

# CENTER SEEKS COMMON LANGUAGE TO DIALOGUE ON MIDEAST

## Conference Draws Israeli and Palestinian Scholars

By Mariaelena Finessi

ROME, DEC. 3, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The retired prefect of the Congregation for Eastern Churches presided over a discussion on a book by an Italian scholar regarding the Holy Places of Jerusalem in the struggle for peace in the Middle East.

Cardinal Achille Silvestrini directed the Nov. 19 conference on Enrico Molinaro's "The Holy Places of Jerusalem in Middle East Peace Agreements: The Conflict Between Global and State Identities."

Ambassadors and Israeli and Palestinian experts joined in the discussion.

Molinaro proposes a study center for the Holy Places of Jerusalem, with a profile that does not pertain to any political or religious party: "We do not wish to impose anything on anyone, either on the national parties or the religious communities. Instead, we are at their service and, in this connection, we preferred the term 'Center' instead of 'Observatory,' as originally proposed. In fact, we resolved not to control or observe but rather to respond to requests for further reflection and writing of common principles or a common glossary, and all this for the advantage of the local populations."

The center, initially with headquarters in Rome, will be dedicated to study and research, as well as the promotion and facilitating of relations between the communities. Research activity will be focused on safeguarding respect for liberty of worship and access to the Holy Places for all.

Moreover, the center will promote reconciliation, interreligious and intercultural dialogue through activities of administrative, economic, fiscal, commercial and security consultation.

And in collaboration with the European Union, the United Nations, the United States and Russia, it aims to organize informal meetings on certain aspects of the complex issue of Middle East peace, eventually helping to sway public opinion toward cooperation.

More than places

"The Holy Places are not museums, or monuments for tourists, but posts in which believers live with their culture and their institutions and which, because of this, must be safeguarded -- keeping in mind, however, that what one wishes to safeguard is not only the heritage of the past but also the people who live there today, and those who will live there in the future," explained Monsignor Alberto Ortega Martin, representing the Vatican Secretariat of State at the conference.

Nazmi Al-Jubeih, co-director of the RIWAQ Center for Architectural Conservation in Ramallah, affirmed that it is erroneous to believe that the conflict over Jerusalem is only religious.

"Instead, it is above all territorial and it is because of this that the solution to the problem can no longer be deferred," he said.

For his part, Mark Heller of the Institute for National Security Studies of Tel Aviv reflected on the role of emotions and passions in this controversy. He said these are factors that "should be reserved to human relations," and should not define interactions between national authorities.

An approach free of prejudices and ideologies, and hence exclusively technical-judicial, is what Victor Magiar said he hopes for. Magiar is an official of the Jewish Community of Rome.

"The political solution must be separated from the religious solution, to impede politics from using religion for political purposes and religion from using politics for religious purposes," he said.

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On the Net:

"The Holy Places of Jerusalem in Middle East Peace Agreements":

[www.amazon.com/Places-Jerusalem-Middle-Peace-Agreements/dp/1845193350/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?  
ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1259886329&sr=8-1](http://www.amazon.com/Places-Jerusalem-Middle-Peace-Agreements/dp/1845193350/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1259886329&sr=8-1)