



## **Burden to Blessing: Christian Books in Beirut**

By Joy Mallouh

“The evangelical church in the mountainous Mediterranean country needs Christian literature,” says Pastor Joy Mallouh, of Clarion Publishing House in Beirut, Lebanon. “When I committed myself to serving here, I wanted to help this ministry to recover.”

It was a difficult time for Clarion. Lebanon’s civil war, which raged from 1976 to 1990, had ended. Financial support for the ministry decreased as the church in the West became focused on missions in Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union countries.

In addition, “the emergence of the internet and the fast development of audiovisuals led many to claim that the age of print was past,” says Mallouh. “Christian publication was seen as a financial burden.”

Clarion Publishing House had to undergo many changes to function more effectively in Lebanon’s post-war business climate.

### ***Staffing changes***

“The monthly running costs of our institution had to be enormously reduced,” says Mallouh. The organization cut the number of employees, and recruited more volunteers.

“I started working with freelancers in graphic design and translation. I have often found Christians who were happy to offer their work for free. I myself give most of my time in editing and pre-press work,” says Mallouh, who works as Clarion’s director on a volunteer, part-time basis and serves as the

senior pastor for a church affiliated with the Church of God Reformation Movement.

### ***Expanded distribution***

“A second measure we took was the expansion of our distribution network,” says Mallouh. “Since it was expensive for Clarion to maintain a Web site, we contacted a local secular distributor who agreed to promote our books on his Web site against wholesale discounts on sales. With this outlet and our stock with MECO Literature in Larnaca, Cyprus, any client is able to order any book and receive it instantly.”

However, “Lebanese people are not good book readers,” affirms Mallouh. “Another challenge is promoting book reading.”

### ***Inventory reduction***

“My concern for several years was the old stock we had in our warehouse,” says Mallouh. “These books were precious in my sight. They could be a blessing for someone who was unable to purchase Christian literature.”

Mallouh set out to find a buyer for Clarion’s languishing stock. He contacted several Christian mission agencies.

“We were able to find an organization willing to purchase this stock for distribution in Sudan and Iraq,” says Mallouh. The resulting influx of cash was put to good use.

Clarion published new titles, but in much smaller quantities than in the past. “After an extensive study I realized that our press run should not exceed 2000-3000 copies per

title, unless orders were guaranteed,” says Mallouh.

### ***Partnering for outreach***

“It is a challenge to find Christian authors who are willing to write and enrich the Christian literature with a Middle Eastern Christian experience and view,” says Mallouh. “Most of our publications are translated from English.” Clarion’s books include titles on marriage and family, evangelism, biographies, devotionals, and fiction stories.

“With limited resources,” says Clarion’s director, “I have found my way through to encourage a few agencies and publishers from abroad to partner with us in new book projects to reach out to the Arab-speaking world. I am excited by what we can do together.

“The ministry in Clarion Publishing House continues to be a challenge,” adds Mallouh. “I thank the Lord who has been faithful in the midst of all crises. He is faithful if we do our part in dedication to His glory.”

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## ***A LONG HISTORY***

Christian publishing houses have a long history in Lebanon:

- o Nile Mission Press, founded in 1905, moved from Egypt to Lebanon in the late 1950s, and then changed its name in 1960 to become the Arabic Literature Mission.
- o The British Syrian Mission, founded in 1860, adopted the name Lebanon Evangelical Mission in 1959, and later became the Lebanese Evangelical Society

(LES). It began a literature ministry in 1965. Two years later, that ministry became part of Christian Arabic Literature League.

- o The Middle East General Mission moved from Egypt to Lebanon and Cyprus in 1956. It was not primarily a publisher but was involved in literature distribution.

These three agencies merged in 1971 to create Clarion Publishing House. This ministry served under the supervision of the foreign mission work in Lebanon.

In 1976, a year after the start of Lebanon’s civil war, a fanatic religious group attacked the premises of the LES in West Beirut and set the building on fire. Most of the books in the warehouse were miraculously spared. The literature distribution side of Clarion’s work was temporarily moved to the Christian East side of Beirut, but the situation in the country continued to deteriorate. Therefore, a large quantity of the stock was shipped to Larnaca in Cyprus to handle distribution of Arabic literature around the world. For several years, Clarion Publishing operated from its offices in Cyprus. In 1982, with staffing changes, the editorial work moved back to Lebanon. The book distribution work was separated from Clarion and became part of Middle East Christian Outreach (MECO) and in 1983 became known as MECO Literature. Clarion and MECO Literature continue to work closely today to spread the Gospel throughout the region.

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