



Homespun Gospel: The Triumph of Sentimentality in Contemporary American Evangelicalism

By Todd M. Brenneman

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In popular evangelical literature, God is loving and friendly, described in heartfelt, often saccharine language that evokes nostalgia, comfortable domesticity, and familial love. This emotional style has been widely adopted by the writers most popular among American evangelicals, including such celebrity pastors as Max Lucado, Rick Warren, and Joel Osteen. Todd M. Brenneman provides groundbreaking insight into the phenomenon of evangelical sentimentality: an emotional appeal to readers' feelings about familial relationships, which can in turn be used as the basis for a relationship with God.

Brenneman shows how evangelicals use tropes of God as father, human beings as children, and nostalgia for an imagined idyllic home life to provide alternate sources of social authority, intended to help evangelicals survive a culture that is philosophically at odds with conservative Christianity. Yet Brenneman also demonstrates that the sentimental focus on individual emotion and experience can undermine the evangelical agenda. Sentimentality is an effective means of achieving individual conversions, but it also promotes a narcissism that blinds evangelicals to larger social forces and impedes their ability to bring about the change they seek.

Homespun Gospel offers a compelling perspective on an unexplored but vital aspect of American evangelical identity.

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Editorial Review

Review

"*Homespun Gospel* is an insightful work that encourages us to rethink, and re-feel, evangelicalism. It should stimulate and provoke a great many conversations to come."--*Sociology of Religion*

"*Homespun Gospel* is a nuanced and thought-provoking work... Recommended."--*CHOICE*

"*Homespun Gospel* could very well launch a broad reinterpretation of contemporary evangelicalism. The genius of Brenneman's book is in reexamining old, familiar scenes through freshly adjusted lenses."
--*Christianity Today*

"*Homespun Gospel* shows that the pulse of American evangelicalism resides, appropriately, in the heart. Brenneman skillfully moves evangelical studies away from beliefs and politics before revealing how sentimentality informs those spheres, too." --Steven P. Miller, author of *Billy Graham and the Rise of the Republican South*

"Why read this book? Because it redirects our search for the soul of evangelical politics from the preacher-politicians who dominate the media to those preacher-authors who claim no political involvement at all, and whose books, Brenneman argues, foster a culture of simplicity, dull the evangelical intellect, legitimate narcissism, and shape the evangelical 'mind.' A provocative read to say the least!" --Richard T. Hughes, author of *Myths America Lives By*

"*Homespun Gospel* provides an insightful analysis of well-known, but seldom studied figures of contemporary evangelicalism. Brenneman's argument that evangelicalism can best be understood through the lens of sentimentality is both provocative and compelling. Brenneman challenges readers to grapple with evangelicalism on different terms and makes a great contribution to the study of this complicated religious movement." --Lynn S. Neal, author of *Romancing God: Evangelical Women and Inspirational Fiction*

About the Author

Todd M. Brenneman is Assistant Professor of Christian History at Faulkner University in Montgomery, AL. He earned his Ph.D. at Florida State University. His research interests include religion in the United States, evangelicalism, the history of Christianity, and religion and children.

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