



## NEXT STEPS FOR “THE RESISTANCE”

### But Baby, It’s Cold Outside!

January 7, 2018

WASHINGTON, DC ~ *Armed Freedom*

I was invited to attend a recent meeting of the DNC that advertised a free screening of the latest *Star Wars* movie, *The Last Jedi*.

(I would have liked to have received a similar invitation from the RNC, but I’m probably not on their list, having written a few less-than-fawningly-obsequious pieces about the President.)

It was an appealing invitation: coming in from the cold to view the movie, interesting company and hot *hors d’oeuvres*. (I emphasize they were *hot* because I’m *still* freezing my feathers off up here on this dome! But things are looking up: what with Congress’ return from the holidays, the Capitol’s hot-air heating system is back online.) But when the hard-to-know-what-to-make-of-it book, *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House* came out, I decided to keep watch over things up here and invited the National Cathedral’s Father Newel Post (*see Edition 8*) to go in my stead, providing he brings me some still-hot *hors d’oeuvres* afterwards. Father Newel eagerly accepted and offered to write a piece inspired by the movie. What follows are his thoughts about the movie and its importance for us.



### *The Last Jedi* and Saving Our Democracy

~ Fr. Newel Post

The evening was everything Freedom had led me to expect, *except* that some Hollywood-type editor had, rather redundantly, movie-shopped the Supreme Leader Snoke by putting a Trump wig on him. As bad as Trump is, that’s maybe a bit of a stretch. Maybe. Even without the wig, most folks will catch the movie’s political relevance.

The movie itself was right up there with the best of the franchise’s episodes of this saga, which will doubtless run until we make America great again by having once again clean waters, good air, a decent social safety-net, and manage to restore all three parts of our government to a semblance of functionality in which a modicum of civility enables *true* public discourse. In other words, forever.

In case you’ve just wandered in from life on the flat earth, *Star Wars* is an example of a serialized form of modern mythmaking about the battle between good and evil. To its credit, over the 8 episodes (and 2016’s *Rogue*

*One*, a gap-filler between 7 and 8), the character development has become more layered and true-to-life. The heroes and heroines are shown wrestling mightily with their conflicting motives: self-interest vs. the greater good, fearful retreat vs. engagement in spite of the fear, loyalty to rank vs. fidelity to the cause, hope vs. cynicism . . . even parsing the words of holy writ vs. being faithful to the essential Meaning to which they point.

It isn’t difficult to miss the film’s political analogy to fascism and totalitarian rule. In this movie, the First Order characters wear black uniforms and helmets eerily reminiscent of WWII Nazi issue.

Kylo Ren, the intended heir to Darth Vader’s role says of the First Order: "It’s task is to remove the dis-order from our own existence, so that civilization may be returned to the stability that promotes progress....Future historians will look upon this as the time when a strong hand brought the rule of law back to civilization." Law and order. Sound familiar?

The movie’s script has many memorable (and often funny) lines. Jedi Master Yoda, speaking to Luke of the Jedi’s sacred texts, observes

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with his characteristic impish smile: "Page turners, they are not." Later he addresses Luke, whom he had advised not to train any more Jedi: "Heeded my words not, did you? Pass on what you have learned. Strength, mastery. But weakness, folly, failure also. Yes, failure most of all. The greatest teacher, failure is."

But the line I most want to lift up is spoken by a seemingly secondary character we'll probably meet in future episodes. Rose Tico, a techie gearhead who helps keep the aging Resistance fleet running (*pictured on the masthead*), develops an intense fondness for Finn, one of the leaders of the Resistance. As Finn is suicidally (and against orders) piloting his speeder into the mouth of a gigantic cannon, Rose, in her own speeder, knocks Finn's and her own craft to the ground.

Crawling to her cockpit, Finn holds the injured Rose, who delivers this important line to Finn: "*We're going to win this war not by fighting what we hate, but saving what we love!*"

(There is a poignant irony of casting here in this multi-layered epic. The actress who portrays Rose Tico, Kelly Marie Tran, was born to Vietnamese parents who fled Vietnam after a war in which America seemed to be fighting against what it hated, more than saving what it loved.)

What - and who - do we love? That is what needs to be asked by those of us who are in the political resistance.

*Beyond* our narrow self-interest, *what* do we love? *Beyond* "our own," *who* do we love?

"Beyond" is critical. As in *Star Wars*, ours is the battle against the fatal, dark undertow of "me and mine." *Trumpism* is focused precisely by that darkness. But sometimes, if we're honest, so are we. Like the leaders of *Star Wars*' Resistance, *we also* must wrestle our self-centered dark side on behalf of our better angels, which are of the light. When it comes to *self-love*, it is those angels we must love and "save."

Politically, "beyond" implies a very big tent. It will not do to focus *only* on the "traditionally marginalized": the immigrants, those who are LGBTQ, persons of color, the urban poor. "Beyond" suggests we include those who may be of a "lower" socioeconomic class: the often-white members of a trade, those who fix our cars, and care for the very young and very old.

About now you will say to me, "Father Newel, you're asking us to 'save' everyone. That leads to just the same old tax and spend, big government, failed nanny state the Trumpists accuse us of having created!"

Not necessarily. I'm not talking about particular solutions. I'm talking about *what animates us!* If it is only the ever-louder denunciation of what we hate, we shall become like what we hate. We will "grow weary of well-doing!"

Along with Robert F. Kennedy, "I believe that, as long as there is plenty, poverty is evil. Government belongs

wherever evil needs an adversary and there are people in distress."

The poet Kahlil Gibran said, "Work is love made visible."<sup>1</sup> I propose to you that the purpose of government is to make love visible. *That is its work.*

*How* its work is accomplished will, as in *Star Wars*, require sacrifice: sacrifice of our egos' insistence that we alone are correct, and a willingness to compromise with the best of others' attempts at making love visible; and sacrifice of our treasure, because a dime dropped into a beggar's cup still leaves him a victim of a cruel and unjust economic system that will be costly to change. But take heart and hope as you remember this wisdom from the Yoda-like Reinhold Niebuhr:

"Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we must be saved by love. . . ."<sup>2</sup>



Rey and Luke Skywalker . . . the last Jedi?

<sup>1</sup> *The Prophet*, Kahlil Gibran (Vintage, 2015)

<sup>2</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (University Of Chicago Press, 2008).