

A Rhetorical Comparison of Daniel Defoe's *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* and the Twenty-First Century War on Christianity

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Abstract

The rhetoric used by those who claim to believe the modern day War on Christianity exists is strikingly similar to that used by Daniel Defoe in *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* as an exposition of the harsh treatment Dissenters received from Tories in eighteenth-century England, and warrants further examination. The use of antirrhesis, chorographia, and parody are so similar, it begs the question as to whether reporters on the War on Christianity actually believe this is occurring or claiming this war exists to gain economic and political traction. Examining their use may shed light on economic considerations and voting tendencies of Evangelical Christians in the United States, in the same way Defoe's use highlights the absence of threat to Anglicans by Dissenters. This essay examines myriad sources on the financial status of celebrities from popular political commentary shows, Donald Trump, and Fox News with respect to their specific targeting of Evangelical Christians, who feel disenfranchised and marginalized by the increasingly progressive sentiments in contemporary political discourse and legal statutes, just as

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Anglicans in Defoe's day felt legal rights afforded to Dissenters marginalized them socially and legally. In doing so, the reader is able to observe evidence that the so-called War on Christianity, rather than seeking to bind Christians together to fight for a return to an idealized American past, as Defoe highlighted the need for Christian unity across sects, may simply have become a new form of profiteering by preying on the fears of those who feel they have lost their supremacy in the US.

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