

# Has Star Wars Become a False Idol for Lost and Distracted Souls?

*HAN: Hokey religions and ancient weapons are no match for a good blaster at your side, kid.*

*LUKE: You don't believe in the Force, do you?*

*HAN: Kid, I've flown from one side of this galaxy to the other. I've seen a lot of strange stuff, but I've never seen anything to make me believe there's one all-powerful force controlling everything. There's no mystical energy field that controls my destiny.*

–Star Wars, *Episode IV*, 1977

In [\*The Restoration of Christian Culture\*](#), John Senior wrote, “It isn't necessary to document how much our music, architecture, poetry, art from Picasso, Stravinsky, and the Bauhaus to the popular stuff like *Star Wars*, are idolatries of force.” While it is interesting to see *Star Wars* ranked with the likes of Picasso and Stravinsky, it is even more interesting to think of *Star Wars* as part of a pantheon of a idolatry that has become the destiny of a generation of lost souls. Dr. Senior suggests that boundary-breaking, *avant-garde* trends in art, from Picasso to *Star Wars*, reflect that the world is wandering in a wilderness and has chosen to worship the golden idols of distraction—an idolatry that was given a new force with the advent of *Star Wars*.

Forty years ago this summer—what seems to many a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away—*Star Wars* was released, and America was sold into the slavery of pop-culture merchandising. With this era-changing movie, the American cinematic focus shifted away from sophisticated dramas—such as *The Godfather*, *One Flew*

*Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and *Taxi Driver*—back to a pre-60s golden-age trope where exhibitionism and carnival capers in motion pictures made money. Some say that George Lucas effected a return to what the movies were meant to be, while others argue that his swashbuckling “space opera” was a backslide from which cinema has never recovered. In either case, *Star Wars* was the flagship film to sell itself as a franchise, driven and dominated by mass marketing, special effects, action sequences, and cornball dialogue. Gaining the status of highest-grossing film of all time, *Star Wars* became the epitome of the summer blockbuster, recasting movies as commercial events that cater to the lowest common denominator of the movie-going public. The effects of *Star Wars* run deep in the entertainment industry and have made explosive, eye-candy spectacle an idol of distraction for many whose lives are so meaningless that distraction is a crucial drug.

Popcorn flicks like *Star Wars* are central, even integral, to American leisure—which is arresting if Josef Pieper’s notion about the basis of culture is correct. Where would society be without its screens, its celebrities, and its space sagas? It is rare to walk into a home that does not have a television dominating, or even enshrining, its living room. It is almost a matter of principle akin to a religious obligation in the civilian temples of Americanism. The parallels between the television and the tabernacle show how deft the forces of darkness are at leading man from the truth by imitating it. Leaving aside the comparisons that exist between the local church and the local theater, entertainment has become something like a new religion, a ritual for people to fill the voids in their lives—only entertainment is fast becoming nothing more than an addiction to nothingness, a placebo against the emptiness of the times. In these ways, modern entertainment is not simply distorting the elements of religion, but actually commandeering the role of religion in human society. A new idol has risen for the idle neo-pagans, and it is the idolatry of distraction.

Idolatry is not limited to worshipping false gods. The word and the practice also applies to the veneration, or pseudo-veneration, of anything that distances or obstructs man from God. Idolatry is the act of divinizing things other than the Divine, which can occur through rendering the reverence due to God elsewhere, an error that has entrenched itself through the widespread embrace of personal tech-products and mass-marketing entertainment. As in any form of idolatry, there are a misplaced faith and fervor toward something unworthy of that fidelity and feeling that postures as a fitting recipient—a fitting end. The only result is that such things drag man away from his true end—his ultimate End. It is often said that modern entertainment is addictive, and addiction is a reverse image of devotion—and that perversion of devotion can be interpreted as a species of idolatry.

There is a devious irony in the parallels between religion and popular entertainment and personal technologies. The movies and the Internet fulfill a primal human desire for another “reality” and another “life.” Social media and cellphones provide “communion.” Updates, upgrades, and data-deletion bestow a “clean slate.” Wi-fi and on-demand features brings a permeating, invisible source of “power” and “security.” The cloud lays up “treasures” which neither rust nor moth consume. Search engines are the man-made “mind of God.” Is it going too far to intimate that religion has, in some ways, been forcibly replaced as the guiding force of human destiny? To be fair, no one worships the Internet or prays to their favorite film characters, but there is a dependency on such distractions that mirrors a standard of dedication owed to God. To say that these trends, this popular stuff, appears idolatrous is not to say that they are a new religion. No one looked to George Lucas to fill a God-sized hole in their soul, but *Star Wars* and its ilk have presented a new way of acting religiously without revelation, dogma, or reality. Modernity’s enchantment with everything that *Star Wars* represents is rooted in a religious hunger for transcendence—but God has

been left off the modern menu.

It is a Marxist principle that man is determined by his technologies, his means of production, and the technological trappings and cultural impact of *Star Wars* are emblematic of what man's attentions have been seduced by. Again from Dr. Senior: "I have found a large plurality of students who find, say, [Treasure Island](#) what they call 'hard reading,' which means too difficult to enjoy with anything approaching their delight in *Star Wars*." Taking advantage of this reality, the studios ceaselessly spend millions upon millions of dollars to produce high-voltage trash to distract the masses. The box offices collect millions upon millions of dollars to provide a prison of escapism. People who hunger for fact gorge on fantasy; and they come away confirmed only in their confusion and reinforced in the roots of their malady. This is a central problem of movies and moviegoers today—a problem perpetuated by *Star Wars* culture. There is a constant search for distraction from a gnawing sense of un-fulfillment, of being lost, of groping for affirmation in a culture that has lost touch with those realities that are intrinsically meaningful.

Though not on the same cultural level as Picasso or Stravinsky, *Star Wars* holds an unmistakable edge with the masses and is a force with which to reckon forty years later. *Star Wars* is strange stuff, indeed, but it is popular stuff, an icon of the modern idol: distraction. For distraction has become the stuff of religion for a generation wandering in the wilderness. It is an idolatry of force, as Dr. Senior put it, and that force, whether we believe in it or not, is with us.

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