

Week 1 Devotion: Dr. Yousef AlKhouri

“He has brought down powerful from their thrones but has lifted up the lowly”. (Luke 1:52)

The crucified Jesus Christ was a Palestinian Jew—fully divine and fully human. In Christ, God entered human history and geography in a miraculous way. The mystery of the Incarnation is not just a theological doctrine; it is God’s tangible engagement with human life, stepping into history to be one of us. God’s choice of Palestine for the Incarnation was intentional, as was the decision to become incarnate during a time of Roman occupation and oppression. The Incarnation, then, is not just a spiritual concept; it carries geopolitical significance. It is the *kairos*, the fullness of time, in which God appeared in the flesh to experience life under imperial domination, suffering its injustice and brutality. Ultimately Christ did not just live under empire—he was executed by it. While his death on the cross is redemptive and atoning, it is also incarnate, demonstrating that God suffers with and for humanity. For Palestinians, the cross is a profound reminder that God is with us, suffering as we suffer and feeling our pain.

The cross also holds a liberating meaning in two dimensions. First, it signifies God’s victory over sin and death. Second, it represents a challenge to corrupt political, economic, religious, and social systems. Jesus’ crucifixion was the result of his rejection of oppression and his confrontation with an unjust and racist order. His progressive vision sparked fear among those who benefited from imperial and religious oppression. As one theologian put it, “Christ was crucified because he openly challenged the corrupt status quo upheld by the alliance between the Jewish religious elite in Jerusalem and the Roman occupiers.” Christ did not remain silent in the face of injustice; from the beginning of his ministry, he proclaimed the coming of God’s kingdom—a just kingdom opposed to both the Temple elite’s exploitation and Caesar’s empire of slavery and oppression. The cross, then, is the price of faithfulness to the mission of justice, a declaration of freedom from fear and the ultimate sign of God’s power and victory. The cross calls us Palestinians to resist oppression, hold fast to truth and reject fear while striving to manifest God’s just reign.

Finally, the cross is the means of reconciliation between humanity and God, as well as among human beings. Humanity’s rebellion against God fractured not only the divine–human relationship but also humans’ relationships with one another. In contrast to God’s wisdom, humanity devised systems of segregation, social stratification, and gender hierarchies to dominate and subjugate others. Jesus’ vision of the kingdom—a community of radical equality—posed a direct threat to imperial policies and their religious defenders. The church, founded by Christ, embraces all people, rejecting the exclusivist social and religious hierarchies of the Roman Empire. On the cross, God dismantled every wall separating humans from God and from one another. With his arms stretched wide, Jesus reconciled humanity to itself, calling his followers to continue his work. The cross teaches Palestinians, the cross teaches us the imperative of reconciliation, of breaking down of barriers, whether physical, ethnic, or gender-based, of rejecting oppressive systems. The cross is God’s open invitation to meditate on divine love, to live victoriously without fear, and to embody the message of the kingdom. It calls us to discover new meanings of the crucified Christ and his cross, to live and act as our Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ of our land and people.

Week 1 Discussion and Prayer:

Dr. Yousef AlKhoury

Questions:

1. What does the cross mean to you today?
2. How does the cross challenge our allegiances and invite us to actively resist imperial, unjust structures?

Prayer

Incarnated Christ, the embodiment of God's solidarity with the oppressed, you have experienced our suffering, even to the point of unjust execution by an imperial power. Lord, give us courage to speak truth to power as you did. Remind our hearts that you did not replicate the way of the empire to destroy your enemies but to restore them. Amen.

Dr. Yousef AlKhoury

Dr. AlKhoury is Christian Palestinian theologian and activist. He was born in Gaza to a Christian family with a long heritage of serving in the priesthood of the Greek Orthodox Church. He lives in Bethlehem, Palestine, and serves as academic dean at Bethlehem Bible College.

