

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

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between Mayor Richard Wilkins III and Faith Lehane in Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season 3, arguing that Faith functions as literal “faith” whose genuine belief enables the Mayor’s transformation from politician to theological authority figure. While the Mayor employs Christian moral language and family values rhetoric, his love for Faith follows Old Testament patterns of conditional divine favor rather than unconditional parental affection. Through close analysis of key episodes, particularly “Bad Girls” and “Consequences,” this study demonstrates how Faith’s approach to the Mayor represents a conscious choice to seek divine authority after her individualistic philosophy fails. The Mayor’s consistent moral rhetoric within his relationship with Faith, combined with his demand for absolute devotion, positions him as a complex theological entity who appropriates Christian forms for divine rather than human purposes. By comparing this dynamic to the evolving Giles-Buffy relationship, this analysis reveals how both represent chosen family structures operating according to fundamentally different principles—human love that evolves toward unconditional support versus divine love that remains eternally contingent upon worship and obedience.

Introduction

The relationship between Mayor Richard Wilkins III and Faith Lehane in Buffy the Vampire Slayer’s third season has traditionally been interpreted through familial frameworks, with scholars viewing the Mayor as a surrogate father providing Faith with needed paternal guidance. However, this reading, while containing valid elements, fails to account for the

unique theological dimensions of their bond that emerge through careful examination of the text. Faith's very name suggests a deeper symbolic function, and her relationship with the Mayor operates according to divine rather than purely familial logic.

This paper argues that Faith functions as literal "faith" whose genuine belief enables the Mayor's transformation from mere politician to theological authority figure. Unlike vampires who fear the Mayor's power or human employees who respect his political position, Faith as a Slayer makes a deliberate choice to approach the Mayor and select him as her guiding authority. This theological interpretation reveals the Mayor not merely as a patriarchal figure but as a complex entity who embodies both Christian moral language and pre-Christian divine authority, whose love for Faith follows Old Testament patterns of conditional favor rather than unconditional parental affection.

Faith's Approach to the Mayor: From Independence to Divine Authority

The crucial moment that establishes Faith's theological relationship with the Mayor occurs in "Consequences" when she approaches him after killing Allan Finch. The scripts reveal that Faith had other options available to her—she could have fled Sunnydale, sought help from Buffy and the Scoobies, or attempted to handle the consequences through other means. Instead, she deliberately chooses to approach the Mayor, drawn by the appeal of his authority and the structure he provides.

When Faith declares "I guess that means you have a job opening," she offers herself not merely as an employee seeking protection, but as someone choosing to serve under his authority. The Mayor's immediate acceptance reveals his understanding of this dimension: he recognizes her not as a mere subordinate but as the devoted follower necessary for his ascension. As he later tells her, "No father could be prouder," language that evokes not human paternal love but the conditional approval of divine authority.

This choice becomes more significant when we consider Faith's character arc leading to this moment. Throughout "Bad Girls," Faith consistently advocates for slayer independence, arguing "We're Slayers, girlfriend, the Chosen Two. Why should we let him take all the fun out of it?" Her philosophy of "want, take, have" represents a rejection of external authority in favor of individual desire. However, this apparent embrace of independence ultimately proves hollow when Faith discovers that pure individualism cannot provide the moral framework she desperately needs after killing Allan.

The scripts show Faith's distress in the aftermath of Allan's death. In her hotel room, she scrubs at her bloodstained shirt while telling Buffy, "There is no body. I took it, weighted it, and dumped it. The body doesn't exist." Yet her actions—the compulsive cleaning, the disposal of evidence—reveal someone struggling with guilt despite her claims of indifference. When she insists "I don't care!" the very vehemence of her denial suggests otherwise.

Faith's turn to the Mayor represents not a betrayal of her independence but its conscious sacrifice in service of a higher authority. She seeks absolution through submission to divine power, finding in the Mayor the moral structure that her individualistic framework cannot

provide.

The Mayor's Theological Language and Divine Authority

A crucial aspect supporting the theological interpretation lies in the Mayor's deployment of Christian moral language and family values rhetoric, even while pursuing fundamentally anti-Christian goals. Throughout Season 3, the Mayor never abandons his moral terminology or his concern for propriety and cleanliness. His commitment to this linguistic framework reflects deep embedding within Christian moral structures, even as he subverts their ultimate purpose.

The scripts provide extensive evidence of the Mayor's moral consistency. In "Bad Girls," he chuckles over the Family Circus comic strip, declaring "I just love the Family Circus! That P.J., he's getting to be quite a handful." This moment of genuine pleasure in wholesome family entertainment occurs immediately before he discusses vampire elimination with Mr. Trick, suggesting that his moral language is not mere performance but integral to his character.

His relationship with Faith consistently employs paternal language, but this rhetoric serves theological rather than purely familial functions. When he tells Faith in "Graduation Day," "No father could be prouder," the language evokes not human paternal love but the conditional approval of Old Testament divine authority. His pride depends entirely upon Faith's continued devotion and service, mirroring the way divine love in biblical tradition consistently requires faithful obedience.

The Mayor's moral consistency extends beyond his relationship with Faith to his broader behavior throughout Season 3. Unlike other villains who employ deception as a primary tool, the Mayor maintains his moral rhetoric even in private moments. His concern for propriety, his family values language, and his consistent truthfulness within his relationship with Faith suggest that his authority operates through genuine theological mechanisms rather than mere institutional coercion.

Old Testament Patterns of Conditional Divine Love

The Mayor's love for Faith follows distinctly Old Testament patterns of divine favor, fundamentally distinguishing it from unconditional parental affection. While human parental love ideally operates without conditions, 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 theological framework illuminates the Mayor's statement that Faith could never disappoint him. Rather than representing unconditional parental love, this reflects divine certainty—disappointment would require Faith to cease being faithful, transforming her into someone other than "his Faith." The possessive language here carries double meaning: she is both personally his and literally the faith that enables his transformation.

The scripts support this interpretation through the Mayor's expectations of absolute devotion.

In “Consequences,” when Faith approaches him, he immediately recognizes her value not merely as a powerful ally but as someone whose belief gives his ascension meaning and legitimacy. His response to her offer demonstrates his understanding that she represents more than just another subordinate—she is the faithful believer necessary for his divine transformation.

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. The Mayor’s love similarly positions Faith to potentially sacrifice those closest to her as proof of loyalty, explaining why his 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 detailed 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—Mayor over citizen, Watcher over Slayer—but evolve in opposite directions, revealing the distinction between human and divine love patterns.

The scripts document Giles’s relationship with Buffy transforming 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. In “Consequences,” when Giles pretends to believe Faith’s lie about Buffy killing Allan, he does so not to manipulate but to protect both Slayers while seeking the truth. The relationship becomes genuinely familial, with power dynamics shifting toward equality and mutual respect.

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.

The scripts reveal this distinction through the Mayor’s consistent expectation that Faith will prioritize his needs over all other considerations. When Faith tells him “I guess that means you have a job opening,” his immediate acceptance demonstrates his recognition that she offers not employment but devotion. Unlike Giles, who learns to support Buffy’s independence even when it conflicts with his preferences, the Mayor requires Faith’s continued submission to maintain their relationship.

This contrast explains 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 that supports Buffy’s growth. The Mayor’s apparent kindness masks an eternal need for devotion that can never be satisfied or transcended.

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. This interpretation explains the Mayor's immediate recognition of Faith's value when she approaches him in "Consequences."

Faith's offer "I guess that means you have a job opening" signals her willingness to serve not as an employee but as a devotee. The Mayor's response reveals his understanding of this theological dimension: he recognizes her not as a mere subordinate but as the faithful believer necessary for his transformation. What is a god without believers, without the 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 scripts support this reading through the Mayor's language throughout Season 3. His consistent references to Faith as "my Faith" carry the double meaning—she is both personally his and literally the faith that enables his ascension. This theological relationship explains Faith's evolution from independent slayer to devoted follower. Her philosophy of "want, take, have" in "Bad Girls" represents not genuine independence but spiritual emptiness masquerading as freedom.

When this individualistic framework fails her after Allan's death, she seeks meaning through submission to the Mayor's divine authority. Her choice to serve him represents not weakness but a conscious decision to find purpose through devotion to something greater than herself. The scripts show her transformation from someone who rejects external authority to someone who willingly subordinates herself to the Mayor's divine will.

Addressing Counterevidence: The Mayor's Deception and Manipulation

While the theological interpretation provides valuable insights into the Mayor-Faith relationship, it must acknowledge evidence that complicates this reading. The Mayor does engage in deception and manipulation throughout Season 3, particularly in his political dealings and his interactions with characters outside his relationship with Faith. His treatment of Allan Finch, his deception of Sunnydale's citizens, and his manipulation of various supernatural entities all suggest conventional villainy rather than pure theological authority.

However, these apparent contradictions can be reconciled within the theological framework. The scripts reveal that the Mayor's deception operates selectively—he lies to those outside his divine relationship with Faith while maintaining truthfulness within that sacred bond. This pattern reflects the biblical tradition where divine figures often employ deception against enemies while maintaining covenant faithfulness with chosen believers.

The Mayor's political machinations serve his ultimate theological transformation rather than contradicting his divine nature. His hundred-year plan requires careful manipulation of human institutions and supernatural forces, but these activities serve his ascension rather than mere worldly power. The complexity of his character allows for both genuine divine

authority in his relationship with Faith and conventional villainy in his broader activities.

Most importantly, the scripts show the Mayor's consistent moral language and family values rhetoric even in his most manipulative moments. In "Bad Girls," even while plotting with Mr. Trick, he maintains his concern for propriety and his genuine pleasure in wholesome entertainment. This suggests that his moral framework is not mere performance but integral to his character, supporting the theological interpretation even while acknowledging his manipulative aspects.

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 divine purposes, paternal care that serves theological needs rather than human development.

The Mayor's theological complexity appears in his ability to maintain Christian moral rhetoric while pursuing fundamentally anti-Christian goals. The scripts show him speaking 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 absolute obedience—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.

The scripts support this interpretation through the Mayor's consistent moral language even in private moments. His genuine pleasure in the Family Circus, his concern for Allan's betrayal, and his family values rhetoric all suggest deep embedding within Christian moral structures, even as he subverts their ultimate purpose for his own divine ascension.

Conclusion

Reinterpreting the Mayor-Faith relationship through theological rather than purely paternal frameworks reveals dimensions of their bond that familial readings cannot adequately address. Faith functions as literal "faith" whose belief enables the Mayor's transformation from politician to deity-figure, while the Mayor operates as a complex theological entity 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 support 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.

The scripts provide extensive evidence for this theological reading through Faith's conscious choice to approach the Mayor, his consistent moral rhetoric, and the conditional nature of his love for her. While acknowledging the Mayor's deceptive and manipulative aspects toward others, the analysis demonstrates how these elements serve his theological transformation rather than contradicting it.

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. Through Faith's journey from independence to devotion, the show explores the seductive power of theological certainty while maintaining its commitment to individual agency and moral complexity.