate resolution of the saga) and the transformative and lasting power of religion as it grows to encompass new ideas and to face new challenges and so perhaps this is a more realistic view, than *Star Trek*, which envisions religion as a passing thing, that human beings will eventually have no need for. One way to sum it all up would be to say that while *Star Trek* declares the death of the gods and where to go from there; *Star Wars* espouses the everlasting role of the gods in our lives.

Looking at *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* one can see that in science fiction, issues such as religion, which form an important part of life for billions of people in our world, can be discussed in an allegorical fashion, which is less likely to offend people's sensibilities and offer solutions to problems as well as to create thought experiments about the future. By bringing up these important issues, the

genre serves an important function to spark debate and discussion, while also entertaining. By viewing science fiction with this in mind, we can come to a better appreciation of the genre and help to understand the ideas being presented by the creators of the material. We need not accept their conclusions at face value of course and should continue to evaluate them critically.

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<sup>1</sup> "Though the original *Star Trek* series is now seen as the classic, *The Next Generation* is in fact truer to Roddenberry's original vision of the series. He wanted to use many of the features of the second series in the first but was simply not allowed to. In 1987 Roddenberry was given free rein for the first time in his career, and the result is a far fuller vision of the Federation than seen in the first series." (Richards, *Meaning of Star Trek*, p. 5)

<sup>2</sup> "I am simply trying to struggle through life; trying to do God's bidding. - George Lucas" (Pollock, *Skywalking*. p.141)

<sup>3</sup> The Force embraces passive Oriental philosophies and the Judeo-Christian ethic of responsibility and self-sacrifice. Yoda's philosophy is Buddhist - he tells Luke that the Force requires him to be calm, at peace, and passive; it should be used for knowledge and defense, not greed and aggression ... To Lucas, the Force means looking into yourself, recognizing your potential, and the obstacles that stand in your way. He had undergone just this kind of introspection following his car accident - it was his religious conversion, and he wanted to share it with everyone." (Pollock, *Skywalking*. p.140)

<sup>4</sup> "I guess from that time it was clear to me that religion was largely nonsense, was largely magical, superstitious things. In my own teen life I just couldn't see any point in adopting something based on magic, which was obviously phony and superstitious ... I stopped going to church as soon as it became possible to do things on my own as a teenager. I made up my mind that church, and probably largely the Bible, was not for me. I did not go back to even thinking much about it. If people need to do that, ignore them and maybe they will ignore you and you can go on with your own life." (Alexander, *Star Trek Creator*, p. 37)

<sup>5</sup> "It seems to me more and more with each passing year and each new massacre (as many perpetrated by Christians as anyone else) that the real villain is religion - at least religion as generally practiced by people who somehow become sure that they and only they know the "real" answer. How few humans there are that seem to realize that killing, much less hating, their fellow humans in the name of their "god" is the ultimate kind of perversion.

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At any rate, I've elected to believe in a God which is so far beyond our conception and real understanding that it would be nonsense to do anything in its name other than perhaps to revere all life as being part of that unfathomable greatness." (Alexander, *Star Trek Creator*, p. 480)

<sup>6</sup> "My second wife Majel Lee (Hudec) and I were both raised Protestant but well before ever meeting had both left the Protestant Church in favor of non-sectarian beliefs which included respect for all other religions, but emphasizing the concept of God as too great and too encompassing to be explained and appreciated by any single system of belief. Some aspects of Buddhism express some of our beliefs but also do some aspects of the New and Old Testaments as well as other books and philosophies." (Alexander, *Star Trek Creator*, p. 422).

<sup>7</sup> "A lot of stuff there is very personal," he said several years after *Star Wars* was first released. "There's more of me in *Star Wars* than I care to admit. Knowing that the film was made for a young audience, I was trying to say, in a simple way, that there is a God and that there is a good side and a bad side. You have a choice between them, but the world works better if you're on the good side." (Pollock, *Skywalking*. pp. 288-289)

<sup>8</sup> "It was at Denver that someone wrote a question "What is your religion?" My answer was: "I do not belong to any church but I do consider myself to be a religious man. I believe that I am a part of you and you are a part of me and we are a part of all life ... also a part of the creative force and intelligence behind life. Therefore, if we are a part of God then our lives are not brief meaningless things, but rather have a great importance and significance. All of us and each of us." (Alexander, *Star Trek Creator*, p. 423)

<sup>9</sup> "The Enterprise of Captain Kirk has a run-in with an omnipotent being in nearly half of its seventy-eight episodes, while the Enterprise of Captain Picard confronts omnipotent beings in only a few, mostly those episodes dealing with Q or with the Traveler. There may be gods in the *Star Trek* universe, but they seem to be dying out. (Richards, *Meaning of Star Trek*, p. 161)."

<sup>10</sup> "These are not gods in the accepted sense of a supreme being who originally created the universe. Most of the time *Star Trek* posits a polytheistic universe in which a variety of powerful beings inhabit a realm above and beyond humanity. These gods are omnipotent, but not omniscient, and the distinction is important ... Gods may exist, but in *Star Trek* it seems that all we want them to do is leave us alone. "Leave us," Captain Picard tells Q at the end of "Encounter at Farpoint." "We have passed your test." (Richards, *Meaning of Star Trek*, pp.171-172).

<sup>11</sup> "Even Q is clearly hemmed in by a series of constraints placed on his powers by the Continuum. Human beings may not be gods, but they are freer than gods, and it is precisely their freedom that gives them great power. Gods in the series are often prisoners of their own divinity ... "(Richards, *Meaning of Star Trek*, p. 181).

<sup>12</sup> "The Borg are a culture of self-improvement taken to its logical conclusion. To improve themselves, they are willing to consume anything and everything in their way. But each time the Borg improve themselves, it is at the direct expense of another culture whose life and technology they have consumed in their continuing quest for betterment." (Richards, *Meaning of Star Trek*, p. 49).

<sup>13</sup> "The Romulans and the Klingons both have clear analogues in our own ancient history. Instead of ancient Romans we get aliens from a planet called Romulus. Instead of barbarians we get Klingons (the original Greek word for "barbarian" can be best translated into English as something like "kling" or "klang," referring to the strange sounds foreigners make when they speak)." (Richards, *Meaning of Star Trek*, p. 25).

<sup>14</sup> "In a great many ways, The *Star Trek* Universe owes a lot more to early science fiction writers like Jules Verne and H.G. Wells than to later writers like Isaac Asimov and Ray Bradbury. These Victorian writers believed in progress. They believed the world was going to get better, not worse ...In *Star Trek* there is no poverty, hunger, discrimination, or disease ...Gene Roddenberry was a rarity, a creator of modern science fiction who continued to believe that science would ultimately right all the wrongs in the world." (Richards, *Meaning of Star Trek*, p. 8).

<sup>15</sup> "Wired: At one time you said, "Technology won't save us." Do you think technology is making the world better or worse?

Lucas: If you watch the curve of science and everything we know, it shoots up like a rocket. We're on this rocket and we're going perfectly vertical into the stars. But the emotional intelligence of humankind is equally if not more important than our intellectual intelligence. We're just as emotionally illiterate as we were 5,000 years ago; so emotionally our line is completely horizontal. The problem is the horizontal and the vertical are getting farther and farther apart. And as these things grow apart, there's going to be some kind of consequence of that." (*Wired interview*, Feb. 1997).

<sup>16</sup> "Inevitably, as indicated in *The Empire Strikes Back*, Anakin himself becomes consumed by pride and ego, and ends up choosing the Dark Side that Ben had rejected, and his new identity as Darth Vader, the Dark Father. "It's bleak," Lucas confirmed to the *Los Angeles Times*. "But if you know the other three movies, you know everything turns out all right in the end - that his son comes back and redeems him. That's the real story. It's always about the redemption of Anakin Skywalker." (Pollock, *Skywalking*. p. 284).

<sup>17</sup> "Even when employed for good, the Force is addictive. If used to excess, it will turn on the user and bring out his bad, aggressive side. Darth Vader may be the legendary monster, but Lucas makes it clear that he thinks the dark side is in all of us. He offers redemption for our original sin, however. Vader does not triumph; Luke does." (Pollock, *Skywalking*. p.141)

<sup>18</sup> "Children are not the only ones influenced by *Star Wars*. Audiences share a subconscious emotional reaction to a movie - when it's as popular as *Star Wars*, the shared emotion becomes a cultural force. People also saw what they wanted to see in the film. At various times it's been described as a metaphor for the tenets of Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam. Lucas wanted to instill in children a belief in a supreme being - not a religious god, but a universal deity that he named the Force, a cosmic energy source that incorporates and consumes all living things.

<sup>19</sup> "Unlike say, the *Star Wars* movies, *Star Trek* normally eschews extremes of good and evil, choosing instead to posit a more morally ambiguous universe ...Death is the only true evil in the *Star Trek* universe, where enemies never remain enemies for long ...

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On the death of a fellow Klingon in "Reunion" Worf turns to the sky and screams. Death is horrible, and unlike almost everything else in the Star Trek universe, it cannot be explained away. The only true monster in the series is death itself." (Richards, *Meaning of Star Trek*, pp. 168-169).

<sup>20</sup> "In most science fiction the gods look after human beings, as they do in the *Star Wars* films, where the Force guides the actions of the human beings fighting the Evil Empire. *Star Trek* may be the only science fiction in which an individual human being actually saves the life of a god (when Picard saves the life of "Q" in "Déjà Q"). The universe of *Star Trek* is a universe in which individual action matters far more than divine or collective action." (Richards, *Meaning of Star Trek*, p. 64).

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II. Multimedia sources:

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*Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace*, DVD

*Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*, DVD

*Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope Special Edition*, VHS tape

*Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back Special Edition*, VHS tape

*Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi Special Edition*, VHS tape

By Paramount Studios

*Star Trek: The Motion Picture Special Edition*, DVD

*Star Trek III: The Search for Spock*, DVD

*Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, VHS tape

*Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*, VHS tape

*Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, DVD

*Star Trek Generations*, DVD

*Star Trek First Contact*, DVD

*Star Trek Insurrection*, DVD

*Star Trek Nemesis*, DVD

Television:

By Paramount Studios

*Star Trek* (aka: *Star Trek: The Original Series* aka *Star Trek: TOS*)  
series 1966- 1969

*Star Trek: The Next Generation* (aka: *Star Trek: TNG*) series 1987-1994

*Star Trek: Deep Space 9* (aka: *Star Trek: DS9*) series 1992-1999

*Star Trek: Voyager* (aka: *Star Trek: VOY* aka *Star Trek: VGER*) series 1995-2001

*Enterprise* (aka: *Star Trek: Enterprise*; aka *Star Trek: ENT*) series 2001-present

### III. Online sources:

StarDestroyer.net: *Star Wars* vs. *Star Trek* by Michael Wong.

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*Internet Movie Database*, source for official and unofficial information on thousands of films and television shows

Daystrom Institute Technical Library by Graham Kennedy (*Star Trek* information).

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Wired Magazine: "Wired Collections: Film & Special Effects: Beyond *Star Wars*" (interview with George Lucas). Feb. 1997.

### IV. Extended Multimedia Information (Source: *Internet Movie Database*)

#### *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*

1979 Paramount Pictures

Directed by Robert Wise (I)

Writing credits Alan Dean Foster (story), Harold Livingston, Gene Roddenberry (uncredited) (story)

#### *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*

1982 Paramount Pictures

Directed by Nicholas Meyer



Writing credits (in credits order): Harve Bennett (story) and Jack B. Sowards (story), Jack B. Sowards, Nicholas Meyer (uncredited)

*Star Trek III: The Search for Spock*

1984 Paramount Pictures

Directed by Leonard Nimoy

Writing credits: Harve Bennett

*Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*

1986 Paramount Pictures

Directed by Leonard Nimoy

Writing credits (in credits order): Leonard Nimoy (story) & Harve Bennett (story), Steve Meerson & Peter Krikes and Harve Bennett & Nicholas Meyer

*Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*

1989 Paramount Pictures

Directed by William Shatner

Writing credits (WGA) (in credits order): Gene Roddenberry (television series *Star Trek*), William Shatner (story) & Harve Bennett (story) & David Loughery (story) David Loughery (screenplay)

*Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*

1991 Paramount Pictures

Directed by Nicholas Meyer

Writing credits (WGA) (in credits order): Gene Roddenberry (television series *Star Trek*), Leonard Nimoy (story) and Lawrence Konner (story) & Mark Rosenthal (I) (story), Nicholas Meyer (screenplay) & Denny Martin Flinn (screenplay)

*Star Trek: Generations*

1994 Paramount Pictures

Directed by David Carson (I)

Writing credits (WGA) (in credits order): Gene Roddenberry (television series *Star Trek*), Rick Berman (story) & Ronald D. Moore (story) & Brannon Braga (story), Ronald D. Moore (screenplay) & Brannon Braga (screenplay)

*Star Trek: First Contact*

1996 Paramount Pictures

Directed by Jonathan Frakes

Writing credits (WGA) (in credits order): Gene Roddenberry (television series *Star Trek*), Rick Berman (story) & Brannon Braga (story) & Ronald D. Moore (story), Brannon Braga (screenplay) & Ronald D. Moore (screenplay)

*Star Trek: Insurrection*

1998 Paramount Pictures

Directed by Jonathan Frakes

Writing credits (WGA) (in credits order): Gene Roddenberry (television series *Star Trek*), Rick Berman (story) & Brannon Braga (story) & Ronald D. Moore (story), Brannon Braga (screenplay) & Ronald D. Moore (screenplay)

*Star Trek: Nemesis*

2002 Paramount Pictures

Directed by Stuart Baird

Writing credits (WGA): Gene Roddenberry (television series *Star Trek*), John Logan (I) (story) & Rick Berman (story) & Brent Spiner (story), John Logan (I) (screenplay)

*Star Wars* (aka: *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*)

1977 LucasFilm Limited

Directed by George Lucas

Writing credits: George Lucas

*Empire Strikes Back, The* (aka: *Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back*)

1980 LucasFilm Limited

Directed by Irvin Kershner

Writing credits (in credits order): George Lucas (story), Leigh Brackett and Lawrence Kasdan

*Return of the Jedi* (aka: *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*)

1983 LucasFilm Limited

Directed by Richard Marquand

Writing credits (in credits order): George Lucas (story), Lawrence Kasdan and George Lucas

*Phantom Menace, The - Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace*

1999 LucasFilm Limited

Directed by George Lucas

Writing credits: George Lucas

*Attack of the Clones - Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones*

2002 LucasFilm Limited

Directed by George Lucas

Writing credits: George Lucas (story), George Lucas (screenplay) and Jonathan Hales (screenplay)