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Lori G. Beaman. *Shared Beliefs, Different Lives: Women's Identities in Evangelical Context*. St. Louis: Chalice, 1999. Pp. ix + 161. \$21.99 (Paper).

[1] *Shared Beliefs, Different Lives* challenges popular cultural and academic misconceptions about modern evangelical Christian women. While many issues are addressed, the author highlights two important items. First, evangelical Christian women are not a monolithic entity marching *en masse* to a subcultural beat. Rather, they are endlessly diverse and vibrant in the expression of their faith within their own worlds. Second, these women who choose to live in a patriarchal context are not "mindless doormats" or "submissive servants" (Beaman's words) as some who do not espouse the evangelical world view might suppose. They are purposeful agents negotiating the implications of their faith within their daily lives, not resisting traditional patriarchal dogma outright nor accepting it at face value. Reading *Shared Beliefs, Different Lives* may be a broadening experience for many readers as Beaman affords them an honest and compelling glimpse into another world.

[2] Beaman's book began while she worked with the "Religion and Violence Research Team" at the Murial McQueen Fergusson Center for Family Violence Research in eastern Canada. Many of her co-workers were evangelical Christians who graciously shared their ideas and beliefs with her and allowed her to enter their world via their conversations. The data which forms the basis of Beaman's book were collected over a two-year period from a variety of sources including thirty "focus groups" with evangelical women (research via small group discussion), ninety-four in-depth interviews with women drawn primarily from the focus groups (interviews averaging about ninety minutes), and numerous questionnaires and interviews with evangelical clergy (both men and women). Beaman says that it was through these groups that she learned the vernacular of the evangelical world and was able to negotiate her way in what was to her a foreign land. The land (the culture of evangelical women) is unfamiliar to Beaman because, as she notes, she writes as an outsider. She is a feminist sociologist who is trying "to learn the language of this community of believers . . . to recognize their material culture and to distinguish the necessary from the optional in their faith-related practices" (1-2). Beaman's vantage point offers a fresh perspective of evangelical women that is different from discussions of "Christian life" written by insiders. This study attempts to understand how evangelical Christian women utilize their faith to guide their

relationships with husbands, children, faith communities, and the outside world. It is an attempt to discover how these women "interpret, react to, shape, and incorporate church teachings into their daily lives" (8).

[3] The interviews are the strength of Beaman's book. Through them, the reader can peer into the world of evangelical Christian women as they candidly discuss their lives. Thus, they speak for themselves on such topics as: personal faith; marriage; motherhood; their roles at home, church, and community; balancing work responsibilities with home and church life; feminism; violence against women (especially within Christian families); Christian witnessing or reticence to witnessing; activism and women's rights; and the frequently sounded motif—the challenge to live in the world but not be dominated by it. In order to gain a clearer perspective of the diverse responses from the women in her research, Beaman developed a typology to categorize their responses. Drawing on the previous work of Lyn Gesch with church women (Beaman discusses her research methodology in the appendix), Beaman identified three primary streams of thought among the group of women who participated in her study. She labels these categories traditionalist, moderate, and feminist evangelicals. Traditionalists object to women's participation in the paid labor force outside the home, interpret biblical passages more literally than women in the other categories, and adhere to the traditional division of labor between men and women. They are also the smallest of the three groups. Feminist evangelical women form a sharp contrast to the traditionalists. They reject all rhetoric of submission and call for an articulation of male-female relationships as partnerships. They embrace women's equality and advocate for increased roles for women within church hierarchy. Moderates, as distinct from the other two categories, accept biblical teachings on submission and male leadership, but live and interpret them from the perspectives of partnership and equality within their own marriages and churches. They readily accept feminist notions of equality, but are outspokenly cautious about any form of feminist activism. This later group comprises the largest group of women in the study. The diverse responses to Beaman's study indicate that for these women, evangelical ideology is descriptive rather than prescriptive.

[4] Despite her feminist background and her misgivings about evangelical ideology, Beaman obviously admires the women she has come to know through her research and evinces a genuine respect for their positions. She is careful to place her work in the continuum of scholarly investigation of the evangelical world in general and of evangelical Christian women in particular. Her book is a welcome complement to this previous body of work. She includes brief chapter summaries, a final summation at the conclusion of the book, and an extensive bibliography for further reading. The book, however, suffers from the lack of an index, and her bibliography, though extensive, contains only a limited number of books by evangelical authors or publishers (only 8 out of 164 entries are evangelical).

[5] Although Beaman never applies the results of her research beyond eastern Canada, as if to speak for all Canadian or American evangelical women, the book nevertheless is limited by the size of its research pool. What about the diversities among evangelical Christian women living in other areas of Canada or the various regions of the United States? Are there differences between evangelical Christian women who live in rural versus urban or suburban areas? How does socio-economic standing in the community affect the three categories of evangelical Christian women Beaman identifies as they interact across the three groups and

with the world around them? Must all women belong to what she calls the "Bible cozy" culture, or are there alternatives available for dissenting Christian women? Beaman's study fails to mention the books or magazines/journals these women read. Also overlooked in her research are the kinds of music, entertainment, or recreation they enjoy. Furthermore, do denominational distinctions within the evangelical world have an impact on how evangelical Christian women shape their worlds? These questions and others like them call for continued research into a most intriguing field of study, and *Shared Beliefs, Different Lives* has laid the preliminary foundation for such work.

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