

a Young

Is 'Star Wars' a force to aid your soul?

ROCHESTER — Ever felt that a "Star Wars" movie was like a highly entertaining comparative religions class?

You may feel that way for good reason, according to Jack Garner, movie critic for the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*.

George Lucas, the man behind the four "Star Wars" films — including the most recent, "The Phantom Menace," — designed his films to be modern-day morality tales that would resonate with the religious sensibilities of his audiences, Garner said.

"Star Wars" is a patchwork quilt of religious beliefs," Garner told about 40 people gathered at a Corpus Christi School at Blessed Sacrament Church classroom June 17. "It doesn't support any one religious belief... I think you're going to find a movie that reflects the religion and beliefs of George Lucas."

Garner's talk on "The Spirituality of Star Wars" was sponsored by Crossroads, Blessed Sacrament's young adult ministry. Garner, a parishioner at Blessed Sacrament, combined his own comments with film clips from the first three "Star Wars" movies in his presentation.

"Star Wars" movies, Garner said, contain elements of Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism. The films are an attempt to uphold universally recognized beliefs about the struggle between good and evil.

On the other hand, he said, it's a huge mistake to take the mythology underlying "Star Wars" any more seriously than Lucas intended. While researching the spiritual aspects of "Star Wars," for example, Garner came across a Web site actually devoted to a "Star Wars" religion.

"These people need to get a life, or at least a more complex, fulfilling religion," Garner said of the Web site designers.

Garner — who's spoken to Lucas about the "Star Wars" films — said that Lucas grew up in a Methodist household, and that he didn't care much for Sunday school.

However, Lucas was always interested in religious ritual and mythology, Garner said. The "Star Wars" filmmaker wanted to create a movie myth of his own that would be comparable to the fairytales and legends of old.

On that note, it's important to remember that the first "Star Wars" installment came out in 1977 after a decade of such angst-ridden Hollywood movies as "Easy Rider," movies that reflected the social turmoil of that era, Garner said.

"It was a time when Hollywood did not feel right making 'popcorn' movies," Garner said, referring to westerns and other heroic types of films. "(Lucas) basically saw that there were children out there with no fairy tales, no swashbuckling tales."

Unlike its contemporaries in the 1970s, the first "Star Wars" movie clearly pit good against evil, named its heroes and villains, and used many classic elements of a morality tale, Garner said. Indeed, all four "Star Wars" movies harken back to ancient tales of salvation and redemption. He listed several parallels between the Bible and other religions' scriptures, and "Star Wars," including:

▲ The Jedi Knights, who battle for good in the movies, are akin to the disciples who do the will of a master, or "chosen one" in many religions.

▲ Each Jedi Knight has a master or teacher from whom he or she learns, in much the same manner as a disciple would learn from a religious leader.

▲ "The Force" is akin to God, a supreme being or power that pervades the universe and holds it together.

▲ Only those who trust in The Force succeed fully in "Star Wars," much like any religion's adherents who must eventually put reason aside and make "a leap of faith"



Story by Rob Cullivan

Below left, Jar Jar Binks toy figure
Below right, Queen Amidala toy figure

in order to succeed spiritually.

▲ The heroic figures in "Star Wars" are always tempted at some point to do the wrong thing, much like Christ was tempted in the desert by Satan.

▲ Evil is truly present in the universe in "Star Wars" where it is known as "The Dark Side." The inhabitants of Lucas' world must choose between serving good or evil, just as everyone must do when considering following a spiritual path.

▲ "May the Force be with you" and "The Force is with you always," phrases that various "Star Wars" characters utter to each other, echo Christ telling his apostles: "And behold, I am with you always, till the end of the age." (Matt. 28: 20).

Not every viewer of "Star Wars" is pleased with its spiritual messages, Garner said. For example, some Christian viewers of "The Phantom Menace" have been troubled by the fact that Anakin

Skywalker — who grows up to be the evil Darth Vader — is born of a virgin mother. But Garner said Lucas told him that Skywalker's birth in the movie is not a virgin birth in the sense that Christ's was. Lucas said a future movie will explain that the boy was the result of a self-dividing cell in the mother.

Garner also pointed out that if there is any overall message in "Star Wars," it is to believe that the impossible is possible.

He played an audiotape of Lucas relating how he thought many people give up on their dreams before giving them a chance to become real, something Lucas said he simply didn't consider when working on the first "Star Wars" film.

After the critic's presentation, one audience member, Andy Pokon, 32, a Rochester Catholic, said he's been interested in "Star Wars" since the first movie came out. His parents were splitting up at the time, and he found the movie a comforting emotional escape from the emotional turmoil he was experiencing.

He added that he began buying "Star Wars" action figures at the time, a habit that later led him to one of his occupations — buying and selling toys. He also said the movie challenged him spiritually by pointing out the importance of faith, and he thought other

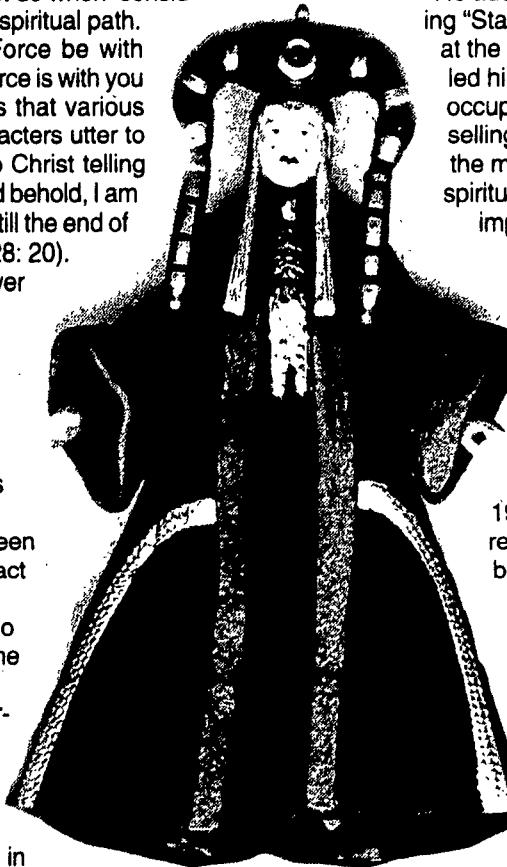
people may have likewise benefited from the movie.

To illustrate his point, he noted that Lucas belongs to a generation that came of age in the 1960s when traditional religious beliefs were being questioned.

"A lot of people were losing their spirituality," Pokon said. "Many were unsatisfied with Christianity... If anything, ('Star Wars') probably brought a lot of people back to Christianity."

Garner pointed out that the "Star Wars" movies go beyond many action-adventure films by placing their characters in situations that evoke questions about life's deeper meaning.

"I think ('Star Wars') prompts the right questions, and it should be commended for that," he said.



Events

Unless otherwise indicated, for information on these upcoming events, call Odyssey, the diocesan-sponsored young adults network, at 716/328-3228 or 1-800-388-7177, ext. 375.

▲ **Saturday, July 10:** Canoe trip on the Genesee River. Meet at Genesee Valley Park Canoe Livery, Rochester, at 10 a.m. \$10 per person, cost covers canoe, paddle and life jacket.

▲ **Friday, July 16:** Rochester Red Wings baseball game. 7:15 p.m. Discounted tickets are \$6.50, with reservations required by July 8.

▲ **Saturday, July 17:** Sushi night at California Rollin', 274 N. Goodman St., Rochester. 7 p.m.

▲ **Sunday, July 18:** Erie Canal Path bike ride.

▲ **Thursday, July 22:** Dinner at the Elmwood Inn, 1256 Mt. Hope Ave., Rochester. 7 p.m.

▲ **Tuesday, July 27:** 7 p.m. movie

at place to be determined. "Brother Sun, Sister Moon," the story of St. Francis of Assisi. Discussion afterward.

▲ **Saturday, Aug. 7:** "Winds of Change" convention for Catholics ages 18-22. 9:30 a.m.-8 p.m. at the State University of New York College at Geneseo. \$30 cost includes dinner. Call Sylvia Mancuso at 716/328-3228, ext. 295, or 1-800-388-7177, ext. 295, or e-mail her at smancuso@dor.org.

▲ **Friday, Aug. 20:** Rochester Red Wings Game. 7:15 p.m. \$6.50 tickets must be reserved by July 12.

▲ **Tuesday, Aug. 24:** 7 p.m. movie at place to be determined. "Romero," the story of Salvadoran archbishop slain for speaking out against his government's oppression of the poor. Discussion afterward.

▲ **Thursday, Aug. 26:** Dinner at the Elmwood Inn, 1256 Mt. Hope Ave., Rochester. 7 p.m.



CONFERENCE HONORING GOD the FATHER

Saturday, August 7, 1999

7:30 a.m. Registration, 8:45 a.m. Program

Nazareth College Arts Center

4245 East Avenue, Rochester, NY

Confirmed Speakers & Guests: Rev. George Kosicki, C.S.B. John Leary, Fr. Albert J. M. Shamon, Eileen George, Dr. Janet Smith & Dr. Dolores Grier
Program Includes: Speakers, Music, Confession, Holy Hour, Healing Procession with the Blessed Sacrament, Benediction, and Closing Mass

REGISTRATION FORM

To help us, PLEASE include a self-addressed stamped envelope

Name: _____

Street: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Telephone (Day): _____ Telephone (evening): _____

No. of Adults (18 & over) _____ X \$20 = _____

No. of Youth (12-17) _____ X \$5 = _____

No. of Religious _____ X \$5 = _____

No. Box Lunches _____ X \$6.75 = _____

Total Enclosed = _____

Handicapped / Special Needs: _____

TO RESERVE BOX LUNCHES
(Soda included)
Please indicate choice and number
Ham: ___ Turkey: ___ Roast Beef: ___
Pita Bread Veggie Sand: ___

Please make checks payable to: Conference Honoring God the Father
Return with payment to: 1008 Maple Drive, Webster, NY 14580-1726