

# The Mayor as Theological Figure: Faith, Belief, and Divine Love in Season 3

October 24, 2025

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## Abstract

This paper reexamines the relationship between Mayor Wilkins and Faith Lehane in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* Season 3, arguing for a theological rather than purely paternal interpretation of their bond. While scholarship has traditionally viewed the Mayor as a father figure to Faith, this analysis positions Faith as literal “faith” whose belief provides essential meaning to the Mayor’s ascension. Unlike vampires who fear the Mayor’s power or human employees who respect his authority, Faith as a Slayer consciously chooses to renounce her independence and worship the Mayor as her deity. This theological framework reveals the Mayor’s consistent truthfulness and biblical rhetoric as evidence of deeply embedded Christian moral structures, even while pursuing godlike transformation. The Mayor’s love follows Old Testament patterns of divine favor contingent upon faithful devotion, fundamentally distinguishing it from unconditional parental affection. By comparing this dynamic to the Giles-Buffy relationship, this paper illuminates how both represent chosen family structures with vastly different power dynamics, connecting to broader themes of institutional authority and religious symbolism throughout the series.

## Introduction

The relationship between Mayor Richard Wilkins III and Faith Lehane in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*’s third season has long been interpreted through familial frameworks, with critics viewing the Mayor as a surrogate father providing Faith with the paternal guidance she lacks. However, this reading, while compelling, fails to account for the unique theological dimensions of their bond. Faith’s very name suggests a deeper symbolic function, and her relationship

with the Mayor operates according to divine rather than familial logic. This paper argues that Faith functions as literal “faith” whose genuine belief enables the Mayor’s ascension to godhood, positioning their relationship within theological rather than paternal frameworks.

This reinterpretation reveals the Mayor not merely as a patriarchal figure but as a complex theological entity who embodies both Christian moral language and pre-Christian divine authority. His love for Faith follows Old Testament patterns where divine favor depends entirely upon faithful devotion, distinguishing it fundamentally from unconditional parental affection. Through comparison with the Giles-Buffy dynamic, this analysis demonstrates how institutional authority and religious symbolism permeate the series’ exploration of chosen family structures.

## **Faith as Literal Faith: The Theology of Belief**

The most crucial element distinguishing the Mayor’s relationship with Faith from traditional paternal bonds lies in Faith’s function as literal “faith” who provides his ascension with meaning through genuine belief. Unlike the vampires who serve the Mayor out of fear or human employees who respect his authority, Faith as a Slayer makes a conscious choice to renounce her independence and select the Mayor as her guiding deity. This theological interpretation explains what might otherwise seem like inconsistencies in the Mayor’s behavior and rhetoric.

Faith’s decision to approach the Mayor in “Consequences” represents more than seeking protection or guidance—it constitutes an act of religious conversion. When she declares “I guess that means you have a job opening” after killing Mr. Trick, she offers herself not as an employee but as a devotee. The Mayor’s response reveals his understanding of this theological dimension: he immediately recognizes her not as a mere subordinate but as the faithful believer necessary for his transformation.

The theological framework becomes explicit in the Mayor’s language throughout Season 3. His consistent references to Faith as “my Faith” carry double meaning—she is both personally his and literally the faith that enables his ascension. As one analysis notes, “What is a god without any believers, without any faithful?” The Mayor’s power derives not merely from magical rituals or political authority, but from having a true believer whose faith gives his transformation meaning and legitimacy.

## **The Mayor’s Truthfulness and Biblical Language**

A crucial aspect supporting the theological interpretation lies in the Mayor’s consistent truthfulness and deployment of biblical language, even while pursuing fundamentally anti-Christian goals. Throughout the series, the Mayor never lies—a characteristic that distinguishes him from typical villains and aligns him with divine rather than demonic archetypes. His commitment to truth-telling reflects deep embedding within Christian moral frameworks, even as he subverts their ultimate purpose.

The Mayor’s rhetoric consistently employs family values language and moral terminology rooted in Christian tradition. He speaks of being a “family man,” maintains concern for

propriety and cleanliness, and uses biblical cadences in his speech patterns. This linguistic consistency suggests that his evil operates not through rejection of Christian morality but through its appropriation for divine rather than human ends. He embodies what might be termed “theological evil”—maintaining the forms and language of righteousness while pursuing godhood rather than service to God.

This truthfulness serves a theological function: gods, even false ones, must maintain consistency to retain the faith of their believers. The Mayor’s inability to lie reflects not moral goodness but divine necessity—his ascension depends upon Faith’s continued belief, which would be undermined by deception. His honesty thus becomes another mechanism of control, ensuring Faith’s devotion while maintaining his divine authenticity.

## **Old Testament Divine Love Patterns**

The Mayor’s love for Faith follows distinctly Old Testament patterns of divine favor, fundamentally distinguishing it from parental affection. While human parental love ideally operates unconditionally, divine love in the Hebrew Bible consistently depends upon faithful obedience and worship. The Mayor’s affection for Faith remains entirely contingent upon her continued devotion and service, mirroring the conditional nature of divine covenant relationships.

This pattern becomes evident in the Mayor’s expectations of Faith throughout their relationship. His love manifests through provision—the apartment, material goods, protection—but always within the context of her worship and obedience. The theological framework explains his statement that it would be “impossible” for Faith to disappoint him: not because his love is unconditional, but because disappointment would require her to cease being faithful, at which point she would no longer be “his Faith” in either sense.

The Old Testament parallel extends to the Mayor’s potential demands for sacrifice. Divine love in biblical tradition often requires believers to sacrifice what they hold most dear to prove their devotion—Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac being the archetypal example. The Mayor’s love similarly positions Faith to potentially sacrifice those closest to her as proof of loyalty. This theological reading illuminates why the Mayor’s affection, while genuine, carries an inherently threatening undertone that purely paternal love would lack.

## **Contrast with the Giles-Buffy Dynamic**

The theological interpretation of the Mayor-Faith relationship becomes clearer through comparison with the Giles-Buffy dynamic, which represents a parallel chosen family structure operating according to fundamentally different principles. Both relationships begin with institutional authority—Watcher over Slayer—but evolve in opposite directions, revealing the distinction between human and divine love patterns.

Giles’s relationship with Buffy transforms from authoritarian control to supportive guidance, particularly after his dismissal from the Watchers Council in “Helpless.” His love evolves toward the unconditional, as evidenced by his willingness to support Buffy’s decisions even when he disagrees with them. The relationship becomes genuinely familial, with power dynamics shifting toward equality and mutual respect. Giles learns to love Buffy as a father

loves a daughter—supporting her independence and growth even when it conflicts with his preferences.

In stark contrast, the Mayor's love for Faith remains fundamentally conditional on her continued worship. While he provides paternal care—protection, guidance, material support—these offerings serve to maintain her devotion rather than foster her independence. The Mayor never evolves beyond the need for Faith's worship because his divine nature requires it. He cannot love Faith unconditionally without ceasing to be the god-figure she serves.

This distinction reveals why the Mayor's love, though genuine, ultimately proves more dangerous than Giles's initially authoritarian approach. Giles's authoritarianism stems from institutional obligation and gradually gives way to authentic care. The Mayor's apparent kindness masks an eternal need for devotion that can never be satisfied or transcended.

## **Theological Authority and Religious Symbolism**

The theological interpretation of the Mayor-Faith relationship connects to broader themes of institutional authority and religious symbolism throughout *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The series consistently explores how religious and pseudo-religious institutions attempt to control individuals through claims to divine authority. The Watchers Council, the Initiative, and various demonic cults all represent institutional attempts to subordinate individual agency to higher authority.

The Mayor represents the most sophisticated version of this pattern because his authority operates through genuine theological mechanisms rather than mere institutional coercion. Unlike the Watchers Council, which relies on tradition and bureaucracy, or the Initiative, which depends on military hierarchy, the Mayor's power derives from actual belief. Faith's devotion transforms him from politician to deity, making his authority both more legitimate and more dangerous than purely institutional forms.

The religious symbolism extends beyond the Mayor-Faith relationship to encompass the series' broader exploration of how individuals navigate competing claims to ultimate authority. Buffy's rejection of the Watchers Council, Willow's embrace of Wiccan practice, and various characters' relationships with Christianity all reflect the series' interest in how people choose their ultimate loyalties. The Mayor-Faith dynamic represents the most complete example of religious conversion within the series, demonstrating both the appeal and the danger of surrendering individual agency to divine authority.

## **The Mayor as Complex Theological Figure**

Rather than functioning as a simple patriarch or traditional villain, the Mayor emerges as a complex theological figure who embodies both Christian moral language and pre-Christian divine authority. His character synthesizes seemingly contradictory elements: genuine moral concern combined with ultimate evil, truthfulness in service of deception, paternal care that serves divine narcissism. This complexity reflects the series' sophisticated understanding of how religious authority operates in practice.

The Mayor's theological complexity appears in his ability to maintain Christian moral rhetoric while pursuing fundamentally anti-Christian goals. He speaks the language of family values and community responsibility while planning to devour his constituents. This contradiction resolves when understood theologically: the Mayor employs Christian moral language not hypocritically but appropriatively, using familiar religious forms to establish his own divine authority.

His pre-Christian divine characteristics—the demand for worship, the conditional love, the requirement of sacrifice—operate through Christian linguistic and cultural forms, creating a syncretic religious system that appears familiar while serving alien purposes. This theological sophistication makes the Mayor uniquely dangerous because his evil operates through recognizable and appealing religious mechanisms rather than obvious malevolence.

## Conclusion

Reinterpreting the Mayor-Faith relationship through theological rather than paternal frameworks reveals dimensions of their bond that purely familial readings cannot address. Faith functions as literal “faith” whose belief enables the Mayor's transformation, while the Mayor operates as a complex theological figure who appropriates Christian moral language for divine rather than human purposes. Their relationship follows Old Testament patterns of conditional divine love, fundamentally distinguishing it from the unconditional parental affection that characterizes healthy family bonds.

This theological interpretation illuminates broader themes within *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* regarding institutional authority, religious symbolism, and the dangers of surrendering individual agency to claims of ultimate authority. The Mayor represents the most sophisticated form of religious control within the series because his power derives from genuine belief rather than mere institutional coercion. Faith's devotion transforms him from politician to deity, making their relationship both more intimate and more dangerous than traditional authority structures.

The comparison with the Giles-Buffy dynamic reveals how chosen family structures can operate according to fundamentally different principles, with human love evolving toward unconditional support while divine love remains eternally conditional upon worship and obedience. This distinction explains why the Mayor's genuine care for Faith ultimately proves more threatening than Giles's initial authoritarianism: human love can transcend its institutional origins, but divine love cannot exist without continued devotion.

Understanding the Mayor as a theological rather than purely paternal figure enriches our comprehension of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s sophisticated exploration of authority, belief, and the complex dynamics through which individuals choose their ultimate loyalties. The series' treatment of the Mayor-Faith relationship demonstrates how religious conversion operates in practice, revealing both the genuine appeal of surrendering agency to divine authority and the ultimate costs of such surrender for human flourishing and moral development.