

Conflict Management Approaches in Palestinian Baptist intra-church conflict in Israel between 1990 and 2016, in Dialogue with Miroslav Volf's Theology of Reconciliation:  
an Analysis and Critical Evaluation

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2018 Middlesex University PhD

ABSTRACT

In the early 1990s, the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, changed its global philosophy of ministry and withdrew from direct involvement in the Baptist churches it planted, including in Israel. Around the same time, local churches started to split.

This research project seeks to contribute towards a solution to this problem by asking and answering both a sociological and a theological question: Sociologically, what are the nature and causes of the splits and how do Palestinian Baptist churches manage such intra-church conflict? Theologically, what are the desirable conflict management practices and how should they be adapted to local cultural traditions? The primary purpose of this research is to generate a local theory regarding a Palestinian theology of reconciliation which is both theologically and culturally relevant.

This thesis argues that the primary factor for church splits is the clash between the pastors' legacy of a 'hierarchical-patriarchal' approach and the younger generation's 'Congregationalist-democratic' approach, both grounded in, but each offering a different interpretation of Christian *theology* and Arab *culture*. It identifies four conflict management practices that are implemented by Palestinian Baptists in Israeli and holds that the main reason that the conflicts have not been resolved effectively is the clash between contenders' interpretations of theology and culture. The pastors' cultural-theological approach is a combination of traditional *sulha* and hierarchical theology that was customary in traditional Palestinian churches. By contrast, the younger generation's cultural-theological approach is a combination of alternative-legalist and Western-Baptist.

The thesis examines the relevance of Miroslav Volf's theology of reconciliation for the cases at hand. It argues that the model is indeed pertinent to Palestinian Baptists in Israel, who are in the process of investing new meanings into their theology of reconciliation. Yet, in order to be applicable to this context it requires cultural translation in eight elements: formality, dignity, venting, community, church practices, the not necessarily linear nature of the reconciliation process, to view divine justice as compatible with divine love and thus not separate them during conflict, and since conditional and unconditional forgiveness have much in common and differ in the way reconciliation is realized the focus should be on achieving reconciliation.