

Star Wars: Episode IX-The Rise of Skywalker (2019)



The screen full of action never lets up in this final chapter of the 9-part Skywalker series. It began with a reluctant young male hero, Luke Skywalker, and it ends with an eager female Jedi, Rey (Daisy Ridley), who at the end proudly says she is Rey Skywalker. There are so many characters and subplots that the casual film goer might become lost, but the incredible special effects and intense action will keep your eyes focused on the screen. There are also some touching moments, mainly involving Leia, now General, Han Solo, and of course, Luke Skywalker. And the epilogue adds a beautiful final closure to the epic.

Rey is young and confident in her just finished Jedi Knight training, ready to do battle against the Final Order, the agency that in the two films just prior to this one that had replaced the Galactic Empire that Luke and Leia had led the Rebels against. Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) is the head of the Final Order with a mystical connection to Leia. Soon enough they will be crossing light sabers.

There is also a new threat, even more dangerous than the Final Order. Despite what we saw in an earlier film, the Sith leader Emperor Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid) is not dead, but alive and well on his way to finishing his preparation to take over or destroy the galaxy. He has built a fleet, each major ship being equipped with a planet-destroying death ray.

When Rey sets forth the Resistance base on her mission to confront Kylo Ren and the Final Force, she is accompanied by her stalwart friends Finn (John Boyega), Poe (Oscar Isaac), Chewbacca (Joonas Suotamo), C-3PO (Anthony Daniels), C3-P0, and BB-8. Later on they are joined by Hans Solo's companion Lando Calrissian (Billy Dee Williams). A couple of the shots of the gang in the ship's cockpit resemble those from the original trilogy, bringing back good memories.

People of faith will appreciate the resemblance of Rey's temptation scene in her encounter with Palpatine with that of Christ's encounter with Satan in the wilderness. Both are about power—Palpatine promising Rey the lordship of the galaxy if she comes over to the dark side of the Force, and Satan's that Christ can use his power to gain a following and conquer the world. During her encounter with Kylo Ren Rey faces a similar temptation, and it is to the script's credit that Rey chooses a nonviolent resolution to their enmity, one very different from most action thrillers.

A second resemblance to Scripture made me think of "the great cloud of witnesses" phrase in the 12th chapter of Hebrews. Rey has a spiritual encounter that bolsters her commitment to her mission, as we see below:

Obi Wan Kenobi: These are your final steps, Rey. Rise and take them.

Anakin Skywalker: Rey.

Ahsoka Tano: Rey.

Kannan Jarus: Rey.

Anakin Skywalker: Bring back the balance, Rey. As I did.

Luminara Unduli: The light. Find the light, Rey.

Mace Windu: You're not alone, Rey.

Yoda: Alone, never have you been.

Qui-Gon Jinn: Every Jedi who ever lived, lives in you.

Anakin Skywalker: The force surrounds you, Rey.

Aayla Secura: Let it guide you.

Ahsoka Tano: As it guided us.

Mace Windu: Feel the force feeling through you, Rey.

Anakin Skywalker: Let it lift you, Rey.

Adi Gallia: Rise, Rey. (Quote from IMDB)

The third visual parable incident is Kylo Ren's encounter with the ghost or spirit of father, calling to mind the return of the prodigal son in Luke 15. Again, quoting from the IMDB site:

Han Solo: Hey, kid.

[Kylo turns to see a vision of Han Solo standing behind him]

Han Solo: I missed you, son.

Kylo Ren: Your son is dead.

Han Solo: No... Kylo Ren is dead. My son is alive.

Kylo Ren: [in disbelief] You're just a memory.

Han Solo: Your memory. Come home.

Kylo Ren: It's too late. She's gone.

Han Solo: Your mother's gone. But what she stood for, what she fought for... that's not gone.

[pause]

Han Solo: Ben...

Kylo Ren: I know what I have to do, but I don't know if I have the strength to do it.

Han Solo: [touches Kylo's cheek] You do.

[Kylo looks down at his lightsaber, then back at Han]

Kylo Ren: Dad...

Han Solo: [smiles] I know.

Note that Kylo is even told, "Come home." He was certainly further away from "home," geographically and spiritually, than the unnamed son in Jesus' parable!

So, given all of the above, I was more pleased with this final Skywalker film than some critics. It does have its shortcomings, one of the chief being unavoidable. There is no way that any filmmaker could match the fresh thrill of the first Star Wars trilogy. I was just beginning to review films for the Catholic journal *Marriage & Family Living* in 1977, when I wrote an article "The Return of the Hero" contrasting George Lucas's film and *Superman* with the earlier era of the anti-hero film. I have always been thankful that I could share with my children this film trilogy the band of galactic heroes battling evil. It might be the desire to recapture that feeling that leads some to be disappointed with this film.

One great improvement, however, is that here are no grounds

for continuing the complaint made against George Lucas's racial blindness to his all-white cast. He did correct this by adding Billy Dee Williams to his second film, and now we have a huge cast that includes Asians as well as African Americans, as well as a main female character.

And those special effects! Remember George Lucas lamenting the lack of budget and time to expand on that delightful alien band and patrons in the cantina scene? And that after the success of the first film, he was able to go back and add a few more creatures when he re-issued *Star Wars IV*? As I watched many of the scenes set on various planets, with crowds dancing and singing, buying and selling, and such, I marveled at how far filmmakers have come in special creature effects. Yes, despite its flaws, this picture is a joy to the eye!

This review will be in the January issue of VP along with a set of questions for reflection and/or discussion. If you have found reviews on this site helpful, please consider purchasing a subscription or individual issue in The Store