

Catholics
in
Encounter

TEACHER'S BOOK



Funded by
the European Union

FACE2FACE CATHOLICS IN ENCOUNTER

TEACHER'S BOOK



EDUC8

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INTRODUCTION

EDUC8 TO BUILD RESILIENCE

Terrorism, war, authoritarianism, poverty, natural disasters, violence... The world does not seem to be doing well. Young people today are growing up in a diverse world in which religion is all too often misused to condone violence. Indeed, religion and violence are often linked together. How can we make young people look beyond such forms of polarization and radicalization?

EDUC8 is a religious education project created for secondary schools and extracurricular contexts. This project aims to **build resilience against polarization and radicalization** among young people, and to demonstrate how they can find resilience and resistance (to this) in their own religious tradition. **This initiative has been funded by the European Union's Internal Security Fund.**

EDUC8 focuses on six different worldviews, namely Judaism, Catholicism, Islam, Orthodoxy, Protestantism, and a non-confessional (ethical) perspective. Each worldview departs from its own tradition on different topics in order to build resistance to polarization and radicalization. Several didactic packages have been developed for 12- to 18-year-old students. This textbook starts from the perspective of the Catholic faith.

This textbook on **Catholicism** is divided into four chapters, also called **deep modules**. Specifically, it covers the following four topics:

1. Encounter with the other: dealing with diversity
2. Encounter with sacred texts: texts of violence
3. Encounter with the environment: social and ecological issues
4. When encounter becomes conflict: just war and just peace



Figure 1
Video Clip

The first module on the encounter with the other examines the way in which Catholic believers view, and interact with, the other, which includes other believers or non-believers. In what way do Catholics want to deal with the existing diversity in society and what are possible barriers and facilitators?

The second module focuses on the Bible, the sacred text of Christianity. In what way do Catholics read the Bible? For example, how can we deal with difficult Bible passages where violence seems to be legitimized?

A third module shifts the focus to the relationship between ecology and Catholicism. How do Catholics interact with their environment (nature, animals), and care for fellow human beings? What social issues do Catholics struggle with regarding this topic?

The fourth and final module highlights how Catholics deal with conflicts in the world. What position do Catholics and the Catholic Church take on war and peace?

The four *deep modules* each consist of the following **three learning materials**:

1. Each deep module starts with a **video clip** in which a possible real-life situation is presented. The video clip also contains some quiz questions, which make the students think about different aspects of the story. Next, the students can work individually, or with guidance, on the student textbook. The choice is yours. Basically, the student textbook is set up so that they can go through all the exercises individually.

2. The **student textbook** contains a short introduction to the video clip and continues with the basic learning material of each deep module, focusing on philosophical/religious knowledge, reflection, and communication. The basic material and the video clip together form a single unit for approaching a specific ideological topic concerning polarization and radicalization. The whole lesson normally takes one-hour.

3. The **teacher textbook** discusses the basic subject matter of the student textbook and provides additional information for the teacher. The teacher textbook also contains supplementary in-depth material with corresponding impulses and didactic suggestions. In this way, the facilitator can select the most appropriate impulses and didactic suggestions for their own learning group to further complement the basic material.

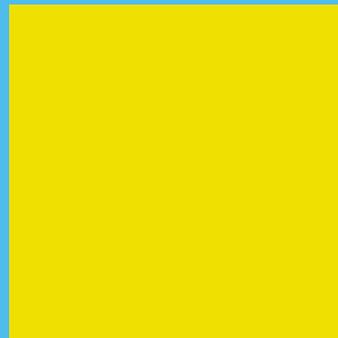
We hope that these teaching materials may inspire and motivate you to work with your students from within their own philosophical and religious tradition to create resilience against polarization and violent abuse of religion.

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“ TERRORISM DOES NOT COME FROM RELIGION. IT USES RELIGION AS AN EXCUSE. RELIGION CAN NEVER CONDONE MURDER, TERROR OR OPPRESSION. ”

POPE FRANCIS, 2021

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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 Syrophenician 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 Syrophenician 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 Syrophoenician 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**.

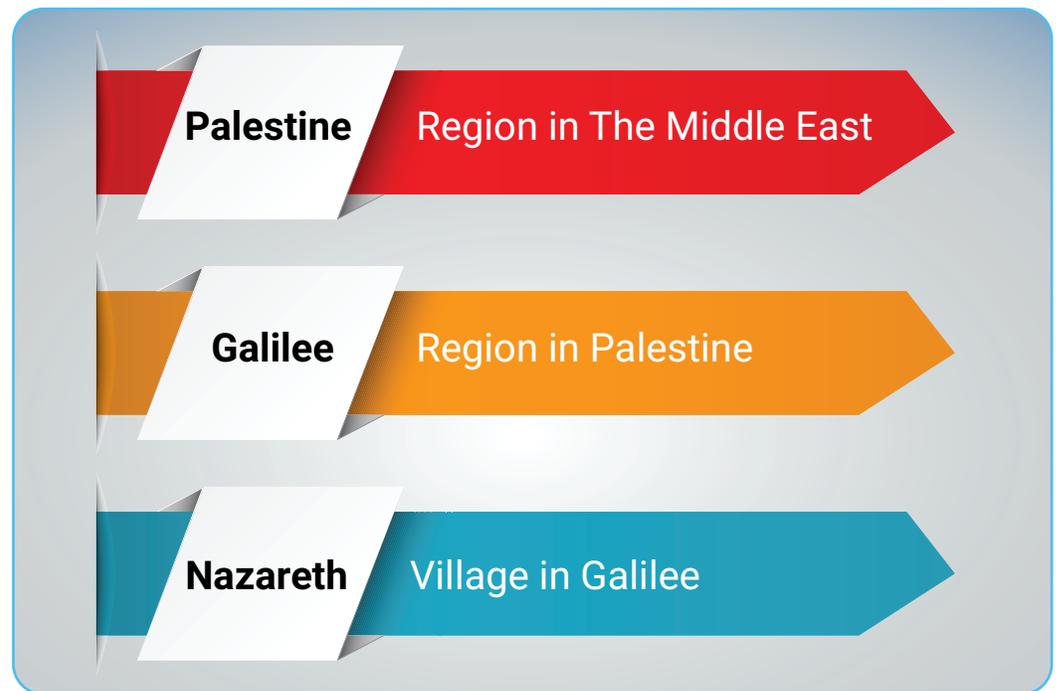


Figure 1.2 Jesus' Environment



Figure 1.3
First century Judean
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.

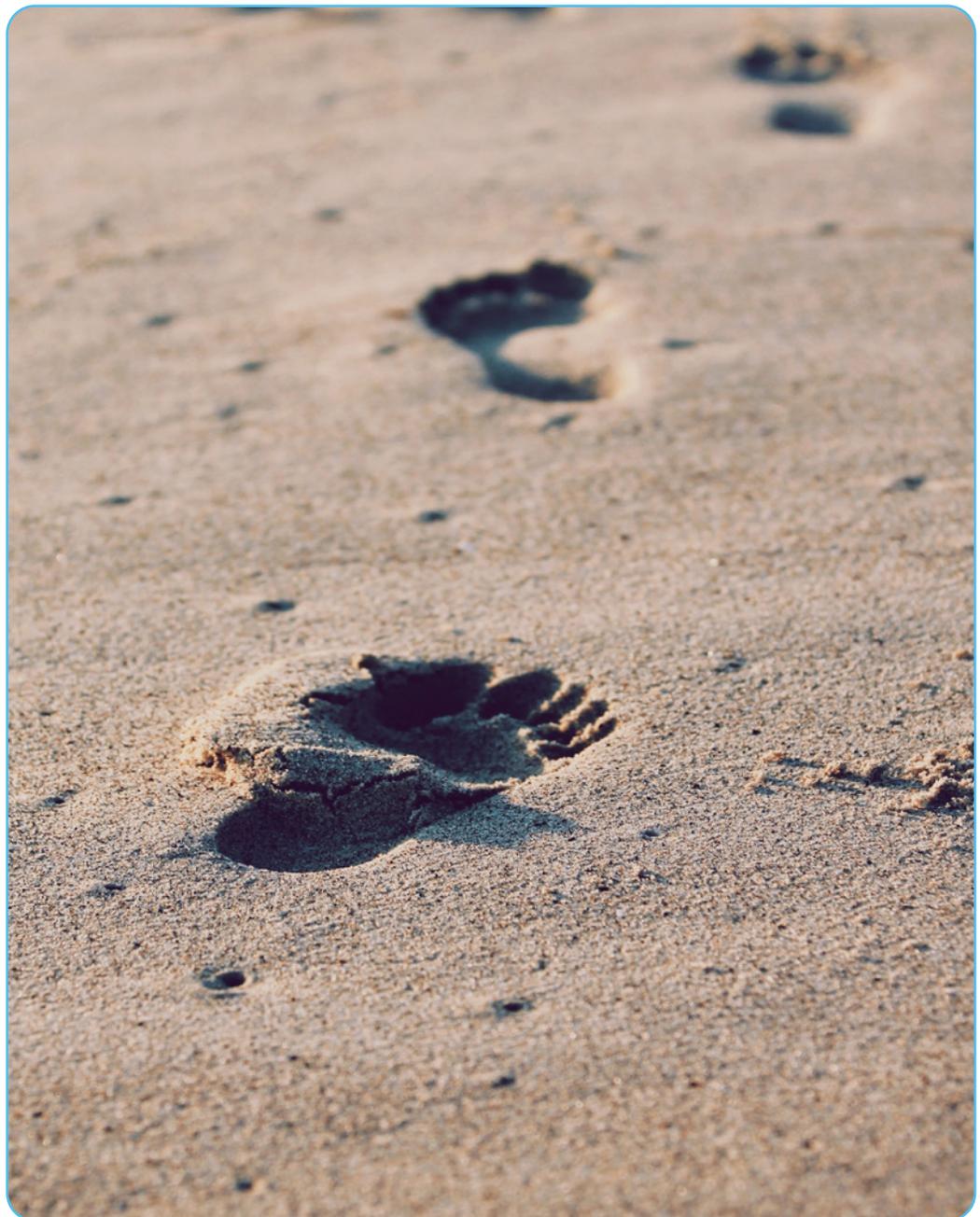


Figure 1.4
Footprints
Image: Christopher
Sardegna | Unsplash

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 Syrophoenician 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 Syrophoenician 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 Syrophoenician origin. So she was not Jewish. 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. 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 Syrophoenician 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 Syrophenician woman, a pagan, should be read in this context.



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

1.4.3 TEXT ANALYSIS **Some highlights of the author/text**

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 Syrophenician 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 Syrophenician 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 Syrophoenician 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 Syrophenician 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)?

o 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).

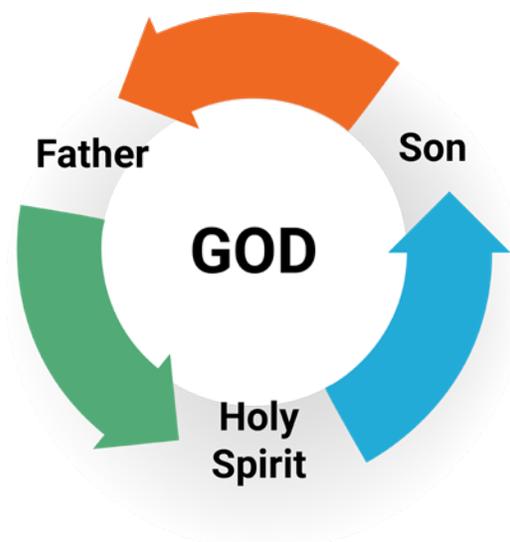


Figure 1.9
Representation of Trinity

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 Syrophenician 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.

* Syrophenician

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.

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 Syrophenician 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: Yeeeeeeeeeeesss? 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 Jezus' 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 Jezus doesn't want to give food for dogs?

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

Ahmed: The what? woman?

iChrist: The Syrophoenician woman... that means she's Greek! And indeed in that story Jezus 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 disbelieve towards iChrist!

Everyone: whaaat?

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

Sarah: There you go! Jezus 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 Jezus 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 Jezus 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 Jezus 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 Jezus and with a small crowd they approach Jezus. She falls to her knees begging Jezus 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 Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

We see Jezus looking at the woman and then we see Jezus 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.

Syrophoenician 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 Jezus. 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 speaking in riddles? And what does Jezus reply?"

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

Jezus 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 Jezus changes his mind, because most of the time, Jezus 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 school gates.

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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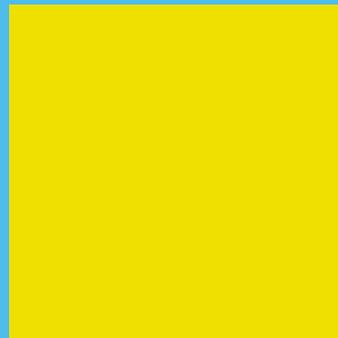
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2



ENCOUNTER WITH SACRED TEXTS:
TEXTS OF VIOLENCE

MODULE TWO

TEXTS OF VIOLENCE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

2.1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE TEACHER'S BOOK

This teacher's book is a didactic package that elaborates on the following theme: 'the encounter with sacred texts: texts of violence'. It has been developed for the 12- to 18-year-old age 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 book, the teacher can work around various topics that fit in with the overarching theme of 'the encounter with sacred texts: texts of violence'. Through 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) the 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 a particular learning group.

This 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 book.

The different chapters:

- In the first chapter, the Sacrifice of Isaac is discussed and interpreted symbolically. How can this intriguing Christian story be understood? Do the pupils themselves make something 'an Isaac sacrifice'? This chapter introduces the pupils to this biblical story and its underlying, symbolic meaning. This chapter is part of the basic teaching material for the pupils.
- The second chapter of this module is a deepening chapter. The biblical story is examined from the perspective of art. In what way has this story of Abraham and Isaac been depicted in art throughout history? The pupils learn to explain the Sacrifice of Isaac through art.
- The third chapter of this module is a deepening chapter. In the first chapter of this module, the pupils already encountered a symbolic interpretation of the Bible and its implications. The third chapter focuses on the consequences of a literal interpretation of the Bible through (biblical) fundamentalism.
- The fourth and final chapter highlights the contemporary relevance of Genesis 22:1-19. Is Isaac still being sacrificed today? 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 pupil. This is followed by a bibliography per chapter of this didactic collection.

**2.1.2 CONTENTS
OF THE
TEACHER'S BOOK**

This didactic package deals with the theme 'the encounter with sacred texts: texts of violence'. The chosen starting point is a Bible story from the First Testament: 'The Sacrifice of Isaac' (Gen 22:1-19). It offers students the opportunity to reflect on and deal with a violent text of the Holy Scripture. Does God really command people to commit violence in His name? Are biblical stories with violent content a legitimization for religious violence? How can Christians today properly read such Bible stories? Should we just ignore them, or even totally reject them?

The starting point of this book 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 'sacred texts of violence' 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 book.

2.2 THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC (GEN 22:1-19): VIDEO CLIP

2.2.1 SCENARIO

The video clip shows Michael, Pieter-Jan, Sarah and Ahmed skating together. Suddenly, Michael slips and bumps into Pieter-Jan, causing a wheel to break off of Pieter-Jan's skateboard. Michael and Pieter-Jan start arguing because Pieter-Jan thinks that Michael deliberately broke the skateboard. Pieter-Jan accuses Michael of always acting violently because he is Catholic, and he refers to a story in the Bible where a father murders his own son. The friends go in search of the story about the 'sacrifice of Isaac' and discover the true meaning of this story.



Figure 2.1
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 learning group.

2.2.2 QUIZ:
CORRECT 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 1: How will the story unfold?

The first question is introduced to the students directly after the verses of Genesis 22:2-9 are shown in the video clip. In these Bible verses, Abraham was commanded by God to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Together with Isaac, he goes to the land of Moriah. There, he builds an altar to sacrifice his son. At this moment, the video clip stops, and the viewer is asked to reflect on what happens next in the biblical story.

- Abraham kills his son Isaac but is overwhelmed by grief and guilt. In the end, he chooses to disobey the God who has caused him so much grief.
- Abraham kills his son Isaac and as a reward from God, for his obedience, he gets a happy and healthy life together with his wife.
- Abraham decides at the very last moment not to kill his son Isaac. What kind of God demands something like that? Abraham chooses his son and loses his faith in God.
- God stops Abraham at the very last moment. Abraham does not sacrifice his son Isaac, but a ram instead.

In the further course of the story, we read that God causes Abraham to end up sacrificing not his son, but a ram. Therefore, the fourth answer is correct. God intervenes and provides a sacrificial animal Himself. The sacrificial animal thus replaces the human sacrifice.

Question 2: Can we use this story to legitimize religious violence?

At the end of the video clip, the students reflect (individually) on the question above.

- Yes, God really wants Abraham to kill his son.
- No, because this story does not belong in the Bible.
- Yes, but only if God demands this from us.
- No, this story criticizes violence in God's name by replacing Isaac with an animal at the end of the story.

The fourth answer is correct. It is ultimately God who ensures that Abraham does not sacrifice his son, but a ram instead. God intervenes and provides the sacrificial animal Himself. In this story, an animal sacrifice replaces the human sacrifice. As a reader, it is important to look beyond the literal interpretation of the story. After all, a symbolic interpretation of Genesis 22:1-19 makes it clear that this story resolutely goes against human and child sacrifices. Quite the contrary, this story tells us that violence is not acceptable, and is certainly not needed in order to appease God.

2.3 THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC (GEN 22:1-19): INTERPRETATION

2.3.1 EXTENDED VERSION OF THE BIBLE STORY GEN 22:1-19

[1] After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." [2] He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you." [3] So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. [4] On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. [5] Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." [6] Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. [7] Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" [8] Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

[9] When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. [10] Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. [11] But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." [12] He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." [13] And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. [14] So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

[15] The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, [16] and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, [17] I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, [18] and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice." [19] So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba.

Source: NRSV, Genesis 22:1-19.

**2.3.2 SHORT VERSION
OF THE BIBLE STORY
GEN 22:1-19**

[God said,] "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer Him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you."

So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him.

[...] Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. The two of them walked on together [without the other young men]. Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father! The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" [...] Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." [...]

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar...

Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.

But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" [...] "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now, I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. [...]

Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba.

Source: S. DE BRUYN, B. LEMMELIJN & S. VANDEN HEEDE, *Bijbel. Verhalen uit het Oude Testament*, Tielt, Lannoo, 2017.

2.3.3 INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLICAL STORY

The Sacrifice of Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19) is a story of the First Testament that leaves almost no one untouched. In the end, the reader is often left with many questions: what kind of God dares to ask a father to sacrifice his (only) son? Does God have the authority or the right to push people this far? How far are people willing to go for an ideal? Is this story not proof that religion is dangerous? Does this story lead to radicalization and fundamentalism? Moreover, Abraham seems to respond to God's command without any form of hesitation or protest. What kind of father is willing to kill and sacrifice his son? Where is Abraham as a father in this story? What kind of father is he? Does a parent have full right of disposal over their child?

"In summary, the story has two different meanings. On the one hand, the story shows that God does not want sacrifices at all, and certainly not human sacrifices. One should not think that he or she can influence God by making a sacrifice. On the other hand, this story shows that no one has a full grip on his or her future. At the end of the story, Abraham must let go of Isaac. The future is not a secured possession for Abraham, but a gift that he receives from God's hand with confidence." – First Testament scholar Paul Kevers

The story as an accusation against human sacrifices

To answer the above-mentioned questions while keeping in mind the biblical story, it is important to pay attention to the context in which the story takes place. If this is not considered, one risks falling into the trap of fundamentalism. The Bible is a product of its time and dates from a distant past. In other words, **there is a large (cultural) gap between the original and the contemporary audience of the biblical stories.**

The Sacrifice of Isaac is a story of the First Testament, which is more than 2000 years old. The Bible is a centuries-old book, written in the Middle East and 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. Society was not global but strongly concentrated in rural areas, local cities, and small villages. Only a small part of the population was rich, and slavery was widespread. Electricity had not yet been invented, nor had the internet. Industry did not exist, the people supported themselves economically mainly through agriculture and fishing, handicrafts, and trade. Religious life in the Middle East was mainly characterized by polytheism. The term 'polytheist' refers to someone who does not believe in one god, but multiple gods. The term 'polytheism' therefore refers to a religion with several gods.

In Genesis 22:2, God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac: *"Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you."*

In the culture of the Middle East, about two millennia ago, child and human sacrifices were not uncommon. Within the polytheistic context, the general cult of sacrifice had its origins in a magical notion of God. By making sacrifices, believers tried to get hold of higher powers or the gods. In this way they tried to keep away evil powers and vice versa they also wanted to invoke favors from good powers or gods. In the story of Isaac, we can also see that God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son. **However, we can wonder whether this God demands a human sacrifice.** The story wants to emphasize that the God of the Bible is elusive.

In Genesis 22:1-19, Abraham is ordered to make a sacrifice in the land of Moriah. Research of the historical critical exegesis has shown that Moriah was a symbol of a cult place where one could make an animal sacrifice to compensate for a child's sacrifice. In addition to the growing importance of monotheism, the conviction that God does not ask human sacrifice became increasingly important. Genesis 22:1-19 represents an important step in this understanding. The story conveys the following message: **God does not want human sacrifices at all, because he is a God of liberation.** It is ultimately God who ensures that Abraham does not sacrifice his son, but a ram instead. God intervenes and provides for the sacrificial animal. In this story an animal sacrifice replaces the human sacrifice.

As a reader, it is important to look beyond the literal interpretation of the story. After all, a symbolic interpretation of Genesis 22:1-19 makes it clear that this story resolutely goes against human and child sacrifices. Quite the contrary, this story emphasizes that violence against children is strictly forbidden. The God of the Bible does not want sacrifices, and certainly not child sacrifices or human sacrifices, or as theologian Paul Keevers stated: *"A man should not think that he can get hold of God by making a sacrifice."* The story of Abraham and Isaac (Gen 22:1-19) is therefore not just a gruesome story from the Bible that approves of child sacrifices. The story is just a criticism on human sacrifice and child sacrifice. Essentially, this story tells that violence is not acceptable, and certainly not to appease God.

The story as an indictment of an omnipotent paternity

The message of Genesis 22:1-19 goes beyond the prohibition of human sacrifice. It is also a test for Abraham, which does not involve sacrificing

Isaac, but rather that he must learn to let go of his son. This interpretation can be seen in the last verse of the story: *“So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba.”* Isaac’s absence is striking. Apparently, Abraham only goes to Beer-sheba with his servants. In this way it is made clear that Abraham has learned to let go of his son.

A **symbolic reading** of the story of Abraham and Isaac can thus be read as an **indictment of omnipotent fatherhood**. In the end, Abraham did not victimize his son, but the assumption that a father can dispose of his son, and that the son is absolutely possessed by the father. Being a father should not mean that you have complete control over your own child, or that you are omnipotent. The story just opposes the idea of an ‘omnipotent fatherhood’.

Abraham must learn to let go of his growing son rather than confiscate him. The ram that is eventually sacrificed is a symbol of masculinity and power. By sacrificing this ram, Abraham renounces the will to rule blindly over his child as a father. By letting go of Isaac, Abraham also learns to let go of his future. In this way, Genesis 22 also gives the message that a human being can never fully seize his future.¹ Man does not have his future in his hands, for it is given to him by God. In line with this we can also read the text with a critical reflection towards ourselves, because every human being sees himself at certain moments in life forced to bring an ‘Isaac sacrifice’.

Elsewhere in the Bible, too, the glorification of the blood bond between individuals is discussed. In other words, the Bible repeatedly gives the attentive reader the message that human fatherhood is not absolute. Matthew 10:34-37 brings the same kind of message:

“[34] Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

[35] For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

[36] and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

[37] Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me”.

¹ There is a clear link between Genesis 22 and Genesis 12. In Genesis 12 Abraham had to break with his past. In Genesis 22 with his future. In both cases he had to do this based on a great trust in God.

2.3.4 BRINGING AN ISAAC SACRIFICE



Figure 2.2
Image: © Kiwihug
Unsplash

What is an **'Isaac sacrifice'**? In a symbolic reading of the biblical story about the Sacrifice of Isaac, we can wonder whether we sometimes still make an 'Isaac sacrifice' nowadays. Sacrifices are part and parcel of life. They teach us to reflect upon ourselves. For believers, such an 'Isaac Sacrifice' can cause them to question not only their image of humanity but also their image of God.

"The Sacrifice of Isaac is, of course, a text in which the Bible rejects the human sacrifice. But instead of seeing the story merely as a remnant of a 'primitive religion' in which God is portrayed as a cruel executioner, perhaps we can also read it as a strong demand for ourselves.

The malaise surrounding such texts is also determined by the way in which we, as contemporary humans, have begun to read this text. We often do this in a moralizing way but also very strongly from our own self-image. Reading this text of Genesis, you cannot help but rebel against God, yes to a fit of profound anger. In that sense the text also reveals our way of thinking about God. At certain moments in our lives we may have the impression that we must bring an Isaac sacrifice. We are touched in the most precious thing we have or are, in the sense of our life itself or in our expectation of the future. Then we rebel. Or sometimes we think we "have to" do something for God. And just then the promise disappears. God disappears. It raises a lot of doubts. We become disoriented. We lose the meaning of our lives. What image of God do I have? The image of an idol, a reflection of the harsh human society that lives on the principle 'do ut des'? Or perhaps it is about the image I have of myself: I always must do the most difficult thing (or be able to do). But why do I think that God necessarily asks me the most difficult, the most negative and the most impossible?"

Source: THOMAS, *Recontextualisering (Bijbelse achtergrond)*, <https://www.kuleuven.be/thomas/page/abel-recontextualisering/> (access 01.04.2020).

2.3.5 DIDACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Interpretation of the Bible story: exploration

The pupils watch the video clip and read the Bible text. They reflect on the corresponding questions individually.

- In the text, indicate verses
 - that you do not like;
 - that surprise you;
 - that you do not understand.
- How does the story unfold? What do you think God's purpose is when He asks Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac? What do you think of this?

Interpretation of the Bible story: how to read a Biblical story?

- What do you think was different about the world of Abraham and Isaac?

Interpretation of the Bible story: does God truly desire human sacrifices from His believers?

- Can we use this story to legitimize religious violence? Why did you pick this answer?
 - Yes, God really wants Abraham to kill his son.
 - Yes, but only if God demands this from us.
 - No, because this story does not belong in the Bible.
 - No, this story criticizes violence in God's name by replacing Isaac with an animal at the end of the story.
- Statement: *"The Sacrifice of Isaac is a gruesome biblical story that approves human and child sacrifices."* Do you agree? Why?

Interpretation of the Bible story: an almighty fatherhood?

- The story of Abraham and Isaac has a double symbolic meaning, but which one? Indicate the correct answer.
- The story shows that God will always reward the sincerest believers. He therefore rescues Abraham's son, Isaac, and ensures that Isaac will always respect his father.
- The story shows that God opposes human sacrifices and shows that a father must always continue to protect his son.
- This story opposes human sacrifices. God does not want such things. He wants to make clear to Abraham that a father cannot fully rule over his child(ren).
- The story shows a God who rewards and protects His faithful believers. In addition, it also wants to make clear that parents can always rule over the fate of their child(ren).

To offer an Isaac Sacrifice

Together with the pupils, read the text of 'Thomas'. In a class discussion it can be discussed whether the pupils themselves ever had to bring such an 'Isaac sacrifice'. Can the pupils understand that people are willing to make certain 'sacrifices' in their lives based on their faith?

- Have you ever had to offer an Isaac sacrifice? Explain.
- Can you imagine that even today people sacrifice their lives, or the lives of others, for their ideals, like a god? What would you say or ask to these people?



Figure 23
The Video Clip

2.4 ART

This 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.

2.4.1 BIBLICAL STORIES IN ART

Numerous stories from the Bible have been a source of inspiration for many artists for centuries. **Biblical stories are strongly anchored in European art history.** Artists depicted these biblical stories each in their own way, in sculptures, frescoes and paintings. In the past, these visual arts often had a didactic role in conveying Christian values and norms to a predominantly illiterate population. Commissioned by (church) institutions or individual art lovers, artists depicted various biblical scenes throughout the centuries. In museums and churches, for example, many different representations can be found of the story of creation, the Flood, the plagues of Egypt, the birth of Christ, the Crucifixion, and so on.

However, the combination of the Bible and art is no longer self-evident in the contemporary context. The ongoing processes of secularization and de-traditionalization make both young people and adults increasingly unfamiliar with biblical stories. This means that they are often no longer able to place or understand biblical art (history). They often have no idea what story and message are hidden behind a certain painting depicting a scene from the Bible.

For centuries, religion, the Catholic Church, and the Bible determined the artistic landscape in Europe. However, throughout the 20th century, art, culture, and religion grew further and further apart. On the one hand, the Church stuck to art from the past and did not keep up with new artistic developments. On the other hand, many Western artists, writers and film directors no longer clung to the Bible as a source of inspiration for their artistic work. The Bible was no longer the only or most important source of inspiration in the art world.

This is not to say that art and the Bible can no longer go together; the Bible remains a living source of inspiration with powerful and challenging stories. Art and the Bible can continue to stimulate each other at a time when these texts are less well known. They can keep provoking the imagination. Artists today are again cautiously looking for religious inspiration. Religion and religious themes are returning to art. Marc Delrue, priest and director of the Museum Moderne Religieuze Kunst (Museum of Modern Religious Art) of the diocese of Bruges, states the following in his book *Art and Spirituality*: *"In secularized society, Christian imagery appears in a totally unexpected context. Many artists see a religious dimension in their work but do not use traditional imagery for this purpose. It is fascinating to see how some deal with their roots in Christianity and with religious symbols, and this at a time marked by religious illiteracy and spiritual supermarkets."*²

² M. DELRUE, *Kunst en spiritualiteit*, Tielt, Lannoo, 2006, p. 82. This is the English translation of a dutch quote: *"In de gesecculariseerde maatschappij verschijnen christelijke beeldmotieven in een totaal onverwachte context. Heel wat kunstenaars zien in hun werk een religieuze dimensie, maar gebruiken daarvoor niet de traditionele beeldspraak. Het is boeiend te zien hoe sommigen omgaan met hun wortels in het christendom en met religieuze symbolen, en dit in een tijd gekenmerkt door religieus analfabetisme en spirituele supermarkten."*

2.4.2 CARAVAGGIO - 'THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC' (1603)

The Italian artist **Caravaggio**, or Michelangelo Merisi, was born in 1571 and died in 1610. He was one of the most famous artists of the Baroque period. His painting **'The Sacrifice of Isaac'** dates from 1603. He was probably commissioned by Cardinal Barberini, the later Pope Urban VIII (1623-1644).

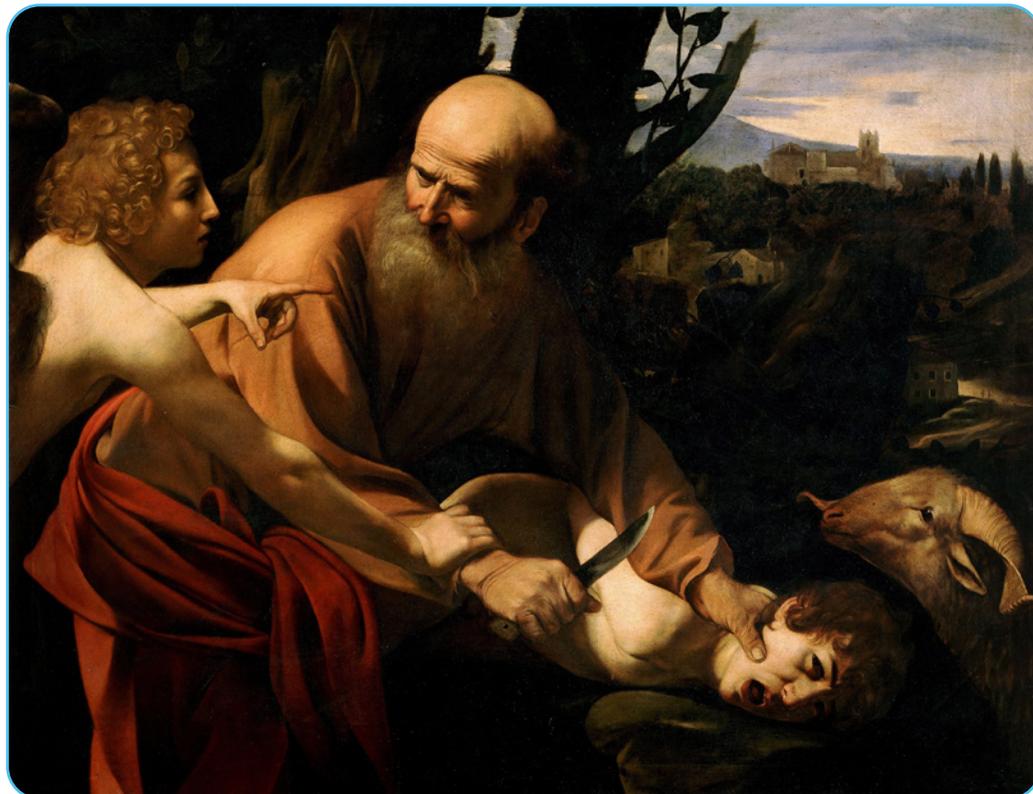


Figure 2.4
Caravaggio – 'The
Sacrifice of Isaac' (1603),
via Wikimedia Commons:
[https://commons.
wikimedia.org/wiki/
File:Sacrifice_of_Isaac-
Caravaggio_\(Uffizi\)](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sacrifice_of_Isaac-Caravaggio_(Uffizi)).

The painting largely follows the storyline from Genesis 22 from verse 10 through 13. In the foreground of the painting we see an angel, Abraham, Isaac and the ram. These are all figures from this biblical story. Abraham is about to sacrifice Isaac to God with a knife that he is holding tightly in his right hand. With his left hand he grabs Isaac firmly. Isaac looks the viewer of the painting straight in the eyes and looks terrified. This gruesome scene contrasts sharply with the rustic landscape of the background.

As mentioned earlier, the painting largely follows the storyline of Genesis 22. However, the figure of the angel is depicted differently than in the biblical story. In the biblical story, God's angel speaks to Abraham from heaven. In the painting, on the other hand, the humanized angel physically grabs Abraham by the wrist, pointing to the ram that will be sacrificed instead of Isaac. In the Biblical story it is told that the ram with his horns was stuck in the surrounding bushes. Caravaggio, however, chose to place the ram's head right next to Isaac. The angel refers explicitly to this. In this way Caravaggio shows the viewer that a divine intervention prevents Abraham from sacrificing his son, Isaac. God is against violence and against human sacrifice. With this painting, Caravaggio also makes it clear that Abraham believes in God unconditionally, despite this heavy ordeal.

[10] Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.

[11] But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, *"Abraham, Abraham!"* And he said, *"Here I am."*

[12] He said, *"Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."*

[13] And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Even today Isaac's sacrifice and Caravaggio's work of art from 1603 continue to inspire. In 2017 a mural based on the work of Caravaggio appeared in the Belgian capital Brussels. On the mural, as on the work of the Italian painter, we see a beheading with a knife. The resemblance with the work of Caravaggio is striking. However, the (controversial) mural from 2017 was not appreciated by everyone and caused a lot of controversy because it could incite violence.



Figure 2.5
The sacrifice of Isaac
street art Brussels,
Belgium.
Source: Sparrow
via Wikimedia Commons,
Licensed under the
Creative Commons
[Attribution-Share Alike
4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)
The picture has not
been changed and
can be found at [https://
commons.wikimedia.org/
wiki/File:The_sacrifice_
of_Isaac_street_art_
Brussels_02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_sacrifice_of_Isaac_street_art_Brussels_02.jpg)

2.4.3 REMBRANDT VAN RIJN – 'THE SACRIFICE OF ABRAHAM' (1635)

Rembrandt Van Rijn (1606-1669) is a well-known artist from the Netherlands. The style of his paintings can be placed within the Baroque period. Rembrandt made frequent use of Second Testament subjects for his paintings, but stories from the First Testament, such as Isaac's sacrifice, also inspired him. In 1635 the painting **'The Sacrifice of Abraham'** appeared.



The painting clearly follows the storyline of Genesis 22. The following figures are depicted in the painting: Abraham, Isaac and the angel. The ram is absent. Abraham is about to sacrifice Isaac to God. He does not hesitate. We can see this in the way he is holding Isaac. He puts his hand firmly on Isaac's face to subdue him, but also to keep the knife hidden from him. However, an angel manages to stop Abraham in time. The knife, with which Abraham initially wanted to sacrifice Isaac with, falls. Unlike in the Bible story, the angel physically touches Abraham. Like

Caravaggio, Rembrandt emphasizes the divine intervention that prevents Abraham from murdering his son Isaac just in time. God is against violence and against human sacrifices.

Figure 2.6
Rembrandt Van Rijn –
'The sacrifice of Abraham'
(1635)
Image: Wikimedia
Commons: [https://
commons.wikimedia.org/
wiki/File:Rembrandt_-_
Sacrifice_of_Isaac_-_
WGA19096.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rembrandt_-_Sacrifice_of_Isaac_-_WGA19096.jpg)

**2.4.4 MARC CHAGALL
'THE SACRIFICE
OF ISAAC'
(1966)**

Marc Chagall (1887-1985) was a Jewish Russian artist. He was also inspired by the Bible story of Abraham and Isaac. Between 1960 and 1965 he worked in France on the painting: '*The Sacrifice of Isaac*'.

In his painting, Chagall follows the storyline of Genesis 22. The following figures are depicted in the foreground of the painting: Abraham, Isaac and the angel. Isaac lies naked in front of Abraham on an altar made of logs. Abraham is standing to his right and has a knife in his right hand. He looks up to heaven where he sees an angel descending towards him. The angel, just like in the Bible story, manages to stop Abraham just in time. After all, God does not want human sacrifices. The painting also depicts a ram hiding behind a tree.

Chagall added a few more figures to this painting in the background that are not mentioned in Genesis 22. On the left in the corner of the painting is Sarah, Isaac's mother. We can also find Jesus carrying his cross, which may be a reference to the story of Abraham and Isaac foreshadowing Christ's crucifixion.

2.4.5 DIDACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

The pupils look at the different paintings and answer the accompanying questions:

Summarize the story of Abraham and Isaac using one of the paintings. Please take the following questions into account:

- What is depicted in the painting?
- Which characters are depicted in the painting?
- What similarities and differences do you notice between the biblical story and this painting?

Let the pupils look for other works of art that take Isaac's Sacrifice as a starting point.



Figure 2.7
Image: © Amaury Salas
Unsplash

2.5 RELIGION AND FUNDAMENTALISM

This 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.

2.5.1 INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS

A literal reading of the story can lead to the idea that the Jewish and Christian traditions approve violence in the name of God. KU Leuven research by Dirk Hutsebaut and Bart Duriez indicates that individuals who deal with religious content in a literal way tend more towards intolerance than individuals who look at the same religious content in a symbolic way.³ **On the other hand, a symbolic approach to faith, and thus also to the Bible, is often accompanied by a tolerant attitude towards people with different views and diversity.** In addition, Bible scholar Hans Ausloos states that a literal reading of the Bible, without making time for critical reflection, all too often leads to (biblical) fundamentalism.⁴

Not every form of fundamentalism is violent. Yet, Professor Ausloos emphasizes that a fundamentalist reading of the Bible can be dangerous and can lead to radicalization and violence. Amnesty International also warns against the consequences of extreme forms of fundamentalism that often conflict with universal human rights.⁵

In this module, we want to teach the pupils how to deal with belief and the Bible in a symbolic way. Concretely, this module goes deeper into one of the so-called 'texts of violence' from the Bible. This biblical text contains violent content and can be difficult to understand. A literal reading of a story like this could be used as a legitimation for (religious) violence. This module aims to draw young people's attention to the dangers of a literal religious experience and thus counter fundamentalist violence and radicalization.

³ D. HUTSEBAUT & B. DURIEZ, *Leidt godsdiens tot onverdraagzaamheid?*, in *Tertio* 87(2001).

⁴ H. AUSLOOS, *Geweld, God, Bijbel*, Averbode, Uitgeverij Averbode, 2019, p. 81-87, p. 96; H. AUSLOOS & B. LEMMELIJN, *De bijbel: een (g)oude(n) gids. Bijbelse antwoorden op menselijke vragen*, Leuven, Acco, 2017, p. 25-26.

⁵ AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, *Godsdienst, geloof en mensenrechten*, <https://www.amnesty.nl/encyclopedie/godsdiens-geloof-religieuze-onverdraagzaamheid-en-mensenrechten> (access 01.04.2020).

2.5.2 WHAT IS RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM?

The term 'fundamentalism' is a complex and layered concept. In this section, we only talk about religious fundamentalism. However, it is important to always keep in mind that fundamentalist ideas can also originate outside religious frameworks.

Religious fundamentalism is a general term for religious movements that have a strict interpretation of a religion. These movements follow a strict and literal reading and interpretation of religious books and doctrines. There is always a strong loyalty to divine revelation, in which deviations from the rules are not tolerated. Fundamentalism is therefore characterized by binary thinking, leaving no room for critical reflection or nuance. Fundamentalist movements can be found in all religions. These fundamentalist movements can have a violent character. Yet, this should not be generalized. After all, not all fundamentalist movements are violent, such as, for example, Creationism in Christianity.⁶

2.5.3 WHAT IS BIBLICAL FUNDAMENTALISM?

Biblical fundamentalism is a movement within Christianity that interprets the Bible literally. Biblical fundamentalists underline that the Bible is the word of God; the result of His revelation. Therefore, according to them, there can be no errors in the Bible. In other words, they emphasize the 'infallibility' of the Scripture: *"There can be no doubt about the Bible, for this is the Word of God"*, according to them.

Biblical fundamentalists often read the Bible very selectively, without paying attention to the (original) context of Bible stories. Everything in the Bible is considered and accepted as historically correct and as fact. Moreover, no attention is paid to possible symbolic meaning(s) of Bible stories. Biblical fundamentalism therefore assumes a literal interpretation of the biblical contents.

"The Bible is anything but a divine recipe book to be slavishly followed. We are still confronted on a daily basis with the results of such a fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible. This kind of interpretation is still at the origin of much religiously legitimized violence and oppression. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the fact that these texts, even if addressed to readers from centuries ago, have inspired people to untold numbers of good things of which we still reap the rewards. Even more so, critically read, as existential literature, they can still inspire people to deal with all facets of life: despair and suffering, love and happiness, adversity, and prosperity."

Bible scholars: Hans Ausloos and Bénédicte Lemmelijn⁷

⁶ More information: H. AUSLOOS en B. LEMMELIJN, *De bijbel: een (g)oude(n) gids. Bijbelse antwoorden op menselijke vragen*, Acco, Leuven, 2017, p. 44-58.

⁷ THOMAS, *Kritische lezing Bijbel*, <https://www.kuleuven.be/thomas/page/kritische-lezing-bijbel/> (access 02.04.2020). This is the English translation of a Dutch quote: *"De Bijbel is dan ook alles-behalve een goddelijk receptenboek, dat slaafs moet worden gevolgd. Met de resultaten van een dergelijke fundamentalistische interpretatie van de Bijbel worden we nog dagelijks geconfronteerd. Nog steeds ligt dit soort interpretatie aan de oorsprong van veel religieus gelegitimeerd geweld en onderdrukking. Niettemin kunnen we er niet omheen dat deze teksten, ook al zijn ze geadresseerd aan lezers van eeuwen geleden, mensen hebben geïnspireerd tot onnoemlijk veel goeds waarvan we nog steeds de vruchten plukken. Meer nog, kritisch gelezen, als existentiële literatuur, kunnen ze nog steeds een inspiratiebron zijn voor 's mensen omgaan met alle facetten van het leven: wanhoop en lijden, liefde en geluk, tegenslag en voorspoed."*

Summary:

- Biblical fundamentalism is a movement within Christianity that interprets the Bible literally. *“The Bible is literally true and there are no errors in it.”*
- The Bible cannot be doubted, for it is the Word of God.
- Everything in the Bible is (historically) true. No consideration is given to the possible symbolic meaning of the Bible stories.

2.5.4 DIDACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Together with the students, search for the definitions of ‘religious fundamentalism’ and ‘biblical fundamentalism’.

Discuss the following statements with the pupils. The pupils indicate whether they agree or disagree and explain why they do/do not:

- *“Fundamentalist movements can only be found within religions. Only religious people can have radical thoughts.”*
- *“Fundamentalism is always accompanied by violence.”*

Assign the pupils, individually or in groups, to look for contemporary forms of biblical fundamentalism.

Assign the pupils, individually or in groups, to look for violent or non-violent forms of fundamentalist movements within Christianity.

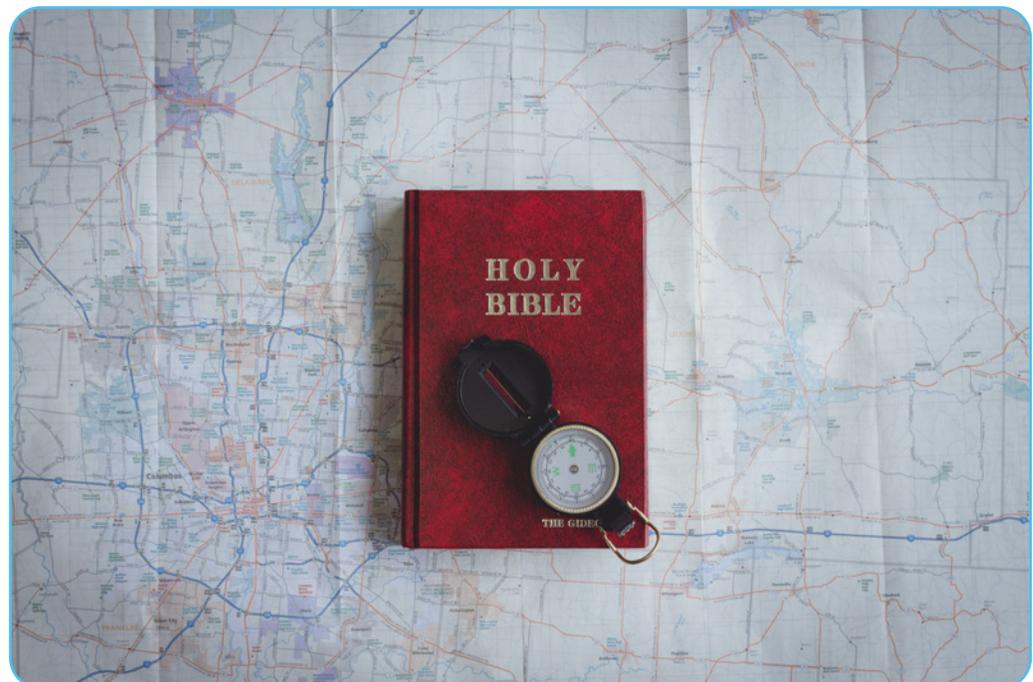


Figure 2.8
Image: © Alex
Grodkiewicz | Unsplash

2.6 THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC AS AN ACCUSATION AGAINST HUMAN SACRIFICE: IS THIS STILL RELEVANT TODAY?

This 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.

2.6.1 INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS

The Sacrifice of Isaac is one of the most famous stories from the Bible. As a common ancestor of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Abraham was and remains a man of world literature. He is still one of the most famous and important figures in our culture. The figure of Abraham is present in our language, literature, painting, music, sculpture, and so on. The importance of Abraham for our culture cannot be denied. The story of Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19) has a long history and is more than 2000 years old. For this reason, we can ask ourselves the following question: can this ancient story still be meaningful to us today?

2.6.2 IS ISAAC BEING SACRIFICED AGAIN TODAY?

The biblical story of Isaac's sacrifice can be understood in the first place as an accusation of human sacrifice. However, talking about the sacrifice of people in the 21st-century seems very strange at first sight. The obviousness of human sacrifice in the culture in which the Bible story of Abraham and Isaac originated cannot be compared to the culture of our contemporary society. The reaction "*which religion requires human sacrifice from its believers?*" is not an unusual reaction for a person living in 21st-century society. Does this mean that there are no more human sacrifices today? Is Isaac being sacrificed today or not?

Even in our time and society, the biblical story about Isaac's Sacrifice remains relevant. People are still being sacrificed, as victims of abuse and violence.

This thought was visually processed by **Erik Ravelo**. He is a Cuban artist who developed a touching photo project that focuses on the abuse and violence inflicted on children today. This photo project was given the title '**Los Intocables**', which means '*The Untouchables*'. The Cuban artist's project consists of seven different photographs that together form an accusation of the abuse and violence of 'sacrificed' children. Based on the seven photographs, the artist shows seven situations in which, according to him, the fundamental rights of children are being threatened.

The title of the work *'Los Intocables'* refers to both the victims and the perpetrators. The children should be 'inviolable' because their right to a healthy and happy life should be protected. The perpetrators are 'untouchable' in the sense that they are often not punished and that injustice can continue without punishment. The photo series was part of **Benetton's 'Unhate' campaign**, a campaign that aimed to raise awareness of the right to have 'a childhood' and the awareness of that which threatens this right.

Typical for this photo series is the attitude of the children. Each child is depicted on the back of an adult as if the child were crucified. **The innocent children are thus depicted in the same way as the crucifixion of Jesus.** Not on a cross, but on their perpetrator. In this way Ravelo emphasizes that the perpetrators are responsible for the suffering of the children.

In this way, Ravelo wanted to frame the contemporary and sometimes gruesome reality of violence and abuse from a Christian perspective. In this way Christians believe that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of man. By suffering and dying on the cross, Jesus takes the place of these innocent victims. He fully identifies with the fate of the children and pays the price for the evil and sin that destroyed them.

The controversial work of art has provoked many reactions, both positive and negative. The campaign was even considered 'offensive' by Facebook for months. That's why Facebook even blocked Erik Ravelo's messages and page. But with the help of lawyers, the ban was eventually canceled.

**2.6.4 DIDACTICAL
SUGGESTIONS:
IS ISAAC BEING
SACRIFICED AGAIN
TODAY?**

How is Isaac being sacrificed today? This question can be discussed in a class discussion. Then, let the pupils look for examples of (religious) violence and abuse.

This class discussion can also be done based on Erik Ravelo's photo series. The pupils can see one of these photos and discuss it in class. Subsequently, the pupils can discuss the other photos individually or in groups. Or let the pupils, individually or in a group, choose a photo. The pupils search for and discuss the event this photo symbolizes and then present it to the rest of the class group.

2.7 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.*

Biblical fundamentalism

Biblical fundamentalism is a movement within Christianity. This movement reads and interprets the Bible in a literal way: *"The Bible is literally true and there are no errors in it"*. The Bible should not and cannot be doubted, because this is the Word of God. Everything in the Bible is true. No consideration is given to the possible symbolic meaning of the Bible stories.

*** Genesis**

Genesis is the first book of the First Testament. 'Genesis' is Hebrew for 'in the beginning'. This Bible book tells the story of creation, the Fall, and the history of Israel. The sacrifice of Isaac can also be found in this Bible book. Genesis contains stories of faith and does not aim to give a factual or historical account of the creation of the world.

*** Isaac Sacrifice**

In a symbolic reading of the Bible story about the Sacrifice of Isaac, we may also ask ourselves whether we are making an 'Isaac Sacrifice' today. Sacrifices are part of life. They teach us to reflect upon ourselves. This is also called 'to bring an Isaac Sacrifice'. For believers, such an Isaac Sacrifice can cause them to question not only their image of humanity but also their image of God.

*** The Middle East**

The Bible, and thus the stories of the First Testament, originated centuries ago in the culture of the Middle East. All biblical stories are strongly influenced by the culture and the social life of the Middle East.

Jesus lived in the Middle East. That is why Christianity has its origins in this region. The Middle East has also contributed significantly to other developments in European culture, like for example, our alphabet, developments in agriculture, and so on.

The term 'the Middle East' refers to the countries of Southwest Asia and some parts of North Africa, such as Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and so on.

*** 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.

Religious fundamentalism

The term 'religious fundamentalism' refers to movements within religions that have a strict interpretation of a religion. Religious fundamentalists have a strict and literal interpretation of religious books and rules of faith.

It is important to know that fundamentalist currents can be found in all religions. Moreover, not all religious fundamentalist movements are violent.

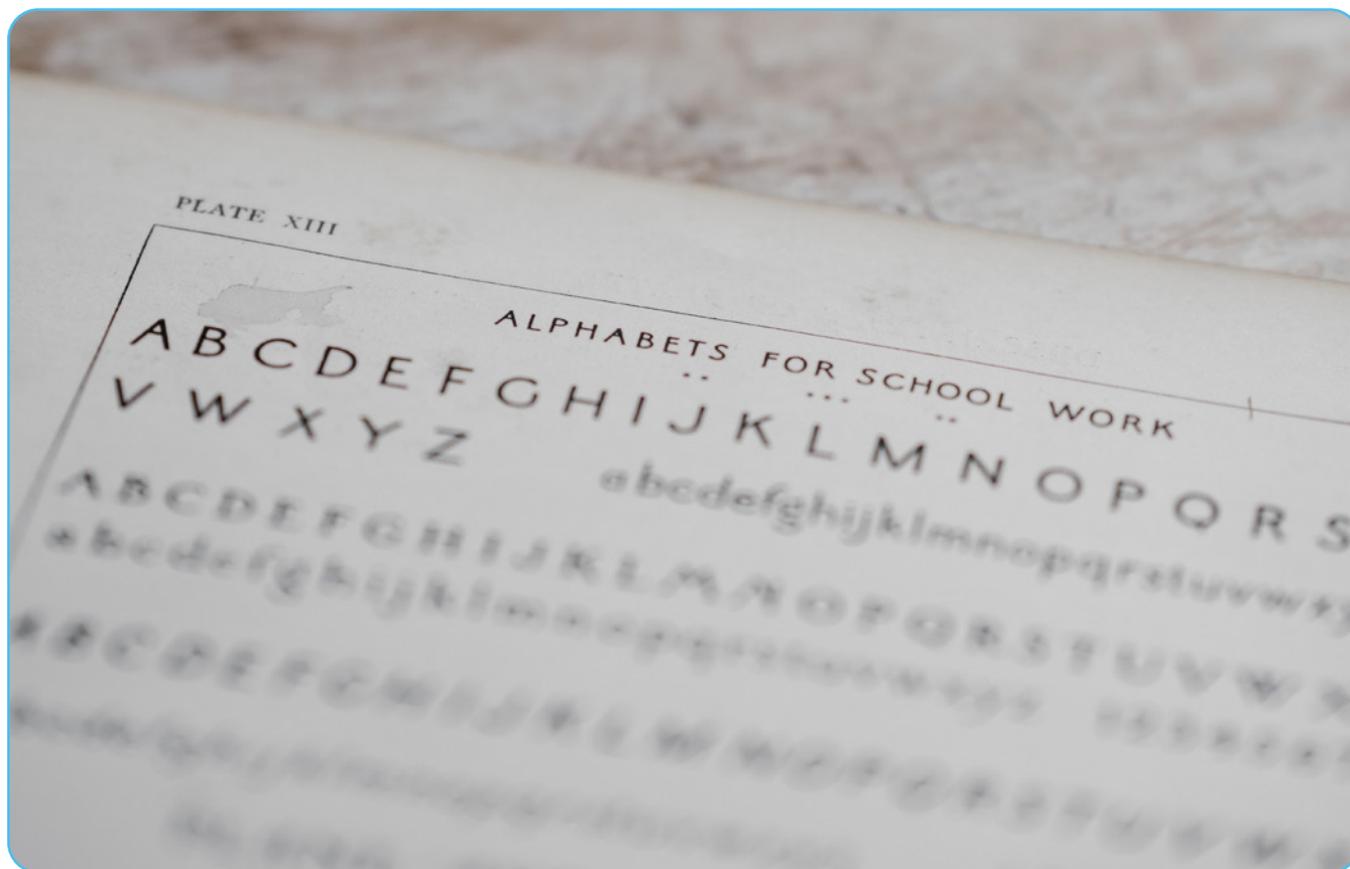


Photo: Annie Spratt | Unsplash

2.8 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

1. EXT PLAYGROUND DAY

Michael, Pieter-Jan, Lindsay, Sarah and Ahmed are skating together. Suddenly, Michael slides out and bumps into Pieter-Jan, causing Pieter-Jan's skateboard to break, one wheel off (or something). Pieter-Jan gets angry, he thinks Michael did it on purpose.

Pieter-Jan: What did you do? You ruined my new skateboard!

Michael: I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to!

Pieter-Jan: Yeah, sure, like you're such a saint.

Michael: I'm really sorry, I crashed, I really didn't mean to ruin your skateboard.

Pieter-Jan: Whatever. As if a Catholic like you wouldn't react violently on purpose? You were just jealous of my skateboard.

Lindsay: Calm down, guys. Maybe we can still fix your skateboard?

Michael: I'm not jealous of your skateboard! And as a Catholic, I wouldn't use violence at all!

Pieter-Jan: Whatever. The Bible is full of violent stories. Like that one story, where a father kills his own son, also intentionally!

Michael: What? That's not true?

Ahmed: Relax, guys. Pieter-Jan, Michael didn't do this on purpose. And what story are you suddenly talking about?

Michael: Yes, I really didn't do this on purpose. And what kind of story are you talking about all of a sudden?

Sarah steps into the conversation

Sarah: I know what story you're talking about, the story of Abraham and Isaac! Wait let me use my new application so we can fact check it!

Sarah takes out her tablet and everyone takes a position to look over her shoulder. She opens an application named 'the vault of knowledge'. A short loading screen appears and then a screen with a search bar and a volume button appear. Sarah puts her finger on the volume button and a scan is done.

Application: Access to unlimited knowledge granted... Please ask your question... please ask your question...

Sarah: Can you tell us the story about Isaac?

We see the text bar getting filled with 'Story of Abraham and Isaac). A search icon appears followed by a red exclamation mark.

Michael: What does that mean?

Sarah: It means the story has some dangers of interpretation. Let's go on.

Sarah clicks on the exclamation mark and the vault tells the story of Abraham and Isaac and shows illustrations

[BIBLICAL STORY, part 1]

In this section, the story of Abraham and Isaac is presented (voice-over application).

Genesis 22:2-9

And then God said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer Him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you."

So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him.

Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. The two of them walked on together [without the other young men]. Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father! The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" [...] Abraham said, "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." [...]

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar...

Returning to the pupils, they clearly look shocked and confused.

Michael: Huh?! Wait a minute... So, Abraham is ordered by God to sacrifice his only son?

Pieter-Jan: That's really crazy. What kind of God is asking such a horrible thing of one of his followers? What kind of God would that be? A God who purposely wants to do evil? Moreover, Abraham does not even seem to doubt God's command. Will he just do whatever God asks him to?

Michael: Can we really read such a terrible story in the Bible?!

Sarah: Let's get back to the story.

[BIBLICAL STORY, part 2]

Genesis 22:10-19

Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.

But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" [...] "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me."

And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. [...]

EXT PLAYGROUND

Returning to the pupils, they look confused.

Michael: Wait, so Abraham doesn't kill his own son?

Pieter-Jan: But why does God give the order to kill Isaac first and then he saves him? I don't understand any of this.

Michael: What's the meaning of this story? How can we understand this story?

Sarah: Wait, there is a Frequently Asked Questions section on this story: let's check it out!

We see Sarah pushing the FAQ section and we see different questions appear:

Sarah: Look at all these questions: (reads aloud) 'How is it possible that a story like this can be found in the Bible?'

Ahmed: Yeah, I thought the Bible was like Jesus about love.

Sarah swipes left and another question appears

Sarah: (reads aloud a second question) 'Do people really attach importance to this story?'

Lindsay: I think the people who do are a bit sick in their heads, no?

Sarah (reads aloud the third question): 'Does God have the right to demand such things? To test people like that?'

Pieter-Jan: What kind of God asks a father to sacrifice his only son?

Sarah: Sure, but what kind of father is willing to sacrifice and kill his son without any kind of protest or hesitation? I mean since when is it okay to sacrifice human lives?

Lindsay: For me this is just proof that religion is irrational and dangerous, don't you think?

Sarah: Let's look at this one: 'Is the story of Abraham and Isaac still relevant today? Can we still get something out of this? Does this story still have a message for us?'

Sarah pushes on the question button:

Application: While some might use this story to do violence in the name of God, the deeper meaning of the story is actually to criticize just that. The story criticizes violence in God's name by replacing Isaac with an animal at the end of the story, violence is wrong and can certainly not appease God.

Pieter-Jan: Ah... man... religion can be so confusing sometimes...

Michael: Yeah I know... That's why violence in name of any God seems a bit crazy... The old text can be interpreted in so many different ways!

Pieter-Jan: Sorry I called your religion violent.

Michael: No worries, we learn each day! And don't worry about your skateboard my dad will fix that in no time!

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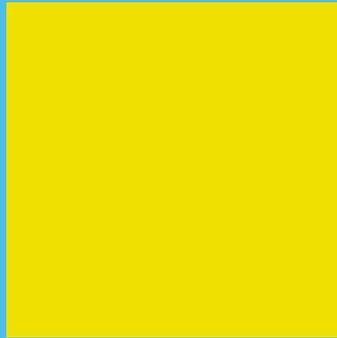
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3



ENCOUNTER WITH THE
ENVIRONMENT: SOCIAL AND
ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

MODULE THREE

SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE TEACHER'S BOOK

This teacher's book is a didactic package that elaborates on the following theme: 'encounter with the environment: social and ecological issues'. It has been developed for a 12 to 18-year-old age 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 environment: social and ecological issues'. 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 the 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.



Figure 3.1
Image: © Guillaume de
Germain | Unsplash

The different chapters:

- The first chapter on climate change, polarization, and social inequality is an introductory part providing more information on the impact of the environmental crisis and climate change on human relations at a local, national and international scale.
- The second chapter on 'Creation Faith and Ecology' is the basic subject matter for the students. This chapter analyses the criticism directed at the Judeo-Christian tradition as the responsible party for the current climate crisis because of the belief in creation. This chapter analyzes Genesis 1 and how this biblical story can teach us more about human attitudes towards nature, animals and fellow human beings.
- The third chapter discusses the encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015), written by Pope Francis. This encyclical is a call from the Pope to all Catholic believers and people of goodwill to take care of our common home, the earth. This chapter briefly discusses the core thoughts of this encyclical.

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

3.1.2 CONTENT OF THE TEACHER'S BOOK

This didactical package deals with the theme 'the encounter with the living environment: social and ecological issues'. Ecology as a theme is strongly present in the social debate. Climate change has consequences for the whole world and can therefore contribute to polarization. Christians today find themselves challenged and called by the issue of dealing with and caring for God's creation. In this module, the students get familiar with a symbolic reading of Genesis 1 and the corresponding vision of the Church on the care for the earth, including a discussion of the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. It offers the opportunity to reflect together with the learning group on social and ecological issues.

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 'the encounter with the living environment: social and ecological issues' 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.

3.2 ECOLOGY AND CATHOLICISM: VIDEO CLIP

3.2.1 SCENARIO

We see four friends, Lindsay, Sarah, Ariella and Michael, walking outside a classroom at school. Suddenly Lindsay gets a message. Her online order, a new dress, has arrived at her home. Sarah and Michael react irritably: does she really need so many clothes? Doesn't this contribute to the negative consequences of climate change? Shouldn't we all think more about our buying behavior and our (over)consumption? Ariella gets involved in the discussion and defends Lindsay: climate change is not Lindsay's fault. Ariella points to Christianity as the big culprit of the current climate crisis. Michael and Sarah are confused, how can Christianity be to blame for the climate crisis? And is this really the truth? Is it really true that Christians are responsible for all of this? Are today's Christian believers not interested in this problem? When the friends leave on a camping trip, they get an answer to all their questions...



Figure 3.1
Video Clip

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

3.2.2 QUIZ: CORRECT 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 Christianity and ecology. After watching the video clip, these questions can also be a starting point for a class discussion.

Question 1: What is Genesis?

- Genesis is a rock band that is named in the Bible.
- Genesis is the name of the first book of the Bible.
- Genesis is the first book of the New Testament.

Genesis is the first book of the First Testament. 'Genesis' is Hebrew for 'in the beginning'. This Bible book tells the story of creation, the Fall, and the history of Israel. Genesis contains stories of faith and does not aim to give a factual or historical account of the creation of the world.

Question 2: All people are created in the image of God. What does this mean?

- All human beings are equal and deserve respect.
- Human beings are like gods in the world.
- Human beings can use animals and plants without any restrictions.

Genesis 1 teaches us that all people are created in the image of God. This means that all humans must take care of God's creation, the earth, just as He would. It implies that all humans are responsible for nature, animals and for each other. Creation is a precious gift from God that humanity needs to treat with care.

3.3 DOES CLIMATE CHANGE EXACERBATE SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND POLARIZATION?

“Experience shows that any ruthlessness towards the environment damages human society and vice versa. It is becoming increasingly clear that there is an indissoluble link between peace with creation and human peace.”

– Pope Benedict XVI

Ecology is a topic that is strongly present in the social debate. There is increasing attention for this subject from various angles: from politics, through the work of volunteers and civil society organizations, thanks to the media highlighting **the negative effects of global warming**, through numerous national and international climate marches, and so on. The idea that there is an urgent need to change the way the (Western) world deals with our planet is becoming more and more common in our everyday reality.

Climate change does not only lead to disastrous consequences for nature. It also poses a **real threat to human relations at a local, national and international level**. The climate crisis can lead to the polarization of social inequality and unrest, which can lead to new tensions and conflicts. Even within existing conflicts and under-the-surface tensions, climate change can exacerbate tensions. All this can lead to a downward spiral of equality and peace, losing sight of the vulnerability of certain population groups and of nature.

In 2020, it is estimated that approximately 26 million people will be forced to flee as a result of natural disasters. Scientific research predicts an increase in climate refugees up to 150 million by 2050, due to flooding, extreme drought and the associated shortage of drinking water. These consequences will be especially felt in the southern hemisphere. In other words, due to the overconsumption of mostly the rich Western countries, the non-industrialized world of the poorest countries will suffer the most severe consequences of the climate crisis.

In the past, as in the Syrian civil war that started in 2011, the consequences of climate change were also at the root of a prolonged armed conflict. Between 2007 and 2010, climate problems caused extreme drought, water shortages and crop failures. Consequently, food prices rose, unemployment rose, rural exodus and so on. It must be emphasized that it was not only the consequences of climate change that caused the war in Syria. It was a combination of political, economic, ideological and environmental problems that ignited this conflict. Wars and acts of war as such often have a far-reaching negative impact on nature, the environment and the climate.

The impact of climate change is not just a far-off problem. Locally, pollution, poor air and water quality have a negative impact on the living environment, health and life expectancy of citizens. As with the large-scale consequences of the climate crisis, at the local level, the most vulnerable members of society are more often the victims of this problem, both mentally and physically. In other words, climate change exacerbates social inequality. Not only are environmental problems forcing us to take better care of the wealth of nature, but a global approach to these problems is also undeniably important in the pursuit of global social justice.



Figure 3.3
Image: © Ben White
Unsplash

3.4 THE STORY OF CREATION AND ECOLOGY

3.4.1 INTRODUCTION

Christians today are also challenged by the issue of dealing with and caring for God's creation. The connection between faith and nature ensures that, from a Christian point of view, the climate issue is an important theme that connects to the respect and care for the whole of creation. How do Christians express this? What are people's place and role in creation? What points of reference can we find in the Bible concerning this theme?

"The Christian does not place true ecological care on the periphery, but at the heart of his faith. [...] It is above all a matter of faith in God's creation and of the loving and compassionate relationship to things. But it is also a matter of commitment and action. Real ecology is in the head, in the heart and in the hands. There is also something to do!"

– Belgian Cardinal Godfried Danneels (1933-2019)

3.4.2 THE STORY OF CREATION AND ECOLOGY

The vision of critics

Today, the Catholic Church takes a clear stance on caring for the earth and emphasizes its importance. Thus, in 2015, Pope Francis published the encyclical *Laudato Si'* in which he calls upon every individual, both Catholic and non-Catholic, to take care of God's creation.

Despite the contemporary commitment of the Catholic Church to the care of creation, the Christian faith has been the focus of criticism on this issue, especially in the past. Through the Judeo-Christian vision of creation, the Church would, after all, be jointly responsible for the way in which the West in particular has dealt with nature and its inhabitants in the past. Especially certain verses from the first chapter of Genesis are criticized and questioned.

Well-known critics who portray the Jewish and Christian traditions as *"the mother of all environmental pollution"* are for example the Australian philosopher Peter Singer and the American historian Lynn White. We focus mainly on Lynn White's vision. In his article, *The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis* (1967), he states that human interaction with nature is always strongly dependent on the vision of the relationship between man and nature. Through their faith in the Bible, Christians have, according to him, adopted an exploitative attitude towards the earth.

According to White, the Bible story Genesis 1 is full of **anthropocentrism** in which man, created in the image of God, is simply elevated to the apogee of creation and thus assigned seemingly unlimited power over the earth. Because man was created in the image of God, White argues, this creature has been given the unlimited task of **subduing and controlling nature**.

According to critics, the current climate problem is therefore the result of a *"typically Christian arrogance"* towards nature, whereby creation is instrumentalized for the benefit of humankind. An arrogance which nature thus regards only as a desanctified object of arbitrariness and self-glorification. Is this really the way in which Catholic believers look at the earth and its inhabitants today?

Genesis 1: a literal or symbolic interpretation?

Critics such as Lynn White and Peter Singer consider the Jewish and Christian tradition to be anthropocentric and therefore the biggest cause of the current climate crisis. To substantiate their argument, they point their finger at the Bible, and more specifically at the **verses below from Genesis 1**.

Is Christianity really an anthropocentric religion? What exactly is the place of people and their role in God's creation? What can we learn today from Genesis 1?

[26] Then God said, "Let us make humankind **in our image, according to our likeness**; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

[27] **So God created humankind in his image in the image of God he created them**; male and female he created them.

[28] God blessed them, and God said to them, "**Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over** the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

[29] God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.

[30] And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

[31] God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Source: *NRSV, Genesis 1:26-31.*

Bible interpretation: the importance of context

Are the Jewish and Christian traditions the major cause of today's environmental problems? The Genesis creation narrative can seem problematic on an ecological level if it is read in a literal way. Interpretations of Genesis that give man the right to rule the earth without limits are literal and fall short. Such interpretations detract from **the rich symbolic meanings** behind the stories.

To discover the symbolic value of the Genesis creation narrative, and the whole Bible in general, one must always be aware of the corresponding **context of the text**. It is in fact the context in which a story originates that sets the reader on their way to grasping its underlying symbolism. The Bible is not just any science or history book, but an ancient book of faith that tries to express all kinds of human experiences and questions in relation to God. Biblical research has shown that Genesis was written at the time of the Babylonian Exile. During the Babylonian Exile, the Israelis were enslaved. Within this context, the creation stories were written as liberation stories to give courage to the oppressed. There was no environmental crisis, as we know it today, at that time either.

In a symbolic reading of Bible stories both the context in which the story originated and the **contemporary context** in which the story is read is important. This is also called **recontextualization**. In recontextualization, aspects of the Christian faith, such as biblical stories, are looked at from a contemporary perspective in which the interaction between text and context can lead to new possibilities of interpretation.

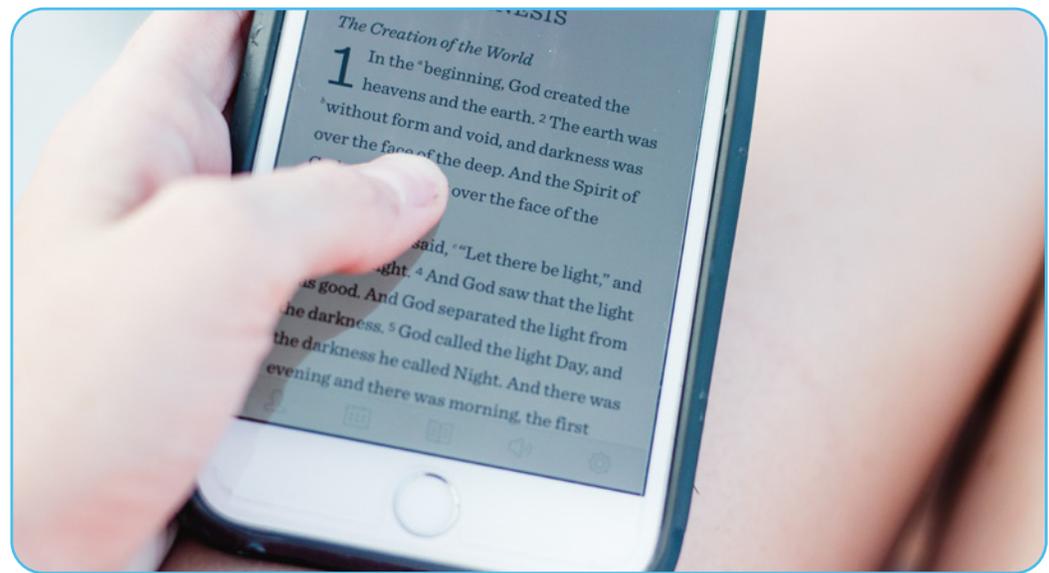


Figure 3.4
Image: © Jenny Smith
Unsplash

Man created in the image of God?

In Genesis 1 it is written that God created man in the image of God:

[27] So God created humankind in his image in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Source: NRSV, Genesis 1:27

“God created humankind in his image in the image of God he created them”, how can we comprehend this? First of all, it should be clear that this does not legitimize a dominant human attitude towards the earth. The Genesis creation narratives show God’s presence in creation. This creation is not just a possession of man, but a gift from God. In other words, man has received autonomy from God and is not responsible for his own origin. Being created in the image of God imposes a **responsibility** towards God’s creation. Man was last created but punished first. Creation is a precious gift from God and as an image of God, man must deal with this in a caring manner and bear responsibility for it.

Theologian Roger Burggraeve explains this as follows: “God puts His world in the hands of man to deal with the world in His place - and thus like God. This relationship can therefore not be arbitrary, but only creative, just as God Himself began to create and unfold the world. In other words, as an ‘image of God’ man is called to be ‘co-creator’.” So, the biblical view of the world is not anthropocentric, but **theocentric**. It is God who is at the core of the existence of creation, not humankind.

“Since all humans are created in the image of God, humans can ‘manage’ nature. But there are also limits to this ability to manage nature. It concerns a relationship between Creator and creature in which man is co-responsible for the preservation of creation in humbleness, reverence and solidarity. Humans are responsible for the preservation of the world in which they live.”²

– Theologian Marc Vervenne

²M. VERVENNE, *Mens, kosmos en aarde. Een exegetische reflectie over Genesis 1-3*, in J. DE TARVERNIER & M. VERVENNE (ed.), *De mens. Verrader of hoeder van de schepping?*, Leuven, Acco, 1991, p. 27-62.

Mankind as ruler of creation?

Human beings are not only created in the likeness of God, but in Genesis 1 it is also written that God calls man to 'rule' over creation and to 'subdue' it:

[26] Then God said, "Let us make humankind **in our image, according to our likeness**; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

[27] **So God created humankind in his image in the image of God he created them**; male and female he created them.

[28] God blessed them, and God said to them, "**Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over** the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

Source: NRSV, Genesis 1:26-28.

How can we understand these verses? They can be read as a release for humans to claim authority over animals, plants and nature in general.

A literal reading of Genesis 1 which labels humans as rulers over the earth detracts from a symbolic reading. Those who read Genesis 1 with a contemporary and symbolic reading can see that the Bible emphasizes human responsibility and connection with creation. The Genesis creation narrative does not grant humans the absolute right to arbitrarily rule over the earth. This 'reign' and 'submission' should be understood as '**servicing**'. Man can only 'rule' and 'submit' from **a servitude for creation**. From a caring and life-giving attitude, people are called upon to serve the fruitfulness and well-being of all creation.

"Ruling is not synonymous with exploitation. It has to do with authority. Real authority, in the true sense of the word, is at the service of the other and contributes to the development of the world. Although Genesis 1 emphasizes the importance of man, it continues to emphasize that man is and remains (only) a creature. [...] As such the poem of creation is a call to man to strive, as an image of God, for a world of peace and harmony."

– Theologians Hans Ausloos and Bénédicte Lemmelijn

³H. AUSLOOS & B. LEMMELIJN, *De bijbel: een (g)oude(n) gids. Bijbelse antwoorden op menselijke vragen*, Leuven, Acco, 2005, p. 111-114.

3.4.3 CHRISTIANITY AS THE MAIN CAUSE OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS? CONCLUSION

What is the human person's place and role in creation? How do people relate to the earth, to the (natural) environment? The interpretation of Genesis 1 plays an important role in the question of how to deal with and care for creation, the earth, the environment, fellow human beings and fellow creatures. From a Christian point of view, the issue of the environment and climate is an important matter that connects to the respect and care for creation. A symbolic interpretation of Genesis 1 plays an important role in the issue of dealing with and caring for God's creation.

In conclusion, it can be stated that a contemporary symbolic interpretation of Genesis 1 emphasizes the serving and nurturing of the earth, rather than its unlimited submission or control. An anthropocentric reading of Genesis 1 detracts from the central beliefs of **theocentric Christianity**.

Thus, men and women must be seen as **guardians or stewards** of creation. After all, being created in the image of God brings with it a responsibility for His creation. Men and women, as stewards, must govern and take care of the earth in a responsible manner in the same way that God would. In this they not only bear responsibility for **nature**, but also for their **fellow human beings**. After all, the earth must be a just place for everyone.



Figure 3.5
Michelangelo - 'The
Creation of Adam'
Image: Wikimedia
Commons: [https://
commons.wikimedia.
org/wiki/File:Creation_of
Adam.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Creation_of_Adam.jpg)

Michelangelo's famous fresco on the creation of Adam was painted around 1511 on the vault of the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City. This fresco shows an energetic and dynamic God who does not touch the hand of Adam. This particularly powerful image shows the biblical story from the book of Genesis in which God breathes life into Adam. The painting is experienced as the representation of the following Bible verses: *"So God created humankind in his image in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."* (Genesis 1:26)

3.4.4 DIDACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Caring for our planet: time for action?!

The students are introduced to the theme of ecology and the issues surrounding the environment and climate. Based on several statements, the students answer the following reflection questions:

- Are you worried about climate change? Why do/do you not? What worries you the most?
- How do you try to take care of the earth?
- Do you have any idea how the Catholic Church deals with caring for our planet?

The Catholic Church and the care for our planet: introduction

The students read the introduction individually.

The importance of Genesis 1

The students read the following Bible verses from the story of the creation of the earth: Genesis 1:26-31. The students indicate the verses that they do not like; that surprise them; that they do not understand.

All human beings are created in the image of God. What does this mean?

The students analyze Genesis 1:26. What does this Bible verse mean? The students answer the following multiple-choice question:

In the Bible fragment, it is written that man was created in the image of God. What does this mean?

- Being created in the image of God means that man resembles God in physiognomy. You can see this, for example, in the painting 'The Creation of Adam' by the artist Michelangelo.
- Being created in the image of God means that man must take care of the earth as God would.
- Being created in the image of God means that man must reign over the earth. So man is in charge of the earth and can do with it what he wants. This is literally written in Genesis 1.

Next, the students are given a text about the meaning of the creation story in which they have to fill in some missing words:

care – responsible – symbolic meaning – reign – literally

If you read the Bible story in a literal way, it may indeed seem that man, as the one in charge, can **reign** over the earth and thus do what he wants with nature and animals. Yet this is not the message of the story. You should always look at the **symbolic meaning** of every Bible story. This means that you must look and think beyond the words that are **literally** written down. Moreover, in Bible texts, you should not look for facts, but rather look at the images and symbols used to express a vision of God, the world and humankind.

Genesis 1 teaches us that man was created in the image of God. This means that man must **care** for the creation of God, the earth, just as God would do. It means that man is **responsible** for nature, animals and other people. Creation is a precious gift from God with which man must deal in a caring manner.

Man will 'rule'. What does this mean?

The students read Genesis 1:26-31. They indicate the verses that make it seem that man is allowed to rule over the earth.

Using the Bible text Genesis 1:26-31 the students answer the following reflective questions:

- Do you think that humans today, as rulers, abuse the earth, nature and animals? Why yes/no? Is this an appropriate attitude?
- *"God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good"* (Genesis 1:31). Would he think so today? Why yes/no? What would you 'recreate' in the existing world?

Based on this last question, a deepening assignment can be given to the students:

- *"God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good"* (Genesis 1:31). Do the students agree with this statement? To answer this question, the students write an alternative creation story. How would they 'recreate' the world?

And what about caring for our fellow human beings?

In conclusion, the students understand that caring for nature and the environment is directly linked to caring for each other, their fellow human beings. In particular, climate change also has a strong impact on people and the interrelationships between people, different population groups, countries, and so on.

“Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change.”

– Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* (202)

This quote can be found in Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’*. More information can be found in the deepening chapter on this encyclical.

Using this quote, the students answer the following reflection questions:

- Do you agree with this quote? Why do you/do you not?
- What can you personally do to take more care of the earth and of others?



Figure 3.6
© Li-An Lim | Unsplash

3.5 LAUDATO SI': THE CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

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.

3.5.1 POPE FRANCIS AND THE ENCYCLICAL LAUDATO SI'

On 18 June 2015 the **encyclical *Laudato Si'*** – “Praise be to you!” - written by Pope Francis was published. This encyclical is a call from the Pope to all Catholic believers and people of goodwill to **take care of our common home**. After all, creation today is under pressure from pollution, the loss of biodiversity, water shortages, an ever-widening gap between rich and poor, and so on. The encyclical deals with today's environmental problems in which Pope Francis not only calls on governments and businesses, but on all people to take more care of the earth. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis pleads for a global approach to the climate problem and an integral ecology and calls on everyone to look for bold answers to the climate crisis.



Figure 3.7
Pope Francis
Image: © Ashwin Vaswani
Unsplash

What is an **encyclical**? Literally, the word encyclical means ‘a letter that passes by’. In particular, it is a letter written by the Pope to the bishops and to all Catholic believers in the world. Since 1963 with the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* by Pope John XXIII, encyclicals have also been addressed to ‘all people of goodwill’, and therefore not only to Catholics or Christians. An encyclical is considered an important letter by the Pope, but it does not have the value of an ecclesiastical law and does not belong to the domain of the Pope's ‘infallible statements’.

3.5.2 KEY IDEAS FROM THE ENCYCLICAL



With the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis brings together both the ecological and the social issues in an integral ecology, which is discussed further below. Caring for the environment cannot be seen in isolation from our dealings with other people, especially the most disadvantaged. Like social encyclicals such as *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Populorum Progressio* (1967), the Church with *Laudato Si'* seeks to provide answers to major global challenges such as poverty, inequality and injustice. Pope Francis does not want to limit his message to Catholics but appeals to everyone who inhabits this planet. Below you will find

some key ideas from this encyclical.

"In this Encyclical, I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home." (LS 3).

The limits of our growth

Pope Francis gives a clear analysis of the current situation of our planet, based on scientific research results. The warnings of scientists are taken seriously, and Pope Francis describes them as *"a cry of creation"*. In concrete terms, various problems are mentioned, such as the global water problem. In every case, Pope Francis has an eye for the harmful consequences for people and the environment.

The Pope opposes the neoliberal development model in which progress is synonymous with 'growth'. On the other hand, the Pope wants to increase his commitment to renewable energy and sustainable development. It is time for new forms of growth and development.

A global ecological conversion

In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis encourages everyone to engage and act. It is now time for global ecological conversion. Every individual is called upon to help take care of our *"common home"* so that future generations can also live in a sustainable and just way.

An integral ecology

Caring for the environment is always related to caring for people, especially the poorest. With the term integral ecology, Pope Francis brings together ecology and social (in)justice. The poorest of our planet are hardest hit by climate change but are least responsible. The way in which we treat nature and creation also has consequences for how we treat our fellow human beings.

A different way of living

The term integral ecology is subsequently also applied in reality: the call to live differently implies that from now on we must apply this integral ecology in our own lifestyles. Pope Francis calls for an 'ecological citizenship' in which one consciously opts for solidarity and sobriety.

3.5.3 POPE FRANCIS AND SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

When the Argentine Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected Bishop of Rome and Pope on March 13, 2013, he decided to be the first Pope in the history of the Catholic Church to adopt the symbolic name Francis, in reference to St. Francis of Assisi.

Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) is the patron saint of the environmental movement, Italy and animals. On his feast day, October 4, World Animal Day is celebrated. Francis of Assisi had great respect for nature and creation. He looked at nature with awe, wonder, a sense of solidarity and brotherhood. Pope Francis' choice of the name shows that Francis of Assisi can still be a source of inspiration for people today.

"Laudato si', mi' Signore", or "Praise be to you, my Lord", are the opening words of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. The title *Laudato Si'* and the opening words of this encyclical refer to the famous Canticle of the Sun of Saint Francis of Assisi. **The Canticle of the Sun**, originated in 1224-1225, shows the great love of Francis of Assisi for nature, creation and God the Creator. In this song, man is portrayed as a humble creature who knows his place within the great, beautiful whole of creation and who feels connected to the Creator and all that He has created. The song shows that respect for nature means that man is not just above nature, but part of it. It shows the connection between man, creation and the Creator. It is also from this threefold relationship that Pope Francis wrote the encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

The encyclical *Laudato Si'* is not an isolated initiative to demand more attention and care for nature and creation. Numerous organizations, actions and initiatives are striving for more attention to the environmental issue. This is done by both religious and non-religious initiatives, such as

'the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation 2020', 'Earth Overshoot Day', and so on.

3.5.4 DIDACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Encyclical

The students seek more information about the encyclical *Laudato Si'* and write a paper in which the following questions can be addressed:

- In what context did this encyclical occur?
- How was this encyclical received by church leaders and/or the wider audience of believers?
- Were there supporters and/or opponents of this encyclical?
- Which passage did you find inspiring? With which passage do you agree or disagree?

Individually, the students seek and select a videoclip, newspaper article, image, painting, and so on, with a focus on *Laudato Si'*.⁴ Next, the students present Pope Francis and the encyclical using the source material of their own choice. Other questions that can also be discussed regarding this theme:

- How does the Church approach care for creation and ecological problems?
- Should the Church play a role in today's environmental problems? How can the Church do this?

Quotes

The students themselves receive or search for (radical) quotes from the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Do the students agree or disagree? What arguments can the students give for their positions?

How can we take care of creation?

What can students do in response to the papal call to take more care of creation? How can this encyclical be applied in daily life?

⁴ POPE FRANCIS, *Laudato Si'*, <https://www.rkddocumenten.nl/rkdocs/index.php?mi=650&dos=427> (access 18.09.2020).

⁵ LiveLaudatoSi, *10 ways to live more simply*, <https://livelaudatosi.org/10-ways-live-simply/> (access 18.09.2020).

The encyclical calls for a more sober way of living according to the principles of *Laudato Si'*. The students get ten concrete tips to apply this themselves.⁵ The students go through these concrete tips and then formulate their own examples of how they themselves can contribute to the care for creation.

The Canticle of the Sun

The students analyze the Canticle of the Sun. What does this teach us about a responsible handling of creation?

Answer: the Canticle of the Sun shows us how we, as human beings, can have respect for nature: as human beings we are not above nature, but a part of nature. It shows us how everything is connected with each other: man, nature and the Creator. From this connection Pope Francis also calls us to have more respect for the planet.

3.6 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.*

* **Anthropocentrism**

Anthropocentrism is the tendency to put the human being at the center of the universe and consider him as the only point of reference. In this view, man is seen as the culmination of creation and can therefore rule over the earth.

Encyclical

The word encyclical literally means 'a letter that passes by'. It is a letter written by the Pope to the bishops, to all Catholic believers in the world and to all people of goodwill.

* **Genesis**

Genesis is the first book of the First Testament. 'Genesis' is Hebrew for 'in the beginning'. This Bible book tells the story of creation, the Fall, and the history of Israel. Genesis contains stories of faith and does not aim to give a factual or historical account of the creation of the world.

* **The story of creation**

The story of creation is a very old text written a long time ago in a very different culture than ours. The story of creation can be found in the book Genesis. This is the first book of the Old Testament. The Old Testament is more than 2000 years old. Although Bible stories were written a long time ago, they can still have an important meaning for us.

Laudato Si'

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* was published the 18th of June 2015. It is a call from the Pope to all Catholic believers and people of goodwill to take care of our common home. After all, today the creation is under pressure due to the current environmental and climate problems. Pope Francis calls not only governments and businesses, but all people to take more care of our climate.

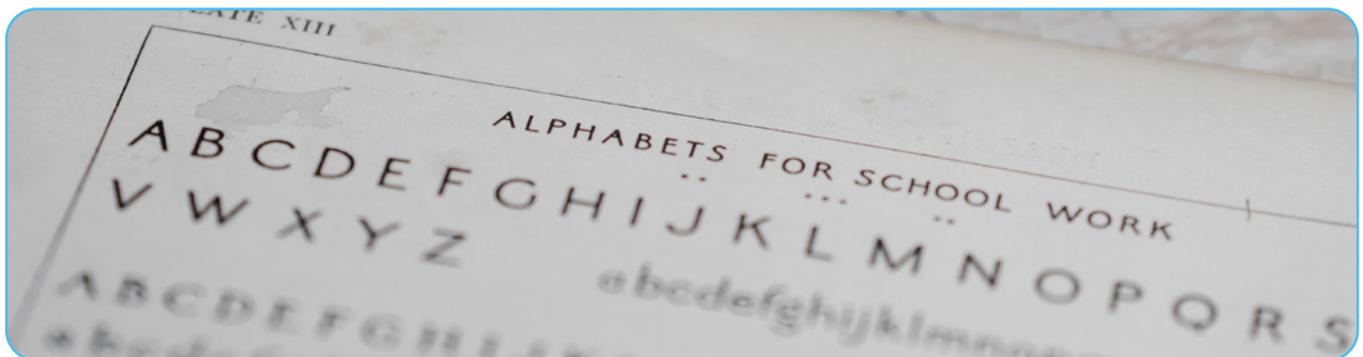


Photo: Annie Spratt | Unsplash

3.7 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

SCHOOL

We can see the back of a classroom; you can see a movie playing about climate change, the bell rings and the students get out of the classroom.

Teacher (while the students are leaving): Everyone, don't forget to be on time for our camping trip! The bus leaves on time!

We see four friends (playground/hallway): Lindsay, Ariella, Sarah and Michael. Lindsay gets a text message: the package she ordered online has arrived at her house.

Lindsay: Yes, yes! My new online order has arrived! I hope this new dress will look good on me!

Lindsay's friends look bewildered and irritated by her.

Sarah: Wow, Lindsay, did you order new things AGAIN? Do you really need all that stuff? We just saw a movie on climate change..

Lindsay: Oh, come on! Don't be such a buzzkill. I really need it, you know.

Michael (sarcastically): Yes, you really need the same dress in three different colors.

Lindsay: Michael, you should shut up, you know. You should be happy I don't call the fashion police on you. They would put you in jail for all the weird clothes you are always wearing.

Sarah: Do you hear yourself? Michael is totally right. The Earth is sick. It is exhausted by our consumerist society. More and more people, people like you, have more and more needs! And a lot of conflicts in the world are a consequence of a struggle for resources.

Ariella: Hey guys, calm down. You're right, but don't be so hard on Lindsay. Climate change is not only her fault. Do you want to know who we really have to blame for all this? It is mostly the fault of Christians! Christians like you, Michael and Sarah. Christians believe they can rule over the Earth, according to the book of Genesis in the Old Testament.

Sarah: What? That is not true!

Ariella: It is true! Christians believe that humans are the only creatures made in God's likeness. They believe that God gave His creation, the entire Earth to them. Being the only creature made in God's likeness, Christians think they own the Earth! And because of all their consumerist behavior, we now all have to bear the consequences including many conflicts between peoples, nations and continents.

Michael: What?

Michael and Sarah look confused. They don't know how to react.

Lindsay (smiling): So, we agree that I'm not cancelling my online orders. I'm not the one to blame, haha!

Ariella: You know what? We should do more for the environment. It could also stop many conflicts in the world. It is time for action!

HOME ARIELLA (after school)

Next, we see Ariella going home/at home watching a climate strike on TV. Here you can also see a quote on a sign of one of the protesters: Climate change? Blame Christianity! (in this way, there is also this polarizing element visible in the video). Ariella is inspired by this protest on TV and she is preparing to join a protest by making signs and a T-shirt (slogan on the T-shirt: Climate Justice Now!).

NEXT DAY: CAMPING TRIP

The next morning, we see the students leaving for a school camping trip. Ariella is wearing the T-shirt she made. The students get on the bus and arrive at a place that looks like a forest/camping place where they set up their tents.

Lindsay (teasing): Sarah, what do you think of my new dress? Doesn't this dress look great on me?

Sarah (a bit frustrated): yeah, I especially hope your new dress survives this camping trip, you know we're going for a long hike, right?

We see the students take a walk in the forest, suddenly they arrive at a kind of treehouse/nature looking house where two people are sitting (=Adam and Eve lookalikes). These two people welcome the students.

"Adam": Hello young friends! Welcome to our Garden of Eden, what brings you here?

Michael: Hello! Thank you for welcoming us. We are on a camping trip and stay here a bit further, we are out hiking today.

Ariella: Hi! You live here in the middle of nature?! So quiet and peaceful!

"Eve": Thank you! We really like living in this place. We are happy with everything nature has given us. We live in perfect harmony with nature. And even more, we have respect for all of nature around us. We let the trees live and grow without touching them, as we were told to do.

"Adam" (pointing at Ariella's T-shirt): And I can see you are also interested in taking care of our environment?

Ariella: Yes I am! Actually, we were talking about this yesterday, how the climate deserves more attention! And also that the guilty must take their responsibility, like Christians for example!

"Adam": Can you explain to me what you mean exactly?

Michael: Yes we were discussing this. Is it true that Christians are to blame for the destruction of nature and the climate? And are the cause of a worldwide conflict on natural resources?

Ariella: Yes. Is this true? Because I read that the book Genesis in the Bible says that human beings have a special role to play on Earth because humans are created in the **image of God**. Because of this, Christians believe they can rule over the Earth which has led to all the current ecological problems!!!

Michael and Sarah look sad and confused.

Michael: What does this really mean, being created in God's image? And what does this have to do with the human responsibility for the Earth?

Sarah: Is the Christian tradition really one of the most important causes for today's environmental crisis and all conflicts connected to it?

"Adam": Ok, let's put an end to all this confusion and let's get our facts straight, shall we?

The children nod.

"Adam": First of all, Christians do believe that God created the world.

"Eve": An important aspect of the Christian faith is the belief that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. We can indeed read this in Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament. However, being created in the image and likeness of God does not mean that Christians believe that human beings can just rule over the Earth and exploit it!

"Adam": It is the opposite: being created in the image of God implies a **responsibility**. The Earth is not just a possession of human beings, it is a gift from God.

Michael: So... We are all responsible for taking good care of the Earth?

"Adam": That's right, Michael.

"Eve": Just to be clear: the world is in no way human property. It is the other way around, because in the Christian tradition, we believe **that human beings are responsible for taking good care of the Earth, and of each other!**

IN LINDSY'S HOUSE

We see the four friends in Lindsay's house (living room). They are clearing all the packages, some stuff goes to aid organizations, some clothes go to Lindsay's closet. Lindsay herself is on her smartphone canceling her next orders.

Ariella: Okay, sorry for everything I've said. I do understand now that we all need to take care of the earth, we should not point our finger at one person or group.

Michael: Don't worry, everything's okay! It was an interesting and fun camping trip!

Lindsay: See, I've already cancelled three orders. [she sees a red dress on her smartphone] Oh but I really need this red dress, so I'm going to order it!

Sarah (showing three different red dresses of Lindsay and smiling to Lindsay): Are you sure? Seems to me that you already have a lot of red dresses in your closet (Sarah winks to Lindsay).

Lindsay: Hmmm, you win! (She cancels the red dress). But hey look, these pants are truly beautiful!

Sarah, Michael and Ariella start laughing.

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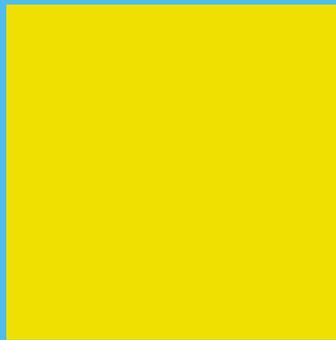
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4



WHEN ENCOUNTER BECOMES CONFLICT:
JUST WAR AND JUST PEACE

MODULE FOUR

JUST WAR AND JUST PEACE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE TEACHER'S BOOK

This teacher's book is a didactic package which elaborates on the following theme: 'when encounter becomes conflict: just war and just peace'. It has been developed for a 12- to 18-year-old age 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 one hour 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:

- In the first chapter, the just war theory is presented and explained. The students are introduced to the history, content, meaning and perspective of this theory today (in the Catholic Church). This chapter is part of the basic teaching material for the students.
- The second chapter is a deepening chapter. In this chapter, based on a few Bible passages, we examine whether the image of Jesus as a radical pacifist is correct. Where did Jesus stand with regard to non-violence?
- The third chapter shows some important developments with regard to the righteous thinking of war throughout the 20th and 21st century and briefly highlights how the Catholic Church has positioned itself from the 20th century until today concerning the just war theory. This chapter is a deepening chapter.
- The fourth and final chapter, which is also part of the deepening subject matter, focuses on a new paradigm: 'a just peace'.

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

4.1.2 CONTENTS OF THE TEACHER'S BOOK

This didactic package deals with the theme 'when encounter becomes conflict: just war and just peace'. This textbook is based on the 'just war theory'. The students are introduced to the history, content, meaning and perspective of this theory today (in the Catholic Church). It offers the opportunity to reflect together with the learning group on encounter, conflict, war and peace.

The starting point of this didactic package is a video clip enacting a potential real-world scenario from the daily life of the pupils. This visual fragment is a general introduction to the theme of 'just war and just peace' 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.

4.2 JUST WAR AND JUST PEACE: VIDEO CLIP

4.2.1 SCENARIO

The video clip shows a group of friends who are playing a video game together. Although everyone is immersed in the game, Pieter-Jan doesn't seem to be enjoying himself. He even criticizes the game: isn't it too violent and doesn't it ensure that violence is normalized? In the resulting argument Pieter-Jan is reproached for being so quick to judge others, since there is a history of violence in his own Christian tradition. He is surprised: aren't Christians pacifists? Now curious, the friends go in search of how the Catholic Church and the Christian tradition behave towards violence and war, and they discover the just war theory and its true meaning.



Figure 4.1
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.

4.2.2 QUIZ: CORRECT 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 just war theory. After watching the video clip, these questions can also be a starting point for a class discussion.

After the group of friends have discovered the theory of the just war and the six associated conditions, the pupils are asked a question about each condition in order to become acquainted with the correct meaning of each of these conditions. More information about these conditions can be found in the next chapter (*The just war theory*).

Question 1a: The just war theory talks about 6 conditions to legitimize the use of violence, like 'just cause'. What does this mean?

- Violence can only be used to fight injustice.
- There are several causes for which violence can be used: to fight injustice, to expand national territory or to be one step ahead of the enemy.

Firstly, war requires a just cause. War and violence can only be used as a response to injustice. For example, when a country defends itself. Or when a country is defending another country that is being unlawfully attacked.

Question 1b: The just war theory talks about 6 conditions to legitimize the use of violence, like 'right intention'. What does this mean?

- When human rights are violated, it is legitimate to intervene by force.
- It is legitimate to invade another country to secure the natural resources needed to save one's own economy.

The intentions behind the war must be right. It must be aimed at an ethical goal and ultimately at restoring peace. One cannot go to war to achieve another goal, for example, economic interests.

Question 1c: The just war theory talks about 6 conditions to legitimize the use of violence, like 'last resort'. What does this mean?

- When diplomacy takes too much time and energy for a country to solve a conflict, it is legitimate to go to war immediately.
- Violence should be avoided, it can only be used when all peaceful alternatives have been attempted and exhausted.

War should always be a last resort. Violence and war should be avoided as much as possible. Only when all options to achieve peace have been exhausted, one can start a war.

Question 1d: The just war theory talks about 6 conditions to legitimize the use of violence, like 'probability of success'. What does this mean?

- One can only go to war when there is a reasonable chance of success.
- Even if it seems impossible to fight this injustice, one must go to war to fight evil with all means.

There must be a reasonable chance of success in going to war to achieve peace. People should not suffer and die needlessly.

Question 1e: The just war theory talks about 6 conditions to legitimize the use of violence, like 'proportionality'. What does this mean?

- The means used must be in reasonable relation to the aggressor's violence, and must never go beyond what is necessary to achieve victory.
- When human rights have been violated, any form of violence is legitimated for the fight this injustice.

The means used must be in proportion to the end that the war seeks to achieve.

Question 1f: The just war theory talks about 6 conditions to legitimize the use of violence, like 'competent authority'. What does this mean?

- War can only be declared by lawful authorities entrusted with the responsibility of protecting the common good of society.
- If a group of people is attacked, it is possible for anyone to legitimately declare war.

War must be lawfully declared by a lawful authority. Only leaders of a recognized political community and with the political requirements of that community, can declare war.

At the end of the video clip, the meaning of the just war theory becomes clear. The students are asked the following question about this:

Question 2: What is the purpose of the 'just war theory' in the Catholic tradition?

- It's a theory that condemns any use of force and violence.
- The use of violence and declaring war to spread and protect the Catholic faith is justified by this theory.
- This theory does not intend to legitimize violence just like that. It is a way to first look for peaceful solutions in a conflict and to avoid the use of violence and war.

The just war theory war defines certain conditions for entering an armed conflict and for justifying the use of violence, to postpone the use of violence for as long as possible and to look for other peaceful solutions first. It is invented to avoid the use of violence and war.



Figure 4.2
The Video Clip

4.3 THE JUST WAR THEORY

4.3.1 INTRODUCTION

The just war theory needs to be framed in the broader context of the debate on the (legitimate) use of violence. The debate on 'war and peace' is universal. It makes us reflect on the limits of what is permissible and also has a long history of reflection in the Catholic tradition.

There are different positions one can take concerning violence. In this module, we will discuss three major currents in the history of the Catholic Church: the attitude of radical pacifism, the idea of "holy war" and prudential pacifism. On the one hand, there is a **radical pacifism** in which war is never tolerated; on the other hand, there is the idea of a **'holy war'** in which the use of violence for certain purposes is accepted. On the other hand, there is also prudential pacifism, an intermediate position in which the use of violence is possible based on certain conditions. How this intermediate position is defined, differs according to context, place and time. A well-known intermediate position amid radical pacifism and an idea of 'holy war' is the **just war theory**. In this way, the just war theory is often presented as a middle ground between the position of radical pacifism and the tradition of holy war.



Figure 4.3

4.3.2 RADICAL PACIFISM AND THE HOLY WAR TRADITION

Pacifism is an attitude that rejects armed violence as a means of resolving conflicts (between states).

In the Catholic tradition, **radical pacifism** originated from the inspiration of Jesus Christ. The radicality of Jesus and the Gospel, the choice for a peaceful, pacifistic lifestyle, led to a clear attitude at the birth of the First Church. Based on the 'Gospel of Peace', including the Sermon on the Mount, any use of violence was refused. Political power building was rejected by the first Christians. For example, it was forbidden to participate in military service, and even police and judicial tasks were rejected because they refused in principle to participate in the death penalty, torture and corporal punishment.

Nevertheless, this position of radical pacifism raises several questions:

- Especially the Old Testament, but also the New Testament has several passages in which violence and war seem to be glorified in the name of God. In the Old Testament, for example, the conquest of the Promised Land in the name of God is considered legitimate. Also, other wars in the name of God seem to be glorified in the Old Testament, with their warriors made into heroes (Joshua, David, Judith, Esther). In the New Testament, the military metaphors of Paul are remarkable. The frequent use of these metaphors indicates that this was more than a literary genre. How should a Christian believer interpret these passages in relation to the position of radical pacifism?
- Radical pacifism can, even today, provoke the following reservations among Christian and Catholic believers: is the attitude of radical pacifism desirable in any situation? Should one 'let oneself be beaten' as a Christian? Should any form of violence be allowed, should injustice not be combated? Should a country remain passive and inactive when it is (unjustly) attacked?

The first Christians thus aspired to a radical pacifist attitude, following the example of Jesus Christ. However, the radical pacifism of Jesus must be put into perspective; in the Bible, there are some passages in which Jesus did not always embody this radical pacifist attitude, for example, the story of the 'Cleaning of the Temple' (see the next chapter in this module).

A radical pacifist attitude in the daily life of the first Christian communities was not always easy or evident. Some Christians left the army after their conversion to Christianity, yet some converts remained at their posts as soldiers. Different opinions were formed among church leaders about

this as early as the first centuries of Christianity. On the one hand, the use of violence went against radical pacifism; on the other hand, in the first centuries of Christianity, the army was used to persecute Christians. Or one was accused of idolatry because the army could demand sacrifice to the emperor.

With the growth of Christianity and the ever-closer bond between Church and State, especially after the Emperor Constantine the Great and the edict of Milan in 313, violence gained more and more religious legitimacy. Tolerance towards Christians who, for example, served in the army became ever greater. After Emperor Theodosius proclaimed Christianity the official state religion of the Roman Empire in 392, it became almost impossible for Christians to distance themselves from politics and related conflicts.

In the name of the defense of the Christian state (with the barbarians attacking the borders of the Roman Empire) and the expansion of Christianity, a divine battle and war was accepted by church leaders. A service to the emperor and the empire was no longer contrary to the service to God. In short, the holy war tradition found its way into Christianity in the early Middle Ages and prepared the way for the crusades between 1096 and 1271. From this perspective, the use of violence for certain (religious) purposes is accepted.

4.3.3 JUST WAR: DEVELOPMENT AND CONTENT

The use of violence in the name of God thus came more and more to the fore within Christianity. In this way, the idea and acceptance of a just war arose in the Middle Ages. An important theologian in this debate was **Augustine of Hippo (354-430)**. In a context of a growing Christianity that should protect and even extend its borders, he outlined the first lines of 'a just war thinking'. If a war did not comply with the following principles, written down by Augustine, one was, according to him, led by hatred and warmongering and waged an unjust war:

- ⇒ A war could only be justified if it was absolutely inevitable and no other means could be found to keep the peace.
- ⇒ A country that refused to retribute something that had come into its possession unlawfully could justly declare war.
- ⇒ Whoever declared war had to behave like a magistrate who passes judgment and punishes the guilty.



Figure 4.4
Oldest image of
Augustine, Rome, 6th
century
Image: Wikimedia
Commons: [https://
commons.wikimedia.
org/wiki/File:Augustine_
Lateran.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Augustine_Lateran.jpg)

Another important figure in the development of the concept of ‘just war’ was the theologian **Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)**, who lived at the time of the Crusades. Based on the principles of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas wrote some theological conclusions in his best-known work ‘Summa Theologica’ (1265).

- ⇒ A war had to be declared by the person in the country concerned who had the highest authority.
- ⇒ The person to whom the war was declared had to have earned it.
- ⇒ The war had to be declared based on a pure intention: let good prevail over evil.

Thomas Aquinas thus stated that the use of violence was not incompatible with the Gospel and the requirement of charity. He described the conditions for entering into conflict and the use of violence (‘*ius ad bellum*’) as well as the conditions for the use of violence itself, the behavior during war (‘*ius in bello*’).



Figure 4.5
Thomas Aquinas;
altarpiece by Carlo Crivelli
Image: Wikimedia
Commons: [https://
commons.wikimedia.
org/wiki/File:Carlo_
Crivelli_007.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Carlo_Crivelli_007.jpg)

Throughout history, these principles were **further elaborated and developed by various commentators, theologians and philosophers** (such as Francisco de Vitoria, Franciscus Suárez, Hugo de Groot, etc.). The doctrine of the just war had a lasting and important impact on the development of Roman Catholic perspectives on peace, even up now. Philosophers also dissociated the just war theory throughout history from the Christian faith, laying the foundations for international humanitarian law developed in the 19th and 20th centuries.

This brief overview of the history and the development of the just war theory makes it clear that there is no 'one existing just war theory'. The idea of just war must be understood as a tradition through time in which, depending on the context, answers have been given concerning the use of violence and war. Discussions about the conditions of 'a just war' occur in all times.

In general, the following conditions are set today for starting an armed conflict within the just war theory ('*ius ad bellum*')¹:

1. Just cause: Going to war must be based on moral grounds, not purely for self-interest. There must be an extraordinarily compelling reason to go to war, a 'just cause'. For example, in the case of genocide or the extermination of a people by its own state or another state.

2. Right intention: the intention of going to war is very important to ensure that it is a just cause. The intention to go to war must be good, it must be aimed at an ethical goal and ultimately at restoring peace. Is the righteous cause one speaks of in order to go to war the real goal? Is the righteous cause not abused to achieve another goal (e.g. economic interests or dominant geopolitical positions)?

3. Last resort: violence and war should be avoided as much as possible. Only when all alternatives and other peaceful attempts to achieve peace have been exhausted, can one proceed to war. First, all non-military means must be exhausted (diplomatic consultations, political pressure, economic sanctions, etc.). However, it must also be considered to what extent, for example, a prolonged economic sanction affects an innocent population. However, it remains important that a war can only be a completely exceptional and last resort.

4. Probability of success: the chance of success must be real, it is unauthorized to send soldiers on a mission for an unattainable goal. A short, powerful and limited military intervention, as war is often announced, all too often escalates into a prolonged armed conflict.

5. Proportionality: the evil consequences of war must not be greater than the evil to be fought by the war. In doing so, one must look at the loss of human life, material destruction, financial costs and non-material drawbacks, both in the short and long term.

6. Competent authority: military action must be based on a legitimate authority, in particular the political authority which, in a society, is responsible for the common good. War can only be declared by a recognized government. In our day and age, the United Nations Security Council is also an important competent body to ensure respect for international law. The competent authority must formally declare war.

¹ More information? R. BURGGRAEVE, J. DE TAVERNIER & L. VANDEWEYER (ed.), *Van rechtvaardige oorlog naar rechtvaardige vrede: katholieken tussen militarisme en pacifisme in historisch-theologisch perspectief*, Leuven, Universitaire pers Leuven, 1993, p. 268-271.

4.3.4 JUST WAR: MEANING

As already discussed, the history of Christian philosophy on war and peace shows, depending on historical circumstances, a back and forth movement between radical pacifism, holy war, and the just war theory.

The tension between just war and pacifism, two traditions with Jewish and Christian roots, is characteristic throughout time. However, both attitudes are essentially close to each other. Both pacifism and the just war theory have as their point of departure **the avoidance of violence based on a moral duty**. The difference between the two positions revolves around the fact that pacifism interprets this duty as absolute, and that defenders of just war, on the other hand, regard violence under certain conditions as permissible. For example, as stated before, it is not permissible to start a war when there are other means left to solve a problem. The theory of just war explicitly refers to this, so that one never uses unnecessary force or starts military intervention.

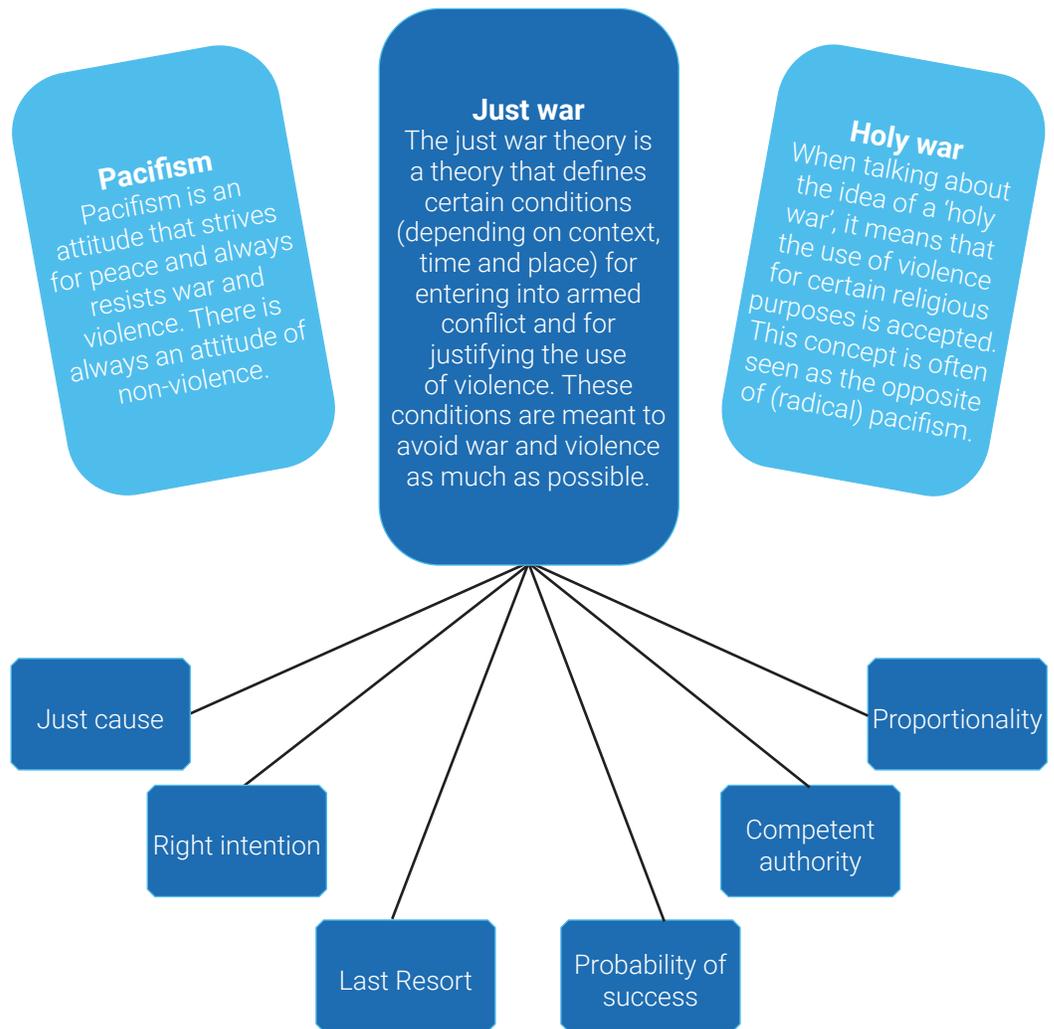
The tradition of just war starts from the radicality of the Gospel and a non-violent charity, and is not a relativization or abolition of this radicality of the Gospel. **The theory provides an overview of criteria for determining in concrete circumstances whether the use of violence and war is justifiable. In other words, it is about a 'justifiable' war instead of a 'just war'.**

War, military intervention and violence must continue to be disturbing thoughts, but also countering all kinds of injustice and oppression is part of evangelical radicalism. **Christians should not only prevent violence and war as much as possible, but they should also stand up for the rights, freedoms and welfare of victims of aggression and injustice** (see further, 'just peace'). Each time from the inspiration to resolve conflicts non-violently and justly. It is thus a **theory to prevent and contain war and violence as much as possible**.

Roger Burggraeve, professor of Ethics (KU Leuven), has studied the concrete meaning of the tradition of just war, and from which perspective this theory should be understood. The Church and ethicists, like Roger Burggraeve, do not see just war as a way of legitimizing or justifying war, but as a theory aimed at *"introducing a certain caution that tries to put off as much as possible the fatal intervention of violence. It is thus a theory that on the one hand wants to postpone violence and war for as long as possible, but on the other hand, it becomes a reality, where people become real victims of intolerable evil."*²

² More information: R. BURGGRAEVE, *De christelijk geïnspireerde vredesethiek in het spanningsveld tussen pacifisme en rechtvaardige oorlog van 1963 tot heden*, in R. BURGGRAEVE, J. DE TAVERNIER & L. VANDEWEYER (ed.), *Van rechtvaardige oorlog naar rechtvaardige vrede: katholieken tussen militarisme en pacifisme in historisch-theologisch perspectief*, Leuven, Universitaire pers Leuven, 1993, p. 253-274.

Summary: In the diagram below, you will find a summary of the most important concepts and terms used in this chapter.



4.3.5 DIDACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

- While looking at the video clip, the students are introduced to the six conditions and the meaning of the just war theory based on a few quiz questions. These quiz questions can be discussed in the classroom after watching the video clip.
- The students are introduced to the concepts of '(in)justice', 'pacifism' and 'holy war'. Can they explain these concepts in their own words and what do they think of these visions?
- The students read the theory about the six conditions for entering a war ('ius ad bellum'). Next, the students solve the following questions:
 - Do the students agree with these conditions, which conditions do they think are important? Which conditions do they disagree with, or find unnecessary? Are these conditions 'enough' for them, or would they make some additions themselves?
- Based on a multiple-choice question, the students reflect on the meaning of the just war theory.
 - How can the just war theory be understood in the Catholic tradition?
 - It is a theory that condemns any use of violence.
 - The use of violence and going to war to spread and protect the Catholic faith is justified by this theory.
 - This theory is not meant to condone violence just like that. It is a way to first look for peaceful solutions in a conflict and to avoid the use of violence and war.
- The students choose one proposition and argue why they agree or disagree with this proposition. Possible propositions:
 - *"War is never justified."*
 - *"Peace can only exist if there is also war."*
 - *"Never do anything in a war that will make reconciliation impossible afterwards."*
 - *"A world without violence is not realistic."*
 - *"Violence begins or ends with yourself."*
 - *"Even in times of peace, it is important for a country to invest in weapons."*
 - *"Risking your own life for strangers in a foreign country is pointless."*
 - *"The just war theory allows the use of violence."*

DEEPENING

Bible fragment

The students read the following excerpt from the Bible (Luke 6:27-31) and discuss the following questions.

"[27] But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, [28] bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. [29] 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.

[30] Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. [31] Do to others as you would have them do to you."

NRSV, Luke 6:27-31.

- Indicate in the text those verses that you do not understand.
- What strikes you in these words of Jesus?
- What do you find feasible or not?
- Does this text, according to you, give guidelines for coming to peace?
- What would you leave out in this text?
- What would you like to add to these words of Jesus?
- Which words of Jesus inspire you to work for peace? Look for some tips yourself.

What's in the news?

The students themselves go in search of current forms of violence and warfare. This can be violence from afar: for example, the war in the Middle East, terrorism, terrorist attacks, violent manifestations in countries, and so on. They can also look for violence from nearby: forms of vandalism, bullying, senseless violence, animal abuse, and so on. Are these forms of violence as bad as warfare? Can you compare this with each other?

The material found is discussed: who is the victim? Where does the situation take place? What is the origin of the violence? In what way can the conflict be solved, or in what way are they trying to solve the conflict? Are other (peaceful) solutions possible? Is it about a 'just war' (to be determined based on the six criteria)? How difficult/easy is it to determine this? What do the pupils think is 'just'?

War and peace?

The following questions can be discussed in a class discussion. The students argue their answer.

- Do you help peace by picking up a gun?
- What is war? What is peace?
- Is peace self-evident? Is war self-evident?
- Does peace mean that everyone can do whatever they want?
- If one has more weapons than the other, are they also stronger?
- If you promise not to use your weapons, should you get rid of them?
- Do you always have to provide protection, even when there is peace?
- Is good and evil the same for everyone?
- Is bullying a kind of warfare?



Figure 4.6
Image: © Priscilla du
Preez | Unsplash

4.4 JESUS: A RADICAL PACIFIST?

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.

Pacifism is an attitude that rejects armed violence as a means of resolving conflicts (between states). An example of absolute non-violence and an attitude of radical pacifism is, according to many Christians, the figure of Jesus Christ. Both in the past and today, the figure of Jesus is often identified with the idea of a radical pacifist attitude. Nevertheless, we can also ask ourselves some questions about this idea of Jesus as a radical pacifist. For example, numerous passages in the Bible show that this idea of Jesus as a radical pacifist is not correct and in which Jesus seems to call for violence.

In this chapter, we look at some passages from the Bible: on the one hand passages in which Jesus calls for non-violence, and on the other hand some passages in which Jesus does not seem to stand for radical non-violence. How did Jesus view non-violence? Was his attitude always radically pacifistic? Was he never angry? How should the passages of the Bible in which he seems to proclaim violence be read, interpreted and understood? How can we understand these contradictory passages of the Bible?

4.4.1 REWARD EVIL WITH EVIL?

Throughout the New Testament, there are several passages in which Jesus proclaims non-violence. Probably the most famous passage is the following fragment from the Sermon on the Mount according to the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 5:38-42):

"[38] You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

[39] But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; [40] and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; [41] and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. [42] Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you."

In this Bible fragment, the message of non-violence is clearly emphasized. The idea that Jesus puts forward here is a high ideal. Should this text be interpreted literally? No, a symbolic interpretation is important here, as always when interpreting Bible texts. The non-violence of Jesus assumes an **active non-violence** that always recognizes the dignity of all those involved in a conflict. With active non-violence, the focus is not on the enemy, but on the fight against injustice and this in the light of a constructive solution. In line with Jesus' action, the Catholic Church also strives for peace. Many Christians increasingly advocate a just peace. More information can be found in the next chapter.

Another well-known fragment in which Jesus proclaims non-violence can also be found in the Sermon on the Mount according to the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 5:43-45). The emphasis here is on charity. Jesus desires his followers to be a neighbor to people in need concretely and realistically. The idea of active non-violence can also be found in these Bible verses. After all, active non-violence proclaims an attitude of respect towards the enemy, the adversary: ***"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"***. To such an extent that it could even eventually, as a result of a change of conscience, become an ally. After all, evil can only be overcome by good:

"[43] You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

[44] But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

[45] so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous."

Source: NRSV, Matthew 5:43-45.

4.4.2 NOT PEACE, BUT THE SWORD?

The message of the New Testament sounds liberating and evocative to many. Yet in the New Testament, and by extension in the Bible as a whole, several unruly statements can be found that seem to illuminate a message of violence. These passages should not be overlooked. After all, a selective reading of the Bible does injustice to the message of the Christian tradition and can also lead to biblical fundamentalism. How can the Bible passages, in which Jesus seems to proclaim violence, be read, interpreted and understood?

Matthew 26:52 states: *“Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.”*³ Nevertheless, both in the Gospel according to Matthew and in the Gospel according to Luke, we can find a seemingly reversed message. At first sight, Jesus seems to be proclaiming a violent message.⁴

[34] Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

[35] For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law,

[36] a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.

(Matthew, 10:34-36)

[51] Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.

[52] From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three.

[53] They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

(Luke 12:51-53)

³ NRSV, *Matthew 26:52*, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+5&version=NIV> (access 18.06.2020).

⁴ NRSV, *Luke 12:51-53*, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+12&version=NRSV> (access 18.06.2020).

For many, the above verses are not consistent with the image they have of Jesus. They therefore raise many questions: did Jesus not support peace after all? Did Jesus really call for the use of the sword, and thus for weapons and warfare? Are such passages proof that religion can be dangerous? Don't they lead to radicalization and fundamentalism? How should such passages be interpreted?

As a reader, it is important to look beyond a literal reading and interpretation. After all, a symbolic reading of the story shows that this is not an actual call to armed violence. Taking these Bible fragments out of context and interpreting them in isolation makes it seem at first sight that Jesus was proclaiming a violent message. However, a literal interpretation does not do justice to the symbolic content of the story. The context in which the story takes place shows that Jesus, through imagery, refers to the possible difficulties that Jesus' followers might face if they were the first Christians to stand up for their faith. It is more an imagery that refers to the possible difficulties that Jesus' first followers might encounter. Indeed, the first Christians faced incomprehension and persecution. Jesus' words were therefore rather a sad warning to prepare his followers for the spiritual battle that awaited them, both within and outside the circle of family and friends, and within society (at that time).



Figure 4.7
Image: © Sixteen Miles
Out | Unsplash

4.4.3 A VIOLENT TEMPLE CLEANSING?

One of the most famous examples where Jesus seems to be behaving violently is the 'temple cleansing' that all four Gospels talk about. In the four Gospels, we can read how Jesus expels vendors and money changers from the Temple of Jerusalem. The four versions of the Temple Purification each have their own accents. However, the version of temple cleansing according to the Gospel of John differs from the versions from the other three Gospels.

The four Gospels describe the hard-handed performance of Jesus in the Temple. Jesus lived and preached in a context in which the Temple of Jerusalem was the heart of Judaism. All pious Jews came here to pray and sacrifice. The Temple stood in the middle of a square that was also called 'the court of the Gentiles' because this place was also accessible to non-Jews. In the time of Jesus, this square was occupied by merchants and moneychangers. In the above Bible passages, we read that Jesus protested against the course of events on the square at that time. For him, this was a sign of greed and a great lack of respect for religious (Jewish) worship. He characterized the Temple as an important and especially holy place of contact between man and God. Also, Jesus made it clear to bystanders that he is the Messiah and that the Kingdom of God is near. Jesus' performance in the court of the Temple is also a symbol of the universality of God's message which is no longer connected only to the Temple of Jerusalem. After all, the evangelical stories of temple cleansing contain references to several Old Testament verses (Malachi, Isaiah 56:7 and Psalm 69:10) which indicate that God's message is addressed to all people on earth.

*"Jesus, by his act, ends the temple's reason for existence. And this is apparent from his answer to the question for a sign: "Break down this temple and in three days I will resurrect it". That temple is Jesus himself. No longer will a stone building serve as a meeting place between God and man, but Jesus himself becomes the meeting place between his Father and the believer. Jesus' resurrection made this possible: that is the conclusion of the disciples who remember Jesus' words after his death and resurrection. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was the only necessary sacrifice. Further sacrifices are no longer necessary. Only pray in spirit and truth as children of one Father: that is what the Christians must do."*⁵

- New Testamentary and Norbertine Filip Noël

⁵ Translation of a Dutch quote: "Jezus beëindigt door zijn daad in feite de bestaansreden van de tempel. En dat blijkt uit zijn antwoord op de vraag naar een teken: 'Breek deze tempel af en in drie dagen zal ik hem doen herrijzen'. Die tempel is Jezus zelf. Niet langer zal een stenen gebouw dienstdoen als ontmoetingsplaats tussen God en mens, maar Jezus zelf wordt de ontmoetingsplaats tussen zijn Vader en de gelovige. Jezus' verrijzenis heeft dit mogelijk gemaakt: dat is de conclusie van de leerlingen die zich Jezus' woorden herinneren na diens dood en verrijzenis. Jezus' offer op het kruis is het enige noodzakelijke offer geweest. Verdere offers zijn niet langer nodig. Alleen bidden in geest en waarheid als kinderen van één Vader: dat moeten de christenen doen."

Jesus Cleanses the Temple - Matthew 21:12-17

[12] Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were buying and selling in the temple and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. [13] He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a den of robbers."

[14] The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. [15] But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard[d] the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became angry [16] and said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?'"

[17] He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple - Mark 11:15-19

[15] Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; [16] and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. [17] He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."

[18] And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching.

[19] And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple - Luke 19:45-48

[45] Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; [46] and he said, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer'; but you have made it a den of robbers."

[47] Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; [48] but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple - John 2:13-22

[13] The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. [14] In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. [15] Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. [16] He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" [17] His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

[18] The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" [19] Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." [20] The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" [21] But he was speaking of the temple of his body. [22] After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

4.4.4 DIDACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Reward evil with evil? Bible interpretation

The students search individually or in pairs for the meaning of the two fragments from the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:38-42 and Mt 5:43-45). For this assignment, they may use the internet. They must learn to look beyond a literal reading of the story. Through the questions below they look for the core message of the story:

- In the Bible verses, Jesus speaks of *“an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”*. What does this mean? What does he think of this principle? Does he want you to take revenge on others just like that?
- In the Bible text, it is also written: *“if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also”*. What would Jesus mean by this? Does he mean this literally? Do you really have to show your other cheek to someone who hits you? Does this mean that Christians should never defend themselves against a violent attack?
- *“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”*. What does this mean? What do you think of this? Do you think this is a viable ideal?

The students reflect on the following propositions.

- *“Violence can only be stopped by violence.”*
- *“If somebody hits me, I have to strike back, or I am a coward.”*
- *“If someone hits me, I do not hit back, or I will stoop to the level of the other.”*
- *“Loving your enemy is not feasible.”*

Not peace, but the sword? Bible interpretation

The Bible verses Matthew 10:34-36 and Luke 12:51-53 are read in class. Then the students are given time to formulate individually some reflections on the Bible fragments. They indicate in the Bible fragments the things they do not understand and the things that strike into them. Next, they write down some questions they would like to ask Jesus based on these verses. These questions are discussed in class. In this way, the students reflect together on the symbolic interpretation of the story.

A violent temple cleansing? Bible interpretation

Numerous stories from the Bible have been a source of inspiration for many artists for centuries. The students search for works of art based on temple cleansing as described in the four Gospels. They individually answer the following questions:

- On which of the four Gospels is this work of art about temple cleansing based?
- Summarize the story based on the artwork. What is depicted in the painting? Which characters are depicted in the painting?
- What similarities and differences do you see between the Bible story and the painting?

A violent temple cleansing? Writing assignment

The students write a newspaper article about what happened during the temple cleansing. In this newspaper article, they summarize the event. They implement a short interview with Jesus. Also, they let a few bystanders speak: what is their reaction to this event?



Figure 4.8
Rembrandt van Rijn
– 'Christ driving the
money-changers from
the Temple'
Image: Wikimedia
Commons: [https://
commons.wikimedia.
org/wiki/File:Rembrandt_
Christ_Driving_the_
Money_Changers_from_
the_Temple.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rembrandt_Christ_Driving_the_Money_Changers_from_the_Temple.jpg)

4.5 THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE JUST WAR THEORY

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.

The just war theory found its roots in early Christianity and the Christian tradition. Developed over time and under the influence of various theologians, philosophers and other commentators and their own time spirit, we still speak today about the just war theory. As already mentioned, there is not one single just war theory, but rather this theory should be seen as a kind of tradition that has developed over time and is subject to change according to context, time and place.

The tension between waging war to fight injustice, and a non-violent, pacifist attitude is of all times, which can also be found in the recent history of the Catholic Church. In what follows, we will discuss some significant developments throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, and briefly highlight how the Catholic Church has positioned herself from the 20th century to the present day against the theory of just war.

4.5.1 A NEW PERSPECTIVE?

A significant event in the 20th century that had a great impact on the way we think about war and peace was the use of 'new' weapons and their destructive power, especially the atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These two air raids were carried out by the American Air Force in August 1945 and had dramatic consequences: around 250,000 people died and hundreds of thousands more lost their lives because of radiation sickness and cancer.

The extent of the power of these **modern weapons** was previously unimaginable. For some, this was a sign to no longer justify war and to adopt a radical pacifist attitude. For others, on the other hand, it meant paying more attention than ever before to the conditions for entering into conflict or not entering into violence ('ius ad bellum'), and especially to the conditions of the use of force itself, the behavior during war ('ius in bello'). In any case, the new, modern way of warfare in the 20th century gave a new impulse to the debate about the tradition of just war.

The debate on war and peace, and in particular just war thinking, with modern atomic weapons in the background, was also conducted in the Catholic Church. Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) published the encyclical '**Pacem in Terris**', 'Peace on Earth', on April 11, 1963. This encyclical reflects Pope John XXIII's vision of world peace. In the context of the post-war period and the beginning of the Cold War at that time, the conviction grew in John XXIII that the Church should insist more strongly on peace.

Some important elements of this encyclical⁶:

- Human rights and religious freedom are given an important place in the encyclical. Peace is only possible if the rights and dignity of all human beings are respected.
- Lasting peace is only possible if the following four pillars are guaranteed: truth, justice, love and freedom.
- Pope John XXIII expressed his hope in the United Nations (UN) as an instrument for maintaining and strengthening overall world peace. In addition, Pope John XXIII stressed that peace is not only the work of governments and international institutions, but also needs cooperation between people with respect for human rights.
- This encyclical was addressed to 'all people of goodwill', a first in the ecclesiastical discourse to address non-Catholics as well. Every human being has a longing for peace and an end to conflict. That is why this encyclical is not only a matter for believers, but for everyone (individuals and states).
- The encyclical goes away from the idea of a just war. The destructive power of nuclear weapons showed that violence can never be acceptable. War and violence are never the solution. Church leaders no longer worked on a doctrine of just war but emphasized a doctrine of peace. The emphasis shifted to the prevention of military conflicts. This did not mean, however, that the tradition of just war was completely rejected, the argument of self-defense as a just cause continued to be justified, but there was a more explicit plea to avoid violence and war.
- It was not the first time that a pope published a document on peace, but the impact of this encyclical cannot be underestimated. This is related to the figure of Pope John XXIII, but also to the simple language used in this document. It was a benchmark in ecclesiastical speaking about peace.

"Yet peace is but an empty word, if it does not rest upon that order which Our hope prevailed upon Us to set forth in outline in this encyclical. It is an order that is founded on truth, built up on justice, nurtured and animated by charity, and brought into effect under the auspices of freedom."

– Pacem in Terris, 167

⁶ VATICAN.VA, *Pacem in Terris*, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html (access 15.06.2020).

The content of the **'Catechism of the Catholic Church'**⁷ is in line with thinking about war and peace, such as the encyclical *'Pacem in Terris'*. The theory of just war is also discussed in the Catechism, but there is also a clear disapproval of the use of atomic, chemical and biological weapons:

Paragraph number 2309:

⇒ The strict conditions for legitimate defense by military force require rigorous consideration. The gravity of such a decision makes it subject to rigorous conditions of moral legitimacy. At one and the same time:

- the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain;
- all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective;
- there must be serious prospects of success;
- the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. The power of modern means of destruction weighs very heavily in evaluating this condition.

These are the traditional elements enumerated in what is called the 'just war' doctrine.

The evaluation of these conditions for moral legitimacy belongs to the prudential judgment of those who have responsibility for the common good.

Paragraph number 2314:

⇒ *"Every act of war directed to the indiscriminate destruction of whole cities or vast areas with their inhabitants is a crime against God and man, which merits firm and unequivocal condemnation."* A danger of modern warfare is that it provides the opportunity to those who possess modern scientific weapons especially atomic, biological, or chemical weapons - to commit such crimes.

⁷ VATICAN.VA, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p3s2c2a5.htm (access 15.06.2020).

In the (post)modern context, the use of nuclear weapons and the development of all kinds of weapons of destruction have caused the age-old doctrine of just war to be increasingly questioned today. **The framework of just war no longer seems to be sufficient as a contemporary answer to the thinking about war and peace.** Various theologians have also described the tradition of just war as obsolete and are increasingly emphasizing the success of non-violence. The prevention of conflict and the building of a lasting peace is more and more put forward as a moral framework by the Church leaders of the Catholic Church. See also the chapter on 'just peace'.

Since 2010, more and more voices have appeared within the Catholic Church to develop a new moral framework for war and peace. Partly under the influence of the refugee crisis and terrorist attacks, the call for a new encyclical, to Pope Francis, on war and peace is growing: a new encyclical in which the tradition of just war is no longer the starting point?



Figure 4.9
Image: © Free-Photos
Pixabay

4.5.2 DIDACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Encyclical

The students search for more information about the encyclical '*Pacem in Terris*' and write a paper in which the following questions can be addressed: in what context did this encyclical come about? How was this encyclical received by church leaders and/or the wider audience of believers? Were there supporters and/or opponents of this encyclical? Which passage did you find inspiring? Which passage do you agree or disagree with?

Catechism

What is the Catechism? The students search individually or in a group for more information about the Catechism. What is characteristic of a Catechism? The students explain the Catechism just war theory in their own words the Catechism using the paragraphs in the Catechism.

Debate

The teacher divides the class into two groups. One group defends the doctrine of just war, the other group argues for a new moral framework in which lasting peace is paramount. Both groups seek arguments for their own point of view and learn to react to what others bring against their points of view during the debate.

Research

The students are given the task of looking for some articles on the current position of the Church, or certain cardinals/theologians, on the tradition of just war today.

Peace movements

The students go in search of contemporary (Christian) peace movements, for example Pax Christi. They compare the position of the Catholic Church with that of the (Christian) peace movements. In what way do these different positions resemble each other and in what way do they differ? Consider motives, arguments and initiatives.

4.6 JUST PEACE

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.

The just war theory places limits on the way war is waged and puts peace first. Throughout the history of Christianity, there have always been proponents and opponents of this theory. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), there has been a growing call from members of the Catholic Church to shift from a 'just war' to a 'just peace'. Indeed, the experiences and consequences of the two World Wars had left a deep impression on peace thinking, both within and outside the Catholic Church. After all, these two World Wars clarified the undeniable importance of a future-oriented peace-building process. This was absent in the aftermath of the First World War. An absence that in this way contributed to the success of the extremist parties of the time, such as Nazism. Other developments of the 20th and 21st centuries, such as the use of nuclear weapons, weapons of destruction and various forms of terror, also heightened criticism of the theory of just war. For many, this doctrine needs to be revised in the light of today's society and the developments just mentioned. Righteous peace is being put forward more and more often. What does this mean, 'just peace'? We will sketch a brief overview below.

4.6.1 JUST PEACE?

Not every peace is good. Even during periods when war seems to be absent, peace is sometimes based on the oppression and exploitation of individuals. For many, peace can only be 'good' if it is just. Ethicist Roger Burggraeve argues that 'justice' and 'peace' should never be separated: *"The Christian tradition has always been sensitive to the tension between peace and justice. Justice and peace must not be separated. Peace can only be a true peace if it is also a righteous reason."*⁸

'Just peace' should be understood as a plea to focus more on a preventive approach to the root causes of armed conflict, on the one hand, and to shed light on the construction of an inclusive and just peace, on the other hand. Just peace is based on the evangelical message of non-violence. Note that just peace does not put forward radical non-violence. After all, the ideal of non-violence should not be misused to help individuals who are suffering from exploitation: *"Only exceptionally may proportional violence be used to remedy injustice. By speaking of just peace rather than just war, we emphasize the criterion of the 'just cause'."*⁹

⁸ Translation of a Dutch quote: *"De christelijke traditie is steeds gevoelig geweest voor de spanning tussen vrede en rechtvaardigheid. [...] Rechtvaardigheid en vrede mogen niet van elkaar gescheiden worden. Vrede kan alleen maar een waarachtige vrede zijn als ze ook een rechtvaardige rede is."* Source: R. BURGGRAEVE, J. DE TAVERNIER & L. VANDEWEYER (ed.), *Van rechtvaardige oorlog naar rechtvaardige vrede: katholieken tussen militarisme en pacifisme in historisch-theologisch perspectief*, Leuven, Universitaire pers Leuven, 1993, p. 253-274.

⁹ Translation of a Dutch quote by Johan De Tavernier: *"Alleen uitzonderlijk mag proportioneel geweld worden gebruikt om onrecht te herstellen. Door eerder te spreken over rechtvaardige vrede dan over rechtvaardige oorlog, benadrukken we het criterium van de 'rechtvaardige zaak'."* Source: S. WAL-RAEVENS, *Dossier Oorlog en Vrede*, in *Tertio*, nr. 1004, 8 May 2019.

In summary: violence should not only be postponed. We must also build a just society where violence and oppression are absent. Moreover, during conflicts, one must not only think about resolving the conflict itself, but also about its consequences, so that a lasting peace is possible. This is the concept of just peace.

On the initiative of *'the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace'* and *'Pax Christi International'*, an international conference on 'Nonviolence and Just Peace' took place in Rome in April 2016. This conference advocated a shift of the Church from a theory of just war to a theory of just peace. In the final declaration of the conference, the Catholic Church is not only called upon to put just peace at the center, but also to **actively promote** it by, for example, offering support to peace activists who oppose injustice. The final declaration also calls on the Catholic Church to remain resolutely opposed to war and violent conflict. The desire for interfaith dialogue on non-violence is also expressed in this document. Finally, the conference also wanted to contribute to a new encyclical on war and peace. The last encyclical on this subject, *'Pacem in Terris'*, was published in 1963 at the hands of Pope John XXIII.

Pax Christi summarized the results of the 2016 conference as follows:

"At the end of the congress, the participants issued a statement addressed to the Church. In it they state that the Church should not only focus on non-violence and the road to just peace but should also actively promote it. The Church should defend and support peace activists who are non-violent in resisting injustice. Furthermore, the Church should remain unequivocally opposed to war and violent struggle - and weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear weapons - and engage in a dialogue on non-violence within the Church and with people with different philosophies of life. In the final declaration, the signatories also address Pope Francis, asking him to share with the world an encyclical on non-violence and just peace".

– Pax Christi¹⁰

¹⁰ Quote: PAX CHRISTI, *Oproep van de Internationale Vredesbeweging aan de Kerk. Zet de evangelische geweldloosheid centraal*, <https://www.paxchristi.be/nieuws/oproep-van-de-internationale-vredesbeweging-aan-de-kerk-zet-de-evangelische-geweldloosheid> (access 14.05.2020).

4.6.2 DIDACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

- Together with the students, look for the differences between the just war theory and the just peace theory.
- Debate: the class will be divided into three groups. Each group is assigned a theory that looks at war in a certain way: the just war theory, radical pacifism and the just peace theory. The three groups each defend the theory assigned to them and enter into debate with each other. The debate can be conducted based on different questions or propositions. For example, what is the position of the three groups concerning the concept of 'holy war'?
- Forwarding sheet: each student is given a sheet with a statement. Every pupil writes his opinion underneath the statement. After the sheet has been circulated throughout the whole class, a student from the class group summarizes the reactions to the rest of the group. Based on this, a class discussion can be started.
 - o Examples of propositions
 - *"Starting a war is always wrong."*
 - *"The Catholic Church can play an important role in promoting global peace."*
 - *"The just war theory is outdated. It's time for a different approach in the form of just peace."*
 - *"Any peace is good."*



Figure 4.10
Image: © Pixel2013
Pixabay

4.7 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 pupils.*

* Holy war

When talking about the idea of a 'holy war', it means that the use of violence for certain religious purposes is accepted. This concept is often seen as the opposite of (radical) pacifism.

* Pacifism

Pacifism is an attitude of non-violence that rejects all forms of violence and war. The main goal in this vision is peace, which can only be achieved by peaceful means and an attitude of non-violence.

* Just war

The just war theory is a theory that defines certain conditions (depending on context, time and place) for entering into armed conflict and for justifying the use of violence. These conditions are meant to avoid war and violence as much as possible.

* Just peace

Violence should not only be postponed. We must also build a just society where violence and oppression are absent. Moreover, during conflicts, one should not only think about resolving the conflict itself, but also about its consequences, so that a lasting peace is possible. This is the concept of just peace.

* Righteous/Unrighteous

Righteous(ness) means 'the right, honest thing'. Being 'just' means being honest and trustworthy. Unrighteous(ness) is just the opposite: something that is unfair or incorrect. An example of this is poverty: it is an injustice that certain children in the world have to go hungry, while other children have enough, or even more than enough.



Photo: Annie Spratt | Unsplash

4.8 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

INT LIVING ROOM

We see 3 friends in Sarah's living room: Sarah, Ahmed and Michael. Sarah and Ahmed are playing a ('violent') video game (PlayStation), Michael seems bored.

*Sarah: I got ya! Take this, you ***.*

Ahmed: What? What? No! No! No! Not again! Why do you always win this level? I want revenge!

Sarah: Are you sure, you want to lose again?

Ahmed: Watch me!

Michael: Are you guys really doing this level again? Ugh... This game is so stupid.

Sarah: That's only just because you can't win, loser!

Michael: No, really. I really don't get what you like about this game. Why is it fun to kill as many enemies as possible? There's no real goal in this game. It's just shooting and killing.

Ahmed: Come on, it's just a fun game to play together!

Michael: Yeah sure, killing people is funny. What if someone starts thinking it is normal to kill people like in this video game?

Sarah: What? Don't start talking about video games being bad, or video games causing violence. You sound like my dad.

Michael: Well, maybe he's right.

Sarah: Well, maybe you are just upset about these video games because you are a Christian, and because Jesus always feels so good about himself and solves everything without violence.

Michael: And what's wrong with that? I find it inspiring to see that Jesus always resisted violence and Christians are pacifists.

Ahmed: Christianity and pacifism? Is this a joke? There are plenty of examples of violence in the history of Christianity, did you forget about the Crusades.

Michael looks confused. He doesn't know how to react on these examples from Ahmed.

Michael: Eum well, yes you're right but.. Now I'm confused, but I really think that Jesus and the Church nowadays want peace in all circumstances.

Sarah: Well, let's see. Let me look this up!

Sarah changes the screen from the game to a search bar and starts searching.

Sarah: Here you see they even made a game about it! (reads description) Did Christians did find a way to justify war? Based on the theory crafted by Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas, two famous theologians from the past. Let me download it!

An intro starts to play

Voice in game: History has been forged by violence and war. 2 Theologians took on the challenge to create a theory... A theory that would change the way we view our own history... A theory on how Christians could justify the last resort of using violence and war. A theory that would last for centuries...

Michael: No, really? Let me see! What kind of conditions can justify violence?

Sarah: let's find out!

Voice in game: Decide over the faith of the perpetrators and judge if the use of (their) violence was just. Decide over the faith of the perpetrators. Will they go to heaven or will they burn in hell?

1. JUST CAUSE: (an icon of lady justice appears)

War and violence can only be used as a response to injustice. For example, when a country defends itself. Or when a country is defending another country that is being unlawfully attacked."

2. RIGHT INTENTION: (an icon of a face with a halo appears)

War must be aimed at an ethical goal and ultimately at restoring peace. One cannot go to war to achieve another goal, for example, economic interests."

3. LAST RESORT: (an icon with a list appears all lines have been crossed except the last one)

Violence and war should be avoided as much as possible. Only when all options to achieve peace have been exhausted, one can start a war."

4. PROBABILITY OF SUCCES: (an icon with 3 stars appears)

"There must be a reasonable chance of success in going to war. People should not suffer and die needlessly."

5. PROPORTIONALITY: "The means used for

violence must be in proportion to the end that the war seeks to achieve.”

6. COMPETENT AUTHORITY “And finally, war must be declared by a lawful authority. Only leaders of a recognized political community and with the political requirements of that community, can declare war.”

Sarah: Before now, I never heard of this ‘just war theory’ and those 6 conditions to go to war...

Michael (looks confused): No, me neither. I’m not sure what to think about this ‘theory’. Why did they make such a theory to go to war? I thought Christians always wanted to behave in a non-violent manner.

Ahmed: Hmm, I hadn’t heard of that theory either. But maybe we should find out more about it?

Sarah: look there is a VR experience!

We see the kids putting on VR glasses

Suddenly, in front of them a hologram (cardinal/pope-like person) appears.

Hologram: Hello friends! I can tell you more about the just war theory! If you guys are curious, that is. (hesitates) but I think that is the only reason people visit me here.... (sighs a bit sadly)

Michael: Well yes, we were wondering: How is it possible that there is a ‘just war theory’ in the the first place? I thought Christians would always be against the use of violence? Why invent a theory to justify violence when you proclaim pacifism?

Sarah: This means Christians within certain rules are allowed to use violence and to start a war? So.... Christianity legitimizes violence?

Hologram: Not so fast, young lady. You don’t have to jump to conclusions right away. You’ve already learned about the 6 conditions to justify a war! This theory—or we can call it a tradition—is an ethical framework originated by Catholic theologians like Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas, and has been adapted and reformulated over time according to context, time and place.

Michael: So, how can we understand this just war theory?

Hologram: The ‘just war theory’ was not invented to allow violence, or to legitimize violence. It is the other way around!

Sarah: I don’t get that at all...

Hologram: For example, one condition states that war must be a last resort. In this way, the theory of just war aims to encourage authorities to first look for other alternatives in order to achieve peace

Michael: Like diplomacy?

Hologram: exactly: Also, you have to look if your intentions are good: war should not be started to enrich yourself. And you have to ask the question: should I use so much violence, is this in proportion and really necessary to stop injustice?

Sarah: Ah, so if I understand correctly, the use of violence should always be a last resort in conflicts between different countries, religions, people... Thus, this theory is invented to postpone the use of violence for as long as possible and to look for other solutions first?

Hologram (smiles, winks): Now you get it. That’s my teaching.

INT LIVING ROOM

We see Sarah, Ahmed and Michael again, playing videogames.

Ahmed: What really??? Again? How can you beat me EVERY TIME?

Sarah: Haha, I’m invincible, the ultimate video game master!

Michael (smiles): Well, let me try to beat you?!

Sarah (smiles): Are you sure? But, will you only kill me as a last resort (Sarah winks)?

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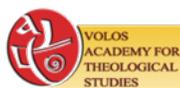
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