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Communication Arts and Sciences

Title of your research project.

“To Restore the Soul of America:” Religious Rhetoric in Joe Biden’s 2020 President-Elect Victory Speech

Description of research. Please provide a few sentences that explain the question and the methods employed in this research project.

On November 7, 2020, after being declared the winner of the 2020 presidential election, Joseph R. Biden delivered his President-Elect victory speech to a crowd in Wilmington, Delaware. Through a generic analysis of religious language in Biden’s victory speech, I suggest that Biden uses religious language in the tradition of American civil religion in an attempt to unify the country after a highly divisive and contested election and to provide hope and comfort in the midst of a global pandemic. While Biden’s address adheres to the themes previous research has associated with the President-Elect victory speech genre, his address appears to utilize religious language more frequently than other victory speeches. I suggest that this is partly due to the unique circumstances in which Biden delivered his address: during a global pandemic, without the concession of his opponent, and at a time when many Americans refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of his election. Because there was no concession speech delivered by his opponent, Biden’s President-Elect victory speech attempted to accomplish all of the objectives usually accomplished by a victory speech working in conjunction with a concession speech. Biden’s decision to utilize “Consoler-in-Chief” rhetoric in his victory speech is also discussed.

Did this project include Penn State students as researchers?

No

If yes to the above question, please state where it was published.

It is in press with the Ohio Communication Journal.

What problem do you address with your research?

How religious rhetoric is used in a unique political speech, and whether this is due to Biden's personal religious beliefs, the situation in which he delivered the speech, or other factors.

