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Sensational Devotion: Evangelical Performance in Twenty-First-Century America

Jill C. Stevenson

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In "Sensational Devotion, " Jill Stevenson examines a range of evangelical performances, including contemporary Passion plays, biblical theme parks, Holy Land re-creations, creationist museums, and megachurches, to understand how they serve their evangelical audiences while shaping larger cultural and national dialogues. Such performative media support specific theologies and core beliefs by creating sensual, live experiences for believers, but the accessible, familiar forms they take and the pop culture motifs they employ also attract nonbelievers willing to try out these genres, even if only for curiosity s sake. This familiarity not only helps these performances achieve their goals, but it also enables them to contribute to public dialogue about the role of religious faith in America. Stevenson shows how these genres are significant and influential cultural products that utilize sophisticated tactics in order to reach large audiences comprised of firm believers, extreme skeptics, and those in between. Using historical research coupled with personal visits to these various venues, the author not only critically examines these spaces and events within their specific religious, cultural, and national contexts, but also places them within a longer devotional tradition in order to suggest how they cultivate religious belief by generating vivid, sensual, affectively oriented, and individualized experiences."

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