

In 1983, after the original *Battlestar Galactica* television series had wound down, the *Journal of Popular Culture* published Brigham Young University's James E Ford's article "Battlestar Gallactica [sic] and Mormon Theology." Ford reported that he and others knowledgeable about Mormonism with whom he spoke were "both surprised... and pleased" by the fidelity with which the original series presented Mormon theology to the viewing audience,<sup>1</sup> thanks, in large part, to its creator prominent LDS member Glen Larson. Given the non-involvement of Mormon authorities with the current series, in contradistinction to the original, it is surprising to find that the current series offers a richer, more sophisticated and comprehensive portrayal of Mormon cosmology than the original, even as it jettisons a portion of Mormon theology.

Amongst films canvassing mainline, Catholic or evangelical Christian thematic material, there is a wide divergence between those that focus on theological engagement and those that engage cosmologically. With the exception of films that actually seek to depict events in Christian sacred history like Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ*, most films that engage with Christian cosmology are either uninterested in or hostile to the moral structures hard-wired into a Christian universe. Hence films like *The Prophecy* are cosmologically Christian but not theologically so. It and other films that make use of Christian demonology, angelology, sacred history and other cosmological elements tend to depict universes that feature a limited God or even a deistic one and tend to valorize and reward behaviours on the part of their characters that are violent, militant and ruthless.

Whereas the original *Battlestar Galactica* movie, television series and spinoff (*Galactica 1980*) were both cosmologically and theologically Mormon, the producers of the "reimagined"

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<sup>1</sup> Ford, James E. "Battlestar Galactica and Mormon Theology" in *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 17 no. 3, 1983. 83.

*Battlestar* have decoupled Mormonism's cosmological elements from its theology, yielding a both rich and nuanced universe and, ironically, a more thought-provoking exploration of uniquely Mormon concepts such as pre-existence, historical typology, god-making and the physicality of the soul than any orthodox Mormon production possibly could.

Historical typology, the staple of medieval and late antique Christian historiography has largely vanished from the historical thought of fundamentalist and mainline Christian denominations alike, whereas in Mormonism, it has become integral to the faith's model of time.<sup>2</sup> Beginning in the New Testament, itself, in attempts to reconcile exegetically the differences between the Old and New Testaments, Stoic exegetical principles were imported through Hellenistic Judaism, as exemplified in the writings of Philo of Alexandria.<sup>3</sup> Typological theories of history understand past events in Scripture both as having actually taken place and as prefiguring future events throughout time; in this way, they are understood as "shadows and types" of events that will recur repeatedly, although never identically, throughout space-time. Most classically, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac is said to both have taken place and to have prefigured Christ's sacrifice.<sup>4</sup>

As in the original series, the show chronicles the exodus "a motley collection of spaceships containing the remnants of the once numerous and powerful human race,"<sup>5</sup> survivors of an attempted genocide perpetrated by a race of robots known as the Cylons. But unlike the original series which seems to portray human beings existing in the far future,<sup>6</sup> or

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<sup>2</sup> McConkie, Bruce. *The Mortal Messiah* vol 1. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1981.) 307.

<sup>3</sup> Sterling, G. E. "Platonizing Moses: Philo and Middle Platonism" in *Studia Philonica* vol. 5, 1993. 98.

<sup>4</sup> De Lubac, Henri. *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture* vol. 1 Tr. Mark Sebanc. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998.) 125-34.

<sup>5</sup> Ford, James E. "Battlestar Galactica and Mormon Theology" in *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 17 no. 3, 1983. 83.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 83.

contemporaneously with the present day, as in successor series *Galactica 1980*, the reimagined *Battlestar* appears to offer us an alternative creation myth for the peopling of our own world.

In Mormon cosmology, there are four phases or “estates”<sup>7</sup> to the human life-cycle: pre-existence, mortality, post-mortality and resurrection. (This is typically expressed as a three-stage process in Mormonism, however, with the disembodied post-mortal state and embodied resurrection conflated into a single phase divided into two parts.) All mortal humans and animals, in Mormonism, are composed of a spirit and a body but the body exists only in the second and fourth phases whereas the spirit exists continuously.<sup>8</sup> Distinct from most Abrahamic faiths, Mormonism holds that the spirit is not ontologically different than the body but is, instead, a type of “refined matter”<sup>9</sup> that will one day be detectable through scientific means. Although a reward system is closely yoked to this progression, the four phases are universal amongst all human beings.<sup>10</sup> Hierarchies based on conduct, moral rectitude and lineage exist, then, within these phases<sup>11</sup> but do not qualify or disqualify souls from entry thereunto.<sup>12</sup>

In the first phase, pre-existence, all of us, as God’s spirit-children begin as essentially identical but fully aware beings<sup>13</sup> but through their exercise of “free agency” (Mormonism’s particular version of free will) become distinct from one another, cultivating particular talents and inclinations, talents and inclinations that will remain with them throughout their life cycle.<sup>14</sup> Because of the formative nature of the pre-existence, God sets certain elect groups of spirits apart and exposes them to different experiences in order to condition them for their anticipated duties

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<sup>7</sup> To be found.

<sup>8</sup> Pratt, Orson. *Masterful Discourses of Orson Pratt* Ed. N B Lundwall. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962.) 71.

<sup>9</sup> Pratt, Orson. *The Seer*. (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 1990) 33.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, Joseph Fielding. *Answers to Gospel Questions* vol. 2. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1958.) 6.

<sup>11</sup> Roberts, B. H. *The Gospel: An Exposition of Its First Principles*. (Salt Lake City: George Q Cannon & Sons, 1893.) 347.

<sup>12</sup> McConkie, Bruce R. *A New Witness to the Articles of Faith*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1985.) 153.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, Joseph Fielding. *Doctrines of Salvation* vol. 1. Ed. Bruce McConkie. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954.) 59.

<sup>14</sup> McConkie, Bruce. *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1985.) 34.

in future phases of existence.<sup>15</sup> Jews, for instance, were such a group. But, as the historical records inform Mormons, the free agency of elect groups is in no way vitiated by this “segregation;” although the spirits of Jews-to-be were set apart and cultivated to be more “spiritual,” this could not guarantee their future compliance with divine ordinances. This point is underlined in Mormon ideas of blackness which posited until recently that those born into African lineages<sup>16</sup> were spirits who chose not to fight with Jehovah in his battle with Lucifer, as opposed to individuals who were in any way intentionally set apart by God. During the pre-existence, spirits suffer no consequences for their actions, being free to gradually differentiate themselves without fear of death.

Once this process is complete, spirits must choose to fall into mortality, the second phase of existence in order to continue their “progression” towards the “exaltation,” the terminal point in Mormonism when resurrected beings are so advanced in intelligence and rectitude that they, themselves, become gods who create worlds and people them.<sup>17</sup> In this way, the command to reproduce suffuses Mormon religion in ways that it does not other Abrahamic faiths. It is imperative for human beings in this estate to create tabernacles for other pre-existent spirits to inhabit but this is merely a dress rehearsal for exaltation when it is spirits bodies that we will father. The Cylon religion shares this divine commandment<sup>18</sup> and motivates its adherents to take great risks to couple with humans, lacking the capacity to reproduce, themselves.

This path to exaltation is the “Plan of Salvation,” a scheme proposed by God to the pre-existent spirits, based on the universal rules that God discovered (as opposed to creating).<sup>19</sup> In

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<sup>15</sup> *Doctrine and Covenants* 138:56.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, Joseph Fielding. *Doctrines of Salvation* vol. 1. Ed. Bruce McConkie. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954.) 66.

<sup>17</sup> *Doctrine and Covenants* 132:19.

<sup>18</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2004.) 1.01.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, Joseph. “King Follett Sermon” in *Documentary History of the Church* vol. 6 Ed. ? () 305.

order to become like Him (the goal in Mormonism),<sup>20</sup> spirits would have to become mortal, lose their memories and awareness of the pre-existence<sup>21</sup> and re-earn or prove their worthiness to become gods. In this way, although entering existence unequally,<sup>22</sup> all spirits would have the option, as mortals, to lead Christ-like lives and earn their way towards exaltation or to fall back in this hierarchy through iniquity or sloth.<sup>23</sup> This Plan, furthermore, is not merely a general template for how all people should live; it entails certain pre-determined roles for elect spirits to carry out in mortality,<sup>24</sup> as does the Cylon “plan.”<sup>25</sup> Jehovah, in Mormonism, must be born into mortality as Jesus and, in the course of his short life, figure out what task he was assigned in the pre-existence in time to conduct a three-year ministry and then sacrifice himself on the cross – otherwise the Plan does not work.

A council was held in the pre-existence and God’s proposal was debated in competition with that of Lucifer who argued that exaltation could be achieved by all if the spirits abandoned their free agency<sup>26</sup> and did not enter into mortality, thereby preserving their perfect knowledge of their true identities and of the pre-existence. He offered an existence devoid of consequence or progression thanks to the absence the finality of death, with the security that spirits who did ill in the flesh could always return to the pre-existence to try again,<sup>27</sup> essentially a universalist soteriology. After losing the debate, Lucifer rebelled and the spirits divided into three groups: God’s army led by Jehovah and Michael the Archangel, Lucifer’s army and those who chose to

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<sup>20</sup> Roberts, B. H. *The Gospel: An Exposition of Its First Principles*. (Salt Lake City: George Q Cannon & Sons, 1893.) 352.

<sup>21</sup> Pratt, Orson. *Masterful Discourses of Orson Pratt* Ed. N B Lundwall. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962.) 505.

<sup>22</sup> Roberts, B. H. *The Gospel: An Exposition of Its First Principles*. (Salt Lake City: George Q Cannon & Sons, 1893.) 346.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 347.

<sup>24</sup> *Doctrine and Covenants* 138:53

<sup>25</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2004.) 1.01.

<sup>26</sup> Roberts, B. H. *The Gospel: An Exposition of Its First Principles*. (Salt Lake City: George Q Cannon & Sons, 1893.) 268.

<sup>27</sup> Bautista, Margarito. *La Evolución de Mexico; Sus Fundadores y Origen Verdades; El Destino de Europa y America*. (Mexico City: Arzate Brothers, 1935.) 307.

remain neutral (Africans-to-be).<sup>28</sup> As in conventional Christianity, Lucifer lost and he and his spirits were cast down, forced to live in the world but without the benefit of mortal tabernacles. The leader of God's hosts, Michael, was specially rewarded. He would lose his knowledge of the pre-existence and become the first mortal, one who would go by a different name: Adam.<sup>29</sup>

Although *Battlestar* does not offer an identical narrative, striking parallels are nevertheless evident. Cylons seem very much like pre-existent entities, divided into tribes or, in the terminology of the series, "model numbers"<sup>30</sup> of identical beings, not subject to mortality, who can be infinitely reborn, perfectly retaining the knowledge of their previous experiences, their consciousness being transmitted from one body to the next in the form of energy<sup>31</sup> not unlike the "refined matter" postulated in Mormon thought, every time they learn a lesson that would, for a mortal, end in the death of the body. And as these experiences pile up, the entities within each model number gradually become distinct entities with different skills, values and thoughts until, eventually, individuals with these model numbers make different choices than one another.<sup>32</sup> Such a powerful and accessible presentation of Mormon cosmology is made possible, in the show, by the lack of any requirement to support Mormon orthodoxy that mortal tabernacles are only to be awarded in the second phase; disposable, industrially-produced bodies are, in fact, more illustrative of this cosmological model than the holographic projection that a faithful production might offer.

If one accepts Cylon existence as analogous to the pre-existence, other parallels then become obvious. One is struck, for instance, by the series of councils that are held by the Cylons

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<sup>28</sup> Smith, Joseph Fielding. *Doctrines of Salvation* vol. 1. Ed. Bruce McConkie. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954.) 66.

<sup>29</sup> *Doctrine and Covenants* 128:21; Pratt, Orson. *The Seer*. (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 1990) 71.

<sup>30</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Miniseries, 200 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2003.)

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>32</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2004.) 4.?

during the fourth season that divide them into two camps: those that favour free will and mortality and those that do not.<sup>33</sup> But, as in films based on Christian cosmology, the absence or limitation of God yields a narrative that renders the “good guys” more ruthless and empowers Satan and his hosts. This time, when free agency is debated, its advocates narrowly lose. This then compels *them* to rebel and begin the war against the Lucifer figure, Model One (numbered as befits the Son of the Morning), who believes that free agency is an error that must be corrected. For this reason, “self-aware[ness]” must be withheld from the majority of Cylons.<sup>34</sup> Whereas the Cylons led by Model Six favour progression towards humanity, Model One stands against progress, arguing that the Cylons should not seek to become mortal and human but instead be the best machines they can be.<sup>35</sup> And it is he who begins to win the war decisively. In this case, the heavenly hosts do not become mortal of their own volition but have it forced upon them by virtue of losing the war and, in consequence, access to the resurrection ships.

Similarly, the idea of Cylon “programming” as the explanation for exceptional untrained talent at particular skills or the source of subconscious impulses to carry out certain tasks, such as Model Eight attempted assassination of Adama are very similar to the way Mormons understand the influence experiences in the pre-existence exert in one’s mortal life.<sup>36</sup>

More striking still is the experience of the “final five” Cylons, the first Cylons to have left the pre-existence and entered into mortality. These Cylons’ physical appearance is unknown to the other seven model numbers, suggesting that they have not been reborn on any of the “resurrection ships,” and thereby indicating that they are fully subject to death. More importantly, they lack the knowledge of what, if any, special duties they were assigned in the

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<sup>33</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2004.) 4.?

<sup>34</sup> *Battlestar* 3.02, 0:16.

<sup>35</sup> *Battlestar* 2.20, 0:23.

<sup>36</sup> McConkie, Bruce. *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1985.) 513.

pre-existence. Even when they come to realize that they are Cylons, this is only a starting point in piecing together the mission that they were sent to carry-out.<sup>37</sup> Writing this essay just prior to the airing of the fifth season in which the fifth of the “final five” will be revealed, I cannot resist emphasizing that Adam had a different name in the pre-existence and was given a crucially important mission to carry out in mortality, even though he could not recall who it was that he used to be.

The *Scrolls of Pythia*, the holy book of the Twelve Tribes of Kobol begin with the statement, “Life here began out there,”<sup>38</sup> the words that echo the opening monologue of the original Battlestar, a closely paraphrasing the words of Mormon prophet Joseph Fielding Smith, “*Life did not originate here. Man did not come first into existence here... all life on this earth came from elsewhere.*”<sup>39</sup>

A basic Mormon doctrine, propounded in the *Book of Abraham* is the assertion that human beings are not native to this solar system but came from the planet Kolob, “nigh unto the Throne of God.” And just as “the gods” collectively organized and supervised creation in Mormonism, the “Lords of Kobol” are the gods of Battlestar’s human homeworld who directed them to their “twelve worlds” and stand as judges in the afterlife.<sup>40</sup> Mormonism is much more easily adapted than most Abrahamic faiths’ historical thought to the contemporary idea of space-time that conceptualizes time and space as dimensions in that it organizes human experience into an infinity of “dispensations” that are separated by time and/or space.<sup>41</sup> Dispensations are organized together in a cycle of apostasies and restorations.

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<sup>37</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2006.) 3.20.

<sup>38</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Miniseries, 200 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2003.)

<sup>39</sup> Smith, Joseph Fielding. *Doctrines of Salvation* vol. 1. Ed. Bruce McConkie. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954.) 74.

<sup>40</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Miniseries, 200 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2003.)

<sup>41</sup> McConkie, Bruce R. *A New Witness to the Articles of Faith*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1985.) 137.



A dispensation begins with a group of elect individuals arriving at a point in space-time and forming a society based on eternal Gospel principles consistent with the Plan of Salvation. By complying with those principles, these elect people become prosperous, just and successful, waxing powerful.<sup>42</sup> Each dispensation is headed by an individual identified in the pre-existence who is designated in the Plan to found a new civilization; in Mormon terrestrial history such individuals have included Adam, Enoch, Noah, Jared,<sup>43</sup> Abraham, Moses, Lehi, Jesus and Joseph Smith. These individuals' new start entails them being set apart from the rest of humanity in one of the following ways: emigration to a new land, cataclysm or "quarantine."<sup>44</sup> In the Mormon narrative, Adam, Jared and Lehi are ordered to come to a new land and people it, set apart from the other human beings; Noah is, of course, set apart from the iniquitous past by the Deluge and Enoch by the removal of his city from the face of the earth; Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Joseph Smith are ordered to found proselytizing societies that, nevertheless, are encouraged to live by different laws and practice endogamy in order to remain set apart from the iniquitous mass of humanity who will not hearken to their warnings. Battlestar's scripture, the *Scrolls of Pythia* offer a similar model, describing how "3600 years ago, Pythia wrote about the exile and rebirth of the human race. And the Lords of Kobol anointed a leader to guide a caravan through the heavens." And this journey is understood by the humans in the series as prefiguring their own, President Roslyn, their leader, prefigured in the previously-anointed one.<sup>45</sup>

Inevitably, the pride of these societies grows and they become iniquitous, falling from God's favour and becoming subject to plagues, natural disasters and war as they cease

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<sup>42</sup> Smith, Joseph Fielding. *The Progress of Man*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1936.) 112.

<sup>43</sup> Roberts, B. H. *The Gospel: An Exposition of Its First Principles*. (Salt Lake City: George Q Cannon & Sons, 1893.) 165.

<sup>44</sup> Nibley, Hugh. *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* vol. 6 Ed. John Welch. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1957.) 137.

<sup>45</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2004.) 1.10.

complying with His Plan. Eventually, this rises to the level of an “apostasy,” and all but a few turn their backs on God. This necessitates that the elect be separated from the iniquitous and the cycle is begun anew<sup>46</sup> to play out in a separate section of space-time. Dispensations separate from our own do not merely infinitely stretch backwards and forwards in time;<sup>47</sup> they stretch outwards into the universe with other dispensations in other “worlds”<sup>48</sup> moving through this inexorable cycle.<sup>49</sup> Or, as the most oft-quoted section of both the *Scrolls of Pythia* and the unnamed Cylon scripture state, “All of this has happened before. And it will happen again.”<sup>50</sup>

So it is that in Battlestar, the human beings fleeing Kobol, the world where they lived with the gods, divide into two dispensations: the Twelve Colonies and the lost colony of Earth, only to become numerous, iniquitous and prideful in the former colonies, bringing about the war that nearly annihilates them, thereby separating an elect remnant, led by Adama who strikes out to found a new dispensation.

Of course, in this pattern of self-similar yet unique dispensations, because all are governed by the same universal laws, one should expect to see recurring patterns: the twelve Cylon models<sup>51</sup> of Battlestar remind us of the Israel’s twelve tribes which, in turn, allude to the Twelve Colonies of Kobol, ruled by the Quorum of the Twelve, eponymous with the governing body of the Mormon Church (and, in fact, the “true church” in all dispensations).<sup>52</sup> Because “Israel” has always been the true church, in fact, the Quorum of the Twelve and Christ’s twelve apostles are holders of exactly the same eternal office as the princes of Israel’s original twelve

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<sup>46</sup> Smith, Joseph Fielding. *The Progress of Man*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1936.) 112.

<sup>47</sup> Pratt, Orson. *Masterful Discourses of Orson Pratt* Ed. N B Lundwall. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962.) 305.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 298.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 304.

<sup>50</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2004.) 1.08.

<sup>51</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Miniseries, 200 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2003.)

<sup>52</sup> Roberts, B H. *New Witnesses for God* vol. 1. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1911.) 74.

tribes.<sup>53</sup> But of course, there were really thirteen colonies formed from the exodus of Kobol, like the Thirteen American colonies in Mormonism's next exodus, or the thirteen companies of the exodus to Utah (as mandated by scripture as opposed to the actual on-the-ground organization),<sup>54</sup> if one includes the thirteenth group that traveled by sea following a different route. (The colonization of the United States is part of Mormon sacred history, enjoying a place in their Scripture, the Constitution of the Thirteen Colonies enjoying scriptural status as a "divinely inspired" document.) President Roslyn fits easily into this model: a leader who begins the exodus but who will die before reaching "the Promised Land."<sup>55</sup>

But *Battlestar* is not merely allusive to Mormon cosmology. Intentionally or unintentionally, it engages in cosmological speculation that a church-affiliated production never could. In Mormonism, "as we are, God once was; as God is, man may be."<sup>56</sup> The original God or "heavenly father" made himself a God by discovering the rules and principles of the universe; this "intelligence" is what made him wax in power, in turn magnifying his intelligence further. Or as Baltar observes, "If we knew God's will, we would all be gods."<sup>57</sup>

If it really is true that all of this has happened before and all of this will happen again, we can shed certain claims regarding the uniqueness of God if we consider the possibility that the cycle of dispensations stretches infinitely backwards and forwards through time. In such a system, we can consider the possibility that we are not, as Mormon orthodoxy suggests, the first generation of beings to become like God and have our own spirit-children who will pass through the four-stage cycle but some later generation, the children or even great<sup>100</sup> grandchildren of God's spirit-children. This possibility is further reinforced by the *Cylon* recognition that, in a

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<sup>53</sup> McConkie, Bruce R. *A New Witness to the Articles of Faith*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1985.) 333.

<sup>54</sup> *Doctrine and Covenants* 136:3.

<sup>55</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2004.) 1.12.

<sup>56</sup> *Lectures on the Articles of Faith*. (Salt Lake City, 1899.) 431.

<sup>57</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2006.) 3.07.

way, Kobol remains the ur-world, the “birthplace of us all;” Kobol can still be recognized as the starting point, given its status as God’s home world, even if the generation so recognizing it was not born there.<sup>58</sup> It was the first Eden, “The birthplace of mankind where the gods and men lived in paradise until the exodus of the thirteen tribes.”<sup>59</sup>

An exalted being or god, in Mormon orthodoxy, spends his existence fathering spirit-children and forming worlds for them to inhabit. One knows a god because he has sons and daughters who look like him, who share his physical form or “likeness” (it is a matter of Mormon doctrine that all intelligent extra-terrestrial beings will look like us<sup>60</sup> because we look like God). In this way, the humans of the Battlestar universe are coming to exhibit the characteristics of gods, as evidenced by their creation of the Cylons, ensouled creatures who look just like them, even if the ensouled status of Cylons is an ongoing dispute between humans and their creation.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, it is not as humanity’s creation but “humanity’s children” that the Cylons identify themselves,<sup>62</sup> acknowledging human beings as “our parents, in a sense.”<sup>63</sup>

And freed from the requirement for the goodness of God entailed by Mormon orthodoxy, a new element is added to cyclic time. When the humans return to their Edenic birthplace, Kobol where the gods created them, they find the planet abandoned and signs that prior to their emigration, relations with the gods had deteriorated with the gods murdering or “sacrificing” humans.<sup>64</sup> And if all this has happened before and it will happen again, one can infer a similar rebellion by the humans to the one in which the Cylons are now engaged, rising up and slaughtering their creators for their hubris and savagery, taking their place as the ensouled beings

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<sup>58</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2004.) 1.08.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 1.12.

<sup>60</sup> Pratt, Orson. *Masterful Discourses of Orson Pratt* Ed. N B Lundwall. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962.) 298.

<sup>61</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Minieries, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2003.)

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2004.) 1.03.

<sup>64</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2005.) 2.02.

who people the mortal estate. Adama, in the first episode, recognizes human culpability in the Cylon uprising, observing that

...we still visit all of our sins on our children. We refuse to accept responsibility for anything we have done. Like we did with the cylons; we decided to play God, create life. When that life turned against us, we comforted ourselves in the knowledge that it really wasn't our fault... you cannot play God and then wash your hands of the things you have created.<sup>65</sup>

But this recognition is not merely one of culpability; it is the recognition that human beings have created life, just as the gods once did. In this way, the union between the “sons of God and the daughters of men,” in *Genesis* is played-out again with the impregnation of female Cylons by Baltar and Helo, the incipient gods.

Lest one view this and the myriad other references to Greek mythology as beyond the pale in Mormon cosmology, it is worth noting that academic Mormon apologists were given fresh legitimacy and creative inspiration by the post-war emergence of the Near Eastern Studies discipline that began to understand the Eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamia as a single culture complex, allowing Mormon scholars, led by Hugh Nibley, to situate their polytheism within a new understanding of Judaism that integrated it within a hybrid worldview that included Egyptian, Phoenician and Greek cosmological elements.<sup>66</sup> This has also been helpful to Mormons in historically grounding their concurrent claims of monotheism (they venerate only one god) while believing that many gods exist and that they, themselves, may become gods. The henotheism of early Judaism is echoed in the “local monotheism”<sup>67</sup> of Mormonism. In *Battlestar*, humans and Cylons are similarly occupants of the same cosmological system even as the former deny the existence of a single God while the latter see it as blasphemy to worship any other than

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<sup>65</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Miniseries, 200 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2003.)

<sup>66</sup> Nibley, Hugh. *Since Cumorah: The Book of Mormon in the Modern World*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1967.) 52.

<sup>67</sup> To be found.

Him. Interestingly, Cylons, when they pray, utilize the same appellation of God as do Mormons, “heavenly father.”<sup>68</sup>

In fact, Nibley was able to use his knowledge of a wide variety of Near Eastern languages to contest academic condemnation of the *Book of Mormon*’s choice of character names by arguing that, given the deep integration of the Near East’s cultures, the appearance of names of Greek, Egyptian, Phoenicia and Babylonian names reinforced rather than undermining the scripture’s claim of Judean origin.<sup>69</sup> To a follower of the Nibley corpus, Hera would be a reasonable name to give the first of the sons of those children who are the sons of the gods and daughters of men.<sup>70</sup>

The recurrence of the names of the Lords of Kobol such as Athena<sup>71</sup> in the call signs of the colonial fleet are yet another element of the patterns of resemblance in cyclic time. And, in case the analogy between the Lord and human beings is insufficiently clear, a funerary oration from the *Scrolls of Pythia* describe them as “as many and varied as mortal men.”<sup>72</sup>

With such a strong emphasis on the cyclic aspect of Mormon ideas of time, the series can offer itself as both a version of the far future and as a portrayal of the creation myth. The technology of the colonists who reach the ruined world in our solar system (either Phaeton<sup>73</sup> or pre-Adamite earth) is consistent with the Mormon belief that Adam’s scientific knowledge and proficiency exceeded our own.<sup>74</sup> And, as of the beginning of the fifth season, Mormon belief

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<sup>68</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2006.) 3.01.

<sup>69</sup> Nibley, Hugh. *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* vol. 5. Ed. John Welch. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1988.) 25.

<sup>70</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2005.) 2.18.

<sup>71</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2004.) 1.12.

<sup>72</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2007.) 4.04.

<sup>73</sup> This is the name Soviet astronomers assigned to the planet whose destruction supposedly produced the Asteroid Belt in a now-discredited belief of Cold War Russian astronomy.

<sup>74</sup> Smith, Joseph Fielding. *The Progress of Man*. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1936.) 179.

predicts the most likely way forward: Adam is sent to our world to renew, reassemble and repopulate a planet whose inhabitants were destroyed by a possible self-inflicted cataclysm.<sup>75</sup>

Even as the Cylons are led by Adama/Adam to their new home to begin the cycle anew, the end of the gods is not one of defeat. Those who pass the test of mortality are resurrected, returning from death, like Christ, to lead their fellow humans to the next phase of existence. In this way, a resurrected Starbuck returns from the dead, her body immune to bullets, her purpose revealed by the Cylon hybrid (an oracular being) as “the harbinger of death... you will lead [humanity] to their end.”<sup>76</sup> It is worth noting that prior to the collective resurrection of humanity, resurrected beings, including Christ, remain unaware of all they did in the pre-existence.

What are we to make of such a lengthy, inspired and costly meditation on Mormon cosmology, coming, as it does, from a creative project that explicitly declared its intent to abandon the Mormon elements of the original series from which it was adapted? Should we accept the statements of series creator Ronald Moore at face-value<sup>77</sup> that the new *Battlestar* should not be viewed in Mormon terms? I would suggest that accepting at face value the denials of an author about his text’s inspiration, especially in the fantasy or science fiction genres seems like a thoroughly discredited way to proceed. To blithely accept the statements of \_\_\_ without examination seems as credible as turning away from the myriad similarities between medieval Europe and JRR Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*, based simply on authorial denial. Certainly the claim that *Battlestar* does not comment of Mormonism spares both Mormon hierarchs and series producers an uncomfortable public dialogue while still leaving open the possibility for Mormons interested the resonances between their faith and the series to fully engage with them

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<sup>75</sup> Roberts, B. H. *The Gospel: An Exposition of Its First Principles*. (Salt Lake City: George Q Cannon & Sons, 1893.) 333.

<sup>76</sup> *Battlestar Galactica*. TV Series, 50 min. (Vancouver: Universal Television, 2007.) 4.06.

<sup>77</sup> Obtain citation information from Liana.

But there exists a middle ground between the idea that we should accept its producers' words at face value that Battlestar is not Mormon and the idea that it is a carefully constructed meditation on Mormonism. But in the wake of John Brooke's *Refiner's Fire* and Quinn's *Early Mormonism and the Magic Worldview*, it is not a very popular one in Mormon Studies. I would suggest that we need to consider the possibility that once certain key intellectual structures are introduced into a belief system, they naturally entail other ideas. Individuals like Brooke argue that the allegedly unique elements of Mormon cosmology can be traced backwards to Hermetic magical traditions brought from Europe and are countered by faithful historians who point out that while the possibility of lineal transmission of ideas has been demonstrated, the actual transmission has not, allowing them to argue that these ideas really did come to Joseph Smith from God. This debate is just the latest iteration of the debate between Mormons and their opponents in 1830 with the discovery that the Book of Mormon came swift on the heels of another book suggesting that American Indians had once been Israelites.<sup>78</sup> Conversely, Mormon apologists claim that the faith's *Book of Abraham* was not composed by Smith but truly translated from a now-lost Egyptian papyrus because of its resonances, in certain parts, with texts discovered at Nag Hammadi or Qumran.

But there is another possibility, one with which historians of Mesoamerica have by necessity become comfortable: when certain social or ideological elements are combined, they tend to produce similarly-shaped things. Mesoamerica's pyramids, priests, symbolic alphabets and steep social hierarchies do not need to have come from Egypt or the Near East for the simple reason that dense agrarian populations, when alloyed with certain ecological and social conditions, tend to produce similar kinds of things, with or without the direct cultural transmission of ideas. Large pyramids made of mud or stone bricks just happen because, as a

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<sup>78</sup> To be found.



species, we are not as creative as we would like to believe we are. In this light, the question becomes not how much did Moore need to know about Mormonism to write the *Battlestar Galactica* script bible but how little.

All of this may have happened before and may well happen again, not because of a universal intelligence or consciousness but simply due to the existence of universal structures. I would suggest that it is natural for a Nibleyesque framework to emerge around any project that seeks to integrate Greek gods into an Abrahamic worldview. Just as Joseph Smith probably composed the *Book of Abraham* in order to solve the same problems that authors of similar texts in antiquity did, those of integrating a Hellenistic system of polytheism and demonology into an Abrahamic framework, why can it not be that much of *Battlestar's* replication of Mormonism is just the latest iteration of this phenomenon?

As Teryl Givens suggests in his forthcoming book on the subject, the pre-existence was, in ancient philosophical and religious systems, an attempt to solve problems within a cosmology. In their efforts to explain the behaviour and inner lives of the Cylon sleeper agents and the “final five,” *Battlestar's* writers and producers organically generated a Cylon experience that increasingly resembles the Mormon pre-existence. Many of these elements require no direct engagement with the writings of Joseph Fielding Smith, Orson Pratt, Bruce McConkie or Joseph Smith; they simply require that the author explain a certain lived experience. The conflict within Model Eight, between her programming and her conscious desires are most easily placed in dialogue with the grotesque process of Cylon reincarnation by recreating the Mormon framework, especially when Mormonism has already necessarily shaped other elements of the universe in which the Cylons are situated.

In this way, we can see Mormon fear of potential heresy or at least controversy as having restrained the original Battlestar from cosmological speculation by placing the Cylons outside of the faith's structure for God's descendants.

We cannot know, therefore, what portion of Battlestar's Mormon cosmology was intentionally borrowed from canonical and authoritative exegetical Mormon texts. Even if we had unmediated and total access to the honest testimony of the show's creators, this would be impossible. They might have forgotten conversations they had or books they read that informed them of Mormon beliefs; they might mistakenly remember, once notified of the strong Mormon resonances of a particular show element, having heard of a doctrine of which they had never actually been told. At best, all we could recover was the point, if it exists, at which the replication of Mormon cosmology became self-conscious. As Cylons, after all, how are we to distinguish between our programming and our own choices in determining what we do. All we can know is that all of this has happened before. And it will happen again.

Cylon plan and tabernacles

Physical location of pre-existence

- What the uninitiated need to hear:
  - o More about James Ford article
    - More about how my article is different from Ford's
  - o More about original article
- Explain the models better
- Scrolls of Pythia
  - o Clarify dispensational system
  - o What are the scrolls in Battlestar and how are they tied to Mormonism?
- Religious studies jargon I am introducing
- Tabernacle – solely Mormon term
  - o Deal with other Mormon terms
  - o Use footnotes – to put additional definitions
- Include Mormonism's change over time in comparing the two shows
  - o Use Stark's optimum tensions model
- Needs more Battlestar – use concrete examples
  - o Do a Ford-like episode
- Battlestar: how is it a Mormon text?
- Two possible competing theses:
  - o Minimize first series
  - o OR Show  $\Delta t$
- I never go anywhere with the good guys being morally flexible
  - o We need a narrative example to help with this
- Consider descriptive rather than footnotes
- Protagonist-antagonist divide
  - o Use Law of Opposites
- What about Stoicism as an influence?
  - o "The Great Conflagration"
- What is the difference between "elements" and "sophisticated portrayal"
  - o Use Dulin's Duns Scotus ontological monism
- Mainstream press on Battlestar
  - o Battlestar Iraq
- Stylistically, can we use the Pythia refrain more?
- Non-similarity of Olmos and Greene
  - o Typoslogos
- "Reimagined instead of the sequel"

All are the same

All members of tribes are same

Individuals are unique

- Additional step in pre-existence