

TIME TO PLAY THE RELIGION CARD: MESSIAH COMPLEXES IN
BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

A Paper
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

Carissa Noel Wolf

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major Department:
English
Option: Composition

November 2010

Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University
Graduate School

Title

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By

Carissa Noel Wolf

The Supervisory Committee certifies that this *disquisition* complies with North Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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November 10, 2011

Date

Kevin Brooks, Ph.D.

Department Chair

ABSTRACT

Wolf, Carissa Noel, M.A., Department of English, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, North Dakota State University, November 2010. Time to Play the Religion Card: Messiah Complexes in *Battlestar Galactica*. Major Professor: Dr. Miriam Mara.

In 2003, *Battlestar Galactica* (*BSG*) was re-invented from its 1978 roots and updated to a post-apocalyptic narrative that reflects numerous issues in current American culture, including the influence of religious rhetoric in post-9/11 politics. As theorized by psychoanalyst Carl Jung, the fictions of a culture reveal the subconscious values and beliefs of that culture,¹ and *BSG* has proven fertile ground for such investigations. Four major compilations of critical essays on *BSG* have been published to date, with some articles analyzing the post-9/11 politics and others on the use of religion in the narrative, but few examine these elements in conjunction with each other or how the characters use them. This combination of political and religious rhetoric is especially important in how *BSG* cultivates multiple messianic characters to drive its narrative and resolve complex issues for its characters – yet the published scholarship remains silent on this.

For a single narrative to contain multiple messianic characters is a rare phenomenon, for as mythologist Joseph Campbell observes, such salvation figures operate on global and cosmic scales.² Yet *BSG* transforms the characters of Laura Roslin and Gaius Baltar into a space-age Moses and Christ, respectively, and more importantly it makes their tag-team messiahships a necessity for the narrative. In creating this messianic multiplicity, *BSG* suggests that a single individual cannot address all of the needs of a desperate people – a messiah can function either in the political realm (serving as an agent of physical salvation) or on a spiritual level (delivering emotional redemption), but not both. Much of this messianic dualism emerges in the characters' rhetorical strategies – relying on classical Aristotelian forms vs. Judeo-Christian sermonic

1. Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 79.

2. Campbell, "Transformations of the Hero," 119-120.

oratory, how they address underlying needs to appeal to the people, and in the ultimate ‘scope’ of their messianic influence on their societal and cultural history. Their messianic transformations and the mythic nature of the *BSG* narrative itself take a modern twist on Jungian archetypes and Campbellian universals, and thus guided by the same theorists that influenced their construction, I analyze the messiahships of Laura Roslin and Gaius Baltar through their use of political and religious rhetoric, how that rhetoric transforms them and their followers, and what this unique storytelling reveals about post-9/11 American perspectives.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
INTRODUCTION	7
BATTLESTAR AMERICA: BSG AS A CULTURAL MIRROR	9
Myth, Culture, and Defining the Messiah.....	11
Ascent to Messiahship	16
LAURA ROSLIN, MOSES OF A DESOLATE PEOPLE.....	18
“I’m Having Visions” – Grooming Through Circumstance	18
“I’m Playing the Religious Card” – Using Religion for Political Purpose.....	26
“I am the Dying Leader” – Internalization of Messiahship	33
GAIUS BALTAR, FROM ATHEIST TO CHRIST.....	40
“I’m Your Subconscious Frakking With Your Mind” – Head-Six, the Externalized Internal	40
“I am an Instrument of God” – Adoption of a Public Persona	47
“How Do You Know That God is On Your Side, Doctor?” – Firm Belief and the Culmination of the Messiah’s Journey	55
CONCLUSIONS: MESSIAHS IN TANDEM	67
Different Rates of Messianic Development.....	68
Differing Interpretations of the Divine	70
Differing Forms of Messiahship	71
Beyond the Battlestar	72
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	75

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Roslin changes from Secretary of Education to President (Moore and James, “Miniseries”).....	19
2. Roslin’s vision of Leoben and her reality (Graphia, “Flesh and Bone”).....	23
3. Roslin becomes Moses on Kobol (Moore and Eick, “Home, Pt. 2”).....	35
4. Gaius Baltar, the divine instrument (Weddle and Thompson, “Hand of God”).....	44
5. Baltar and his disciples (Weddle and Thompson, “He That Believeth in Me”).....	53
6. Baltar prays for a miracle (Weddle and Thompson, “He That Believeth in Me”)..	53
7. Baltar’s sermon in Dogsville (Espenson, “Deadlock”).....	62
8. Baltar preaches at gunpoint (Moore, “Daybreak”).....	65
9. Baltar’s challenge to the audience (Moore, “Daybreak”).....	65

INTRODUCTION

Humanity has just been attacked, their homes nuked out of existence by their former slaves, the android Cylons. Only 50,000 souls of twenty billion survive, housed in a ragtag fleet of a single military ship and forty-odd civilian remnants. The civilization is less than a shadow of itself, humanity's hopes of a future entirely reliant on the myth of a planet called Earth.

Thus the 2003 re-imagined *Battlestar Galactica* series begins from humanity's darkest hour and hurtles them forward, beyond the apocalypse into an uncertain future. From these ashes rise two figures: schoolteacher-turned-president Laura Roslin and scientific genius Gaius Baltar, both of whom find themselves caught up in destinies far larger than any they could have imagined. Roslin, newly diagnosed with terminal breast cancer, becomes the dying leader foretold in mystical scriptures, a leader destined to guide her people to a new homeworld. Baltar, an atheist who believes only in empirical rationality, hallucinates a Cylon woman¹ who says he is chosen by God and he begins to preach her message. Both these characters emerge as saviors to their people, one a Moses guiding them one to physical salvation from utter destruction, the other a space-age Christ proclaiming emotional and spiritual redemption.

As Roslin and Baltar don their messianic robes, they undergo intense psychological transformations that force them to re-evaluate their own rhetorical strategies and belief systems while probing our contemporary views of messiahship in general. The presence of two simultaneous messianic figures within the same series during the same fictionalized time frame bring into question the powers wielded by these saviors, what needs they meet for their people and how they meet them. In presenting two messiahs in a post-apocalyptic scenario, *BSG* suggests that a single individual cannot embody or address all of the needs of a desperate people

1. A member of the sixth humanoid model line, henceforth called 'Head-Six' in this writing.

– a messiah can function either in the political realm (serving as an agent of physical salvation) or on a spiritual level (delivering emotional redemption), but not both and not simultaneously. Much of this messianic dualism emerges in their rhetorical strategies: what forms of oratory they use (Aristotelian rhetoric vs. Judeo-Christian sermons), how such rhetoric addresses underlying needs to appeal to the people, and in the nature of their messianic influence on their societal and cultural history. The stories of these two characters demonstrate that messiahs stand at the crossroads of the religious and the political, for they must change not only the way a society functions but also how a society thinks – and therein lies the true transformation and legacy of the savior.

BATTLESTAR AMERICA: *BSG* AS A CULTURAL MIRROR

Battlestar Galactica (*BSG*) is unique among science fiction series, for it does not attempt to wow the viewer with shiny gadgets or technobabble, but it grounds its narrative in the human condition. Co-executive producer Ron Moore calls it “naturalistic science fiction” – having elements of hard science fiction (with no overt bending or breaking of the rules of physics), combined with the “space opera” (melodramas set in space) and dystopian fiction.² The human element drives the plot, not the technological, and much of the drama arises from the characters, their relationships, and their reactions. This emphasis on human drama over science allows *BSG* to provide unique insight on the society that spawned it. As literary scholars C.W. Marshall and Tiffany Potter note, “the series moves well beyond the simple reflection of Western culture’s religious, economic, and gendered organization, towards a dialogic relationship, informed by questions, debate, and analysis, representing the world not merely as it is, or as it should be.”³ Scholars and fans alike have latched on to these underlying themes, analyzing the series for its cultural insight and commentary.

Aside from numerous conversations on Internet forums, four major compilations of critical essays on *BSG* have been published to date,⁴ and discussion on the franchise shows little sign of slowing down. One of the most common discussion topics in *BSG* is the prevalence of political themes, especially post-9/11 concepts. As film scholar Brian L. Ott analyzes the allegorical nature of the series, he pays particular attention to its exploration of the behaviors of a

2. Marshall and Potter. “I See the Patterns,” 5.

3. Ibid.

4. Hatch, Richard, ed., *So Say We All: An Unauthorized Collection of Thoughts and Opinions on Battlestar Galactica*; Eberl, Jason T., ed., *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy: Knowledge Here Began Out There*; Potter, Tiffany and C.W. Marshall, eds., *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica*; Steiff, Josef and Tristan D. Tamplin, eds., *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy: Mission Accomplished or Mission Frakked Up?*

society gripped by fear.⁵ “By dramatizing the moral pitfalls and dangers of unrestrained fear,” he explains, “*BSG* furnishes viewers with a vocabulary and thus with a set of symbolic resources for managing their social anxieties.”⁶ Such dramatization of real-world events – military occupation, suicide bombings, interrogative torture, and terrorism in general – provides a way for the viewer to both make sense of and critique the actions of the American government, since the viewer is simultaneously distanced from the fictionalized societies of *BSG* while emotionally invested in the characters.

Another recurring discussion is the role of religion within the series. However, the published material tends to use broad-spectrum analysis to examine the general role religion plays in the narrative, not how the characters use or are used by it. In their insightful analysis of *BSG*'s religious imagery and use of various belief systems, philosophy and pop-culture scholars Jason T. Eberl and Jennifer A. Vines note that some characters, including Baltar, dismiss any kind of religiosity as something followed by only the simple-minded and uneducated.⁷ Other characters more openly proclaim and demonstrate their faith in contrast to such cynicism, which provides *BSG* with a full spectrum of religious beliefs and perspectives. Though Eberl and Vines analyze how several other characters profess their religious views and beliefs, depth of examination is sacrificed for breadth, and the scholars focus more on what the characters say and their surface-level intentions than what subconscious needs their faith meets or masks.

Those subconscious elements of faith are better addressed by Taneli Kukkonen's exploration of the differences between the Cylons' monotheism and the Colonial humans' polytheistic faith.⁸ According to Kukkonen, polytheism's ensemble cast of deities meets the need

5. Ott, “(Re)Framing Fear.”

6. Ibid, 14.

7. Eberl and Vines, “‘I am an Instrument of God’.”

8. Kukkonen, “God Against the Gods.”

for divine influence over natural events while appealing to the desire for easily understood figureheads (i.e. different gods to different tasks or events). Conversely, monotheism boils everything down to a single deity of infinite power but with a personality too complex for a simple human(oid) to fully comprehend. Such diversity of belief systems help the characters make sense of their world and the unexplainable events within it, but Kukkonen does not address the transformative capabilities faith in the divine can have upon a person or what effect such faiths have upon the characters of *BSG*, especially in a conversion experience. While both aforementioned articles analyze religious belief and behavior within the series, both were published prior to the airing of the fourth season, when the religious rhetoric and themes are most overt. In the end, Kukkonen's, Eberl and Vines's discussions provide an incomplete picture at best.

Although political overtones and religious influences are so prevalent throughout *BSG*, little published material examines these elements in conjunction with each other or how the characters use them. Even less material is able to provide a comprehensive view of religion's role during the series' entire run because only one of the four major compilations was collected after the series ended.⁹ Religion, politics and rhetoric all have cumulative effects in *BSG*, and only by examining the series from start to finish, from premiere to finale, can those effects and their results be fully understood.

Myth, Culture, and Defining the Messiah

BSG's rich commentary on current social conditions moves beyond a mere point-for-point, issue-for-issue translation between the modern world and the Colonial fleet – it also

9. Steiff and Tamplin, eds., *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy: Mission Accomplished or Mission Frakked Up?*

functions on deeper, psychological levels. The narrative of *BSG* attempts to reach out beyond itself, to speak of something larger, something almost universal to the so-called “human condition.” In so doing, *BSG* draws on the theories of psychoanalyst Carl Jung and myth scholar Joseph Campbell, especially in the construction of its narrative and in the development of the Colonials’ messiahs.

One of the most fundamental concepts underlying *BSG* is evident in the series’ oft-repeated mantra: “All of this has happened before and all of this will happen again,”¹⁰ which ties directly into Campbell’s theory of cosmological cycles. According to Campbell, “the cosmological cycle is normally represented as repeating itself, world without end,” and all actions, behaviors, stories, even historical events, are mere snapshots of that vast cycle, including the rise and fall of messiah figures.¹¹ Variations may occur within a cycle, but not enough to break it or to keep it from rolling forward. These continuing cycles help account for the appearances of archetypes – recurring images or motifs in mythology, or more specifically, “a tendency to form such representations of a motif” from the individual unconscious mind and from humanity’s collective unconscious, according to psychoanalyst Carl Jung.¹²

One such archetype, perhaps the most prevalent in Western myth and fiction, is that of the hero, which according to Jung, “always refers to a powerful man or god-man who vanquishes evil in the form of dragons, serpents, monsters, and so on, and who liberates his people from destruction and death.”¹³ While most mythological heroes commit their deeds for a select group of individuals, the messiah functions on a more global scale, a sort of “universal hero” who serves as an agent of salvation for every person on the planet or universe. “Their myths open out

10. First mentioned by Head-Six in Angeli’s “Six Degrees of Separation.”

11. Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 224.

12. Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 69.

13. Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 79.

to cosmic proportions,” Campbell explains. “Their words carry an authority beyond anything pronounced by the heroes of the scepter and the book [government leaders]”¹⁴ because messiahs influence their people on a physical and spiritual level, and thus have a longer-lasting effect.

Though many academics debate the validity of archetypes’ universality across all of human history, cultures, and mythology,¹⁵ *BSG* is able to use archetypes because its narrative structure (i.e. cosmological cycles) allows for them – if everything has happened before, then the hero of the past is the hero of today is the hero of tomorrow. Moreover, *BSG* uses these pre-established character types not as carbon copies but as variations on a theme, for heroes and messiahs are products of their time and the societies that spawn them. Messiah figures can be especially poignant cultural mirrors because they are a direct, corrective response to a “period of desolation as caused by a moral fault on the part of man.”¹⁶ Their stories reflect specific societal shortcomings and perspectives, and according to Jung, just as an individual’s dreamtime fantasies can reveal the person’s inner desires and virtues, so too can a society’s myths reveal various subconscious aspects of the culture that birthed them. He states, “We regard the personal complexes as compensations for one-sided or faulty attitudes of consciousness; in the same way, myths of a religious nature can be interpreted as a sort of mental therapy for the sufferings and anxieties of mankind in general.”¹⁷ Within *BSG*, the sufferings and anxieties of the colonial humans are clear: they attempted to play god in creating the Cylons, the Cylons repaid them with nukes, and now humanity’s future is of dubitable duration. As a cultural text, *BSG* addresses many hot-button issues and current events by recontextualizing them in a futuristic society,

14. Campbell, “Transformations of the Hero,” 119-120.

15. For example, Andrew Neher’s “Jung’s Theory of Archetypes: A Critique” in *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 36 (1991): 61-91; James W. Chesebro, Dale A Bertelsen, and Thomas F. Gencarelli’s “Archetypal Criticism” in *Communication Education* 39 (1990): 257-274; Naomi R. Goldenberg’s “A Feminist Critique of Jung” in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 2 (1976): 443-449.

16. Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 302.

17. Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 79.

thereby both distancing the audience from contemporary arguments while forcing them to confront the topics head on.

Because of this recontextualization, *BSG* can function not only as entertainment but also as an allegorical exploration of American culture at a specific moment in time. During the early 2000s, America was still reeling from the aftershocks of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and grappled with the tactical and moral dilemmas of warring with an enemy comprised more of ideas than of ethnicities or political boundaries. In response, President George W. Bush's political speeches and military strategies developed a noticeably religious turn, because that was the only way to comprehend what was happening. "Religion offered an immediately available frame of reference to make sense of otherwise senseless events," as political scholars Andrew J. Bacevich and Elizabeth H. Prodromou explain.¹⁸ In its grief, America needed immediate answers, and if reasons could not be found in our cultural consciousness or human understanding, then at least those answers were known to the divine. "More than that," Bacevich and Prodromou continue, "religion offered a framework to assist [Bush] in crafting the basic U.S. approach to waging [...] a global war on terror." After 9/11, religion became both a defensive and an offensive tool: it is a comfort blanket to the individual and assuages fears; in politics and government, it becomes a justification for reaction. This two-edged sword of religious rhetoric and its convergence with political strategizing is reflected prominently in *BSG*, both in how the narrative unfolds but most importantly in the development of the *BSG* messiahs themselves.

An additional reason behind the prominent religious themes of *BSG* comes from its very foundations. The original 1978 series incorporated numerous Mormon concepts,¹⁹ but in the 2003 re-imagining, co-executive producer Ron Moore loosened the strings: "I looked at the

18. Bacevich and Prodromou. "God is Not Neutral," 47.

19. Further elaborated in Wolfe's "Why Your Mormon Neighbor Knows More About This Show Than You Do."

original series as mythos and the way it dealt with religion as sort of a global sense. I was aware that Glen [Larson, creator of 1978 series] had used Mormon influences and how he had created the cosmology, but I'm not that familiar with Mormon belief or practice."²⁰ Instead, Moore drew from his Irish-Catholic background to create a less denominationally-constricted, more mythologically-influenced religious framework for the *BSG* universe. This is reflected in the way *BSG* begins in the Greco-Roman mythology and moves towards Judeo-Christianity, but this slant is not the result of proselytizing producers. Moore and David Eick created *BSG* as an agnostic text, taking various perspectives on issues to help the viewer interrogate their own beliefs.²¹ With this broader treatment of religion, the 2003 series is better able to explore the core concepts of human (and Cylon) natures, as well as comment on our own preconceptions on religion and messiahship.

Before a deeper examination of the *BSG* messiahs can be undertaken, some important distinctions must be made. Firstly, Roslin and Baltar are not the only characters in *BSG* to undergo such religion-driven journeys for a greater good. Several other characters, both human and Cylon, rise up as religion-based leaders,²² but in Roslin and Baltar the messianic transformation plays a dominant role in their character development throughout the series, and between them lies the most visible struggle for political-religious power.

Secondly, the role of the messiah must be defined. In the broadest sense, a messiah is "an actual or expected liberator or savior of an oppressed people, country, etc.; a zealous leader of any cause or enterprise."²³ More theologically, the Messiah is "the promised deliverer of the

20. Moore and Leventry, "The Souls of Cylons."

21. Moore, podcast commentary for "Epiphanies."

22. The Cylon Three known as D'Anna Biers and Caprica-Six develop into the Cylon versions of Moses and Christ, respectively, while the Two called Leoben Conoyand human Viper pilot Kara 'Starbuck' Thrace serve more as prophets.

23. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 3rd ed., s.v. "Messiah," accessed January 21, 2011, <http://www.oed.com:80/Entry/117116>.

Jewish nation and the redeemer of the human race prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures.”²⁴

Christianity believes that only Jesus Christ fulfills this promise, but in Old Testament writings, this same definition can be applied to Moses as well.²⁵ In both definitions, the theological and the generic, the messianic role has two components: that of physical salvation or rescue from a dire situation, and of spiritual redemption of the people. But there is third component, one far more subtle: that of personal belief. As the *BSG* messiahs demonstrate, a messiah serves as an agent of salvation (either physical or spiritual) who not only shows a people the way to salvation, but believes he or she is *the* route to salvation. Roslin believes she is the only one capable of leading the fleet to the promised land of a new homeworld; Baltar believes that only he can enact God’s will among the humans and peacefully unite all of God’s children, human and Cylon alike.

Ascent to Messiahship

As these characters take on their roles, the messiahs of *BSG* undergo transformations similar to what Jung and Campbell have described of mythological heroes. In order to analyze this transformation, I have dissected the messianic development of Roslin and Baltar into three distinct stages dependent on their psychological states and the varying rhetorical strategies used to convince and convert their people. These differing rhetorical strategies are manifestations of both the characters’ messianic development and their changing self-perceptions.

First, Roslin and Baltar must be groomed to accept their destinies, or at least the potential of divine influence in their lives. This preparation occurs through an accumulation of coincidental, acausal events that establish the character in a messianic position, and secondary

24. Ibid.

25. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. “Messiah,” accessed January 21, 2011, <http://etymonline.com/index.php?term=messiah>

characters help persuade the savior-to-be into viewing him/herself as a chosen one (the priestess Elosha for Roslin, Head-Six for Baltar).

Upon answering the call to action and accepting destiny, the *BSG* messiah then crafts a public persona using both classical Aristotelian rhetoric and Judeo-Christian sermonic oratory to wield their newfound power for their people's benefit, as well as for the messiah's own ends. By this stage, the messiah might not fully believe in their fate or role; they need only accept it enough to be willing to use it to manipulate others. Full belief in oneself as a messiah figure occurs in the third stage, when that public persona is internalized and becomes part of the character's personal identity. At this point, their rhetorical strategies become either entirely sermonic and conversion-based, or deliberative and action-oriented, depending on the nature of their messiahship.

In general, Roslin and Baltar are fashioned as differing, contrasting forms of the messiah archetype – one operating on a more physical and political level and one of spiritual inclinations; one espousing traditional, classical rhetoric and the other shifting to more sermonic forms – so they can meet various needs of the people and rise as saviors of equal political and religious power. Additionally, these different definitions of messianic power suggest that the messiah is not quite as universal as Campbell and Jung indicate – not that the messiah cannot save everyone, but that a single messiah cannot be an agent of both physical and spiritual salvation. In fact, the human messiahs of *BSG* are specifically established to not be able to switch roles. Their destinies are similar, their paths separate, but both messiahs are focused on a single task: helping humanity survive the present and ensuring that they have a future.

LAURA ROSLIN, MOSES OF A DESOLATE PEOPLE

Laura Roslin is the first savior to emerge and the fastest to move through all three stages of messianic development; the speed and nature of her development directly correlates to the fleet's dire situation. She is given no time to deliberate on the heroic call to action, but is thrown headlong onto the path of messiahship. Curious machinations of fate awaken her to her destiny and help rekindle her people's beliefs in the divine, beliefs that she manipulates through tactical pragmatism and political scheming until her rhetoric is so powerful that she convinces herself of her providence and can finally consummate her messianic fate. Roslin is a master strategist and throughout her journey she treats religion as both a valid concept and a tool of ultimate persuasion. Even when she fully believes in herself as a messiah, the lords of Kobol are still pawns in her rhetorical game.

"I'm Having Visions" – Grooming Through Circumstance

Roslin's messianic journey begins from the first moments of the series, when the colonies are destroyed and she just so happens to be the highest-ranking government official left alive.²⁶ What is most interesting at the onset of Roslin's messiahship is that, when the call to action is given, she is the least likely candidate for such a position, and the least expected. She has no wartime experience as Secretary of Education and she does not have the physical bearing of a strong military leader.

When Roslin first assumes the presidency, she has to fight to earn respect as a leader not only because she is female, but because her background and physical appearance do not readily

26. Moore and James, "Miniseries."

display her competency as a wartime leader. Although *BSG* in general attempts to neutralize traditional gender roles,²⁷ it still retains elements of our cultural misogyny, especially in regards to Roslin's early characterization. As Secretary of Education, Roslin represents more feminine traditions – the caring, nurturing, educating matron – but the president, especially a *wartime* president, must be more aggressive in the use of power and military might, and more assertive to make the hard decisions and not be undermined for it. Although these traditionally masculine behaviors are inherent in Roslin's personality from the start, she exhibits them more in her behavior than in her attire (figure 1). Her wardrobe is limited to skirt-suits and slacks that flatter her curves more than sharpen; her hair is not trimmed short as is stereotypically common among cinematic women of power, but worn long to warm her features and soften her appearance. The



Figure 1. *Left to right*, Roslin changes from Secretary of Education to President (Moore and James, “Miniseries”).

27. E.g. male and female fighter pilots, the female Starbuck and Boomer, gender-neutralization of ‘sir’ in regards to superior officers.

outfit she wears as Secretary of Education, too, emphasizes her femininity with its tailored curves and soft pastels, both of which separate her from the cold steel world of the military. When she becomes president, however, she changes into a suit of darker color and sharper lines, drawing her inner strength and assertion into her outward appearance. As she progresses through the messianic stages, Roslin strikes a balance between these masculine and feminine roles by promising the fleet that she will take care of them (feminine, nurturing) by finding them a new homeworld and protecting them from the Cylons (masculine, aggressive). Additionally, she lets Adama outwardly assume the protecting/attacking role so that she can stand as the more feminine caregiver, when in fact her personality is more aggressive and combat-ready than his. Interestingly, Roslin's combination of physical femininity, intimidating personality and ultimate destiny as messiah figure subvert traditional Jungian and Campbellian views of the messiah. Both theorists infer that messiahs and heroes are only masculine in nature, and females only inspire or distract the male hero on his journey (i.e. damsel in distress or seductress). In presenting the first emergent messiah as female and as a female war leader, *BSG* subverts these traditional mythological preconceptions of savior-hero figures and transforms them into tales more universal and gender neutral. Part of this transformation of archetypes is a staple of the genre – good science fiction pulls ideas from the stories of the past and projects them into a future tense – but it is also partially a narrative tactic to update the old stories for a modern audience to increase their resonance and relevance with the viewer. This heroic gender-subversion also sets the tone for the rest of the series and for the development of the messiahs, namely in the fight against prejudices (from within and without), and the ability to twist those notions for positive benefits through rhetorical strategy.

Although she is the divinely-chosen savior and is able to step right into a position of leadership, Roslin has to fight for respect of that status. Just prior to her inauguration, one man complains to Apollo of Roslin's taking command, even begging the Viper pilot to assume control instead, but Apollo looks to Roslin, shrugs and says, "The lady's in charge."²⁸ Even Commander Adama underestimates her, balking at her order for the *Galactica* to assist in rescue operations, and then demanding of Apollo, "We're in the middle of a war, and you want to take orders from a school teacher?" Roslin responds by defying Adama's orders and following her own decisions, regardless of how others view her. She plows forward, making the choices between what is right and what is necessary, and the people follow on her heels out of fear and lack of other options.

However, rather than allowing the people to focus on what she has not (experience, military bearing, etc.) and what they have not (a homeworld, safety), Roslin gives them something to look forward to. In looking to their future, Roslin falls back to their religious traditions and the myth of Earth, just as Moses offered the hope of God's long-promised land before the enslaved Israelites to persuade them to follow him. Both she and her man-at-arms, Commander Adama, know that "it's not enough just to live, there has to be something to live *for*."²⁹ Though Adama is the first to invoke the myth of Earth, it is Roslin who shapes it into the core of her presidency and lets her political strategies be guided by the prophecies and traditions of their religion. Part of the reason for this fallback to religion could be because there were no contingency plans for coping with an attack of such magnitude, so Roslin and her administration have to cope as best they can, just as Bush and his administration had to cope with the aftermath of 9/11. "No contingency plan existed for what to do next [after the attacks...]" Bacevich and

28. Moore and James, "Miniseries."

29. Adama to Roslin in Moore and James's "Miniseries."

Prodromou comment. “As a result, in charting his immediate response to 9/11, Bush had to rely on his own resources and trust his own instincts.”³⁰ For Bush, his instincts turned him back to his Christian faith for guidance, just as Roslin and the fleet turned to their religion to guide them from their devastated homeworlds and towards the mythical Kobol and fabled Earth. This direct parallel between the Colonial and American experiences ties together fiction and reality in a way that only allegory can accomplish, but because *BSG* is a fictional and mythologized universe, it can resolve its conflicts in ways that Americans cannot – even turning a political leader into a religious figurehead. In the war on terror, Bush adopted a sort of quasi-messiahship, for as Bacevich and Prodromou explain, “From the outset, President Bush looked upon that war as something of a crusade and he himself as something of an agent of divine will.”³¹ Though Bush did not present himself as a full-fledged messiah, Roslin, his fictional reflection, is free to fill this role to its fullest extent, even if she has no personal intention to.

Roslin’s transformation from pinch-hitting president to political savior begins in her subconscious, manifested through her visions. At first she disregards these visions as no more real or surreal than any other dreams until they grow increasingly vivid and prophetic – like small ‘burning bush’ moments that grow into a bonfire, to extend the Moses allegory. The emergence of these visions could be attributed to the drugs she takes for her cancer, especially the chamalla, a fictional hallucinogen more commonly used among colonial oracles and priests seeking religious visions. However, that does not account for the eerie coincidences between her dreams and her reality.

30. Bacevich and Prodromou, “God is Not Neutral,” 48.

31. *Ibid.*, 47.

“Flesh and Bone”³² opens with the first of Roslin’s visions, where she is chased by *Galactica* marines through a forest, then encounters the Cylon model called Leoben just before he is pulled away by an unseen force. A short while later, a Leoben is found hiding in the fleet, interrogated and flushed out the airlock (on Roslin’s orders). The cinematic editing takes special care to reuse the exact same shots between Roslin’s vision and Leoben’s death (figure 2), emphasizing the prescient similarity between the two events.



Figure 2. *Left to right*, Roslin’s vision of Leoben and her reality (Graphia, “Flesh and Bone”).

In a less mythical world, characters and audience members could merely chalk this up to coincidence and ignore it, but the strong Jungian influence in *BSG* suggests that this even is more synchronistic in nature. In Jung’s terms, synchronicity is when: “A) An unconscious image comes into consciousness either directly (i.e. literally) or indirectly (symbolized or suggested) in the form of a dream, idea, or premonition. B) An objective situation coincides with this content.”³³ In other words, synchronistic events are ‘meaningful coincidences’ between a person’s psychic state and external occurrences, and easily lend themselves to religious interpretations of divine intervention. These coincidences are an important facet of the psychological effect of religion, for through such events, people can be converted to or affirmed

32. Graphia, “Flesh and Bone.”

33. Jung, *Synchronicity*, 31.

in their faith. In and of itself, the Leoben dream is not particularly religious and rather insignificant: it is a one-time event, and its content is never revisited again in the series. However, Jung says, “As a rule, a dream belongs in a series,”³⁴ and Leoben proves the catalyst for a series of prophetic visions. Everyone experiences synchronistic events, but when those events cumulate, they can build into a religious experience – as is the case with Laura Roslin. At first she ignores the dreams’ meanings, but as they continue she interprets them more synchronistically, especially with the help of the priestess Elosha. Such synchronistic events prove to be the primary method of Roslin’s preparation for the messianic role.

After her second vision of a dozen snakes crawling over the presidential podium, Roslin seeks spiritual counsel with the priestess Elosha. As the closest clergy to hand, Elosha has the theological background to connect prophecy and present for Roslin:

Elosha: You’re kidding me, right? You’ve read Pythia and now you’re having me on.

Roslin: No...who is Pythia?

Elosha: An oracle in the sacred scrolls. About 3,600 years ago, Pythia wrote about the exile and rebirth of the human race. ‘And the lords appointed a leader to guide the caravan of the heavens to their new homeland and unto the leader they gave a vision of serpents, numbering two and ten, as a sign of things to come.’ [...] She also wrote that the leader suffered a wasting disease and would not live to enter the new land. But you’re not dying, are you?³⁵

This exchange establishes the coincidences between a prophecy Roslin has never heard of before, the president’s visions, and her cancer – three completely separate events linked by their simultaneity and, to borrow Jung’s words, “connected so meaningfully that their ‘chance’ concurrence would represent a degree of improbability that would have to be expressed by an

34. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, 38.

35. Weddle and Thompson, “Hand of God.”

astronomical figure.”³⁶ The easiest way of explaining these events coinciding with Roslin’s life, aside from chance, is that they are divinely directed, for only god/the gods can work on such a cosmically subtle level. Such subtle divine direction enables Roslin to add these events to her oratorical toolkit and political rhetoric later on without many negative side effects (i.e. religious guilt or questioning of sanity). She is merely connecting the dots of prophecy and deducing the gods’ will, not directly interacting with the deities. However, these two synchronistic visions and Elosha’s prophetic knowledge are not yet enough to convince Roslin; they are simply ‘meaningful coincidences’ until the third vision cements her divine providence.

In Moore’s two-parter, “Kobol’s Last Gleaming,” the fleet finds a planet littered with ruins, but when Roslin first looks at the aerial photographs, she sees the inhabited buildings of the ancient past. Specifically, “the forum and the operahouse in the city of the gods, on Kobol,”³⁷ buildings that play providential roles throughout the series. Again Roslin sees a vision filled with information she did not know beforehand, information from a prophecy she had not read, and she can finally profess: “It’s real. The scriptures, the myths, the prophecies. They’re all real.”³⁸ In finally accepting the truth of their religion and their history, Roslin is able to take the next step on her messianic journey. This delayed belief also lends Roslin credibility as a government leader, for she is not forcibly making herself into a messiah, but is guided into the position by forces larger than her. It reinforces her initial humility and reluctance of leadership, two factors directly contrasted with the crafty manipulations and rhetorical strategy of her second stage of messiahship.

These connections between *BSG*’s myths and the reality in the narrative also serve to confirm the colonial scriptures as a factual record of their history, in whole or in part. This is

36. Jung, *Synchronicity*, 21.

37. Elosha in Moore’s “Kobol’s Last Gleaming, Pt. 1.”

38. Roslin in Moore’s “Kobol’s Last Gleaming, Pt. 1.”

especially poignant because both Jung and Campbell believe that every cultural myth has a nugget of history at its core. By so grounding the colonial religion in a history, *BSG* does not treat religion in general as a mere superstition or naïve beliefs held by people who do not know any better; instead *BSG* handles religion as something just as credible as historical fact, and just as valid a justification for action as any reasoned argument because of the ways religious belief is manifested and supported by events in the narrative. This approach is yet another distinction for *BSG* as a whole, for other sci-fi series are quick to dismiss religion as sufficiently advanced technology or mere folktales and superstition,³⁹ but in the characterization of Roslin, it is treated with respect, occasionally reverence, and a tool of ultimate persuasion.

“I’m Playing the Religious Card” – Using Religion for Political Purpose

Once she accepts the messianic call, Roslin does not immediately embrace it as part of her personal identity or even use it to her benefit. Instead she uses the ‘religion card’ sparingly, at key moments to persuade key people and only to smooth the way for her cause. As her actress, Mary McDonnell, notes, “Laura has nothing to lose and is learning to deal with what’s in front of her in the best way possible. All she wants to do is ensure the survival of the human race, and her determination to achieve that goal makes her clearer, stronger and faster.”⁴⁰ Because she is so focused on humanity’s survival, she does not hesitate to exploit any opportunity she encounters, even if it means forsaking her natural humility and skepticism to turn herself into a semi-divine messiah, at least in the eyes of others. As soon as the connection between her and the mythical dying leader is established and confirmed, she treats it as another tool, using it when most rhetorically effective for her political strategy.

39. E.g. *Star Trek* (all series), *Stargate*, and *Doctor Who*. See note 19 in the next chapter for elaboration.

40. Quoted in Bassom’s *Official Companion*, 102.

Most noteworthy during this stage is how she uses rhetorical appeals to persuade her audience. At first, her tactics are based firmly in the classical Aristotelian traditions of ethos, pathos and logos, but over time she takes on a more sermonic, Judeo-Christian style. As rhetorician George A. Kennedy explains, the two forms are structurally similar: “The basic modes of proof of Judeo-Christian rhetoric are grace, authority, and logos, the divine message that can be understood by human beings. These partially correspond, respectively, to the pathos, ethos, and logos of Aristotelian rhetoric.”⁴¹ As Roslin increasingly bases her persuasive tactics in this religious form of oratory, she converts others to her divine destiny and progresses further in her messianic development. This particular rhetorical shift is not a reflection of her changing self-perspective, but of the differing audiences and varying philosophical viewpoints she appeals to. Her self-image seems to change as a side effect of her rhetorical strategies.

Adama is the first person she must persuade to follow the scriptures and clues on Kobol, but he is also her hardest audience because of his stout agnosticism. He does not scorn others’ beliefs, but to him, the gods are nothing more than stories and if the scriptures have a historical basis, they’re so enshrouded in myth that the separation of fact and fiction is impossible. When Roslin lays out a plan before him to search Kobol and use military assets to find clues mentioned in the scriptures, Adama asks her not to let her newfound religiosity “blind you to the reality that we face.”⁴² In response, she spins his own language back on him:

Reality is that the Cylon Raider has been successfully jump-tested. *Reality* is that Cylon technology obviously outstrips our own, and *reality* is, there is a good chance the Raider can jump all the way back to Caprica and retrieve that arrow and find our way to Earth, the real Earth.⁴³

41. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 140.

42. Moore, “Kobol’s Last Gleaming, Pt. 1.”

43. *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

Her repetition of “reality” and emphasis on hard fact and empirical data (that Adama himself has conducted) grounds her argument in the same logic that he is using to deny her. In using such reasoning, Roslin’s plan is presented not as a religious pilgrimage, but an archaeological search using clues in the scriptures, including the aforementioned arrow. She simply wants to use military equipment to exhaust all options in the search for Earth, like any rational leader would, and her religious beliefs play a minor part in that choice. Her argument is heavily based on logos, on logic and reason and repetition of keywords, and should appeal to Adama’s military rationality, yet it does not sway him.

With one door closed, Roslin maneuvers around him to the rogue Viper pilot Starbuck, over whom she can assert some level of authority and who has already demonstrated some degree of religious belief. Because of this pre-existing religiosity, Roslin shapes her argument to resemble sermon forms, specifically ones identified by Biblical scholar Lawrence Wills. According to Wills, many Hellenistic Jewish and early Christian sermons followed a cyclic rhetorical form: “(1) an indicative or exemplary section...in the form of scriptural quotations, authoritative examples from past or present, or reasoned exposition of theological points; (2) a conclusion, based on the exempla and indicating their significance for those addressed...and (3) an exhortation” to the audience based on the conclusion.⁴⁴ Roslin uses this sermon structure to play on the pilot’s faith and manipulate Starbuck into either accepting the mission or denying her own beliefs:

Roslin: If you believe in the gods, then you believe in the cycle of time, that we are all playing our parts in a story that unfolds again and again and again throughout eternity.

Starbuck: That's the way I was raised. But that doesn't mean that my part in the story is to go off on some crazy-ass mission against orders.

44. Wills, “Form of the Sermon,” 279.

Roslin: May I tell you the part of the story that it would seem, I am playing? I am dying [...] I have terminal breast cancer. I have six months at the outside to live and I've only told three people so I would appreciate it if you kept it to yourself.

Starbuck: Of course. Are you saying that you're—

Roslin: The scriptures tell us that a dying leader led humanity to the promised land. If you go back to Caprica and bring me the arrow, I will show us the way.

Starbuck: This is crazy.

Roslin: You keep using that word. It is crazy, perhaps. But it doesn't mean it isn't true. And it may be our only chance, our only chance to find Earth.⁴⁵

In this exchange, Roslin begins with exempla of personal value to Starbuck – a well-known passage of Colonial scripture. Then she questions the pilot's faith, specifically whether Starbuck believes in the Colonials' concept of cosmological cycles, where everyone is playing predetermined roles in an endlessly repeating story. These questions build up to the next part of Roslin's argument, the conclusion, in which she implies Starbuck's faith is rooted in reality, not myth, and that the dying leader is real and incarnated by Roslin. Lastly, she delivers the exhortation and asks Starbuck to be a key player in the search for Earth.

It is important to note that in this scene, Roslin does not speak in concretes: she does not explicitly state that she is the dying leader, but instead lays the clues side by side for Starbuck (and the viewer) to connect. This structure leaves just enough room for doubt, but phrases things in such a way that doubting these connections and these prophecies is equivalent to shooting oneself in both feet. In so doing, Roslin moves away from classical Aristotelian forms, wherein credibility is “established by what is said and should not be a matter of authority or the previous reputation of the orator,” as rhetorician George A. Kennedy explains.⁴⁶ Instead she plays off of

45. Moore, “Kobol's Last Gleaming, Pt. 1.”

46. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 82.

the Judeo-Christian/sermonic version of ethos: divine authority.⁴⁷ Roslin casts herself as one sent by the gods, that any power she has is not of her own but given her by the divine, and to defy her is to defy the lords of Kobol themselves. As mentioned previously, this is the same strategy employed by President Bush following the attacks on 9/11, wherein he viewed himself as “something of an agent of divine will,” and he was only doing what God commanded of him as a national leader.⁴⁸ By presenting themselves as reluctant leaders, both Roslin and Bush maintain the integrity of their political offices, strengthen their power base, and preserve their humility before others – and that humility is their final note of persuasion.

And Roslin does remain humble in that sense, for she does not reveal her messiahship beyond her closest allies until her hand is forced. After a failed coup, Roslin finds herself in *Galactica*'s brig and Colonel Tigh is eager to expose her as a drug-addled schoolteacher and pseudo-religious nutjob before the Quorum of colonial representatives. Instead of denying the colonel's accusations or spin-doctoring them, Roslin confirms everything to the Quorum, and in this reveal, her combination of Aristotelian and sermonic rhetoric is strongest. She begins with logos, stating: “Everything I have done is consistent, logical. We have found Kobol. We have found the city of the gods. And when we retrieve the arrow, we will open the tomb of Athena and we will find the road to Earth.”⁴⁹ As she did with Adama, she emphasizes the reasoning and logic behind her actions, simultaneously countering Tigh's accusations of religious delusions while outlining the facts before her audience to connect history and myth into present-day reality.

As Roslin continues, she draws on the same ethos and pathos as she did with Starbuck – credibility given through divine authority and emotional persuasion by tugging on religious

47. Ibid, 139-40.

48. Bacevich and Prodromou, “God is Not Neutral,” 47.

49. Prestwich and Yorkin, “Fragged.”

heartstrings. Unlike with Starbuck, the connections between prophecy and president are explicit when she says, “I humbly believe that I am fulfilling the role of the [dying] leader [...] I am dying. I have terminal breast cancer. Dr. Cottle will verify the diagnosis. I have a few months to live. And in that time, I will lead the people to salvation. It is my sole purpose.”⁵⁰ Roslin’s words are carefully chosen, some of them emotionally heavy – “salvation,” “dying,” “sole purpose” – but they are not unsubstantiated. She mentions the fleet doctor, a medical expert, to at least partially confirm her claim, that she is *a* dying leader. That she is *the prophesied* dying leader is still debatable, but she has planted the seed in her audience’s mind and established even a minor connection between reality and prophecy, just enough for the Quorum to believe. The conviction with which she delivers this claim strengthens those connections even more, subtly promising that, if she cannot deliver Earth, she will at least expend all her energy in the search. As in the exchange with Starbuck, Roslin’s sermonically-influenced rhetoric serves her purpose, and the Quorum representatives fall to their knees before their savior.⁵¹

With the civilian government under her influence and the military trying to turn the fleet against her, Roslin must find a way to unite them all under her messianic leadership, so again she draws upon the gods to sway the people’s opinion. Most interestingly, while she might be emotionally invested in her beliefs (of the gods, of her messiahship), Roslin can take an objective view of it and recognize the powerful rhetorical tool in her grasp. Most importantly, she is cutthroat enough to use it as the ultimate persuasive tool. When one of her co-conspirators recognizes that they “need something heartfelt. Something human and personal that will galvanize the people,”⁵² Roslin sends a broadcast directly to the fleet:

50. Prestwich and Yorkin, “Fragged.”

51. Ibid.

52. Tom Zarek in Robinson’s “The Farm.”

It seems I have been chosen to help lead you to the promised land of Earth. I will not question this choice. I will simply try to play my part in the plan. Therefore, at the appointed hour, I will give a signal to the fleet. All those wishing to honor the gods and walk the path of destiny will follow me back to Kobol. It is there that we will meet the gods' servant with the Arrow of Apollo.⁵³

Again she plays to the prophecies, using the same strategies as she did for the Quorum and for Starbuck. Again she bases her ethos in divine authority, but instead of simply making the connections between prophecy and presidency, she casts herself as a lone figure caught up in a larger scheme, one far beyond her power to control or change. In “try[ing] to play my part in the plan,” she removes herself as an active agent of her messiahship and surrenders her will to the gods, thus becoming a vehicle of divine will and retaining a semblance of humility before her people. Presenting her messiahship in this manner essentially diffuses counter-arguments from the people, for she is not choosing to become a godsend or do this for her own glory, but she is humbly acting according to her role. This humility is what cements her power, at least temporarily, and allows her to act fully as president and as messiah. In her use of religious rhetoric, the *BSG* writers confirm Roslin as a reflection of George W. Bush, but in her tactical connection with messiahship, she transcends the point of mere allegory to do what Bush never could. She becomes the hero in her own mythic tale, a hero who can fulfill American desires for salvation from a situation that offers no easy way out.

Throughout this stage of her development, Roslin demonstrates her powers of oratory and of office, but her most successful rhetoric combines the political with the messianic, the classical with the Judeo-Christian sermonic. Her ethos shifts from the classical structure, wherein credibility comes from the individual orator, towards the external, authority-granted-by-the-divine function of Judeo-Christian sermonic forms. The emotional pathos of her oratory changes

53. Robinson, “The Farm.”

as well, for instead of trying to persuade others purely through logic and rationalization, she tugs on their religious heartstrings, on the basic philosophical ideas that comprise their civilization and converts the fleet to follow her. Only her logos remains classically-grounded, for Roslin must rely on her oratory skills to choose the words and the arguments to sway the people; she is not “a vehicle through which an authoritative message will be expressed”⁵⁴ as in the case of the Judeo-Christian preacher. Because her rhetoric is so curiously balanced between these classical and sermonic forms, Roslin’s destiny is tailor-made for political messiahship. Only in this realm do her powers appear most strongly, and her entire destiny hinges on her maintaining that government station, for without it she has nothing, and to a degree, she is nothing.

“I am the Dying Leader” – Internalization of Messiahship

After revealing her messiahship to the entire fleet, Roslin moves into the third stage of messiahship and internalizes her role. However, this transformation is not limited to herself as an individual but expands to her presidential office as well. In declaring herself a Mosaic savior, Roslin shifts the colonial government from a democracy that answers to the people to an ecclesiastical state that answers to the gods, and temporarily makes her untouchable and unstoppable as a government leader.

Democratic governments derive power from the people they govern and the officials elected, so while Roslin is simply the president of the colonies, her power is limited to what the system allows her. However ecclesiastical states, or theocracies, derive power not from the people but from religion, which means leaders of such states can do practically anything as god/the gods command it. Machiavelli states of ecclesiastical principalities, “Though they are acquired either by virtue or by fortune, they are kept without because they are upheld by orders

54. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 139.

grown ancient in religion, which have been so powerful and of such quality that they keep their princes in state regardless of how they proceed and live.”⁵⁵ By connecting herself with the mythical dying leader, Roslin elevates her political status and removes herself from interrogation, for she is no longer just Roslin-the-president, but Roslin-the-myth and Roslin-the-savior. People will cling more strongly to their beliefs and ideas than to an individual, but when an individual is the incarnation of those beliefs that person enjoys (at least temporarily) untouchable and unquestionable power over the people. When George W. Bush cast himself as an “agent of divine will” in his post-9/11 rhetoric, he invoked some of this same influence to push military forces into Iraq and Afghanistan; Roslin uses it to rally the people behind her and lead an expedition on Kobol and into initial consummation of her destiny.

The Kobol expedition is the first time that Roslin fully internalizes the messianic identity – she is no longer Roslin-the-president plus Roslin-the-messiah, but *only* Roslin-the-messiah. Even after Elosha dies and she has no other external forms of spiritual guidance, Roslin is pushed forward on the tides of destiny because she is doing what she knows she is meant to do for her people. As Joseph Campbell notes of this stage, “in so far as the hero’s act coincides with that for which his society itself is ready, he seems to ride on the great rhythm of the historical process.”⁵⁶ Roslin has rekindled the faith of her people and made them believe in her, so she is now able to follow, literally, in the footsteps of those who came before her, using the clues left behind in the scriptures as she makes her future destiny real.

During this moment of initial consummation (‘initial’ because she will reach this internalized stage a second time, in the fourth season), Roslin no longer relies on her rhetoric to sway people. The time for words is over, and she leads by action – and the opening of “Home,

55. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 42.

56. Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 59.

Pt. 2” reflects this. The opening montage has no dialogue, only images of Roslin leading her troops over the rough terrain in an endless downpour, her hands clutching Elosha’s copy of the scriptures against her heart (figure 3). She moves because she is compelled to and others either get caught up in that fervor and follow her, or they get out of her way. Even Adama, her strongest ‘opponent’ in this search on Kobol, eventually conforms to her will and joins the expedition.



Figure 3. Roslin becomes Moses on Kobol (Moore and Eick, “Home, Pt. 2”).

Thus far, the story of *BSG* closely mimics that of Moses and the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt, but unlike in the Biblical story, Roslin does not remain in a permanent state of messiahship. After Kobol and her initial consummation, Roslin’s messiahship falls into dormancy, especially after her cancer is cured.⁵⁷ Her cancer was a necessary and required condition of her prophesied destiny, and as executive producer Ron Moore comments in the

57. Thompson, Joel, “Epiphanies.”

episode's podcast, "If the prophecies are correct, a *dying* leader will lead them to the promised land, and if Laura is no longer dying, maybe she's not the leader anymore."⁵⁸ Instead of a messiah, Roslin becomes just another wartime president. Her rhetoric, too, slides back into classical forms more typical of political and deliberative rhetoric, for she no longer makes continued references to the prophecies or invokes the Judeo-Christian/sermonic forms much during this interim. And lastly, just like Moses, she loses the faith of her people, and they take a different path than the one she foretold, even choosing a different leader.⁵⁹ Interestingly, as her prophesied destiny falls apart on all levels, she does not.

Even when bereft of her political leadership and messianic identities, Roslin still uses her skills for her people. She keeps socially and politically active: she resumes teaching and starts a school on New Caprica, while helping the Resistance strategize the fight against the Cylon occupation. This sort of personal agency and non-passivity demonstrate the strength of her character, and when compared to Baltar's actions during similar circumstances,⁶⁰ this behavior clearly shows the dedication to her cause and her undying focus on the endgame: the dream of Earth.

That dream is the only thing that keeps Roslin and the fleet going. As Jung states, "Man positively needs general ideas and convictions that will give a meaning to life and enable him to find a place for himself in the universe. He can stand the most incredible hardships when he is convinced that they make sense."⁶¹ Earth is the light at the end of the tunnel and everything they endure is working towards that dream – until they find it to be a nuclear wasteland.⁶² The events

58. Moore, podcast commentary for "Epiphanies."

59. Moore, "Lay Down Your Burdens, Pt. 2."

60. When Baltar is shorn of political and societal status to become an exile, war criminal, and prisoner of war, he loses everything, even his motivation to live. (This will be further detailed in the next chapter.)

61. Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 89.

62. Weddle and Thompson, "Revelations."

that follow demonstrate what happens when the expectations of messiahship go unfulfilled: emotional, individual, and cultural breakdown. Beloved characters commit suicide onscreen, the once disciplined decks of the *Galactica* dissolve to apathy, and Roslin takes a lighter to her scriptures.⁶³ Why? – because their messiah and their religion have failed them. And the viewer cannot help but sympathize with the fleet because once again, *BSG* poses the hard questions: What do you do when your last hope, your only savior, has failed? How do you go on? Until this mid-season cliffhanger, *BSG* is a strong allegory and exploration of post-9/11 America; but with “Revelations,”⁶⁴ *BSG* moves beyond a singular culture’s experience to probe humanity’s psychological and philosophical motivations. To this, Jung can provide something of an answer. He comments, “A sense of wider meaning to one’s existence is what raises a man beyond mere getting and spending. If he lacks this sense, he is lost and miserable.”⁶⁵ In Jung’s mind, humanity is hardwired for some kind of philosophical existentialism: there has to be some kind of overarching natural force or intelligent hand that guides the universe, a method in the madness, and to a vast amount of people that method comes from some form of religion. However, when those personal ideologies collide head-on with reality, one of those has to shatter – and in Roslin’s case, she does.

Upon the discovery of a desolated Earth, actress Mary McDonnell comments that Roslin thought “she had made a huge mistake, and gotten people to trust her and had people killed [...] because of this bigger idea of survival of a race that she thought she was responsible for. And suddenly it was like, ‘My visions are wrong, it’s a failure.’”⁶⁶ However, Roslin’s failure was in merely following a destiny. As a leader, as a hero, as a messiah, she must *make* her destiny

63. Ibid, “Sometimes a Great Notion.”

64. Ibid, “Revelations.”

65. Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 89.

66. Quoted in Goslin’s *Official Companion Season Four*, 130.

happen and not merely follow in the footsteps of those who came before. The heroic journey is a transformative one, not just on the hero but on the society from which he/she originates. To borrow Campbell's definition, it's "leaving one condition and finding the source of life to bring you forth into a richer or mature condition,"⁶⁷ and maturation cannot occur by following in others' tracks. Instead, it comes by stepping off the path, breaking the cycles of what has come before and making new cycles. All of this may have happened before, as *BSG* suggests, but not all of it must happen in the same way. Roslin may be Pythia's leader, but as Adama points out, Earth is not a place but a dream,⁶⁸ a dream that Roslin makes real by finding another habitable planet.

Roslin's story reads like a modernized allegory of Moses – leading a people out of calamity, into the unknown, to a promised land. And just as with Moses, she is not able to enter the promised land. Moses was denied because of a lack of trust in God,⁶⁹ but Roslin's fate is shown not as a fault on her part, but as the final consummation of her destiny. "The last act in the biography of the hero is that of the death or departure," Campbell explains. "Here the whole sense of the life is epitomized,"⁷⁰ not only in how the hero leaves or dies, but in how he/she faces it. And Roslin passes away in peace, her role completed and humanity no longer in immediate danger of extinction. Campbell also states that, "Many [heroes] give their lives. But [...] out of the given life comes a new life. It may not be the hero's life, but it's a new life, a new way of being or becoming."⁷¹ And that new life is precisely what Roslin has given her people, and her audience: a new world and a new hope. However, the salvation she offers is physical, tangible, and (cosmologically speaking) short-lived. Her political messiahship has only led them to a new

67. Campbell, *Power of Myth*, 124.

68. Moore, "Daybreak."

69. Num. 20: 12, Deut. 1:37, (New International Version).

70. Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 306.

71. Campbell, *Power of Myth*, 135.

home, but not shown them the tools to preserve it, for those tools require a shift in cultural perspective and fundamental beliefs, and are not within the scope of political messiahship.

Throughout Roslin's journey, she plays the political card more heavily than the religious, and her presidential identity has consistently taken precedence over her messiahship. She is always determined to provide the fleet with a physical salvation from extinction, and would have had this drive even without her messianic destiny. Her messiahship functions more as a supplement to the presidential office, an enabling force that helps make the dream of Earth a reality. In her hands, the prophecies become another rhetorical tool and give her oratory a more sermon-like style, yet she still stays grounded in the classical, Aristotelian rhetoric. Interestingly, though Roslin comes to be emotionally invested in her beliefs and her messiahship, that does not deter her from strategically using religion as the ultimate persuasive tool, for her pragmatism and politics outweigh her personal humility. She is wholly dedicated to her cause, to giving the people a hope and a future of physical substance. Yet as dedicated as she is, Roslin cannot provide them a way to break out of the cosmological cycle – the cycle of birth, death, rebirth, destruction – she merely gives them a new place and a new variation on an old theme. Breaking that cycle requires spiritual transformation, and the work of a spiritual messiah.

GAIUS BALTAR, FROM ATHEIST TO CHRIST

Although Roslin is the first to undergo the messianic transformation, the metamorphosis of Gaius Baltar is arguably more drastic. He begins the series as a headstrong atheist and narcissist willing to say anything to protect himself, but under the rhetorical manipulation of Head-Six he is guided into accepting his role as divine instrument. Then once he is stripped of all worldly awards and power, Baltar relies on sermonic rhetoric to gather people to him, drawing power and status from their numbers as a protective measure for his body and his fragile ego. The more he preaches to them of the One True God, the more he believes, until he finally steps fully into the role. Unlike Roslin, Baltar's messiahship is not contingent on his holding government office, but rather reliant on him *not* having legislative power. He is not the political messiah that Roslin is and cannot lead them to physical salvation. Instead, his destiny lies in the hearts and souls of the people, providing emotional and spiritual redemption to break them out of self-destructive cycles.

"I'm Your Subconscious Frakking With Your Mind" – Head-Six, the Externalized Internal

Baltar's messianic journey shares some general similarities with Roslin's, but the divine influence in his character development is far more overt. His fate is not so clearly defined from the start, and he is given spiritual aid (Head-Six) rather than having to seek it out as Roslin does with Elosha. Both messiahs are groomed through a series of circumstances and synchronistic events, but Roslin's transformation is largely driven by internal forces as she interprets the events on her own, whereas Baltar is worked over by the manipulative Head-Six. She molds his

mind and preconceptions through sheer force of will and through careful rhetorical strategy that circumvents his preconceived notions and wavering personality.

A character like Head-Six is necessary because of where Baltar's messianic transformation begins. In contrast to the religiously neutral Roslin, Baltar is a staunch atheist openly antagonistic of anything religious, calling it a "bunch of mysticism and superstition" followed by the uneducated.⁷² Additionally, executive producer David Eick describes the doctor as "a pathological narcissistic" who "operates purely out of his own agenda and to satisfy his own needs and desires."⁷³ This description is not far removed from the clinical definition of narcissism, which is "a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy" for others.⁷⁴ From this initial characterization, Gaius Baltar is the last person one would expect to become a selfless, moral, religious leader. Yet this baseline personality makes his transformation all the more dramatic, and his eventual conversion both suspicious and sincere since no one can truly know his motivations – no one but perhaps Head-Six.

Head-Six is the sole driving force of Baltar's conversion and she is only able to overcome his rigid atheism and wavering personality by circumventing every aspect of his narcissistic personality via a combination of psychological, physical, and verbal rhetoric. Firstly, she knows that the doctor values his intelligence above all, and so appears in a hallucinatory fashion to make him (and the audience) question his very sanity. She constantly pops in and out of scenes, appearing and disappearing with a turn of the camera or a jump cut, as if she only exists in the doctor's mind. Rather than immediately attributing her appearance to a religious experience, Baltar behaves as any empirically-minded individual would and, to borrow Jung's phrasing,

72. Moore and James, "Miniseries."

73. "The Doctor is Out (of His Mind)."

74. American Psychiatric Association, "Narcissistic personality disorder," 714 (hereafter cited as *DSM-IV-TR*).

“boils [it] down to a particular condition of the mind.”⁷⁵ At first she appears to be merely “an expression of [Baltar’s] subconscious mind playing itself out during my waking state,”⁷⁶ or the result of a Cylon chip implanted in his brain. However, Head-Six sets out to directly counter that delusion by acting upon him physically – caressing him, having psycho-sexual intercourse with him, slamming his head into a mirror, strangling him by his tie, even holding him like a puppet after soldiers beat him down.⁷⁷ No mere hallucination, no matter how vivid, can act upon a person in such a manner, which goes far to suggest that she is more than just a psychic interface. As Jung states, “It is an almost ridiculous prejudice to assume that existence can only be physical,”⁷⁸ and as events unfold, Head-Six is revealed as a metaphysical being, an angel who acts on Baltar via his psyche.

By undermining the doctor’s brain, his most valued possession, Head-Six weakens his egotism and leaves him ready for her next rhetorical strategy: repetition. When not psychically tormenting him, Head-Six continually refers to “God’s love,” “God’s will,” “God’s plan,” and speaks of God and religion and faith in general. Against her religious demagoguery, Baltar repeats his own empirical mantra: “I believe in a world I can understand. A rational universe explained through rational means,”⁷⁹ and that rationality does not include God. To this challenge, Head-Six (and by proxy, the One True God) responds with a moment of synchronicity, taking two completely chance events and connecting them with “a degree of improbability that would have to be expressed by an astronomical figure”⁸⁰ in such a way that even the doctor cannot deny the divine intervention.

75. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, 75.

76. Baltar in Moore and James’s “Miniseries.”

77. Vlaming’s “Tigh Me Up, Tigh Me Down,” Moore’s “Kobol’s Last Gleaming, Pt. 1,” Joel Thompson’s “Epiphanies,” and Espenson’s “Escape Velocity,” respectively.

78. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, 11.

79. Moore, “33.”

80. Jung, *Synchronicity*, 21.

In “Hand of God,”⁸¹ the fleet finds a Cylon mining operation and Baltar is summoned to identify the weak spot of the facility. When he begs for help, Head-Six says only: “Open your heart to Him and He’ll show you the way.” Baltar picks a random spot on the photograph and is shocked when he discovers he identified the precise weakness. As happened with Roslin, *BSG*’s divine force manifests through synchronistic events, “the simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appears as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state”⁸² – in other words, a ‘meaningful coincidence’ in which the individual assumes causation instead of mere chance correlation. Baltar could have chosen that point for any number of reasons: dumb luck, perhaps subconscious revelation, or as Head-Six suggests, God prompted him.

True synchronistic events are often attributed to religious experiences, prescient visions and ESP phenomena – events that certainly help Roslin transform into a Mosaic savior and that help Head-Six groom Baltar into messiahship. Head-Six suggests that God “doesn’t always speak in words” and He guided Baltar’s finger to that point as “part of God’s plan.” Her rhetoric is beautifully manipulative and caters directly to the defining characteristics of Baltar’s narcissism: “a grandiose sense of self-importance”⁸³ and the belief that he is “superior, special, or unique and expects others to recognize [him] as such.”⁸⁴ Now that some divine force has specifically chosen Baltar, it not only makes him more special, it justifies his egocentrism. Strategically, such catering to this overly-inflated ego is the fastest way for Baltar to realize that, “There really is no other explanation for it. I am an instrument of God.”⁸⁵ As a stubborn atheist, divine intervention is the last explanation Baltar would use for anything fortuitous, but with this

81. Weddle and Thompson, “Hand of God.”

82. Jung, *Synchronicity*, 25.

83. *DSM-IV-TR*, 714.

84. *DSM-IV-TR*, 714.

85. Baltar in Weddle and Thompson’s “Hand of God.”

confession, he has opened himself to the possibilities, however self-serving his motivations may be. Additionally, Head-Six's repetitious sermonizing and manipulative rhetoric sink deeper into Baltar's psyche than is apparent at this point in the narrative, for many turns of phrase and core concepts that she mentions during this stage resurface again later in Baltar's messianic progression, namely in his early sermons.⁸⁶

This realization and future destiny are emphasized in the visual rhetoric of the final shots of this episode (figure 4). Nearly silhouetted against a blue-grey sky, he leans against a railing with his arms lazily extended in a crucifixion pose, foreshadowing his eventual 'crucifixion' before his people in season three and his development into a monotheistic preacher in season four. The loosely-tied robe lends a further Biblical quality to the scene and visually connects Baltar with traditional images of Jesus. The final shot features Baltar looking up into a camera positioned above him, as if confirming his status as divine instrument and looking for further guidance. Camera placement also lets the audience look 'through God's eyes' at him, to see him finally willing to do God's work.



Figure 4. Gaius Baltar, the divine instrument (Weddle and Thompson, "Hand of God").

86. Which are discussed later in this chapter.

However, Baltar does not passively accept this destiny as truth; he pauses to analyze it and challenges Head-Six on the feasibility of her prophecies. As she continues to manipulate and nudge him along the path to messiahship, he begins to rebel and accuses her of “more doubletalk, more mind games”⁸⁷ – until she spins the tactic around on him.

You’re right. There is no Cylon chip implanted in your brain. I’m not real.”
[Laughs.] I’m your subconscious frakking with your mind. [...] You helped the Cylons commit genocide against your own people, and your fragile little mind couldn’t handle it. So poof, I appear and start telling you how special you are. How God has chosen you.

After she has spent all this time building him up, building up his beliefs in God, now she tests the strength of those beliefs by undermining everything. By definition, narcissists suffer from fragile self-esteem and are “very sensitive to ‘injury’ from criticism or defeat. [...] They may react with disdain, rage, or defiant counterattack” when pressed,⁸⁸ which is precisely Baltar’s response to Head-Six’s continued taunts:

Head-Six: Come on, Gaius. Even back when you weren’t nuts, there was always that little voice in your head. That little voice helping you through the rough times, remember? I’m just the latest version of that little voice.

Baltar: I don’t believe that for one moment. No. God has a plan for me.

Head-Six: God’s plan. [Laughs.] Yeah, God has a plan and there is a God and he talks to Gaius Baltar. Okay.

Baltar: Oh shut up will you!

Baltar clings desperately to his hope in a divine plan, for belief in God is the one possible outcome for this set of circumstances that is neither negative nor destructive to Baltar’s still-pervasive egotism. This sort of mockery also prepares Baltar for persecution later, building up

87. Moore and Eick, “Home, Pt. 2.”

88. *DSM-IV-TR*, 715.

his skin and his faith so that he will be a psychologically stronger preacher and not victim to these same doubts when they rise from within. When the MRI rules out the possibility of a Cylon chip, only two explanations remain: either Baltar is going nuts or Head-Six is a divine messenger.

The latter is proven in another moment of synchronicity: when Head-Six foretells the Cylon Athena's pregnancy by the human Helo, both Baltar and the audience know Head-Six is "rather more than a simple manifestation of my subconscious."⁸⁹ Her claim of divine messenger is not necessarily proven, but certainly acceptable mostly because her actions and knowledge cannot be defined by the empirical. Such a character and presentation make *BSG* unique among its genre-brethren. *BSG* is a gritty, militaristic science fiction series, and such genres do not easily lend themselves to the inclusion of metaphysical or religious beings but often work to the exclusion of them. Deities are often discredited to merely aliens with sufficiently advanced technology⁹⁰ and not often does religion provide a major driving force in the main narrative. As previously mentioned in the analysis of Roslin, *BSG* treats religion not with disdain but with respect, as valid motivation for character development, and the metaphysical as equally possible as the physical. In the world of *BSG*, not everything can be defined and quantified scientifically, and not everything needs to be. Some things can simply be accepted on faith, and some things require it, especially in the case of messiahship. Messiahs must believe in something larger than themselves – the greater good, a diety, providence, etc. – in order to fully exercise their power and consummate their destiny.

89. Baltar in Moore and Eick's "Home, Pt. 2."

90. For example, the Egyptian gods of *Stargate* are humans wearing headdresses of alien manufacture; in *Doctor Who*'s "The Fires of Pompeii," the Doctor is worshipped for a deity because of his teleporting TARDIS; and the *Star Trek* crew (in all series) are often confused for gods by peoples of more primitive civilizations.

Such beliefs are what ultimately push Baltar ahead on his messianic progression. Previously Baltar had only limited himself to empirical thought and analysis, a “rational universe explained through rational means.”⁹¹ If something existed beyond the physical plane, he did not merely ignore it; he discounted it outright. Head-Six is an intrusion of the metaphysical on his worldview – he can experience her through his senses but he knows she is not real, and her constant presence forces him to re-evaluate his perspective in order to account for her. By making such a skeptical character into a messiah, *BSG* not only demonstrates the transformative nature of the heroic journey and of religion in general, it underscores a less-prominent tenet of Christianity and other traditions – that God can, and does, call upon anyone to become His servant, and those predisposed towards religion only need less preparation. Additionally, Baltar’s early skepticism and theistic antagonism draw some parallels with the Apostle Paul, who tortured and stoned Christians before being called and converted, and whose rhetorical style will later emerge in the way the writers construct Baltar’s sermons. For now though, Baltar’s empirical rationality towards religion and the mystical is satiated by Head-Six’s rhetoric, and he can move forward on his messianic journey.

“I am an Instrument of God” – Adoption of a Public Persona

Once Baltar begins to believe in his divine destiny, he moves into the second stage of messianic development and begins to employ the rhetoric of a religious leader. However, he does not use rhetoric to deliberately build up a public persona (as Roslin does), but the rhetoric and persona are results of the transformation within. During this second stage of development, events unfold that continue to break Baltar of his narcissistic tendencies while simultaneously revealing his underlying prowess for sermonic oratory. These two steps are necessary in order for Baltar to

91. Moore, “33.”

willingly become the messiah he is meant to be, for a messiah's primary function is to act for the people's salvation and to be a vehicle for the divine message – and Baltar cannot fulfill either task yet.

Baltar's lingering pride and personal ego are major roadblocks in his messianic progression, especially his desire for societal status. He believes himself chosen by God and therefore superior to everyone else, including the frontrunner messiah, Roslin. Though he and Roslin share a similar destiny, Baltar must be made aware that his path is not hers, so the *BSG* narrative carefully sets him up and *proves* him unfit for political messiahship. The best leaders do not let the power get to their head and work for the greater good – two requirements met by Roslin but utterly lacking in Baltar. Because of this deficiency, his political promotion is fraught with strife both internal and external. He has to struggle to win the presidency and under his leadership, the fleet colonizes a planet barely suited for life, and then is overtaken by the Cylons. In a situation reminiscent of both Nazi Germany/Vichy France in World War II and of the U.S. occupation of Baghdad in 2003, Baltar is stripped of power and demoted to puppet president.

In reaching for presidential office, Baltar's labor-intensive quest and ultimate failure seem to indicate that he is moving on a path contrary to his destiny, and against the betterment of his people. As mentioned previously, Campbell notes, "In so far as the hero's act coincides with that for which his society itself is ready, he seems to ride on the great rhythm of the historical process."⁹² So long as Baltar is moving towards the status of selfless spiritual messiah, everything falls into his lap; but the effort involved to gain and hold political power proves that the podium is not his to hold, that it is not what his people need of him. Yet because of his overwhelming ego, the presidency is a position Baltar must attain and fail at in order to be put in his place. In contrast, Roslin does not have to undergo this process of vocational elimination

92. Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 59.

because she consistently follows her path, and she does not have the over-reaching egotism found in Baltar. This sort of narrative construction suggests that messiahs have predestined paths from which they cannot deviate, or their destinies and effectiveness will fall impotent. However, that path is not the same for every messiah, or every messiah of the same sub-type. Instead, the journey is tailored specifically for each messiah, their personality, their society, and the ultimate form of their destiny.

This presidential failure is the first of a series of events that break down Baltar's narcissistic spirit, events either designed by the One True God or manipulated so by the opportunistic Head-Six. To reiterate, narcissism is defined by a sense of "grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy,"⁹³ and Baltar's post-presidential exile breaks his spirit in all three areas. The gain and loss of the presidency effectively pops his grandiose bubble and egocentric worldview, and his resulting exile among the Cylons attacks his incessant need for admiration by making him less than nothing – a pitiful creature that the Cylons can't decide whether to let live or kill outright.⁹⁴ However, the more Baltar is shorn of status, the closer he grows to God, for he has no one else on whom he can rely, and the closer he gets to consummation of his messiahship. When he is tortured by D'Anna in "A Measure of Salvation," Head-Six urges Baltar to seek escape through rhetoric: "Use your intellect against her. Reason, logic, analysis. Find the holes in her psyche. [...] Examine her faith."⁹⁵ D'Anna is one of the more religiously-inclined models, but her faith is not rock-solid and leaves plenty of holes for Baltar to probe.

This episode marks the first time Baltar uses distinctly Judeo-Christian rhetoric, but it is delivered less as part of a manipulative strategy (like Roslin) and more extemporaneously, more

93. *DSM-IV-TR*, 714.

94. Verheiden, "Collaborators."

95. Angeli, "A Measure of Salvation."

inspired by the moment. Like Roslin, Baltar draws upon the three-tiered structure of early Christian sermons (exempla based on scripture or theological points, conclusion analyzing the significance of the exempla, and an exhortation to the listener⁹⁶), but he uses a distinctly New Testament style with the invocation of Pauline rhetoric. He begins by establishing his perspective and credibility: he is a scientist first and foremost, a man who understands that the boundaries of human knowledge fall far short of omniscience. Then he moves into the theological:

And as a scientist, I believe that if God exists then our knowledge of him is imperfect. Why? Because the stories and myths we have are products of men. The passage of time. That religion is based upon a theory. Impossible to prove, yet you bestow it with absolutes like ‘there is no such thing as coincidence.’⁹⁷

Here, Baltar first alludes to certain principles of the Apostle Paul’s rhetoric, namely that humans cannot fully comprehend the divine. As rhetorician George A. Kennedy states, Paul believed that “in place of worldly philosophy there exists a higher philosophy, only dimly apprehended by human beings”⁹⁸ and Paul himself wrote: “For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection [God, or the divine] comes, imperfection disappears. [...] Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”⁹⁹ In Christian doctrine, God knows His people fully, understands their motivations and behaviors, but we cannot fully know Him because we are imperfect and His nature far exceeds the scope of our understanding. Baltar’s reasoning here combines these basic Christian-Pauline tenets with the more Jungian concepts of archetypes, mythology, and narrative decay over time. This combination of psychology and rhetoric allows him to tap into D’Anna’s psyche, expose the weaknesses of her faith, the holes in

96. Wills, “Form of the Sermon,” 279.

97. Angeli, “A Measure of Salvation.”

98. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 151.

99. 1 Cor. 13:9-10, 12 (NIV).

her logic, and begin to enable her to accept those limitations. This sort of discourse is far from rare in real-world Christian theology, especially in sermons of conversion. Here, Baltar is trying to build up D'Anna's faith in herself, in her God, and in him, while simultaneously doing the same upon the viewer, so that the viewer is more likely to accept Baltar's internal transformation as sincere and his growing messiahship as real.

Once Baltar has established the limitations of human knowledge, he applies it to D'Anna's wavering faith: "Absolute belief in God's will means there's a reason for everything. And yet, you can't help but ask yourself how God can allow death and destruction and then despise yourself for asking."¹⁰⁰ Re-evaluating one's faith is natural, even psychology healthy, until it turns to extreme doubt, which Baltar assuages with Pauline rhetoric: "But the truth is, if we knew God's will, we'd all be gods, wouldn't we?" This assertion of limited knowledge makes D'Anna pause and her hesitation also subtly begs the viewer to consider this oft-quoted argument for God's omniscience. Baltar then delivers the sermonic exhortation: "I can see it in your eyes, D'Anna. You're frustrated. You're conflicted. Let me help you. Let me help you change. Find a way to reconcile your faith with fact. Find a way towards a rational universe."¹⁰¹ This last phrase, "a rational universe," harkens back to the empirical mantra he recited in the first season¹⁰² and in the first stage of his messianic development, making it apparent that this sermon is also a testimonial of his own faith.

This sermonic rhetoric and analysis serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it saves his life by confusing his tormentor, for a sermon is the last thing expected on the torture rack. Secondly, it shows that Baltar is growing closer to becoming God's true instrument, for his rhetoric is becoming increasingly Judeo-Christian in both form and function. Unlike Roslin, Baltar has little

100. Angeli, "A Measure of Salvation."

101. Ibid.

102. Moore, "33."

skill in practicing rhetorical tact,¹⁰³ but Kennedy states that “the Judeo-Christian orator, at least in theory, has little need of practice or knowledge of art as is required of the orator in the classical tradition. He needs only the inspiration of the [Holy] Spirit” to speak God’s message.¹⁰⁴ In this situation, Baltar is wracked with so much pain that he cannot scheme or weasel out of it as he normally does, but he is guided by Head-Six into delivering a message more eloquent and effective than he could under more normal conditions.

Once his prowess for Judeo-Christian oratory is uncovered, Baltar uses it increasingly often, and he comes to rely on Head-Six less for instruction, more for inspiration in his sermons. This is especially evident when he returns to the colonial fleet and has even less societal status than he did among the Cylons. All of humanity wants him executed as a traitor to his race, except a cult of followers that has sprung up from his prison-published manifesto. Though this ‘Cult of Baltar’ originally spawned out of lingering selfishness and self-preservation, the cult is responsible for pushing him toward the final stage of messiahship, for they truly believe in him and they force him to live up to such a role.

When Baltar seeks refuge with the cult,¹⁰⁵ he is close enough to consummation of destiny that his messiahship grows visual. As shown in figure 5, Baltar sports longer, scruffier hair and a thick beard, for he was given no razor during his imprisonment on either the Cylon basestar or in *Galactica’s* brig. His scruffy and disheveled appearance exaggerates his societal losses, loneliness, and newfound exile, while simultaneously making him resemble traditional images of Christ more so than in prior seasons. The blaze-orange blanket draped over his shoulders

103. In “The Doctor is Out (of His Mind),” actor James Callis says he plays Baltar as a brilliant scientist but horrible liar. This trait is played up for humor and drama in later seasons.

104. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 141.

105. Weddle and Thompson, “He That Believeth in Me.”

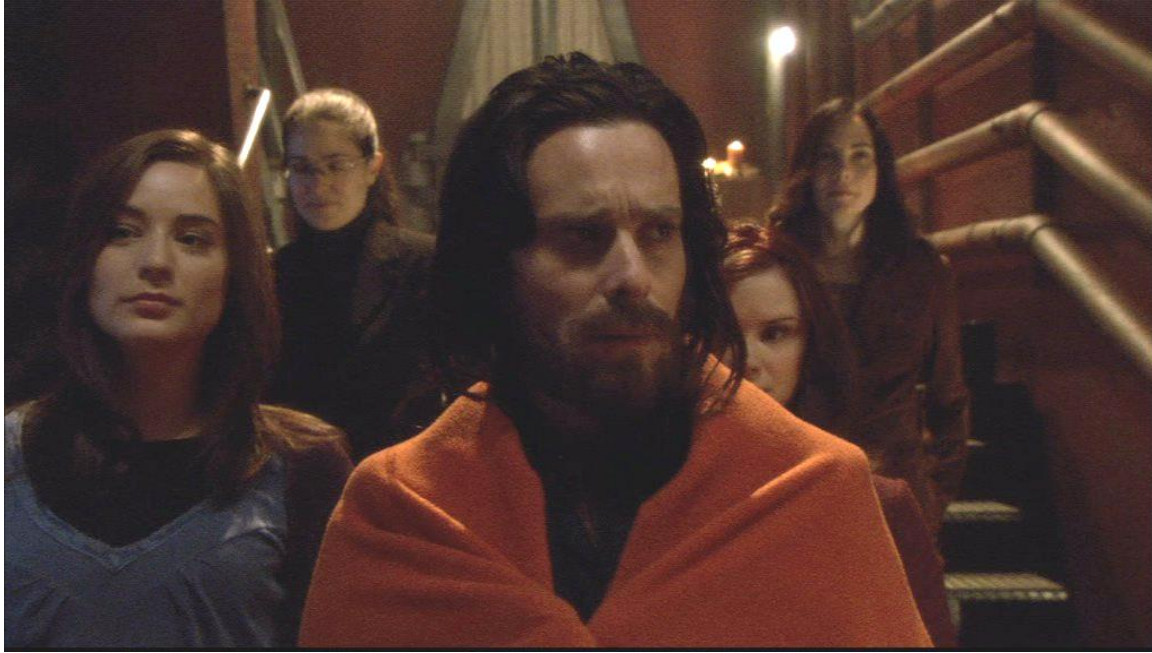


Figure 5. Baltar and his disciples (Weddle and Thompson, “He That Believeth in Me”).



Figure 6. Baltar prays for a miracle (Weddle and Thompson, “He That Believeth in Me”).

suggests emotional despair as he clutches it in a child-like grasp, but it also gives the illusion of a cloak, again subtly reminiscent of Biblical robes.

The rest of “He That Believeth in Me” provides stronger, more overt religious imagery, all manipulated by Head-Six, but the final nudge towards actualized messiahship occurs at the end of the episode, when Baltar demonstrates a growing sense of empathy. Narcissists are characterized by an inability to sympathize with others or recognize “the desires, subjective experiences, and feelings of others,”¹⁰⁶ but when one of his disciples brings her dying son to him, Baltar is moved to prayer on the boy’s behalf:

Please God, I’m only asking you this one last time. Don’t let this child die. Has he sinned against you? He can’t have sinned against you. He’s not even had a life yet. How can you take him and let me live? After all I’ve done. Really, if you want someone to suffer, take me. We both know I deserve it. I have been selfish and weak. I have failed so many people, and I have killed. I’m not asking for your forgiveness. I’m just asking that you spare the life of this innocent child. Don’t take him, take me. Take me, take me please.¹⁰⁷

What is remarkable in this moment is his motivation. Although a narcissist can take on “an appearance of humility [to] mask and protect the grandiosity,”¹⁰⁸ that is not the case here. Baltar is not praying so that others may see him or to build up his pious persona, for everyone else is asleep and there is no audience for him to play to. Baltar’s voice grows tight, pained, when he speaks of his sins, and he begins to cry on behalf of the child. He looks up into a light source above him, eyes constantly moving as if searching for God, Head-Six or some other divine force to enact a miracle (figure 6). In this scene, Baltar is played as more than a man broken, he is broken-*hearted* for another person’s sake, and although he keeps the linguistic focus on himself

106. *DSM-IV-TR*, 715.

107. Weddle and Thompson, “He That Believeth in Me.”

108. *DSM-IV-TR*, 715-716.

with constant repetitions of “I” and iteration of things he has/has not done, the intent is clearly for the salvation of another. Such visuals are less for his followers’ benefit – they already believe in him – but externalize his inner transformation to help convince the viewer that his messiahship is not another mask or persona, but a true change of heart.

This selfless act has a two-fold result. Firstly, the boy recovers with no sign of his illness in a dramatic New Testament-styled healing that demonstrates the One True God’s existence within the *BSG* universe, that He is actively listening and does intervene on behalf of His people (like the Christian God). Secondly, it is an overt reconnection of Baltar’s destiny with the life of Christ, for it replicates (or at least alludes to) several of the healings recorded in the Bible. This miracle and Baltar’s sudden empathy for others demonstrate the extent of his internal transformation, a transformation most unexpected given his character development to this point. Though his rhetoric has been that of a messiah, his intentions have been less than pure until this healing, when Baltar not only embraces the messianic identity his followers have attributed to him, but he begins to earn it for himself. He also earns the role from the viewing audience as it becomes evident that his heart, not his ego, now drives him towards his destiny.

“How Do You Know That God is On Your Side, Doctor?” – Firm Belief and the Culmination of the Messiah’s Journey

Throughout the series, Baltar has repeatedly demonstrated an unusual insight into the desires and hopes of his immediate audience, and he constantly attempts to portray himself in the most positive (and least guilty) manner. This insight is frequently undermined by the doctor’s near complete inability to lie successfully, but as Baltar becomes a more fully-actualized Christ figure, his rhetorical effectiveness improves dramatically. This increased effectiveness is

partially because he is no longer speaking out of his own selfish desires and is thus more in tune with his audience, but mostly because his rhetoric takes on an increasingly Judeo-Christian format, which is more in line with his spiritual messiahship.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, classical rhetoricians rely upon the Aristotelian model of ethos, pathos and logos to sway their audiences, but Judeo-Christian preaching takes a different spin on these three appeals. Logos, the actual words spoken, remains conceptually the same between the Aristotelian and sermonic forms, but classical logos is carefully chosen by the orator; whereas Judeo-Christian logos is inspired by God, for it is His message, not the preacher's. Ethos, the orator's credibility, originates not from the preacher's history or deeds, but from divine authority to speak on God's behalf. As rhetorician George A. Kennedy states, the preacher is merely a mouthpiece for the message, "a vehicle through which an authoritative message will be expressed."¹⁰⁹ In Baltar's case, the message is inspired by the 'holy spirit' of Head-Six, who feeds him lines and exposition topics as he speaks to his followers. She explicitly tells him, "God speaks through you to them. When you go out there you are divinely inspired. You are the instrument that God uses to speak to His people."¹¹⁰ Additionally, sermonic ethos, or authority, is demonstrated by the performing of miracles, for only a person sent by God can work true miracles in His Name. When Baltar heals the dying boy, he proves his authority as divine messenger and mouthpiece of God, and when word of the miracle spreads throughout the fleet, Baltar gathers even more to his cult. And this ethos affects the viewers as well, for they are encouraged to accept that this religion is not based on empty faith or hollow words, but is an interpretation of something that is real and true in the *BSG* universe as anything tangible or scientific.

109. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 139.

110. Deleted scene from Moore's "A Disquiet Follows My Soul," extended version.

The final difference between classical Aristotelian rhetoric and Judeo-Christian sermonic form is the interpretation of emotional appeals. Classical pathos again is purposely chosen by the orator as a way to sway the audience via emotional appeals, but Judeo-Christian pathos comes from God. No matter what the preacher says or attempts to evoke from the audience, “God must act, through grace, to move the hearts of an audience before individuals can receive the Word [logos], and if he does pour out his grace, the truth of the message will be recognized because of its authority and not through its logical argumentation.”¹¹¹ Emotional persuasion comes because God moves the heartstrings, not because the preacher is tugging on them. Because of this supernatural aid, the preacher can address what the audience most wants and *needs* to hear, even without the preacher’s knowing. Additionally, classical rhetoric in *BSG* is more action-orientated, encouraging the people to make political decisions or enact physical change; whereas the sermonic rhetoric changes the individual from the inside out. Sermonic rhetoric might promote physical action (like aiding others, helping the poor, etc.), but such action is more a side effect of the internal, spiritual changes.

This elemental breakdown demonstrates how Baltar’s religious rhetoric operates in contrast with Roslin’s and displays some of the fundamental differences in their messiahships. She is ever the orator, deliberately choosing her words to suit the audience, while Baltar speaks from inspiration. She ‘plays’ the religious card, citing divine authority to justify her actions; but Baltar actively demonstrates his messiahship through miracles. Lastly, she tactfully pulls the heartstrings of people and politicians to manipulate and persuade them to action; when Baltar chooses to play on emotions, it’s blatant and transparent, but his sermons are genuinely moving because they address the underlying desires of his people (both his cult and the fleet at large),

111. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 140.

and allow him to deliver a message most sorely needed in such desperate times: a message of love, hope, and change from within.

These underlying needs are most specifically addressed in how Baltar's monotheistic faith is presented in contrast with the traditional polytheism of the fleet. Kobol's pantheon of gods helps explain the complex personality of *BSG*'s divine force by breaking it into an ensemble cast, but though the pantheon is inhumanly powerful, they are humanly fallible. They can control the elements, can move mountains and stars, but succumb to petty rages and violent tantrums with the maturity of a child. As Baltar points out, Zeus, king of the gods, is "prone to giving birth out of his forehead," an action no human can do, but he is "a serial rapist."¹¹² Even Athena, the goddess of wisdom, is no more omniscient than a human and apparently no more immortal, for she supposedly killed herself on Kobol.¹¹³ Baltar's One True God, on the other hand, is fully omniscient and omnipotent, more of a caretaker than a punisher or superpowered child. God is love, as Head-Six and Baltar so frequently expound, and He cares for His people and accepts them as they are. As Baltar professes in one of his messages, "I have, in fact, been a profoundly selfish man. But that doesn't matter, you see. [...] Something in the universe loves the entity that is me."¹¹⁴ By presenting such a nurturing God, Baltar addresses the people's needs for acceptance, for hope, and especially for forgiveness of guilt.

This absolution of guilt is another primary need that Baltar's monotheism addresses, and another lack of Kobol's pantheon. The people of the fleet feel overwhelming guilt – guilt for what they have done or haven't done, guilt over forsaken morals, guilt for even surviving – and the lords of Kobol do not provide a way to relieve that guilt. Baltar, however, provides an outlet when he tells the people to "Love your faults. Embrace them. If God embraces them, then how

112. Espenson, "Escape Velocity."

113. Moore and Eick, "Home. Pt. 2."

114. Espenson, "Escape Velocity."

can they be faults? [...] You have to love yourself. If we don't love ourselves, how can we love others?"¹¹⁵ He assuages his audience's guilt by accepting it, and by telling them it's okay to have such feelings because they are part of being true to one's self. This exhortation to "know thyself"¹¹⁶ coincides with Jung's theories on psychological wholeness through religious experiences, for religion forces one to confront the darker parts of one's psyche and either vanquish them or accept them. Contemporary Christian doctrine urges the former, to overcome temptation and not yield to sin; Baltar, conversely, promotes the latter then pushes it to an extreme. In the same sermon on faults, he tells his followers: "The truth is we are all perfect just as we are. God only loves that which is perfect and He loves you; He loves you because you are perfect. You are perfect just as you are."¹¹⁶ This is the split between Baltar's monotheism and contemporary Christianity. Christianity has the doctrine of original sin: we are all born sinners because Adam and Eve disobeyed in the Garden of Eden, and thus we are imperfect beings who can strive for perfection only with God's help. Baltar's religion, however, eradicates that original sin and guilt, and thus removes the need for redemption and any impetus for a person to act morally upright other than because "it's the right thing to do." This division on original sin/perfection shatters the illusion that Baltar's monotheism is a point-for-point allegory of Christianity. Instead, Baltarism seems to function as a "best of" contemporary Christian doctrine, taking the most desired aspects and glossing over the finger-pointing controversies – in part because controversy is the last thing the fleet needs more of, and in part because it allows *BSG*'s writers to deliver a Christian-based message without becoming too preachy and alienating parts of its viewership.

115. Ibid.

116. Ibid.

Another of the high points of Baltaristic Judeo-Christianity is that of a nurturing deity actively involved in His people's lives. The lords of Kobol are passive deities, only prayed to and never responding but in the subtlest of synchronistic events. Sometimes such synchronicity is so subtle that either the characters fail to realize it or their rationalization and interpretation of such acausality is so vague it could mean anything. The people of the fleet feel this pantheonic passivity, yet still linger in their beliefs because they have nothing else to believe in, until Baltar. During one of his wireless broadcasts to the fleet, Baltar says, "The gods cannot be blamed for not coming to your aid. It's not because they weren't listening. It's because they don't exist. The gods we've been praying to for thousands of years do not exist. [...] We have been pandering to our own ignorance for far too long."¹¹⁷ Instead of empty prayers to false gods and idols, Baltar presents a new option of hope for the fleet in the form of a very active deity. When the One True God intervenes, the events leave a stark impact, as with the presence of Head-Six and Baltar's healing of the boy. His One True God actually cares, directly involves Himself in people's lives, and His touch and presence is presented as far more tangible than Kobol's pantheon. Although the pantheon does produce its own messiah – Roslin – it is the direct intervention in day-to-day activities that brings the most immediate comfort to the people, and that provides the strongest evidence of an active divine force.

The more Baltar speaks of his One True God, the more he teaches the people of this deity and the more he grows towards actualized messiahship. When the decks of *Galactica* erupt in mutiny and civil war, Baltar escapes to another ship, but the longer he stays away from his followers, the more their danger presses upon him.¹¹⁸ Instead of burying himself in escapism, as he has done before, Baltar calls himself on it. Moore comments, "He's gotten to a point where he

117. Verheiden, "The Road Less Travelled."

118. Angeli, "Blood on the Scales."

can actually see that [escapism] in himself and start to pull himself up short here.”¹¹⁹ Markedly, Baltar does more than simply chastise himself for his cowardice, he actively takes steps to correct it: “I have to go back,” he tells himself, “They’re my responsibility.” Previously, whenever Baltar has successfully avoided danger and left others to suffer in his place, he always contented himself with surviving, but now he willfully returns to the crossfire and take a stand for his people. This action also suggests that his cult has become more than just a group of blind followers working in his name; they are *his people*. They are as much a part of his identity as he is of theirs.

Baltar continues to move outside of himself when he returns to the *Galactica* and finds his disciples have taken to stockpiling weapons and food.¹²⁰ Baltar calls them out on this hoarding, especially when he and his people visit the shantytown erected in one of *Galactica*’s hangar bays. “Are we going to enjoy this food with children starving? Now ask yourself this question, really. Look around, look at these children. It’s not just this child here. [...] I mean, it’s all of these children, isn’t it? All of them,” he says, and then addresses the crowd. “I am coming back here. And if it is the last thing I do, I will see that every single one of you are fed and your children are fed, as God is my witness!”¹²¹ Again Baltar reaches out to others in their times of need and he’s reaching to a far larger group than simply his cult members. As Moore comments, actor James Callis tried to portray this as genuine sincerity on Baltar’s part: “He’s trying to reach out on genuine human levels, and he’s trying to do things without manipulation, and he’s trying to sort of do what, in his head, is the right and moral thing to do.”¹²² Just as when he prayed to heal the boy, Baltar feels genuine compassion for others but this time it is a conscious, willful act

119. Moore, podcast commentary for “Blood on the Scales.”

120. Espenson, “Deadlock.”

121. Espenson, “Deadlock.”

122. Moore, podcast commentary for “Deadlock.”

on his part. Later on, Baltar tells Head-Six that, “I did enjoy giving. I loved it, actually. [If I did] it long enough, I’d have given my heart.”¹²³ Such selfless actions are side effects of the spiritual metamorphosis within, indicative that Baltar has finally overcome his narcissism, and more importantly, he is doing so of his own free will – not because of Head-Six or his prescribed destiny, but because *he* wants to.

This inner motivation is part of his final drive towards messiahship, a development underscored by the scene itself. This message and teaching is delivered outside of the safety of his lair, in the middle of a large throng of people, similar to how Jesus preached in the public squares at the drop of a hat. Baltar’s message here is clearly not premeditated; it is inspired by the moment and by an immediate need of *the* people, not just *his* people. This Christ-like connection is enhanced by the shawl Baltar wears (figure 7) and adds a further “Biblical flavor” to the visuals, as Moore mentions in the episode commentary.



Figure 7. Baltar’s sermon in Dogsville (Espenson, “Deadlock”).

123. Espenson, “Deadlock.”

This selflessness prompts Baltar to join the near-suicide run of the *Galactica* into the Cylons' home colony to rescue a single girl, the human-Cylon hybrid child Hera.¹²⁴ Amid the tension and assault rifles, Baltar delivers his finest sermon of the series, serving as a trinity of preacher, orator and hostage negotiator. During this final sermon, Baltar is finally willing and able to consummate his messiahship as he expounds on proof of God's existence, or at least the existence of some divine force. Most importantly he takes a stand against the endless cosmological cycles of the *BSG* universe:

God's a force of nature, beyond good and evil. Good and evil, we created those. You wanna break the cycle? Break the cycle of birth, death, rebirth, destruction, escape, death? Well that's in our hands, and our hands only. It requires a leap of faith. It requires that we live in hope, not fear.¹²⁵

Here Baltar is urging what no other character has asked through the entire course of *BSG*: to step outside of the larger cycle, break free of one's never-ending role, and defy the oft-repeated mantra that "all this has happened before and all of this will happen again." Joseph Campbell describes the cosmological cycle as "repeating itself, world without end"¹²⁶ and mythology helps steer those trapped in its cycle, in "a directing of the mind and heart, by means of profoundly informed figurations, to that ultimate mystery which fills and surrounds all existences."¹²⁷ By asking this of Cavil and those around him, Baltar is not only asking for the immediate solution of a ceasefire, but he is also asking everyone to break the cycle of hurt and pain they have experienced in their lifetimes: to be the better person. He is also asking them to break the larger cosmological cycles recorded in myth and history, the cycles of 'humanity creates Cylon, Cylon

124. Whose birth was foretold by Head-Six in Moore's "Kobol's Last Gleaming, Pt. 2."

125. Moore, "Daybreak."

126. Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 224.

127. *Ibid*, 228.

rebels, everyone kills each other until they return to their respective corners.’ All of this may have happened before, but it does not have to happen again if the two races can come together in peace, and that peace begins with the human-Cylon child, Hera – at least within the *BSG* universe.

Baltar’s final sermon also contains a plea for the post-9/11 world – that we are all God’s creatures, and we do not need to continue to murder and kill each other in the name of religion, of politics, or of any other cause. Baltar might as well be addressing the viewer and our society at large, asking us to “break the cycle of birth, death, [...] destruction, escape, death.” Such overt proselytizing to the audience is evident through camera placement, and how squarely Baltar looks at the audience. When his sermon begins, the camera watches him over characters’ shoulders, never straight on but always at an angle (figure 8). As his speech progresses, the camera tightens focus on his face until he delivers the exhortation¹²⁸ and his face fills the screen as he stares directly into the camera (figure 9). Although this final sermon seems like the consummation of his destiny, Baltar’s messiahship is ultimately incomplete, for he does not face the final task: he does not die or leave the narrative as Roslin does. Instead, after his work reuniting the human and Cylon races, the *BSG* narrative leaves him as a sort of messiah-in-retirement, as though his task is not finished but merely put on hiatus. Such unfinished business could be due to several factors: creator sentimentality, the desire for a happy ending, or perhaps because his messianic scope is different than Roslin’s and requires more monitoring to properly cultivate it.

Viewed holistically, Baltar’s story and messianic transformation operate on multiple levels. Firstly, that such a narcissistic man can become a selfless savior indicates that anyone can

128. Quoted previously. See note 54 above.



Figure 8. Baltar preaches at gunpoint (Moore, “Daybreak”).

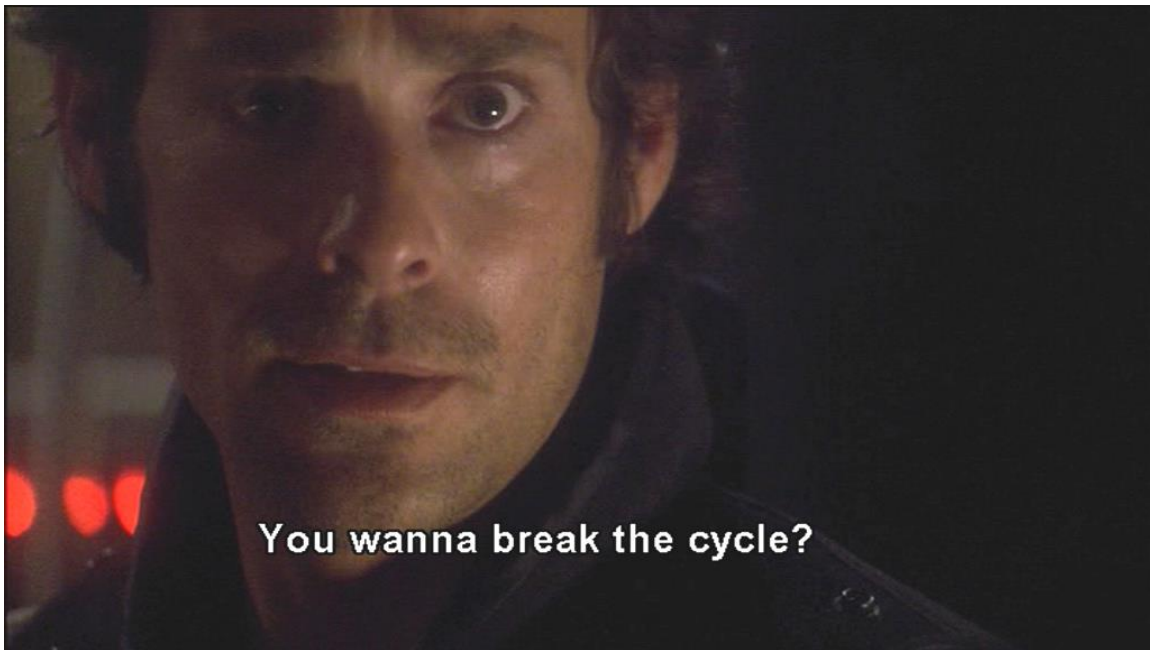


Figure 9. Baltar’s challenge to the audience (Moore, “Daybreak”).

be called to messiahship – a basic tenet of contemporary Christian doctrine. Baltar starts the series as an antagonistic atheistic narcissist until his ego and selfishness are broken down by the manipulations of Head-Six. Circumstances break his spirit further, until he learns to rely on the One True God and begins to espouse His message via Judeo-Christian rhetoric. The more he preaches, the more he is rebuilt into the shape of God's instrument, until he is finally able to fulfill his destiny by showing both humans and Cylons the road to redemption and a way out of the self-destructive cosmological cycles in which they are trapped. On this last note, the broadness of the scope of Baltar's destiny is evident. A political messiah like Roslin is focused on current situations, on rescuing an existing group of people, but a spiritual messiah like Baltar looks farther ahead, to saving souls, to protecting generations of a distant future, to breaking out of the prison of the cyclic present and creating a new future.

CONCLUSIONS: MESSIAHS IN TANDEM

The individual transformations of *BSG*'s messiahs are interesting examinations of character development and well-crafted plotlines that resonate with the audience on societal and psychological levels. However, those examinations only explain how the *BSG* messiahs come to be, not why the series is able to develop and support multiple messianic figures, or even why so many saviors are even an essential part of its narrative.

Part of this answer lies in the construction of the *BSG* narrative itself. *Battlestar Galactica* is not just another post-apocalyptic sci-fi drama, but it behaves as more of a modern-day myth in many of the narrative elements it uses, especially how it develops its own internal mythology (the Pythian prophecy, the Greco-Roman 'lords of Kobol,' the Judeo-Christian One True God, etc.) and uses that inner mythos to tell a story steeped in Jungian archetypes and Campbell's mythological universals. These elements give *BSG* a foundation on which to build its messiahs, for the messiah's story "open[s] out to cosmic proportions" more so than political leaders or adventuresome heroes.¹²⁹ Yet multiple messiahs within the same story are a rare occurrence in mythology, for when a messiah or world-redeeming figure emerges, that person is usually alone in his/her quest because only that person is called and only that person is equipped to answer the call. This is clearly not the case in *BSG*, where both Laura Roslin and Gaius Baltar are divinely called to action and both respond.¹³⁰ Multiple messiahs are possible in *BSG* because they are not carbon copies of each other; they develop at different rates, represent differing interpretations of the divine, and serve different functions for their people and for the narrative.

129. Campbell, "Transformations of the Hero," 119-120.

130. Among others. The Cylons have their own pair of messianic characters, D'Anna and Caprica-Six, and prophet figures also emerge in both the human and Cylon fleets. Roslin and Baltar are just the most prominent of all of them.

This effectively subdivides the general archetype of the messiah, making Roslin and Baltar into different forms of the same figure.

Different Rates of Messianic Development

Of the reasons for multiple messiahs, asynchronous development is the most easily definable aspect of the explanation. *BSG* carefully sets up its messiahs to develop at different rates so that only one messiah is active at a time, specifically the messiah best equipped to handle the people's current needs. At the beginning of the series, the people are most in need of a strong political leader, someone who can guide them to a physical salvation, so Roslin is thrown immediately into the messianic role. According to the hierarchy of needs developed by Abraham Maslow, a person's physical needs (food, shelter, safety) are the most basic, and those needs must be met before anything else (spiritual, psychological, etc.) can be addressed. This albeit antiquated psychological theory helps explain and justify why the political messiah, Roslin, is the first to emerge and the first to actualize her destiny. She rapidly progresses through the stages, reaching active messiahship early in the second season during her trek on Kobol,¹³¹ and just in time for her to rekindle hope for her people and to renew their faith both in the gods and in religion in general. During this time, Baltar is still in the first stage of messianic development, and he is still being groomed by Head-Six, for his time is not yet come.

After Kobol, Roslin's cancer goes into remission¹³² and her messiahship falls dormant, and her people feel a sense of relative safety and comfort, enough to grow apathetic of her messiahship. This apathy opens the door for Baltar to move into the second stage, using rhetoric

131. Robinson, "The Farm."

132. Thompson, Joel, "Epiphanies."

to gain (and lose) the presidency.¹³³ His atrocious leadership makes the people return to Roslin, the more competent political messiah, and starts to bring her messiahship slowly out of dormancy. Baltar, in turn, develops his talent for sermonizing while in exile from humanity,¹³⁴ but moves into actualized messiahship at the behest of his cult following.¹³⁵ His cult is able to grow because the people are tired of the passive pantheon of their traditional religion and need a different source of morale. Baltar's messages provide hope of a distant future, comfort of a divine plan borne of a loving active deity, absolution of personal guilt, and other elements lacking in the lords of Kobol.

While Baltar preaches, Roslin's cancer comes out of remission and she begins having visions again,¹³⁶ and her messiahship is kickstarted back into the final actualized stage of messiahship. Both she and Baltar continue on their destined paths, their actualized messiahships coinciding only in the series finale as a culmination of their destinies. Both of them act to save the child Hera, who represents both physical and spiritual/emotional forms of salvation for both humans and Cylons. Humans and Cylons are in physical danger of dying out,¹³⁷ and only through hybridization can both races survive. But hybrid offspring can only result after peace is established between the species, grievances and prejudices set aside, and love allowed to bloom. In acting to save this single child, Roslin and Baltar consummate both their messiahships: Roslin stands beside Adama to lead the charge to physically save Hera, and Baltar uses his oratory skills to diffuse the hostage situation and convert everyone to a different perspective.

133. Moore, "Lay Down Your Burdens, Pt. 2."

134. Angeli, "A Measure of Salvation."

135. Weddle and Thompson, "He That Believeth in Me."

136. The operahouse dream, from Taylor's "Crossroads, Pt. 1."

137. The humans will go extinct due to a dwindling population, and the Cylons because they cannot procreate with each other.

Differing Interpretations of the Divine

Another primary reason for the development of multiple messiahs is that they represent differing interpretations of the same divine force. Numerous synchronistic events and curious coincidences throughout *BSG* indicate that there are preternatural forces at work within the series' universe, but definitions and explanations of such forces vary widely. Roslin's political messiahship arises from the colonies' traditional religion, a form of Greco-Roman polytheism that breaks up the divine force into a pantheon of humanized gods. This breakdown limits the gods' powers to a level more easily understood by the human followers; a sort of 'remaking the gods in man's own image.' If there are many gods, then many supernatural things can happen at once, and paradoxes or conflicting events can be more easily explained as a clashing of divine opinions. This is the religion that the humans of the fleet have been raised in and what many of them still follow to various degrees, so it functions as a baseline ideology for the series. Having the first emergent messiah come out of this belief system helps rekindle the people's faith in something divine and that there are intelligent forces at work that defy or are larger than human understanding. In addition, Roslin's traditional, polytheistic messiahship and early actualization of that role actually help to pave the way for Baltar's monotheism.

Once the people of the fleet experience Roslin's political messiahship and are reawakened to the existence of the divine, some of them realize that the lords of Kobol are not the best definition of such preternatural forces and so begin to search for alternate interpretations, including that of Baltar's Judeo-Christian monotheism. The One True God is a singular divine entity, no sub-division necessary, and His nature and powers are far too expansive for mortals to fully comprehend. This singular personification of divinity offers what the pantheon cannot: only one being is running the universe, only one plan is in place, and we mortals do not and cannot

comprehend everything that happens. This provides a greater sense of comfort and safety for the believers of such a faith, for this admission of limited knowledge shifts ultimate responsibility from the individual to the divine and the individual can rest assured that all events are directed, even if they are not of immediate benefit for the individual. This sort of faith does not diminish innate human curiosity, but admits that not everything can be known, and not everything has to be understood for the plan to come together.

Differing Forms of Messiahship

Finally, *BSG*'s use of multiple messiahs stems from the roles they serve for their people and for the narrative. The complexity of the culture's needs creates a situation that cannot be resolved by a single individual because the types of resolutions needed and the timeline in which they must be enacted are too disparate for easy solutions. As has been defined in the first chapter, the messianic archetype comprises both political leadership towards physical salvation and spiritual redemption from a crisis state, and Roslin and Baltar divide this definition into its fullest incarnations. Roslin, the political messiah, combines prophecy and political rhetoric to become a Moses-like figure who leads her people out of calamity and into a new land promised in their scriptures. Baltar becomes a neo-Christ, an agent of spiritual salvation who uses sermonic rhetoric to urge the people towards forgiveness and redemption, teaching them how to break out of the self-destructive cycles in which they are trapped. Roslin guides the fleet to the physical safety of a new homeworld; Baltar's message helps them preserve it.

Along with these differing forms of messiahship and differing forms of salvation, the scope of each messiahship is different. Roslin looks out for her people in the here and now, saving them from imminent danger, and working for the survival of the existing generations

(while helping to ensure that there will be later generations). Baltar, as the spiritual/emotional messiah, has more of an eye for the distant future, setting things in place now for the benefit of the generations that are yet to come. This is evident in their final moments as messiahs, after they have fully consummated their messiahships and their stories draw to a close. When Roslin's messiahship ends, so does she. Her role in the narrative is done, her actions for the people completed, the prophecies fulfilled, so she undertakes that 'last act of the hero'¹³⁸ and journeys into death onscreen. In contrast, Baltar does not die or leave the narrative; *BSG* ends with him starting a new life along with everyone else. Perhaps Baltar survives because the writers liked him too much, or because he is a symbol of hope and transformation, or because his messiahship is only initially consummated during the showdown for Hera and he must continue guiding the people on a path away from the self-destructive cosmological cycles. Roslin's life will fade into myth within a few generations of the colonization of new Earth, the benefits of her actions slowly fading with time; Baltar's influence lingers because he touched souls, changed minds, taught the fleet (and us, the viewer) how to spare ourselves from the negative consequences of our own actions. The effects of Baltar's messages may not be immediately evident, but they build up over time, hopefully enough to break out of the cosmological cycles. Although Roslin's actions primarily benefit the colonial fleet and the narrative, Baltar's message moves beyond its fictional universe to American audiences, urging us to probe our own preconceptions and exchange hatred for love so that we may break out of our self-destructive behaviors.

Beyond the Battlestar

These elements – asynchronous development, representations of varying religions, and subdivision of messianic responsibilities – help explain how *BSG* can support multiple messiahs,

138. Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 306.

and go far in explaining why they are so prominent in the storyline. However, the *BSG* messiahs are far more than well-developed characters; their stories and messages reach beyond the fictional universe in which they live and resonate with the society from which they spawned. Jung has stated that, “Myths of a religious nature can be interpreted as a sort of mental therapy for the sufferings and anxieties of mankind in general.”¹³⁹ If *BSG* is a true modern myth and its religious overtones not mere tools of storytelling, then it is trying to address or play off of certain unconscious issues in society.

One unconscious issue is the definition of hero, of savior. By having two messiahs in a post-apocalyptic scenario, *BSG* suggests that a single individual cannot embody or address all of the needs of a desperate people – a messiah can either serve political or spiritual roles, be an agent of physical salvation or spiritual/emotional redemption, but not both. Roslin can only save her people from death; she cannot change their spirits over the long term. Baltar is a horrible political leader, but he can change others’ perspectives. And ultimately, the spiritual/emotional savior seems to be the most influential, as his development is longer and more thorough, and his story continues after the political savior is dead. Roslin plays a finite role: she saves her people, finds Earth, then dies and exits the narrative once her duty is done. Conversely, Baltar continues on in a state of dormant messiahship, suggesting that his role is not yet completed.

This mythology still does not fully explain the presence of multiple messiahs, but if this perspective is combined with the strong allegorical elements of *BSG*, then a fuller explanation emerges – fantasy fulfillment. When the *BSG* Miniseries aired in 2003, the pain of 9/11 still had not healed, America was entrenched in Afghanistan and U.S. forces had just entered Iraq. Though two years of war had passed, America still had not defined an endgoal for the conflicts nor had a clear definition of when or how victory could be attained, and the country began to

139. Jung, *Man and His Symbols*, 79.

doubt the war would ever end. As a society and as a country, we felt the acute need for a leader with a vision, of a messiah who could deliver us from this situation – a need resolved vicariously through Laura Roslin. By placing the Colonial fleet in an emotionally similar situation as America on 9/11, the audience empathizes with them and can accept Roslin’s leadership as a comforting presence. As President of the Colonies and later as the Mosaic savior, Roslin accomplishes what Americans wish George W. Bush could have done for our country: removed us from the problem and made us safe again.

However the catharsis provided by Roslin’s wish-fulfilling messiahship is temporary at best, a band-aid over an aching wound. *BSG*’s writers understand that political salvation only displaces the psychological or ideological issues that caused the need for salvation in the first place, so they provide a redemptive leader in Baltar to heal the ache. His sermons provide a clearer way out of the destructive cycles, even if the message is not truly original. The concepts of peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding are not new; they are merely repeated from what American society has tried to teach for decades through civil rights activism, seminars, sensitivity training, and other efforts. What Baltar does offer, though, is a new presentation and a new sense of what is at stake – the cosmological cycles.

In these ways, the *BSG* messiahs fulfill the subconscious desires of post-9/11 America. The physical salvation that Roslin provides for her people is what we desperately sought as a nation (and to a degree, still do). Baltar’s sermonizing tells us what we want to hear, and confirms that our attempts at increased cultural sensitivity are indeed the right thing to do. Though crafted entirely of fiction, the *BSG* messiahs reflect more of American society and values than perhaps visible at first glance.

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