



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

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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