Introduction

Popular media forms may be considered biblical in that they include veiled or explicit references to biblical texts, characters, and images. Yet, such usage is often understood as referring to biblical values that are necessarily reflected in biblical content. Tyler Perry’s film Madea’s Big Happy Family (2010) [MBHF] would seem to have little in common with the New Testament Epistles. The film explores the complex relationship dynamics of a contemporary African American extended family in crisis, while the Epistles provide instruction and advice to nascent Christian communities in the first and second centuries CE. No obvious linkage between this film and these texts exists. Yet, like MBHF, the New Testament Epistles, particularly the household codes, exhibit concerns regarding proper order within a patriarchal family structure, especially for women and children within the household. This chapter examines this film in light of the household codes. It illustrates how this film reflects and reinforces conservative, “Bible-based” notions of family and demonstrates how it upholds the stereotype of the strong black woman who takes on what is regarded as an inappropriate leadership role in the family.

Bible and Popular Media

The Christian Bible, including the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, plays an important role in American art, culture, and public discourse. Popular media forms including film, television, and magazines use the Bible frequently by employing biblical imagery,
characters, quotations, and allusions. In some instances, the use of biblical texts is explicit. For example, Mark Burnett produced a History Channel television miniseries called *The Bible*. The series, which aired in 2013, is a 10-hour, 12-part scripted series that highlighted key biblical events such as the Exodus and the nativity and crucifixion of Jesus. Also, GSN (Game Show Network) premiered *The American Bible Challenge* in August 2012. Hosted by comedian Jeff Foxworthy, this television game show tests contestants’ knowledge of biblical content. The Bible has also provided rich material for filmmakers since the early twentieth century with silent films such as *Samson and Delilah* (1903) and *Ben Hur* (1907). Classic films like *The Robe* (1953) and Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments* (1956) are based on biblical texts. The Bible continues to supply contemporary filmmakers with an abundance of story lines and characters. For instance, in *Evan Almighty* (2007), Evan Baxter, the central character, is a modern-day Noah who builds an ark (Genesis 6:5–9:17).

Since the Bible is a religious text, its use can generate controversy. Tim Tebow, an avowed Christian and New York Jets quarterback, is featured in the September 2012 issue of *GQ*. The magazine’s article, “Have You Accepted Tim Tebow as Your QB and Sunday Savior?” includes a photograph of a shirtless Tebow. He stands in a crucifix pose with his arms outstretched and legs crossed at the knees. This depiction of Tebow as a crucified Christ-figure created a media firestorm and presumably increased sales. Some popular media forms may lack explicit biblical references but may be regarded as reflecting “biblical” values and morals by engaging Christian themes or by reflecting what is perceived as a Christian perspective on particular issues. For instance, the NBC television series “Highway to Heaven,” starring Michael Landon, was widely regarded as a Christian program. The show aired from 1985 to 1989 and dealt with issues such as forgiveness, repentance, and death. It featured angels who reported to “The Boss” and who were sent on assignment to Earth.

In most instances, the use of biblical material in popular media is not explicit. In President Barack Obama’s speech to the United Auto Workers (UAW) Conference in February 2012, he alludes to a biblical text. In speaking of political debates regarding American values, he explains:

> I keep on hearing these same folks talk about values all the time. You want to talk about values? Hard work—that’s a value. Looking out for one another—that’s a value. The idea that we’re all in it together, and I’m my brother’s keeper and sister’s keeper—that’s a value.

While Obama adds a gender-inclusive note, his speech references the biblical story of Cain and Abel. In this story, the Lord asks Cain, “Where is