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Disciplined by democracy: moral framing and the rhetoric of Red Letter Christians.

Boerboom, Samuel Isaac (2010)



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Title

Disciplined by democracy: moral framing and the rhetoric of Red Letter Christians.

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Abstract

In this dissertation I study both the textual reception and rhetorical production strategies of the Red Letter Christians, a discourse community whose identity is linked to these very same strategies. I contend that the Red Letter Christians engage in biblical reading strategies that make them distinct from other politically liberal or progressive religious groups. The Red Letter Christians employ a moral frame based on their particular reading of the Bible. Embedded in the notion of "conservative radicalism," such a moral frame asserts a dedication to timeless principles and truths authenticated by the gospel accounts of Jesus while it simultaneously upholds a passionate defense of social justice and the activist need to engage in political action in the present. Such a moral frame is biconceptual, expressing both conservative and progressive dimensions of moral social action. Due to the biconceptuality of the Red Letter Christian moral frame, Red Letter Christians often stress the importance of humility and non-partisan dialogue. Critics of the Red Letter Christians from both the political left and the right argue that such discourse is often incomprehensible and obfuscates the political positions the group defends in their rhetoric. I assert that in spite of their common reception as a religiously liberal group, the Red Letter Christians offer a model of discourse that at its best authenticates and otherwise justifies a model of post-partisan discourse that re-imagines religion's role in public political discourse.

Keywords

Democracy

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Interpretive persuasion

Moral framing

Religion

Rhetoric

Communication Studies

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