

The Revival of Palestinian Christianity

Developments in Palestinian Theology

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Abstract

Palestinian Christians are a minority of approximately 1 or 2% in a context marked by conflict, expulsions, and ongoing emigration. Despite all this, Palestinian Christians have made a significant contribution to society in the spheres of politics, the arts, science, and social welfare. Moreover, from the 1980s onwards, this Palestinian context of struggle has also been the source for the emergence of a socially and politically committed contextual theology. This article analyses the development of Palestinian contextual theology by examining theological publications by Palestinian theologians. It identifies liberation, reconciliation, witness, ecumenism, and interfaith-dialogue as some of the dominant theological themes. What unites these publications is a theological engagement with the Palestinian Christian identity in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Keywords

contextual theology – Israeli-Palestinian conflict – Kairos theology – Palestinian Christianity – Palestinian theology – public theology

1 An Arab Christian Awakening

Palestinian Christians feel deeply rooted in Palestinian society. They understand themselves as part of the Palestinian community and actively contribute to its flourishing. This article aims to outline how Palestinian Christians have embraced their vocation, in the words of Emeritus Patriarch Michel Sabbah, to

be “in the service of society.”¹ Michel Sabbah, born in Nazareth in 1933, was consecrated on 6th January, 1988, by Pope John Paul II as the first Palestinian-born Roman Catholic Patriarch of Jerusalem. This was a significant event in the recent history of the Palestinian church, highlighting the indigenization of religious leadership in the 1970s and 1980s. These indigenous Palestinian (and other Arab) church leaders gradually made their voices heard on topics like injustice, peace, and occupation, encouraging their religious communities not to lose hope. This development of indigenization has paved the way for a specific Palestinian strand of theological thought, as well as a feeling of public responsibility visible among both the clergy and laypeople in Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant denominations.

Not long after Michel Sabbah assumed his post as Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, he published his first pastoral letter on 15th August, 1988, in which he encouraged the faithful to “proclaim the message of the faith according to God’s Will: to carry out our mission means to serve Him and our fellow-men.”² With these words, Sabbah voiced a specific Palestinian theological theme that I call ‘the revival of Palestinian Christianity’: a spiritual, societal, and political awakening of the Palestinian church that started in the 1970s and which transformed the local churches into an important force for social and political change.

This revival is part of a longer, more gradual ‘Christian awakening’ in the Middle East, starting in the 19th century and continuing over the course of the 20th century, itself the result of the challenges of war, displacement, migration, European intervention, and an overall religious radicalisation in the Middle East. In this context, Arab Christians have found opportunities to contribute to social and political change. Examples are the Christian pioneers in Arab nationalist thinking during the *Nahḍa* (‘Arab Renaissance’) in Ottoman Syria,³ such as Butrus al-Bustani (1819-1883), a Maronite convert to Protestantism, as well as the Melkite (Greek Catholic) father and son Nasif Al-Yaziji (1800-1871) and Ibrahim Al-Yaziji (1847-1906). The Coptic Orthodox politician and

1 Michel Sabbah, *First Pastoral Letter “Our Faith in the Holy Land,”* Jerusalem 15th August 1988, § 45. <https://www.lpj.org/first-pastoral-letter-of-patriarch-michel-sabbah/> (accessed May 2020).

2 Sabbah, *First Pastoral Letter*, § 5.

3 Throughout this article, the transliteration system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES) has been used. Diacritical marks for transliterated terms have been used and all Arabic terms are italicised in the text, except for names of persons, places and organisations. The English spelling of places that have a clearly established English name, like Jerusalem (instead of the Arabic name Al-Quds), has been used. For names of persons, their own preferred spelling has been honoured.

diplomat in Egypt, Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1922-2016), is a more recent example of an Arab Christian with social and political influence, having served as Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1992 to 1996.

In terms of public visibility and engagement, Arab Christians have also been influential in the arts and sciences. For example, the voice of Lebanese Greek Orthodox singer Fairuz (b. 1935) is regularly heard on radio broadcasts all over the Levant. Born in an Anglican Palestinian family, literary critic Edward Said (1935-2003) has been one of the most influential thinkers in recent scholarship, well-known for his theory of Orientalism.⁴ Arab Christians have also been influential in social welfare, for instance in the flourishing of the press in 19th and 20th century Lebanon and Egypt, not to mention their influence in the areas of education and health care, mainly due to their contact with Western missionary work.⁵

This article contests the common and rather pessimist discourse on Christians in the Middle East. Themes of suffering and the impending disappearance of Middle Eastern Christianity seemed to dominate in the writings of historians such as Frenchman Jean-Pierre Valognes and American Philip Jenkins, but also appeared in the works of more popular writers such as Scottish William Dalrymple.⁶ Christians in the Middle East, Palestinian Christians included, do indeed live in vulnerable circumstances with declining numbers. Statistics of the *World Christian Database* reveal that Christians

4 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003 [1978]). Born to a Protestant family, Said identified as a secular humanist. However, Said was the keynote speaker during Sabeel's first international conference in Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem in 1990, a clearly Christian-oriented event (which will be referred to later in this article).

5 See, for example: Deanna Ferree Womack, *Protestants, Gender and the Arab Renaissance in Late Ottoman Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019); David D. Grafton, *The Contested Origins of the 1865 Arabic Bible: Contributions to the Nineteenth Century Nahḍa* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Heather J. Sharkey, "American Missionaries, the Arabic Bible, and Coptic Reform in Late Nineteenth-century Egypt," in *American Missionaries and the Middle East: Foundational Encounters*, (eds.). Mehmet Ali Doğan and Heather J. Sharkey (Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2011), 237-59; Heather J. Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Qustandi Shomali, "Palestinian Christians: Politics, Press and Religious Identity 1900-1948," in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, (eds.). Anthony O'Mahony, Göran Gunner & Kevork Hintlian (London: Scorpion Cavendish Ltd, 1995), 225-36.

6 Jean-Pierre Valognes, *Vie et mort des chrétiens d'Orient: Des origines à nos jours* (Life and Death of Middle Eastern Christians: From the Origins to the Present Day) (Paris: Fayard, 1994); Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia—and How it Died* (Oxford: Lion Hudson PLC, 2008); William Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain: A journey in the shadow of Byzantium* (London: Harper Press, 1998).

make up 0.82% of the population in the Palestinian Territories and 2% of the population in Israel.⁷ These Palestinian Christians live as a tiny minority in a context marked by armed and ideological conflict, expulsions, and ongoing emigration. Palestinian Christians are suffering from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and—as Middle Eastern Christians in general—from the rise of militant Islamic groups. On top of that, about half of the Palestinian population lives outside the borders of the historical Palestine of 1948,⁸ which makes them a people in diaspora. Consequently, Palestinian Christians are often categorised as “a threatened form of Christianity”, “a Christian neighbour to the Muslims”, or “a minority in need of help (from the West)”.⁹

While acknowledging the harsh situation in which Palestinian Christians are living, this article aims to demonstrate how Palestinian Christians have brought about a revival and played a significant role in creating a society based on the principles of justice, peace, and reconciliation. This article specifically focuses on the public role of Palestinian contextual theology as reflected in Palestinian theological works. Accordingly, the first part of the article presents the historical and theological developments since the 1980s, and the second part reviews the scope of Palestinian theology. This article therefore functions as an overview of Palestinian theology and distinguishes itself from earlier presentations by prioritising the contextual developments in various local churches that contributed to the revival mentioned above. In the author’s opinion, it is more fruitful to study theological developments in their broader, holistic context instead of taking a more enumerative, systematic approach, which merely focuses on thematic perspectives such as liberation, the Bible, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or the influence of Protestant/Evangelical Palestinian theologians.¹⁰ While the author, as part of the PhD project, has con-

7 Todd M. Johnson & Gina A. Zurlo (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, accessed May 2020).

8 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Palestine in Figures 2019* (Ramallah, 2020), 11. <http://pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2513.pdf> (accessed May 2020).

9 See, for example: Amahl Bishara, “Covering the Christians of the Holy Land,” *Middle East Research and Information Project* 43/2 (2013), 7-14.

10 For an overview with a more systematic approach, see for example: Rafiq Khoury, “Palestinian Contextual Theology: A general survey,” in *Christian Theology in the Palestinian Context*, (eds.) Rafiq Khoury & Rainer Zimmer-Winkel (Berlin: Aphorisma Verlag, 2019), 9-46. Other scholars have emphasized only one aspect of Palestinian theology. On Palestinian liberation theology: Samuel J. Kuruvilla, *Radical Christianity in Palestine and Israel: Liberation and Theology in the Middle East* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2013); Laura C. Robson, “Palestinian liberation theology, Muslim-Christian relations and the Arab-Israeli conflict,” *Islam and Christian Muslim Relations* 21/1 (2010), 39-50. On the Bible: Lance C. Laird, “Meeting Jesus Again in the First Place: Palestinian Christians and

ducted interviews with all of the Palestinian theologians who are mentioned below, this article is a literature study and relies primarily on Palestinian theological publications, mainly, but not exclusively, those produced in English.

2 The Emergence of Palestinian Theology

Contextual theology can be defined as “the attempt to understand the Christian faith in terms of a particular context”.¹¹ Roman Catholic authors such as Stephen Bevans and Robert Schreiter argue that context is at the very centre of theology. Beside the two classical *loci theologici* of Scripture and tradition, contextual theology adds a third theological source, namely the locus of the human experience or the context. In his reflection on the birth of Palestinian theology, Father Rafiq Khoury (b. 1943), Palestinian theologian and vicar of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, writes that Palestinian theology indeed developed from experience to reflection, and from general “Christian thought” to a well-formulated body of “contextual theology”.¹² Recent events in the second part of the 20th century, such as war, displacement, and colonial intervention, made Palestinian Christians start asking questions about their identity. In the words of Khoury:

It started from the base, at the grassroots level, among those who were daily living through the tragedy. It started in the form of questions that these people began to ask themselves spontaneously: Who are we? What is the meaning of our presence in the Holy Land? What is our identity? What are our vocation, mission, and witness? What does it mean to be

the Bible,” *Interpretations* 55/4 (2001), 400-12; Janneke Stegeman, “Remembering the land: Jeremiah 32 and in Palestinian narrative and identity,” *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 26/1 (2013), 41-54. On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Alain Epp Weaver, *Inhabiting the Land: Thinking Theologically about the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018), 46-68; On Protestant/Evangelical theologians: Yohanna Katanacho, “Palestinian Protestant theological responses to a world marked by violence,” *Missiology: An International Review* 36/3 (2008), 289-305. A thorough, but dated study that traces the history of Palestinian theological developments: Uwe Gräbe, *Kontextuelle Palästinensische Theologie: Streitbare und Umstrittene Beiträge zum Ökumenischen und Interreligiösen Gespräch* (Contextual Palestinian Theology. Disputatious and controversial contribution to the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue) (Erlangen: Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, 1998).

11 Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*. Revised and Expanded Edition (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002 [1992]), 3. Another seminal work in contextual theology: Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (London: SCM Press, 1985).

12 Khoury, “Palestinian Contextual Theology,” 18.

an Arab Palestinian Christian here and now? Where do we come from? What are our roots? Where are we going? What are the questions put before our Christian conscience by the tragedy of our Palestinian people? What is our position? Our attitude? What is the originality of our contribution to the struggle of the Palestinian people? ... and many other questions besides.¹³

For some Palestinian theologians, the seed for theological reflection was sown during the *Nakba* ('catastrophe'), referring to the 'disaster of 1948' when more than 700,000 Arab refugees fled or were expelled from their villages. This had disruptive consequences on different levels of human existence, identity, and theology.¹⁴ The Melkite archbishop from Haifa, Joseph Raya (1916-2005), was the first church official who spoke out for the Christian victims of the *Nakba*.¹⁵ He fought for the rights of the villagers of Iqrit and Kufr Baram, two Christian villages in Galilee in northern Israel, whose inhabitants were driven out in 1948, and which were finally bulldozed in 1951.

Other theologians point to the *Naksa* ('setback'), the Six-Day War of 1967, as the decisive event that shaped the emergence of Palestinian contextual theology.¹⁶ Israel defeated a joint front of Arab nations and took over the Palestinian-populated West Bank (previously controlled by Jordan), the Golan Heights (previously controlled by Syria), and the Gaza-strip and Sinai Peninsula (previously controlled by Egypt). This defeat caused shock waves through the Arab world, but simultaneously gave rise to independent Palestinian thought, both politically and theologically. It also changed broader Arab patterns of thinking concerning religious concepts such as violence in the Old Testament, God's covenant with the Jewish people, and the identity of Jesus and his connection to Judaism. This was illustrated in the first major Arab theological document that dealt with the Arab-Israeli conflict after the Six-Day War: *A theological perspective on the Arab-Israeli conflict*, written by a group of Lebanese and Syrian theologians.¹⁷ Another important step on the road to

13 Rafiq Khoury, "Palestinian Contextual Theology," 16f.

14 E.g. Naim Ateek, interviewed by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Jerusalem, 22th February 2018; Elias Chacour, interviewed by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Ibilin, 19th July 2018. See also: Cedar Duaybis, "The Three-fold Nakba," *Cornerstone* 66/summer (2013), 8f.

15 Cf. Naim S. Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice and the Palestine-Israel Conflict* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017), 124f.

16 E.g. Rafiq Khoury, interviewed by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Jerusalem, 28th December 2017; Michel Sabbah, interviewed by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Taybeh, 1st December 2017.

17 Cf. George F. Sabra, "Theology," in *Edinburgh Companions to Global Christianity: Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, (eds.). Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros & Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 325-34.

Palestinian contextual theology was taken on 20th April, 1971, with the creation of the *Justice and Peace Committee/Jerusalem* of the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land, under the banner of the episcopate of the Catholic Church in Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Cyprus. This committee published its first document in 1980 on the political commitment of Palestinian Christians, and has continued to produce further publications concerning the Palestinian Christian community.¹⁸

2.1 *First Phase (1984-2000): Giving a Voice to Palestinian Christians*

It was not until the 1980s that Palestinian contextual theology began to take its current shape. In 1984, Melkite Emeritus Archbishop Elias Chacour (b. 1939) published *Blood Brothers: The Dramatic Story of a Palestinian Christian working for Peace in Israel*, a memoir that can be conceived as the first contextual theological book by a Palestinian theologian.¹⁹ Chacour was a young priest in the time of Archbishop Raya and came from Kufr Baram, one of the Christian villages destroyed after the *Nakba*. Chacour produced a narrative theology; he wrote his own personal story of displacement and formulated a theology on the Palestinian connection to the land. Later, this genre was also used by other theologians like Naim Ateek, Alex Awad, Munther Isaac, and Mitri Raheb, whose works are either based on biographies or on anecdotes from their own lives.

A next milestone in the history of Palestinian contextual theology was the publication of *Theology and the Local Church in the Holy Land* in 1987, by the Al-Liqa' ('Encounter') Center in Bethlehem, which a Melkite named Geris Khoury (1952-2016) founded in 1982 and presided over until 2016. Since then, a Roman Catholic named Yousef Zaknoun has directed the center.²⁰ The

18 For more information, see the website of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land: <http://catholicchurch-holyland.com> (accessed July 2020).

19 Elias Chacour, *Blood Brothers: The Dramatic Story of a Palestinian Christian working for Peace in Israel*. Updated Edition (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2003). His later books include: Elias Chacour, *We Belong to the Land: The Story of a Palestinian Israeli who Lives for Peace and Reconciliation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001); Elias Chacour, *Faith beyond Despair: Building Hope in the Holy Land*. Trans. by A. Harvey (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008).

20 Al-Liqa' Center, *Basis Document: Theology and the Local Church in the Holy Land*, 3rd ed. (Bethlehem: Al-Liqa' Center for Religious and Heritage Studies in the Holy Land, 2015). Those involved in writing this basic document are: Father Rafiq Khoury, Joseph Zaknoun, Adnan Musallam, The Reverend Munib Younan, George Hantilian, Peter Qumri, Shukri Sambar and Geris Khoury. For an overview, see: Al-Liqa' Center, *Al-Liqa' Center, The Center for Religious and Heritage Studies in the Holy Land: 25 the Silver Jubilee, 1982-2007* (Al-Liqa' Center for Religious and Heritage Studies in the Holy Land, 2007).

Al-Liqa' Center was established as a small initiative but quickly developed into one of the main institutes for local Palestinian theology. The foundational idea behind Al-Liqa' was that religion in the Middle East stands for more than just piety and needs to be seen as a force influencing social and political movements. In the opinion of the founders, the church needs to understand her own identity, using the hermeneutics of contextual theology and ecumenical cooperation to formulate an answer to the question of Palestinian Christian identity. The 1987 document was designed to serve as a starting point for a local theological movement and was used at one of the first conferences Al-Liqa' organised at Tantur, an international ecumenical institute in Jerusalem. The authors conclude: "... the task is to contribute, each within his specialization, to the building of the church and the serving of society."²¹ Another publication, called *Al-Liqa' Journal* (in Arabic from 1985 onwards and in English since 1992), presents socially and politically motivated articles, written by Palestinian scholars from diverse backgrounds.

Hence, Palestinian contextual theology emerged in the 1980s as a politically and socially committed enterprise. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, this runs parallel with the outbreak of the First *Intifada* ('Uprising') on 8th December 1987. This was a time in which the Palestinians were feeling tired, frustrated, and helpless after twenty years of occupation and felt discouraged about the political climate within both the Israeli government and the Palestinian leadership. This caused the Palestinian people to become more outspoken and seize the initiative by establishing new grassroots movements; the *Intifadas* can be understood as an answer of revolt, and Al-Liqa' as an answer from theology. This development of a Palestinian theology was advanced because of the indigenization of religious leadership in the Catholic and Protestant denominations in the 1970s and 1980s. And thus, with the eruption of the First *Intifada*, the indigenous Arab leaders made their voices heard. Less than two months after the First *Intifada*, on 22nd of January, 1988, the Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches of Jerusalem issued their first of many joint statements against the Israeli occupation. These statements continue to be issued right up to the present day.²²

A subsequent development in Palestinian contextual theology was the emergence of a Palestinian liberation theology. The Reverend Naim Ateek (b. 1937), an Anglican priest, has been seen as the father of Palestinian liberation theology.

21 Al-Liqa', *Basis Document*, 18.

22 For an overview of the statements from 1988 until 2008, see: Melanie A. May, *Jerusalem Testament: Palestinian Christians Speak, 1988-2008* (Grand Rapids & Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2010).

In 1989 he published his book *Justice, and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, the first serious attempt of a Palestinian Christian to provide a counterargument to a (Christian) Zionist reading of the Bible.²³ After the publication of his book, Ateek founded Sabeel ('the Way') Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, which is currently located in Shu'afat, a neighbourhood in East Jerusalem. Where Al-Liqa' was essentially an encounter between local Palestinians focussing on ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, Sabeel (although initially addressing the local church) was internationally connected, and its leaders' writings were characterised by theological activism.

In 1990, Sabeel organized its first conference on Palestinian liberation theology at Tantur Ecumenical Institute. There were ten international participants from across the world, including the United States, Ireland, South Africa, The Philippines, Zimbabwe, and Sri Lanka, joined by around forty local participants.²⁴ This was the beginning of a global movement of groups called Friends of Sabeel in several countries in North America and Europe. Nearly all Sabeel's material is written in English, which has aided Palestinian liberation theology to gain attention and support throughout the world. Palestinian liberation theology began as a response to Western Christian theologies about Israel. The movement could therefore be critiqued for not sufficiently reaching Palestinian laypeople. Ateek was, however, of significant importance for his own Arab church community. He served as Canon of the Anglican St. George Cathedral in Jerusalem from 1985 until 1997 and preached every Sunday during the time of the First *Intifada*. After each of those services, Ateek listened to the reflections of his congregation on the sermons and on the Gospel in relation to the political situation they were living in. These moments provided inspiration for his books on liberation theology.²⁵

Another prominent theologian in this field is the Reverend Mitri Raheb (b. 1962), a Lutheran pastor who calls himself a contextual theologian rather than a liberation theologian—although his concerns are similar to Ateek's. In fact, some distinguish 'Palestinian liberation theology' (*lahūt al-tahrīr al-Filastīnī*) from 'Palestinian contextual theology' (*lahūt al-siyāqī al-Filastīnī*),²⁶ but this article considers liberation theology to be part of Palestinian contextual

23 Naim S. Ateek, *Justice, and only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989). Later Ateek published two other books concerning Palestinian liberation theology: Naim S. Ateek, *A Palestinian Cry for Reconciliation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008); Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology*.

24 Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology*, 130.

25 Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology*, 37ff.

26 E.g. Jamal Khader, interviewed by Elizabeth Marteiijn, Ramallah, 21st December 2017; Weaver, *Inhabiting the Land*, 53.

theology. Raheb became pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem in 1987,²⁷ and started publishing in 1990.²⁸ Raheb's first book in English, *I am a Palestinian Christian* (1995),²⁹ mainly addresses the identity of Palestinian Christians and Biblical interpretations of topics such as election, the Promised Land, the Exodus, violence, suffering, and loving one's neighbour. In his later work, Raheb provides arguments against what he calls "imperial theology": a divine purpose of the empire in an ideological or theological framework.³⁰ Raheb explains what this imperial theology entails for Palestinians, saying:

It is noteworthy that, on the issue of Palestine, both supposedly liberal Western theology and conservative and fundamentalist theology are uncritical of the State of Israel and contain a pro-Israeli bias, choosing to ignore the presence and suffering of the native Palestinian people. We are still far away from the moment where Western and Jewish theologians will ask Palestinians for forgiveness for the harm done to them and their land in the name of the Divine.³¹

Raheb is a very productive theologian: he has published sixteen books in different languages,³² dozens of articles, and numerous co-authored or edited books. Furthermore, Raheb established the center *Dar al-Nadwa* in Bethlehem in 1995 as an international forum for the dialogue between faith and culture, *Dar al-Kalima* College in 2006, and *Diyar* publishing house in 2011. Hence, similar to

27 For an overview of his sermons, see: Mitri Raheb, *Lakulli maqāmin maqālun: 'Izaat larubu' qarn: 1988-2013* (For every situation a comment: Sermons for a quarter century: 1988-2013) (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2013).

28 Mitri Raheb, *Das reformatorische Erbe unter den Palästinensern: Zur Entstehung der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche in Jordanien* (The Reformed Heritage among the Palestinians: The Emergence of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Jordan) (Guetersloh: Guetersloher Verlagshaus, 1990).

29 Mitri Raheb, *I am a Palestinian Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). A similar book was first published in German a year earlier: Mitri Raheb, *Ich bin Christ und Palästinenser: Israel, seine Nachbarn und die Bibel* (I am Christian and Palestinian: Israel, its neighbours, and the Bible) (Guetersloh: Guetersloher Verlagshaus, 1994).

30 Mitri Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible through Palestinian Eyes* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014).

31 Raheb, *Faith*, 65f.

32 Raheb also published the following books in English: Mitri Raheb and Suzanne Watts Henderson, *The Cross in Context: Suffering and Redemption in Palestine* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017); Mitri Raheb, *Sailing Through Troubled Waters: Christianity in the Middle East* (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2013); Mitri Raheb, *Bethlehem Besieged* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

Ateek's theological activism, Raheb's work merges theology and public engagement, contributing not only to the development of Palestinian theology, but also to Palestinian society in general.

2.2 *Second Phase (from 2000 Onwards): Localising the Theological Questions*

While the 1980s brought the formal emergence of Palestinian theology, by the turn of the new millennium this theological revival had moved into a new phase of contextual reflection. When Pope John Paul II visited Israel and the Palestinian Territories during his Millennium Pilgrimage in March 2000, it raised the morale of Palestinian Christians. Like his predecessor Pope Paul VI in January 1964—the first pope to visit the Holy Land in modern history—Pope John Paul II said that the suffering of the Palestinians must end, and that Palestinian people have a natural right to a homeland. In his Easter Message of 23th April, 2000, Patriarch Michel Sabbah reflected on the papal visit, emphasising the Pope's times of deep prayer at the Holy Places and summarising the Pope's message with the following words: "... be courageous, accept your vocation, and accomplish your mission in your different societies in the land of Jesus."³³ Hence, Roman Catholic leadership has shown awareness of Palestinian Christian suffering.

This contrasts with the situation of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, where the Greek hierarchy has frequently clashed with their Arab priests and laity since the end of the Ottoman Empire.³⁴ These conflicting relations came especially to light during the Second *Intifada* (2000-2005) when the Palestinian Archbishop Theodosios Hanna (also known as Atallah Hanna; b. 1965) acted as official spokesperson of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Archbishop Theodosios is known for his outspoken political activism, which has caused frequent clashes with the majority-Greek clergy of his church—and even more so with the Israeli authorities, who arrested and interrogated Archbishop Theodosios several times during the Second *Intifada*. As one of

33 Michel Sabbah, "Easter Message, 23 April 2000," § 3, in *Faithful Witness: On Reconciliation and Peace in the Holy Land*, (eds.) Michel Sabbah (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2009), 126ff.

34 This clash has been documented by, for example: Anna Hager, "The Orthodox Issue in Jordan: The Struggle for an Arab and Orthodox Identity," *Studies in World Christianity* 24/3 (2018), 212-23; Samuel J. Kuruvilla, "Church-State Relations in Palestine: Empires, Arab-Nationalism and the indigenous Greek Orthodox, 1880-1940," *Holy Land Studies* 10/1 (2011), 55-71; Laura C. Robson, "Communalism and Nationalism in the Mandate: The Greek Orthodox Controversy and the National Movement," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 41/1 (2011), 6-23; Sotiris Roussos, "The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and Community of Jerusalem," in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, (eds.) Anthony O'Mahony, Göran Gunner and Kevork Hintlian (London: Scorpion Cavendish, 1995), 211-24.

just four high-ranking Arab clerics in the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Archbishop Theodosios Atallah Hanna is an exception to the rather distanced leadership of the Greek Orthodox hierarchy.

Local Palestinian leaders, such as Patriarch Michel Sabbah and Archbishop Theodosios, were beacons of hope for the Palestinian Christian community during times of crisis and uncertainty, expounding their contextual theology in sermons, pastoral letters, and media appearances. In 2003, three years into the *Intifada*, Father Jamal Khader (b. 1964) was appointed as the new Chairperson of the Department of Religious Studies of Bethlehem University, a Roman Catholic institution.³⁵ This was another important step forward for contextual theology, as this department started to organise local and international conferences on contextual theological topics. Further progress came in 2005, towards the end of the *Intifada*, when Lutheran human rights activist Rifat Kassis (b. 1958) gathered an ecumenical group of fifteen Palestinian Christians, both clergy and laypeople, to work on a Palestinian Kairos document, patterned on its South African counterpart of 1985.³⁶ On 11th December, 2009, this group presented the *Palestinian Kairos Document* in Bethlehem, urging Palestinians to be steadfast, patient, and resist the occupier in non-violent ways. The text challenges churches of all denominations to get involved in current debates within the tradition of love for the oppressed. The document boldly calls the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land “a sin against God and humanity”:

We also declare that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land is a sin against God and humanity because it deprives the Palestinians of their basic human rights, bestowed by God. It distorts the image of God in the Israeli who has become an occupier just as it distorts this image in the Palestinian living under occupation. We declare that any theology,

35 Some of his writings include: Jamal Khader, “Religions in the Service of Peace? The Case of Palestine/Israel,” in *The Role of Religion in Peacebuilding: Crossing the Boundaries of Prejudice and Distrust*, (eds.). Pauline Kollontai, Sue Yore, and Sebastian Kim (London & Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018), 226-42; Jamal Khader, “Countering Violence in the name of God in Present Day Palestine/Israel,” *The Ecumenical Review* 68/1 (2016), 81-94; Jamal Khader, “The Context of *Kairos Palestine*,” *The Ecumenical Review* 64/1 (2012), 3-6.

36 The fifteen authors of the Kairos Palestine Document (2009): Patriarch Michel Sabbah, Archbishop Theodosios (Atallah Hanna), Father Jamal Khader, Father Rafiq Khoury, The Reverend Mitri Raheb, The Reverend Naim Ateek, The Reverend Yohanna Katanacho, The Reverend Fadi Diab, Gerjes Khoury, Cedar Duaybis, Nora Kort, Lucy Thaljih, Nidal Abu Zuluf, Yusef Daher, and Rifat Kassis (coordinator). For background information on the Palestinian Kairos movement, see: Rifat Odeh Kassis, *Kairos for Palestine* (Ramallah: Badayl/Alternatives, 2011).

seemingly based on the Bible or on faith or on history, that legitimizes the occupation, is far from Christian teachings, because it calls for violence and holy war in the name of God Almighty, subordinating God to temporary human interests, and distorting the divine image in the human beings living under both political and theological injustice.³⁷

Originally published in Arabic and English, the Palestinian Kairos Document has now been translated into 21 languages. After the so-called “Bethlehem-call”, a conference in Bethlehem in 2011, Kairos Palestine has evolved into a Global Kairos Network, which is currently present in eleven countries worldwide.

Lastly, some of the newest developments in the field of Palestinian contextual work have taken place in the young and quickly advancing strand of Evangelical Palestinian theology.³⁸ Centres for Evangelical Palestinian theology include Bethlehem Bible College (established in 1979) and Nazareth Evangelical College (established in 2014). The Evangelical voice especially gained attention through the first Christ at the Checkpoint conference in Bethlehem 2010, which aimed to “reclaim the prophetic role in bringing peace, justice and reconciliation in Palestine and Israel.”³⁹ Now, once every two years, these Christ at the Checkpoint conferences are organised under the auspices of Bethlehem Bible College and led by local Palestinian Evangelicals.

37 Kairos Palestine, *A Moment of Truth: A word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering* (Bethlehem: Kairos Palestine, 2009), § 2.5.

38 For more information on Palestinian Evangelicals, see: Azar Ajjaj, Duane Alexander Miller & Philip Sumpter, *Arab Evangelicals in Israel* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2016). A selection of theological publications from Palestinian Evangelicals includes: Alex Awad, *Palestinian Memories: A Story of a Palestinian Mother and her People* (Bethlehem: Bethlehem Bible College, 2012); Munther Isaac, *The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2020); Munther Isaac, *From Land to Lands, from Eden to the Renewed Earth: A Christ-Centered Biblical Theology of the Promised Land* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2015); Yohanna Katanacho, *Praying through the Psalms* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2018); Yohanna Katanacho, *The Land of Christ: A Palestinian Cry* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013); Salim J. Munayer & Lisa Loden, *Through my Enemies Eyes: Envisioning Reconciliation in Israel-Palestine* (Crownhill: Paternoster, 2014); Salim J. Munayer & Lisa Loden (eds.), *The Land Cries Out: Theology of Reconciliation in the Israeli-Palestinian Context* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011).

39 Christ at the Checkpoint Conference Committee, *The Christ at the Checkpoint Manifesto*, statement 1. <https://christatthecheckpoint.bethbc.edu/about-christ-at-the-checkpoint/> (accessed May 2020). For a selection of papers presented during the conferences, see: Manfred W. Kohl & Munther Isaac, *Christ at the Checkpoint: Blessed are the Peacemakers* (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2018).

Hence, just as the First *Intifada* functioned as a stimulus for Palestinian clergy and theologians to become more outspoken, the developments in the early years of the 21st century made Palestinian theology more localised. Currently, one can speak of a systematised body of Palestinian contextual works. Fourteen Palestinian theologians have published contextual theology books in English, Arabic or German; and this number is significantly higher if one counts Palestinian theologians who have contributed to the *Al-Liqa' Journal*, those who have spoken at national or international conferences, or those who teach at local universities and seminaries.⁴⁰ At the end of April 2017, the book *Madkhal ilā al-lahūt al-Filasṭīnī* (*Introduction to Palestinian Theology*) was launched.⁴¹ This book was edited by a Lutheran theologian, the Reverend Munther Isaac (b. 1979), and contains the first systematic overview of Palestinian theology, with articles from the main players in the field. The first edited volume of this sort in English was published in January 2019 under the title *Christian Theology in the Palestinian Context*, edited by Father Rafiq Khoury and Rainer Zimmer-Winkel.⁴² The publication of these books clearly indicates that the field of Palestinian contextual theology—since its emergence around 35 years ago—is burgeoning, with participants from across the Christian spectrum.

Nevertheless, many of these developments have been overlooked in Western theological circles and also in the field of World Christianity, despite its attention to theological developments outside of Europe and North America. This is partly because the development of Arab contextual theology came later and was slower to develop than in some other regions of the world. The other reason for this lack of academic attention is the very different status of Christianity in the Middle East: in contrast to Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia, Christianity in the Middle East is dwindling. Hence, the trajectory of Christianity in the Middle East does not fit the general assumption underlying the field of World Christianity that the number of Christians in the Global South is growing rapidly.⁴³

40 These fourteen theologians include The Reverend Naim S. Ateek, The Reverend Alex Awad, Father Elias Chacour, The Reverend Munther Isaac, The Reverend Yohanna Katanacho, Father Jamal Khader, Geris Khoury, Father Rafiq Khoury, Rula Khoury Mansour, Salim J. Munayer, The Reverend Mitri Raheb, Patriarch Michel Sabbah, Bishop Munib A. Younan, and Jean Zaru.

41 Munther Isaac (ed.), *Madkhal ilā al-lahūt al-Filasṭīnī* (*Introduction to Palestinian Theology*) (Bethlehem: Diyar Publisher, 2017).

42 Khoury and Zimmer-Winkel (eds.), *Christian Theology*.

43 Dyron B. Daugherty, "Ignoring the East: Correcting a Serious Flaw in World Christianity Scholarship," in *Religion on the Move! New Dynamics of Christian Expansion in a Globalizing*

3 The Scope of Palestinian Theology

Palestinian theologians have been pioneers, playing an exemplary role in the emergence of a broader spectrum of Arab theology, and hence have made a significant contribution to Arab thought in general.⁴⁴ Palestinian theology offers a deep reflection on the recent history of the Middle East—a history of political turmoil, conflict, human suffering, and an ongoing flow of refugees. Broadly speaking, there are currently four major themes in Palestinian theological works, most of which this article has already alluded to: 1) liberation, 2) reconciliation, 3) witness, and 4) ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. This final section provides an in-depth examination of these distinct, but interconnected themes. Many Palestinian contextual theologians reflect on all four themes, but have a particular emphasis. In addition, these themes carry a varying weight of importance dependent on the given situation at different periods of time. What unites all these theologians, though, is their theological engagement with their identity as Palestinian Christians, and their reflection on the social and political context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

3.1 *Liberation*

One of the distinct strands in Palestinian contextual theology is liberation theology. Influenced by postcolonial theories, the liberation theme encompasses a broad spectrum of connected topics including biblical hermeneutics, modern Israel, the status of the Old Testament, the Exodus narrative, the covenant, election, the land, and Christian Zionism. This theme is found, for example, in the work of Munther Isaac, Yohanna Katanacho, and Mitri Raheb. Most prominently, Palestinian liberation theology is found in the writings of Naim Ateek, the author of *Justice, and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (1989) and founder of Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Center. Ateek aims to find a new biblical hermeneutic that emphasises a universal, inclusive view of God, over against the restrictive, exclusive views of some Jews and certain Western Christian theologians. Palestinian liberation theology, as developed

World, (eds.). Afe Adogame and Shobana Shankar (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 41-59; Womack, *Protestants, Gender and the Arab Renaissance*, 336.

44 Cf. Elizabeth S. Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 207-13. A similar development of contextualised Arab theology took place in other places in the Middle East, see Antoine Fleyfel, *La Théologie Contextuelle Arabe: Modèle Libanais* (Arab Contextual Theology: Lebanese Model) (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011); Andrea Zaki Stephanous (ed.), *Arabic Christian Theology: A contemporary Global Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019).

by Ateek, differs profoundly from the Latin American variant as expounded, for example, by the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez,⁴⁵ since it addresses Zionist and colonial oppression instead of focussing on economic oppression as the direct result of colonialism.⁴⁶ In Western academia, Palestinian liberation ideas are among the most discussed theological concepts of Palestinian theology.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, Palestinian liberation theology has not had a wide audience among Palestinian laypeople and could therefore be described as a movement of the Palestinian Christian elite.

3.2 *Reconciliation*

A second major theme in Palestinian theology is reconciliation. The narrative of liberation was often heard in the 1980s, 1990s, and at the beginning of the 2000s, the time of political tension and *Intifadas*. More recently, Palestinian theologians have begun to portray themselves as active reconcilers instead of critical liberationists. Concepts of reconciliation are found, for example, in the writings of Elias Chacour and Salim Munayer and in the work of two prominent women theologians, Rula Khoury Mansour and Jean Zaru.⁴⁸ Salim Munayer (b. 1955) made reconciliation the main theme of his work and founded the organisation *Musalaha* ('Reconciliation') in Jerusalem, which aims to build bridges between different segments of the Israeli and Palestinian society according to reconciliation principles derived from the Bible. Instead of focussing on different ethnic and nationalistic identities, *Musalaha's* theological emphasis points to the biblical concept of new identity in Christ, making it

45 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (London: SCM, 1988).

46 For a comparison between Palestinian liberation theology and Latin American liberation theology, see: Brian Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), 231-7; Samuel J. Kuruvilla, "Theologies of Liberation in Latin America and Palestine-Israel in Comparative Perspective: Contextual Differences and Practical Similarities," *Holy Land Studies* 9/1 (2010), 51-69.

47 This becomes apparent in, for example: Michel Elias Andraos, "Palestinian Theology of Reconciliation: A Cry of Hope in the Absence of All Hope," *VOICES Theological Journal of Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians* 36/1 (2013), 47-59; Kuruvilla, *Radical Christianity*; Robson, "Palestinian liberation theology"; Andrea Zaki Stephanous and Jos M. Strengtholt, "Middle Eastern and Arab Theology," in *Global Dictionary of Theology*, (eds.) William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Downers Grove & Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 537-42.

48 Chacour, *Blood Brothers*; Rula Khoury Mansour, *Theology of Reconciliation in the Context of Church Relations: A Palestinian Christian Perspective in Dialogue with Miroslav Volf* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2020); Munayer & Loden, *Through*; Jean Zaru, *Occupied with Non-Violence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

possible for opposing people to meet and reconcile in this new identity. One could question, however, whether such a focus on reconciliation can be viewed separately from the concept of liberation. Ateek, for example, has argued that liberation and reconciliation are interconnected, but that liberation and justice are necessary before any form of reconciliation can be achieved.⁴⁹

3.3 *Witness*

The theme of ‘witness,’ the most widespread and popular theological concept among current Palestinian clergy, can be found in different sources, especially in the statements of the Heads of churches in Jerusalem. It is also apparent in the work of Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah who has said that it is the vocation of Palestinian Christians to bear the witness of Jesus Christ “first of all, in the face of the holiness of this land, then in the face of the difficult birth of peace and justice in it, and in the face of the oppression and the violation of the dignity of the human person, which is being perpetrated here.”⁵⁰ Therefore, a Palestinian Christian theology of witness strives first of all for justice and then, in second place, for a Christian contribution to society. Bishop Emeritus Munib Younan (b. 1950) calls this a theology of *martyria* (Greek for ‘witness’) and focuses on the social role of Christianity. He describes witness as a creative *diakonia*, where the Christian faith functions as an inspiration to establish schools, universities, Bible translations, and ecumenical movements.⁵¹ The concept of witness is, therefore, most apparent in the public role played by Christians in society. However, a theology of witness does not speak radical truths to long-standing injustices in the same way liberation and reconciliation theologies do.

3.4 *Ecumenical and Interfaith Dialogue*

Fourthly, a recurring theme in Palestinian contextual works is ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. Organisations such as Al-Liqa’, Sabeel, and Kairos Palestine are all ecumenical initiatives. The organisation Al-Liqa’ has organised yearly conferences for Christian-Muslim dialogue since 1983. This has long been a group for the Arab intelligentsia, who promote Palestinian nationalism,

49 Ateek, *Justice*, 180f.

50 Michel Sabbah, “Homily at the Benedictine Abbey Hagia Maria Sion in Jerusalem, Pentecost Sunday 8th June 2003,” § 3, in Sabbah, *Faithful*, 165ff.

51 Munib A. Younan, “Anniversary Worship Service in the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem, Sunday 17th May 2009,” in *Our Shared Witness: A Voice for Justice and Reconciliation*, (eds.). Munib A. Younan (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2012), 41-5. See also: Munib A. Younan, *Witnessing for Peace: In Jerusalem and the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

unity, and dialogue. Father Rafiq Khoury, who is also part of Al-Liqa', states that Christian-Muslim relations in Palestine are a special case.⁵² Palestine is situated at the crossroads of three continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe) and of three world religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam). Palestinian Christians have gone through an advanced stage of Arabisation, Khoury argues. In fact, he describes Palestine as "that part that Arabized the most".⁵³ Furthermore, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict made Palestinian Christians and Muslims not suffer *from* each other, but *with* each other. One could also reference such Palestinian solidarity to explain the ecumenical attempts for church unity and national unity made by the Patriarchs and Heads of Christian communities in their joint statements concerning the Israeli occupation. The question remains, though: What will happen to this church unity and interreligious dialogue if group interests do not coincide any longer but oppose each other?

4 Some Remarks

Although this article has specifically focussed on texts written by Palestinian theologians and church leaders, there are parallel developments in popular religious expressions, such as pilgrimage and the veneration of saints. This has been highlighted in articles on the popular Palestinian Saint George veneration and on the way Palestinian Christians deal with the historicity of biblical places.⁵⁴ Furthermore, Palestinian Christians are locally active in the sphere of civil society, education, health care, and the arts.⁵⁵ On the political level,

52 Rafiq Khoury, "Future of Muslim-Christian Relations in Palestine," *Al-Liqa' Journal* 11 & 12 (1998), 88-113. Also notice his five book series: Rafiq Khoury, *Naḥwa lahūt mutjassid fī tarbiyyat bilādnā* (Towards an Incarnational Theology for the Progress of our Country) (Bethlehem: Al-Liqa' Publications, 2012); Rafiq Khoury, *Al-ḥudūr al-Masīḥiyya fī-l mashriq al-'Arabiyya bin al-māḍī wa al-ḥādāra wa al-mustaqbal* (The Christian Presence in the Near East in the Past, Present, and Future) (Bethlehem: Al-Liqa' Publications, 2014); Rafiq Khoury, *Al-ākhir ... na'ama 'am naqima?* (The End ... Blessing or Curse?) (Bethlehem: Al-Liqa' Publications, 2016); Rafiq Khoury, *Filasṭīn fī-l qalb* (Palestine in the Heart) (Bethlehem: Al-Liqa' Publications, 2017); Rafiq Khoury, *Kitāb al-a'yyām* (Book for every Day) (Bethlehem: Al-Liqa' Publications, 2018).

53 Khoury, "Muslim-Christian Relations," 94.

54 See: Elizabeth Marteiijn, "Martyrdom, Liberation, and Belonging: An Ethnography on the Popular Saint George Veneration among Palestinian Christians," *Journal of World Christianity* 10/1 (2020), 53-67; Elizabeth S. Marteiijn, "The Politics of Interpretation: Understanding Biblical History in Palestinian Rural Culture," *Studies in World Christianity* 26/1 (2020), 4-20.

55 Paul S. Rowe, "The Open Sanctuary: Palestinian Christian Civil Society Organizations and the Survival of the Christian Minority in Israel-Palestine," *Journal of Church and State* 58/4 (2016), 1-19; Shomali, "Palestinian Christians".

Christians have a set number of seats in the Parliament of the Palestinian Authority. Several of the national political liberation movements, like the *Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine* (PFLP) and the *Al-Ard* ('the Land') movement, had Christian founders as well. There was also Christian participation in the Palestinian delegation in the 1990s peace process, with Anglican politician Dr Hanan Ashrawi (b. 1946).⁵⁶ Palestinian contextual theology is therefore an exponent of a wider Palestinian Christian societal and political engagement.

While the spectrum of Palestinian contextual theology is broad and diverse, not all voices are equally represented. In Palestinian theology there is, for example, an underrepresentation of female voices, just as there are no Arab female church leaders in the Palestinian Territories. This does not mean that women have not played any role in this Christian revival. The three women Cedar Duaybis, Nora Carmi, and Jean Zaru were part of the group that helped establish Sabeel. Similarly, the Kairos Palestine Document has three women among its fifteen authors: Cedar Duaybis, Nora Kort, and Lucy Taljieh. This article also referred to Palestinian Evangelical theologian Rula Khoury Mansour, who recently published her first book—which may signify the beginning of a broader theological engagement of young female Palestinian theologians who are now graduate students. Neither should one underestimate the role of the *Rahbāt al-Wardiyye* ('Rosary Sisters'), founded by Palestinian nun Maria-Alphonsine Danil Ghattas (1843-1927) on 24th July, 1880. This Arab Roman-Catholic order runs churches, schools, and hospitals in the Palestinian Territories, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates.

Another group that is generally underrepresented in the discussion of Palestinian theology are the Eastern Orthodox Christians, who in fact are the largest community among Palestinian Christians. Palestinian theologians from the Western school of theology—Roman Catholics, mainline Protestants, and Evangelicals—have played the major role in the formation of Palestinian contextual theology. The most plausible explanation for their dominant role is their direct engagement with European and American Christian Zionist concepts of eschatology, the land, and the covenant. It was their struggle with these questions which resulted in the emergence of a body of Palestinian contextual theology.

56 For a review on Middle Eastern Christianity and politics, see: Kail C. Ellis (ed.), *Secular Nationalism and Citizenship in Muslim Countries. Arab Christians in the Levant*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Mohammed Girma & Cristian Romocea (eds.), *Christian Citizenship in the Middle East: Divided Allegiance or Dual Belonging?* (London & Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017); Fiona McCallum, "Christian political participation in the Arab world," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23/1 (2012), 3-18.

5 Conclusion

This article has described how Palestinian theology and Christianity have developed since the 1970s. It has reviewed the historical developments of the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s that made Palestinian clergy and theologians more outspoken. Developments such as the First *Intifada* and the indigenization of religious leadership have encouraged Palestinian Christian leaders to speak out. Since the turn of the millennium, Palestinian theology has become more localised, by not prioritising international Christian connections but by emphasising the importance of local theological discussion. Earlier theological initiatives such as the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land, the joint statements of Patriarchs and Heads of Christian communities of Jerusalem, the local theology of the Al-Liqa' Center in Bethlehem, and the liberation theology of Sabeel Center in Jerusalem, became enriched by newer theological streams such as Palestinian Kairos theology and Palestinian Evangelical theology. It is now possible to speak of a systematised body of Palestinian theology containing theological reflection on the concepts of liberation, reconciliation, witness, interreligious dialogue, and ecumenism.

Throughout this article the importance of 'context' has been apparent. There are two different ways in which context has influenced Palestinian theology. A theology of liberation is based on a 'context of co-resistance', found in places such as Jerusalem, where Christians live together with Muslims *against* the Israeli occupier. In contrast, the theology focussing on reconciliation and witness leans more towards a 'context of co-existence': living peacefully together *with* the other, with Jews and with Muslims.

Beyond a select few like Naim Ateek and Mitri Raheb, Palestinian theologians—and Middle Eastern theologians in general—have gained little influence in Western theological scholarship or in the field of World Christianity. Misunderstanding in the West, ongoing emigration, and growing sectarianism have minimized the voices and public engagement of Palestinian Christians. As a result, Christians in the region are grouping together to survive and prioritise the needs of their own community. Yet, the challenges Palestinian Christians face have enhanced their sensitivity to the prophetic vocation of their faith and paved the way for theologians to become creative and for citizens to become socially committed.

The examples of Palestinian theologians mentioned in this article indicate that hope for the future is not lost. Palestinian theologians are currently localising the theological discourse even further by publishing more work in Arabic and working together with Arab theologians from other parts of the Middle East. We might even see another revival of Palestinian Christianity if those

church leaders and theologians keep showing vitality and courage for a continuation of the public engagement of Christian faith and theology. It will be the task of other world theologians to engage with them, stimulate them, and include these Palestinian theologians in their international theological debates.

Note

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