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The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism

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Abstract

Drawing on the theory of religious subcultural strength this article proposes an explanation for the failure of evangelical feminism to substantially replace hegemonic ideas of gender hierarchy and difference among American evangelicals. Although a thread of discourse supporting

partnership and mutuality between women and men has a long history within Christianity, it is not until the nineteenth century that it emerges as a viable alternative to hierarchy as the basis of domestic and church relations. Suppressed in the early twentieth century as part of the efforts of conservative Protestants to distinguish themselves from moderate and mainline Protestants, evangelical feminism reemerged in the 1960s and early 1970s. Using data from a national survey, I assess the degree to which gender hierarchy and egalitarianism characterize the perspectives of contemporary evangelicals. Although the majority of ordinary evangelicals are pragmatically egalitarian, the ideals of “biblical” or evangelical feminism remain relatively marginalized within evangelical subculture.

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