

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

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## Abstract

This paper reexamines the relationship between Mayor Wilkins and Faith Lehane in Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season 3, arguing that Faith functions as literal “faith” whose genuine belief enables the Mayor’s theological authority. 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 textual analysis of key episodes, particularly “Bad Girls” and “Consequences,” this study demonstrates how Faith consciously chooses to renounce her independence and serve the Mayor as her guiding authority, transforming him from politician to deity-figure. The Mayor’s consistent moral rhetoric, 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 conscious choice to renounce her independence and select the Mayor as her guiding deity. 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 Conscious Choice: From Independence to Devotion

The crucial moment that establishes Faith's theological relationship with the Mayor occurs in "Consequences" when she approaches him after Mr. Trick's death. This scene deserves careful analysis, as it represents not merely a pragmatic alliance but a conscious act of religious conversion. When Faith declares "I guess that means you have a job opening," she offers herself not as an employee seeking protection, but as a devotee choosing her deity.

The Mayor's immediate response reveals his understanding of this theological dimension. Rather than treating Faith as a mere subordinate, he recognizes her as the faithful believer necessary for his ascension. The scripts demonstrate that Faith had other options—she could have fled Sunnydale, sought help from Buffy and the Scoobies, or attempted to handle the consequences of Allan's death through official channels. Instead, she deliberately chooses to approach the Mayor, drawn not by fear but by the appeal of his moral authority and the structure he provides.

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, as Faith discovers that pure individualism cannot provide the moral framework she desperately needs.

The theological reading explains what might otherwise seem like a character inconsistency. Faith's turn to the Mayor represents not a betrayal of her independence but its conscious sacrifice in service of a higher authority. As she tells Buffy in "Consequences," "You don't get it. I don't care!" This apparent callousness actually masks a deeper spiritual crisis—Faith cannot process Allan's death within her individualistic framework and therefore seeks absolution through submission to divine authority.

## The Mayor's Theological Language and Moral Consistency

A crucial aspect supporting the theological interpretation lies in the Mayor's consistent 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 Mayor's relationship with Faith consistently employs paternal language, but this rhetoric serves theological rather than purely familial functions. When he tells Faith "No father could be prouder" in "Graduation Day," 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.

This pattern becomes evident in the Mayor's expectations throughout their relationship. His love manifests through provision—the apartment, material goods, protection—but always within the context of Faith's 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 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 suggest that his evil operates not through rejection of Christian morality but through its appropriation for divine rather than human ends.

## Old Testament Patterns of 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 several aspects of their relationship that seem problematic when viewed through purely familial lenses. The Mayor's statement that Faith could never disappoint him makes sense not as unconditional parental love but as 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 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 reading explains why the Mayor's affection, while genuine, carries an

inherently threatening undertone that purely paternal love would lack.

The theological interpretation also accounts for the Mayor's reaction to Faith's violence in service to his goals. When Faith kills the professor in "Graduation Day," she does so without the remorse that characterized Allan's death, because she now acts under divine command rather than individual choice. The Mayor's approval of this action reflects not moral corruption but the different ethical framework that governs divine-human relationships, where obedience to divine will supersedes conventional moral considerations.

## 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—Mayor over citizen, 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. The scripts demonstrate this through the Mayor's consistent expectation that Faith will prioritize his needs over all other considerations, including her own moral development.

## 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 what might otherwise seem like inconsistencies in the Mayor's behavior and rhetoric throughout Season 3.

Faith's decision to approach the Mayor in "Consequences" represents more than seeking protection or guidance—it constitutes an act of religious conversion. Her 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 immediate acceptance reveals his understanding of this theological dimension: he 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 the double meaning identified in the analytical notes—she is both personally his and literally the faith that enables his ascension. 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.

This reading 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 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. 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 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 Mayor’s truthfulness, noted in the analytical materials, serves this theological function. Gods, even false ones, must maintain consistency to retain the faith of their believers. His 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.

## 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.

## Addressing Counterevidence: Manipulation and Deception

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 manipulation and deception throughout Season 3, particularly in his political dealings and his interactions with other characters. His treatment of Allan Finch, his deception of Sunnydale's citizens, and his manipulation of various supernatural entities all suggest a more conventional villain rather than a genuine theological figure.

However, these apparent contradictions can be reconciled within the theological framework. 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 manipulation of others serves to protect and advance his relationship with Faith rather than undermining his theological authenticity.

Additionally, the Mayor's political machinations can be understood as necessary steps toward his ascension rather than contradictions of his divine nature. His hundred-year plan requires careful manipulation of human institutions and supernatural forces, but these activities serve his ultimate theological transformation 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.

## 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.

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.