

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Kingdom of God Has No Borders: A Global History of American Evangelicals*,  
by Melani McAlister (New York: Oxford U.P., 2018; pp. 394. £19.99).

Melani McAlister's book is a well-written account of American evangelicals' engagement with the Middle East and Africa in the fifty years after the end of the Second World War. McAlister argues that American evangelicals went abroad seeking emotionally rich religious experiences and the protection of Christians internationally. She shows how the expansion of American military, economic and cultural power facilitated the movement of American evangelicals overseas in those years. Subsequently, the evangelicals returned home to lobby the US government on a range of issues shaped by their faith and international missions. Finally, McAlister demonstrates that the patterns of influence were not unidirectional; American evangelicalism was transformed not only by these international encounters but also by the conversion of millions outside the United States.

McAlister's study highlights lower-level actors, which enables her to demonstrate the ways in which many American evangelicals were deeply engaged with the world beyond the United States. By making her story an international one, she complicates existing narratives of evangelicals as only conservative and as overwhelmingly focused on American domestic politics. Her global approach helps us realise 'how very non-white' evangelicals are beyond the borders of the United States (p. 6). It also reveals the degree to which evangelicals did not operate independently of the US government; McAlister demonstrates that American evangelicals succeeded in several key instances in 'harness[ing] the power of the US state ... to shape religious communities and global politics alike' (p. 287).

McAlister's research blends different methodological approaches—archival research in the United States and South Africa as well as work as a participant observer on mission trips to Sudan and Egypt. The latter method enables her to delve into the challenges faced by contemporary evangelicals, in particular the emotional impact of their mission experiences and the limits of what their compassion can accomplish.

McAlister organises her account in three sections—networks, bodies and emotions. One direction of evangelicals' international engagement is the export of their distinct theological and world-views through the dissemination of written materials, the reach of radio programmes, the movement of American missionaries, and new technological innovations such as the internet. She also highlights the significance of schools and colleges to the networks which evangelicals built, analysing not only those constructed by Americans abroad but also those in the United States, such as Wheaton College in Illinois, which nurture many young evangelicals.

In her discussion of evangelical networks, McAlister explores the connections between evangelical missionaries and US foreign relations, focusing in particular on the murder of American missionary Paul Carlson in Congo in 1964. The protection of American missionaries and their work

warranted repeated intervention by the United States government, including through the evacuation of Americans from hostile situations in Congo and elsewhere. Despite their unofficial positions, these missionaries nonetheless acted as political, cultural and religious imperialists. McAlister also reveals how US foreign policy could have a negative impact on missionary activity, such as when anti-Americanism in the 1970s, fuelled by the Cold War and the war in Vietnam, limited missionary activity abroad.

McAlister argues that the 1967 Six Day War heightened American evangelicals' interest in the Middle East and that it fuelled both a rise in American evangelicals travelling to the Holy Land and a strengthening of American evangelicals' commitment to the state of Israel. Beyond revealing the existence of these links, McAlister highlights the political significance of evangelicals' beliefs and behaviour. She illustrates how evangelicals' connections to Israel have only heightened over time, with increasingly salience in American domestic politics and US foreign policy.

McAlister shows that the narrative of the global persecution of Christians is a powerful theme in evangelicals' international engagement. She focuses on these concerns through discourse around Christians' bodies and the torture and other punishments they endure. Connecting her discussion of networks and bodies, McAlister asks what sacrifice is required of missionaries—should they pay with their lives, as Carlson did, in effect becoming martyrs for the cause? McAlister examines evangelicals' efforts to formalise concerns about persecution through, among other steps, the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act and the creation of the position of ambassador for religious freedom in the State Department. She also analyses American evangelicals' attention to Israel and Sudan. In Sudan, as with Israel, American evangelicals feared the threat of 'militant Islam' (p. 177). One manifestation of this concern was the effort to 'redeem', or purchase the freedom of, slaves, which inspired considerable involvement from African Americans whose interest also had racial and historical dimensions.

In her concluding section, McAlister highlights the emotions of compassion and despair as well as expressions of emotion such as weeping. She reveals American evangelicals' 'enchanted internationalism', or how they seek 'emotionally powerful forms of religious experience' abroad, particularly in Africa (p. 9). A principal focus of these chapters is illuminating the controversy around the short-term missionary movement, a means to enable millions of Americans to take brief missionary trips overseas. The movement's critics, however, charged that these trips were 'neo-colonial', 'spiritual tourism' and superficial (p. 208). More fundamentally, the impact of this 'enchanted internationalism' was primarily on the evangelical who undertook the mission, with far less evidence that they had a meaningful influence on the people in the communities they were supposed to be serving. One of the final issues the author tackles is the influence of American evangelicals on Uganda's 2009 Anti-Homosexuality Bill. Earlier narratives had emphasised the impact of socially conservative American evangelicals, but McAlister argues instead that Ugandans had greater agency than those accounts acknowledged: 'No one injected religious ideas into Ugandans' (p. 250).

McAlister's decision to situate American evangelicals in a global context reveals that the balance of power between evangelicals inside the United States and beyond had been transformed by the early twenty-first century.

In McAlister's stark language: 'The Biblical interpretations of global South Christians were not under US control' (p. 266).<sup>1</sup> This shift in evangelism was most striking in that, in the early years of her study, it had been foreign liberals who had pushed American evangelicals in new directions, whereas, in the 2000s, evangelicals to the right of many Americans were now driving the agenda.

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