**RELS 499A Bachelor’s Essay Proposal, Fall 2022**

**Allen Duggar**

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**Street Preaching (Title TBD)**

The itinerant evangelist is an image deeply ingrained in the American psyche. Whether it’s the fire and brimstone sermons of George Whitefield or the ecstatic singing of tent revivals, the idiosyncrasies of the traveling preacher occupy a special place in the American religious imagination. Today, that tradition continues with a small group of preachers standing on street corners around the country. Though they often deviate from normative Christian theology and are often considered strange by the passersby to which they minister, they nonetheless remain important characters in American Christian mythology. Street preachers often see themselves as the heirs to the tradition of the Jewish prophets of the Old Testament and the missionary work of Paul of Tarsus. To what extent are these comparisons accurate? And how do these frequent theological innovators emphasize and express their continuities to older forms of Christian ministry?

Because they exist outside of the strict watch of institutionalized denominations, street evangelists have a greater capacity to express their religious imagination, to reinterpret scripture and doctrine in ways unguided by the pedagogical traditions of ordained clergy. My Bachelor’s Essay will take an ethnographic approach to explore street preaching as an act of creativity. In concert with a robust review of the literature surrounding street evangelism and the history of American Evangelicalism more broadly, I hope to speak to at least five such preachers to answer the following questions. **How do street evangelists position themselves in relation to religious institutions, their fellow believers, and potential converts? How do street evangelists frame Christian theology? What strategies do they use to attract attention from passersby? Are there aesthetic commonalities that unite street sermons into a genre separate from those given at the pulpit? In what ways do street evangelists conform to models of Christian clergy, and in what ways do they innovate on those models?**

In the answers to these questions, my Bachelor’s Essay will explore the act of intentionally othering oneself (from both mainstream Christian denominations and ‘normal’ society) by taking up public evangelism. **What pushes someone out to the street to spread their message? Are there personal similarities between individual preachers to be identified? Additionally, I will consider street preaching in its contemporary context as a piece of public performance art**. This practice is more than simply an expression of theology, but indeed a piece of spontaneous creativity and an embodied practice.

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