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ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER:
DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

MODULE ONE

DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE TEACHER'S BOOK

This teacher's book is a didactic package which elaborates on the following theme: 'encounter with the other: dealing with diversity'. It has been developed for a 12- to 18-year-old group and offers the teacher or supervisor of a learning group the opportunity to develop this theme at the level of their class group.

In this teacher's book, the teacher can work around various topics that fit in with the overarching theme of 'encounter with the other: dealing with diversity'. By means of impulses and didactic suggestions, it is possible to approach this theme from different perspectives. Impulses are elements that the teacher can bring into the classroom to start the conversation. This book contains a diversity of impulses with different levels of difficulty. These impulses aim to contribute to the learning process and exist in different forms. It is not the intention to use all impulses. The teacher can select the most appropriate impulses based on (the initial situation in) his learning group. The didactic suggestions are concrete proposals to get to work with the impulses and focus on philosophical reflection and communication. This allows the teacher to approach the different impulses in a varied way that suits their learning group.

This teacher's book makes a distinction between 'basic material' and 'deepening'. The basic subject matter is standard in the student's book and takes two hours to complete. In addition, the teacher has the choice to deepen the students' knowledge by means of the extra chapters with accompanying impulses and didactic suggestions, which are provided in this teacher's book.

The different chapters:

- First, there will be a general historical overview of Jesus' world. The context of the Bible story is an important basis for the learning group to better understand and interpret Mk 7:24-30 ('The Syrophoenician Woman's Faith'). This chapter is part of the basic teaching material for the students.
- Secondly, the Biblical story (Mark 7:24-30) itself is discussed. How can this intriguing story from the Christian tradition be understood? What meanings can we derive from this story, and is this story still relevant today? This section introduces the students to this Biblical story and its underlying meaning. This chapter is part of the basic teaching material for the students.
- The third chapter of this teacher's book goes deeper into the discussion about the divine and/or human form of Jesus. Based on this chapter, the students learn more about the importance of Trinity in Christianity. This is a deepening chapter.
- The last chapter deals with the question of polarization and depolarization. This chapter examines what the term polarization (in our society) means and what attitude Jesus adopts, a polarizing or depolarizing attitude? This is a deepening chapter.

Finally, this teacher's book contains a glossary in which all difficult terms are explained concisely and at the level of the student. This is followed by a bibliography per chapter of this didactic collection.

1.1.2 CONTENTS OF THE TEACHER'S BOOK

This didactic package deals with the theme 'encounter with the other: dealing with diversity'. The chosen starting point is a Bible story from the New Testament: 'The Syrophoenician Woman's Faith' (Mark 7:24-30). This Bible story from the Christian tradition can be understood as a reflection of the universal mission of Christianity. It offers the opportunity to reflect together within the learning group on the encounter and the attitude towards the 'other'. How can we deal with the existing diversity in our society today?

The starting point of this didactic package is a video clip enacting a potential real-world scenario from the daily life of the students. This visual fragment is a general introduction to the theme of 'diversity' for the learning group, providing the teacher a basis upon which to develop the theme through one or more of the impulses and didactic suggestions prepared in this teacher's book.

1.2 THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN'S FAITH (MARK 7:24-30)

1.2.1 SCENARIO

The video clip is set in the context of a class in which two pupils, Ahmed and Pieter-Jan, have missed the necessary material for a test due to illness. Another student, Sarah, lends her notes to Pieter-Jan. Ahmed wants to borrow these notes from Sarah too, but it turns out Sarah has suddenly 'lost them'. In fact, she has not lost her notes. Rather, she does not want to lend them to Ahmed because of her attitude towards Muslims. In defence of her attitude, Sarah refers to a Bible story about Jesus and his attitude towards 'the other'. The classmates go in search of the Biblical story and its meaning.



Figure 1.1
The Video Clip

After viewing the video clip, the teacher can start working with one or more of the impulses from this didactic package, following the level of his/her own learning group.

1.2.2 QUIZ: ANSWERS

Several questions are introduced in the video clip and focus on the outcome and the concluding message of the story. Through these questions, the students will be stimulated to reflect on the content and meaning of the Bible story, and its various perspectives and dimensions. After watching the video clip, these questions can also be a starting point for a class discussion.

Question 1a: What does Jesus mean by ‘the children’?

- It refers to ‘children’ in the literal meaning of the word.
- It refers to individuals that belong to his own religious tradition.

When Jesus speaks about ‘the children’, he refers to the people who are part of his own religious tradition.

Question 1b: Jesus refers to ‘dogs’. What does this mean?

- He refers to people that are not part of his religious tradition.
- He is talking about the animal. People should eat first, before they give food to animals.

When Jesus speaks about ‘the dogs’, he refers to the people who are not part of his own religious tradition.

Question 1c: What do you think Jesus means by this answer: ‘Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs’?

- Jesus wants to make clear that he is only interested in helping people of his own religious tradition.
- Jesus is not interested in feeding animals. Animals and nature are not important, people are.

Jesus wants to be there for the Jewish people in the first place. The bread that is meant for ‘the children’ (the Jewish people) should not be fed to ‘the dogs’ (other believers).

Question 1d: How will this story end?

- Jesus will make clear that indeed he is only interested in helping people of his own religious tradition.
- Jesus will change his mind and he will open the hearts of all people to receive love.
- Jesus will become angry because he is 'disturbed' by a stranger.

Through the encounter and the conversation with the woman, Jesus changes his mind. This is remarkable! In most gospel stories, it is Jesus who changes the perspective of the other. But in this story, it is Jesus himself who changes his mind because of the other.

Question 2: If the student really wants to follow Jesus based on the whole story, then:

- She must not change her mind. She should not help the Muslim student who asks for help.
- This story makes her change her mind. She will help the Muslim student.

Just like Jesus can change his mind and help the other, so can the student change her mind and help the Muslim pupil.

Question 3: How can we understand the biblical story about the Syrophoenician woman?

- Jesus makes it clear that God's message is only for His own people. Even today, we only have to take care of our own people.
- In the encounter with the woman, Jesus changes his mind and perspective. He makes it clear that anyone can be part of the Kingdom of God.
- Jesus understands the woman but can't help her. He only has time to help his own fellow believers, the Jewish people.

Through the encounter with the Syrophoenician woman, Jesus doesn't want to be there just for the Jewish people, the children of Israel. On the contrary, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God has a universal scope and therefore applies to everyone.

1.3 TIME TRAVEL: JESUS IN HISTORY

*The Bible is a centuries-old book, written in a world that is very different from ours. In order to understand a story from the Bible properly, it is important to have knowledge of the world of that era. The world in which you live always influences your thoughts and actions. Even Jesus has not been an exception. We can never understand the stories about him if we don't know what the world he lived in was like. So, it is important to always keep the cultural context of a story in mind. **The context counts!***

1.3.1 JESUS' ENVIRONMENT: WHERE DID HE LIVE?

Jesus was born around the year six BCE in Bethlehem, during the reign of King Herod, and grew up in **Nazareth**. This was then a small village in **Galilee**. Galilee was a Jewish region in what was then **Palestine** (region in The Middle East).

In the story of 'Jesus and the Syrophenician woman' we read that Jesus stayed in the area of the city of **Tyre**. At that time, Tyre was a harbour town on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The city was outside the borders of Palestine. It was one of the most important cities of the small coastal state of **Phoenicia**.

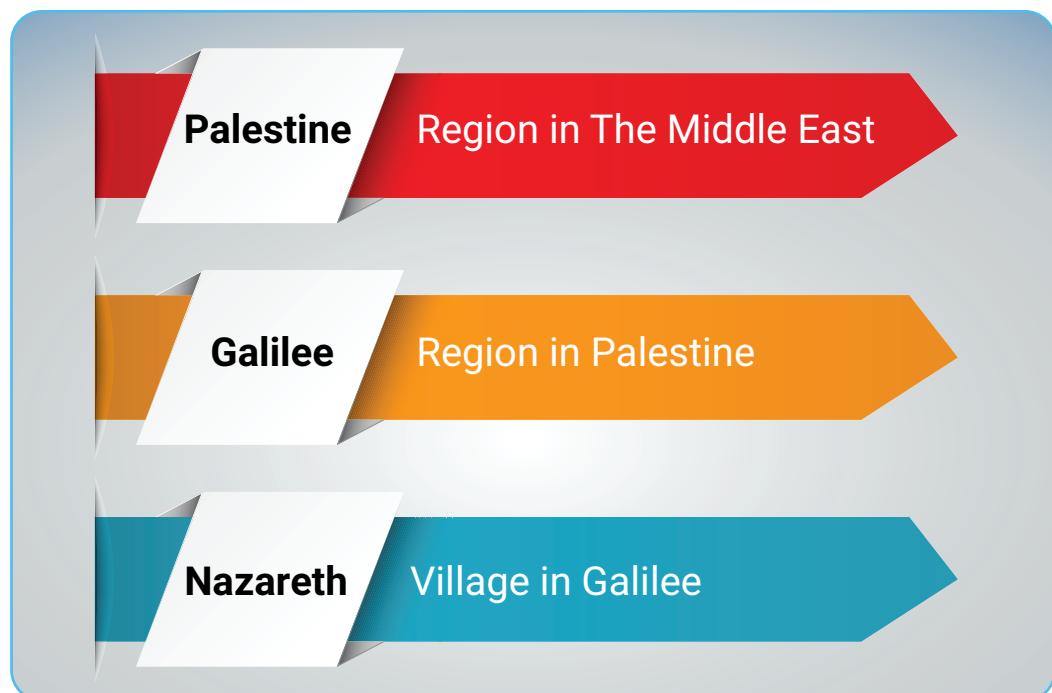


Figure 1.2 Jesus'
Environment



Figure 1.3
First century Judeae province

Religious life in Tyre was mainly characterized by polytheism. The term 'polytheist' refers to someone who does not believe in one god, but in multiple gods. The term 'polytheism' therefore refers to a religion with several gods. At the time of Jesus, this was unacceptable for the Jewish people. That's why they called Tyre "*the land of the pagans*". People who did not believe in the God of the Jews, were considered unclean. Jews themselves are not polytheists, but monotheists because they believe in one god (and that is Yahweh). Thus, the term 'monotheism' refers to a religion with one god.

1.3.2 THE SOCIETY OF GALILEE

The world in which Jesus lived was very different from the twenty-first century. Jesus was born approximately around the year six BCE. At that time, society was not global, but strongly concentrated in rural areas, local cities and small villages. This was also the case in Galilee, the area where Jesus lived. Only a small part of the population was rich and slavery was widespread. Electricity had not yet been invented, nor had the internet or social media. Industry did not exist, the people supported themselves economically mainly through agriculture and fishing, handicrafts and trade. In most villages the men made a living as carpenters, blacksmiths, potters, basket makers, and so on. In exchange for their services, they received grain, oil, vegetables, or other food. Jesus also had this life. He grew up in the Galilean rural areas. As a carpenter, Joseph, the father of Jesus, performed one of the most respected professions in Nazareth.

In Galilee, family formed the centre of social life. Gender equality did not exist. The man always acted as head of the family and the woman was the property of her husband or father. In marriage, the woman did not have the same rights as her husband. In public life, too, no role was assigned to women; they had very little to say in society. In other words, the world in which Jesus grew up was a '**patriarchal society**'. This means that men were labelled as superior, and women as inferior or subordinate.

1.3.3 RELIGIOUS LIFE IN GALILEE

For several centuries different communities were in charge in Galilee. All these different rulers left their mark on life in Galilee. The people of Galilee knew different religious and social groups that each had their own ideas about religion and the world around them. Despite these differences, the many communities influenced each other's religious and/or cultural ideas. In other words, there was an exchange of habits. Nevertheless, the majority of the population throughout Palestine (and therefore also Galilee) was Jewish. Yet, there were also many people who were non-Jewish. So, they had no faith in the Jewish God, but sometimes worshiped different gods (polytheism). Because they did not believe in the God of the Jewish tradition, the Jewish people called them 'pagans'. Their faith deviated from Jewish tradition, and therefore they were generally shunned by Jews.

In order to better understand the Bible and the life of Jesus, it is important to know that Jesus grew up, lived and preached in this Jewish context. Religious life was of great importance in Palestine, and therefore also in Galilee. Jesus and his environment were strongly influenced by Jewish Scripture and tradition. So, **Jesus himself was Jewish**. Every event, from the cradle to the grave, was dominated by Jewish tradition. The temple in Jerusalem then formed the heart of Judaism: all devout Jews came there to pray and sacrifice, including Jesus. Jerusalem was the capital/center of Palestine.

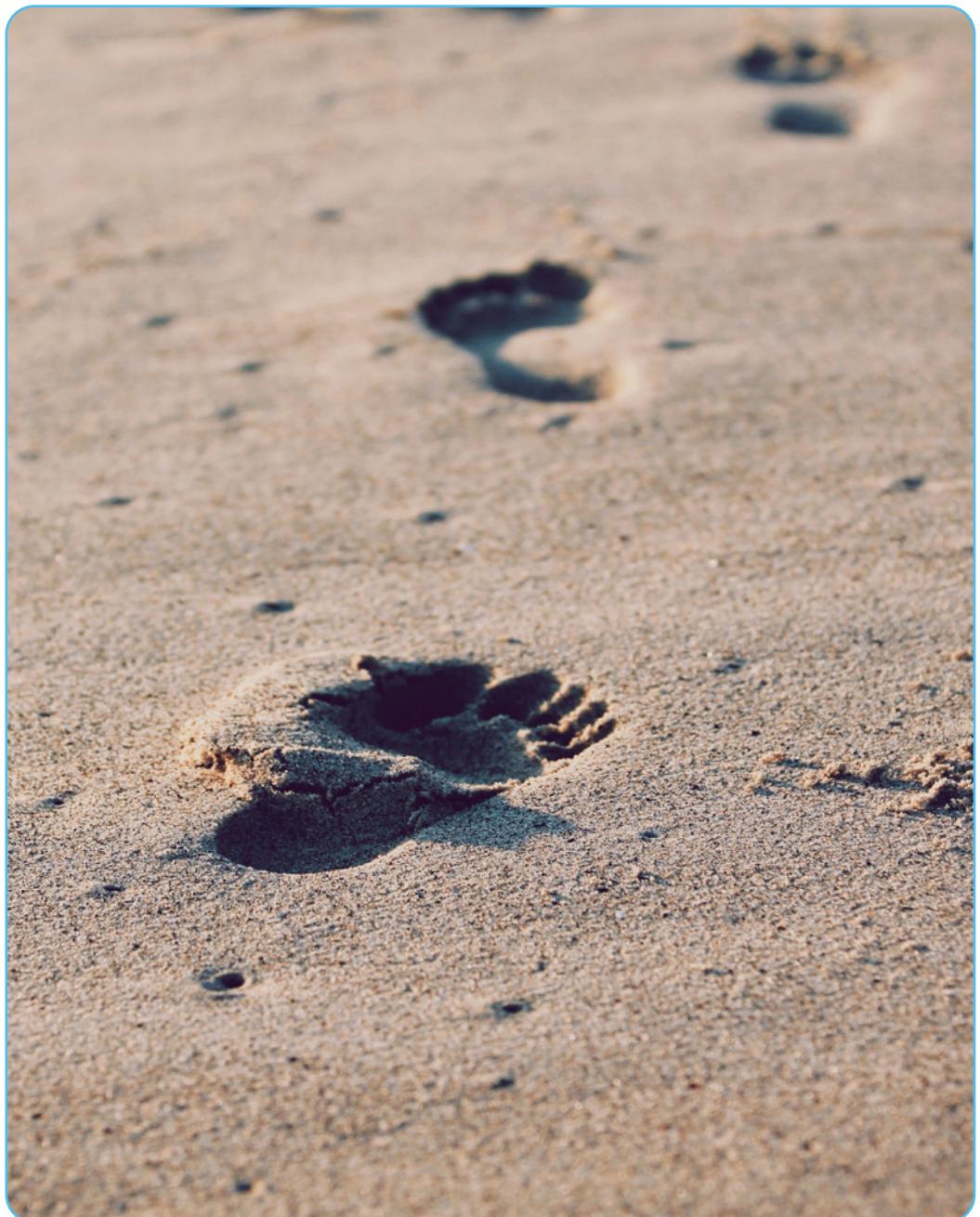


Figure 1.4
Footprints
Image: Christopher Sardegna | Unsplash

1.3.4 DIDACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Base

Society: Let the students read the text about the society of Jesus individually or in pairs. Instruct them to indicate the missing words in the text. Then have the text read out in class by several students. Afterwards the students are given time to solve the questions below in pairs and to discuss them with each other.

ASSIGNMENT. Connect the right place with the right event in Jesus' life.

WHAT	WHERE
1. Jesus was born in ...	A. Bethlehem
2. Jesus grew up in ...	B. Nazareth
3. Galilee is a region in ...	C. Palestine

ASSIGNMENT. Read the text about the society of Galilee, and fill in the missing words.

Jesus – religion – Jewish – monotheism – polytheism

In Galilee there were many different communities. All these communities had their own ideas about religion and the world around them. Yet the majority of the population throughout Palestine (and therefore also Galilee) was **Jewish**. However, there were also many people who were not Jewish. Their faith deviated from Jewish tradition, and therefore they were generally shunned by Jews and seen as 'pagans'. They did not believe in the Jewish God, but sometimes worshipped different gods and were therefore polytheists. The term '**polytheism**' refers to a religion with several gods. Jews are not polytheists, but monotheists because they believe in one God (and that is Yahweh). So, the term '**monotheism**' refers to a religion with only one god.

In order to have a better understanding of the Bible and the life of Jesus, it is important to know that Jesus grew up, lived and preached in this Jewish context. **Religion** was very important in Palestine, and therefore also in Galilee. **Jesus** and his environment were strongly influenced by Jewish Scripture and tradition. So, Jesus himself was Jewish. Every event, from the cradle to the grave, was dominated by the Jewish tradition.

The students answer the following questions:

1. What is the difference between monotheism and polytheism?
2. Right or wrong: all the inhabitants of Galilee were Jews.

DEEPENING

Society: The following in-depth questions can be asked to the students:

- If you had lived during the time of Jesus and you would have met him, what would you ask him?
- What else would you like to know about Jesus' time and his environment?
- In Jesus' time the woman was subservient to her husband. She played no part in society. How would you have reacted if you had lived in this time?
- If you were living in Jesus' time, what would you want to see and do there?

1.4 INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLICAL STORY

1.4.1 'JESUS AND THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN'

[24] From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice,

[25] but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.

[26] Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

[27] He said to her, "*Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.*"

[28] But she answered him, "*Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.*"

[29] Then he said to her, "*For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.*"

[30] So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

1.4.2 BIBLICAL POSITIONING

Mark 7:24-30 shows the story of the encounter between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman. This story is part of a broader context in which Jesus and his followers are retreating from Galilee. They'll go to the area of Tyre and Sidon. For Jesus, this is a foreign country. In the story, it is stated that the woman is Greek and of Syrophenician origin. So she was not Jewish. The name 'Syrophenician' is a combination of 'Syrian' and 'Phoenician', and probably comes from the fact that Phoenicia was then part of the Roman province of Syria. To Jesus and his followers, she was **a stranger, a 'pagan'**. When this woman hears from Jesus and comes to him, she asks for his help. Her daughter is possessed of an unclean spirit, and she hopes that Jesus can grant her salvation and deliverance.

Just before the encounter between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman, a conversation took place in the Gospel of Mark between Jesus and some Pharisees about purity. In Jewish society, '**the purity laws**' existed to separate what was Jewish and pure; and what was non-Jewish and unclean. The Pharisees criticized Jesus because they saw the disciples of Jesus eat bread with unwashed hands, which was unclean. They challenged Jesus and asked him why his disciples do not follow tradition, why they eat bread

in this ‘impure’ way. Jesus reproached the Pharisees for only following the letter of the law, and not listening to the spirit of the law. What they represent as ‘the true doctrine’ are, according to Jesus, only precepts of men (Mark 7:7). And Jesus goes on: *“There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile”* (Mark 7:15). In this passage, Mark seems to show that Jesus turns away from the Jewish purity laws. Jesus always crosses the boundary of the prevailing interpretations of his contemporaries, the boundary between what was considered pure and unclean.

However, Jesus did not want to go against these laws of purity, but he does question the way the Pharisees interpret them. For Jesus, it is rather an internalization of these ‘laws of purity’. These ‘laws’ must be applied only to the heart. Only that which comes from the heart of man can make a man unclean: evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder...

The extension of Christianity to non-Jews, was it unclean? This question seemed to be an important discussion at the time Mark was writing his gospel. The encounter between Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman, a pagan, should be read in this context.



Figure 1.5
Holy Bible
Image: © Priscilla Du
Preez | Unsplash

Tyre

The evangelist Mark emphasizes that Jesus and his followers go to the region of Tyre. The story does not take place in Jesus' own country. He is not surrounded by his own fellow believers, namely the Jewish people.

Already in the time of Jesus' life, several Jewish believers fled from Palestine, due to military and political difficulties. Not living in one's own country was therefore a situation that was recognizable to the Jewish people in the first century CE. Jews who settled in new areas often continued to distinguish themselves strongly from the local population. These locals were considered unclean or pagan by Jews. In this story we can ask ourselves why Jesus wanted to withdraw. Why he did not want to be disturbed? Did he need rest because of his popularity, or because of the previous discussion with the Pharisees?

Jesus did not want to be disturbed. Mark emphasized the fact that Jesus wished to remain unnoticed. But his presence in Tyre did not go unnoticed. At this point Jesus' fame reached beyond the borders of Galilee.

Impureness

The Syrophoenician woman asks Jesus to help her daughter who is possessed by an unclean spirit/demon.

In this way, the theme of 'uncleanness' comes up three times in this story. First there is the mention of the region of Tyre. This makes it clear that Jesus is in foreign territory. Secondly, the daughter is possessed by an unclean spirit. Finally, Mark emphasizes that the woman is a Syrophoenician woman of Greek descent, so for Jesus and his followers she is a foreign woman.

Demon/spirit

In the gospels, but also in just about every other religion in the Middle East, one often speaks of 'demons' or 'impure spirits'. They assumed the existence of demons that could afflict people with sickness and possession. The medical knowledge we have today shows the enormous gap with the world at that time. Today we no longer talk about demons or impure spirits, but about tumors, viruses and bacteria. In the culture of that time, psychological problems were also attributed to negative forces or evil spirits.

Interpretation of the Biblical story

The Syrophenician woman asks Jesus to expel the unclean spirit from the body of her daughter. Jesus' reaction is striking, his answer sounds rather strange and dismissive: "*Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs*" (Mark 7:27). What does Jesus mean by this?

Jesus uses metaphors in his answer. He designates the woman as a '**dog**' and he strongly insults her in this way. With this reference to 'the dogs', Jesus seems to emphasize that everyone who does not belong to the Jewish people is labelled as a pagan. This explains why Jesus initially rejects this woman and her request for help.

In addition, Jesus refers in his answer to '**the bread**'. Here, the bread symbolizes the liberating action of Jesus, the power Jesus gives to his followers. Jesus indicates that this bread is primarily meant for the Jewish people. First, the bread is to be given to the children of Israel, because what would be done if there is too little? Surely this can't be shared with other believers?

Jesus' proclamation of the gospel and the liberation he wanted to grant was first directed to the Jewish people. Only after that will there be 'bread' for other believers. Jesus indicates that he was sent only for "the lost sheep" of Israel. So he does not reject the woman completely, but he throws up an obstacle. First 'the children' have to get enough food. The bread intended for the children (the Jewish people) must not be fed to the dogs (the pagans). First and foremost, the children must have sufficient opportunity to eat, instead of immediately giving it to the dogs.

The woman understands immediately what Jesus wants to say. However, she does not give up and confronts Jesus with the following answer: "*Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs*" (Mark 7:28). The woman points out to Jesus that even now there is something for the dogs under the table. She means the following: despite the separation between his own Jewish people and the pagans, there is enough 'bread' for everyone. The liberating action of Jesus is not only possible for the Jewish people. Jesus brings salvation, and that salvation is not only for 'the children of Israel'. In this way, the woman criticizes the short-sighted perspective of Jesus.

The woman's counter-response turns out to work. Jesus gives her the following answer: "*For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter*" (Mark 7:29). The strong faith of the woman makes a great impression on Jesus. He agrees with her, even though the woman and her daughter are of pagan origin. The healing is not at the expense of the children for whom Jesus came. The woman's daughter is freed from the unclean spirit thanks to the power of Jesus. Through the encounter and the conversation with the woman, Jesus changes his mind. From then on, he understands that his proclamation of God does not only apply to the Jewish people, the children of Israel. On the contrary, the proclamation of the Kingdom of God has a universal scope and thus applies to everyone. The dialogue with the stranger brings Jesus himself closer to his own identity: the kingdom of God is not only for one closed group, but for everyone.

It is important to frame this story in the context of that time. The gospel of Mark was written at a time when most Christians were Jews, who thought that Jesus' message was only for Jews. However, over the years other people, pagans, also felt drawn to faith in Jesus' message. This caused a discussion among the first Christians: was the message of Jesus also meant for pagans? In this context we can understand this story. Mark makes it clear that pagans also belong to the kingdom of God.

Relevance today?

Jesus had withdrawn himself and did not want to be disturbed. Yet, he was being disturbed by a foreign woman. Initially, Jesus rejects this woman. Jesus thinks that his mission is limited to his own people, the Jewish people. But the woman's counter-response makes him reconsider his mission. He changes his mind through the encounter with this woman. If Jesus can change his mind, so can we.

What is striking about this story is the fact that Jesus is represented in a very human way by Mark. Jesus retreats to recharge his batteries, a feeling that we can sometimes experience today. Jesus' attitude is not fundamentalist. He is open to reason and allows himself to be touched by the words of the woman, by the need of the other for whom he is prepared to change his own attitude.

It is also remarkable that it is Jesus who changes his mind. In most of the gospel stories it is Jesus who changes the perspective of his disciples. But in this story, the encounter with the woman creates a new perspective for Jesus himself. Maybe this story wants to suggest that the kingdom of God means that everyone can change their thought, vision and perspective? The story shows us that the kingdom of God is a world where people don't give up, people continue to help—no matter what—because they are driven by love for their fellow man (like the woman who fights for her daughter). People dare to push their limits and they want to listen to the demands of people in need.



Figure 1.6
Holy Bible
Image: © Priscilla Du
Preez | Unsplash

1.4.4 DIDACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Mark 7:24-30

While reading (in excerpts) the gospel text of Mark 7:24-30, the following questions can be discussed in class:

- Do you understand what Jesus means by this answer: "*Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs*" (Mark 7:27)? What do you think of his reaction? Did you expect this answer? What image of Jesus are we getting here?
- How does the woman react? What does the woman mean by her answer: "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (Mark 7:28)?
- What attitude does Jesus take after the woman's response? Doesn't he want to help 'other believers' in need? How can this be seen as a story of depolarization?

1.5 JESUS AS HUMAN VERSUS THE DIVINE JESUS

This teacher's book makes a distinction between 'basic material' and 'deepening'. This chapter can be used as 'deepening' by the teacher and is not part of the basic package. In the appendices you can find the student's book.

1.5.1 WAS JESUS HUMAN, GOD, OR BOTH?

In the Bible Jesus is often referred to as 'the Son of God'. What does that actually mean, 'Son of God'? Was Jesus a man, was he God, or was he both? And how is that even possible?

The questions above are issues that Christians have struggled with since the beginning of Christianity.

In the fourth century, the Roman emperor Constantine made an important attempt to end the discussions surrounding this issue. He convened a council in 325 CE: The Council of Nicaea. A council is a type of assembly among the leaders of Christianity. At the Council of Nicaea, the Christian leaders determined that Jesus was one person in two natures: one divine and one human. In other words, Jesus belongs to God Himself. Jesus is not subordinate to God (the Father), but he is one with God. He is therefore equal to God. Whenever the New Testament mentions Jesus, this always is related to God. The same applies the other way around; if the New Testament refers to God, then this always has to do with Jesus as well. Faith in Jesus and in God are therefore closely related.

According to the official doctrine of the Catholic Church, Jesus is both God and human. Nevertheless, Christians continue to have discussions about this issue today. To many believers, this is also a personal issue. For example, there are Christians who invariably emphasize the divinity of Jesus. Secondly, there are also Christians who emphasize his humanity. Thirdly, there are Christians who have an image of God in which the divinity and humanity of Jesus are not in opposition. For them, therefore, Jesus is both God and human.

1.5.2 WHAT DOES “BEING THE SON OF GOD” MEAN? TRINITY

Christians see God as a **Trinity**: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three and yet one. But what does the term ‘Trinity’ mean? This is an important term that refers to three persons in one God. Christians believe that God is so great and so much that He is God in three different ways:

1. **God:** He is the one who is seen by Christians as the (omnipotent) Father, the Creator of heaven and earth.
2. **Jesus Christ:** This is a second way to speak about God and to believe in Him. God loved people so much that He wanted to get as close to them as possible in the form of Jesus.
3. **The Holy Spirit:** This is a third way to refer to God. The Holy Spirit inspires people so that the message of Jesus can live on to this day.

In summary, do Christians believe in three Gods? No, they do not. Christianity is a **monotheistic religion**. Christians believe in one God who reveals Himself in three different forms. This is called the Trinity. Thus, Christians do not pray to three different Gods, but to one God. By making the sign of the cross at the beginning and end of a prayer, Christians refer to this Trinity of God. They say: “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen”. In this way, they express their faith in the Trinity.



Figure 1.7
Cross
Image: © Federico Tasin
Unsplash

1.5.3 JESUS AND THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN

Jesus has a unique relationship with God, and he also has a human side. He is unique, but like everyone else, he has known trials and tribulations throughout his life. The story of Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman shows us a very human Jesus--a Jesus who can make mistakes and can change his opinion.

For example, Jesus also felt the need to retreat and recharge, just as we can experience this feeling at times today. Despite Jesus' answer, where he seems to cling to a cultural-religious boundary, he is open to reason. His attitude is not principled. He allows himself to be touched by the needs of others and is willing to change his own stance. The separation between 'pure' and 'impure' is broken with this story: on a social level (by a woman), on a geographical level (the woman is a stranger) and on a religious level (the woman is a pagan).

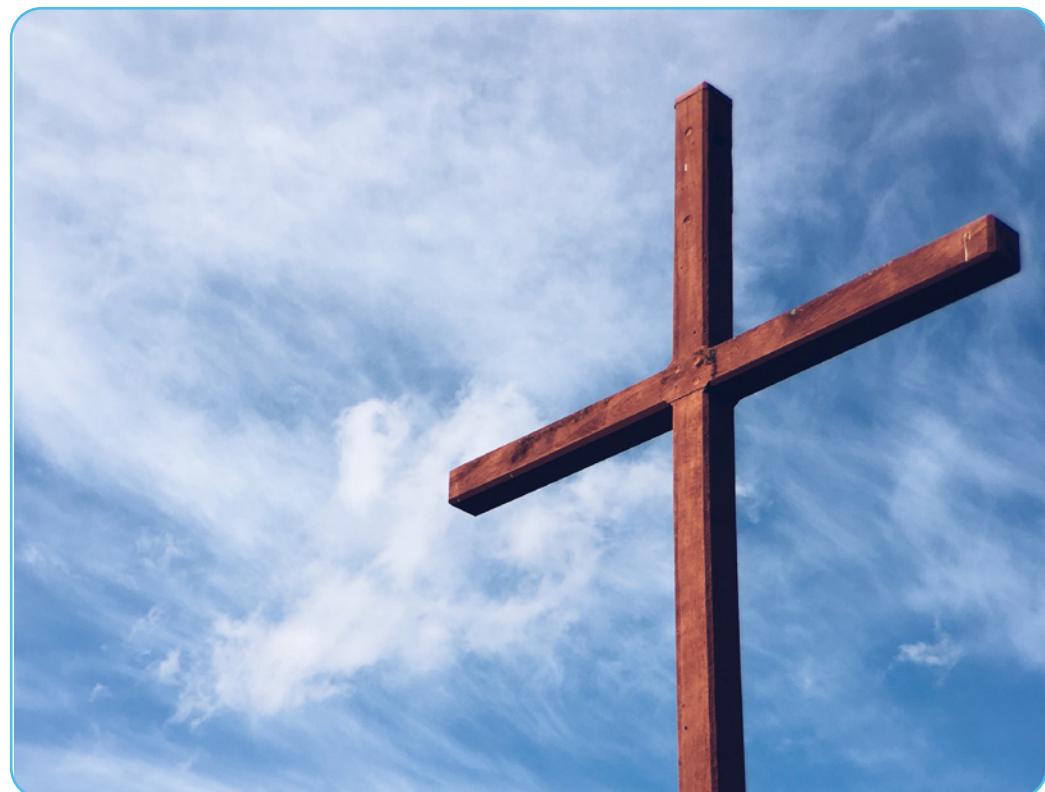


Figure 1.8
Cross
Image: © Aaron Burden
Unsplash

1.5.4 DIDACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Discuss with students the meaning of the Trinity using the diagram below. The following questions may be asked:

- If God is one, how do the three entities (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) relate to each other?
- Do Christians believe in three gods?
- Statement: *"If Christianity believes in the Trinity, then it is not a monotheistic religion."* In the students' opinion, is this statement true? Why (not)?
 - The term 'monotheism' was discussed and explained in the first part of this module. By way of repetition, students can be asked whether they can explain the meaning of this term in their own words (to each other).

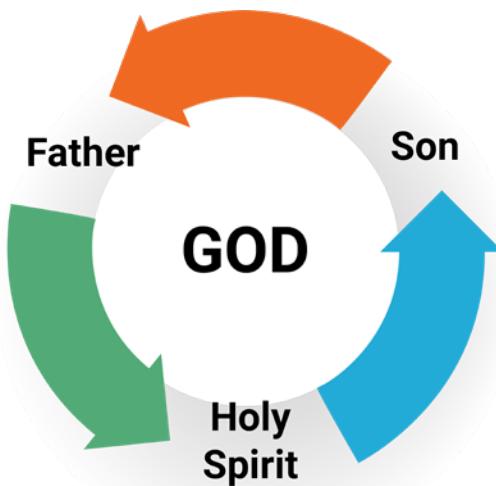


Figure 1.9
Representation of Trinity

The students reflect on their own views of Trinity using the following questions:

- Is it important to know today what Trinity means? Why (not)?
- What symbols of Trinity do you still encounter today in our contemporary culture?

The students read the story of Jesus and the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30). Next, they answer the following questions.

- Does this story show us the divine or the human side of Jesus?
- Do you sometimes feel the need to step back?
- Do you sometimes dare to change your mind?

1.6 POLARIZATION

This teacher's book makes a distinction between 'basic material' and material for 'deepening' student understanding. This chapter can be used as 'deepening' by the teacher and is not part of the basic package. In the appendices you can find the student's book.

1.6.1 JESUS (DE)POLARIZES?

People have different opinions on many subjects. A disagreement is inherent to communication and is not in itself problematic. In our society, there are many subjects on which (groups of) people disagree. It only becomes difficult when these different opinions and visions lead to conflicts, or when certain (groups of) people are being personally attacked.

When groups are opposed to each other and the contradictions between these groups become ever greater, we speak of polarization. The two groups face each other as 'opposite poles'. The term '**polarization**' seems to be popping up more and more in recent years. People talk more and more about increasing polarization between certain groups in society. Or they talk about politicians who make use of polarizing statements and thus deliberately want to set people up against each other, in order to increase their own support or to divert attention from other social problems.

Polarization is not always negative. Different points of view, dynamics of polarization and conflicting opinions can be important for a society. It provides an open debate, to address any possible shortcomings or to implement social changes. But when only the radical views are heard, and the moderate voices disappear in the debate, people can feel compelled to choose either side. Society can be strongly divided. There is little attention for nuance.

A strong polarization process can also be described as an '**us-versus-them**' way of thinking. In this way, groups of people are placed directly opposite each other. Examples of such groups include those based on ethnic, cultural or religious differences; poor **versus** rich, the people **versus** the elite, political right **versus** political left, men **versus** women, government **versus** citizens, and so on. Polarization can escalate and lead to conflict, aggression and violence.

When reading the Biblical story of Jesus' encounter with the Syrophenician woman, one can ask if Jesus polarizes in this story. Does he polarize the relationship between his own people (the Jewish people) and other non-Jewish people? Jesus initially rejects the woman in this story because of her 'strange' origin: "*Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs*" (Mark 7:27).

Does Jesus estrange himself from the woman? Is he concerned only with his own people? Does he not want to help 'other believers' in need? Is Jesus deliberately polarising two groups of people as 'opposite poles'?

Or is the evangelist showing that Jesus is depolarizing? When the woman gives a critical answer to the first reaction of Jesus, this makes a big impression on Jesus. The woman seems to have a great influence on Jesus, because he is willing to change his own attitude. This is made clear with the following answer from Jesus: "*For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter*" (Mark 7:29).

Jesus chooses to help the other in need, despite the possibility that this might not have been common in the context back then. This story can be interesting to understand the value of Jesus' encounters with others. Jesus breaks through limits and polarization. Jesus touches people who are sick, he visits tax collectors and sinners, and so on. He breaks the boundaries of the 'laws of purity', and transcends the separation between what was Jewish and non-Jewish according to the interpretations of his contemporaries.

1.6.2 DIDACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Polarization is everywhere

At school, in the media, with politicians, between certain groups in society: it is through daily situations such as these that we are confronted with an 'us-versus-them' way of thinking. The students receive a newspaper article or search for a newspaper article about polarization themselves. The students analyze the article:

- Which conflict emerges in the article?
- Which two poles are facing each other?
- Are both sides of the story being addressed or is only one perspective more prominent in the article?
- What do you think about this reporting?

The analysis of the article can then be presented to the rest of the class group.

Jesus (de)polarizes

Is the Biblical story about Jesus and the Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30) a story of polarization or depolarization? The students can discuss this in a class discussion.

Afterwards, the students receive two (new) Biblical texts. The Biblical story about Jesus and the adulterous woman (John 8:1-11) and the story in which Jesus states that he did not come to bring peace, but the sword (Mt 10:34-39).

- Both Bible texts are read. Which of the two texts is consistent with the image that the pupils have of Jesus?
- In the story of the adulterous woman, the students indicate who wants to polarize and how Jesus reacts to this. In what way does Jesus depolarize?
- The pupils think about what Jesus would have written in the sand the first time and the second time. This can be discussed in a class discussion.
- What do the pupils think of the second Bible story, of a Jesus who says that he will not bring peace, but the sword, that he will bring discord? Would the pupils call this polarization? And if so, is it positive or negative polarization?

1.7 GLOSSARY

In this glossary you will find more information and an explanation of certain concepts.

Note: The words marked with an asterisk () are also listed in the basic vocabulary list for students.*

Illiterate

Illiteracy or an illiterate refers to someone who cannot, or cannot sufficiently, read, spell and/or write.

Council

A ‘council’ is an assembly of the leaders of Christianity. At the Council of Nicaea (in 325 CE) the Christian leaders concluded that Jesus was one person in two natures: one divine and one human. In other words, Jesus belongs to God Himself. Jesus is not subordinate to God (the Father), but he is one with God. He is therefore equal to God.

Detraditionalization

The concept of ‘detraditionalization’ refers to the process by which the traditions of a society are no longer passed on to the next generation. Traditional values and norms are no longer taken for granted and the influence of traditional institutions is diminishing.

Trinity

Christians understand God as a ‘Trinity’: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three and yet one. Christians believe that God is so great and powerful that He is God in three different ways. In sum, Christians believe in one God who reveals Himself in three different forms. This is called the Holy Trinity.

*** Gospel**

The writings of the New Testament in the Bible tell us more about the life of Jesus, about His words and deeds. The New Testament begins with the four Gospels: the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These gospels are written based on their faith and demonstrate faith in Jesus as the Messiah. They bear witness to the evangelists’ personal faith in Jesus. The words and stories of Jesus are brought together in these writings.

‘Gospel’ comes from the Greek word ‘euangelion’, this literally means ‘good news’. It refers to the good message brought by Jesus Christ.

Pharisees

The Pharisees were a religious movement of devout Jews in the days of Jesus who very precisely held to the prescriptions of their faith. They strongly obeyed the law. Some Pharisees were so radical that they did not want to come into contact with people who did not know or who violated Jewish law. The word ‘Pharisee’ literally means ‘separated’.

*** Phoenicia**

At the time of Jesus, Phoenicia was a small coastal state in the Old Near East on the Mediterranean Sea.

* Galilee

At the time of Jesus, Galilee was a Jewish region in what was then Palestine. This area was slightly smaller than Belgium today. Jesus spent most of his life in the region of Galilee.

Gender equality

The term 'gender equality' refers to the equal treatment of everyone, regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

* Pagans

The devout Jews in Jesus' time labelled all people who did not believe in the Jewish God (Yahweh) as 'pagans.' These people were condemned by them. To the devout Jews, a pagan person was someone who did not believe in Yahweh. By rejecting the God of the Jews, they were thus considered as 'unclean'.

Jerusalem

In the time of Jesus, Jerusalem was the capital of Palestine. Jerusalem not only had a temple, but also synagogues: this is where the Jews came to pray. Even today, Jerusalem remains an important city for Jews all over the world.

Jerusalem is also an important city for Christians. In Jerusalem Jesus was condemned, crucified and buried. Christians also believe that he was resurrected here. The apostles began to tell the stories of Jesus in Jerusalem.

Canaanite descent/Canaan

Canaan, in ancient times, was an area located west of the Jordan River and east of the Mediterranean Sea. This is also referred to in the Bible as the 'Promised Land'. In Christianity, this term refers to the land God promises to Abraham's descendants in the Bible. After the exodus into Egypt, the Israelites wander in the desert and eventually enter Canaan, fulfilling God's promise.

* Children of Israel

The term 'children of Israel' or the 'lost sheep' of Israel refers to the 'Israelites', to the Jewish people.

* Kingdom of God

Jesus speaks in the gospels about the 'Kingdom of God', or the 'proclamation of the Kingdom of God'. It is a concept by which one refers to the rule of God over all things, His Kingdom transcends earthly rule. The gospel writers want to announce the rule of God with this proclamation. There are different views on the meaning of the Kingdom of God: is the Kingdom already established on earth, or is it in the (near) future? Is it already here in part? Or is the Church an expression of this Kingdom?

Messiah

The term 'messiah' is a Biblical term and literally means 'the anointed One'. It is a title used in the Hebrew Bible for three types of people who were commissioned by God and anointed: prophets, high priests and kings. A Messiah has been promised to the Jews, who will free the Jewish people and bring peace. Christians believe that the promised Messiah has already come, especially in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is sometimes addressed as 'Son of David'. It is an honorary title and confirms faith in Jesus. By addressing him as 'Lord', one expresses his divinity. The term 'Son of David' is used to proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah. 'Son of David' refers to the promised Messiah.

* **Middle East**

Jesus lived in the Middle East. That is why Christianity has its origins in this region. The term 'Middle East' refers to the countries of Southwest Asia and some parts of North Africa, such as Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and so on.

* **Monotheism**

The term 'monotheism' refers to the belief in one god. A monotheistic religion proclaims belief in the existence of one god. Examples of monotheistic religions are Judaism, Christianity, Islam. These are the three largest monotheistic religions.

* **Nazareth**

Nazareth was in ancient times a small village in Galilee. Galilee was a Jewish region in what was then Palestine (region in the Middle East). Jesus was born around the year six BCE in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth.

* **Palestine**

At the time of Jesus, Palestine was a place in the Middle East. Jesus lived here as Bethlehem, Nazareth and Galilee are all in Palestine, and therefore also in the Middle East.

Polarization

When different groups face each other and the contradictions between these groups become stronger, we speak of polarization. The two groups that face each other are thus 'polar opposites'.

Polarization is the process whereby the opposing views of different groups in a society become increasingly further apart and it becomes increasingly difficult to bring these groups together. The contradictions between these groups are being increasingly emphasized.

* **Polytheism**

The term 'Polytheist' refers to someone who does not believe in one, but in several gods. The term 'polytheism' therefore refers to a religion with several gods.

The Greeks and the Romans of antiquity, for example, were polytheists as they believed in different gods.

Purity laws

The theme of 'purity' was an important term in the Jewish community. In Jewish society, 'the purity laws' existed to separate what was Jewish and pure from what was non-Jewish and unclean. They are rules and guidelines for maintaining natural order.

Secularization

The term 'secularization' literally means 'rejection'. It is a general term for the process by which society is less and less influenced by religion, faith and ecclesiastical authority.

* **Syrophoenician**

The name 'Syrophoenician' is a combination of 'Syrian' and 'Phoenician', and probably comes from the fact that Phoenicia was then part of the Roman province of Syria.

Temple of Jerusalem

When Jesus lived, the Temple of Jerusalem formed the heart of Judaism: all the devout Jews came here to pray and sacrifice. Only Jews could enter the temple. Jesus also came here regularly. The temple used to be the most important building of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the capital/centre of Palestine.

In 70 CE, the Romans destroyed this temple. Only one wall remained: the western wall. This wall and surrounds are now known as the Wailing Wall. Jerusalem is not only an important city for Jews and Christians, but also for Muslims. According to their tradition, the prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven in Jerusalem.

* **Tyre**

In the story of 'The Syrophoenician Woman's Faith', we read that Jesus stayed near the city of Tyre. At that time, Tyre was a harbour town on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The city was outside the borders of Palestine at that time. It was one of the most important cities of the small coastal state of Phoenicia.

* **Devout**

When the term 'devout' is used to refer to a person in a religious context, this means that it is a very religious and dedicated person. This person also demonstrates this in his thinking and acting.



Photo: Annie Spratt | Unsplash

1.8 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

1 INT CLASSROOM DAY

We see a classroom filled with pupils and a teacher who enters. We see 2 pupils surrounded by others and they seem excited.

Teacher (exhausted and cynical):

I hope you guys are back in good form because end of this week we will be having.... a math test!

The class boos to the teacher.

Teacher: I know, I know... it's your favorite subject...

The class boos even louder...

Ahmed and Pieter-Jan look at each other and are clearly nervous about this news. Ahmed raises his hand.

Ahmed: How are we supposed to study if we don't even have notes on those classes?

Pieter-Jan: Yeah?!

Teacher: Pieter-Jan, raise your hand when you want to say something!

Pieter-Jan raises his hand and speaks to the teacher.

Pieter-Jan: Mr. Roberts, how can we study what we haven't seen yet? I mean: we weren't there the last days?

Teacher (a bit annoyed, not looking at the pupils): Sighs....Can anybody give these poor, poor students, his or her notes?

2 INT SCHOOL DAY

We see Ahmed going towards Sarah.

Ahmed: Hey Sarah, I heard Pieter-Jan returned your notes,... Could I have them during the lunchbreak so I could copy them as well?

Sarah hesitates

Sarah: Oh... euhm... Let me get 'em...

She starts to look into her bag.

Sarah: Oh no, I lost my notes!

All other kids look at Sarah.

Sarah: I guess I will not be able to lend you my notes then, sorry...

Ahmed (disappointed): oh... ok then...

A bit further up we see Sarah putting away some book when Lindsay walks over to her.

Lindsay: Hey Sarah, I heard you lost your notes, you can have mine if you want.

Sarah: Well, I didn't actually lose my notes. I just didn't want to give my notes to Ahmed.

Lindsay: "What do you mean?

Sarah: I just don't want to give my notes to him.

Lindsay: But why? What's the problem? Did something happen?

Sarah: Not really. I just don't want to give my notes to a Muslim...

Lindsay (confused): What?

Sarah (a bit louder): They shouldn't be here, in our country, in our school. My dad tells me they take our jobs and our money. And now they even want to take my notes. We are always expected to help them, just like that. As if we don't have enough of our own worries. It is not my problem that he was sick.

This last answer was definitely heard by Ahmed.

Ahmed (shocked): I'm so sorry you feel this way. I don't really know what to say, but I don't want to do anything wrong, I just wanted to ask for some help with the lessons I've missed the last few days because I was sick."

Sarah: Well, that's not my fault and certainly not my responsibility to help you.

Ahmed: (shocked, confused): oh... ok then....

Sarah: Now you don't have much more to say, do you? Now that you hear the truth? And it is the truth, because even Jesus once said that we should not pay attention to strangers or take care of them.

Lindsay: Hey, calm down. You shouldn't be so hard. And what do you suddenly say about Jesus?"

Sarah: My dad showed me: in the bible, there's a story about Jesus and he says something about dogs: 'We shouldn't give food to the dogs', so people like you (pointing towards Ahmed), shouldn't get food from us.

Lindsay: "What? What are you saying? It seems unlikely to me that Jesus would say something like that."

Ahmed: Yes, are you sure? Because Jesus is also a prophet in the Islamic tradition. And for us, Jesus symbolises love and giving, which is the exactly opposite of what you're saying.

Sarah: Well it is! I'll show you!

3 INT LIBRARY –DESK DAY

The kids enter the library and look for someone who can help them and go to the counter where a geeky looking librarian is working on his computer.

Librarian: Yeeeeeeeeess? What are you young adventurers doing in this temple of knowledge? Can I help you finding your destiny?

Sarah: We are looking for the story where Jezus is talking about dogs...

Librarian (thinking): Hmmmm... That sounds like a job for iChrist!

The kids look to each other in confusion..

Librarian: iChrist is the new artificial AI for all questions concerning the Catholic religion! It was developed by the best developers the Vatican could find! Filled with great features and they even tried to integrate 'the voice of Jesus' based on the real testimonials!

Sarah: Ok that sounds exciting!! Just tell us where it is please?

Librarian (becomes a bit mysterious, talking more heavily): Oh sure, you can find iChrist... His presence is actually everywhere but it is mostly felt in the 'interactive part'... Just walk through that door, passed the 'Children section' and 'war stories' you'll find a place which lacks books and paper. That's where you can find iChrist's personal space.

4 INT LIBRARY – iChrist's personal space DAY

The children walk into a room without books and only 1 screen in the middle of the room. The Children go stand before the screen and it flips on! A Digital looking figure in a robe appears.

iChrist: Welcome young and bright minds! Let your minds be enlightened with my infinite wisdom!

Sarah: Can you tell us about the story where Jesus doesn't want to give food for dogs?

iChrist: ah yes, the story of the Syrophenician woman?

Ahmed: The what? woman?

iChrist: The Syrophenician woman... that means she's Greek! And indeed in that story Jesus Christ, my real live counterpart (winks) says 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs'.

All kids are looking in disbelief towards iChrist!

Everyone: whaaat?

Sarah seems proud to be able to proof she is right.

Sarah: There you go! Jesus is against strangers and only wants to take care of the people who are part of his religious tradition.

The other 3 kids seem a bit disappointed by Jezus' reaction. Sarah is happy being right on this.

Ahmed: I am shocked! I didn't know Jezus could be so cruel. My dad always said to me that Jesus represents love in our religion! So,... I guess that is a lie....

iChrist: Now now, let's get our facts straight, shall we? I'll tell you the story the way it was meant to be told... So, let me tell you what this story is really about!

TRANSITION TOWARDS BIBLICAL TIME

5 EXT ANCIENT PALESTINE DAY

VOICE OVER iChrist: From there Jesus sets out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice,

TEXT IN IMAGE: TYRE 28 AC

We see a hooded Jesus hiding behind pillars and rocks entering a house where a group people are having a market.

6 INT ANCIENT PALESTINIAN HOUSE DAY

We see a woman, recognizing Jesus and with a small crowd they approach Jesus. She falls to her knees begging Jesus to help her.

VOICE OVER iChrist: but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

We see Jesus looking at the woman and then we see Jesus saying something in sync with the voice of the priest.

iChrist: He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

7 INT LIBRARY – iChrist's personal space DAY

Sarah (intervenes): see, it is literally in the bible!

iChrist (annoyed): Yes, you think are so right, but actually you could not be more wrong... Don't intervene,... let me finish!

8 INT ANCIENT PALESTINIAN HOUSE DAY

We see Jezus in conversation with the woman. Again we see Jezus in sync with the voice of the iChrist.

iChrist: He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

But she answers, again in sync with the Priests voice.

Syrophenician woman: Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

We see the woman answering Jezus. And Jezus is considering her words carefully and we see him actually changing his mind.

iChrist: Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go-- the demon has left your daughter."

9 EXT ANCIENT PALESTINIAN ROAD

We see the woman returning home finding her child in good health.

10 INT ANCIENT PALESTINIAN HOUSE OF WOMAN

She finds her child in good health and they hug intensely.

11 INT LIBRARY – iChrist's personal space DAY

We see the iChrist finishing his story.

iChrist: So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Sarah: Huh? What does that mean??-

Ahmed: I don't understand it either!

iChrist: Let me explain... When Jezus is speaking about his children he is indeed speaking of the people that are part of his group and religion, so the Jewish people of Israël. The woman is actually Greek and a stranger to him and he compares her with a dog.

Sarah: Indeed, you see, foreigners are dogs!

iChrist (irritated)...: God da... please child, let me finish!

12 EXT ANCIENT PALESTINE DAY

We see Jezus speaking in front of a crowd, giving bread to his followers. Giving it to everyone. People rejoice.

VOICE OVER iChrist: The woman then contradicts Jesus. She replies: 'even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs'.

Sarah (a bit sassy): Yeah... and what does that mean? Why is this woman is speaking in riddles? And what does Jesus reply?"

iChrist: She's telling him that Jesus should listen to her too. And now, by saying this, the woman changes Jesus his mind, and he helps her. He tells her to go home, and her daughter is cured. In this moment, in this encounter,

Jesus changes his perspective.

Children: wow, ok...

iChrist: The woman makes him realise that salvation, the bread, is for everyone and not only for the Jewish people. Even more, this biblical story is known as the only story in which Jesus changes his mind, because most of the time, Jesus will change the minds of someone else.

13 INT LIBRARY – iChrist's personal space DAY

Sarah: ...

Ahmed: ...

Priest: So, don't you think it is time to put aside our differences and change our minds as well?

Sarah:... I am sorry Ahmed, it's my dad that is the douchebag.

Ahmed: Don't worry Sarah, I didn't know this story either.

14 EXT SCHOOL DAY

We see everyone entering the schoolgates.

TEXT IN IMAGE: Next week

15 INT CLASSROOM DAY

We see the teacher hanging a score sheet on the wall.

Teacher: Here are the results of the Math test! I am VERY disappointed in one person in particular...

We see Ahmed closing his eyes in fear of it being him.

Teacher: Geoffrey, you are the only one who didn't pass this test... again... Come on man, pull yourself together.

We see a kid sniffing and being a bit sad by the news... Then we turn to Ahmed:

Ahmed (relieved): Phew I passed!

We see Ahmed looking at Sarah. Sarah notices and smiles! Ahmed winks back to her.

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This book was funded by the European Union's Internal Security Fund – Police.

