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Paper Title: **A Performance Ethnographic Review of Sermonic Rhetoric: An Analysis of Crisis Liturgy**

Abstract:

This paper examines how sermons within populist nationalist evangelical contexts function as ritual performances of identity formation in moments of crisis. René Girard's mimetic theory provides the primary interpretive foundation for the project, especially his account of rivalry, scapegoating, and communal consolidation through opposition. Drawing on performance ethnography and critical ethnography alongside Girard's framework, the study analyzes sermonic responses to the death of Charlie Kirk as a concentrated moment of theological and political meaning-making. Rather than approaching sermons simply as texts, the paper treats them as embodied performances that mirror congregational anxiety, construct interpretive worlds, and mobilize communal action. Using Dwight Conquergood's categories of mimesis, poesis, and kinesis, I show how these sermons transformed a public death into a sacralized narrative of threat, righteousness, and resistance. Across diverse ecclesial settings, the rhetoric varied in tone and style, yet displayed a common architecture: threat construction, moral polarization, enemy formation, sacralization, and communal consolidation. The paper argues that crisis liturgy reveals the deeper theological reflexes of these communities, particularly the fusion of faith, grievance, and oppositional identity. In contrast to a cruciform theological posture of self-examination, repentance, and enemy-love, these sermons frequently stabilized belonging through antagonism. The study contributes to conversations in violence and religion by showing how ritualized preaching can intensify mimetic rivalry and scapegoating while presenting itself as faithful witness.