



Evangelizing Lebanon: Baptists, Missions, and the Question of Cultures

By Melanie E. Trexler

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In 1893, Said Jureidini, an Arabic-speaking Christian from the Ottoman Empire, experienced an evangelical conversion while attending the Chicago World's Fair. Two years later he founded the first Baptist church in modern-day Lebanon. For financial support, he aligned his fledgling church with American Landmark Baptists and, later, Southern Baptists. By doing so, Jureidini linked the fate of Baptists in Lebanon with those in the United States.

In *Evangelizing Lebanon*, Melanie E. Trexler explores the complex, reflexive relationship between Baptist missionaries from the States and Baptists in Lebanon. Trexler pays close attention to the contexts surrounding the relationships, the consequences, and the theologies inherent to missionary praxis, carefully profiling the perspectives of both the missionaries and the Lebanese Baptists.

Trexler thus discovers a fraught mutuality at work. U.S. missionaries presented new models of church planting, evangelism, and educational opportunities that empowered the Lebanese Baptists to accomplish personal and communal goals. In turn, Lebanese Baptists prompted missionaries to rethink their ideas about mission, Muslim-Christian relations, and even American foreign policy in the region.

But Trexler also reveals how missionaries' efforts to evangelize Muslims came to threaten the very security of the Lebanese Baptists. Trexler shows how Baptist missionary theology and praxis in Lebanon had more to do with bolstering an insular Baptist identity in the U.S. than it did with engaging in interfaith relationships with Lebanese Muslims. Ironically, American Baptists' efforts to help ultimately spun out of control and led to unintended consequences. Trexler's study of Baptists in Lebanon serves as a warning for missional identity everywhere, Baptist or not: missionary insistence on a narrow and politically useful definition of what it means to be Christian can both aid and undermine, build and destabilize.

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Evangelizing Lebanon: Baptists, Missions, and the Question of Cultures By Melanie E. Trexler Bibliography

- Rank: #4070957 in Books
- Published on: 2016-09-15
- Original language: English
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 6.25" w x 1.25" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 276 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"*Evangelizing Lebanon* is a study of Lebanese Baptist identity. The Arabic-speaking Baptist community that coalesced in 1895 under Lebanese leadership represented a new way to be Protestant in Beirut. Trexler carefully sorts through the complicated relationships that Lebanese Baptists have cultivated since then with several generations of Southern Baptist missionaries from America, other Middle Eastern Protestants, and the Muslim majority of Lebanon. She demonstrates how a small evangelical minority group has sought to exercise influence within the particular context of Lebanese society."?Stanley H. Skreslet, F. S. Royster Professor of Christian Missions, Union Presbyterian Seminary

"In *Evangelizing Lebanon*, Melanie Trexler considers the long-running Arab-American relationship that has connected Baptists in the United States and in what is now Lebanon from the late nineteenth century to the present. Readers interested in the history of Lebanon, Christian missions, Baptist peoples and traditions, or U.S.-Middle Eastern relations will appreciate this engaging, thoroughly researched, and finely analyzed account."?Heather J. Sharkey, Associate Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Pennsylvania

"Melanie Trexler's study of Lebanese Baptists and Southern Baptist missionaries both provides engaging portraits of individuals and groups and presents important conclusions about modern religious intercultural relations in general. As well as being an in-depth history of a particular Christian group, this study is also a sound analysis of the evolution of Western Christian missionary policies in the twentieth century and a useful examination of Christian life in part of the Arab world."?John Voll, Professor of Islamic History, Georgetown University

"This study provides an original and insightful contribution to our understanding of the dynamic interaction between the historical churches of the Middle East, the Islamic revival, and American and Israeli intervention in Lebanese affairs on the lives of the Baptists of Lebanon. *Evangelizing Lebanon* is a must-read for anyone interested in Lebanese history as well as the impact of foreign interests on local Christians in the Middle East."?Yvonne Haddad, Professor of the History of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Georgetown University

"a useful volume, both for students of Protestant missions to the Middle East in general and students of Southern Baptist missions in particular."?Walker Robins, *Reading Religion*

About the Author

Melanie E. Trexler is Assistant Professor of Theology at Valparaiso University.

Users Review

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