

“Guys, Where are we?”

This is the question, asked by one of the characters of “Lost” in its very first season, the question that represented the uniquely “spiritual” quality of that series, famously ended last Sunday night. By the end of its six years spirituality had become the main character of the series.

Now, I should confess at the outset that I am far from a “Lostie.” I’m sure I haven’t watched more than ten minutes at a time of the entire series, even though I am a confirmed “channel surfer.” But what interests me today is a kind of parallel dynamic: a parallel between the search for meaning as it comes down to us in the Bible and the search for meaning that appears to be connected with all the attention focused on “Lost.”

What interests me about Lost is that it is a serialized TV story that set sail without a destination in mind but with a number of compelling almost mythological plot lines that were developed but without the intention or expectation of tying them up. So over six years the series’s increasing number of dedicated fans were Lost in a story-world where their commitments were elaborated, frustrated and toyed with, without ever being resolved. There was development, and even a hint of cosmic significance with this island with, among other supernatural or mythic elements, a mysterious healing light and a cloudy manifestation of evil, but without resolution, without any obvious allegorical code, kind of like life itself. And so by the time it was decided that the series was to end, all of these sub-plots were so far developed that it was impossible to tie them all up. But in the process of trying, a kind of meta-narrative was referenced that had certain resonance with traditional religious thinking.

For instance, some have said that the plot technique, the viewer learns of at the end, that all the people on the Island were already dead and have entered into an ““entry stage” of the afterlife,’ having actually already died at the beginning in the plane crash, suggests a re-working of the idea of purgatory, that place where souls who have not committed a mortal sin can go in hopes that those of us left would pray for them, make offerings (indulgences) and until such a time as their debts are repaid, and they can ascend to heaven. And further that this technique was also connected to the idea of reincarnation, since these dead could re-enter, under certain circumstances, the world of the living in order to carry out some task that would help others, and thus themselves be liberated from the island, and be, as it were saved or reborn.

And all of these attempts to redeem the plot by redeeming the characters, have the effect for the committed viewer of changing their perception of the episodes they have seen so that hopefully they can say, “O, now I get it. Now I understand what was going on.” Or even so that some sense of meaning might emerge, some way in which the events of the story might be resolved into a coherent moral tale. The pressure on the creators and writers to do this seemed so great that they were reduced to the classic introduction of a gimmick, a *deus ex machina*, an instrument of redemption or resolution of an otherwise hopelessly “lost” plot. In this case it is the

introduction of a reunion in a church, with all of the characters enacting a kind of heavenly reconciliation of their troubled relationships. By referring to that imagery the viewer is reassured.

The parallel is thus quite obvious. The meta-narrative supplied by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (the gospel) as it has been preserved and proclaimed by the church provides a sense of reassurance of reconciliation and resolution of all of our little “plot lines.” And the process of projecting meaning from that assured final resolution back into our daily moments of anxiety and challenge can operate for us while we’re in the midst of those challenges, while we’re in the suspense of the adventure on the “islands” on which each of us are “lost.”

The power of this over arching story, this narrative of the Love of God, so great that it overcomes death, had an affect on the entire sweep of the Biblical history up to the time of Jesus. It means that instead of living in rivalry and violent conflict with one another, like the children of Adam and Eve did, we can extend love and forgiveness to our brothers and sisters. It means that instead of fearing and warring against others and strangers, we can recognize others, even when they are very different from ourselves, as members of our family whom we haven’t yet gotten to know. It means that when others harm us or take advantage of us, when they disregard our goodness and intimidate and bully us, we can forgive them and express such disarming love for them that our oneness with them can be surprisingly revealed even to them.

The whole story of God’s relationship with the chosen people that we hear about in what we call the Old Testament was reinterpreted by the ending, by the final episode in the narrative series, by the revelation in the death and resurrection of Jesus. What was revealed was that God was God of all, not just of the religious authorities. And that even those whom we regard as sinners and aliens, those our leaders have told us are evil charlatans and godless blasphemers like they said Jesus was, may reveal the perfect healing and forgiving love of God. That is, they might even BE GOD!

For before the revelation of God as Trinity; as the crucified one sent from the Father to give the Spirit, we believed God was the God of the good, only of those on our side. But by releasing the Spirit of love back to His Father on the Cross, Jesus made it possible for the Spirit to be released freely upon all flesh, the good and the bad, the just and the unjust, like the rain from heaven. We had thought our life on the island was to be preoccupied in protecting ourselves from those who are Other, who are bad, who are out to get us. But now that In Christ the Spirit of love has been released through us, we are called to imitate God’s self-emptying love in service of others, without fear of strangers or enemies. So, “Where are we, guys?” We are secure in God.

In the death and resurrection of Jesus we experience the relational God, the Trinitarian nature of God. The one who created us and saves us and before whom we live and must make an account of ourselves is a mutual relationship of love and of the bestowal of freedom and blessing. The resurrection is not so much the narrative gimmick of a deus ex machina as it is an invitation into the relationship with one another that mirrors the relationship that is God.

And so it may be that “Lost” is really a post modern narrative reflection on the gospel story.

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