



# Romancing God: Evangelical Women and Inspirational Fiction

*Lynn S. Neal*

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## **Romancing God: Evangelical Women and Inspirational Fiction** Lynn S. Neal

In the world of the evangelical romance novel, sex and desire are mitigated by an omnipresent third party--the divine. Thus romance is not just an encounter between lovers, but a triangle of affection: man, woman, and God. Although this literature is often disparaged by scholars and pastors alike, inspirational fiction plays a unique and important role in the religious lives of many evangelical women. In an engaging study of why women read evangelical romance novels, Lynn S. Neal interviews writers and readers of the genre and finds a complex religious piety among ordinary people.

In evangelical love stories, the success of the hero and heroine's romance rests upon their religious choices. These fictional religious choices, readers report, often inspire real spiritual change in their own lives. Amidst the demands of daily life or during a challenge to one's faith, these books offer a respite from problems and a time for fun, but they also provide a means to cultivate piety and to appreciate the unconditional power of God's love. The reading of inspirational fiction emerges from and reinforces an evangelical lifestyle, Neal argues, but women's interpretations of the stories demonstrate the constant negotiations that characterize evangelical living. Neal's study of religion in practice highlights evangelicalism's aesthetic sensibility and helps to alter conventional understandings--both secular and religious--of this prominent subculture.

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