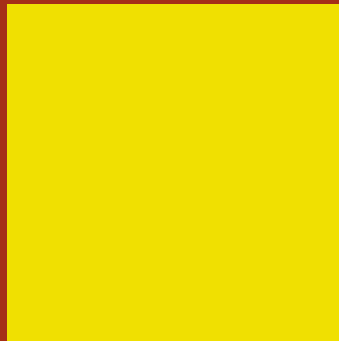


4



WHEN ENCOUNTER
BECOMES CONFLICT: JUST
WAR AND JUST PEACE

MODULE FOUR

JUST WAR AND JUST PEACE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this part of the curriculum, the following theme is elaborated: 'when encounter becomes conflict: just war and just peace'. This package has been developed for secondary school and offers the teacher or supervisor of a learning group the opportunity to develop this theme at the level of one's own class.

This lesson starts with a biblical text related to this topic. This text serves as the main thread for the core of this lesson. This teacher's book details how the student's book is structured. In addition, extra information about topics covered in the student's book and didactic suggestions are given. This is in the form of alternative assignments and how they could be structured. All this information serves adequately as inspiration for preparing and structuring the lesson.

This teacher's book distinguishes between '*basic learning material*' and '*deeper learning material*'. Basic learning material is covered in the student's book and takes 1 class session to complete. In addition, the teacher has the option to further deepen the students' knowledge by employing an extra section with accompanying information and didactic suggestions provided in this book.

This class consists of the following lesson sections:

- First, the content of the book of Revelation of John is discussed. This chapter is part of the basic learning material for the students.
- Second, some Bible texts (Luke 6:27-32 and Revelation 21:1-22:5) are discussed. This section addresses the question of how Christians can deal with violent conflict. This chapter is part of the basic learning material for the students.
- The third chapter detail the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I discusses his ideas on war and violence and his role in the German resistance. This is an in-depth chapter.

This teacher's book concludes with a glossary in which all difficult terms are explained simply and concisely at the level of the students. This is followed by a bibliography per section of this teaching package.

4.1.2 LEARNING OBJECTIVES OF THE LESSON

1. The student can describe why it is important to study a Bible text in its context.
2. The student asks questions about a text while reading a (possibly violent, discriminating and / or polarizing) Bible text without giving direct answers.
3. The student is willing to relate his/her point of view on violence and war to the story of the Bible.
4. The student can describe the concepts of pacifism, just war, and peace.
5. The student displays a willingness to handle Bible texts beyond a mere one-time reading.
6. The student can name important elements of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life and thought.

4.1.3 DIDACTIC SUGGESTIONS

At the beginning of each section, explanations are given about the purpose and content of the section. After that, several didactic suggestions are given. These suggestions include the following aspects:

- *Questions*: These are additional questions that can be used to discuss the lesson in-class, without the students working through the student's book independently. Some of the questions can be used to introduce the lesson.
- *Alternative teaching methods and assignments*: These are teaching methods and assignments that can be used to replace parts of the lesson or to supplement (parts of) the lesson.

General suggestions

The different parts of the lesson can be implemented in two ways: individually or in-class. These implementations can be combined with having students go through part of the teaching material or assignments as homework in advance. 'Individual' means that the students go through the course material independently.

Regarding in-class implementation, two variants appear in this teacher's book.

- The course material is read together. Throughout the reading, several questions are asked of the students. If necessary, an alternative assignment is used as a conclusion to the lesson.
- The material is implemented by using alternative assignments instead of reading through the student's book.

4.1.4 PLANNING

You can choose to have the students go through the lesson digitally or you can use the printed version of the students' textbook. In both cases, the students can individually complete the lesson independently. The basic learning material is developed for 1 class session. If the lesson is done in-class, you can go through the lessons in parts. Below is an example schedule for a 50-minute lesson.

1. 4 minutes: Opening + Introduce the scenario
2. 5 minutes: View the video
3. 3 minutes: Discuss the video
4. 5 minutes: Students make independent section 1: The world of the Bible
5. 3 minutes Discuss section 1
6. 25 minutes: Students make independent section 2: Introducing the world of the story
7. 5 minutes: Review section 2 / Review lesson

4.2 VIDEO



Figure 4.1
The video clip

David, Sarah and Anna are watching TV together. On the TV, we see tanks driving down a road. A reporter explains that troops from one country have crossed the border into their neighboring country. According to the president of this country, the neighboring nation violates the rights of its citizens. Contrary to this, the prime minister of this neighboring country claims that his president intends to only expand his power. Sarah, David, and Anna talk about whether or not their own government ought to help the invaded country. They also discuss whether Christians can approve of a war. In the midst of their discussion, the reporter on the TV interrupts them and helps them to think more deeply about these issues.

Discussion of the video

Discuss the image clip with the students in-class: what did they see?

The following questions are suggestions of things you could ask.

Introductory questions for the first chapter of this module: 'The World of the Bible'

- The video refers to an image of Jesus appearing as a warrior in the book of Revelation of John. What does book of "Revelation of John" contain?
- In the video the teens talk about loving your neighbor. Jesus takes it one step further and also speaks of loving an enemy. What does Jesus mean by an "enemy" in Luke 6:27-32?

Introductory questions for the second chapter of this module: 'The world of the story'

- The teens in the video are talking about war. How would you define "war"?
- What historical or ongoing wars do you know of?
- How would you define 'peace'?
- The video talks about bringing peace. Can war be used as a means to bring peace? What do you think?

Introductory questions for the second chapter of this module: 'Discipleship with a Price: The Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer'

- Someone who thought about using violence and was directly confronted with it himself is Dietrich Bonhoeffer. What can you tell about him?
- Bonhoeffer talked a lot about "discipleship. What do you think a disciple of Jesus is?

4.3 OPENING

4.3.1 PURPOSE AND CONTENT

This section serves as an introduction to the lesson. The goal is to allow the students to explore the Bible texts (Luke 6:27-32 and Revelation 19:11-16, 19) and to let them recall their prior knowledge.

4.3.2 EXERCISE

Exercise 2

Read the text about loving your enemies and a white horse rider on the next page. You may already know these texts. Write down what you think it means.

The aim of this exercise is to appeal to the students' prior knowledge. To answer this task quickly and comprehensively, the Bible text must already be known. Gather the answers from different students to get an idea of the level of the group.

4.4.3.3 BIBLE TEXT

Luke 6:27-32

But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.

Revelation of John 19:11-16, 19

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. ...

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army.

4.4 THE WORLD OF THE BIBLE

4.4.1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this section of the lesson is to introduce students to certain aspects of the book of Revelation of John. The goal is to clarify the context of Revelation 19:11-19 and thereby make it clear that the rider on a white horse in this chapter represents Jesus. This knowledge is relevant to better understand the Bible text that is the focus of this lesson. The following learning objective is specifically addressed in this subchapter:

1. The student can describe why it is important to study a Bible text in its context.

4.4.2 CONTENT

This lesson section explains how the Revelation of John is put together to make it clear that the white diamonds are an image of Jesus.

4.4.3 EXERCISES AND ANSWERS

Exercise 3

Who is the rider on the white horse in Revelation 19:11-19.

- A. King David**
- B. Prophet Elijah**
- C. Jesus**
- D. Archangel Gabriel**

The aim of this exercise is for the students to recognize that the rider on a white horse is Jesus.

4.4.4 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Revelation of John

The content and interpretation of this book is a difficult topic and hotly debated among Bible scholars. There are several major theological lines of interpretation by which the book can be approached. Gregory Beale presents a helpful classification into futurism, historicism, preterism, and idealism. (1) The **preterist** interpretation assumes that the events described in the book already happened in the first century. (2) The **futurist** interpretation assumes that the book describes future events just before the return of Jesus. (3) The **historical** interpretation assumes that the text wants to say something about the course of history up to the coming of Jesus, as well as the reader's time. (4) The **idealist** interpretation assumes that the imagery in the text is not related to past or future events but seeks to symbolically represent the ongoing struggle between God and evil. A combination of these four lines can also be applied. The exact interpretation of the book is not important for the purpose of this lesson. When discussing the Book of Revelation, it is important to keep these lines of interpretation in mind. During reading this book, students may refer to one or more of these interpretations.

The Book of Revelation consists of a series of visions. To understand Revelation 19 properly, it is important to study the structure of the book. The structure and content are briefly summarized below:

- 1:1-20 - This text serves as an introduction to the book.
- 1:20-3:21 - This section contains seven letters addressed to seven Christian communities in Asia Minor.
- 4:1-5:14 - This section describes a picture of a heavenly throne room where God is worshipped. There is a sealed scroll here that no one can open.
- 6:1-8:1 - A lamb appears and is able to break the seals of the scroll. After each seal is broken, something special happens in heaven or on earth. The lamb is a picture of Jesus.
- 8:2-11:19 - Seven angels with trumpets are described. These angels blow their trumpets one by one. After each trumpet sound, something special happens in heaven or on earth.
- 12:1-14:20 - It describes how a pregnant woman gives birth to a son. After the birth, a dragon appears and tries to kill the woman and the child. The child is often interpreted as referring to Jesus.

- 15:1-16:21 This section describes how seven sacrificial bowls are poured out on the earth. After each bowl is poured out, something special happens on the earth.
- 17:1-19:10 - This section describes the judgment that is pronounced on Babylon.
- 19:11-21 - In this section, a white horseman goes to war with Satan and achieves victory.
- 21:1-22:5 - This section contains the picture of a New Heaven and a New Earth.
- 22:6-21 - This section contains the last words given to John.

It is evident from the imagery used in the book that the rider on a white horse in chapter 19 is an **image of Jesus**. Although Jesus is previously depicted as a slaughtered lamb, in chapter 19 he is described as a violent man and an army commander. After this description, the image of Jesus as a lamb appears again.

4.4.5 DIDACTIC SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are only helpful if the lesson is taught through classroom instruction.

Suggestions for introductory questions

- What is the Book of Revelation of John about?
- The Book of Revelation often speaks of a lamb. Who is this lamb?
- What do you notice about the white rider?

Alternative assignments and instructional methods

Assignment. Have the students read Revelation 19 and 20 or read it together as a group. Discuss what they observe in the text. See if you can include the whole of the Book of Revelation in the discussion as well. Additionally, ask questions such as:

- Why do you think imagery is used in the Book of Revelation?
- How does Jesus appear in the text?
- Why is there fighting in the text?

4.5 THE WORLD OF STORY

4.5.1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this section is to have the students think about the use of war and violence. This is done on the basis of two Bible texts. The students are given a number of skills for this purpose. The emphasis in this lesson is on the interpretation and application of the Bible text. The following learning objectives will be addressed in this lesson section:

2. The student asks questions about a text while reading a (possibly violent, discriminating and / or polarizing) Bible text without giving direct answers.
3. The student is willing to relate his/her point of view on violence and war to the story of the Bible.
4. The student can describe the concepts of pacifism, just war, and peace.
5. The student displays a willingness to handle Bible texts beyond a mere one-time reading.

4.5.2 CONTENT

In this section of the lesson, we explore how Christians deal with war and violence. **The first part** of this section discusses the concepts of pacifism, just war, and holy war. Students should think about exactly what the concepts mean and what their opinion of these concepts is.

The **second part** of this section discusses the views of four Protestant thinkers on violence and war. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* presented a pacifist thought from a Protestant reflection on discipleship. *Daniel Bell* presented an alternative perspective on just war from Christian discipleship. *Walter Wink* presented active nonviolent resistance, which he saw as an alternative to both just war and pacifism. *Reinhold Niebuhr* presented an argument against pacifism and argues why war can sometimes be necessary.

4.5.3 EXERCISES AND ANSWERS

Exercise 3

In both Bible passages, a relationship is made between the person of Jesus and violence. What strikes you about this?

The purpose of this exercise is for students to study the Bible text again and name the apparent contradiction between the two texts.

Example answers:

1. In Revelation 19:11-19, Jesus seems very energetic, whereas in Luke 6:27-32, Jesus actually requires his followers to remain calm.
2. In Revelation 19:11-19, Jesus appears combative, but in Luke 6:27-32, he appears rather passive.
3. In Revelation 19:11-19, Jesus appears combative, but in Luke 6:27-32, he appears rather passive.

Exercise 4

Read the statements below.

- 4. According to Jesus, you cannot not use violence to defend yourself, but you may use it to defend others.**
- 5. When it is necessary, Christians may fight in wars to make the world a better place.**
- 6. Loving your enemies means never using violence.**
- 7. Following Jesus means taking up your cross. Thus, you can be a victim of violence, but never a perpetrator of violence.**

Which statements do you agree with? Explain why, using at least the two biblical texts.

The purpose of this response is for students to interpret the texts and compare them with the statements. In addition, they are forced to apply the texts in practice. In this sense, they are moved to place the Bible texts in a theological context.

Exercise 5

Compare the concepts of “pacifism,” “just war,” and “holy war. How do the three concepts differ and how are they similar?

The purpose of this exercise is for students to process the concepts of pacifism, just war, and holy war by highlighting the differences and similarities. In addition, the main similarity, just peace, has already been named in the text. This exercise also serves to bring this clearly to the students' attention.

Sample Answers:

- These three terms emphasize that achieving goals is an important motivation behind our behavior.
- The terms give different perspectives on how a goal may be achieved.
- Both pacifism and the just war tradition favor peaceful solutions, but just war argues that sometimes violent interventions/wars cannot be avoided.

Exercise 6

What would just peace look like in today's world?

The purpose of this exercise is for students to apply the concept of just peace in today's society and thereby critically analyze today's society as well.

Example answer:

Just peace would mean that there would be no more poverty. Also, everyone would be able to do fun things without money being a factor. Additionally, we would be surrounded by much more nature to enjoy and we would need fewer factories. Furthermore, the government would do everything in its power to ensure that people in other countries have it as good as we do in this country.

Exercise 7

What can you do to ensure peace?

The purpose of this exercise is for students to think about their possible role in bringing about a more just and peaceful society.

Sample answer:

I can ensure a more just world by treating everyone equally. I can also think about how my choices affect the lives of others. In addition, I could do volunteer work to make the lives of others more pleasant that way. Last but not least, I can organize an afternoon for sports and games in my class so that we will start getting to know each other better and thus fight less.

Exercise 8

Which thinker appeals to you the most and which does not? Why? Try to use the two Bible texts from this lesson in your answer.

The purpose of this exercise is for students to evaluate pacifism and just war from a Protestant perspective. Even though the Catholic tradition has clearer views on just war, Protestants have also written about it. By pointing out Protestant thinkers, students are also made aware of the diversity within Protestantism.

Exercise 9

Jesus thus tells to love one's enemies. What does this mean to you? How do you apply this in your own life?

The purpose of this assignment is to help students evaluate the meaning of loving your enemies so that they can relate this question to themselves. By answering this question at the end of the lesson, they have the opportunity to incorporate Protestant ideas and concepts into their response.

4.5.4 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

War and armed conflict defined

War can be defined as an armed conflict between countries and people groups, but it can also have a broader meaning. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines war as "an actual, intentional, and widespread armed conflict." This definition presupposes several conditions before one can speak of war. In addition, this definition does not limit war only to armed conflicts between nations. It can also refer to armed conflicts based on **other group divisions**. Consider, for instance, **people** and religious **groups**.

This broad definition more accurately reflects the reality of war throughout history.

When thinking about war, it is useful to discuss the **spectrum of war conflicts in the modern era** developed by Jill Long (2016). On this spectrum, unrestricted armed conflict and world peace are at the extremes. This spectrum illustrates that conflicts exist in various degrees. It also demonstrates that true peace is more than the absence of brute force and conflict in a country. There are many different intermediary forms between waging war and having world peace, in which peace is achieved to a certain degree. An example of an intermediate form is “subcutaneous tensions” between countries, which may create or sustain a threat of war. Another example is an unequal balance of power in which one country promotes its own interests at the expense of the inhabitants of another country, but without violence.

In the **modern legal order**, war is a means of promoting peace that can only be used under strict conditions. War as a means of conquest, retaliation, or pressure is consequently prohibited. War is permissible under international law only if all other means have been exhausted and there is an international mandate for it. This international legal order has its origins in the “just war” tradition. The Christian tradition has played an important role in the development of these concepts.

Pacifism

Pacifism is an attitude that certain people adopt, rejecting violence and/or war as a means that may be used to reach an end. The word “pacifism” is derived from the Latin *pax* meaning “peace” and *facere* meaning “to make.” Pacifism is thus the making of peace. Modern pacifism is truly diverse. People reject war for different reasons and have different opinions about when violence is or is not permissible.

Many Christian pacifists consider the **core message** of the Bible to be love, peace, and compassion. This is directly related to Jesus’ call to love one’s neighbour and even one’s enemy. It also emphasizes the exercise of authority through love and humility rather than punishment and violence. This vision implies an optimistic view of human potential. After all, following Jesus then gives the possibility to make his message of peace a reality in the here and now. Critics often describe this optimism as (naïve) idealism.

Just war theory

Just war theory is concerned with the moral justification for when and how wars may be fought. These theories constitute an important **tradition** within political, religious, and military ethics. In this tradition, war can be considered in specific cases as a means of preventing more serious violence and more casualties.

The tradition has its origins already in antiquity amongst the Greek and Roman philosophers. It was Cicero who, as early as 44 B.C., laid out a comprehensive consideration of conditions to justify warfare. It was not until the fourth century, after the Emperor Constantine, that the tradition began to develop within Christian theology. Two distinct phases of warfare in which the question of justification comes into play have been distinguished: *Jus ad Bellum* and *Jus in Bello*.

'Jus ad Bellum' concerns the question of when a group is entitled to start a war on just grounds. The following conditions apply in the modern just war tradition: (a) just cause, (b) as a last resort, (c) by a proper and competent authority, (d) with the right intention, (e) with probability of success, (f) with proportionality. The student book further explains these conditions.

'Jus in bello' concerns how war can be just during combat. The following conditions apply in modern just war theory:

- *Distinction*: The applied violence may only be directed at armed combatants of the enemy and not at bystanders.
- *Proportionality*: The combatants must ensure that the harm done to unarmed civilians from the violence used is proportionate to the benefits to unarmed civilians.
- *Necessity*: The objective of all military decisions should be aimed at defeating the enemy and minimizing harm to ordinary citizens.

Nowadays, many scholars also add a third phase. **'Jus post bellum'**, and this concerns justice after the end of a war.

Within Christian thought, just war theory is often defended by arguing that it is consistent with the realities of the world. It can also be argued that there is a moral obligation to use all means to bring about justice, just as in the Bible God also allowed violence to work toward a more just world.

Holy Wars

A final form of justification for war, which can also be discussed within the Christian tradition, is '**holy war**'. Holy war means that a war is justified by the approval or involvement of a divinity. In practice, this means that at least one of the parties in a war acts on the belief that the war represents a divine purpose or mission. In a wider application, we can speak of '**religious wars**'. This means that war is waged in which religious goals play a major role. An example of so-called 'holy wars' are the Crusades.

Just Peace

The concept of just peace represents an important concept when discussing just war theory and pacifism is the concept of **just peace**. Peace is a concept used primarily to describe the absence of conflict, wars, and violence. However, peace can also be applied more broadly and then refers to a state of completeness and harmony between people, as well as within persons themselves. This application of 'peace' aligns with the Hebrew 'shalom'. Just peace is a concept which directly links to the broader use of peace with justice. For a just peace to truly exist, one can only speak of a harmonious existence of people if there is also justice in that society.

Both pacifists and adherents of the just war tradition **strive to achieve peace**. Most of the Protestant thinkers described below will also highlight peace as the primary goal of their approach. Thus, talking about violence and war cannot be done without thinking about peace. Based on biblical texts such as Revelation 19 and Isaiah 11:6-9, the concept of just peace may be considered an important concept to Christians.

Protestant thinkers

This lesson specifically addresses the question of how Christians should deal with war and violence. Two main viewpoints are explained, pacifism and just war theory. No answer is given as to which of these views would be better. In the breadth of Protestant traditions, both views are defended. Although certain church traditions are known to be pacifist or non-pacifist, shifts within denominations are also evident. For example, throughout the 20th century there was a shift within Pentecostal denominations, from being predominantly pacifist to have a greater emphasis on just war. Notable Protestant pacifists include John Howard Yoder, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Jean Lassare. Notable Protestants within the just war tradition are Oliver O'Donovan and Reinhold Niebuhr.

This lesson focuses on the ideas of four Protestant writers. Below, some brief information about these writers is given.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

This additional material of this module is about Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). More information about Bonhoeffer can be found [there](#).

Daniel Bell

Daniel Bell is a theologian and ethicist. He has written about the topics just war and economics. He was a professor of ethics at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Columbia, Florida. He also served as an elder in the United Methodist Church. In 2009, his book *Just War as Christian Discipleship* was published.

In this book, Bell presents an **alternative approach** to the just war tradition for Christians. He calls the traditional approach the **Public Policy Checklist**. According to Bell, this approach consists primarily of checking off a checklist to make decisions about war. This rules-based approach aims to force people to abide by the rules when approving war.

Bell believes that the (un)justice of war should be judged primarily from the standpoint of **character and virtue**. The aim is to develop a **character and virtues** that allow one to always approach problematic situations with the conviction that justice and peace must be the only outcome in these situations. In this sense, the individual places just peace at the center of all reflections and decision-making. Thus, an important part of this approach is that violence is not considered as an end or means of power, but rather as a means to bring about justice. According to Bell, this can only be properly developed through **Christian discipleship**. Through discipleship, a person can learn to deal with the complexity of the world and allow the justice of the gospel to be the basis for the public realm.

Bell thus seeks to exchange the completion of a checklist for the development of a certain attitude to life and mindset. The disciple is formed to be able to participate in the social debate about conflict, injustice and war. For the church, this means that not political connections are the key to success, but the key is a reverence for God. God wants the believer to pursue justice, and in this pursuit, war can sometimes be judged as a just means.

Walter Wink

Walter Wink (1935-2012) advocated as a theologian for **active nonviolence**. Wink was a professor at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York. Wink is well-known for his four-part series "The Powers", in which he develops his position on active nonviolence.

Wink defends the thesis that Christians should pursue nonviolence. This nonviolence is not passive but presupposes the **active commitment** against violence. Wink rejects what he calls the 'myth of redemptive violence'. This is the notion that violence can be just and necessary. This is a myth that Wink believes pervades modern society.

According to Wink, Jesus revealed a God who rejects violence and is inherently nonviolent. The reign of God means the utter **destruction** of all forms of violence. Through Jesus, God contradicted man's belief that violence is a solution to problems. Such destruction cannot be achieved by taking over violence from evil. By doing so, you yourself become the evil you are fighting against. In Jesus, God contradicted man's belief in violence as a solution to problems. **Nonviolent resistance** to violence is a way to break with this violence. Creating nonviolent alternatives is a spiritual practice because it demands, first of all, the courage to fight the evil within ourselves.

Wink uses the "turning of the other cheek" as an example of creating a political and cultural context of resistance. Instead of standing up to violent humiliation, which is expected in a violent culture, you turn the other cheek. Wink calls the attitude of seeking nonviolent alternatives the third way. In searching for the **third way**, Wink places your enemy at the center.

Reinhold Niebuhr

Reinhold Niebuhr (1882-1971) was a reformed theologian who has written extensively about the relation between Christianity and politics. After the First World War, he developed pacifist beliefs, in the period leading up to the Second World War he abandoned them. He is one of the founders of the tradition of Christian Realism. This tradition presupposes three things: (1) the sinfulness of humanity; (2) the freedom of humanity; (3) the truth and seriousness of the 'great commandment'.

Niebuhr does not reject pacifism as a whole, but he does reject the practical pacifism of the liberal Christianity of his day. Niebuhr contended that the **ethic of the gospel** is pure love and nonviolence. It is due to the nature of humankind that this pacifism is an ideal that cannot be realized. For this reason, Niebuhr completely rejects any form of **idealism**. While it is possible for an individual to live out the ideal of the gospel in their own life, it is impossible for societies.

Niebuhr argues that war may be necessary and somewhat justifiable. At the same time, he does reject the just war tradition. According to him, this tradition is based on the notion of **natural laws** and aims to reach morally normative decisions on war and peace. In doing so, Niebuhr argues, this

tradition places too much faith in human **reason**. He argues that people do not make decisions based on reason, but rather on **passions and interests**. This is why an objectively “just” war is not possible.

Niebuhr describes war as “a final revelation of the character of humanity”. Wars are full of **tragedy** and **human suffering**. Niebuhr therefore does not think lightly of war. In all considerations of war in academia and politics, this tragedy has to be front and center. Although for Niebuhr wars can never be condoned, he believes that because of human nature war is a necessary means of sustaining societies. As he saw it, Christians’ job in the present state of the world is to use every means in order to create a **peaceful society**. If you do not do this, according to Niebuhr, you cannot be called a true peacemaker.

It is important to note that Niebuhr did not really engage with the tradition in his discussions of the just war tradition. Various thinkers had already discussed many of his objections during his life. Ultimately, an important contribution to (Christian) politics has been his emphasis on passion and interests in decision-making.

4.5.5 DIDACTIC SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are useful only if the lesson is covered through classroom instruction.

Suggestions for introductory questions

- How would you define 'war'?
- What is pacifism and what are your views on it?
- Does something like a 'just war' exist?
- Thesis: Violence and war are never good.

Alternative assignments and instructional methods

Assignment. Divide the class into small groups. Have each group discuss whether or not war may sometimes be allowed. They may also set terms for when it is permissible or list arguments for why it cannot be. Ask the students to reflect on the concept of peace through these conversations as well. Give them the following questions to consider:

- Who determines whether war may be waged? How can such a person, group, or agency actually determine this?
- What are the conditions under which a just war can be declared?
- What is your opinion on the idea that war may be necessary?
- What does peace look like?
- Can war and a desire for peace go hand in hand?

Students will create a poster answering the questions and present it briefly to each other.

Assignment. Divide the class into pairs. Students are instructed to search for more information on pacifism, just war, and holy war.

The assignment is to find out what the terms mean. The objective is that the students to arrive at a definition of the three terms and describe the differences and similarities between the terms. All pairs briefly present their definitions and together as a class work towards one definition per term.

Assignment. Make space in the classroom. The students position themselves on an imaginary or real line that consists of two poles. Let the students determine their position on the line between the two poles of statements. Examples of opposite statements:

- Resorting to war is often permissible. <-> Resorting to war is never permissible.
- Violence can be a means to help others. <-> Violence can never be used to help others.
- Pacifism is an ideal image that we should strive for in our society. <-> Pacifism is an ideal image that is not realistic for our contemporary society.
- Jesus had pacifist ideas. <-> Jesus had no pacifist ideas.
- God uses war as a means to bring about peace. <-> God is completely nonviolent.

After each pair of opposing statements, ask a number of students to explain their position.



Figure 4.2
A consequence of war
Source: Pxhere

4.6 DISCIPLESHIP WITH A PRICE: THE LIFE OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

4.6.1 PURPOSE In this section, the students are introduced to the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The following learning objectives are specifically addressed in this subchapter:

6. The student can name the most important elements of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life and thought.

4.6.2 CONTENT This lesson section provides a representation of the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. A brief outline of Bonhoeffer's life is given, then Bonhoeffer's vision of discipleship and pacifism is discussed.

4.6.3 EXERCISES AND ANSWERS

Exercise 1

What does the concept of 'being a disciple of Jesus' mean to you?

The purpose of this exercise is for the students to reflect on what following Jesus means and means to them.

Exercise 2

Bonhoeffer says that to follow Jesus means to resist nonviolently. Do you think effective nonviolent resistance is possible? If so, what do you think this nonviolent resistance might look like? If not, why?

The purpose of this assignment is for students to reflect on the idea of nonviolent resistance. They are asked to reflect on the practicalities of this resistance. In addition, students are encouraged to further develop their own opinions on this topic.

Sample answer:

- Yes, we can obey laws as best we can, but sometimes you have to use the loopholes in a law as much as possible to achieve a good goal.
- No, even by chanting slogans on the street, for example, you are using a form of (verbal) violence.

Exercise 3

Bonhoeffer is also sometimes called a martyr and a Protestant saint.

What in Bonhoeffer's life speaks to you? How can you try to elicit this yourself?

The purpose of this exercise is for students to draw lessons of their own from the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

4.6.4 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Biography

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born on 4 February 1906 in Breslau, then Germany now Poland, along with his twin sister Sabine. He grew up in a household of eight children. His father, Karl, was a neurologist and psychiatrist and his mother, Paula, was a teacher. Besides Dietrich, also his brother Klaus died during the Second World War. His brother Walter had already died during the First World War. Furthermore, the husbands of his older sisters Ursula and Christel were executed during the war. Christel herself was also imprisoned during the war but survived. His brother Karl became a chemist and was one of the discoverers of the spin isomers of hydrogen.

Dietrich surprised his family when he announced that he was going to study **theology**. Although the family was Christian, they did not attend church. A visit to Rome in 1924 impressed him greatly and changed his vision of the church. In 1928, he graduated with a thesis in which he argued that the church should be a community of saints. He started his pastoral career in 1928, when he became a chaplain in a German church in Barcelona. It was here that his pastoral talents became evident, and Bonhoeffer consequently breathed new life into the community.

In 1930, he left for a **postdoctoral** fellowship in the US. There he worked at Union Theological Seminary and gained a new understanding of **social justice** through visiting black churches. After returning from the US, he held various pastoral positions in different places in Europe.

In 1933, he left Germany to become the pastor of some small German-speaking congregations in London. Although he was not present when the Confessing Church was established, he mobilized German pastors in England against Nazism and organized aid for German refugees.

In 1935, he returned to Germany to work at a **seminary of the Confessing Church**. It was during his work at this seminary that he wrote his two best-known works, "Living Together" and "Cost of Discipleship". After all seminaries were shut down under the pressure of the SS, Bonhoeffer moved to go to the US to avoid conscription. However, in the US he felt the desire to help his fellow German believers on the ground in Germany itself. In 1939, he thus returned to Germany.

He applied to be a military chaplain to carry on his pastoral work, but that job was rejected. He eventually got a job as a **counterintelligence officer** with the Abwehr where he had to gather information as a pastoral worker abroad. In reality, he was a double agent who used his position to help the German resistance and support Christians throughout Europe. He used the various trips he made for this position to share information about the resistance to the Allies.

Bonhoeffer played a **key role** in a nonviolent plan to help 14 Jewish men and women flee to Switzerland. He was arrested in April 1943 after it was discovered that he had arranged the money to make this escape plan possible. Official documents show that he was convicted of using his position to avoid service in the army and of giving other people the opportunity to do the same.



Figure 4.3
Concentration camp
Flossenbürg
Source: Wikimedia
Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flossenburg.jpg>.

After the failed **coup** on July 20, 1944, in which an attempt was made to assassinate Adolf Hitler as well, his contacts with the conspirators were revealed. He eventually ended up at concentration camp Flossenbürg. It seems impossible that Bonhoeffer was actually involved in the preparation of

this coup attempt since he had already been imprisoned for a year. When Hitler ordered the death of the conspirators in April 1945, Bonhoeffer was sentenced to death by SS Judge Otto Thorbeck on April 8. The sentence was carried out on April 9, 1945, barely two weeks before the camp was liberated by U.S. soldiers.

Bonhoeffer and Discipleship

The book 'Cost of Discipleship' outlines Bonhoeffer's vision of what it means to follow Jesus. The two concepts underlying his vision are cheap and costly grace. According to Bonhoeffer, cheap grace is simply receiving forgiveness and comfort without any real meaning. It is a system that is lifeless and makes the church dead. Cheap grace is something offered as a quick fix without transforming a person into a true follower of Jesus.

In contrast to this cheap grace stands costly grace, which demands that as a believer you submit to a higher good. This higher good is the work of Jesus. Following Jesus is costly because it involves that a person is willing to give up everything and, if necessary, break ties with the world. The risk associated with this decision is that this person is vulnerable and may be rejected by the world. This may also mean that a person must suffer.

For Bonhoeffer, the church is not a place of retribution in the world because it does not have any political status. The church has to patiently endure the aggression of the world. The calling of the church is to become one with Jesus rather than to eradicate all evil from the world. For a follower of Jesus, this means enduring and not resisting violence and aggression. This also means not trying to justify one's own use of violence. Because a person resists nonviolently, it can actually overcome the evil done by others.

An important question is how Bonhoeffer ended up participating in a conspiracy. Opinions differ on the question. Some scholars claim that Bonhoeffer abandoned his earlier pacifist views, yet a 2013 biography shows that he likely always held on to his ideas.¹ There is no evidence that he joined the Abwehr to help assassinate Hitler. On the contrary, the reason appears to have been his determination to help the church. Moreover, no evidence was found of direct involvement in coup attempts and attacks against Hitler.

4.6.5 DIDACTIC SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are useful only if the lesson is covered through classroom instruction.

Suggestions for introductory questions

- What does the word discipleship mean?
- What makes following Jesus precious?
- What was the confessing church?
- How can you resist violence and war?

Alternative assignments and instructional methods

Video. Watch a documentary or a movie about the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer with the students. Since documentaries and movies can take longer than a lesson will allow, it is best to select a fragment. Examples of films and documentaries are Bonhoeffer: Agent of Grace (2000), Bonhoeffer (2003), Hanged on a Twisted Cross (1996) and Heroes of Conscience (1993).

¹ Mark Nation, Anthony G Siegrist, and Daniel P Umbel, Bonhoeffer the Assassin?: Challenging the Myth, Recovering His Call to Peacemaking, 2013, Accessed March 30, 2021, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10805947>.

4.7 STUDENT PAGES: DISCIPLESHIP WITH A PRICE: THE LIFE OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

When you are confronted with a government that goes against everything that you believe, what do you do? What if this government threatens the lives of innocent people and divides society? What if your fellow believers start running after this government? These questions should be asked when you look at the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Dietrich is one of the most influential **church leaders** of the 21st century. He was born on February 4, 1906 in what was then Breslau, Germany. On April 9, 1945 he was executed by the Nazis. In 1937 he published the book "The cost of discipleship". In this book, he reflects on what it means to follow Jesus.

The Life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dietrich was the son of psychiatrist and neurologist Karl and of teacher Paula. He grew up in a family that described itself as 'Christian' but did not attend church. His mother taught the children about the Bible at home. It still came as a surprise when Dietrich decided to study theology and become a **pastor**. After his studies in Tübingen, he left for the USA to continue his studies. There he became friends with Reinhold Niebuhr and the French pacifist Jean Lassere. In the US, Bonhoeffer also learned the perspective of the oppressed.

When Bonhoeffer returned to Germany in 1931, he went to work at the University of Berlin. During the rise of Nazism, a part of the German church favored this ideology. Bonhoeffer resisted this and became part of a countermovement that would eventually form the 'Confessing Church'. In the years leading up to the war, he taught at a school of this Confessing Church. During this period, he developed his ideas about **following** Jesus.

Exercise 1

What does it mean to you to follow Jesus?

Following Jesus

The work of Bonhoeffer offers a form of pacifism which does not conform to common meanings. His pacifism is a form of **faith expression** that is based upon following Jesus. To this end, Bonhoeffer distinguishes between cheap and costly grace.



Cheap grace, according to Bonhoeffer, emphasizes the beautiful and enjoyable aspects of Christianity without talking about the less pleasant sides. This means that a person says he or she is a Christian without really putting any effort into it.



Costly grace is a grace that calls to truly imitate and follow Jesus. This imitation is costly because it involves being willing to give up everything and sever connections with the world. The risk of such a choice is that you become vulnerable and may be rejected by the world. This may also mean experiencing suffering.

For Bonhoeffer, the church is not a place of severe intervention to deal with injustices in the world. The church does not participate in the normal political affairs of society. The church must patiently **endure** the aggression and violence of the world. Its calling is to become one with Jesus and not to rid the world of evil. For followers of Jesus, this means enduring aggression and evil and not **resisting**. It also means not condoning one's own use of violence. Nonviolent resistance can overcome the evil of the other.

Exercise 2

Bonhoeffer says that to follow Jesus means to resist nonviolently. Do you think effective nonviolent resistance is possible? If so, what do you think this nonviolent resistance might look like? If not, why?

Conspiracy

Figure 4.4
Bonhoeffer together with
students, 21 March 1932.
Source: The German
Federal Archive via
Wikimedia Commons:
[https://commons.
wikimedia.org/wiki/
File:Bundesarchiv_
Bild_183-R0211-316_
Dietrich_Bonhoeffer_
mit_Schülern.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_183-R0211-316_Dietrich_Bonhoeffer_mit_Schülern.jpg)



In 1941 he applied for the position of chaplain in the German army. He was rejected for this position, so he went to work as a **counterintelligence officer** with the *Abwehr*, the German spy agency of the time. In this position, he continued to support church leaders during the trips he had to make for his job.

He was arrested in 1943 for his participation in **Operation 7**, which was a plot to allow 14 Jewish men and women to escape from Germany without the use of any violence. He was convicted for evading military service and for helping others to escape service as well. In 1944, his name came up in a **failed plot** to assassinate Hitler. He was sent to a higher security prison. He eventually ended up in concentration camp Flossenbürg and was executed two weeks before the camp was liberated. His last words before he was executed were, *"This is the end, for me the beginning of life."*

Bonhoeffer thus seems to have changed his **mind**. Where he was first a pacifist, he now seemed to be actively participating in a struggle against Hitler. Yet this is not definitely the case. There is no evidence that Bonhoeffer actually participated in the coup and attack attempts. In the resistance, he continued to serve primarily as a **spiritual worker**. He was thus active in the resistance, but probably did so mainly to avoid fighting in the German army.

Exercise 3

Bonhoeffer is also sometimes called a martyr and a Protestant saint. What in Bonhoeffer's life speaks to you? How can you try to elicit this yourself?

4.8 GLOSSARY

This glossary from the student booklet supplemented by the extra lesson section provides more information and interpretation for certain terms. Behind each word is indicated in brackets to which lesson section it belongs.

Disciple (5)

A disciple is a follower of Jesus.

Enemy (5)

An enemy is a term used to indicate that an individual or a group is the opponent against whom someone is fighting.

Evil (5)

Evil is a term that describes what people perceive as be negative and wrong.

Just (5)

Just means that something is right or fair.

Just War (5)

A just war is a war that aims to establish peace and meets several preconditions. To start a war, the following preconditions need to be met: (4) have a just cause; (5) have the right intention; (6) use war as a last resort; (4) the war needs to have a high probability of success; (5) be proportionate to combatted evil; (6) be started by a proper and competent authority. The preconditions during a war are: (4) discrimination; (5) proportionality; and (6) necessity.

Pacifism (5)

Pacifism is the rejection of war and violence to achieve one's goals. Pacifists thus seek peace without the use of armed struggle.

Peace (5)

Peace is a term used to describe both the absence of conflict and the well-being of a person or society.

Revelation (4)

A revelation is a way in which God makes something about Himself known to people.

War (5)

War is an armed conflict between social groups, such as countries, people groups or religious groups.

4.9 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

1 INT ROOM

Sarah, David and Anna are sitting in front of a TV. The TV screen shows tanks driving on a road.

Voice over: Troops have crossed the border to intervene in the conflict that has been stirring up the country.

David: *Wow, what is going on there...*

We see a man is talking on the TV screen.

Voice over continues: *Their president said in a speech earlier today that the neighboring country has been violating international law and human rights.*

The prime minister of that country responded angrily in return. She said that lies are being spread about a domestic conflict and that they are just as much under attack by this lying president.

We focus on the Sarah, David and Anna talking. Sarah looks sad, Anna looks angry.

Sarah: *That is very terrible news.*

Anna: *Yeah, it is. I believe that our government should take action and help this invaded country even though it is far away! We must protect and help those in need.*

Sarah: *Yes, we need to help those in need, but in this situation that means partaking in a war.*

David: *Yeah, why do you immediately say that we have to get involved in this war?*

Anna: *Well, this president wants to invade another country, on top of that he has repeatedly used violence against his own people. It is nonsense that he wants to go to war to rescue people in another country. He just wants to take over their land! It is our duty to help those in need.*

Sarah: *Yeah, but even if this invasion is wrong, Jesus tells us to love our neighbors and that we should not strike back when we are beaten but turn the other cheek. Why should we then take up arms and go to war?*

Anna: *Yeah, I know, but we cannot sit still and let this happen.*

David: *Well, don't you think Jesus is opposed to all wars?*

Anna: *Yeah, that may look like it, but God also commanded several times to go to war in the Old Testament. Does this not mean that war is sometimes a part of God's will?*

Sarah: *I don't know if I agree with you.*

The frame focuses on the TV. A news presenter on the TV screen turns his head and looks directly at the teens.

Presenter: *Uhm, hey hello over here, I noticed you are talking about a difficult topic. I think you three may need some help. I have some questions that may assist you in thinking about this. You want to hear them, or not?*

We focus on Sarah, David and Anna talking

David: *Is he talking to us?*

Sarah: *Uhm, yes, how..., this is very weird, but why not?*

Anna: *Yeah, it is weird, but let's do it.*

We focus on the TV.

Presenter: *Okay, Some Christians do not want to be part of any war. How are people who do not want to take part in any war called?*

We focus on Sarah, David and Anna talking

David: *Uhm, is it not pacifist.*

Sarah: *Indeed, it is.*

Anna: *Yeah, but they are on the wrong side.*

Sarah: *Why? Aren't they listening to Jesus? He was also a pacifist, wasn't he?*

David: *Yeah, as Sarah already said he told us to turn the other cheek.*

Anna: *Yes, he did, but it is more complicated. For instance, he did not reject soldiers as bad people.*

We focus on the TV.

Presenter: *The correct answer is indeed a pacifist. Not all Christians are pacifists. Some Christians can also believe in what is called just war theory. Do you know what 'just war is?'*

We focus on Sarah, David and Anna talking

David: *Uh well I do not know.*

Anna: It is the idea that if a country has a just cause and fights in a just manner with the goal to bring peace, then a war can be called just.

David: But isn't war always violent and therefore bad? I remember talking to your father about using violence.

Sarah: You are right, it is. Jesus himself showed this to us in his own example. He never used violence but forgave those who were violent towards him. Instead of fighting, we should humble ourselves and be merciful to others too.

We focus on the TV.

Presenter: Yes, you explained it correctly, these are the essentials of just war theory. What do you think of the following statement: Jesus is depicted as a warrior in the Bible.

We focus on Sarah, David and Anna talking

Sarah: That is definitely not true, I cannot imagine Jesus being depicted as a warrior.

David nods his head.

David: Yeah, neither can I.

Anna: But it is true. Jesus is depicted as a warrior in the Book of Revelation.

David looks surprised.

David: What? I thought Jesus was a pacifist.

Anna: No, he is not. Since Jesus is depicted as taking up arms, then it may be fine for us to do that in certain circumstances as well.

Sarah: Which circumstances? Where do we draw the line? I think we cannot do that fairly. So, we should not take risks and not go to war at all.

David: I was thinking something similar. An image of Jesus as warrior doesn't necessarily justify war.

Anna: Yeah, but Jesus also praises the peacemakers. Maybe war can be used as a final means to bring peace as well, don't you think?

Sarah: Mm, that could be true. I am still not sure.

We focus on the TV.

Presenter: Oh, the connection is getting bad.... Let us return to the core question. Should we help in this war?

We focus on Sarah, David and Anna talking

Anna: MM, it is more complicated than I thought, but I still think that as Christians we may approve some armed conflicts. To protect those in need and to prevent further violence is a just cause. Thus, in this case, yes.

Sarah: I still do not know. War or other armed conflicts lead to too much suffering. That can never be described as good. However, the Allies helped liberate Europe in World War II. On the other hand, Jesus seems to be telling us not to take up arms.

David: Well, I believe we cannot say that as Christians, we should always help others even by fighting in an armed conflict. Maybe we should do other things instead you know to alleviate the suffering or to help stop the violence.

We focus on the TV.

Presenter: Yes, what you are saying is all valuable. It is not simple indeed. There are a lot of other questions that you have to think about while talking about this topic. Let's agree that we reached no agreement. But that should not keep us from further thinking and talking about this topic.

We focus on Sarah, David and Anna talking

David: Yeah, maybe we should accept our different opinions for now.

Sarah: Yeah, but do we agree that following Jesus means bringing hope in difficult situations, including potential wars.

Anna: Yeah, I agree with that.

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