



The Oxford Centre for Mission Studies
and
The University of Wales

**The Ethnic Identity of Palestinian Arab Christian
Adolescents in Israel**

PhD, Salim J. Munayer

2000

The Oxford Centre for Mission Studies

www.ocms.ac.uk

The Ethnic Identity of Palestinian Arab Christian Adolescents in Israel

PhD Thesis, Salim J. Munayer, 2000

Abstract

For centuries the Palestinian Arab Christians were a minority among Muslims. With the establishment of the states of Israel, the Christians became a minority within a minority, creating a new situation where the Christian has to relate to two majority groups. Demographically, there is a continuous decrease in the Christian population in comparison to Jewish and Muslim populations. In terms of economic development, the Christian community lags behind the Jewish majority, while surpassing the achievements of the surrounding Muslim community. Palestinian Arab Christian society has, in general, placed high emphasis on education because it has become the means to achieve social status and to climb up the socio-economic ladder. The purpose of this study is to explore the complexities of the adolescent Palestinian Arab Christian identity, from the perspectives of social and developmental psychology.

To this effect, we developed an expanded model of acculturation orientations, and examined simultaneously the extent to which Arab Christian youngsters wish to retain their cultural identity and the extent to which they would like to adopt characteristics of the Jewish and Muslim majority groups. We also examined the way in which our respondents perceive the acculturation expectations held by their Jewish and Muslim counterparts. In addition, the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure questionnaire, developed by Jean Phinney (1992) for measuring ethnic identity achievement (as well as ethnic identity exploration and commitment) was adapted to the population under study. Based on social constructivist premises, we also explored the adolescents' constructions of relevant cultural groups (Christian, Muslim, Jews, and Western) in terms of the values that characterize them. Finally, we developed an instrument according to the Identity Structure Analysis framework, uniquely suited to the in-depth exploration of ethnic and cultural identities. Taken together, these research instruments - grounded in a variety of complementary theoretical and methodological approaches - provide us with a comprehensive analysis of the ethnic identity of the Palestinian Arab Christian adolescents in Israel.

The overall pattern of results suggest that Palestinian Arab Christians in Israel perceive themselves as a distinct ethnic group and also have a positive evaluation of their cultural group. In their relationship to the two majority groups, our respondents express higher preference to integrate with Israeli Jewish society (i.e., to adopt aspects of its culture without relinquishing their traditional culture); toward Muslim Arabs, their first preference is separation (involving relatively little inter-cultural contact with them). Other results suggest that Palestinian Arab Christians tend to regard Israeli Jewish society as a vehicle for Westernization. However, it seems clear that they are not willing to adopt every "Western" value and are selective in which values they choose to adopt. As to the perceptions of acculturation expectations held by Muslims and Jews, it would seem that Arab Christian youngsters feel a pressure to assimilate, particularly from the Israeli Jewish society. This perceived pressure can lead to psychological discomfort. Some implications of our findings for the cultural education of Arab Christian youth in Israel are explored, within the theoretical framework of multicultural education.