

## Jediism: Why Religion Hasn't Jumped the Shark

Written by Ginny Grimsley  
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### Pop Culture's Cross-Pollination with Traditional Faith Make Both Stronger

For centuries, religion has influenced culture – the visual arts, music, theater and architecture. Where would society be without the Gutenberg printing press, created to make the Bible available to everyone? The press led to exponential growth in European literacy, kick-starting future intellectual discovery and accelerating the progress of civilization.

Gutenberg's press also lit the kindling for the Protestant Reformation. This combination of technology and culture led to a drastic new understanding of Christianity, fragmenting the continental reach of the Vatican, an institution that has mastered the use of branding via artistic expression. As most religious scholars would admit, culture and religion have always had a symbiotic relationship, promoting both purposes in a unified form.

The cultural-religious connection newest evolution is Jediism, a religious movement made official in 2000 and based on the ideas of characters in the "Star Wars" film series. Just as Protestantism did not destroy Christianity, neither will The Force – a religious tenet in Jediism – steal traditional religions' thunder. However, it may make religion again relevant to more than just a handful of geeks.

Data from the Gallup Organization and the Pew Research Center show organized religion trending downward:

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- Since the 1970s, Americans' confidence in organized religion has steadily decreased.
- This year, the downward trend has hit its lowest point; only 44 percent of Americans have "a great deal" of confidence in organized religion.
- Pew polls indicate that while many young people identify less with the denominations they are born into, most teens and 20-somethings consider themselves "spiritual."

To put it in economic terms, there's a growing market of young and spiritual people who are hungry for direction. Is Jediism the answer?

Jediism incorporates ideas from Christianity, Buddhism, Taoism, Stoicism and Shintoism. Although the new religion is mostly based on George Lucas' vision, there is no founder or central structure. A common belief in Jediism is the Jedi Code, which reads:

- There is no emotion; there is peace.
- There is no ignorance; there is knowledge.
- There is no passion; there is serenity.
- There is no chaos; there is harmony.
- There is no death; there is The Force.

It is not just that more people are self identifying as nondenominational – the Pew Center also found that nearly one in five Americans, 19 percent, check the "nothing in particular" box, or atheist or agnostic, for religious belief. That's the highest percentage of nonreligious people ever surveyed in the country.

Just as culture and artistic expression have always informed religion, it is time for more religious people to embrace how science informs human understanding of the universe. Unlike the great American astronomer Carl Sagan, who said religious and scientific disagreements

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can be solved by understanding each as “non-overlapping magisterial” – many believe religion, culture and science are three peas in the same pod. They are three essential, distinctive yet related fields to the same end, which is the struggle to grasp truth.

Why not? Authorities on both sides are dipping their toes in the water with oddball, stranger-than-fiction scientific posits such as String Theory, which attempts to reconcile two seemingly incompatible theories: quantum mechanics and general relativity. The theory, studied by today's leading physicists, says that there are more dimensions to reality than we can perceive, and that there may be activity from another universe occurring right in front of us, but we simply are not “tuned in” for those dimensions.

We may have a doppelganger living right next to us, in a parallel universe. In a side-by-side comparison with Jediism, which is the stranger belief? I am reminded of a J.B.S. Haldane quote:

“Now, my own suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose ... I suspect that there are more things in heaven and earth that are dreamed of, or can be dreamed of, in any philosophy.”

About Eli Just

Eli Just ( [www.elijust.net](http://www.elijust.net) ) is the author of several books including the popular “Manny Jones” series of Supernatural thrillers and “The Eddy.” He has a master's in history from Southeastern Louisiana University and is a self-taught student of physics, which he taught at the high school level. As a Christian, Just enjoys exploring themes involving physics and its relationship to religion. He lives in northern Georgia.