

Pilgrimage in Crisis: Christian Pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2000-2003

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The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of the 'Christian experience' in the Holy Land. The research describes, characterises and analyses the characteristics of Catholic and Protestants pilgrims to holy sites in the Holy Land between the years 2000-2003. Pilgrimage and Tourism experiences have been documented world-wide. However, the experience of the modern pilgrim in Israel has not been studied in depth.

The method was based on questionnaires, which the pilgrims themselves were asked to complete on the first and last days of their tour; in-depth interviews were conducted with the pilgrims, and with the staff of the organized tours to the sites such as tour leaders, priests, travel and tour agency operators, and with the managers in charge of the different sites. Observations at the various sites were carried out.

Research began in 2000 when many pilgrims planned to make the journey to the Holy Land for the Millenium- a very special occasion for Christians. However, the Palestinian uprising (the "Intifada") disrupted the plans of many potential pilgrims who cancelled their plans. Thus, this study focuses on those groups of pilgrims that decided to visit the Holy Land in spite of, and in the face of, the frightening possibility of terrorist activity. These non-typical pilgrims in an era of political and military upheavals, are the subjects of this study which documented their knowledge, feelings, motivations and perceptions throughout their trip.