

Kristy Maddux. *The Faithful Citizen: Popular Christian Media and Gendered Civic Identities*, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010; 282 pages. \$29.95.

In *The Faithful Citizen: Popular Christian Media and Gendered Civic Identities*, Kristy Maddux selects five “Christian-themed mass media texts” that exemplify Christian civic participation differently determined by gendered identities:

Two films:

Amazing Grace

The Passion of the Christ

Two book projects that have become films:

Left Behind

The Da Vinci Code

One television series:

7th Heaven

Beginning with *Amazing Grace*, Maddux asserts that British abolitionist William Wilberforce demonstrates Christian political activism characterized by “genteel masculinity” and “prophetic calling” (32). Wilberforce combines “intellectualism” with moral living over physical prowess to pass his abolition bill in Parliament. He models using “legislative politics” for religiously based cultural reform (48-56). Next, and oppositely, Jesus in *The Passion of the Christ* performs “feminine submission” by accepting “victimhood” and not transformed “agency” that protests the violence of the State. Instead Jesus “sanction[s]” such violence as “God-willed.” Mary, Mary Magdalene, and John similarly submit cinematically. The submissions portrayed in *The Passion* directly challenge liberation, womanist and feminist theologies. Following *The Passion’s* alternative, Maddux recommends that Christians today submissively pray “for the nation’s well-being.” She suggests the National Prayer Center of Washington D.C. and The Worldwide Prayer Center in Colorado Springs as organizations where such civic participation in prayer occurs (82-5).

After pointed interpretations of *The Passion*, Maddux examines *Left Behind* as tragicomic narratives organized by three binaries: “good/evil” (a division for people and events in the world), “truth/persuasion” (truth is self-evident [re: ‘nondiscursive’] while persuasion requires argumentation that can be deceptive [re: ‘anti-intellectualism’]), and “reality/appearance” (a permutation of truth/persuasion). The three binaries emerge from “brutish masculinity” where Tribulation Force members like Buck, Chloe (though she eventually reverts to femininity as an antidote for her behavior, 116), and Rabbi Ben-Judah, use “strength, instinct, and courage” over rationality and intellect for apocalyptic battle that leads to saving from God (110-119). *Left Behind* spurs readers not to wait for the renewal of all things by an “omnipotent God,” but to activate “radical” possibilities for eschaton oriented political action. For her penultimate analysis, Maddux investigates *7th Heaven* - the “longest running” television family drama at 11 seasons (122). The Camden family, and especially their protestant clergy father, Eric, who is “thoroughly feminized” due to his pastoral expertise and plumbing ignorance, as well as his willingness to cry as a show of emotion, enact individual volunteerism that effects community healing and change (143, 135). For Maddux, *7th Heaven* champions Marvin Olasky’s *The*

Tragedy of American Compassion, which grounded Clinton and Bush initiatives for “post-welfare privatization” and governmental support for faith-based organizations (145, 129). Yet *7th Heaven* also remains distinct from Olasky, and still politically savvy, by presenting effective neighborly help without the “imposition” of “religious values” (153). Her final mass-media text, *The Da Vinci Code* casts a feminist vision of Christian discipleship that ironically counters “American feminism” by asserting “biological difference, compulsory heterosexuality, and [primarily change within] the private sphere” (178). With a further twist, Maddux asserts that *The Da Vinci Code* aligns with “self-help discourses” from Focus on the Family’s James Dobson and *Left Behind* author, Tim LeHaye (178-79). Her five case studies conclude with six summary lessons (not given away here) and mention of *The Shack* and figures like Mark Driscoll, Rick Warren, and Jim Wallis to show the “persistent” variety of Christian civic participation and their value and inadequacy as possibilities for public expression of Christian commitment.

The Faithful Citizen provides provocative counterpoint to earlier works like Colleen McDannell’s *Material Christianity*. It will attract current readers interested in the crossroads of popular culture and Christianity. Yet three limitations appear. First, the identifications of gender rely upon colloquial assumptions and unclear criteria. How and why are strength, instinct, courage, or plumbing masculine and crying feminine? Second, her chosen texts and civic participation claims seem out of sync sometimes. Mel Gibson’s Jesus may unusually submit to the State, but does Dan Brown actually present a vision of Christian feminist *discipleship*; is it a devotional work, or more a narrative of ecclesiastical intrigue? Such curious coordination and interpretation of the mass-media material, especially as counter-argument to programs like liberation, womanist, and feminist theology (all defined rather swiftly) raise suspicion that analyses within *The Faithful Citizen* mainly react to “liberal” theological scholarship. Maddux stresses the multiplicity and possibility of gendered identities and civic action in Christian themed media to avoid bias, but is the balance of *The Faithful Citizen* as fictional as the media it describes, promoting instead theological and cultural “conservatism” – i.e. reinsertion of conventional gender roles and emphasis upon redemptive suffering?

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