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Implications for Inter-faith Relations

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**RESEARCH NOTES:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF JEWISH,
CHRISTIAN AND ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALIST
PERSPECTIVES ON JERUSALEM: IMPLICATIONS
FOR INTER-FAITH RELATIONS**

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Introduction

One of the most salient aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the last thirty years has been the growing power of 'religious fundamentalism' within the three 'Abrahamic faiths' (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), and the focus of religious conflict in the Holy Land on the question of Jerusalem. The opposing radical religious forces of Judaism, Christianity and Islam seem increasingly unable to find common ground, with 'religious fundamentalists' on all sides the usual scapegoats. Many academic studies on the Holy Land have tried to explain this by looking at the fundamentalist perspectives of the individual religions, but it is unusual for researchers to investigate the fundamentalist movements of these three religions in comparative terms.

In 2002 the *Holy Land Research Project* of the School of Theology, Philosophy and History, St Mary's College, was awarded a three-year research grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (formerly AHRB) to carry out such research. The grant was for a major project on Jerusalem entitled: '*A comparative study of Jewish, Christian and Islamic fundamentalist perspectives on Jerusalem, and their implications*'. The project started on 1 September 2002 and ended on 31 August 2005. The personnel of the project consisted of Dr Michael Prior, Dr Nur Masalha and a part-time

research worker based in the Holy Land. In July 2004 the personnel of the project suffered a profound bereavement with the loss of Dr Prior. Dr Michael Hayes, Head of the School of Theology, Philosophy and History, joined the team in September 2004 and the project team continued to work in line with the schedule originally proposed.

The main aims of the Jerusalem research project were to investigate evolving religious attitudes since the 1967 war, including towards the various 'holinesses' of Jerusalem and rights of occupancy, the social and political conditions under which these attitudes evolve, their likely impact on community and national relations, and their implications for inter-faith relations in the Holy Land. Exploring evolving attitudes towards the 'sacred geography' of Jerusalem and rights of occupancy would be carried out within the wider context of multi-faith relations and comparative (Jewish, Muslim and Christian) perspectives.

Methodology and the Comparative Perspective

Methodologically the research project on the religious politics of Jerusalem took as its starting point the conceptual problems with the term 'religious fundamentalism'. There is no agreed definition of the concept, and it has often been used pejoratively when talking about conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere. By studying the literature from radical religious groups, and talking to key religious leaders, our research team studied the impact of radical religious groups on interfaith relations in Jerusalem.

The range of methods for collecting material (interviews, published material, etc.) proved to be particularly valuable in sharpening perspectives. The research methodology devised and employed in the first year continued to be employed throughout the project with positive results and during the same period the project undertook the systematisation of methodologies and *modi operandi*. Note was taken of the contrast between self-describing material and that emanating from others, including scholarly interpretations. The comparative perspective has proved to be particularly revealing and instructive. Specifically, the comparative perspective has provided important avenues for developing the theoretical dimension of the research project.

In conformity with the project plan the resident worker in the Holy Land carried out extensive field research. Also several visits by the main researcher, Dr Nur Masalha and the two award-holders were undertaken. During the same period a great amount of original and primary sources in Hebrew, Arabic and English was collected and multiple interviews were conducted.

The continuing crisis in the Holy Land, which entails further travel restrictions imposed by the Israeli army both within the occupied territo-

ries and between East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, has presented the project team with some obvious difficulties and serious challenges. However the continuing multiple political and military crises in Middle East, including the US-led invasion of Iraq in March 2003, as a whole have not hindered the research team in their work. Meeting some groups and people was not possible in the first year, but further attempts were made to address these issues in the second and third year of the project. Despite these difficulties, however, the research team managed to carry out the research successfully and virtually all the tasks planned for the three years of the project were accomplished; successful efforts were made during the third year to meet and interview groups and individuals to whom access had previously been denied.

Initial Findings

In line with our dissemination plans the team project organised a one-day Conference in Jerusalem, on 27 April 2005 (held at the YWCA, East Jerusalem), entitled 'Perspectives on Jerusalem'. The conference was co-sponsored by the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre in Jerusalem. Both Dr Hayes and Dr Masalha spoke at the conference. Other speakers included the Rev. Dr Naim S. Ateek (Director of Sabeel); Dr Asad Ghanem (Department of Politics, Haifa University; Chair of Ibn Khaldun Centre, Galilee); Dr Bernard Sabella (Executive Director, Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees, Middle East Council of Churches, Jerusalem); Professor Jeff Halper (Head of ICAHD-Israeli Committee Against House Demolition, Jerusalem); Mr Ibrahim Dakkak (a prominent Palestinian national leader, East Jerusalem); Rabbi Jeremy Milgrom (formerly Chair of Rabbis for Human Rights and currently a leading human rights activist, Jerusalem). Other preliminary reports on the project have been disseminated in seminar and conference papers and in articles published in academic journals, with due recognition of the support of the AHRC.

The initial examination and evaluation of materials has revealed not only the growing power of 'fundamentalism' within the three 'Abrahamic faiths' but also the growing focus of the religious conflict in Israel-Palestine on the question of the holy sites in Jerusalem. Furthermore, it was confirmed, there were some profound similarities between the Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious 'fundamentalist' attitudes towards the 'sacred geography' of Jerusalem. The initial examination and evaluation of materials have revealed the following findings:

1. ***The 'sacred geography' of Jerusalem in comparative perspective:*** Devotion to some 'sacred geography' is a phenomenon in all faiths and cultures; devotion to the 'sacred geography' of Jerusalem is central to the three

Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Although the three faiths have different origins and diverse texts, laws, metaphors, myths, and values, they are interrelated and share much in common. Historically the city of Jerusalem was not founded by Jews, Christians, or Muslims – it is one of the oldest cities on earth, founded by the Jebusites, who belonged to a Canaanite tribe, about 5,000 years ago; also historically the city, for different reasons, became central to the ‘sacred geography’ of the three faiths. Its ‘holiness’ for Jews, Muslims and Christians partly derives from the presence of their most sacred shrines in the city.

Furthermore devotion to the ‘sacred geography’ of Jerusalem has partly to do with the spiritual life of each faith. In fact one of the main current problems of Jerusalem is the *inseparability* of the spiritual/religious and secular/political dimensions. Moreover in all three faiths the notion of the ‘sacred geography’ of Jerusalem seems to answer a profound human need. In recent years the ‘sacred space’ of Jerusalem has inspired powerful emotions among Jews, Muslims and Christians: deep anxiety, intense anger, intense traumatic pain, and strong socio-economic, religio-political and spiritual activity.

2. *Historically evolving holinesses:* Historically various social, economic and political and ideological factors made Jerusalem ‘holy’ to Jews, Christians and Muslims. More crucially, however, the religious attitudes towards the ‘sacred geography’ of Jerusalem – the Jewish, Christian and Muslim ‘holinesses’ of the city – have evolved historically and will continue to do so, under *intense national conflicts and ever-changing social, political and demographic conditions*.

3. *Ahistorical and mythical perspectives versus religious co-existence:* Evidence has emerged supporting the project’s original hypothesis that for many Jewish, Christian, and Muslim fundamentalists the religious ‘holiness’ of the city is not a *historically* evolving phenomenon, but rather something which exists above and outside history.

Although religious attitudes towards the ‘sacred geography’ of Jerusalem have evolved historically and will continue to do so, many Jewish, Christian and Muslim ‘fundamentalists’ (as well as secular and religious nationalists) continue to propagate ahistorical and mythical perspectives on Jerusalem. Israeli Jewish ‘fundamentalists’ and secular nationalists, for instance, continue to propagate two interrelated myths of Jerusalem as the *united eternal* capital of Israel, and of the *unbroken* chain of Jewish presence in the city. Not only do they emphasise the undeniable strong bond of Judaism with the city, but they also claim an unbroken Jewish presence in the city for the last 5,000 years.

The historical evidence shows that these claims of an ‘unbroken chain

of Jewish presence in the city' is no more than a recently created nationalist myth. Indeed, for nearly 700 years after the destruction of the Second Temple there is no evidence of a Jewish community in Jerusalem, and for many centuries between the second and the 19th centuries, Jewish settlement in Jerusalem was patchy. Although theologically, spiritually, religiously and symbolically Jerusalem remained central in the Jewish religious imagination, politically, socially, economically, demographically and even culturally and intellectually Jerusalem was not a major centre for Judaism. Apparently only for a short period, some forty years only, was Jerusalem the capital of the ancient Israelite monarchy.

Furthermore for centuries under the Christian Byzantine empire, Jews were actually banned from residing in Jerusalem. Ironically it was only after the Arab Muslim conquest in 638, when Muslims took over the city, that Jews were allowed to come back to Jerusalem. A number of documents in the famous Cairo *geniza* record the financial contribution of rich Jews in Egypt and Sicily towards the support of poor Jews in Jerusalem and the maintenance of a synagogue next to the Wailing Wall, which, of course, is adjacent to the Muslim holy shrines of Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

The arrival of the Crusaders ensured that the Jewish presence therein would, again, be interrupted. When the Crusaders captured Jerusalem in 1099, the Jewish – as well as the Muslim – community was once again thrown out of the city. Only after 1260, under the Muslim Mamluke Sultans of Egypt, did Jews slowly begin to return to the city. But then a conflict began to simmer between the Jewish community and local Christians over holy places on Mount Zion. After 1516, under Ottoman Muslim rule, the Jewish settlement in the city was secure, and we see some demographic growth. In the 17th century, the estimated Jewish population of the city was 1000, about 10 per cent of the city's population. Moreover, until the mid-19th century, the Jewish community in Jerusalem remained very small; relatively poor, and largely dependent on charity and financial support from Jews outside Palestine. Indeed for four centuries of Ottoman rule, the main intellectual and religious centre of Jewish life in Palestine was not Jerusalem, but the city of Safad in Galilee.

More crucially the fact that for centuries Muslim rulers allowed the Jewish community to build and maintain a Jewish synagogue next to the third holiest shrine of Islam (Al-Haram Al-Sharif) is striking. Evidence has emerged from our research showing that, for different reasons, both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Muslims prefer to gloss over the historical fact that Muslim and Jewish 'holy places' and 'holy spaces' co-existed side by side peacefully in the city for many centuries.

4. Devotion to the 'sacred geography' of Jerusalem, nationalist mythologies and identity politics: Throughout much of the 20th century the issue

of the 'sacred geography' of Jerusalem has been (and remains) politically explosive partly because in all three faiths the city has acquired a powerful mythical status. Each faith has many powerful 'myths' with regards to the 'sacred geography' of Jerusalem. Not only are many Jews, Muslims and Christians (as well as Israelis and Palestinians) wrapped up in all kinds of powerful mythologies of Jerusalem, but these mythologies are also bound up with identity politics. Religious identities in Israel-Palestine in themselves are not necessarily the cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but these religious identities can easily be politically manipulated by religious fundamentalists and secular nationalists and channelled into bitter religious conflicts.

5. *The impact of the 1967 War on the rise of Jewish, Christian and Islamic 'fundamentalisms'*: Since the 1967 war, and the occupation of the Old City of Jerusalem by Israel, radical religious Zionism (both Jewish and dispensationalist evangelical Christian), often described as the 'messianic' forces or religious 'fundamentalist' trends, have transposed the political Zionism of Theodor Herzl from an altogether secular nationalist aspiration to create a sovereign 'state for the Jews' to the apocalyptic redemption of the entire 'land of the Bible'.

The 1967 war was a watershed in the history of both Israel and American evangelical dispensationalism; the war had a profound effect on the religious camps in both Israel and the US (especially the so-called Christian Right in the US). In Israel, even for many secular Jews who were either indifferent to religion or opposed it, the occupation of the Old City of Jerusalem and the West Bank represented a conversion of almost mystical proportions. The war gave rise to Israeli-Jewish 'fundamentalism' and radicalised American Protestant dispensationalism. In the wake of the war and the rise of radical Jewish and American Christian groups, the role of the Old Testament narrative within radical religious politics increased significantly. Arising in the wake of the new Israeli conquests and accompanying the success of political Zionism, radical religious groups (both in Israel and the US) have developed into a major political and cultural force, with a considerable influence on the attitudes, commitments, and votes of a large number of religious and secular Israelis and Americans.

The war, in fact, was traumatic for both Arabs and Jews. The Arab defeat in the war, in particular, was highly traumatic for Palestinians, both Christian and Muslims, contributing to the dramatic decline in secular Arab nationalism and the rise of political Islam in the Middle East. Although the Palestinian 'Islamic Resistance Movement', better-known as Hamas (Arabic acronym for *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya*) was founded in early 1988, the Palestinian Hamas was not born in a vacuum at the beginning of the first Intifada (the 'uprising' from 1987 to 1993). Hamas developed from its predecessor, the Muslim Brotherhood movement, first founded in Egypt.

The traumatic defeat of the Arab countries in the war, and the occupation of the third holiest shrine for Islam (in Jerusalem) by Israel, was a turning point for political Islam in the region. The post-1967 period provided Islamic movements in the region with an excellent opportunity to popularise the notion that political Islam was the only true path to victory in the struggle against the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem, the West Bank and western colonialism in general. In recent years, in particular, much of Islamist politics in the region has focused on the question of Palestine in general and the question of Jerusalem in particular.

6. *The impact of socio-economic conditions and coalition politics:* Evidence has emerged showing that, on the whole, the rise of religious ‘fundamentalism’ in Israel – in contrast with the variety of Islamic ‘fundamentalism’ in Palestine – is not the product of socio-economic or political marginalisation. In Palestine radical Islamist groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad have been founded as opposition groups – based on socially and economically deprived and marginalised groups in Palestinian society, fighting against the mainstream predominantly secular, PLO/Palestinian Authority. In Israel religious fundamentalism is rather a middle-class phenomenon and the product of Israeli elites and coalition politics: the powerful settlement movement of Gush Emunim, which has been the most successful extra-parliamentary movement to arise in Israel since 1948, and has had a profound influence upon the Israeli political system, almost exclusively consists of highly-educated Ashkenazi, middle-class and professional Israelis. Unlike the activists of the Palestinian Hamas (who were in opposition until January 2006), the Gush settlers have had a disproportionate impact on the Israeli establishment and official Israeli policies owing to their middle class background, as well as their dogged religious determination, dynamism and practical pursuit of their objectives. Also in contrast with Islamist politics in Palestine, in Israel nationalist-religious *yeshivot* (talmudic seminaries and high schools) of the NRP and its religious youth movement, Bnei ‘Akiva (‘Sons of Akiva’) – which gave birth to Gush Emunim – are funded by the state’s Ministry of Education.

Furthermore – in contrast with the lack of coalition politics in Palestine – a significant factor in the rise of Jewish religious radicalism in Israel has been the nature of elite and coalition politics, and the symbiotic relationship which the religious fundamentalists have forged with secular right-wing Israeli elites. While the 1967 war provided the initial impetus for the emergence of religious radicalism in Israel, the secular right’s (Likud’s) domination of Israeli politics since 1977 has helped to consolidate radical Judaism in the country, giving the Gush Emunim fundamentalist settlers an enormous boost and financing their networks of settlements throughout the occupied territories.

7. *The rise of religious intolerance:* History is replete with tragic examples of religions and religious intolerance as causes of conflict and war. However since the occupation of East Jerusalem and the West Bank by Israel in 1967 radical religious politics in the Holy Land has developed into a major force, with a considerable influence on the attitudes of many Israelis and Palestinians. The project has observed and documented the ongoing process of clericalisation in Israel and Palestine since 1967 and the rapid growth of religious ‘fundamentalism’ since 1967; the same process has been accompanied by a strong element of religious intolerance and even coercion. In fact many liberal people we have interviewed (Jews, Muslims, Christians, Israelis, Palestinians) have found the resurgence of religious ‘fundamentalism’ and the rise of religious intolerance and coercion in Israel-Palestine a chilling prospect.

8. *Exclusionist attitudes and absolutist positions:* A key element in the ‘fundamentalism’ of the three faiths – as in other ‘fundamentalist’ movements the world over – is the adherents’ belief that they possess special and direct access to transcendental, *absolute* truth. In the case of radical religious groups across the three faiths evidence has shown that the faith and ideological dedication of the believer are the decisive factors, and these are often couched in ideologically *absolute* and *uncompromising* (rather than *historically* grounded and pragmatic) perspectives.

Furthermore strong evidence has emerged supporting the project’s original hypothesis regarding the relationship between religious ‘fundamentalism’ and *exclusivity* in attitudes towards Jerusalem in all three religions; while each ‘fundamentalist’ group was very sensitive to its own religious rights, there was little evidence of an inclusive spirit. Theologically and rhetorically Jewish, Christian and Muslim ‘fundamentalists’ have sought to construct consistent, radical, absolutist positions towards Jerusalem. Moreover for obvious reasons they have tended to concentrate on the issue of political sovereignty over Jerusalem. Their ideo-theologies have emphasised the right of the people (Israeli or Palestinian) to exclusive absolute sovereignty (with no imposed limitations). Moreover each fundamentalism has also sought prohibitions in the scriptures against giving up parts of the Holy Land. Also for mainly political reasons both Israeli and Palestinian ‘fundamentalists’ prefer to gloss over the historical fact that for centuries ‘holy places’ and holy spaces co-existed side by side in the city.

9. *Halacha/Sharia state versus liberal democracy:* The project documented and studied a diversity of Jewish, Muslim and Christian religious radical groups in Israel and Palestine. Strong evidence has emerged supporting the project’s original hypothesis that these are not homogenous groups. However many of them have constructed new comprehensive ideo-theologies which

envisage theocratic (*halacha* or *sharia*) regimes for Israel and Palestine – based on the *halacha* (the Jewish religious law), in the case of Jewish and Protestant ‘fundamentalist’ groups, and on the Islamic *sharia*, in the case of radical Islamist groups in Palestine. Although many of these groups have features common to secular opposition groups in Israel–Palestine, they tend to equate democratic principles with foreign-imported and secular Western ideologies and they tend to spurn universal, secular humanistic and liberal values.

10. International law and human rights: After 1967 Israel unilaterally annexed Arab East Jerusalem. Under international law, however, East Jerusalem is considered to be occupied territory. In fact the international community considers all Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem as illegal under international law and since 1967 the UN has passed several resolutions condemning the illegal annexation of East Jerusalem by Israel.

Israel is currently building a ‘separation barrier’ (the wall) that will cut off East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank; the ‘wall’ will also divide Bethlehem. Israeli unilateral policies in Jerusalem are highly controversial, as Palestinians want East Jerusalem as their capital. Palestinians argue that Israeli unilateralism jeopardises efforts to achieve a just peace. They also prejudice the outcome of permanent status negotiations over the future of the city. The Palestinians further demand implementation of a ruling by the International Court of Justice in The Hague in 2004 that the ‘wall’ is illegal and should be removed.

11. The relations between the dominant power and the marginalised/occupied community: The project’s original analysis of the significance of the relations between the dominant (Israeli–Jewish) religious power in the city and the marginalised and occupied (both Palestinian Muslim and Christian) religious communities was a dominant theme. Evidence has emerged showing that there was a basic difference between mainstream Israeli–Jewish and ‘fundamentalist’ Muslim attitudes towards the question of the shrines in the Old City. Palestinian Muslims in occupied East Jerusalem are on the defensive, struggling against creeping Judaisation of the Old City and seeking to preserve the religious and prayer *status quo* on Al-Haram Al-Sharif (or ‘Temple Mount’, according to Israeli Jews) while Jewish and Christian ‘fundamentalists’ are on the offensive, running joint and well-funded campaigns in both Israel and the US for changing the *status quo* of the Muslim holy sites and for the building of the Jewish temple on the Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

In fact Israeli–Jewish and American ‘fundamentalist’ groups seek to alter the *status quo* of the Al-Haram Al-Sharif radically, something which could result in local and global conflagration. For some Christian evangelical

‘fundamentalists’ (dispensationalists), in particular, the ‘Battle for the Temple Mount’ is the ‘End of Days Battle of Armageddon’.

12. *Ascribing political motives to the ‘Other’ – and not at all to themselves:*

Evidence has emerged showing that religious ‘fundamentalists’ in all three faiths tend (like many secular nationalists) to discount the religious traditions and narrative of the *Other*. They also ascribe political and administrative motives only to the *Other* – and not at all to themselves. They tend to deny any religious or theological motivation behind the construction of the religious shrines of the *Other*, and assert that historically the building the shrines of the *Other* was purely politically or economically motivated.

Similarities between biblically-based ‘fundamentalist’ ideologies of Jews and American dispensationalist Protestants

13. *Biblically-based attitudes and support for exclusive Israeli control of Jerusalem:* There were some surprising findings: there are some striking similarities between the ‘fundamentalist’ ideologies of Jews and Christians and even, although rarely, some Palestinian converts to dispensationalism have displayed sympathies towards the Zionist project. Similar attitudes towards the Al-Aqsa Mosque and other Muslim shrines in Jerusalem are propagated by both Jewish religious fundamentalists and secular Zionists.

14. *Political sovereignty over Jerusalem:* Evidence has emerged showing that for the biblically-based ‘fundamentalist’ ideologies of Jews and (mainly American) Protestant evangelicals, in their various shades, Zionism and the State of Israel are divine agents; the creation of Israel in 1948 and the conquest of additional territories in the 1967 war are both perceived as constituting part of the divine process of messianic redemption. Both Jewish and Christian fundamentalists emphasise not only the ‘holiness’ of Jerusalem and but also the political and territorial ‘wholeness’ of Greater Israel; they also advocate *exclusive* Israeli sovereignty over Greater Jerusalem. Both fundamentalisms talk about ‘Chosen Land’ and ‘Chosen People’ in exclusive and literal terms: ‘*The Land of Israel, for the People of Israel, according to the Torah of Israel.*’ Both biblically-based fundamentalist currents are inspired by Zionist maximalist territorial expansionism and completely oblivious to international law, UN resolutions on Jerusalem and the human rights of indigenous Palestinians; relying on literalist interpretations of Old Testament commandments to ‘possess and to settle the Promised Land’, some of these groups emphasise territorial expansion by holy wars and military means.

For both fundamentalisms, the establishment of exclusive Israeli sovereignty over the entire, biblically-described Promised Land, and the building

of the Jewish Temple in the (occupied) Old City of Jerusalem, are all part of the implementation of the divinely-ordained messianic redemption. Resistance to the extension of Israeli sovereignty over Greater Jerusalem by the Palestinians, according to many Jewish and Christian fundamentalists, will result in their uprooting and destruction. Often (loosely associated) fundamentalist rabbis and US dispensationalists refer to modern Palestinians as the ‘Amalekites’ or the ‘Canaanites’ of today. Although Jewish fundamentalists refer to Palestinian Muslims as ‘Ishmaelites’, and to the circumstances under which biblical Abraham expelled Ishmael, many Jewish fundamentalists and their American counterparts prefer to use the Hebrew Bible narrative and Joshua’s destruction and subjugation of the Canaanites as a model for the determination of Israeli policy towards the contemporary demographic and political problems of Jerusalem.

The majority of Palestinians support the idea of sharing Jerusalem on the basis of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, with East Jerusalem as its capital. But for both radical Jewish and Christian fundamentalists the current struggle for Jerusalem contains no trace of the claim that Jerusalem is holy to Islam. They claim, rather, that the historic record shows that the actions and circumstances on which the Muslim claim is based are not holy at all. Rather, for Jewish and Christian fundamentalists, Jerusalem has been imbued artificially with Muslim sacredness, through ‘wordplay and administrative sleight of hand’, which, of course, means that there are no genuine ‘holy’ places for Islam in Jerusalem. Such positions are, of course, yet another reflection of religious intolerance and the politics of exclusion.

15. *Attitudes towards the Muslim shrines (Al-Haram Al-Sharif) and the politics of denial:* The project has produced evidence showing that both Jewish and Christian (evangelical) fundamentalists have displayed a new messianic fervour which centres on the building of the ‘Jewish Temple’ on the site of the Muslim shrines in Jerusalem (Al-Haram Al-Sharif). For both groups of fundamentalists, the current Muslim ‘possession’ of the shrines area asserts no legal right; the legal owners are the Jewish people; this Muslim possession has no legal and moral validity. If Muslim possession of the shrines area is morally flawed and legally, at best, temporary, then the Muslims must evacuate the shrines in the interests of the ‘legal owners’. Clearly this new ideo-theology has implications for community, ethnic and interfaith relations in the Holy Land. Given these fundamentalist perspectives, it is hardly surprising that the question of Muslim holy shrines in Jerusalem, and indeed the whole question of Jerusalem, automatically assume cosmic proportions.

The religious ‘holiness’ of Jerusalem in the Muslim tradition focuses on the Al-Haram Al-Sharif, the site of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. As the Quran states, it was to Al-Aqsa that the Prophet was

carried on his Night Journey from Mecca, and from the rock that he ascended to the seventh heaven (*al-Israi wal-mi'iraj*). Today Muslims insist that the entirety of Al-Haram Al-Sharif (including the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the open squares between the shrines) are all sacred ground.

Similar attitudes towards the Al-Aqsa Mosque and other Muslim shrines in the Old City are propagated by both Jewish religious fundamentalists and secular Zionists. Typically, Jewish and Christian fundamentalist perspectives on the Muslim shrines consist of:

- Theologically and religiously they deny any significance for Jerusalem in Islam, and reject Muslim religious 'holiness' in Jerusalem, and Muslim religious rights in the city;
- Socially and politically, they assert that Islam has only a loose and insignificant bond with Jerusalem; Muslims, Arabs and Palestinians, they say, have no attachment to the city, and they deny that Jerusalem was ever a cultural or scholarly centre for Muslims;
- They deny that Jerusalem ever had a role in the life of the Prophet Muhammad;
- They ascribe purely political motives to Muslims in the sanctification of the city: the Umayyad Caliphs, for political reasons, forced the city of Jerusalem to assume a role in the life of the Prophet Muhammad; the 'sanctification' of Jerusalem in Islam was based exclusively on the Umayyad political and building programmes in the city, etc.
- The 'Furthest Mosque' (*Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa* of the Quran), they claim, is merely a figure of speech. They deny the basis for associating the 'Al-Aqsa Mosque' with Jerusalem;
- They assert, by way of contrast and conclusion, that the Jewish faith has altogether stronger and more deeply-rooted bonds with Jerusalem.

16. The politics of armageddon: One the most disturbing situations is the convergence of fundamentalist interests across the faiths, creating the potential for a global holy war. Another disturbing factor is the virtual equi-paration, within some circles of Jewish and Christian fundamentalism, of Jerusalem's Al-Haram Al-Sharif ('Temple Mount') with 'Ground Zero'.

In the 'Battle for Jerusalem' and for the 'Temple Mount', Christian fundamentalists have found common ground with Jewish religious radicals and hard-line Zionists. The fundamentalists share four tenets:

- belief in the 'sanctity' of the modern State of Israel;
- support for Greater Israel and Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank, including Israeli sovereignty over the biblically described 'Land of Israel';
- support for exclusive Jewish sovereignty over Jerusalem;

- the desire for, and indeed the determination to build the Temple on the site of the Muslim shrines at Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

The secular-sacred package of the State of Israel, Jerusalem and the 'Temple', the Second Coming of Christ, and the end-time Battle of Armageddon have all become central to pro-Zionist 'dispensationalist' Christian fundamentalist belief and aspiration. For the dispensationalists (like all other religious fundamentalists) a critical element of the doctrines is the uncompromising belief in the *inerrancy* of the holy texts. For them the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) not only represents the *literal* word of God but also provides a road-map for the future, guiding the continuing struggle towards redemption; for them, history is God's means of communication with his people. Political trends and events contain messages that provide instructions, reprimands, and rewards. Thus, political and historical analysis is equivalent to the interpretation of God's will. The interpretation of political trends in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by 'dispensationalist' Christian fundamentalists points to the 'end-time' Battle of Armageddon.

There is, of course, a variety of interpretations among fundamentalists, but the trends we describe here are broadly shared. For pro-Zionist 'dispensationalist' fundamentalists, the 'Battle for Jerusalem' is also the key to their theory of the 'End Times'. A critical element of this doctrine is the unshakable belief in the *inerrancy* of the Bible. The scriptures, representing the word of God, provide a 'roadmap', not for peace in the Middle East, but for future turbulence. Moreover, the Bible prophesies a second coming by Christ. There is some disagreement as to whether the second coming would be precipitated by humankind's positive advances and achievements, or by its failings. In either case, the 'signs of the times' are invariably bad news – political conflict in the Middle East, religious apostasy, increased wickedness, earthquakes, plagues and widespread misfortune.

The first event in the redemptive process is the *Rapture*, wherein faithful Christian believers would be 'caught up together to meet the Lord in the air'. The rest of humanity will be left behind to endure the 'tribulation', a series of terrible calamities that will last for seven years, under the direction of the 'Antichrist'. In the course of the tribulation, the Antichrist will both force people to wear 'the mark of the beast' and will desecrate the 'temple' in Jerusalem. The Second Coming of Christ and the Battle of Armageddon, and the tribulation will be followed by the millennium and the Final Judgment. Those who are redeemed will be granted eternal bliss, while the wicked will be condemned to eternal punishment. The Righteous, who will meet the Lord during the *Rapture*, will presumably avoid all this tribulation, and the key to their salvation and selection for the Rapture will be unwavering adherence to the scriptures.

There is currently one critical element missing from the 'end-time'

theological package: there is no Temple in Jerusalem. Consequently, the Jews, despite the obvious irony, must construct it on the 'Temple Mount' (Al-Haram Al-Sharif) in order that the followers of the Antichrist may desecrate it, in accordance with their understanding of the fulfilment of biblical prophecy. Thus, Christian fundamentalists find common ground with fundamentalist Jews and hard-line secular Zionists. Since their fate and that of the entire world is at stake, Christian fundamentalists and the Christian Right in the US are committed to supporting and protecting Greater Israel and exclusive Israeli domination of Jerusalem at all costs. This relatively new and unusual alliance between fundamentalist Christian Zionists and Israeli Jewish fundamentalists (and hard-line secular Zionists) has serious implications for interfaith and communal relations in the Holy Land (and elsewhere).

17. *Evaluation of Islam and its 'God'*: Other highly surprising elements have also been uncovered, including the negative evaluation of Islam and its 'God' on the part of a number of Christian 'fundamentalist' groups; in contrast some Jewish fundamentalist groups (following Moses Maimonides) tended to have a more nuanced and complex view of Islam. However a general hostility towards Islam (which is perceived as a common enemy) exists among both Christian and Jewish fundamentalist groups – including the claim that Muslims worship a different god from that of Jews and Christians. It is important to note that such views as espoused by some Christians are confined to fundamentalist circles, foreign alike to Palestinian and mainstream international Christianity.

18. *Rights of residency in Jerusalem*: there is a great deal of debate among Jewish fundamentalist groups and their American evangelical Christian counterparts with regard to the status and rights of residency of Palestinian Muslims and Palestinian Christians in Jerusalem. The ideo-theology of both fundamentalisms, however, generally contains a radical and sharp distinction between 'Jew' and 'gentile' in the Holy Land and assumes basically antagonistic relations between them. For both fundamentalisms, the conflict with 'gentiles' over Jerusalem, and even war against them, is 'for their own good', because this will hasten messianic redemption. For some Jewish and Christian fundamentalists, who embrace the supremacist notion of Jews as a divinely 'chosen people' (*'am segula*), the indigenous Palestinians are no more than tenants and squatters, and a threat to the process of messianic redemption; their human and civil rights are no match for the divine legitimacy and the religiously ordained duty (or *mitzvah*) of 'conquering, possessing and settling the Promised Land'.

For both fundamentalisms, the indigenous Palestinian Muslims and Christians are viewed by radical rabbis as temporary alien residents, and as

a population living, at best, on sufferance. For them, Israel must continue the ancient biblical battles over settlement of the 'Land of Israel', to be won by a combination of religious faith and military might. The devotion of an increasingly powerful trend to the exclusive possession of Greater Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and to messianic redemption has effectively turned the Palestinians in East Jerusalem – illegally occupied and unilaterally annexed to Israel after 1967 – into resident aliens in their own city. The assassination of politically pragmatic Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish fundamentalist on 4 November 1995 and the continuing rise of Israeli and American religious fundamentalisms are bound to have serious implications for community and national and interfaith relations in Jerusalem and indeed the Holy Land.

19. *Creating facts on the ground:* Other findings of the project pointed to the realisation of how Israeli governmental policies in Jerusalem and the creation of social, demographic and political 'facts on the ground' have a major influence on 'fundamentalist' perceptions and behaviours in the city.

20. *'Fundamentalisms' versus pacifism and non-violent struggle:* Fear is a common thread that weaves radical religious movements together. Although it is not the only motivating factor behind political violence, in the case of Israel-Palestine and the question of Jerusalem it is always there. Although radical religious (Jewish, Muslim, and Christian) groups are not homogenous, they invariably fear that the young will abandon the synagogues, churches, mosques for physical and material gratification. Therefore religious radicals of all creeds share some common traits and motivations with those secular radical nationalists who engage in political violence.

The differences among religious fundamentalist (Jewish, Muslim, and Christian) groups were also striking: whilst some groups operate within a context of power and control, others work from a position of resistance, opposition and recovery. Therefore it is over-simplistic to simply equate 'religious fundamentalism' automatically with political violence.

Religion and religious groups, however, can also bring conflict resolution and peace in the Holy Land. In all three faiths, religion also engendered pacifism and pacifist trends. Among the Jerusalem-based religious groups promoting non-violent struggles for pace and justice are 'Clergy for Peace' and Rabbis for Human Rights. Christianity, for instance, through its doctrine of pacifism, advanced religious ethics in warfare. In addition to 'love our neighbour as ourselves', Christ's Sermon on the Mount instructs followers to 'love your enemies and pray for your persecutors' (Matt. 5: 38–46). Over the years, the involvement of groups such as the Quakers and Pax

Christi in the struggle for a just peace in Israel-Palestine has derived from a pacifist tradition. The same non-violent tradition has had a major impact on Palestinian liberation theology. Leading Palestinian Christian theologians based in Jerusalem have promoted non-violent struggle for peace and justice and reconciliation between the three faiths. Dr Naim Ateek, the founder of Sabeel, believes that the Crusades were 'holy wars' fought by the Western Church that perverted religion and for which Eastern Christians have dearly paid. For Eastern Christians, he holds, the way of non-violence is 'their tradition, their Gospel milieu, their heritage'.

The challenge for all religious groups in the Holy Land – as well as for religious politics in Jerusalem – is to develop a pluralistic, democratic and humanist mode of existence based on equality for all the citizens of Israel-Palestine and the recognition of shared principles, values, and interests amid acknowledged religious and political differences.