



Blessed Assurance: Beliefs, Actions, and the Experience of Salvation in a Carolina Baptist Church

M Jean Heriot

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Based on fourteen months of research in a Southern Baptist congregation in rural South Carolina, *Blessed Assurance* investigates a central paradox in evangelical salvation. How, in the context of "this world," can one know that one is saved, or born again, by the grace of Jesus Christ? Through ethnographic and linguistic analyses, M. Jean Heriot examines the specific means that believers use to construct the paradox of salvation itself and how they seek practical resolutions. Her explorations encompass a variety of intriguing questions. What is the basis of the equation between belief in salvation and commitment to the church? How does the pastor use the sermon to urge the congregation to be saved and to manifest that salvation through action? What are the implications of the "altar call," which asks members to enact their beliefs in a ritually charged atmosphere? How do congregation members try to "live" conversion day to day? In seeking answers to these questions, Heriot offers a wealth of insightful vignettes drawn from the people and situations she observed during her field research. What makes this study unique is Heriot's focus on the everyday processes by which believers construct the reality of salvation in their social world. She shows how, through the power of words (especially the "Word of God") and through the ritual enactment of faith messages Sunday after Sunday, believers construct a worldview that makes salvation central to their identity. At the same time, she uncovers the cultural dilemmas that make the goal of salvation so elusive.

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