Between the Hammer and the Anvil: Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land

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Miller and Sumpter show that Palestinian Christians live a precarious existence, caught between the constrictions of Israeli policies (and a poor economy) in the West Bank and rising Islamist social pressures within Palestinian society. Emigration is a crucial problem, as adaptable young people seek better economic opportunities abroad. Christian leaders and churches have responded to this challenge of sustaining the next generation by providing housing for young families and promoting economic development, often drawing upon transnational denominational support. Another strategy of survival has been the operation of quality Christian schools that appeal to Muslim youth, offering the opportunity to inculcate notions of tolerance and charity and thus leaven Palestinian society as a counterweight to militancy. Field research in the West Bank uncovered how believers navigate the fierce challenges of their dual identity as Christians and Palestinians through a two-level discourse that affirms Palestinian solidarity on the public level but in private insists that growing Islamist antagonism threatens their presence and freedom.