

Take Care Who You Hear and Follow

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April 21, 2024

Count Dooku of Serenno is a fictional character in several *Star Wars* films, including *Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones* (2002) and *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith* (2005). Disillusioned with the rampant corruption of the Galactic Republic, where most of its political leaders are more interested in enriching themselves through an oppressive, ever-increasing bureaucracy than protecting the freedom and rights of their constituents, he calls for star systems to engage in self-determinism, separate themselves from the corrupt Republic, and make the galaxy great again by restoring the ideals of what the Republic used to be.

With great charisma, Dooku proclaimed the message that the Supreme Chancellor of the Galactic Republic, Sheev Palpatine, was merely a pawn of corporate interests presiding over a senate body hopelessly steeped in avarice. A cult of personality developed around him, which greatly helped in rallying many star systems to his secessionist cause. They formed the Confederacy of Independent Systems (CIS), making Dooku the Head of State.

War broke out between the CIS and the Republic as the latter sought to bring separatist star systems back under its control. But while this civil war was made to appear to be between Palpatine and Dooku, the reality, unbeknownst to

followers on both sides, was that Palpatine and Dooku were working together behind the scenes to use this conflict as a means for Palpatine to assume emergency powers, destroy opponents to his government, and conquer the galaxy with Dooku and their shared cronies as its sole rulers.

Those who followed Dooku, believing that he was fighting for their freedom, were ultimately betrayed and destroyed by Palpatine. Palpatine also betrayed his partner Dooku and had him killed. With the defeat of the CIS, Palpatine consolidated his power and declared the reorganization of the Republic into the Galactic Empire, assuming the role of emperor. His rule ushered in unprecedented repression and death in the galaxy.

This story is an example of art imitating life, as there are examples of similar occurrences in history. One such example is the Communist Party (Bolsheviks), led by Vladimir Lenin, which seized power in Russia in October 1917. Lenin initially governed in collaboration with other factions but increasingly centralized power and suppressed opposition, leading to his party being the sole legal one allowed in Russia (and later, the Soviet Union). This, in addition to the lack of universal acceptance of his seizure of power, led to civil conflict.

To consolidate power, Lenin established in December 1917 the Cheka (precursor to the KGB), secret police whose primary purpose was to seek out enemies of the state and neutralize them. Many thousands were arrested and killed without trial, with the Cheka being the judge, jury, and executioner.

Lenin was reputed to have said, "The best way to control the opposition is to lead it ourselves." With this in mind, the Cheka engaged in a counterintelligence operation called "The Trust," where a false anti-communist resistance organization called the Monarchist Union of Central Russia (MUCR) was set up to identify, lure, and neutralize those in Russia and among the émigrés in Europe seeking to remove the Bolsheviks from power.

Cheka agents were successful in convincing many Russian dissidents of the size, support among the Russian people, and power of "The Trust" to overthrow the communist regime. Exiled Russians even donated large sums of money and supplies to the effort. But after several years of cultivating trust among the Russian opposition, the Cheka agents running the operation sprang their trap. They betrayed a number of its leaders and supporters by arranging their capture and execution, including some who were lured into the Soviet Union from among the exiles in Europe.

Emboldened by this successful crushing of opposition and having survived an assassination attempt, Lenin embarked on the Red Terror, patterned after the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution, to quash all political dissent and threats to his power. At his direction, the Cheka conducted mass arrests, imprisonments, torture, and executions without trial, leading to the deaths of tens of thousands.

In addition to this democide, one of the tragedies of the rise of Lenin and Soviet Russia was that many of the people who suffered under the autocratic rule of the tsarist government developed a cult of personality around Lenin as they increasingly viewed him as a messianic figure who would lead them into a freer, happier, and more prosperous society. Their idolization of him often blinded them, until it was too late, to the religious, political, and economic repression his rule brought that exceeded the tsars.

This is reminiscent of a verse and coda of the 1971 hit song by the rock group The Who called "Won't Get Fooled Again":

We'll be fighting in the streets
With our children at our feet
And the morals that they worship will be gone
And the men who spurred us on
Sit in judgement of all wrong
They decide and the shotgun sings the song

Meet the new boss
Same as the old boss

In the United States and many other countries around the world, people find themselves in a highly divided and contentious society, where they are polarized by religious and political beliefs and political leaders. Many of them see, and sometimes suffer from, the increasingly pervasive corruption of government and understand that society is rapidly headed for disintegration.

Some political commentators, pundits, and social media influencers emphasize and capitalize on this discontent and fears of people. They cultivate a following by telling people within a certain demographic what they want to hear, and as they profit financially from them, they maneuver them into developing a cult of personality around a particular political figure.

These influencers encourage many in their audiences to project their image of what they want in a leader onto a particular political figure, regardless of the actual deeds of that figure. Some even hint that engaging in civil conflict would be the right course if things do not work out the way they want politically.

Christians in the midst of this charged environment may be tempted to become enamored of political movements or leaders and fight to increase their power, thinking that they are advancing the kingdom of God. In the process, they may fall into compromising their moral principles, be led astray by people who are using them for their own wealth and power, and end up strengthening global elitist agendas that oppose the Lord Jesus and His kingdom, which He will bring about in His own perfect way and time without our help.

The Zealots were a religious and political movement during the time of Jesus' earthly ministry and after. They sought the

removal of the yoke of Rome from Israel and the establishment of God's kingdom, by force if necessary. Some of this group engaged in guerilla warfare tactics and raids on Roman convoys and attacked those they viewed as collaborators with Rome.

Jesus presented a very different message as He proclaimed the gospel. He made it clear that the kingdom of God would not come in the way that the Zealots and their allies expected, a great warrior who would come and overthrow the Romans. It would be inaugurated by God ruling in the hearts of those who embraced His message and believed in Him (Luke 17:20-21).

The Zealots and those whom they persuaded to follow them rejected Jesus and His message, which eventually led to armed conflict, mass death, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as Jesus predicted (Matthew 24:1-2; Mark 13:1-2; Luke 21:5-6).

The Bible warns us against placing undue faith or adulation in any man, particularly in people of great wealth or influence, for like everyone else, they are also subject to human frailties, corruption, and death. It also places us in danger of the curse of turning our hearts away from God, the only One to whom trust and adoration are due and from whom only true and permanent salvation comes.

"Do not trust in princes, in mortal man, in whom there is no salvation. His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish." (Psalm 146:3-4)

"Thus says the LORD, 'Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from the LORD.' ... Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose trust is the LORD." (Jeremiah 17:5-8)

Until Jesus returns, His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). We need to take care to hear and follow what He says, and not the provocateurs and zealots of today, some of whom like Judas goats will lead those who follow them to betrayal

and destruction.

While it is important that followers of Jesus Christ be involved where they can, especially locally, in the formulation of policies and laws in the countries in which they reside, the kingdom of God is advanced through the preaching and embracing of the gospel message, not civil conflict on behalf of a political figure or movement. Societies and those who lead them change for the better as more hearts and minds are changed by the gospel.

One day, Jesus will return to earth as King of kings and Lord of lords, eliminate government corruption with His rod of iron (Revelation 19:11-21), and establish His righteous rule on earth that will never end. Believe in Him and enter His kingdom. Jesus will never betray or abandon you, and all those who trust in Him are forever blessed (Psalm 2:12).

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