

# Commentary: A Palestinian Christian's faith journey

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My journey with Christ has been deeply personal and profoundly shaped by my life in Palestine.

Growing up among a Christian family in Ramallah, I learned early that faith can endure through hardship. Yet, it was only when I questioned everything and rediscovered Jesus for myself that I truly understood what it means to follow him.

## Early years

I was born in Ramallah, a city in the hills of central Palestine, about 20 minutes north of Jerusalem. My family, like many Christian families here, carried its faith through generations of trials and displacements.

We were among what some call the “Living Stones,” the indigenous Christians of the Holy Land, heirs of the first believers who heard the gospel firsthand.

We preserved the faith of our ancestors, protected the holy sites, and witnessed to the power of Jesus through endurance, love and steadfast hope. We also were the salt of the earth among our fellow Palestinians.

In my family, Christianity was not just a faith, but also tradition, culture and loyalty to our ancestors who had kept the faith through empires and persecutions. Leaving it would have felt like betraying both Jesus and my heritage.

My grandfather often told me how his father, a stonemason, had built many

churches across the Holy Land, including our own in Ramallah and Jerusalem. My grandparents taught me to pray before meals and before bed.

My parents and extended family were devout, rarely missing Sunday Mass. Church life shaped our rhythms: weekly worship, a Christian school, youth Bible studies and Scouts run by the parish.

Most of our neighbors were Christian, and the few Muslims I knew were classmates from mostly secular families. My childhood revolved around school, church and family.

## **Hometown**

Ramallah itself changed drastically over the last century. Once a small, fully Christian town, it is now a major city more diverse, politically charged and socially tense.

After the 1948 Nakba, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were ethnically cleansed and their homes and towns destroyed to make way for new Jewish immigrants and the creation of Israel, refugees—both Christian and Muslim—fled to Ramallah.

Many local Christians feared occupation and emigrated, and the Christian population declined, leaving the remaining community caught between Israeli occupation and cultural erosion.

When Israel occupied Ramallah in 1967, the exodus accelerated. Today, Christians make up roughly a quarter of Ramallah's 40,000 residents.

Yet, the "American Federation of Ramallah, Palestine," representing the Ramallah diaspora, counts about 45,000 Palestinian Christian members, making it the largest Palestinian organization in the United States.

# Going to university

University life in nearby Birzeit—a small, largely Christian town—opened my eyes to the broader Palestinian society. There, I met Palestinians from across the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jerusalem, and even from Israel, Jordan and the diaspora.

For the first time, I realized how limited my upbringing had been. I had lived in a predominantly Muslim society without really seeing it.

As I grew older, my faith faced questions I could not answer easily: Why are we Christians becoming a minority in our own city and land? Why are we Palestinians being occupied by the Israelis? Why did God allow suffering, injustice and confusion, especially here in his Holy Land?

## Seeking guidance

During this period, I turned to Christian media for guidance, watching Arab and international channels such as SAT-7, TBN, CBN and God TV, and following preachers and ministers like Paul and Jan Crouch, Joyce Meyer, Benny Hinn, Joel Osteen, Hal Lindsey, Pat Robertson, Andrew Wommack and T.D. Jakes.

I prayed with these preachers and ministers from home, read their books, received their newsletters and grew spiritually, yet I was deeply unsettled.

Many of these preachers and ministries glorified Israel politically while ignoring, dismissing or even vilifying Palestinians. Their sermons often replaced compassion with ideology and faith with politics.

It was painful to see those I admired celebrating symbols of occupation while remaining silent about our suffering. That silence, and at times hostility, made me feel invisible, unloved and unwanted within the global

body of Christ.

I began to question everything. If this was Christianity, did I still belong? Their message, instead of bringing me closer to Jesus, drove me into doubt, spiritual loneliness and depression.

## Seeking the truth

I decided to seek the truth for myself. I began to study other religions systematically. I met with Muslim clerics—one at Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem to learn about Sunni Islam, another in a northern West Bank village to study the Ahmadiyya movement, a sect separated from Sunni Islam. I admired much in Islam but could not embrace it fully.

I then turned to Judaism, studying with an Israeli Jewish rabbi from Jerusalem and at the same time learning from the Palestinian Samaritan community, descendants of those mentioned in the Bible who still live in Nablus and number about a thousand today. Again, I found wisdom but not the fullness of truth.

I even explored briefly other religions such as the Bahá'í faith, Raëlism, Eckankar, Hinduism and Buddhism, gaining insight but not conviction.

After years of searching and questioning, I found myself drawn once more to the faith of my childhood.

## Returning

I returned to Christianity with a renewed hunger to understand it deeply and started studying the Bible with new eyes.

Ramallah, remarkably, has nearly every major denomination: Orthodox, Melkite, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Evangelical, Baptist, Lutheran, Quaker

and Coptic. At first, attending different services felt awkward, but over time, I discovered beauty in each. Through their diverse prayers, traditions and liturgies, I encountered Jesus in new and profound ways.

Eventually, I came to accept Jesus as my Lord, Savior and companion.

I felt his presence everywhere—in the stones of our streets, the olive trees, the mountains and even the sea. He became my guide, my moral compass and my constant friend. I imagined him walking where I walked, resting where I rested and eating the same fish from the Sea of Galilee.

## **Gaining discernment**

Looking back, I now understand my disillusionment with Christian media was not the end of faith but a test of discernment. It helped me recognize what Jesus warned about false prophets and religious leaders who twist God's word for power or profit.

Like the Pharisees of Jesus' time, they used religion to serve their own agendas. Yet, even through the teachings of these preachers and ministers, I learned something vital: The gospel must be separated from politics, Christ's truth stands apart from every empire and ideology, and my faith must rest not in institutions, but in the living Christ himself.

## **Being a Palestinian Christian**

Being a Palestinian Christian shapes everything I do. It calls me to love my Muslim and Jewish neighbors and even our enemies, including the Israeli occupation and settlers who oppress us. Loving them does not mean accepting injustice. It means praying they, too, will encounter Christ and turn from evil.

My identity is bound to my people's history of suffering and resilience.

Living under Israeli military occupation has deepened my understanding of Jesus' teachings on justice, compassion and perseverance.

To be a Palestinian Christian is to carry Christ's light into darkness, his peace into fear and his justice into oppression. It is to live resurrection amid crucifixion and to follow Christ not because of heritage or tradition, but because he alone is the truth that redeems, forgives and gives hope no power on Earth can take away.

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