



Orthodox  
in  
Encounter  
**TEACHER'S BOOK**



Funded by  
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# **FACE2FACE**

# **ORTHODOX IN ENCOUNTER**

TEACHER'S BOOK



EDUC8

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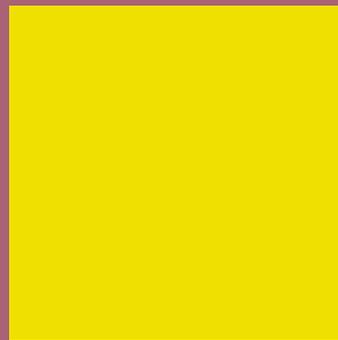
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# INTRODUCTION

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# INTRODUCTION

Dear Colleagues,

Nowadays, the pluralistic nature of society is evident throughout Europe. Globalization, immigration, the flow of refugees, and technological advances have led to the coexistence of people of different faiths. However, this coexistence is often tarnished by incidents of violence and religious fanaticism.

It is the duty of all religions to cultivate awareness in the minds of the faithful of the need for a decent and honest dialogue between religious communities. It is, therefore, of great importance to emphasize the dimensions of cultural anthropology inherent in every religion and the principles within their teaching that promote peace.

But is this feasible within the context of Religious Education? Can school students discover the roots of religious fanaticism and intolerance? Is it possible, in the school environment, to cultivate and promote the peaceful coexistence of religiously diverse communities in one place?

In 2020, the European program EDUC8 was launched, with the aim of familiarizing young people with other faiths and facilitating a dialogue between the different religions coexisting in one place, through Religious Education. This program is based on a calm and dispassionate educational approach, on honest self-criticism on behalf of the religious communities and on fostering acquaintance with the “other”, with the ultimate aim of alleviating religious fanaticism and cultivating mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence.

This book was prepared in the context of this program, along with the corresponding student’s book, providing the teacher with educational material from the perspective of the Orthodox Church.



Figure 1  
Diversity  
Source: AdobeStock

Sub-objectives of the Program for the students and youth of Europe include:

- cultivation of empathy for the “other” through religious education,
- a deeper knowledge of their own faith and a more solid foundation in its principles
- familiarity with the basic principles of decent dialogue,
- to investigate and evaluate fields of communication, interests and activity which are common to the various religions and to reject violence that is often disguised as a religious act,
- an awareness of the conditions necessary for peaceful coexistence with the “other”, to be achieved through specific educational material of the Orthodox tradition and theology, with modern teaching techniques and discussions in the classroom.

The teaching material is divided into 4 sections, as follows, and each topic is further expanded and explored in depth:

- a) Encounter with the “other”: Dealing with diversity
- b) Encounter with sacred texts: Texts of Violence
- c) Encounter with the environment: Social and ecological issues
- d) When encounter becomes conflict: Just war and Just Peace.

Each section uses an animated video with a contemporary story and teenage protagonists. This story is connected with a particular event or excerpt from the Orthodox sacred texts. In the first class hour, therefore, the video serves as an introduction to the subject being addressed. Then

the students process material from their religious tradition and learn the interpretive dimension that is attributed to each topic. In the second class hour, all students of different religions come together, in order to discuss the issue under investigation in plenary. In this way the students bring and share their understanding of the above issues, based on their own tradition, and learn the positions of the others. Through reflection and discussion they are thus led to a dialogue in the safe environment of the school. The main goal of the whole process is to help the students to reject violence through a deeper understanding of their own religion as well as the other religions.

It is our common belief that, in contemporary times, Religious Education is called upon to play an important role in the peaceful coexistence of people with different cultures and beliefs. Let us not forget that the ministry of reconciliation of the world is a command of God (Mt. 5:9). According to a contemporary visionary of peace and of religious dialogue, Anastasios the Archbishop of Albania: "Every crime in the name of religion is a crime against religion itself. Every form of violence in the name of religion rapes, in every sense, religion itself. No war is sacred. Only Peace is sacred."

We hope that the student and teacher textbooks will be of substantial help in your journey, together with your students, to the world of the Orthodox Church and to the encounter with the "other", the different, our everyday fellow human being!

Enjoy the trip!

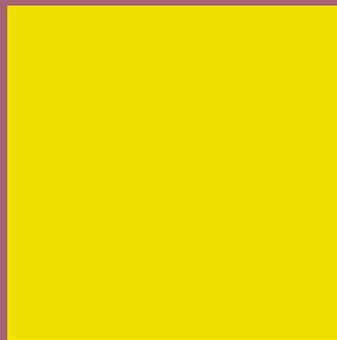
The authors

**“ WHAT IS NEEDED FOR RELIGION, IS TO GUIDE PEOPLE TO THE DEPTH OF THIS TRUTH, TO A CHANGE OF MIND AND LIFE AND TO MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING. THIS IS INDEED THE CORE OF OUR RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS. ”**

————— Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch

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ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER:  
DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

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## MODULE ONE

# DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

## 1.1 TEACHING AIMS & THEOLOGICAL REQUIREMENTS

### 1.1.1 TEACHING AIMS

In these times, where the whole world has become a global village, we no longer engage only with a narrow circle of people close to us, who share the same origin, language, religion and cultural values as us; rather, we are called upon to interact with people who are very different from ourselves. People who are not only different in origin, language and religion, but whose values and choices, behaviors and attitudes differ radically from ours. So how do we confront the “other”, the different one? Some people feel and describe them as “strange” and “undesirable”. Others, however, choose to see the relationship with the “other” as a starting point for changing the world. The students are asked to research and discover the criteria determining their potential attitude towards the different person, as outlined in the Bible as a proposed way of life and realized in the practice of the Orthodox Christian tradition.



Photo: © Bits and Splits / Adobe Stock

### **Goals of Teaching**

The lesson aims to help the students to discover and acquire a deeper understanding of the attitude of the Orthodox Christian Church towards all kinds of difference.

### **Goals for the students**

- To have an in-depth understanding of Orthodox Christian theology relating to the various forms of difference.
- To suggest, on the basis of biblical and patristic teachings, criteria and ways of accepting difference.
- To evaluate positions and attitudes of the Orthodox tradition on issues of difference.

### **Expected learning outcomes for students**

- To learn the orthodox Christian teaching about difference.
- To present critically the beliefs and attitudes of the Christian Church towards issues of any kind of difference.
- To formulate arguments and promote the acceptance of diversity based on Christian theological grounds.
- To recognize the responsibility of the believer but also their own personal responsibility regarding intolerance, conflicts rooted in difference, marginalization and rejection of the other.

## 1.1.2 THEOLOGICAL REQUIREMENTS

### Theological background to the teaching of the subject

We will approach the subject “Encounter with the other: dealing with diversity” by way of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), where Jesus suggests a revolutionary, for his time, perspective concerning the acceptance of the ethnically and religiously “other”. Then, with the help of patristic texts, we will provide the students with the opportunity to discover and evaluate the criteria and the way of life that are proposed by the Christian religion for a genuine and meaningful relationship with the “other” in their daily life.

The following excerpts from the relevant literature are given in order to provide a more profound foundation to the theological approach with our students in the classroom.

#### Texts for theological documentation

Every cell of the visible Body of Christ, of the Church, every believer, by his baptism and his participation in the Eucharist has been called to express, to manifest, to “incarnate” with his being and his work the love of God, no matter under what conditions he lives. Whoever lives in God can only love like him, with a love that takes bold initiatives, that knows no boundaries or prejudices, that embraces everything. The assurance that “God is love” comforts us, and frees us from the multifaceted fear, the fear of the other, of the different, of the unknown, of the developments of humanity that are often foreseen as threatening; of the fear of our failures and sometimes of the abyss of our soul. “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18). Even the people who refuse or do not want to accept the name “God”, indirectly accept his other name: “Love”.

(Anastasios (Yannoulatos, Archbishop of Tirana), God manifested in flesh, Athens: Maistros, 2006)

Here we have a beginning of liberation from the self: the moment we become capable of loving we begin to disengage ourselves from this prison which we are in in relation to our person. There is in fact a complete connection between “loving” and “dying”. To love means to disengage little by little from the exclusive interest that one has in oneself and to transfer that interest and that concern to someone. [...] Ultimately, the more this happens, and the more the egoistic self gets free, the more free we are. [...] only to the extent to which we become capable of loving, we become capable of seeing and perceiving. To see and perceive, whether it be God or the world around us, whether it be the individual neighbor [...].

(Anthony Bloom (Metropolitan of Sourozh), God and Man, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004, pp. 185-186)

Finally, we ask for a “spirit of love”. In the “Ladder of Virtues”, as presented by John Climacus, the virtue of discernment appears as “the greatest of virtues”. The last chapter is about the three virtues, faith, hope and love and, as St. Paul says, “The greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13). Love for all: for God and for our brother and for the whole world. It’s not that I love one, or two, or five, my family and my friends and I do not love others. He who has love, loves the whole universe. He loves animals, he loves enemies, he loves the ones he knows and those who are unknown, he loves his benefactors, as well as those who dislike him, the same way God “rains upon the righteous and the unrighteous.” Love which is biased and not universal is not love.

Love does not divide or separate its recipients, but rather, it shatters its source. Without this love that tears us apart, because our neighbor is our brother, and the image of God, we will not be able to pass to the presence of God. From the image we proceed to the original. From brother to God. God put the brother next to us, to remind us that the path to our salvation is the practice of love. What an awesome virtue! But how difficult it seems to us! But how different would be our society, our community of believers, in any parish where we come together, if we could have this freedom, this fullness, the sacrifice of love, this extravagance of love! To love others not as ourselves, but more than ourselves, because the other, the neighbor, is part of us, is our best self, is a child and brother of Christ, is the visible God of that moment; he is the occasion for us to leave behind our egoism, and the opportunity for us to meet with our God.

(Nikolaos, Metropolitan of Mesogea & Lavreotiki , From the daily to the Godly  
Athens: En plo, 2008, pp. 166-168)

First of all, Love is migration. The only “definition” of God we find in the New Testament is that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). And it is Love because it is a company, a Trinity. And it is a Trinity because each of the Three Persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) has its own self. Each Person is not a fleeting shimmer of the divine Essence, but a truly distinctive Being, which is not identical with the other two. Love is an outreach to someone else, therefore it cannot be realized by beings enclosed in themselves. If I love, I do not cease to be myself, but I “migrate” towards someone who is not me. The second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Son, is an eminent migrant. Not only did he migrate lovingly to the other two Persons, but he also migrated to the human world. In ecclesiastical teaching, Incarnation was not a show. The Son did not visit humanity from a distance (as, for example, when the television channels and we, the well-off, visit the Kurds), but he became a real man, a real Kurd, until his death. In the first years of his life he experienced the exile of a political refugee; he took refuge in neighboring Egypt to escape the blade of Herod who feared the loss of his power (Mt. 2:13-15). He lived wandering and homeless, accepting all places as his home”.

(Thanassis N. Papathanassiou, My God, a foreigner.  
Texts about a truth “in the street”,  
Athens: En Plo, 2018, pp. 50-51)

Despite being a national enemy, the Samaritan [...] put himself in the place of the afflicted Jew and became active. If he had remained within himself, as the priest and the Levite did, he would not have found emotional release and he would not have empathized with the other, or felt compassion. However, the relationship and the situation were mutually one-sided from the beginning to the end of the story. This "mutual one-sidedness" encompassed a selfish selflessness on the part of the Samaritan, if such a verbal paradox is allowed. Of the two, only he himself had an intact consciousness, able to think and consider [...]

The image of the Samaritan, reflected in the misery of the Jew, left no room for narcissism and introduced the element of selfishness into his selfless behavior. There was a relationship, but it was one-sided, since the other person was half dead. He could neither feel nor, much more importantly, express gratitude. The truth of this offering, with no possibility or expectation of recompense, due to the unconsciousness of the beneficiary, lies beyond self-validating reflection and affirmation. Hence the Samaritan does not receive any flattering image of himself, nor does he feel like a virtuous benefactor; he just does what he thinks he should do and leaves, without recompense, unfettered by feelings of gratitude on behalf of the beneficiary, who apparently fails to regain his senses while his benefactor is present.

The scenario of the parable does not allow any psychological elaboration. Everything remains on the practical level of the actions of someone like the Samaritan. Nothing in this story leads us to believe that the Samaritan put special emphasis on his action, so that he swelled up later with self-esteem (pride?). "A Neighbor", says the parable "is the one who showed him mercy", i.e. the one who feels pity for the victim and any victim he comes across, and takes care of them for their own sake and not for his own psychological satisfaction. Caring for the one who needs us does not obey any moral imperative, leading to reciprocal affirmation of identity. In fact, in the parable, things were such that the victim not only could not thank his savior, but was not even able to see him. This is an objective fact, which leaves no room for speculation about the motivation of the Samaritan's behavior [...]. In this light the Samaritan was not even in a position to show generosity. He could be more freely available, since he was caring for someone without a self, putting his greed in the service of the victim [...]

The parable of the Samaritan abandons the model of the theoretical neighbor with demands and distinctions, turning instead to the neighbor whose practice and attitude to life are unconditional. It is important to work in this direction today, thinking above all about the practice of our own availability. This means starting from the side of the weak, of the one without a self, who desperately needs our help, even if his condition is so desperate that it does not allow him to ask for it. Because in our case, and in any similar case, the relationship exists despite the functional absence of the second person, in the sense that the misery that puts him hors de combat, evokes and elicits the purest form of my freedom, as I give without gaining or losing anything, feeling impassive, as I would feel on meeting infinity. That is, the Ego does not grow in self-affirmation but matures in the internalized Thou, so that the external closeness is replaced by a psychic relationship, a new social interweaving.

In taking care of our fellow human in difficulties we take care of his image (reflected) on us, as an act of personal generosity – a kind of sympathy, without expediency or responsibility, for something unknown [...] From this point of view, compassion, as a reaching out to the unknown and the unidentified, emerges as a reaching out to (the) infinity that produces the future. Opening myself up to his pain, I open myself to the eschaton, to the future of the Divine Kingdom. He is a stranger to me, but his strangeness and otherness does not refer to physical space, on the contrary it lies in the fact that liberating my interest guides me to a new time. The suffering of the fellow human transports the depth of (his) being from the world within me; making me act out of compassion and leading me to a mode of existence where the mind watches the emotions without imposing its imperatives on life, in a guilt provoking manner.

(Stelios Ramfos, *Jesus' Secret*, Athens: Armos, 2006, pp. 310- 314)

## 1.2 VIDEO PROJECTION AS A STARTING POINT FOR TEACHING

In this section, the students watch the video and then they answer an initial questionnaire, giving a first impression of their comprehension of the plot of the video and of its implications.



Figure 1.1  
Video Clip

### 1.2.1. VIDEO PLOT SUMMARY

On an island on the Greek border, a family is experiencing the hardships caused to the local community by the presence of hundreds of refugees, who have taken refuge there and are living in makeshift camps. The son of the family, a thirteen-year-old teenager, Yiorgos, has developed a friendship with some refugee youngsters, despite the opposition of his father. Unexpectedly, Yiorgos' grandfather suffers an acute heart attack and needs urgent surgery, and the family's inability to collect enough blood for the needs of the surgery leaves them in a difficult position. Young Yiorgos shares his anxiety about his grandfather's illness with his refugee friends, who, without saying anything, mobilize their family members, as well as other fellow refugees, who go en masse to give blood for Yiorgos' grandfather. In this way, more than enough blood is available for the operation. Yiorgos' father, who is skeptical about the refugees and immigrants, experiences a strong emotional shock when he learns of the generous offer of blood from the refugees. The same goes for Yiorgos' grandfather, who learns of what has happened, on recovering. As a result of this, the grandfather changes his earlier perceptions of foreigners, and recalls the Parable of the Good Samaritan which he had recently heard in the Church. Yiorgos' father, however, does not feel grateful for the blood donation of the refugees and, in addition, continues to refuse any possibility of their integration into the life of the island. The recovery of Yiorgos' grandfather and the change of his perceptions, lead our story to an optimistic, if not entirely happy, end.

### 1.2.2. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONNAIRE

**Instruction to the teacher:** *Having watched the video, students are asked to answer the following multiple-choice questions individually. These questions aim to help the teacher assess the extent of the students' understanding of the content of the video and to evaluate their views on the encounter with the other. The same questions are to be answered by the students again, individually, at the end of the lesson in order to create some measurable results about understanding and change of opinion. For this reason, the correct answers are given only in the final questionnaire.*

Based on the video you watched, try to answer the following questions.

1. What kind of relationship does Yiorgos' father want his son to have with the refugees?
  - a. A friendly relationship
  - b. No relationship at all
  - c. He does not care if his son has any relations with the refugees
  - d. I do not know / No answer
  
2. Who mobilized to donate blood for Yiorgos' grandfather?
  - a. His compatriots and fellow believers
  - b. Lena, Sotiris, Yiorgos' father and two friends of theirs who had diabetes
  - c. Refugees of a different nationality and a different religion
  - d. I do not know / No answer
  
3. In the parable mentioned by the grandfather, who is it who comes to the aid of the wounded man?
  - a. The Samaritan who was considered his enemy
  - b. The Priest who was his compatriot
  - c. The Levite who was his compatriot
  - d. I do not know / No answer

4. The words of Gregory of Nazianzus that “all people have a divine seal and that all of us, in the love of Christ, become as one” are mentioned in the video. What do they mean?
  - a. We are all one in the love of Christ, regardless of ethnic origin, religious belief or social class.
  - b. We are all one in the love of Christ, as long as we share the same religion
  - c. We are all one in the love of Christ, as long as we have a common ethnic origin and religion
  - d. I do not know / No answer
  
5. At the end of the story we watched, whose perceptions were changed in relation to foreigners?
  - a. The father’s
  - b. The grandfather’s
  - c. None of them
  - d. I do not know / No answer

### 1.2.3. TOPICS FOR RESEARCH

The video we watched presents the topic: "Encounter with the other". The main issues and questions we will need to address are:

- a) Whom do we consider to be our neighbor and whom do we consider to be "the other"?
- b) Why do we often regard "the other" fearfully and feel threatened by him/her?
- c) What answers does the New Testament give us to the above questions?
- d) What practices and attitudes can we draw from the Orthodox tradition and apply in our daily life?

## 1.3 US AND THEM

With the following questions, we aim to investigate the ideas of the students on who is for them a “neighbor” and who is not.

### 1.3.1. QUESTIONS

1. In relation to the story you watched, consider the characters and write down which of them you consider “yours”, i.e. close to you?

Possible answers: family, friends, relatives, schoolmates etc

2. In addition to the people close to us, there are also other people around us, who are different from us and whom we often fear and treat with hostility. Can you give some examples?

Possible answers: The students can give examples from their own life.

### 1.3.2. OBSERVING AROUND US:

The following paragraph recapitulates what should have been formulated in the discussion on the answers of the students in the above questions. If the teacher finds it necessary, it can be read in the classroom as well.



Most people usually call “neighbors” their blood relatives, compatriots and fellow believers, local people and friends, with whom we share the same feelings, the same ideas, the same views and in general our daily life. As they have a common language with us, a common religion, a common homeland, we feel they are similar to us, we communicate with them easily and that is why we do not think of them as a threat and we are not afraid of them. On the contrary, we regard as “other” every person who is different from us, who is possibly a foreigner, who does not speak our language, who does not have the same religion, the same homeland and the same culture as us. “Others” differ from us in their ideas and opinions and so communicating with them is difficult and requires a lot of effort and fear. Often, we feel they are a threat to us and we regard them with suspicion. Thus we maintain a distance and are unable to achieve unity and harmonious coexistence with them.

## 1.4 THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

**Instruction to the teacher:** *The next step in our teaching is the reading and processing of the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) through which the students will discover the life proposals presented by Christ in his own words, as written down by the evangelist Luke. The biblical text should be read by the teacher.*

In the New Testament, Christ gives us the criteria and shows us the way to coexist harmoniously with all human beings, regardless of any differences, with love for every human being, even towards the enemy, overcoming fears and insecurities.

### 1.4.1. THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN (LK. 10:25-37)

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.<sup>[a]</sup> Teacher, he said, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"<sup>26</sup> He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?"<sup>27</sup> He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."<sup>28</sup> And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."<sup>29</sup> But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"<sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead."<sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.<sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.<sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.<sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.<sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii,<sup>[b]</sup> gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'<sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"<sup>37</sup> He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

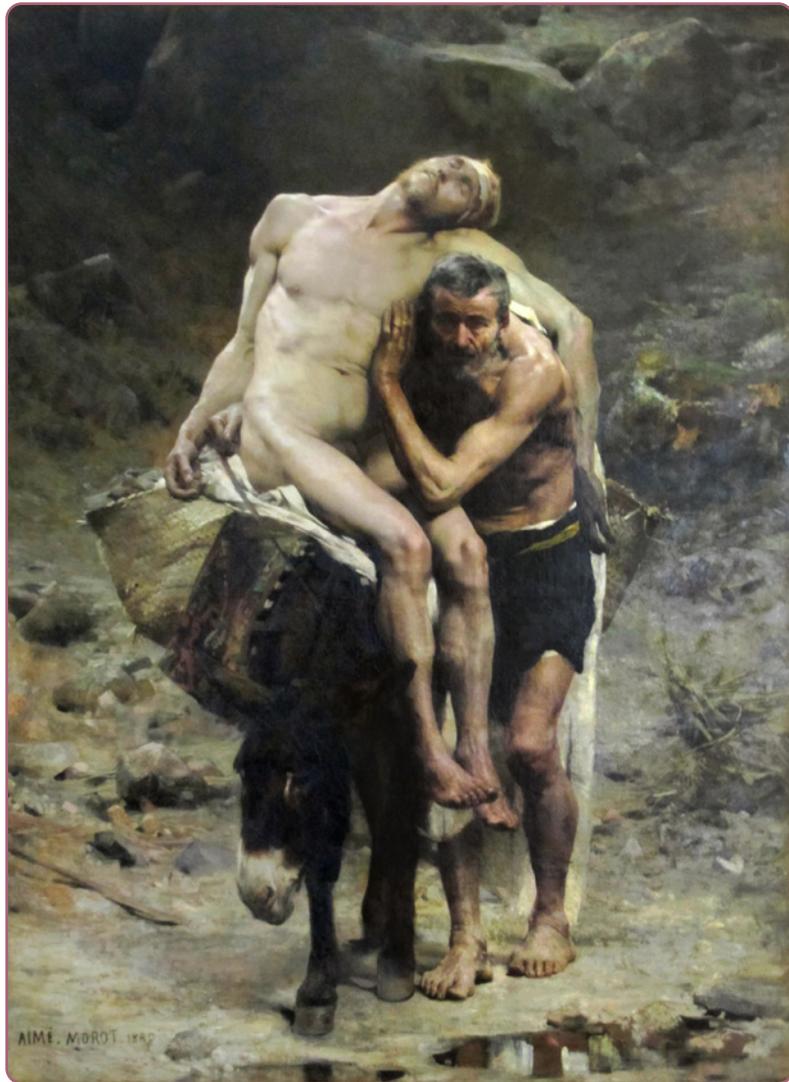


Figure 1.2  
The Good Samaritan by  
Aimé Morot (1880)  
Source: Marc Baronnet  
via Wikimedia Commons:  
[https://commons.  
wikimedia.org/w/index.  
php?curid=7901316](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=7901316)

### 1.4.2. WHAT I NEED TO KNOW IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

The following information is necessary for the processing of the biblical narrative. They can be read in the class, or personally by the students, who can look at the map and locate the two cities mentioned in the parable.

**Parables:** Jesus usually taught in parables. About one third of His teaching is parables. These are short stories He Himself created, whose subject matter comes from the daily life of the Israelites, revealing, in a vivid way, the truths of the Kingdom of God. Jesus taught in parables because this was the usual way of teaching among all his compatriot rabbis, and because it was **an illustrative way of teaching that everyone could understand**. The parables invite the listener to recognize his own self somewhere in the plot of the story, to wake up, to reflect and to take a personal stance. Jesus' parables were justifiably described as an "illustrated gospel".

**Neighbor:** In the times of Christ, the Israelites considered parents, brothers, relatives, friends, neighbors, fellow believers and compatriots as “neighbors”, people close to them. On the other hand, the enemies of their homeland, especially the Romans, foreigners, the followers of different religions and particularly the Samaritans were considered as “other”.

**Priests:** These were the descendants of Aaron, who was the brother of Moses. Priests **served in the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem** during the daily ceremonies. Their main duty was the offering of sacrifices and prayers to liberate the faithful from their sins and from evil forces. In the times of Jesus the priests are estimated to have been about a few thousand. In Jerusalem alone there were over 1000 priests and 250 Levites.

**Levites:** These were the descendants of Levi and **assistants of the priests**. Their duties were to guard and to keep the Temple of Solomon tidy and clean. Both the priests and the Levites knew the divine commandments very well and would have been obliged to take care of the wounded Jew, who was in any case, their compatriot.

**Samaritans:** Members of an ethno-religious group composed of Israelites who had intermarried with Babylonians, Syrians etc. **Their religion had the same roots as Judaism**, but with serious deviations from the Jewish tradition. Because of this, the Israelites considered them schismatic and not compatriots. Their religious center was the temple on Mount Gerizim, which was located above the city of Shechem. In the time of Christ, **the gap between them and the Israelites was vast; the two groups hated each other deeply** and for this reason the Israelites avoided any communication with them.

**Denarius:** (plural Denarii): A silver coin of the Roman Empire, circulating in the time of Christ. On one side it had the image of the emperor Tiberius and on the other the image of his mother Livia. The two dinars that the Samaritan gave to the innkeeper were equal to two daily wages of an unskilled laborer.

**1.4.3 MAP OF PALESTINE  
IN THE TIME OF CHRIST**



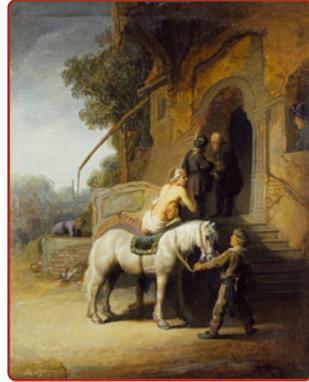
Figure 1.3  
Iudea Province in the  
First Century,  
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wiki/File:First\\_century\\_  
Iudaea\\_province.gif](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:First_century_Iudaea_province.gif)

### 1.4.4 EXERCISE

**Instruction:** With the following exercise, students are asked to process the biblical text by placing the events in the correct order through the works of art. This way, students understand the basic parts of the story, in order to process them further.

The following works of art depict various scenes from the parable of the Good Samaritan. Observe the works carefully and place them in the correct order according to the narrative of the parable. Can you identify the characters from the parable in these works?

Figure 1.4  
Source: Wikimedia  
Commons: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f1/Rembrandt\\_Harmensz\\_van\\_Rijn\\_033.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f1/Rembrandt_Harmensz_van_Rijn_033.jpg)



Rembrandt, *The Good Samaritan*



Figure 1.5  
Source: Wikimedia  
Commons: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paula\\_Modersohn-Becker\\_005.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Paula_Modersohn-Becker_005.jpg)



Paula Modersohn-Becker, *The merciful Samaritan*



Figure 1.6  
Source: Wikimedia  
Commons: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vincent\\_Willem\\_van\\_Gogh\\_022-2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vincent_Willem_van_Gogh_022-2.jpg)



Vincent Van Gogh, *The Good Samaritan*



1 – Paula Modersohn-Becker, 2 – Vincent Van Gogh, 3 – Rembrandt. In the first one the Samaritan meets the wounded Jew (“a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity”, Lk 10:33), in the second one the Samaritan takes the Jew on his horse (“Then he put him on his own animal”, Lk 10:34) and in the third he takes him to the inn keeper (“brought him to an inn, and took care of him”, Lk 10:34).



**1.4.6 DELVING DEEPER INTO THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN:**

**Instruction:**

*To obtain a deeper understanding of the Parable we will investigate what love means to the Samaritan, we will identify similarities between characters in the video and those in the Parable and finally we will focus on the central point of the Parable in order to address its basic question.*

**Exercise 1**

In the biblical text the verbs that express the attitude of the Samaritan towards the wounded Jew are:

came – saw – was moved – approached – bandaged – poured – put on – brought – took care – gave – come back – repay

Use as many of these verbs as you can to describe what love means to the Samaritan.

Indicative Answer: Love means coming close to any person who is in need, who is wound and who experiences otherness. Feeling pity for him and taking care for his body, mental and social wounds. Offering myself in his disposal, spending not only my financial means but also my whole self.

**Exercise 2**

Place the persons of the parable and the persons of the story of the video in the corresponding squares according to their position or behavior.

	Person in need	Who is considered "neighbor"	Who is considered "other" (stranger or enemy)
Parable of Good Samaritan	Jew	Fellow patriots, fellow believers	People of different nations and different religions, Samaritans
Story in the Video	Grandfather	Relatives, fellow patriots, fellow believers	People of different nations and different religions, immigrants, refugees

### Exercise 3

*The following question aims to clarify to the students the difference between the verbs “to be” and “to become”, regarding our relation to our neighbor, as it is defined by Jesus in the aforementioned parable. The neighbor is not only someone who has concrete features, like blood, DNA, ethnicity or religion in common with us. Jesus, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, speaks about the person who becomes a neighbor, i.e. about someone that acts as a neighbor and really loves and takes care of their fellow human, regardless of sex, language, ethnicity, religion or anything else that could define them as “other”*

After telling the parable, in reply to the original question of the lawyer, “who is my neighbor?”, Jesus replies with another question “which of these, do you think, behaved as a neighbor?” What does Jesus want us to understand, with this question, about our attitude toward the other?

#### **1.4.7 ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL FOR EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITIES**

The following two activities are suggested as an alternative, as long as the following requirements are met: since the activities have an experiential character, a sufficient amount of time should be available for their completion and, in addition, both the teacher and the students in the group should be familiar with experiential techniques. The aim of these activities is, on the one hand, to cultivate the empathy of the students and, on the other, to encourage their active engagement in a holistic learning process (spiritual, emotional, physical) which will enable a more profound understanding of themselves and the world around them. Through experiential activities, the students explore a story or text, by becoming the co-creators of a narrative and gaining an empathetic experience of the world of the story through the roles they play.

If these activities are adopted, they should be done after the processing of the parable.

One month after the robbers’ attack, the wounded Israelite who was saved by the Samaritan attends an important festival of the Israelites. There, in the Temple of Solomon, he meets the priest and the Levite, who passed him by when they saw him wounded on the street. Working in small groups, create a short script with the dialogues that you imagine took place between them.

### **Exercise 1**

Choose a name for the Samaritan and one for the wounded Israelite. Imagine that the Israelite had to stay in the inn for 5 days to recover and learned from the innkeeper that the Samaritan had paid all the expenses of his stay. On leaving, he leaves the innkeeper a short note to be given to the Samaritan when he comes there again. What do you think the Israelite would write in that note?

### **Exercise 2**

One month after the robbers' attack, the wounded Israelite who was saved by the Samaritan attends an important festival of the Israelites. There, in the Temple of Solomon, he meets the priest and the Levite, who passed him by when they saw him wounded on the street. Working in small groups, create a short script with the dialogues that you imagine took place between them.

## 1.5 SO FAR WE HAVE UNDERSTOOD...

**Instruction:** *The following texts summarize the main message of the parable. They can be used as material for a deeper comprehension of the life model proposed by the gospel, which is based on taking responsibility for “the other”, through solidarity and a love that knows no boundaries.*

**... that I am not a “neighbor” by default, but I become a “neighbor” to the other through love and solidarity; by accepting responsibility for the other.**

In order to confront the concept of the “foreigner”, we must begin by acknowledging that the Gospel is a scandal. I remind you that, at one point, where Christ gave the definition of “neighbor” [...] **He indicated as the “neighbor” the most distant person (a person of a different race and a different religion) [...]** Which means that, for the definition of the “neighbor” and the “stranger”, the Gospel does not share the criteria of the old world, i.e. common blood [origin], common language and common religion [...] These features, of course, are the building blocks of a nation or a race. But they are not the criteria of the Church. And in fact, if we pay attention to the text of the Gospel, we will see (and I repeat) that **Christ does not say who “is” the neighbor and the enemy, but who “becomes” the neighbor and the enemy.** Both “become”, not according to their origin, but through their actions: through **solidarity** or the denial of love, accordingly.

(Th. N. Papathanassiou, *The Rupture with Zero. Shots of political theology*, Athens: Armos, 2015, pp. 152 -153)

**... that love knows no limits**

Jesus’ question radically reverses the question posed by the lawyer, “who is my neighbor?” While the latter referred to the object of love (i.e. who should be considered as a neighbor), Jesus speaks of the subject of love (i.e. who behaved as a neighbor). The lawyer posed the problem of his epoch, regarding the extent of the concept of the neighbor and therefore of the limits of love, while Jesus, in telling the parable, showed that there are no limits to the concept of the neighbor, nor any restrictions to the commandment to love. If every human being feels as a subject of love, then he cannot set limits to this love; his love extends to all, because the limits of the neighbor are boundless. Whoever loves only his friends, his fellow believers, his own in general, behaves as a human. But whoever is not confined by such barriers, behaves divinely, following the model of the God of love as revealed in the person of Jesus, who tells the parable.

(Ioannis D. Karavidopoulos. *Biblical Studies*, Thessaloniki: Pournaras, 1995, p. 335)

## 1.6 THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE “OTHER” IN THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN TRADITION

To conclude the first teaching hour, patristic texts of the Orthodox tradition are used to help the students discover how the gospel message of limitless love for “the other” became the leaven that constantly transforms the life and the tradition of the church.

The same guidelines given to us by Christ, governing our attitude to our neighbor and to “the other”, and shaping a new way of life, are found in texts of the Orthodox Christian tradition.

In the following texts the criteria of the Orthodox Christian tradition governing our relationship with each other are made clear. These are:

**a) Human nature and human needs are common to us all, and that is why there is no place for discrimination.**

**b) Love for God presupposes love for every human being**

### Exercise 1

Discover in the following texts the phrases that correspond to the above criteria and underline them.

### Texts

If someone who is struggling to meet their needs knocks on your door, do not weigh things in an uneven way. In other words, do not say “He is a friend, he is of the same race, he has benefited me in the past, while the other is a stranger, a foreigner, a person I don’t know.” If you judge unequally, you too will receive no mercy [...] Human nature is common; both neighbor and stranger are human; needs are common to both, and so is poverty.. Offer to your brother as well as to the stranger; do not turn your back on your brother, and make the stranger into your brother too. God wants you to support the needy, and not to discriminate between people; he does not want you to give to the person of your kin and neglect the stranger; all people are of the same kin, all of them are brothers, all of them are children of one father.

(Basil the Great, Fourth oration on Charity)

Possible answers: All people share human nature; everyone is a human being; for both of them, the needs are common, poverty is common “all people are of the same kin, all of them are brothers, all of them are children of one father”.

If we detect any trace of hatred in our hearts against any man whatsoever for committing any fault, we are utterly estranged from love for God, since love for God absolutely precludes us from hating any man. He who loves Me, says the Lord, will keep My commandments (cf. John 14: 13, 23); and “this is My commandment, that you love one another” (John 13: 12). Thus he who does not love his neighbor fails to keep the commandment, and so cannot love the Lord. Blessed is he who can love all men equally. He who loves God will certainly love his neighbor as well.

(Maximus the Confessor, Four hundred texts on love 15 – 17, 23)

Possible answers: Love for God does not tolerate hatred for any person. He who loves God, loves his neighbor without fail.

### **Exercise 2**

According to the words of Gregory of Nazianzus which we heard in the video, “all people have a divine seal and in the love of Christ we all become one. Also, all discrimination belongs to the old world, the one we Christians leave behind.”

Answer individually or work in small groups:

What would you change in your life in order to leave behind what St. Gregory calls the “old world”?

### **Exercise 3**

Imagine that the grandfather in the video story, while recovering in hospital, dictates a message for the social media to his grandson, in which he thanks the people who saved his life. What do you think he would write in his message?

## 1.7 FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE

**Instruction:** *The students are asked to respond to the initial questionnaire again, as a way of evaluating the impact of the lesson. By comparing the initial answers with the final ones, the extent to which the students have altered their opinions may be assessed.*

*The correct answers are: 1B, 2C, 3A, 4A, 5B.*

After our discussions in class, attempt to answer the following questions. Compare your final answers with your original ones.

1. *What kind of relationship does Yiorgos' father want his son to have with the refugees?*

- a. Friendly relationship
- b. No relationship at all
- c. He does not care if his son has relations with the refugees
- d. I do not know / No answer

Correct answer: B. Yiorgos' father wants his son to have no relations with the refugees, for he sees them as a threat for his homeland, since they are of a different nation and a different religion.

2. *Who mobilized to donate blood to Yiorgos' grandfather?*

- a. His compatriots and fellow believers
- b. Lena, Sotiris, Yiorgos' father and two friends of theirs who had diabetes
- c. Refugees of a different nationality and different religion
- d. I do not know / No answer

Correct answer: C. The refugees, though they had never met Yiorgos' grandfather in person, were motivated in order to cover his need in blood, seeing life as a first priority.

3. *In the parable mentioned by the grandfather, who is it who comes to the aid of the wounded man?*
- a. The Samaritan who was considered his enemy
  - b. The Priest who was his compatriot
  - c. The Levite who was his compatriot
  - d. I do not know / No answer

Correct answer: A. Grandfather refers to the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan behaved friendly to the wounded person, though the wounded man was a Jew and there was hatred between them, as they were of different ethnicity and religion.

4. *The words of Gregory of Nazianzus that "all people have a divine seal and that all of us, in the love of Christ, become as one" are mentioned in the video. What do they mean?*
- a. We are all one in the love of Christ, regardless of ethnic origin, religious belief or social class.
  - b. We are all one in the love of Christ, as long as we share the same religion
  - c. We are all one in the love of Christ, as long as we have a common ethnic origin and religion
  - d. I do not know / No answer

Correct Answer: A. According to the words of Gregory of Nazianzus, Jesus' love includes all people as brothers, without social, class, ethnic, religious or other discriminations (Cf. Acts. 17:26).

5. *The words of Gregory of Nazianzus that "all people have a divine seal and that all of us, in the love of Christ, become as one" are mentioned in the video. What do they mean?*
- a. The father's
  - b. The grandfather's
  - c. None of them
  - d. *I do not know / No answer*

Correct Answer: B. Grandfather's perceptions changed, as he saw that the refugees "became" his neighbors with their actual offer of blood. His change was reinforced by the fact that he remembered the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the words of Gregory of Nazianzus he found in his grandson's textbook.

## 1.8 ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS: MATERIAL FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

During the second class hour, the discussion will be enriched by the use of art and literature to help stimulate the creative and critical thinking of the students.

The discussion will be developed along two axes:

1. The representation of Jesus Christ as the Good Samaritan
2. The incorporation of criteria found in the Gospel into everyday practices

### 1.8.1. WORK BASED ON AN IMAGE

In the *exercise* that follows, the teacher presents a miniature from the code *Purpureus Rossanensis* (fol-7v), where Christ is depicted as the Good Samaritan, healing the wounded man with the help of an angel. God himself, in his human incarnation, embarks on the salvation of human beings. Thus, Christ is the ultimate “other” who, like the Good Samaritan, is always present beside those who are in need and suffering. (See also the image by Elena Murariu, page 37.)

Look carefully at the picture and record what you see. What do you think when you see this picture? Is there anything in this image which surprises or concerns you? What would you like to ask about this image? Discuss the possible answers with your classmates.



Figure 1.7  
Rossano Gospels Good Samaritan cut  
Source: Wikimedia Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RossanoGospelsFolio007vGoodSamaritan.jpg>

## 1.8.2 TEXTS

The following text shows how the gospel message of love and solidarity with the “other” becomes an integral part of the consciousness and daily practice of ordinary people of the Church.

### **My grandmother Rousa**

We were hungry and wanted to eat right away. Immediately, without delay. We had stood up and were celebrating by shouting and laughing, when suddenly my grandmother came back in. We froze. She was holding two frightened children by the hand. Smiling and full of kindness, she gestured to us to sit down. The children were crying and couldn't say a word. “Sit all together”, she said. “Tonight we have two more friends: Ahmet and Fatme. We will all eat together and tell stories. Ahmet and Fatme live in Gurculadika. Today they came to Kozani and have not eaten all day.” Isaac and Clio, Greek refugees from Asia Minor, descendants of the Ionians. Fatme and Ahmet from Portorazi, children of the antichrists. And the rest of us, locals from Kozani. At the same table. We were totally stupefied, eyes wide open. The refugees were trembling, the Turks were trembling, and we were trembling too. We sat down, not so much because our grandmother told us to, but mainly because our knees were shaking. And, despite our hunger, it was impossible to start eating. She had managed to make us sit at the same table. The uprooted from their ancient homelands, the enemies from the nation who had oppressed us for four hundred years, and us, yesterday's slaves and today's masters.

(M. Papakonstantinou, *My grandmother Rousa*, Athens: Estia, 1997, pp.38-39)

### **Exercise**

Reading the above text, consider what influence the behavior of the heroine of the narrative can have on the harmonious and peaceful coexistence of people.

### **Interview of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew**

The excerpt from an interview of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, commenting on the Papal Encyclical “Fratelli tutti”, can function in the teaching process as a concluding text that summarizes all the axes of the topic that we have researched. The teacher can ask the students to underline phrases that highlight these axes in the text.

Question: On what basis can we all consider ourselves brothers and why is it important to discover ourselves as such for the good of humanity?

Answer: The Christians of the very early Church called each other “brothers.” This spiritual and Christian brotherhood is deeper than biological kinship. However, for Christians, brothers are not just the members of the Church, but all people. The Word of God took on human form which unites everything by itself. As all human beings are created by God, they are all incorporated into the plan of salvation. The love of the believer has no limits and barriers. In fact, it embraces the whole of creation, it is “the flame of the heart for all creation” (Isaac the Syrian). Love for brothers is always beyond compare. It is not an abstract feeling of sympathy for humanity, which usually ignores the neighbor. The dimension of personal communion and brotherhood distinguishes Christian love from abstract humanism.

(The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “*Abandon indifference and cynicism*”, interview commenting the Papal Encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, 23.10.2020)

Answer: The axes are located in the following phrases of the text:

- a. spiritual and Christian brotherhood is deeper than biological kinship
- b. not only members of the Church, but all peoples are considered brothers
- c. all human beings are created by God
- d. the love of the believer sees no limits and barriers
- e. love [...] embraces the universe as a whole, it is “the flame of the heart for all universe” (Isaac the Syrian)
- f. the dimension of personal communion and brotherhood distinguishes Christian love from abstract humanism

### 1.8.3 SONG

In the task that follows, the teacher seeks to utilize the whole learning process with the technique “Think, Pair, Write, Share (TPWS)”, in order to arrive at the final evaluation. In addition this work could also be extended to a four-hour project entitled: “The responsibility of the Christian in the protection of human rights and the acceptance of difference”. The material and dimensions of the project are open to choice and can be selected after a discussion with the students.

Accepting difference and diversity in everyday life is not an easy task. The band New Order offers a revolutionary proposal for coexistence with the song “Be a rebel”, available at the following link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6E6ugW7TOo&ab\\_channel=neworder](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6E6ugW7TOo&ab_channel=neworder).

After listening to the song and thinking about the issues we explored, discuss your views with your partner. Then, working in groups of 4-5 students, write a text on the topic “The revolution of love” to be published on the school blog.

The New Order song embraces difference and refers to a revolution. What revolution is required, according to Christian theology, to make our relationship with “the other” the opportunity for creating a new world?

Alternatively, students can work on the following question.

What is the responsibility of a Christian in defending forms of difference which are persecuted and which face violence in various forms?

#### 1.8.4 SHORT FILMS

Short films such as those suggested here could be used to investigate the issue more profoundly.

The first film gives the teacher the opportunity to work with students on how our relationship with the “other” enriches us, when we manage to overcome stereotypes. With the second film, students can reflect on the fact that closing in on the microcosm of the ego, where there is no room for difference, breeds anger and despair. In the third film the students can discover that empathy functions as a basic virtue for the coexistence of people and not only.

After the screening of the selected film, there can be a guided discussion in the classroom.

1. Jafar: [https://youtu.be/OWe\\_omalyE0](https://youtu.be/OWe_omalyE0)
2. My Brother: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJ01IGOqnVc>
3. Pet Shop: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRhbtOjAv0c>

## 1.9 GLOSSARY

Clarification of theological terminology, and also information on the historic personalities and places found in the book.

**Asia Minor:** The peninsula of Anatolia in present-day Turkey. It was a crossroads of cultures and a meeting point of migratory tribes moving from east to west and vice versa. Hellenism flourished there from about 1200 BCE until the Asia Minor Catastrophe in 1922 and the expulsion of Greek Christians.

**Basil the Great:** One of the great Fathers of the Christian Church and one of the Three Hierarchs. He was born in 330 in Caesarea, Cappadocia in Asia Minor. He studied rhetoric, philosophy, astronomy, geometry, medicine, and physics in Athens. He lived as an ascetic in the desert of Pontus for five years until he was proclaimed Bishop of Caesarea. As a bishop he founded a number of institutions for the care of the poor and the sick. Throughout his short life he fought for the unity of the Christian Church. His works are divided into dogmatic, anti-heretic, ascetic, practical, orations and letters. He died on January 1, 379 at the age of 49 and was buried with great honors. His memory is celebrated on January 1 by the Orthodox Church and on January 2 by Catholics.

**Blood brother:** One who becomes a brotherly friend through the process of fraternization. In this way individuals or groups of persons who are unrelated by blood are ritually united in fraternal ties, and promise mutual love and protection. This custom was fairly widespread in the Eastern Mediterranean.

**Diabetes:** A chronic disease characterized by a constant high blood sugar level.

**Ecumenical Patriarch:** In the Orthodox Church, the Patriarch of Constantinople is called Ecumenical Patriarch. The title Ecumenical (“Universalis”) was formerly attributed also to the Pope of Rome, but quickly became the exclusive title of the Archbishop and Patriarch of Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman State (Byzantine Empire). The Ecumenical Patriarch is the first among equals (“primus inter pares”) of all the Bishops of the Orthodox Church and presides over the Synod of Bishops.

**Gregory of Nazianzus:** Otherwise known as Gregory the Theologian. He is considered to be an important personage of the Church and one of the Three Hierarchs. He was born in 329 in Arianus, near Nazianzus in Cappadocia. He was ordained a Bishop and proclaimed Ecumenical Patriarch. His rich literary work is divided into orations, letters and poems. He died on January 25, 390, at the age of 61. His memory is celebrated in East and West on January 25.

**Inn:** A type of hostel in olden times; a shop that offered, for a fee, accommodation and food for travellers and their animals.

**Ionians:** The Ionians were one of the four ancient Greek tribes and were settled mainly in Attica, the Aegean islands and Asia Minor, in the region called Ionia.

According to mythology, the Ionians and the rest of the Greek tribes were descendants of Deucalion and Pyrrha whose son, Hellen was considered the progenitor of the Greek (Hellenic) tribes. From the name Ionia, the Turks named the Greeks “Yunan” and Greece “Yunanistan” since the Ionians were the first tribe they met when they came to the area.

**Jericho:** A city in Judea, 27 km to the North East of Jerusalem. The road from Jericho to Jerusalem passed through desert in many places with several precipices and steep cliffs. Robbers frequently found refuge in such places and used them as their strongholds. Pilgrims travelling from Galilee to Jerusalem in order to celebrate Pesach, often made a final stop in Jericho.

**Kozani:** A city in Western Macedonia in Northern Greece which flourished in the 18th century. Kozani still has many mansions dating from that time, which form a tourist attraction.

**Maximus the Confessor:** Was born in Constantinople in 580 and received a remarkable philosophical and theological education. He was a high-ranking government executive and later became a monk. As a monk, he was a central figure in the opposition to the heresies of his time. He was exiled and tortured for his views by a group of heretics but nevertheless he confessed (remained faithful to) Orthodoxy. He died in 662. The Church commemorates him on January 21.

**Olive oil:** This well-known product of olive pressing was a staple food of the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean. At the same time, due to its beneficial ingredients, it facilitates the faster healing of wounds, keeping them soft and moist and preventing pain. Hippocrates, Greek physician of the 4th century BCE, in his work "On ulcers" recommends "gauze folded in two and moistened with wine, with clean wool soaked in olive oil on top" for the treatment of wounds.

**Wine:** A product in daily use in the time of Christ by the peoples of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. In addition to its consumption for enjoyment, it was also used for sterilization and purification, due to its alcohol content.

# 1.10 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

Characters

Yiorgos

Maria: Yiorgos' Mother

Apostolos: Yiorgos' Father

Grandpa: grandfather of Yiorgos and father of Apostolos

Doctor

Refugee kids

## SCENE 1

On a well-known island near the Greek border, the family we have already met is experiencing the hardships caused by the presence of hundreds of refugees in the local community, who have arrived there and live in makeshift camps. The son of the family, thirteen-year-old Yiorgos, is sitting at a table and doing his homework. His father is watching the TV news in the living room. His mother is preparing the food. The door between the two rooms is open. We see Yiorgos in the foreground while in the background his father is watching the TV.

*FATHER: (almost shouting) Hey, look what's going on here! Over and over, boats with refugees and immigrants landing on our island. Where will it all end? Can't they go anywhere else? Soon we won't hear the Greek language in our streets.*

*MOTHER: Calm down, Apostolos, Yiorgos is reading.*

*FATHER: What are you saying, Maria? Can't you see we have a very serious problem with all these foreigners? They are different from us, we have nothing in common. As for Yiorgos, I know that he has made friends with kids from the refugee camp. Time to put an end to this, lad, do you hear me?*

*YIORGOS: (Listening, but maintaining a guilty silence. He whispers faintly) Yes, dad.*

The phone rings and interrupts the talk. The mother picks up the handset, and it becomes obvious that she is frightened by what is being said to her. Yiorgos listens anxiously to what his parents are talking about.

*MOTHER: Apostolos, come here. Something happened to your father. He is in the hospital.*

*FATHER: (talking to the phone) Yes, I understand. We'll be right there... we'll do whatever we can.*

*MOTHER: (With obvious anxiety) What happened?*

*FATHER: My father had a heart attack. He needs surgery immediately and they need us to give blood for the operation. Let's go to the hospital.*

*MOTHER: Yiorgos, we are leaving for the hospital. Stay here. Ah, God help us...*

## SCENE 2

Yiorgos is at home alone. His phone rings. On the screen of the mobile, his friends from the refugee camp, two boys and a girl, appear, looking happy..

*KIDS: Hey, where are you Yiorgos? What happened? Aren't you coming today?*

*YIORGOS: (obviously sad) Sorry guys, I can't come. My grandfather had a heart attack and needs to have an operation. It must be serious, because I heard that the doctors asked us to find blood for the surgery. I'm very scared, guys. (He bursts into tears)*

## SCENE 3

Some hours later, Father and Mother head to the hospital's blood donation department. They are talking to each other.

*MOTHER: What do you mean "you told everybody and only two people came"?*

*FATHER: I called everyone and said that we need blood, but only Sotiris and Lena finally came.*

MOTHER: *And the rest?*

FATHER: *The others couldn't.*

MOTHER: *So, two units of blood from them and two from us, four. And how many do we need?*

FATHER: *At least eight. Maybe ten.*

MOTHER: *Dear God, what shall we do?*

They reach the blood donation department and they see a long queue of refugees waiting.

FATHER: *Look at that, it's terrible. They come here in their thousands and they fill our hospitals too.*

*Entering the department*

FATHER: *We came to give blood for my father.*

DOCTOR: *Don't worry, Mr Apostolos. There are already fifty units of blood available for your father.*

FATHER: *Are you kidding us, doctor? Where did fifty donors come from?*

DOCTOR: *I don't know where they came from, but there they are, waiting patiently to give blood for your father.*

The doctor points to the waiting refugees and Apostolos is left speechless, his eyes wide open in surprise.

#### **SCENE 4**

Some days later. In the hospital room, Yiorgos' grandfather is recovering after the operation. Standing next to him is Yiorgos' father, Yiorgos' Mother and his grandson, Yiorgos. The two men talk to each other.

FATHER: *Thank God, father, everything went well.*

GRANDFATHER: *Yes, son. I already feel better. What I do not understand, however, is how all those strangers came to donate blood for me.*

FATHER: *It is really strange, but I will find out. Anyway, I think they should have asked us if we wanted to receive blood from those people.*

GRANDFATHER: *If it weren't for those people, we may not be here talking right now. I don't know why, but since yesterday, when I learned about the blood, the Parable of the Good Samaritan has stuck in my mind. Do you remember? A Jew is robbed and beaten, and while he is laying there bleeding, a Jewish priest passes by, but he pays no attention. Then a Jewish Levite passes, and also ignores him. At last, a Samaritan comes along, a man from a community the Jews used to hate, and he takes pity on the victim. He cleans his wounds and takes him to an inn for better care. You see? A man considered to be an enemy helps him, while his fellow patriots and believers pass him by. It makes me wonder, who is the friend and who the enemy? Who is "the neighbor", as the Gospel says?*

FATHER: *It seems to me that you were afraid that you would die and you turned to religion. But I wonder, is the blood they gave you safe? Those people are full of diseases.*

GRANDFATHER: *We are afraid of our shadow these days, Apostolos! These people have been here for over a year now. They are our fellow humans and have become our fellow citizens. And they certainly showed it in my case, don't you think?*

FATHER: *I don't recognize you, father. Didn't we say that all these people are a threat and that they should go back where they came from?*

GRANDFATHER: *Let's give it a rest. We have been wrong for so many years. Now we have got to know them in our common homeland: humanity and love.*

Yiorgos' father and mother leave. Yiorgos stays on the ward to keep his grandfather company.

Fade in. Grandpa is reading a book in the hospital bed (maybe the Bible) and Yiorgos is sitting next to him.

YIORGOS: *Grandpa, can I ask you something?*

GRANDFATHER: Yes, of course; go ahead.

YIORGOS: What does "blood brothers" mean?

GRANDFATHER: "Blood brothers" are those who have united their blood.

YIORGOS: Their blood? Yuk!

GRANDFATHER: Yes, and so, even though they are not born of the same parents, they treat each other as if they were real brothers.

YIORGOS: And how do they unite their blood?

GRANDFATHER: They slit the skin of their hands with a knife and join their wounds. This is how their blood is mixed and this is something that unites them forever. Nice idea, huh?

(short silence)

YIORGOS: Does that mean, grandpa, that now that you have the blood of the refugees in you, that you are blood brother "\*" with them?

YIORGOS: Does that mean, grandpa, that now that you have the blood of the refugees in you, that you are blood brother with them?

GRANDFATHER: (with a surprised smile) Hmm, I hadn't thought of that, but hmm... well...I suppose you could say so... actually, why not? (One more moment of silence, Grandpa and Yiorgos look at each other) You know something, my lad? Some time ago, I flipped through your school book on religion and I read something by St. Gregory the Theologian. He said that all people have a divine seal and that all of us, in the love of Christ, become as one. He also said that all discrimination belongs to the old world, the one Christians have left behind. When I read it, I did not like it at all. I closed the book, and I was a bit angry. I could not imagine how deeply I was bound with this old world ...

YIORGOS: You know what I'm thinking, grandpa? After what happened, it's a good thing that I asked you and not dad, what it means to be "blood brothers". I'm afraid dad would call me names.

GRANDFATHER: (laughing) I think you're right. Your dad needs some more time to be able to answer such questions soberly. Let's give him time, shall we?, What do you say?

YIORGOS: (laughing playfully) Yes... of course... Let's wait for him to grow up first ...

The scene closes with grandfather and grandson laughing like kids.

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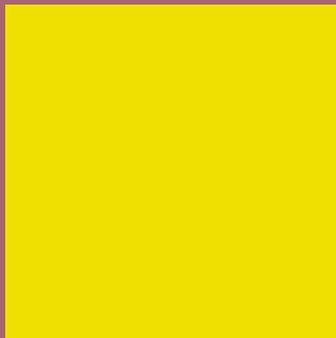
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2

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ENCOUNTER WITH  
SACRED TEXTS: TEXTS  
OF VIOLENCE

# TEXTS OF VIOLENCE

## 2.1 TEACHING AIMS & THEOLOGICAL REQUIREMENTS

### 2.1.1 TEACHING AIMS

In the sacred texts of various religious traditions, it is common to find narrations of events where violence is used against humans by God (or Gods). In the Orthodox Christian tradition, such texts can be found frequently in the Old Testament, and throughout the centuries, various interpretations of such texts have been attempted. Therefore, our approach aims to bring students into contact with such texts, so they can discover how they are perceived by the Church community, and to guide them in the evaluation of these texts; while an additional goal is to relate these biblical narrations to situations in contemporary life.



Photo: © Bits and Splits / Adobe Stock

### **Goals of Teaching**

The main goal is to familiarize students with incidents of violence in the Sacred Texts of the Orthodox Tradition, to enable them to interpret them and to understand their importance for contemporary people.

### **Goals for the students**

- To become acquainted with a narrative from the Bible that shows holy violence.
- To approach and interpret the biblical text containing violence, from the perspective of the Orthodox tradition.
- To be able to distinguish the historical elements of the biblical narrative from the theological truths contained in it.
- To understand the need of the biblical authors to use passages of violence in shaping the narration, due to imperatives imposed by the historical context at the time of writing.
- To seek the image of God as it is presented in the New Testament; God as a Father who loves every human being, even the enemy.
- To understand the effects of a biblical text involving violence on our behavior towards our fellow human beings.
- To transform, through a critical approach to the texts, hostile assumptions towards the “other”, who is perceived as a threat or an enemy.
- To adopt the attitudes and behaviors of an active and democratic citizen, who resists all forms of violence, from whatever source.

### **Expected learning outcomes for students**

- To be able to critically interpret biblical narratives that contain elements of violence.
- To understand the particular features of the language used by biblical writers.
- To revise erroneous and stereotypical perceptions created by a literal approach to biblical texts, especially those with elements of violence.
- To assess incidents of contemporary violence according to Christian interpretive tradition.

## 2.1.2 THEOLOGICAL REQUIREMENTS

### Theological background to the teaching of the subject

As already mentioned in the teaching objectives, we need to guide the students to a realization that in approaching biblical narratives, they need to distinguish between the particular narrative conventions which are specific to their historical context, and the timeless and always contemporary theological meaning which they embody. That is why the Orthodox interpretive tradition, from the times of the Great Church Fathers of the 4th century to present days, does not coincide with the literal meaning of the Bible. This approach to the biblical text, and in our case to the biblical narration of the crossing of the Red Sea, is of great interest and importance for the student, contributing as it does to the development of critical thought and creative thinking. In this way, the biblical text comes to 'meet' our students, in a real sense, as they themselves approach it existentially and not theoretically or ab-stractly.

To provide a sound and more profound foundation to the theological approach to the subject in the classroom, we quote the following texts, which are excerpts from the relevant literature.

#### Texts for theological documentation

As a record of experiences, the Bible is not a didactic moralist book, but rather, for the greater part, a narrator of History. But this is a history which does not aim at a detailed description of events of the past of human society, nor at an objective record of Israel's political and military history. Biblical writers processed the material of their earlier oral tradition referring to events in their history, not as historians (the way the work of historians is perceived today), but mainly as theologians. Therefore, the narration of events is not intended to provide "historical" (in the contemporary meaning) information, but to articulate eternal theological truths; truths that will remain relevant as long as there are people on earth. For the contemporary reader of such texts, the dominant question is whether things happened exactly as described; under exactly what conditions a particular result was achieved or in which order the events took place and how long they lasted. For the biblical writers, such details, which would be of great importance to a historian, are irrelevant. What is important for them is the result and especially its theological significance for the present and future relationship between God and his people. Thus, they can tell the same story twice, presenting the facts from completely different viewpoints, without any attempt to reconcile their differences.

Undoubtedly, the idea that God himself orders the annihilation of the inhabitants of a conquered region, even including the infants, causes horror to the modern reader, and apparently similar feelings were born in the ancient audience too. Thus, through such horrific descriptions, biblical writers attempt to demonstrate, in a way that leaves no room for doubt, the non-existence of pagan deities and the omnipotence of the one and only God.

(M. Konstantinou, *The Old Testament: Deciphering the universal human heritage*, Athens: Armos, 2008, pp. 66-67, 78)

The beginning of the Book tells the beginning of the world (Genesis) and is followed by the encounter with the Only God (Exodus), then the tribulations of the chosen people, its distress and its glories. The book most often published, read and glossed, our MetaBook derives its aura from being a source of both information and a faith, the annals of a people and the Word of God. It has a dual value: horizontal (as the chronicle of a localized history) and vertical (as the unveiling of a supernatural design). On the one hand, the epic narrativization of a national itinerary, issuing in a picturesque saga; on the other, the promotion to universality of a number of quite specific events, which have been turned into the stuff of every man's prayers. Two stories for the price of one, the profane and the sacred each drawing support from the other. Yet the more the elements of the file have been examined, the more the theological has come unglued from the historical. The creative virtue of the fantastical, and the efficacy of symbols, deserve to be admired all the more for it. The Bible is not "false" (except from the perspective of our historicist illusions). It's performative.

(Régis Debray: *God. An itinerary* (trns J. Mehlman), London & New York: Verso, 2004, pp.26-27)

And now we come to the crossing of the Red Sea by the Jews. We understand, of course, why Moses, a leader of [former] slaves, does not guide his people to the north, where the borders were guarded by the Egyptian army, but leads them to the NE of the Suez region, to the desert, through areas that were sometimes dry and sometimes covered by water. Eventually they would attempt to enter Canaan along the eastern side. The term "Red Sea" is a misinterpretation of the Septuagint interpreters. The Hebrew text has "Yam Suph" (= reed sea), i.e. located near the Nile Delta, more precisely near the town of Goshen, where many of the slave Jews lived. The "Red Sea", as one can see on the map, is far from the place where the events of Exodus took place. The oldest sources, Yahwist (c. 900 BCE) and Elohist (850 BCE) also speak of Yahweh's war against Pharaoh: The water splits in two and the Jewish people pass through, but when Pharaoh's army attempts to pass, the water floods back and drowns them, or (another version) God strikes terror in the Egyptians, who fall into the sea and drown. The Priestly Source speaks of a miraculous low tide when the Jews passed, and of a high tide when the Egyptian army attempted the crossing. The earliest surviving text speaking of Yahweh's victory is found in the victory hymns of Mariam and Israel in Exodus 15:1. This is a victorious heroic song much older than the rest of the text of the Exodus. It is reminiscent of the women's paeon after David's victory over the Philistines (1 Kings 18:1-2), Balaam's blessing on Israel (Num. 24) and the blessing of the people by Moses (Deut. 32-33). This miracle of the passage of the Jewish travelers and the disaster of the Egyptians was the official "passage" of the Israeli slaves into a great historical nation under the protection of Yahweh, and in this sense was considered the starting point of the Jewish religion and Jewish nation. According to Martin Noth, the events at this sea were so unique and extraordinary that they became the essence of the original Israeli confession and were seen as the real beginning of the history of Israel, and of the fundamental activity of God in favor of Israel. Throughout its history, whenever Jewish people wanted to express the depth of their relationship to Yahweh, they referred to Exodus. The great Prophet of the captivity, the so-called Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. Chapters 40-45), writing about the liberation of the people from Babylonian captivity, speaks of a new Exodus. And in the New Testament also, Jesus considers

His death and resurrection in Jerusalem to be “his Exodus which was to be fulfilled in Jerusalem” (Lk 9:31). The Apostle Paul also speaks of the course of the Church up to the Second Coming using as a background the image of Exodus and the march of God’s people in the desert (1 Cor 10: 1-13).

(S. Agourides, *History of the religion of Israel*, Athens: Ellinika Gramata, 1995, pp.58-59)

Among God’s great works, Exodus is one of the most important. It is clearly a mystery of liberation. It’s just one aspect of Easter [...] This mystery of God as a liberator of prisoners emerges at all levels of the history of salvation, like a sound reflected in ever-deepening echoes [...] The people of Israel, led by the pillar of light, left Egyptian tyranny. Pharaoh and his chariots began pursuing them. And the people reached the sea. The road is cut. They are doomed to extinction or to a second slavery. Like an army, trapped on the sea shore, about to be destroyed or captured. We must underline the desperate nature of the situation. It gives the episode all of its meaning. Indeed, at the moment they were totally unable to save themselves, God accomplishes what was impossible for humans [...] At dawn, after the tragic and miraculous night, seeing the corpses of the Egyptians cast up on the shore, Moses and the children of Israel improvised the Hymn of Exodus [...] Mariam, the prophetess, sister of Aaron, took a drum in her hands and all the women followed her with drums and dances. Mariam replied to the children of Israel: “Let’s sing to the Lord, he is gloriously glorified, he threw both horses and riders into the sea.” There on the banks of the Red Sea, the first Pesach service is established. Dom Winzen notes that “at that time, the divine liturgy was born.” Because it is indeed a liturgy. The choir of the women repeating the chorus alternates with the choir of the men chanting the verse. We still sing this hymn in the paschal vigil. Throughout the story of salvation, every Easter, Mariam’s hymn will resound.

(Jean Daniélou, *Essai sur le mystère de l’histoire*, Volos: Volos Academy Publications, 2014, pp.240-241)

God’s revelation to mankind is progressive. That is, God gradually revealed more and more of the truth, depending on how much people could feel and accept it each time. Thus, the whole of humanity is being educated through Israel (Gal 3:24) ... For example, a four-year-old child has an absolute need to feel that his father is protecting him from any external threat. He asks for the father’s protection, without caring if the neighbor, the friend or even the brother is wronged in this way, since he feels threatened by them. This is how we can think of Israel in the first centuries of its relationship with God: a child seeking the protection of his almighty father. But through the centuries, God the Father, educating the Israelites, revealed more and more [...] In this light, then, we can recognize that every time Israel sees God as “exclusively its own”, “hostile to others”, “harsh” and “justly vengeful”, it is through the eyes of the childhood phase of its relationship with God. Humans, therefore, because of their own weakness, projected their own needs onto their relationship with God, just as the little child does to its parents (1 Cor 13:11).

(Ol. Grizopoulou – P. Kazlari, *Old Testament, The prehistory of Christianity, Class A Religious Education (Teacher’s book)*, Athens: O.E.D.V., undated, pp. 52-53)

## 2.2 VIDEO PROJECTION AS A STARTING POINT FOR TEACHING

In this section, the students watch the video and then they answer a first questionnaire, giving a first impression of their comprehension of the plot of the video and of its implementations.



Figure 2.1  
Video Clip

### 2.2.1 VIDEO PLOT SUMMARY

The main characters of the video are two teenage students on a Greek island. They are at a remote spot on the coast, discussing the topical question of the refugees who have crowded their island. They debate whether the refugees should be considered as dangerous, and they consider whether the fact that many of the refugees get drowned, in their effort to reach the Greek islands, should be understood as God's will. This discussion touches upon the story of the drowning of the Egyptians in the book of Exodus. What, then, is God's will? Are the refugees dangerous, being of a different faith and of a different nation? Maybe God wants to demonstrate his power once again, as in the story of the Hebrews crossing the Red Sea? One of the youngsters approaches these questions religiously, while the other keeps disputing his arguments. As they continue their discussion, night falls and the weather turns bad. Suddenly the two boys see a boat in the sea, approaching the cliff, hitting the rocks and starting to sink. In the boat, there are refugees asking for help. How will the two youngsters react? After a short dialogue, the boys decide to help the refugees themselves, judging that going for help would only be a loss of time. With great effort, they manage to tie the boat to the rocks and to help the refugees to come ashore, saving them from drowning. Among the refugees there is also a baby and a young girl. Upon returning home, one of the youngsters (the religious one) talks to his mother, who praises his deeds and offers a new explanation of the facts, and of religiously inspired violence, taking into consideration the question of divine will. The next day, the two boys visit the rescued refugees, who express their gratitude, addressing the boys as sent by Divine Providence. The rescued girl mentions especially the saving of the baby, who proves to be her brother, and she gives a bottle of jasmine perfume to one of the boys, as a gift.

## 2.2.2 COMPREHENSION QUESTIONNAIRE

**Instruction:** *Having watched the video, students are asked to answer the following multiple-choice questions individually. These questions aim to help the teacher assess the extent of the students' understanding of the content of the video and to evaluate their views on the relationship between violence and religion. The same questions are to be answered by the students again, individually, at the end of the lesson in order to create some measurable results about understanding and change of opinion. For this reason, the correct answers are given only in the final questionnaire.*

Based on the video you watched, try to answer the following questions.

1. Why were the youngsters initially reluctant to help the refugees?
  - a. Because they did not want to waste time as they had planned to meet their friends.
  - b. Because they believed that refugees are dangerous to their homeland.
  - c. Because it was getting dark and they had to return to their homes.
  - d. I do not know / No answer
  
2. In the biblical narration of the Exodus, which people are involved?
  - a. Greeks and Syrians
  - b. Egyptians and Greeks
  - c. Egyptians and Jews
  - d. I do not know / No answer
  
3. In the biblical narration, which sea did the pursued people cross, in order to be saved:
  - a. The Aegean Sea
  - b. The Red Sea
  - c. The Mediterranean Sea
  - d. I do not know / No answer

4. Why, in the biblical narrative, God is depicted to act violently and vengefully?
  - a. In this way the faithful wanted to declare their trust in the one and only God, who is also the Savior of humankind.
  - b. Because God is violent and punishes those who do not follow His will.
  - c. Because God is just and His justice is sometimes rendered only by force.
  - d. I do not know / No answer
  
5. For Christians, God is the One who:
  - a. Loves all men/women regardless of national origin, religious faith and social class.
  - b. Loves only those who believe in Him.
  - c. Like any father, He punishes those who want to harm His children, i.e. the faithful, even to the extent of using violence.
  - d. I do not know / No answer

### **2.2.3 TOPICS FOR RESEARCH**

With the video we watched, we are introduced to the topic "Encounter with sacred texts: Texts of violence". The main issues to be addressed, after the video screening, are:

- a. Why, in the Bible, is God depicted acting in violent ways?
- b. Maybe there is something else which we must comprehend behind the sacred texts, as, for example, in the narration of Exodus\*?
- c. Which assumptions should we keep in mind, when approaching the texts of the Bible?

## 2.3 WHAT I NEED TO KNOW IN ORDER TO STUDY THE BIBLE STORY

### 2.3.1 HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

**Instruction:** *In this part, the students are given more information, which is necessary for them in order to study and process the biblical narration. The students, as they listen to the information, check the map (see 4.3) and follow the summary table with the protagonists, events and dates.*

 The story of the crossing of the Red Sea\* can be found in the **book of Exodus\*** in the Old Testament\*. This book includes the events that took place around the 13th century BCE and reveal God's intervention in history with the aim of liberating the Israelites from the Egyptians and leading them to the land of Canaan\*. The Israelites lived in Egypt from 1600 to 1200 BCE, for approximately 400 years. When Ramses II\* became Pharaoh (1290–1224 BCE), he took strict measures against them, fearing they would ally with other peoples of the desert and revolt against him. One such measure was the killing of Jewish male children to limit their number. **Moses\*** was born at that time, and was miraculously saved from death. **He was chosen by God to liberate the Israelites and lead them to the land of Canaan\*.**

 On their way to the land of Canaan\*, the Israelites did not follow the shorter, coastal route. Instead, in order to avoid the Egyptian guards, they headed south to the Red Sea\*. Pharaoh at that time was Merneptah\* (1224–1204 BCE), the successor of Ramses II\*. With his army, Merneptah\* pursued the Israelites as far as the sea, but he could not prevent them from fleeing, because God opened a passage for them through the sea. Marching through the sea, they were able to proceed to the desert and were saved. In commemoration of this important event, Israelites celebrate **“Pesach\*” (=passage) even today, as the crossing of the Red Sea\* marked their passage from slavery in Egypt to freedom.**

 During this period, God makes a Covenant, i.e. a **Testament\*** with His people and at the same time protects them, supports them, cares for them, strengthens and guides them. On the other hand, the people relate to him, trust him and recognize him as unique and omnipotent.

### 2.3.2 THE PROTAGONISTS

Protagonists	Event	Dates
Ramses II	Egyptian Pharaoh who took strict measures against the Israelites, fearing they could ally with peoples of the desert and revolt against the Egyptians.	1290–1224 BCE
Moses	Leader of the Israelites who led them to liberation from the Egyptians.	1393–1273 BCE
Merneptah	Egyptian Pharaoh. Son and successor of Ramses II. Pursued the Israelites with his army as far as the sea, but was unable to prevent their escape	1224–1204 BCE



Figure 2.2  
Ivan Aivazovsky: Passage of the Jews through the Red Sea, 1891  
Source: Wikimedia Commons: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aivazovsky\\_Passage\\_of\\_the\\_Jews\\_through\\_the\\_Red\\_Sea.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aivazovsky_Passage_of_the_Jews_through_the_Red_Sea.jpg)

2.3.3 MAP



Figure 2.3  
Map with the march  
of the Israelites fleeing  
Egypt  
by Vaso Gogou

## 2.4 THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA

In this part of the book, the teacher and the students approach the violent and biased attitude of God throughout the Old Testament narration of the crossing of the Red Sea and attempt to clarify the reasons behind it. In parallel, by referring to other texts as well, they will try to sketch out the dramatic elements and the possible exaggerations and inaccuracies, juxtaposing them to the historical facts the theological goals of the narration.

### 2.4.1 THE OLD TESTAMENT TEXT (EXODUS 14: 1-31 ABBR., NRSV)

The following bible excerpt should be preferably read by the teacher.

Then the Lord said to Moses: <sup>2</sup> Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea [...] <sup>3</sup> Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, "They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them." <sup>4</sup> I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, so that I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord. And they did so. [...] <sup>10</sup> As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. [...] <sup>13</sup> But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. <sup>14</sup> The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still." <sup>15</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, "[...] Tell the Israelites to go forward. <sup>16</sup> But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. <sup>17</sup> Then I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers. <sup>18</sup> And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh" [...] <sup>21</sup> Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. <sup>22</sup> The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. <sup>23</sup> The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. [...] <sup>24</sup> At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. <sup>25</sup> He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt." <sup>26</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." <sup>27</sup> So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. <sup>28</sup> The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. <sup>30</sup> Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. <sup>31</sup> Israel saw the great work that the Lord did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the Lord and believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.

## 2.4.2 EXERCISES

**Instruction:** *In the following exercises, students are asked to process the biblical text by identifying words and phrases that show God to act violently, and then to investigate why the biblical writer presents God to be violent and vindictive. The teacher encourages the students to express themselves freely and support their opinion.*

*All exercises can take place in classroom, possibly by small groups of students as well.*

### Exercise 1

Which of the following adjectives would you use to describe the God you encounter in the text?

Omnipotent		Biased		Vengeful	
Angry		Violent		Forgiving	
Evil		Benign		Harsh	
Protector		Helper		Punishing	
Intervening		Miraculous		Compassionate	
Righteous		Saviour		Liberating	

### Exercise 2

Find and underline in the Bible text the phrases that show God's wrath towards the Egyptians.

### Exercise 3

In the same text, mention sentences which show the reasons for God's violent actions.

## 2.4.3 SEEKING FOR THE DEEP INTERPRETATION

**Instruction:** *In the exercises that follow, the students seek to understand the historical context of the biblical text and the aims pursued by its final authors (see again the texts by M. Konstantinou and R. Debray).*

The biblical narration we read, describes a God who uses violence against humans. Let's read the following text and try to understand why the author of the Bible presents God like this. Maybe we need to consider something else?

### God as an avenger

All the events of the Old Testament\* were **transmitted orally for centuries before they began being recorded**. These Oral Traditions\* contained many expressions of emotion and tension, which were often exaggerated, and today we need to distinguish these from historical information. It's not our aim to discover what actually happened then, but to try to understand the significance it had for the life of those people who recorded the events centuries later, with the intention of proclaiming their faith in the one and only God. The one who, when needed, was always present and saved them from harm, evil and death. They were deeply convinced that they could not succeed on their own during those dramatically difficult times. This does not mean (as understood by those who interpret the Old Testament\* literally) that God killed children or enemies [...] Rather, it expresses their deep faith that, in this struggle, their lives and rights were protected by God. With such a view, history becomes "**sacred history**." That is, **when man recognizes Divine Providence in cases where life is preserved, protected, and escapes the danger of extinction**. And this God-savior of their lives is the one people trust.

(Ol. Grizopoulou & P. Kazlari, *Old Testament, The prehistory of Christianity, Class A Religious Education (Teacher's book)*, Athens: O.E.D.V., undated, p.58)

### Exercise

Based on the fact that the recording of historical events by biblical writers takes place many centuries after the events themselves, try to answer the following questions:

To which extent are these events accurately described? Do they include exaggerations because they serve other purposes? What are the purposes of this record?

### Suggestions for answer

These events are not described exactly as they happened, i.e., we do not have a faithful historical narration, since the narration was transmitted orally for centuries before it was written down. And it was pretty normal to be accompanied with strong emotions and to be enriched with exaggeration. Thus, when we study biblical narratives, we need to separate the historical events from the way they were written down and to recognize any exaggerations in their depiction.

These exaggerations, such as God destroying enemies, show the significance that people wanted to give to such events. Their main goal was to proclaim their faith in the one and only God, who was omnipresent and saved them from harm, evil and death. Therefore, they wanted to emphasize their deep faith that God protects them in their struggle for life by acknowledging His providence.

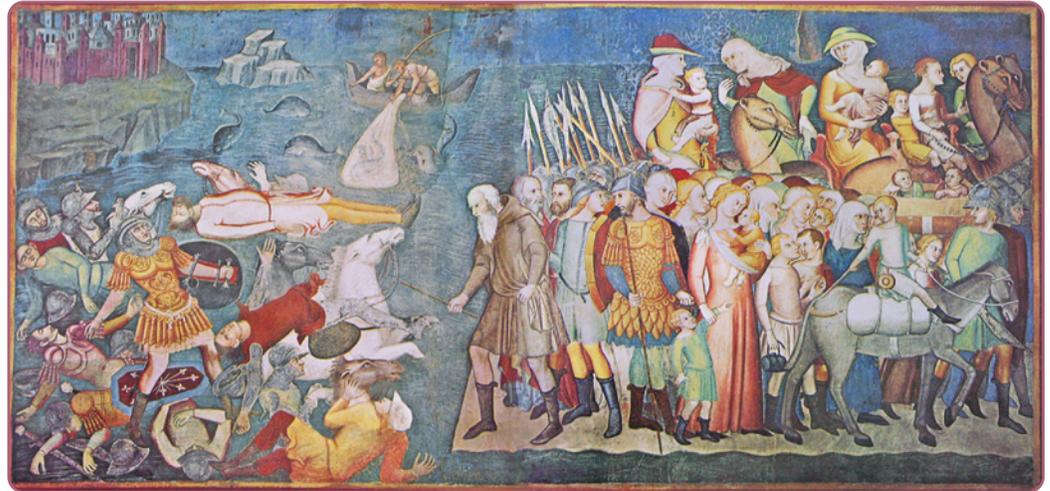


Figure 2.4  
Bartolo di Fredi, *The Crossing of the Red Sea*, Collegiate Church of San Gemignano, Italy, 1356  
Source: Wikimedia Commons: [https://he.wikisource.org/wiki/צבוקה:SG\\_OT\\_304\\_Crossing\\_the\\_Red\\_Sea.JPG](https://he.wikisource.org/wiki/צבוקה:SG_OT_304_Crossing_the_Red_Sea.JPG).

## 2.5 SO FAR...

... we have learned ... understood ... clarified

**Instruction:** *The paragraph “So far ... we have learned – understood – clarified” is a summary of the elaboration of the topic that took place in the classroom, making it easier for the student to recall the main points. At this point, we seek to assess the progress of the learning process so far (formative assessment). In addition, we evaluate the achievement of the expected learning outcomes, monitor and provide feedback on the progress of the students and correct any misunderstandings.*

In the Old Testament\*, the narration of the crossing of the Red Sea\* (Exodus\* 14:1-31) contains scenes of violence. It is violence exercised by God against the Egyptians, whom he eradicates, thus saving the people of Israel from their persecutors. **Approached literally**, this narration describes a God who is biased in favor of one particular nation and uses violence to bring another one to destruction.

The core of the historical events of Exodus\* took place around the 13th century BCE; however, the relevant texts of the Old Testament\* were recorded much later, in the 6th to 5th century BCE. The motivation for writing down narrations which had been passed down orally over centuries was not the study of history (in the contemporary sense of an accurate, objective understanding of events); but rather, it reflected concerns for the significance these narratives could have for people at the time of their recording. People of that era had already developed civilization, had settled in cities and their living conditions were essentially different from those of the period of the events narrated. **Therefore, the references of the Scriptures are not intended to provide exact historical information, as we understand it today, but rather to elaborate eternal theological truths, that will remain valid as long as there are people on Earth.**

Biblical authors attempted to graphically illustrate, absolutely and leaving no room for doubt, the omnipotence of the one and only God, in contrast to the weakness or even the non-existence of the pagan deities of that time.

**Thus, their goal was to emphasize that their God is a unique, omnipotent protector and liberator.** Every time they lived through difficult and dramatic situations, he was present and saved them from every evil. Their profound conviction was that they could not cope with the hardships of life on their own, but God, through his saving interventions, protected their every righteous struggle.

Approaching the narration of the crossing of the Red Sea\*, as well as all the narrations of the Old Testament\*, from this perspective, we are able to understand the significance they have for us today and **distinguish** between the **“sacred history”** found in these texts and the **objective history** describing actual events.

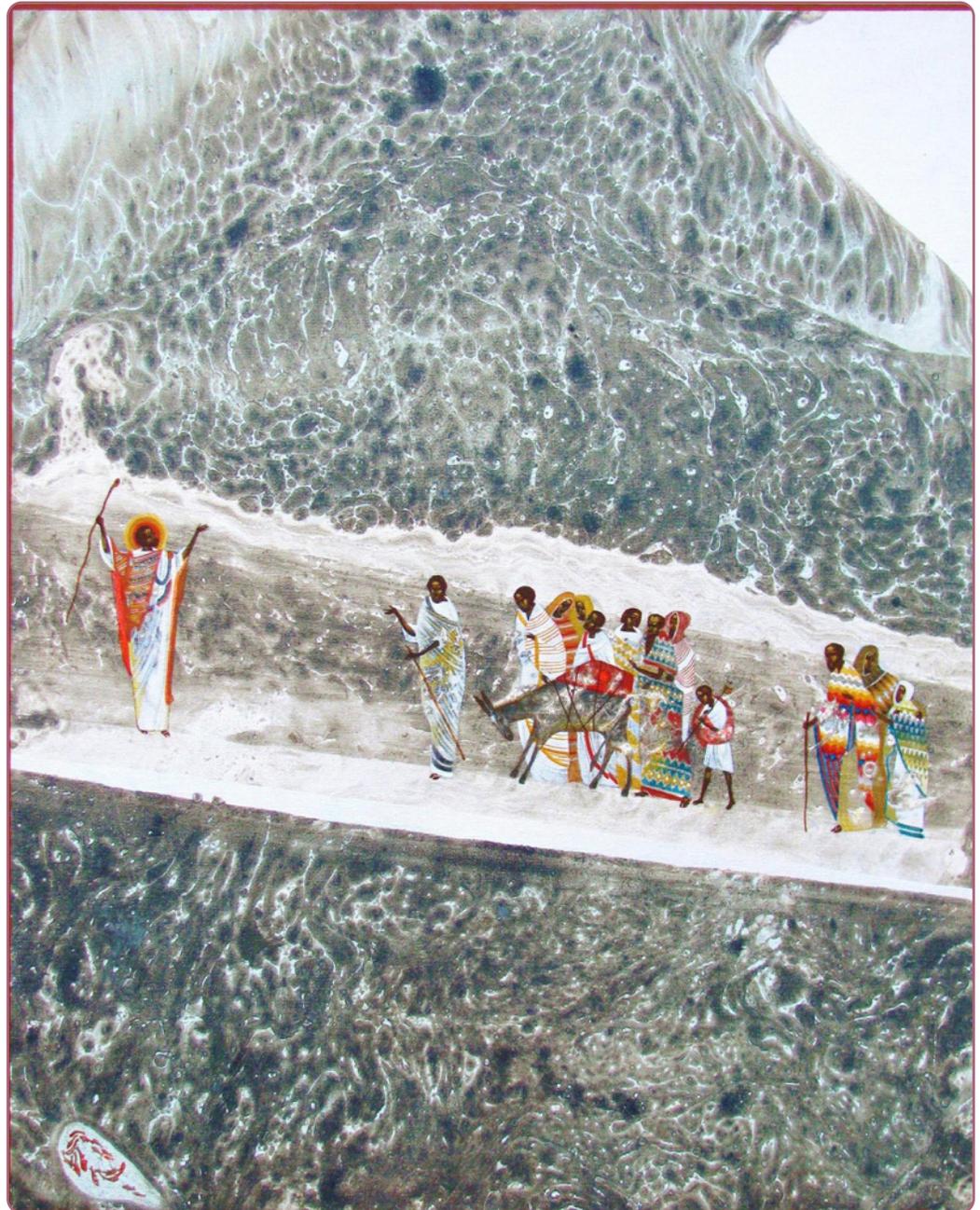


Figure 2.5  
Ivanka Demchuk,  
*Crossing the Red Sea*  
[https://www.etsy.com/  
listing/563765092/  
crossing-the-red-  
sea-original-print-  
on?ref=landingpage\\_  
similar\\_listing\\_top-  
2&pro=1&frs=1](https://www.etsy.com/listing/563765092/crossing-the-red-sea-original-print-on?ref=landingpage_similar_listing_top-2&pro=1&frs=1)

## 2.6 THE IMAGE OF TRUE GOD

**Instruction:** *Through the following questions, taking the video and the text of the Old Testament\* as a starting point, we can investigate the image of God the Father, a God of love for all.*

*This love eradicates fear and insecurity towards the Other, the stranger and even the enemy. In the video, this image of God the Father finally prevails in the minds of the youngsters and their actions show that they have managed to overcome their initial fears and insecurities towards the stranger.*

### 2.6.1 EXERCISE 1 Who would I want to be my God?

Write down words that come to your mind spontaneously and try to give a description of this God.



### 2.6.2 EXERCISE 2 In the video, in the scene where Yiorgos chats with his mother about the rescue of the refugees\*, he asks “Mom, do you think God can do evil?” to which she answers, “Since we call him Father, I cannot imagine him harming his children.”

What can the phrase “God is Father” mean to a Christian?

In order to answer, we will use the following text from the New Testament\*:

Speaking to his disciples, Jesus says: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those that hate you and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he causes his sun to rise on both the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.” (Mt. 5:43-45)

In addition, consider the following excerpt from the New Testament:

“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Lk. 11:9-13)

### 2.6.3 EXERCISE 3

God is Father to all men. Why, then, when we feel fear of the stranger and of the unknown, do we often need a strong God who protects only us and annihilates the one we fear?

When we are afraid, our image of God, but also of our fellow humans, is often affected by our insecurity. How can we deal with our fears towards strangers? In the following paragraph, underline the keywords that answer the above question. Explain your choice.

Let's remember what we saw in the video: Yiorgos shares his father's fear of the supposedly “dangerous” refugees and thus he remembers the story of the Old Testament. In the end, however, the youngsters' contact and acquaintance with the refugees eliminates the fear and creates feelings of friendship and familiarity with them.

Answer: Keywords are “contact” and “acquaintance”

### 2.6.4 CONCLUSION

According to the Christian tradition, God is ...

... Father, who loves all people with no exceptions and discriminations. God-Father, being Love himself, calls all of us to love all of our **fellow humans, even our enemies**, if we want to be his real children.

## 2.7 FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE

**Instruction:** *The initial questionnaire is given to the students again, aiming at the final evaluation of the lesson. The comparison of the initial answers with the final ones reveals whether and to what extent the students have moved from their original positions. The correct answers are: 1B, 2C, 3B, 4A, 5A.*

After our discussions in class, attempt to answer the following questions. Compare your final answers with your original ones.

1. Why were the youngsters initially reluctant to help the refugees?
  - a. Because they did not want to waste time as they had planned to meet their friends.
  - b. Because they believed that refugees are dangerous to their homeland.
  - c. Because it was getting dark and they had to return to their homes.
  - d. I do not know / No answer
  
2. In the biblical narration of the Exodus, which people are involved?
  - a. Greeks and Syrians
  - b. Egyptians and Greeks
  - c. Egyptians and Jews
  - d. I do not know / No answer
  
3. In the biblical narration, which sea did the pursued people cross, in order to be saved:
  - a. The Aegean Sea
  - b. The Red Sea
  - c. The Mediterranean Sea
  - d. I do not know / No answer

4. Why is God shown, in the biblical narrative, to act violently and vengefully?
- a. In this way the faithful wanted to declare their trust in the one and only God, who is also the Savior of humankind.
  - b. Because God is violent and punishes those who do not follow His will.
  - c. Because God is just and His justice is sometimes rendered only by force.
  - d. I do not know / No answer
5. For Christians, God is the One who:
- a. Loves all men/women regardless of national origin, religious faith and social class.
  - b. Loves only those who believe in Him.
  - c. Like any father, He punishes those who want to harm His children, i.e. the faithful, even to the extent of using violence.
  - d. I do not know / No answer

## 2.8 ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS: MATERIAL FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

In order to enrich the discussion which will take place in the second class hour, the use of art is proposed, since art can help stimulate the creative and critical thinking of the students. To this end, a painting and a song are given.

### 2.8.1 WHEN PAINTING BECOMES THEOLOGY: DISCUSSION BASED ON WORKS OF ART

Marc Chagall's painting "The Crossing of the Red Sea" is chosen since the painter creates a theological opening, by including the perspective of God as presented in the New Testament; a God who not only avoids the use of violence, but is treated violently and accepts being sacrificed out of his love for humans. Thus, we consider that the main characteristic of this work is the inclusion of the crucified Jesus, and propose that the significance of this inclusion is discussed in class. This aspect of Chagall's work highlights the gradual progression of the revelation of God which begins with the first books of the Old Testament and culminates in the person of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

The work can be found here: [https://3.bp.blogspot.com/-o05XXbSK1r0/WbgtkzEU6EI/AAAAAAAAAB9I/eZ1oukmfffd4nADyMafrwNhB8WXkTnqACLcBGAs/s1600/crossing\\_the\\_red\\_sea\\_chagall.jpg](https://3.bp.blogspot.com/-o05XXbSK1r0/WbgtkzEU6EI/AAAAAAAAAB9I/eZ1oukmfffd4nADyMafrwNhB8WXkTnqACLcBGAs/s1600/crossing_the_red_sea_chagall.jpg).

### Work on a painting by Mark Chagall

Looking at Chagall's work

- a. Write down your answers to the following questions:

Which elements from the Bible narrations about the Crossing of the Red Sea can be traced in Chagall's painting?

Which questions come to your mind when seeing this work?

What would you like to explore further?

- b. Discuss the fact that the artist adds, on the distant horizon, the Crucified Jesus.

**Answer:** It portrays a God who not only does not exercise violence, but is treated violently and gets sacrificed out of his love for humans.

## **Commentary on Mark Chagall's painting 'The Crossing of the Red Sea'**

Mark Chagall created a number of paintings on the topic of the Crossing of the Red Sea between 1955 and 1973. As in most of his works, Chagall uses his own symbols and his own visionary style to express universal truths through the reality of the images he creates. We can see here how he places the characters portrayed into a dramatic coexistence, utilizing strong colors. In a sea interpreted in an ethereal blue, the white angel leads the Jews to their salvation, while Moses, in his bright yellow tunic, orders the sea to block the passage for the Egyptians, depicted in a red color full of despair. The narrative is complemented by secondary themes: A minute angel holds the Ten Commandments while, at the top of the painting, two images in the dark sky frame the savior angel. On the left, King David appears to be playing his harp, and in this way the painter reveals the historical path of the Jewish people. On the right, however, we are surprised to find the depiction of the crucified Jesus. Chagall, in this work as in many others, manages to incorporate opposites and to bridge gaps which existed for centuries between different religions. With the crucified Jesus he sheds a new light on the drama of those who seek escape from slavery and walk through suffering towards freedom with hope. In the orthodox understanding of this work, man is not alone on this path, for Jesus himself is suffering with him.

## 2.8.2 THE PRAYER OF THE REFUGEE: A DISCUSSION BASED ON A SONG

The first question aims to reinforce the student's empathy and it is, therefore, important to create the proper emotional climate in the classroom so that the student groups can express themselves spontaneously and freely. In the second question, the groups consider the prayer they have composed, and are invited to identify the elements which their composition has in common with the song, but also with the plot of the video. In this way, the treatment of the topic is enriched by stimulating an emotional as well as intellectual response. Simultaneously, evaluation of the progress of the learning process is facilitated, as students are encouraged to take a critical approach and, based on the teaching material (Bible, art, video story), to become responsible citizens against any form of violence.



Figure 2.6  
Nikolaos Gyzis, Greeks  
fleeing the Destruction of  
Psara, 1896-8  
Source: [https://commons.  
wikimedia.org/wiki/  
File:Gysis\\_Nikolaos\\_After\\_  
the\\_destruction\\_of\\_Psara.  
jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gysis_Nikolaos_After_the_destruction_of_Psara.jpg)

### The prayer of the Refugee

- The refugees are on the shores of Turkey, ready to board the boats prepared by the illegal traffickers. Before they leave, they feel the need to pray. In what words do you imagine they would pray to God at that moment?
- Let's listen to the song Exodus by Edith Piaf (available at: <https://safeyoutube.net/w/45HE>). Can you find common topics between the refugees' prayer you just composed, the song and the video we have seen?

## **Exodus (Edith Piaf)**

They left during the winter sun  
They left running through the sea  
To erase fear  
To override fear  
That life had nailed into the depths of their hearts

They left believing in the harvest  
From the old country of their song  
Their hearts singing with hope  
Their hearts bellowing with hope  
They have reclaimed the road of their memories

They have cried the tears of the sea  
They have recited so many prayers  
“Deliver us, our brothers!  
Deliver us, our brothers!”  
That their brothers will pull them towards the light

They are there in a new country  
That floats with the mast of their boat  
Their broken hearts of love  
Their hearts of love lost  
They have found the land of love

### **Work on the song Exodus**

After working with the song, the teacher can ask the students the following question: Do you think that the refugees in the story of the video we watched “found the land of love”?

## 2.9 GLOSSARY

Clarification of theological terminology, and also information on the historic personalities and places found in the book.

### **Canaan**

In the Old Testament, refers to the land settled by the Israelites, but also by its “Canaanite” inhabitants. The name means “country of purple” (Greek name “Phoenicia”) and comes from the main export product of the region, a substance used to dye fabrics deep purple. The land of Canaan is the Promised Land; the fulfillment of God’s promises to the people of Israel by enabling them to settle in this area after leaving Egypt.

### **Easter (Christian)**

with the feast of Easter, Christians celebrate the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, who gave man the prospect of life, and freedom from death and evil in all its manifestations. They celebrate the restoration of life in its entirety and its victory over death which was brought by Jesus Christ.

### **Exodus**

The book of Exodus is the second book of the Bible and the Hebrew Bible and belongs to the historical books of the Old Testament. Exodus, together with the books of Genesis, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy is the Pentateuch (in Hebrew **Law** (Torah). In the Greek translation of the Septuagint (LXX) it was called “Exodus”, because the central issue is the exit (ie the liberation) of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The protagonist in the Exodus is Moses.

### **Merneptah (1224-1204 BCE)**

The 3rd son of Ramses II and his wife Isetnofret (and 13th son of Ramses, overall). With his army, Merneptah pursued the Israelites to the sea, but was unable to prevent them from fleeing.

### **Moses**

Charismatic personality of the Jewish nation and religion. Moses was a leader, a hero, a legislator, a prophet and a mediator between God and his people. He led the people of Israel to liberation from the Egyptians, crossing the Red Sea and through the Sinai Desert for 40 years. According to Jewish and Christian tradition, Moses received the 10 commandments from God. He receives special honour as a prophet from both Christians and Muslims.

### **Oral Traditions (Old Testament)**

Words and narratives that Jews, both men and women, repeated to each other outside their tents in the desert, and in their homes, whether hovels or palaces. At the heart of these narratives has always been the conviction that God is the great protagonist in human life. Most of these narratives were transmitted in ways that were easy to decipher: narratives, images, quotes, poems. In this way they were indelibly engraved in the memory of people and everyone was able to understand them. Centuries later, these narratives began to be recorded and gradually, a collection of texts was created that later became the Old Testament.

### **Pesach (Jewish)**

The word Pesach means “passage”. Jews celebrating Pesach remember that their ancestors crossed the Red Sea from slavery in Egypt into freedom.

### **Ramses II (1290-1224 BCE)**

Also known as Ramses the Great. He was the third pharaoh of Egypt’s 19th dynasty and the most powerful of all Egyptian rulers.

### **Red Sea**

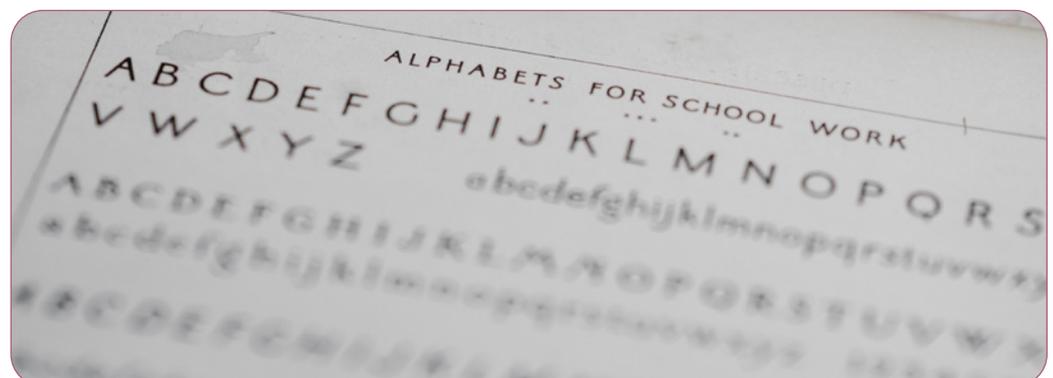
The narrow sea arm of the Indian Ocean between NE. Africa and SW. Asia, where it creates the ancient Arabian Gulf. At the time of the “Exodus” of the Israelites from Egypt, the Red Sea was also called the Sea of Reeds and was then a lake. The northern part, west of the Sinai Peninsula, is mentioned in the Old Testament book of Exodus as being crossed by the Israelites since, for a millennium, it was crossed only widthwise and never lengthwise.

### **Refugee**

Someone who is forced, by circumstances or by violence, to leave his or her home or place of permanent residence and seek refuge in a foreign country or country of ethnic origin. Often used in the plural to refer to populations of people moving in groups.

### **Testament**

The term literally means the last expression of a person’s will, but in the Bible it is used to describe a Hebrew word meaning “treaty”, “alliance” or “agreement”. However, in addition to the meaning it can have for human relationships, the term is used specifically to denote the particular agreement that governs God’s relationship (Gen. 9:8; Ex. 15:18; 17:1) with the people of Israel (Ex. 19-24) and aims to create the conditions for the salvation of all mankind. The responsibility for initiating the agreement lies with God, who determines its content and terms. But this does not abolish the freedom of man, who is free to accept or reject the agreement, which provides for rights and obligations for both God (faithfulness to promises, love and protection for his people) and man (faith in the One and Only God, and social justice). Thus the covenant does not define a God-master and man-slave relationship, but a father-son relationship (Ex. 4:22).



## 2.10 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

### Coast at a Greek island, close to the Turkish coast. Evening

Two youngsters, friends from school, have gone fishing on a rocky and steep coast. It's late afternoon. As they fish they talk.

STRATOS: *Have you heard? Yesterday, two more boats with refugees and migrants arrived on our island. But the sea was very rough and I heard their boat sank and most of them drowned.*

YIORGOS: *Saying the truth, I don't understand why they embark and risk drowning. And those who manage to reach our island, they live in miserable conditions. You see them everywhere.*

STRATOS: *Yeah, I know...*

YIORGOS: *My dad says that we can't afford more of them on the island. He also says that many of them come on purpose, in order to alter our faith and traditions. They are dangerous. May God put his hand.*

STRATOS: *What do you mean?*

YIORGOS: *My dad says that God stands by our side and that's why they are drowning, God doesn't let them carry out their plans for our country.*

STRATOS: *This reminds me of the story of the Red Sea Crossing we read the day before yesterday at school.*

### In the class of Stratos and Yiorgos

The teacher act with a bit of talent and with the help of slides showing illustrations on the story of the Red Sea Crossing. Some kids are very enthusiastic, some are a bit bored but the excitement of the teacher is contagious.

TEACHER: *And Lord said to Moses "Tell the Israelites to go forward. But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground. [...] And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers." [...] and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. [...] Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained.*

*But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.*

### Coast at a Greek island, close to the Turkish coast.

YIORGOS: *Exactly. That's what my dad says! As of then, so and now God protects his believers and punishes those who try to cause them harm.*

STRATOS: *Do you mean that God destroys people? Does he harm people?*

YIORGOS: *Ehh ... I don't know. I never thought about it, but why not?*

STRATOS: *So, some people are his favorites and some others, "let them go hell", as we use to say?*

YIORGOS: *I'm not sure, but it could be that way. After all, everything happens as God wants to. Isn't that what they say? God can do everything. God is omnipotent.*

STRATOS: *I don't know man... But I really need to go. I don't think God will help me on my geography test tomorrow.*

### Stratos strats walking away when Yiorgos sees a flickering flashlight in the sea and hears voices

YIORGOS: *Hey, Stratos, look!*

STRATOS: *Where?*

YIORGOS: *To the sea, yo! There's a light there. Voices too, can't you hear?*

STRATOS: *Yes, right. I hear something. Let's go closer to see...*

(From the side of the sea, voices are heard shouting in an incomprehensible language and in English they cry "Help")

STRATOS: *There are people ... Refugees!*

YIORGOS: *They ask for help. Let's go... (Yiorgos moves towards from the sea)*

STRATOS: *Go where, Yiorgos? Are you crazy? Let's go home. It's perilous here.*

YIORGOS: *No, Stratos. They ask for help.*

STRATOS: *And how will we help them? You think we can?*

YIORGOS: *I don't know. We'll see.*

(The Refugee boat hits the cliffs, gets slashed and starts sinking. The waves hitting the cliffs push the boat adrift back to the sea. The passengers cry for help. Voices and screams of women and children are heard. A man from the boat throws a rope to the youngsters. The end of the rope slides into the water).

STRATOS: *It's dangerous here. Let's go. Let's go to find someone to help.*

YIORGOS: *Let's try to catch the rope they threw to us.*

STRATOS: *And what to do with it? Can we pull the boat?*

YIORGOS: *We will tie the rope to the cliffs so they can pull it themselves. Come on, hustle, there is no time to waste!*

The youngsters manage to grab the rope and to tie it to a cliff. The passengers of the boat pull the rope and the boat, now half-deflated, finally approaches the rocky shore.

STRATOS: *A baby. He gives us a baby.*

YIORGOS (exhausted and soaked): *Now, let's go call for help.*

STRATOS: *Yes, let's go...*

### **Night at Yiorgos' home**

Yiorgos' mother dries his hair and sits on the bed near him.

MOTHER: *It was dangerous what you did today, you know?*

YIORGOS: *You mean I shouldn't have done it?*

MOTHER: *I mean... what you did was madness.*

*(Pause)*

YIORGOS: *Mom, do you think God can do evil?*

MOTHER: *How did you come to this, right now?*

YIORGOS: *Answer me.*

MOTHER: *Hmm, let me tell you... Since we call him "Father" I can't imagine him hurting his children.*

YIORGOS: *Yes, every father loves his children, but sometimes he gets angry. Do you think dad will be angry with me? You know his views on immigrants and refugees*

...

MOTHER: *I know. But also, I know that if he sees a fire burning, first he will put out the fire and then he will look for the arsonist.*

YIORGOS: *Do you mean that dad, being there in my place, he would do the same?*

MOTHER: *Yes, that's what I believe. Your dad may have his ideas, but he puts compassion above ideas.*

YIORGOS: *And what's your own opinion?*

MOTHER: *I think that since you were there, you did exactly what you had to do. I'm very proud of you.*

*(She kisses him, stands up and goes out of the room, turning off the light. Yiorgos lies on his bed and he recalls what happened a few hours ago. Shortly after, he falls asleep. He is exhausted).*

### **Next day at the old olive mill**

The boys look at the old olive mill while they approach.

STRATOS: *Lucky we were there, eh? Or was it God's intent; you think?*

YIORGOS: *My grandmother says that God acts in his own way and many times, we can't even imagine them.*

Arriving at the old olive mill, some of the refugees recognize them and approach them, smiling. One of the refugees, together with a girl of their age, comes to meet them.

REFUGEE GIRL: *You are the boys who tied the rope of our boat yesterday, aren't you?*

YIORGOS: *(somehow confused and shy) Yyyyes, eh, you know ... we ... it was by chance, I mean ...*

STRATOS: *(almost apologetically) Yes, yes, it just happened we were there.*

REFUGEE GIRL: *Thank you very much. Thanks to you we have been saved.*

YIORGOS: *No, don't say ... Everyone would do that.*

STRATOS: *It was pure luck, that is.*

REFUGEE GIRL: *Some people call it luck. I name it the Hand of God. Yesterday you became God's hand.*

The young girl approaches and gives Yiorgos something. She smiles at him and leaves. Yiorgos looks at his hand. The girl has given him a small glass bottle. He opens it and an exquisite fragrance comes out.

STRATOS: *What is it?*

YIORGOS: *Perfume. (He smells it.) Jasmine!*

STRATOS: *Jasmine. Divine! Come on, "God's hand", let's go now and you can give me a helping hand to clean our storeroom, as my father asked me to, otherwise nothing will save me from his hands!*

The two youngsters walk away laughing and teasing each other.

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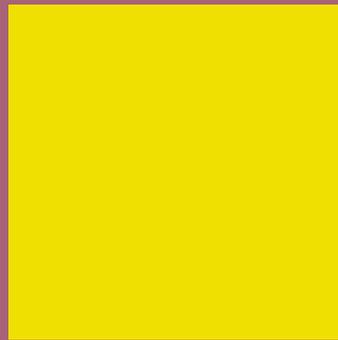
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# 3

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ENCOUNTER WITH THE  
ENVIRONMENT: SOCIAL AND  
ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

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## MODULE THREE

# SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

## 3.1 TEACHING AIMS

Whole books have been written and lots of discussions have taken place in recent years about the ecological crisis the world is facing. Individuals but also collective bodies have become aware and are struggling in various ways to fix the ecological problem. Orthodox theology highlights the main causes of the problem and, at the same time, suggests ways out of it. In the text that follows, the Ecumenical Patriarch describes in general terms the ecological crisis, briefly pointing at its essential causes and at our great responsibility for the protection of the environment.

Modern ecological problems are one aspect of the crisis of a culture focused on economy, a culture which is technocratic, individualistic, arrogant, a culture of quantitative criteria and numbers, of profit and consumption, of bliss and of unfettered freedom. The destruction of the environment is the result of a specific mode of economic, technological and social development, which despises both the human person and nature. For the first time in history, man has the capability to destroy life on Earth. Nuclear weapons are the pre-eminent symbol of the Promethean titanism of present day man. Facing the fact that today we can go beyond the limits, the idea of “moderation” – “moderation is the best thing” as the ancient Greek saying goes – acquires unprecedented relevance and value. As science penetrates deeper in the depths of the mystery of life and manipulates it, our responsibility to protect life becomes greater.”

(Excerpt from a speech by the Ecumenical Patriarch  
on the protection of the Environment

Source: [https://ntsireve.blogspot.com/2019/03/blog-post\\_9.html](https://ntsireve.blogspot.com/2019/03/blog-post_9.html))

In our approach to the topic “Encounter with the Environment”, we will, therefore, give the students an opportunity to discover the teachings of biblical and modern theological texts in order to examine and redefine values and attitudes connected with this issue. The central motive in the planning of our lesson is to provoke the interest of the students and encourage them in their own search for solutions to the environmental crisis which, unless we act immediately, is leading us to a total catastrophe.

### 3.1.1 GOAL OF TEACHING

#### Goals of Teaching

The lesson aims to help the students to discover and evaluate the Christian understanding of the sanctity of nature and to raise their awareness about the protection of the environment through their acquaintance with the ecological theological teachings of the Orthodox Church.

#### Goals for the students

- To gain an in-depth understanding of the interpretation and ecological implications of the Orthodox Christian teaching regarding the creation of the world and of man in the image of God.
- To discover the importance of eco-theology in Orthodox Christian thought and to become acquainted with representatives of these concepts.
- To evaluate the Christian teachings about the environment and human responsibility towards it, both locally and globally.
- To determine the personal responsibility of the believer, as well as their own responsibility, towards the ecological crisis.

#### Expected learning outcomes for students

- To learn the Christian teaching about the creation of the world and the mission of man to protect the environment, according to the Bible.
- To evaluate the Christian positions on the natural environment.
- To discover contemporary cases of important personalities inside the Orthodox Church who translated their words into inspirational action for the protection of the environment.
- To recognize the believer's responsibility for the ecological crisis locally and globally.
- To raise awareness and make environmental protection a top priority in their lives.

### 3.1.2 THEOLOGICAL REQUIREMENTS

To provide sound foundations for our the theological approach to the topic “Encounter with the environment”, we quote excerpts from the relevant literature, which formulate some basic theological positions of the Orthodox Church on the relationship between humanity and the environment::

1. The Christian believer respects the world as sacred, because the world is in a dialectical relationship with God, receiving the energies of the Holy Spirit. Thus mankind is the link between the world and God and functions as a priest who freely and consciously accepts the world that God gives to us and returns it as a gift to the Giver. Our task, then, is to transform the world into a “thanksgiving offering,” which has the potential to be integrated into every form of culture that preserves the sanctity of nature.

It seems that the ecological crisis is a crisis of culture. It is a crisis that has to do with the loss of the sacrality of nature in our culture. And I can see only two ways to overcome this. One would be the way of paganism. The pagan regards the world as sacred, because it is penetrated by divine presence; he therefore respects it to the point of worshipping it explicitly or implicitly. He never worries about its fate, for he believes in its eternity. The other way is that which we have tried to describe here. It is the Christian way, for the Christian regards the world as sacred, because it stands in dialectical relationship with God; thus he respects it (without worshipping it, since it has no divine presence in his nature), but he always worries about its fate: a breach of communion with God will amount to its extinction. Of these two ways it is the second one that gives to man responsibility for the fate of creation. The first sees man as a part of the world; the second sees him as the crucial link between the world and God, as the only person in creation that can lead it to survival. Unless we are to return to paganism, this second way would appear to be the only way to face the ecological crisis and respect again the sacrality of nature.

(John Zizioulas (Metropolitan of Pergamon),  
“Preserving God’s Cration”, *Theology in Green* 7.1993, p. 31)

There are three words that we Christians usually use to describe man's relationship with creation: king, treasurer and priest. The first of these, kings, has serious foundations in the Bible. In the description of Creation at the beginning of the book of Genesis, immediately after the creation of Adam in the image and likeness of God, man is given dominion over all animals (Gen. 1:26) and then he, exercising his right sovereignty, names every living creature (Gen. 2: 18-20). What is remarkable is that, in the description of Genesis, the royal office seems to be bestowed on man as a consequence of his creation in the image and likeness of God. God, as the king of the universe, is generous, has a tender and merciful heart. And man, therefore, as a king, if he wants to be a true image of divine majesty, he must display these very qualities. Ownership does not mean tyranny. Unfortunately, this has not been understood by Christians over the centuries, and the term king, otherwise legitimate, has practically encouraged an arrogant, insensitive mentality that is responsible for the current ecological crisis. That is why, in both America and Europe, efforts are being made today to avoid this term. If we recognize that we have misunderstood the meaning of our royal office, perhaps it would be better to speak of man as the steward of Creation. This at least has the advantage of making it clear that our power over Creation is not absolute but a giver. We are not its owners or bosses, because it belongs to God. It was just given to us with confidence. But even this term, of the housekeeper, has some disadvantages. We can consider it to imply a utilitarian, managerial approach to nature, such as to see it as an asset that we must cultivate and exploit. Here we must be careful not to objectify and depersonalize Creation. Do not see it as "something" but as "you". In view of these possible abuses of the terms "king" and "treasurer," it is wiser for us to adopt a third model: our calling as human beings is to stand as priests of Creation. Absolutely consciously, he takes the world into his own hands - the world that God gives to us - and offers this gift to the Giver, thus invoking His blessing on the whole physical order. Through this act of priestly offering, Creation communicates with God, and thus is saved, fulfills its purpose, and is transformed. This is the essence of the priesthood, a call that only human beings can fulfill. Our human duty, then, as priests of Creation, is to transform the world into a "thanksgiving offering"».

(Kallistos Ware, *Ecological Crisis and Hope*, Akritas, Athens 2008, pp. 36-39)

Human beings have a vital need to be in a *koinonia* of love, not only with the rest of humanity but also with the world of nature and the entire universe. If we continue to abuse nature rather than “use” it, there is a danger that the development of our technology will lead us to terrifying feats of self-destruction. Christianity delivered humanity from the fear inherent in magical beliefs and from the deification of nature; moreover, by cultivating an active rather than a passive attitude in human beings, Christianity also encouraged the development of science. In the end, however, modern humanity has lost any and all sense of the sacred and in fact has already arrived at the opposite extreme, gazing at nature with impious eyes that lack respect and are often filled with hostile cynicism rather than love. We have thus become increasingly alienated from nature; we behave like robbers of nature, shutting ourselves away in our man-made hideouts. But nature, too, can retaliate.

Some reconciliation between humanity and nature is urgently needed. It is time we understood that nature is something sacred. It does not lie outside the sphere of the Holy Spirit’s activity. In Christ, holiness became united with humanness; as a result, holiness no longer evokes fear, but inspires respect and love—indeed, it invites us to share in *koinonia*. The various elements in Orthodox worship that represent nature are not used as mere decoration but play an organic part in the service. Bread, wine, fire, and incense are integral components in a liturgy of loving communion. Rediscovering the dimensions of nature’s sacredness and its original harmony with humanity’s intrinsic nature constitutes an indispensable contribution toward achieving real global *koinonia*.

(Anastasios (Yannoulatos, Archbishop of Albania), *Facing the World: Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns*, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press & WCC Publications, Crestwood and Geneva, 2003, p. 36).

2. Evil does not only concern human relationships, but affects all material creation. Therefore, sin is not only a failure in human relationships, but also the failure of man in his relationship with nature. This position broadens the perspective we have had so far on ethics.

Evil is not just an issue for man, but it affects the whole of creation. Certainly evil presupposes freedom, and as such can only be produced by free persons. But the moment it comes to reality, evil pervades and upsets the entire created order. This is what makes Paul write the well-known “ecological” words of the letter to the Romans, chapter 8: “all creation sighs and accompanies until now ...”. Decay and death, sorrow and pain, are common experiences of all creatures, along with humans. Overcoming these evils on the other hand is expected to affect all buildings, not just people. Every pain and misery imposed on non-human beings is no less evil than that which falls on human beings. Cosmological prophecy and cosmological eschatology presuppose an understanding of evil that includes nature. They lead to a new conception of morality that goes beyond what we usually think of as moral or immoral. This morality is still waiting to find its place in our Christian consciences. We have become accustomed to perceiving sin in anthropological and social terms. But there is also sin against nature, since evil upsets the whole created order. Cosmology must enter our ethics, which requires a revolution in our education, in our sermons and in our textbooks.»

(John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamos, “Revelation and the Environment”,  
Synaxis 56 (1995), pp.17-21)

«The abuse of Creation must be considered a sin... To say that the abuse of material things is not just a technological omission but a moral offense may be obvious, but it is something that Christians in the past have overlooked too often. The tendency was to think that sin is related to the evil we do to our fellow human beings... As the abuse of land and air, water resources, plants and animals springs directly from greed and greed. Our egoism is indeed a sin, a deadly transgression, seeking repentance and correction.

(Kallistos Ware, Ecological Crisis and Hope,  
Akritas, Athens 2008, pp.35-36)

### 3. The ecological crisis is due to spiritual and moral causes.

It is clear that the present-day ecological crisis is due to spiritual and moral causes. Its roots are connected with greed, avarice and egoism, which lead to the thoughtless use of natural resources, the filling of the atmosphere with damaging pollutants, and to climate change. The Christian response to the problem demands repentance for the abuses, an ascetic frame of mind as an antidote to overconsumption, and at the same time a cultivation of the consciousness that man is a “steward” and not a possessor of creation. The Church never ceases to emphasize that future generations also have a right to the natural resources that the Creator has given us. For this reason, the Orthodox Church takes an active part in the various international ecological initiatives and has ordained the 1st of September as a day of prayer for the protection of the natural environment.

*(Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church to the Orthodox people and to all people of good will, Crete 2016)*

### 4. The ecological problem is always linked to the social issue of poverty and of human dignity.

[...] Scholars and theologians, in recent decades, have been discerning and directing our attention to the mutuality between ecology and human dignity—between the abuse of the environment and the abuse of human beings. One shining example is His-All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. In his book, “Encountering the Mystery”, [...], His All-Holiness writes: “Orthodox theology [...] recognizes the natural creation as inseparable from the identity and destiny of humanity, because every human action leaves a lasting imprint on the body of the earth. Human attitudes and behavior toward creation directly impact on and reflect human attitudes and behavior toward other people [...] Scientists estimate that those most hurt by global warming in years to come will be those who can least afford it. Therefore, the ecological problem of pollution is invariably connected to the social problem of poverty; and so all ecological activity is ultimately measured and properly judged by its impact and effect upon the poor (see Matt. 25).” And similarly, last year, in his opening address at the Ecumenical forum on modern slavery, His All-Holiness stated the following: “We are convinced that responding to the problem of modern slavery is directly and inseparably linked to creation care [...] The entire world is the body of Christ; just as human beings are the very body of Christ. The whole planet bears the traces of God, just as every person is created in the image of God. The way we respect creation reflects the way we respond to our fellow human beings. The scars we inflict on our environment reveal our willingness to exploit our brother and sister.” The vision that His All-Holiness expresses in these passages, and throughout his ministry, bears witness to Orthodox Christianity’s integrated understanding of ecology, theology, and human dignity.

*(Rev. Deacon Perry Hamalis,  
“Love God, Love thy Neighbor, Love the Trees:  
Environmental Justice in Orthodox Christianity”  
in Ecology, Theology and Human dignity in the Orthodox Christian Tradition,  
International Symposium on the Environment Proceedings,  
Seoul: Orthodox Metropolis of Korea, 2018, pp. 168-172)*

5. In the Orthodox Christian tradition the proposal that has been tested in practice for the solution of the ecological problem is ascetic exercise. Through ascetic self-transcendence, man learns to respect the sacrality of nature, as he limits his selfish desires, separating them from his real natural needs. Human desires have historically ranged between the deification of nature on the one hand and its devaluation on the other.

For the Christian, nature is not an impersonal and neutral object, even if created by a Supreme Being. Nature is the poem of the personal God-Word, and it reveals in every aspect the personal otherness of the creative energy of its poet. The term “natural theory” in the Christian vocabulary means the result of ascetic self-transcendence, the ascetic achievement of man overcoming his egocentric possessive and utilitarian priorities and experiencing his relationship with the world, as he experiences his relationship with a painting, sculpture, music composition or any other artwork.»

(Christos Yannaras, “Nature and History in the Book of Apocalypse”,  
*Synaxis*, 56 (1995), p.46)

Exercise does not simply mean fasting, vigilance and repentance, but any form of voluntary restraint, more simplicity at every level and manifestation of our daily lives. The ecological crisis can be solved - if a solution is still possible - only through our desire for self-limitation in the consumption of not only food but also all natural resources. It can only be solved if we make the distinction between what we want and what we need, between our selfish desires and our natural needs. Only through self-denial, through the decision to abstain, through the decision to sometimes say “no” to ourselves, will we rediscover our true place in the universe.

(Kallistos Ware, *The beginning of the day: the Orthodox approach to creation*,  
Akritas, Athens 2007, pp.26-27)

## 3.2 VIDEO PROJECTION AS A STARTING POINT FOR TEACHING

In this section, the students watch the video and then they answer an initial questionnaire, giving a first impression of their comprehension of the plot of the video and of its implications.



Figure 3.1  
Video Clip

### 3.2.1 VIDEO PLOT SUMMARY

In the classroom of Yiorgos and Stratos, the youngsters known to us from previous videos, the teacher of religious education explains the teaching of Genesis regarding the creation of the biosphere and the responsibility of mankind as a caretaker of it. The next day, the whole class goes for an excursion to the nearby beach, by the river. While in a joyful mood, the kids suddenly realize that there are dead fish and an awful odor at the river mouth and, after a short investigation, they find out that these are the results of the pollution produced by a nearby olive mill. The kids and the teacher discuss how this practice conflicts with the Bible teachings. In a third scene, Yiorgos and Stratos speak with Yiorgos' family on the topic of pollution. Yiorgos' father insists that pollution is insignificant compared to the benefits of the olive mill and that there is no theological teaching concerning environmental issues; but all of a sudden, in the news bulletin on the television, there is a speech by the Ecumenical Patriarch, explaining that mistreatment of the environment is a sin, proving Yiorgos father to be totally wrong..

### 3.2.2 COMPREHENSION QUESTIONNAIRE

**Instruction:** *Having watched the video, students are asked to answer the following multiple-choice questions individually. These questions aim to help the teacher assess the extent of the students' understanding of the content of the video and to evaluate their views on the relationship between environment and religion. The same questions are to be answered by the students again, individually, at the end of the lesson in order to create some measurable results about understanding and change of opinion. For this reason, the correct answers are given only in the final questionnaire.*

Based on the video you watched, try to answer the following questions.

1. *In the video we watched the theme of the creation of the world was connected:*
  - a. With the charitable work of the Church
  - b. With religious worship
  - c. With the protection of the environment
  - d. I do not know / No answer
  
2. *The pollution observed by the children during the excursion comes from:*
  - a. The waste of the nearby olive mill
  - b. The sewage from an oil tanker that sank on a nearby beach
  - c. Wind turbines
  - d. I do not know / No answer
  
3. *In the video, the youngsters support the view that in order to stop the pollution of the environment it is necessary:*
  - a. To shut down the factory
  - b. To press the factory to comply with the laws and rules of environmental protection
  - c. To dispose of the waste in another area
  - d. I do not know / No answer

4. *What does the Ecumenical Patriarch in the video characterize as a sin?*
- a. The pollution of the environment
  - b. The biodiversity of creation
  - c. Child labor
  - d. I do not know / No answer
5. *Regarding the protection of the environment, what do you consider that the Christian Church do: The pollution of the environment*
- a. It does not care
  - b. It does not include it in its priorities
  - c. It is interested
  - d. I do not know / I did not understand

### **3.2.3 TOPICS FOR RESEARCH**

The video we watched presents the topic: "Encounter with the environment". The main issues and questions we will need to address are:

- a. the mission of mankind for the transformation of creation with respect to its sacrality.
- b. the failure of mankind's relationship with the environment.
- c. the responsibility of mankind for the protection of the environment and the practices that we can draw from the Orthodox tradition for a way out of the ecological crisis.

**Instruction:** *With the following questions we aim to engage the students in the issue that emerges in the story of the video. They can express their positions and at the same time speak of their personal experiences from relevant examples.*

### **Exercise 1**

Based on the screened video, imagine the decision made by Yiorgos and his classmates made regarding the problem of the pollution created by the olive mill.

#### **Indicative answer:**

The students may write a letter to the director of the mill, pointing out the problems that have been created in the environment. They can address this letter to the local authorities too.

### **Exercise 2**

Have you heard or witnessed similar cases of environmental pollution? Mention some of them.

#### **Indicative answer:**

Problems of environmental pollution from meat processing waste or from fertilizer processing etc.

## 3.3 ISSUES WHICH WE WILL EXAMINE

The problem of environmental pollution is extensive nowadays and poses a serious, global threat to life on the planet. But how did we reach this point? What did we fail to notice along the way? Can we prevent greater catastrophes, even now? What is our responsibility towards the environment?

Let us look at the answers to the above questions which can be obtained by drawing first from the Bible, and then from the interpretive approach of the Orthodox Christian tradition.

**Instruction:** *Our work with the students around the topic of the environment will be founded on the description of the creation of the world and of mankind as given in Genesis. In this passage we find the basic teachings of the Christian faith regarding the relationship between mankind and creation:*

- *All nature is a creation of the God of love and as such is only good.*
- *Mankind, created in the image of God, receives the whole of creation from God, with dominion over it, and accepts the responsibility to care for it and protect it.*

*The biblical text should be read by the teacher.*

### 3.3.1 THE BOOK OF GENESIS (GEN: 1:27-31 & 2:8,15 NRSV)

#### **The book of Genesis (Gen: 1:27-31 & 2:8,15 NRSV)**

<sup>27</sup>So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup>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." <sup>29</sup>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." <sup>30</sup>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. <sup>31</sup>God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

<sup>8</sup>And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. [...] <sup>15</sup> The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.



Figure 3.2  
Aquarelle by Vaso Gogou

### 3.3.2 WHAT I NEED TO KNOW IN ORDER TO STUDY THE ABOVE BIBLICAL PASSAGE

The following information is necessary for the processing of the biblical narrative. They can be read in the class, or individually by the students, who are then required, in the following exercise, to fill in the blanks with the appropriate words. With this work we evaluate whether the biblical text and the interpretive information have been understood.

**In the image:** The phrase that “man was created in the image of God” does not refer to external features, but to the **spiritual gifts of mankind**, such as reason, will, conscience, freedom, etc., as well as dominion over nature. This is what distinguishes mankind from the rest of creation.

**He created man and woman:** From the first moment of his creation, **the human being is understood as a social being**, as something that exists only in communion, in a relationship.

**Fill the earth and subdue it:** The authority of mankind over nature is granted by God, implying accountability to God for the proper administration of nature. Only the creator, God, is an absolute sovereign over creation and consequently **mankind can become sovereign only by becoming a co-creator**.

**God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good:** With this phrase the Bible makes clear on the one hand the value of God’s creative work and on the other hand **the fact that God, being good himself, can only do good**. Therefore, the God of love is not responsible for the ugly and bad things in the world.

**God planted a garden in Eden, in the east:** This image contains all the elements that allow the reader to imagine the beauty of the place that God prepared for man's dwelling. The word "**Eden**" means **pleasure**. In the translation of the Septuagint the term "Eden" is given not as a place name, but as a noun: "Paradise". The word "paradise" is of Persian origin and means a large garden with many trees and various plants. The garden is placed in the east because the west was considered, according to the perceptions of the time, the place where death dominates, while on the contrary the east is a symbol of life. Of course, the image of the Garden of Eden is not found in any particular place on Earth. It is a boundless space covering the whole earth, it is **the kingdom of man throughout creation**. The biblical author draws the image of the Garden of Eden from various traditions and myths that existed at that time among the peoples of Mesopotamia. He uses an image familiar to his readers to proclaim an important truth: that man's happiness depends on his relationship with God and his harmonious relationship with the environment.

**God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it:** God plants the garden, he himself places man in it and he invites man to work to make the world his exclusive area through his own work. Man did not have the whole world as his own immediately, nor did he dominate all of creation, nor was his relationship with God a complete and perfect communion. **Man is therefore called to a dynamic course**, in order to become like God and **become co-creator with him**.

### 3.3.3 EXERCISE

Fill the blanks by choosing the appropriate word in parentheses based on what you read in the biblical text and the above information.

God, after creating the world, finally saw all of His creations and rejoiced because they were **very good** (very good / really many). Man was created in the image of God, which means that, among all creation, only man has spiritual qualities. According to the Bible, God created man and woman, to show us that man is a **social** (social / reproductive) being. Man was also instructed by God to rule over the whole earth. This does not mean that man dominates over creation, but that he is accountable to God for the proper **administration** (consumption / administration) of the creation. The Bible also says that God planted a garden in the east of Eden and God put man in this beautiful garden to live, giving him the command to **cultivate** (cultivate / dominate) it and to **take care of** (control / take care of) it. Of course, this garden was not in a specific place, but it includes the whole **Earth** (Earth / Mesopotamia).

The students are asked to read the verses of Psalm 65 individually and to answer the questions that follow. Our goal is to detect the relationship between God, the human beings and the creation. For the relation of the humanity with creation, students are invited to read the quoted text by Alexander Schmemmann.

### From the Book of Psalms (Ps. 65:9-11)

<sup>9</sup> You visit the earth and water it,  
you greatly enrich it;  
the river of God is full of water;  
you provide the people with grain,  
for so you have prepared it.  
<sup>10</sup> You water its furrows abundantly,  
settling its ridges,  
softening it with showers,  
and blessing its growth.  
<sup>11</sup> You crown the year with your bounty;  
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.



Figure 3.3  
Aquarelle by Vaso Gogou

### Exercise

In the verses of the Psalm that you just read, highlight words or phrases that show the relationship of God with creation.

### Indicative answer:

Words or phrases that the students should probably highlight: you visit, you provide, you enrich, you prepare, blessing, softening, you crown with your bounty, your tracks overflow with richness.

## From the works of Alexander Schmemmann

All that exists is God's gift to man, and it all exists to make God known to man, to make man's life communion with God. It is divine love made food, made life for man. [...] God blessed the world, blessed man, blessed the seventh day (that is, time), and this means that He filled all that exists with His love and goodness, made all this "very good." So the only natural (and not "supernatural") reaction of man, to whom God gave this blessed and sanctified world, is to bless God in return, to thank Him, to see the world as God sees it and—in this act of gratitude and adoration—to know, name and possess the world.

*(Alexander Schmemmann, For the life of the world,  
St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 1998, pp. 14-15)*

### Exercise

Which truths about man's relationship with creation does the above text reveal to us?

#### **Indicative answer:**

Man is called "to see the world the way God sees it; and in the act of gratitude and worship, to know, to name and to possess the world."

## 3.4 MAN AS THE RULER OF CREATION

**Instructions:** *Based on the answers that we receive from the students about the relationship between man and creation, we will elaborate more on what it means that man names and possesses the world. This notion of possession of the world in combination with the dominance that we read in the biblical text can create questions and misunderstandings in the students' perception of the relationship between man and the environment. It is also necessary to understand what it means that man "gives names" to the world. We will find material for the elaboration of the above in a) the text of Kallistos Ware and b) the fresco by Theophanes of Crete.*

- a. Text by Kallistos Ware:** *We suggest that, after the students read the text, there can be a discussion in the class that will highlight the meaning of human sovereignty in creation. They will also do the work 4.3.2*
- b. Fresco by Theophanes of Crete:** *We suggest that the students, after observing carefully the picture, read the commentary on the picture and discuss the meaning of naming.*

In the book of Genesis we read that God, after creating humans as man and woman, blessed them and said to them, "fill the earth and subdue it." With the help of the following text, try to find what it means to make man sovereign over the whole creation.

For in Genesis account, our dominion over the creation is a consequence precisely of the fact that we are created in the divine image. Our exercise of dominion, then, so far from being selfish and oppressive, is to reflect the attributes of God, our archetype. We are to display towards creations nothing less than the gentle and tender-hearted compassion that is characteristic of God himself. [...] Let us treat nature as a "thou", not an "it". [...] It is our human vocation to be priest of the creation. The essence of priesthood [...] is to offer, to give thanks and to bless. The priest [...] is the one who takes the world into his or her hands and then offers it back to God, thereby bringing down God's blessing upon that which he or she offers. Through this act of priestly offering, creation is brought into communion with God himself. Such is the essence of priesthood; such is our God-given vocation as human beings; and it is a vocation that only human beings can perform. By acting in this manner as priests of creation, we, human beings, transform the world into a "eucharistic" offering.

*(Kallistos Ware, The beginning of the day: the Orthodox approach to creation, Akritas, Athens 2007, pp. 23-25)*

## Exercise

Based on what you have discovered in the above text, can you formulate in a sentence what does it mean for you that man becomes sovereign in creation?

### Indicative answer

Sovereignty does not mean the predominance of man over creation with selfishness and oppression, but man, as an image of God, should be express himself with kindness and mercy, just as God does. Nature is to be perceived by man as a person, that is, a “you” and not as an impersonal and neutral “it”. That’s why man is asked by God to become a priest of the creation, i.e. to take the world into his own hands, to transform it and to give it back as a gift to God, bringing it in relation to Him.



Figure 3.4  
Source: Wikimedia  
Commons, [https://  
az.wikipedia.org/wiki/  
Fayl:Adam\\_naming\\_  
animals\\_-\\_Moni\\_Ayou\\_  
Nikolaou\\_\(Meteora\).jpg](https://az.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fayl:Adam_naming_animals_-_Moni_Ayou_Nikolaou_( Meteora).jpg)

(Theophanes of Crete, “Adam gave names to all the animals, to the birds of the sky and to the wild beasts”. (Gen. 9: 19-20), fresco, 16th century, St Nikolaos Anapafsas, Meteora, Greece)

### Comment on the image

Man is a creator in the image of God the Creator. He gives name to things and in this way he gives them meaning, he creates things by renewing the Creation of God and in this way he reveals the divine glory in ever new forms

(Kallistos Ware, *Ecological Crisis and Hope*, Akritas, Athens 2008, p.93)

## 3.5 SO FAR WE HAVE UNDERSTOOD...

At this point of our teaching process we need to summarize what the students have discovered and understood so far on the relationship between man and creation.

... that the world was created with love and care by God, and man was asked to take care of it. **Man** is sovereign on the creation, but this does not mean that he becomes its dominator, thus destroying it. It means that he functions as a priest **who receives the whole world as a gift and a blessing from God** and his responsibility **is to act creatively inside it and to offer it back to its Donor** with perfect respect to each one of his creations.

## 3.6 TEXTS FROM THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Our next teaching step is the engagement with texts from the Orthodox Christian tradition that confront the ecological crisis, namely the causes of the crisis, the ways out of it and the great responsibility of all of us for the present and future of the environment.

The questions that still remain are:

- What are the causes of the ecological crisis we experience today?
- Is there a way out of the crisis and what is it?
- What is our duty regarding the environment?

We can draw answers from the Orthodox Christian tradition

In fact, the present crisis is not outside of us, a crisis in our natural environment, but a crisis within us, in the way we humans think and feel. The real problem is not in the ecosystem, but in the human heart. It is so true what has been said, that we suffer from ecological heart failure. This means that the real problem is not technological or economic, but deeply spiritual. If the atmosphere is increasingly polluted, if lakes and rivers are poisoned, if forests die and the green meadows of the earth become deserted, it is because we humans are alienated from God and from our true selves... The most urgent need is not for more complex scientific skills, but for a collective repentance movement, with the literal meaning of the Greek term, which is "change of law". We need to change the way we think about God, the world, and ourselves.

(Kallistos Ware, *Ecological Crisis and Hope*, Akritas, Athens 2008, 34-35)

It is clear that the present-day ecological crisis is due to spiritual and moral causes. Its roots are connected with greed, avarice and egoism, which lead to the thoughtless use of natural resources, the filling of the atmosphere with damaging pollutants, and to climate change. The Christian response to the problem demands repentance for the abuses, an ascetic frame of mind as an antidote to overconsumption, and at the same time a cultivation of the consciousness that man is a "steward" and not a possessor of creation.

(*Message of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church to the Orthodox people and to all people of good will*, Crete 2016)

The tendency was to consider sin to be related to the evil we do to our fellow human beings [...] As the abuse of land and air, water resources, plants and animals springs directly from greed and greed our selfishness is indeed a sin, a deadly transgression, seeking repentance and correction

*(Kallistos Ware, Ecological Crisis and Hope, Akritas, Athens 2008, 35-36)*

### 3.6.1 THEREFORE **Exercise 1**

The causes of the ecological crisis according to the Orthodox Christian point of view are:

#### **Indicative answer:**

The causes are not in the ecosystem, but in the human heart. In other words, the deeper causes are spiritual and moral. Greed, and selfishness lead to environmental disaster.

#### **Exercise 2**

The way out of the ecological crisis according to the Orthodox Christian point of view is:

#### **Indicative answer:**

There can be a way out if we understand that the abuse of creation is a sin. That is why we need to repent, that is, to change the way we think about God, the world, and ourselves. This is the literal meaning of the Greek word "repentance", which is composed of after + mind; that is, I change my way of thinking and my way of life. So this change means in practice reducing overindulgence and overconsumption through restraint and asceticism.



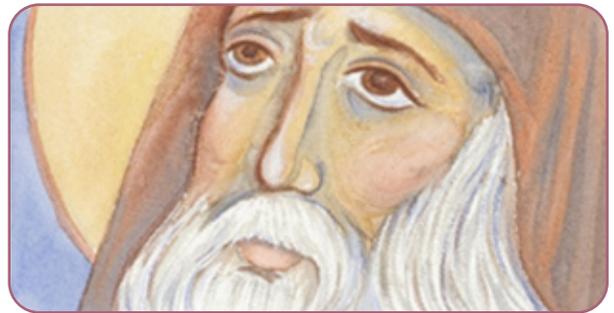
Figure 3.5  
Aquarelle by Vaso Gogou

## 3.7 THE SAINTS OF THE CHURCH AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

**Instruction:** Our final step in the first teaching hour is to reference incidents from the life of saints of the Christian church which illustrate a relationship of love and care for the environment. We suggest that the students be divided into small groups and that each group choose a saint and identify the loving relationship that this saint had with the environment. Each group is then asked to convey the ecological message of the narrative, creating their own poster. A variety of painting techniques and media can be used or collage posters or digital posters can be created using the appropriate tools. At the end, the posters will be posted in the classroom and the students will comment on them. The aim of this exercise is for the students to creatively and imaginatively express what they have understood from their involvement with the topic “the encounter with the environment”.

### Saint Silouan the Athonite

loved not only people but also all of God’s creation. Looking at the blue sky and the white clouds, he said: “How great is our Lord and how beautifully He made everything! His glory is evident in all things around



us. All we have to do is take care of all them, with love and to glorify Him joyfully for His rich gifts. The heart that has learned to love, mourns for all creation, even for a green leaf if it is cut without need.”

### Saint Porphyrios of Kafsokalivia

narrates: “Once a woman came and brought me her goats and asked me: Can you pray for my goats, for they are not doing well? The woman was sad and I felt sorry for her. I got up. The goats came to me by themselves. I stretched out my arms and read a prayer. They were all near me, raising their heads and looking at me. A male one came closer. He bent down and kissed my hand. He wanted me to stroke him. I stroked him and he was pleased.

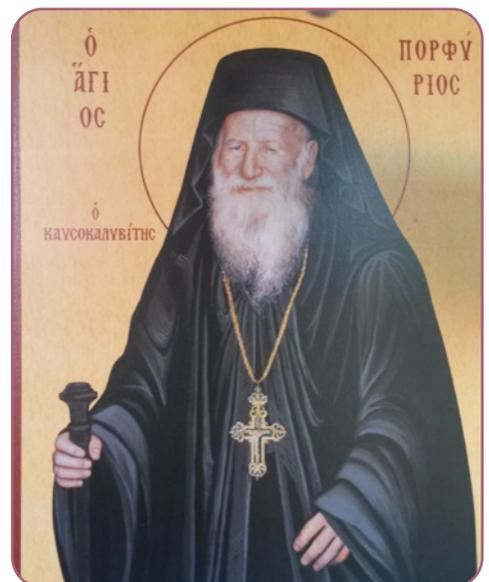


Figure 3.6  
Saint Silouan the  
Antonite, aquarelle by  
Vaso Gogou

Figure 3.7  
St Porphyrios of  
Kafsokalivia, Icon of  
Saint Porphyrios in the  
monastery of Panagia  
Eleousa, Achaea, Greece  
by Peloponnisios via  
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been changed and  
can be found at [https://  
upload.wikimedia.org/  
wikipedia/commons/  
thumb/d/d0/Saint\\_  
Porphyrios.jpg/800px-  
Saint\\_Porphyrrios.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/d/d0/Saint_Porphyrrios.jpg/800px-Saint_Porphyrrios.jpg)

They gathered around me and looked up. They were looking me in the face. I blessed them. I was talking and praying. All that concerns nature is of great assistance to us in our spiritual life, by the grace of God. I myself am moved to tears of joy whenever I feel the harmony of nature.”

**Saint Gerasimus of Jordan** lived as a monk in the desert around the River Jordan. One day, while he was on the banks of the river, he heard the dreadful roar of a lion in pain. Guided by the cries of the beast and without any fear, he found himself in front of a huge lion. The king of the animals appeared to be in great pain. The saint took pity on the creature of God, and, as if it could talk to him, asked it where it hurts. The proud beast approached trustfully and showed the saint its front paw. A sharp reed was the cause of the problem. The saint carefully pulled the reed from the animal’s paw and treated the wound with great care. After that, the lion became the faithful and inseparable companion of Saint Gerasimus. It followed him wherever he went, and served him, wanting to express his great gratitude.

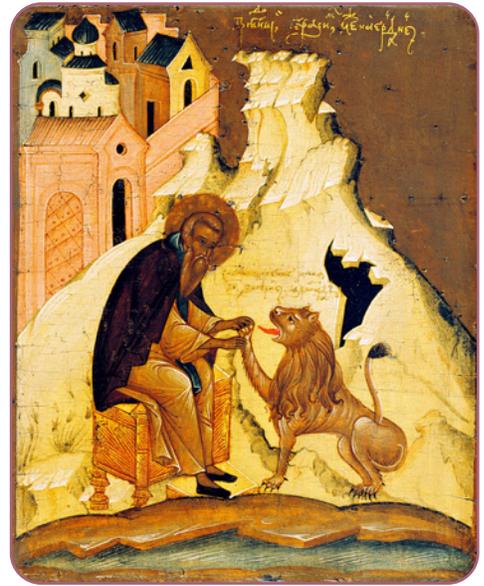


Figure 3.8  
St Gerasimus of Jordan  
Source: Wikimedia  
Commons: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=73126343>

**Saint Amfilochios** lived in Patmos, in the monastery of St John the Theologian. The elder often used to say: “Do you know that God gave us another commandment, which is not mentioned in the Bible? It is the commandment to love trees. “Whoever plants a tree, plants hope, plants peace, plants love and has the blessing of God.” In the sacrament of confession, the elder Amfilochios would listen to the mistakes and the sins of the people; their sufferings and their trials, their questions. He comforted them and advised them, encouraging them to make good and honorable decisions and to repent, that is, to change their way of thinking and living. And he advised them to plant and take care of a tree, to show their repentance.

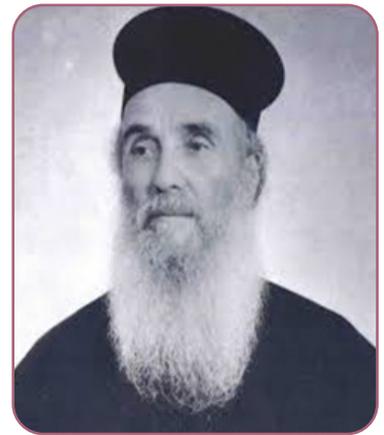


Figure 3.9  
St Amfilochios of Patmos,  
<https://www.saint.gr/4444/saint.aspx>

(Selections from the book: Drips of God’s love, the Saints and the Environment, Holy Monastery of Chrysopigi, Chania, 2015)

**3.7.1 EXERCISE** Choose one of the above stories. Write down which attitude towards the environment is pointed out in this story, in one sentence.

## 3.8 FEEDBACK QUESTIONNAIRE

**Instruction:** *The students are asked to respond to the initial questionnaire again, as a way of evaluating the impact of the lesson. By comparing the initial answers with the final ones, the extent to which the students have altered their opinions may be assessed.*

After our discussions in class, attempt to answer the following questions. Compare your final answers with your original ones.

1. *In the video we watched the theme of the creation of the world was connected:*
  - a. With the charitable work of the Church
  - b. With religious worship
  - c. With the protection of the environment
  - d. I do not know / No answer

Answer 1: C

In the video we watched, the theme of the creation of the world was linked to the protection of the environment because God gave man the creation (the garden of Eden) to look after and take care of it.

2. *The pollutions observed by the children during the excursion comes from:*
  - a. The waste of the nearby olive mill
  - b. The sewage from an oil tanker that sank on a nearby beach
  - c. Wind turbines
  - d. I do not know / No answer

Answer 2: A

The local oil mill was responsible for the sewage that polluted the environment.

3. *In the video, the youngsters support the view that in order to stop the pollution of the environment it is necessary:*
- a. To shut down the factory
  - b. To press the factory to comply with the laws and rules of environmental protection
  - c. To dispose the waste in another area
  - d. I do not know / No answer

Answer 3: B

The kids' goal is not to close the factory or relocate the problem, but to abide by the laws governing the protection of the environment.

4. *The Ecumenical Patriarch in the video characterizes as a sin:*
- a. The pollution of the environment
  - b. The biodiversity of creation
  - c. Child labor
  - d. I do not know / No answer

Answer 4: A

The Ecumenical Patriarch in the video refers to the pollution of the environment, which he characterizes as a sin. Child labor is also a sin, but it is not the subject of the video. Biodiversity is part of creation and of course it is not a sin.

5. *What do you consider to be the attitude of the Christian Church regarding the protection of the environment?*
- a. It does not care
  - b. It does not include it in its priorities
  - c. It is interested
  - d. I do not know / I did not understand

Answer 5: C

Pollution of the environment destroys God's creation, and therefore it is harmful for man too. That is why the Church cares about the protection of the environment.

## 3.9 ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

In the second teaching hour, it is proposed to enrich the discussion by the use of texts and works of art, which will give impetus to the creative and critical thinking of the students. The focus of the discussion can be:

- a. Ways in which the ecological crisis is linked to issues of human dignity and to the social issues of oppression and exploitation of people.
- b. The great responsibility of the Church, but also of every human being, for the protection of the environment.
- c. The protection of the environment is an immediate priority because time margins have narrowed dramatically.

The teacher has the option to choose, depending on the ability and the interests of the class, one or more of the above axes with the corresponding material and the activities that accompany it.

### 3.9.1 ECOLOGY AND HUMAN DIGNITY

The ecological issue also has serious social implications, and it is very important for our students to recognize them.

The teacher reads the following text to the class, and discusses with the students how environmental hazards threaten the most disadvantaged groups in society. The examples of Chicago and Korea show us that degraded social groups are forced to live oppressed in a polluted environment. This text gives the opportunity to connect the ecological crisis with human dignity.

At the end of the discussion the teacher invites the students to answer the question:

Explain why the responsibility of man for the protection of the environment is at the same time the responsibility for the achievement of social justice.

#### **Indicative answer**

As Christians we have a great responsibility not only to protect the environment, but also to fight for the protection of poor and oppressed social groups, most affected by environmental pollution. All people are children of God and the whole planet is also the creation of God. The respect we need to show for creation includes and reflects the way we interact with our fellow human beings. We need, therefore, to replace the domination and exploitation of the environment and of fellow human beings with the love and creativity given to us as a gift from God, of whom we are “images” of Him.

This is an example of what scholars call “environmental racism,” which is one form of environmental injustice. It provides us with a picture of the interconnection between polluting the environment and oppressing human beings; between abuse of the natural world and abuse of persons; between ecological harm and loss of human dignity. Citizens of Chicago who live in “red zones” carry a disproportionate amount of the environmental risk because they are less wealthy, less educated, and less connected to the politicians who determine where high-polluting businesses can be located. In short, the poor are trapped, and any effort to move elsewhere presents different obstacles and injustices. [...] Ecology and human dignity are inseparably connected, for good and for ill.[...] Recent studies on Environmental Inequity here in the Republic of Korea, for example, consider the “Toxic Release Inventory (TRI)” and show that distribution of environmental risks and benefits are not evenly balanced across different sociopolitical groups on the peninsula.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the study suggests, as more foreigners migrate to Korea and settle in low-income urban neighborhoods, these immigrant-concentrated neighborhoods tend to be targeted as locations for new factories and waste management facilities, which further concentrates environmental harms among the most vulnerable and powerless members of society.

(Rev. Deacon Perry Hamalis, “Love God, Love thy Neighbor, Love the Trees: Environmental Justice in Orthodox Christianity”  
*in Ecology, Theology and Human dignity in the Orthodox Christian Tradition, International Symposium on the Environment Proceedings, Seoul: Orthodox Metropolis of Korea, 2018, p. 176-180*)

### 3.9.2 WORK OF ART

In order to delve into the third axis, i.e. how dramatically the time frame for environmental protection has narrowed, we will use Isaac Cordal's sculpture "Politicians discussing global warning". In this work, Cordal shows a group of senators talking, while the waters of the world are rising, gradually swallowing them. The art work can be found here: <http://cementeclipses.com/Works/follow-the-leaders/>.

The elaboration of the work that will open the discussion in the classroom will be done with the routine "Interpretation - Justification" of Artful Thinking, which is a method of teaching through the art proposed and applied by David Perkins, and developed by Harvard Project Zero in partnership with Traverse City for Michigan Public Schools. The application utilizes visual arts (painting, sculpture, architecture), musical and literary works. The tools of artful thinking are called routines. The main aim of the method is the development of critical and creative thinking of students through the potential of art.

Based on the routine "Interpretation - Justification" students answer the following questions:

- What do you see happening in this work?
- Why do you say that?

With these questions we ask the students to observe the work carefully and to interpret the work, explaining their observations and interpretation.

In the discussion that will follow, we aim to raise their awareness of how narrow the time limits have been for saving the environment and how great is the responsibility of the world's leaders, and not only, for immediate action.

### 3.9.3 STORY FOR THREE LITTLE DEVILS

The following text by Kallistos Ware also contributes in an original way, with an anecdote, to the discussion about the narrow time we have to act to save the environment, as it draws our attention to the procrastination that characterizes us.

The teacher reads the text to the class and asks the students to answer the question: What is the ecological extension of the following anecdote?

#### **Indicative answer:**

The answer given by the third devil "I will tell them that there is no reason for any haste" highlights our procrastination in taking responsibility, especially in the face of strong environmental issues. This procrastination becomes another cause for evil to triumph.

It is a story about three little devils who finished their education in hell. Just before they were sent to earth, they appeared before the devil for his final examination. Turning to the first, the leader asked: "What will you tell them when you ascend to earth?" "I will tell them that there is no God," replied the first devil. "It does not say much," said the examiner, "they have heard it many times. The problem is that many of them know Him personally." He turned to the second devil "what will you tell them?" asked. "I will say that there is no hell," replied the second. "Ah, I find that smarter, but unfortunately it will not catch on. Many of them are already living in hell." Finally he asked the third: "And what will you tell them?". And the third replied: "I will tell them that there is no reason for any haste." "Wonderful!" exclaimed the arch-devil. "Go and start working!" This is definitely a joke with ecological implications.

(Kallistos Ware, *Ecological Crisis and Hope*,  
Akritas, Athens 2008, pp.84-85)

## 3.10 GLOSSARY

**Amfilochios of Patmos, Saint:** Born in 1889 in Patmos, a Greek island where, according to Christian tradition, St John the Theologian wrote the book of Revelation. St Amphilochios became a monk in 1905 in the Monastery of St John the Theologian and in 1935 he was elected as abbot. He died in 1970. In 2018 the Ecumenical Patriarchate declared him a saint. His memory is celebrated on April 16.

**Ascetic Ethic:** The struggle of the Christian to overcome the failures which strengthen and develop the ego, through prayer, fasting, vigil and charity, and thus restore the relationship with God, fellow humans and the whole of creation.

**Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch:** The 270th “Archbishop of Constantinople - New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church”, according to his exact title. Born on the island of Imbros in 1940. He has been recognized as “The Green Patriarch” for his initiatives for the protection of the environment and his efforts to raise the awareness of Christians on ecological issues.

**Biodiversity (or biological diversity):** This term refers to the sum of the genes, biological species and ecosystems of an area. The large number and diversity of contemporary life forms on earth is the result of hundreds of millions of years of evolutionary history of creation. Today there is a decline in biodiversity on the planet, due to a number of causes such as environmental pollution, deforestation, desertification, water pollution and increased predation.

**Eucharist:** The offering of thanks by man to God, fellow human beings and the natural environment. The core of this offering is the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharist is the basic sacrament in the Orthodox Church, in which the faithful, communing with the Body (bread) and Blood (wine) of Christ, are united with God and with each other.

**Gerasimus of Jordan, Saint:** Born in Lycaea in 5th century AD. In 451 AD he became a monk in the Jordan desert and later founded a monastery near the city of Beth Hoghlah. He died in 475 AD and his memory is celebrated on March 4.

**Mesopotamia:** The name given by the ancient Greeks to the area bounded by the Rivers Tigris (to the east) and Euphrates (to the west). The name defines a large area, which includes the valleys of the two rivers and their tributaries, most of which lies in contemporary Iraq.

**Porphyrios of Kafsokalivia, Saint:** Born in 1906 in the village of Agios Ioannis in Evia. At the age of 13 he went to Mount Athos and stayed there for 6 years. In 1926 he was ordained a priest and went to the Monastery of St Nikolaos in Evia. In 1940 he was appointed as priest of the church of St Gerasimos in the Athens Polyclinic where he served until 1973. He died in 1991. In 2013 the Ecumenical Patriarchate declared him a saint. His memory is celebrated on December 2.

**Psalms:** One of the books of the Old Testament which is essentially a collection of 150 psalms. The name comes from the stringed instrument “psalter”, which accompanied the chanting of the psalms. The Psalms are a typical work of lyrical religious poetry.

**Repentance:** The ecclesiastical term “repentance” can be understood as a “change of mind”. In Greek the corresponding word is “metanoia”, which is a compound word (meta + nous) and means a change of mindset. In the Orthodox Church, repentance is understood as an act of healing from the disease of sin.

**Silouan the Athonite, Saint:** Born in 1866 in the village of Shovskoe near Lipetsk, Russia. In 1892 he went to Mount Athos and became a monk in the Holy Monastery of Saint Panteleimon. He died in 1938. In 1987 he was proclaimed a saint of the Orthodox Church. His memory is celebrated on September 24.

**Sin:** In the Christian tradition the word sin means “mistake”, “failure”. That is, the failure of a person to achieve their goal, leading, through thoughts or actions, to separation from God, from their own self, their fellow human beings and the natural environment.

**Theophanes of Crete:** One of the prominent painters of the Cretan School in the first half of the 16th century, whose work influenced religious post-Byzantine painting. His work, condensed over a period of twenty years (1527-1546) is found in the two main monastic centers of the Greek-speaking Orthodox Church, Meteora and Mount Athos.

## 3.11 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

### CHARACTERS:

YIORGOS: *youngster*

STRATOS: *friend of Yiorgos*

TEACHER: *of Religious Education*

MARIA: *Yiorgos' mother*

APOSTOLOS: *Yiorgos' Father*

The ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH Bartholomew

### SCENE 1

TEACHER: Well, kids, today we will talk about God and the creation of the world. If we look around us we can see that the world is really beautiful and functional. We have been given everything we need to enjoy this life, in harmony with nature, just as the Bible says. I read to you from the book of Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, where God created human beings and placed them in a beautiful garden. God said to them, '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. 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. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day." (Gen. 1:29-31) Please note and remember the sentence: "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good". Whatever God made was very good. There is nothing wrong with Creation, nor are there any evil creatures.

STRATOS: But Miss, isn't man often evil?

TEACHER: Well, Stratos, that's true. We humans often do wrong, but that is because we are the only creature that is free.

STRATOS: And what does that mean? Is it wrong to be free?

TEACHER: Not at all, but it is also a burden, and rather difficult, because as a free person you can choose whether or not to be not a good person

(The lesson continues. Background music)

TEACHER: Well, that's all for today. Remember that tomorrow we are going for a walk to the beach by the river. Bring some food and water with you. See you tomorrow. Take care!

### SCENE 2

The next day the whole class is walking on the beach. The kids play, run, laugh, throw stones into the sea, in a happy and playful mood. Suddenly the children stop one by one as they see dead fish at the mouth of the river as well as large black patches that give off a nasty and irritating odor.

YIORGOS: Look, dead fish!

STRATOS: Yes, and it stinks here!

TEACHER: Something bad is happening here. There is something in the river that is killing the fish.

YIORGOS: Yes. Let's go find it.

STRATOS: Somewhere around here, there is an olive mill. Let's take a look. Maybe that's where this awful smell comes from.

After a while they stop in front of a pipeline that empties into the river. It seems to be well hidden as it is hardly visible through the reeds of the river bank. A thick liquid, almost black in color, and foul smelling, pours out.

TEACHER: You were right, Stratos! (Continues sadly). I read somewhere a few days ago that one cubic meter of liquid waste from an olive mill is equal to 100 cubic meters of municipal wastewater, and the wastewater from the olive mills can "travel" up to 10 kilometers and pollute shores, underground and surface water. Can you imagine it? Let's get out of here, we've seen enough...

On the way back

YIORGOS: I guess, Miss, that God did not imagine that mankind would destroy His beautiful creation...

TEACHER: And to think, Yiorgos, that God "took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it." (Gen 2:15)

YIORGOS (bitterly): Yes, exactly the kind of human care that we saw today!

### SCENE 3

Yiorgos and his friend Stratos meet Yiorgos' parents at the family home.

STRATOS: We are telling you the truth, Mr. Apostolos, we saw with our own eyes the pipeline pouring black wastewater into the river.

YIORGOS: Yes, Dad, why don't you believe us?

FATHER: I believe you, but I think that you are exaggerating a bit.

YIORGOS: We are not exaggerating at all. We saw it with our own eyes. If you don't believe us, ask our teacher, who was with us.

FATHER: No need to ask anyone. It just seems unbelievable to me that such a big olive oil plant does not meet the required environmental protection measures and causes such pollution that you claim to have seen.

MOTHER: Why not believe the kids, Apostolos? After all, they are not too young to understand.

FATHER: Okay, let's assume that things are as you say. What are you going to do now? Will you go to accuse the factory? Will you be satisfied if it is shut down? Don't you know that dozens of people are employed there and make a living from it?

YIORGOS: No, we don't think it should be shut down, we wouldn't want that! What we want is for the mill to comply with the laws and rules of environmental protection, like other factories all over the country. This is what we learn in school and discussed with our teacher, yesterday in class and today on the excursion.

FATHER: This is just a new fashion, like so many others.

MOTHER: What do you mean?

FATHER: Everyone suddenly started caring for the environment.

YIORGOS: Why dad? Don't you yourself get angry when we go to the beach and we see cigarette butts and rubbish everywhere? Doesn't all this bother you?

FATHER: This is a different matter. Here we are talking about things that can't be changed easily, because it would create more problems than it would solve. Many jobs would be lost and trade would be affected.

STRATOS: But God gave us the world to keep and watch over.

FATHER: And where is that written, Stratos?

STRATOS: The Old Testament says so. We read it at school. The Church says so.

FATHER: The Church? Is the Church concerned about environmental issues? I never heard any sermon about the environment.

The television shows a news bulletin and at that moment it refers to Patriarch Bartholomew. The journalist calls him "Green Patriarch".

FATHER: Eh, here is the Patriarch! Have you ever heard him speaking about such issues?

MOTHER: Hush, let's make a break, Apostolos. Why does the journalist call him "Green Patriarch"?

(The Patriarch is heard saying): "Crimes against the natural environment are a sin. The destruction of the biodiversity of God's creation, the pollution of water, earth, air and life by man, are all sins...»

Father is left speechless and Yiorgos, his mother and Stratos burst out laughing.

Father is left speechless and Yiorgos, his mother and Stratos burst out laughing.

## 3.12 REFERENCES

The list of books used by the writers in the preparation of the book at hand, plus the works of art and music used as stimuli for the students, along with the sources where they have been found.

### 3.12.1 Books

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Alexander Schmemmann, For the life of the world, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998, [Greek translation: Alexander Schmemmann, Για να ζήσει ο κόσμος, μτφρ. Ζ. Λορεντζάτος, Αθήνα, 1970].

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Artful Thinking: <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/vt/artfulThinking>

### 3.12.2 Works of art

Theophanes of Crete, "Adam Gave names to all the animals, to the birds of the sky and to the wild beasts" (Gen. 9: 19-20), fresco, 16th century, St Nikolaos Anapafsas, Meteora, Greece [https://az.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%9E%C9%99kil:Adam\\_naming\\_animals\\_-\\_Moni\\_Ayou\\_Nikolaou\\_\(Meteora\).jpg](https://az.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%9E%C9%99kil:Adam_naming_animals_-_Moni_Ayou_Nikolaou_(Meteora).jpg)

St Gerasimus of Jordan

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=73126343>

St Amfilochios of Patmos

<https://www.saint.gr/4444/saint.aspx>

Icon of Saint Porphyrios of Kafsokalyvia in the monastery of Panagia Eleousa, Achaea, Greece

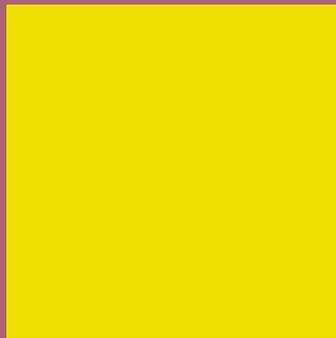
[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/d/d0/Saint\\_Porphyrios.jpg/800px-Saint\\_Porphyrios.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/d/d0/Saint_Porphyrios.jpg/800px-Saint_Porphyrios.jpg)

Links last accessed December 15, 2020

Aquarelles created by Vaso Gogou

# 4

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WHEN ENCOUNTER  
BECOMES CONFLICT: JUST  
WAR AND JUST PEACE

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## MODULE FOUR

# JUST WAR AND JUST PEACE

## 4.1 TEACHING AIMS & THEOLOGICAL REQUIREMENTS

### 4.1.1. TEACHING AIMS

Man seeks and rejoices in meeting; meeting with himself, with his fellow man, with nature, with God himself. Meeting in peace. Meeting safely, in order to develop his talents creatively, to progress both personally and collectively, to enjoy beauty, nature, coexistence with others. To discover and develop collaboration and solidarity through his own efforts, in anticipation of a better, more creative and peaceful future. And yet, experience shows that this meeting is not an easy task. It often becomes poisoned and turns, instead, into conflict. Human history is full of violence, hostilities, aggressive behavior and bloody conflicts between individuals and peoples. Not only in the context of national, political and social confrontations, but also in the context of religion. All religions, including, unfortunately, even the Christian religion, have failed to escape the temptation of conflict, often contradicting the fundamental values they teach.

The issue that will concern us in this lesson is outlined in the following text, and its main axes indicated.

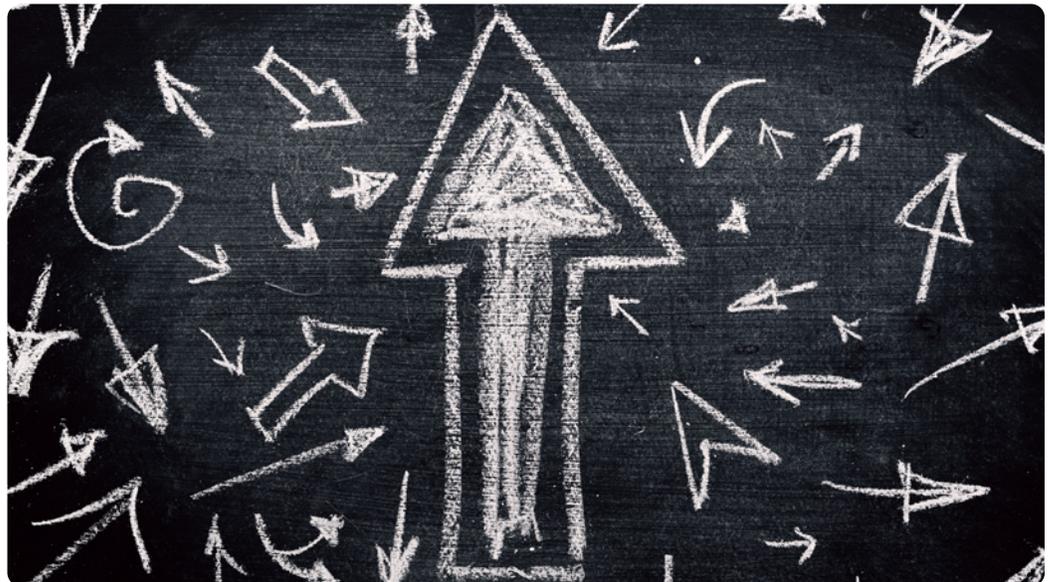


Photo: © Bits and Splits / Adobe Stock

Every day we witness crimes committed in the name of God or in the name of religion, and the publicising of these crimes, online and on television, increases the horror and disgust, the feeling of insecurity, as well as hostility towards others, which are spreading in Western societies, including our own. [...] All over the world there are either religious wars or crimes and massacres committed in the name of religion; at best violence and coercion in the name of religion [...] No doubt, we are in urgent need of models of peaceful coexistence, dialogue, tolerance and reconciliation between religious communities. [...] We are really Christians only in so far as we stay faithful to the gospel commandment of love towards all people, regardless of race, gender, religion, social class or origin; a love that includes even our enemies. We are genuinely Orthodox when we do not succumb to the temptation to impose the kingdom of God through secular means and to enforce the eradication of the weeds that prevent or delay its arrival [...].

(Ignatios, Metropolitan of Demetrias and Almyros. "The spread of the phenomenon of religious fanaticism and the witness and martyrdom of Christians in the modern world". Presentation at the International Interdisciplinary Conference on "Religion and Violence" (ATh., April 27-29, 2015), (excerpt))

#### 4.1.1 GOAL OF TEACHING

##### Goals of Teaching

The lesson aims to help the students to analyse and evaluate the Christian positions on war, violence and peace as well as those regarding the limits to human interaction. They will be encouraged to incorporate Christian values in their personal life to promote peace in the world, through dialogue.

##### Goals for the students

- To understand the various positions of the Orthodox Church on all forms of violence and war, even if it is a just or holy war.
- To study the teaching of the Gospel regarding the peaceful coexistence of people.
- To evaluate the teaching of Christianity regarding the establishment of peace and reconciliation.
- To consider the importance of ecumenical and inter-Christian dialogue for the peaceful coexistence of religious communities.
- To define the personal responsibility of the believer, as well as their own responsibility, towards cultivating reconciliation between all forms of otherness.

##### Expected learning outcomes for students

- To know the meaning of the terms “just war”, “holy war” and “peace in Christ”.
- To examine and evaluate the various interpretive approaches of the above terms.
- To distinguish the Gospel principles defining the limits to peaceful expression.
- To discover the importance of interfaith dialogue and incorporate it in their daily lives.
- To recognize the believer’s responsibility for the maintenance of sober dialogue, mutual respect and peaceful coexistence of diversity at local and global levels.
- To raise awareness and make peace a key value in their lives.

## 4.1.2 THEOLOGICAL REQUIREMENTS

Theological background to the teaching of the subject

To provide a deeper foundation for the theological approach to our subject, "When encounter becomes conflict: just war and just peace", we quote excerpts from the relevant literature, which support the teacher theologically, as well as supplementing the texts used in the student's book to elaborate the topic.

### **Holy Lands and Sacred Nations**

The call that Christ addresses to us is personal and is not addressed to some collective of nation, race, people, and so on. The call of the twelve, Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus, the Canaanite woman, the Roman centurion, or even the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (to ground this argument in a few specific biblical examples), are not only absolutely personal events and choices that are not mediated by religious, national, linguistic, cultural or class collectives, but very often personal choices that are turned against the particular collectives or that push against the framework and limits that they have laid out. The collective of the nation does not take shape in the New Testament, not because some supposedly private religiosity or individual version of faith and salvation arose then, but because the only collective that is recognized is the Church the new people of God - which is, however, a spiritual 'race'. This new people is formed, therefore, not on the basis of race, nation, language or culture, but on the basis of admission into the Body of Christ, offering universality and catholicity.

The Orthodox as well as Christians from other traditions will urgently have to decide which of these two we support and profess: the unity of all and the universal brotherhood of humans, or national particularity?  
In the time and in the context of a multinational pluralistic post-modern society, Christianity loses the theological and spiritual resources of the biblical, patristic and Eucharistic tradition in the rhetoric of 'identities' and in an outdated religious tribalism».

(Pantelis Kalaitzidis, "Holy Lands and Sacred Nations",  
Concilium: International Review of Theology, 2015.1, pp. 122-123)

## A theology of otherness and identity

On the part of religion, it is necessary to formulate a modern theology of otherness and identity, in order to establish that, at the individual level, otherness is not a threat to unity. Difference does not lead to division, but causes our feelings about the other to become an ontological part of our identity. After all, for religion, Truth (God) is not the light of one culture over others; on the contrary, the relation of Truth to the world is inextricably linked to freedom, which means that the identity of the social person embodies otherness. From the viewpoint of modern theology, obsession and self-identification with particular cultural models means the transformation of culture into a "prison of Truth" [...] The human being emerges as a creator of culture in a multicultural environment and not as a product or a consumer in the productive process, as defined by the ideology of the world as a product. According to this logic, religion (as an existential answer), respects diversity and looks forward to world peace, promoting tolerance between the various denominations and versions of revelation, but also between itself and secular movements and views..

(D. Magriplis, "The world as a product and religious fanaticism",  
Synaxis 104, pp. 43-44)

## The Fathers of the Church on non-violence

According to John of Damascus, "virtue is called by this name, because it is based on choice. It is elective and voluntary, because we do good deeds deliberately, by choice, and not unintentionally and out of necessity". He repeatedly states that "that which is done by force, does not constitute a virtue." "God," Basil the Great observes, "does not love what is done out of necessity, but what is accomplished by virtue. And virtue is achieved by free will, not by coercion. Free will is one of those things that depend on us."

The temptation, for the human being to accept God as a tyrant, is, of course, not new. Saint Isidore of Pelusium, replying to someone who wondered why Christ failed to persuade Judas to embrace virtue, says that he should not forget the notion of free will, "because the salvation of human beings is not built by force and coercion, but by persuasion and acceptance" [...]

This is obviously the theological basis which, paired with the primacy of love, caused John Chrysostom (during a time of fierce conflict) to declare that it is an insult to God to ask him to act against our enemies. According to him, Christians must defend their positions to the death and fight against pagan arguments without, however, provoking, or attacking persons or insulting anyone. Similarly, Augustine in a speech that has been described as a "masterpiece of mass manipulation" prevents the Christians of Carthage from invading the property of the pagans in order to destroy their idols. It is better, he said, to uproot idols from their hearts and pray for them, than to spill out hatred against them. And Chrysostom, having in mind the recent plethora of witnesses of martyrs for the Church, considers the use of violence in matters of religious conscience to be a feature of the pagan kings. In his opinion, no Christian king forced an unbeliever to convert. In fact, he considers it an accomplishment that Christians saved many books of the Gentiles from destruction. "It is not right for Christians," he says somewhere, "to destroy fallacies by coercion and violence; they should work out the salvation of men by persuasion, reason, and gentleness.

(Th. N. Papathanassiou, *The Church comes into being when it opens up*, Athens: En Plo, 2008, pp. 244-246))

## A Comment on the parable of the weeds

A brief comment on the parable of the weeds (Mt: 13: 24-30) [...] The temptation of which Christ speaks in this parable is great: to rid the world of evil forever, to uproot the weeds of the wicked, and for Good to prevail absolutely in History. But as evil has no existence, and the only thing that exists is the people who commit it (the weeds are not the wicked but the progeny of the wicked), the cleansing of the world from it simply means death and bloodshed; of the innocent and the guilty alike, the righteous and the unjust, indiscriminately. That is why Christ rejects this temptation, as do the sons of the kingdom, i.e. the saints, and His commandment is unequivocal and absolute (No [...] let them both grow).

This refusal and commandment constitute the most radical condemnation of violence, because violence is condemned in its most attractive version, that is, when it is exercised for the redemption of the world from evil. For the true believer the only holy war that exists is the internal war against the passions and in no sense is it against the sinners, the wicked and the unbelievers. This seemingly purgative and redemptive violence that uproots the weeds of evil from society simply means genocide, ethnic cleansing, as we used to say after the intra-Yugoslavian war; it means totalitarianism, which is precisely the violent imposition of good, the society of bliss, the obligatory virtue, the new type of man. Let us add, finally, that the temptation of the sons of the Kingdom is, from a religious point of view, the supreme monotheistic sin, which is none other than the substitution of man in the judgment of God.

Jesus' command "let them both grow" defines the attitude that Christians must follow (the same applies, I believe, to followers of other religions too) in post-Christian European society: to live and bear witness to their faith and teaching, without anxiety about numbers and statistics, without pressure to proselytize people, but also without succumbing to the temptation of despair in this world that seems to follow a radically different path to their own, and leaving the rest in the hands of God".

(St. Zoumboulakis, God returns to Europe, Introduction to the book by Jean Daniel, Is God a fanatic? Athens: Polis, 1998, pp. 46-49)

## Religious fanaticism or political pathology?

I think that, even if in the personal and subjective worlds, at the level of individuals, the border between moderation and extremism or between sober faith and passionate zeal is vague and porous, certain institutions are called upon to make it visible and respected [...] However, the preservation and deepening of moderation also falls within the jurisdiction of the institutions and the interpretive mediators, even if it cannot be ensured at moments of personally experienced intensity, An institution, whether ecclesiastical or secular, religious or political, can and must propose, argue for and persuade in favor of the moderate interpretation, the non-fanatical and the non-totalitarian interpretation of the faith. This means that even if a passionate fanaticism is an inextricable element of identity and commitment, the institution and its mediators and officials are called upon to organize the resistance, in other words the pedagogical mediation and the clear separation of faith from violence, oppression and hatred”.

(Nikolas Sevastakis, “Religious fanaticism or political pathology?” Frear, Winter 2021)

<https://mag.frear.gr/thriskeytikos-fanatismos-i-politiki-pathologia/>

## Peace and divine Liturgy

The Divine Liturgy begins with the “Litany of peace”. These are the three opening prayers: “Let us pray in the peace of the Lord”, “For the peace from above”, “For the peace of the universe...”. In the three most important moments of the Divine Liturgy, before the reading of the Gospel, before the kiss of peace and before the Holy Communion, the Church has placed the liturgical greeting: “Peace be upon all of you”. In the Holy Anaphora (“Offering”), which is the culmination of the Divine Liturgy, the minister urges: “Let us stand aright! Let us stand in awe! Let us be attentive, that we may present the Holy Offering in peace.” The chanters respond: “A mercy of peace, a sacrifice of praise”, defining its content. After the Offering and before the Holy Communion, prayers for the various needs of people are read. Among them, peace again holds an important place. According to the above, the Divine Liturgy contains a condition and an effect in relation to (the good of) peace. Peace presupposes reconciliation. Most of the prayers aim at leading the believers to a state of reconciliation before the Eucharist, according to Jesus’ recommendation in the Sermon on the Mount: “When you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother [or sister] has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” True participation in the Divine Liturgy implies connection with social life. Anyone who has the experience of peace in the Divine Liturgy cannot remain indifferent to its absence from society. Whoever truly participates in the Divine Liturgy, can no longer think and act differently in the church, and differently after the Liturgy.

(St. Ch. Tsopanidis, “The Churches in Search of a ‘Just Peace’ in an era of globalization”, in Kasselouri-Chatzivasileiadi, Eleni (ed.): “Peace on Earth...”: a Vision and a Demand for Societies and Churches Today. An Orthodox Contribution, Athens: Indiktos, 2010, p.121)

## 4.2 VIDEO PROJECTION AS A STARTING POINT FOR TEACHING

The video we watched prepares our lesson on the topic “When encounter becomes conflict: just war and just peace”, bringing to the fore the key questions:

- How can we deal with violence in our everyday lives?
- What stance does Christ suggest we should adopt in our life?
- Can this proposal work even if we feel we have suffered unjust violence?



Figure 4.1  
Video Clip

After an incident on the way to school with a guard dog which is followed by a quarrel between two classmates about their football teams, Yiorgos comes to think that we frequently try to defend our beliefs in a way that is very similar to that of animals. What does Jesus suggest about our disputes and quarrels? We get the answer through the Gospel and an interactive game organized in the classroom by the religious education teacher of Yiorgos' class.

#### 4.2.2 COMPREHENSION QUESTIONNAIRE

**Instruction:** *Having watched the video, students are asked to answer the following multiple-choice questions individually. These questions aim to help the teacher assess the extent of the students' understanding of the content of the video and to evaluate their views on the relationship between violence and religion.*

*The correct answers are 1 – B, 2 – C, 3 – D.*

Based on the video you watched, try to answer the following questions.

1. *What prompted the discussion in Yiorgos' class?*

- a. A dispute between students and teacher
- b. A quarrel between two students regarding their favorite football teams
- c. A dispute between one group of students and another
- d. The racist attack of one student on another
- e. I do not know / I did not understand

2. *In the video, the teacher read to the class a passage from the Gospel, in which Jesus said:*

- a. You should be patient when you are slapped
- b. If you are slapped on the cheek, you should slap back, to be fair.
- c. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.
- d. When you are slapped you must report it to the authorities.
- e. I do not know / I did not understand.

3. *What method did the teacher use to convey his message to the students?*

- a. They all read a text on terrorism and discussed it.
- b. They split into two groups and did a simulation of a quarrel.
- c. They played the educational game "debate"
- d. They played the interactive game "return the blow"
- e. I do not know / I did not understand

### 4.2.3 HAVE YOU GOT THE MESSAGE?

**Instruction:** *With the question that follows we ask the students to express their personal opinion, to determine the extent to which they have understood the message of the video and, consequently, the meaning of the words of Christ.*

In the video we see that the teacher used the game to help the students understand the words of Christ: "If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also" (Mt. 5:39). In the following box, write a sentence explaining what you think the students learned from this?

**Indicative answer:**

When we do not respond with violence to the violence we receive, then we can hope that the vicious circle of violence will be broken.

## 4.3 THE REJECTION OF VIOLENCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

**Instruction:** *We will base our further investigation of the subject with the students on two passages from the Gospel of Luke, which illustrate Jesus' teaching and attitude toward violence. The biblical texts should be read by the teacher.*

*The following questions aim to help the students identify in the texts the behavior of the Disciples and Jesus' answers, and then justify the way in which the vicious circle of violence can break.*

Every day we witness behavior characterized by conflict and violence. Man is constantly trying to dominate and impose his ideas, or change situations using force, disregarding any concept of freedom.

In the teachings of Christ in the New Testament we find the rejection of any form of violence. Two incidents from Jesus' life reveal in practice his attitude toward violence; an attitude that contrasts with violent behavior suggested even by his own Disciples.

So, we read in the Gospel according to Luke:

### A. Shortly before the passion of Christ

<sup>51</sup>When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup>And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; <sup>53</sup>but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup>When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" <sup>55</sup>But he turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup>Then they went on to another village. (Lk. 9:51-56, NRSV)

### B. During the arrest of Jesus

<sup>47</sup>While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; <sup>48</sup>but Jesus said to him, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" <sup>49</sup>When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, "Lord, should we strike with the sword?" <sup>50</sup>Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. <sup>51</sup>But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. (Lk. 22:47-51, NRSV)



Figure 4.2  
The Betrayal of Judas,  
18th century fresco  
(under restoration) from  
the Church of St Apostles,  
Agia, Greece. Photo by  
Olya Gluschenko, 2017.

### Exercises

1. In the above biblical texts, find the words and actions of the Disciples which show violent behavior, and then find the response of Jesus.

#### Indicative answer:

Students:

“Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?”

“Lord, should we strike with the sword?” Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear.

Jesus:

He turned and rebuked them

“No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him

2. Jesus advises us to avoid responding to violence with violence. Is this suggestion helpful for breaking the vicious circle of violence? Justify your answer.

**Indicative answer:**

The circle of violence traps us in behaviors that lead to a dead end. The violence is constantly multiplying and escalating, resulting in constant destruction. The only way to get out of this trap is to be the first to stop being violent.

**Exercise:**

The exercise is based on the text that follows, which gives us answers to the objection which was raised on the video, that the rejection of violence carries the risk of passivity and therefore of submission to the evil.

Alternatively, this exercise can be done in groups, as the intention is for the answer to emerge from the discussion on the topic between the students, with the support of the text given.

Let us remember again the words of Jesus that we heard in the video: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also” These words urge us to stop the vicious circle of enforcement and retaliation. But this attitude raises the question which is often expressed: Does the rejection of violence lead us to passivity and submission to the evil that happens around us?

The following text gives us the answer to the above question:

We need to be aware that this attitude (the rejection of violence) does not mean passivity\* and fatalism\*. On the contrary, it is an active attitude; it is a choice and an action. The witness [the Christian] does not legitimize evil. He clashes with it and refuses to obey those who serve it. Christ himself, during his trial by the high priest, asked the guard who had hit him to explain the reason: “If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?” (John 18:23). In fact, at some point before his arrest, when he saw that the temple precinct had been turned into a trading post, he made a rough whip out of ropes, pulled people and animals out, threw down the money and turned over the benches. “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” (John 2:16). It is noteworthy that even at this particular moment, Christ did not hit people.

(Ath. N. Papathanasiou – M. Koukounaras-Liagkis  
Topics of Christian Ethics, Athens: Educational Policy Institute, 2020 p.83)

Based on the text, formulate your conclusions in your own words.

**Indicative answer:**

Rejection of violence does not show weakness against those who attack us and try to harm us. We seem to be passive, but in fact we are strong. It takes strength to choose to avoid violence when we are challenged. We can claim our rights and react without using violence. This is shown by the example of Christ, who asked the guard who hit him during his trial for an explanation. But there are also cases when we need to express ourselves dynamically, as Christ did with the merchants in the Temple. He protested strongly against the evil that was being done but, again, without using violence against people.

## 4.4 WAR: ONE OF THE HARSHTEST FORMS OF VIOLENCE

**Instruction:** *Our next educational step concerns the harshest form of violence: war, its causes as well as its forms, that raise moral issues for the Christian, as well as others.. After the students search the texts and locate the main causes of war, they critically examine the concept of a just and holy war. Through the texts quoted, the students are invited to discover the positions of the Orthodox Church regarding these forms of war.*

War is one of the harshest forms of violence a human being can face. The thirst for power and strength, but also the desire for wealth, lead to the annihilation of peoples and cultures, destroying every sign of freedom and humanity. History is full of wounds that war has inflicted on the body of humanity. They confirm how unjust and tragic the violence of war is.

Find, in the following texts, what are the causes of the war.

<sup>1</sup>Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? <sup>2</sup>You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. (James 4:1-2)

Money is the gallows of souls, the hook of death, the bait of sin. How long will it be omnipotent? How long will wealth, the cause of wars, for which weapons are made and swords are sharpened, rule? (Basil the Great, Sermon to the reach, PG 31, 297B)



Figure 4.3  
Mounted Normans  
attacking the Anglo-  
Saxon infantry, 12th  
century, Author  
unknown, 12th century.  
Source Lucien Musset  
The Bayeux Tapestry  
2005 Boydell Press via  
Wikimedia Commons:  
[https://commons.  
wikimedia.org/w/index.  
php?curid=27217789](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=27217789)

#### 4.4.1 BUT IS THERE A JUST WAR?

But there are also wars that we treat as necessary, because they help to bring greater evils to an end. We are accustomed to calling this war “just”, when it takes the form of defense because it protects freedom and life, which are precious to us. In other words, when you are trying to protect the freedom of your homeland and the lives of your loved ones by sacrificing your own life. In the history of the Orthodox Church there are cases where the Church was asked by the Byzantine emperors or by the state power to sanction the just wars they waged, by invoking the help of God. But even in this “just” war, people use violence and kill their fellow human beings in order to defend themselves.

#### Question:

What is the position of the Orthodox Church concerning the “just” war?

To answer, consult the following text and, based on its positions, write a short paragraph with your answer:

Whenever it becomes necessary for a Christian to take part in a war, it should be done in a spirit of self-sacrifice. But this self-sacrifice does not concern [...] his life. It is about something infinitely more important for a Christian: the committing of sin and salvation! That is, participating in a war, with the tragic awareness that for the sake of certain relative values (e.g. the freedom of the community or the security of one's family) one accepts committing a sin and risking one's own salvation. It is a contradictory circumstance, as it is a historic duty to use violence in order to stop a torrent of violence, while being at the same time a torture, in that it is an act that not only does not please God, but will require forgiveness on His part..

(Th. N. Papathanassiou, “Anthropology, Culture, Praxis”  
in *Terrorism and Culture*, Athens, Armos, 2013, p.89)

#### Indicative answer:

For the Orthodox Church every war is a sin, even when it is considered “just”; it is man's failure to meet his fellow man in love. Therefore a Christian, even when participating in a war to defend the freedom of his homeland and his loved ones, knows that he will sacrifice not only his life, but also his salvation. That is why he asks God for forgiveness. So participating in the “just” war is an act of self-sacrifice.

#### 4.4.2 CAN A WAR BE HOLY?

A war is called holy when it is declared by the Church or by a religion or, in general, in the name of God, in order to defend the faith and ideas that characterize that particular religion. For a Christian, every war is a civil war since man turns against his brother, that is, his fellow man. It is a tragic and undesirable reality. Therefore, the Orthodox Church does not accept that a war can be holy for any reason; it is impossible to declare war in the name of God and for it to have a salvific character, leading those who participate in it to their salvation.

## Exercise

The following text mentions an incident from the time of the Byzantine Empire that reveals the position of the Church that no war can have a salvific character.

In 960 A.D. the emperor Nikephoros II Phokas demanded that the Church proclaim as saints all those who died in battles against Islam, defending the Christian faith and the homeland. The Church refused, citing a sacred canon [...] It was the thirteenth canon of Basil the Great, who expressed disagreement with the “impunity” of those killing in war (even defensively!) and argued that a penance of a three year abstention from Holy Communion should be imposed [...]

(Th. N. Papathanassiou, “Anthropology, Culture, Praxis”  
in *Terrorism and Culture*, Athens, Armos, 2013, p.91)

State in one sentence the conclusion you reached after reading the text.

### Indicative answer:

Christians who take part in a war for the sake of faith and religion are under no circumstances saved. On the contrary, the rules of the Church impose penances on them.



Figure 4.4  
Peter Stronsky. The Kind  
Angel of Peace Donetsk,  
Ukraine, 2008, photo  
by Andrew Butko via  
Wikimedia Commons.  
Licensed under the  
the Creative Commons  
[Attribution-Share Alike  
3.0 Unported](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/) license. The  
photo has not  
been changed and  
can be found at [https://  
commons.wikimedia.  
org/wiki/File:2008.\\_  
Донецк\\_122.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2008._Донецк_122.jpg).

#### 4.4.3 AND SO TO CONCLUDE ...

... with what Archbishop Anastasios proclaims about what should be the role of any religion when faced with an armed conflict:

**Instruction:** *It is proposed that the teacher reads the following text to the class, as a final conclusion on the role of religion when addressing violence and war.*

Violence brings violence and in this vicious circle it is the innocent and the weak that become the victims. The Church insists that no one has the right to use the holy oil of religion to feed the flames of armed conflict. Religion is a divine gift, to soothe hearts, to heal wounds and to bring individuals and peoples closer together, in peace."

(Anastasios (Yannoulatos, Archbishop of Tirana), *Vigilance, Debt of the Orthodox*, Athens: En Plo, 2017, p. 122)

## 4.5 THE STRUGGLE FOR PEACE

**Instruction:** *Our investigation of the subject will be completed by considering the concept of peace. Through observation of the drawing, we aim at a deeper understanding of Isaiah's prophecy.*

The prophet Isaiah, in the years of the Old Testament, envisioning the coming of a new world where peace will prevail, says: "4 [...] they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." (Isa. 2: 4)

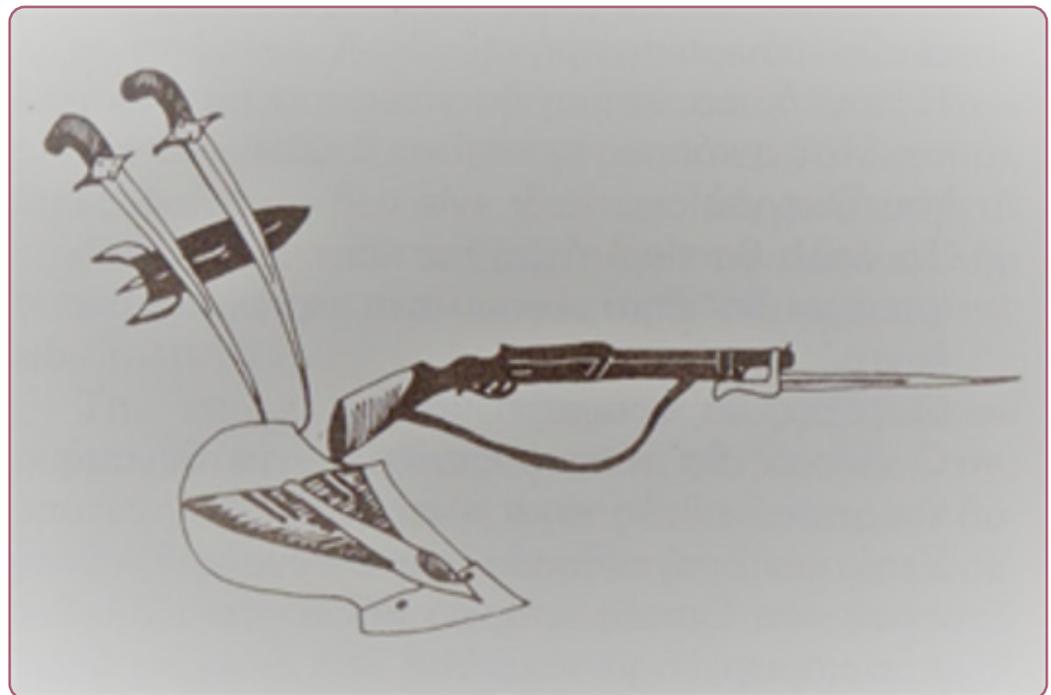


Figure 4.5  
Plow made of weapons  
Drawing by Vaso Gogou

### Exercise

Observe the drawing "plow\* made of weapons" and find the matches with the words of the prophet Isaiah.

## 4.5.1 THE ROLE OF RELIGIONS IN ACHIEVING PEACE



Figure 4.6  
Peace dove statue in  
Lomé, Togo, Africa,  
photo by Jeff Attaway:  
Licensed under the  
the Creative Commons  
[Attribution 2.0 Generic](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peace_dove_(3329620077).jpg)  
license. The photo has  
not been changed and  
can be found at [https://  
commons.wikimedia.org/  
wiki/File:Peace\\_dove\\_  
\(3329620077\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peace_dove_(3329620077).jpg).

**Instruction:** *The last issue which we will focus on in the first teaching hour is the fact that all religions need to contribute to the struggle for peace and, ultimately, to the creation of a society of reconciliation. We will use a text, through which the students will draw inspiration for the task that follows, where they are called upon to react and express themselves creatively to promote a vision of peace.*

### **The Declaration of Assisi**

On January 24th 2002, patriarchs, imams, monks and rabbis from all over the world gathered in Assisi and proclaimed, together with Pope John Paul II, that believers around the world must renounce violence, and prayed together for peace.

## Excerpts from the Declaration of Assisi

We commit ourselves to proclaiming our firm conviction that violence and terrorism are incompatible with the authentic Spirit of religion, and, as we condemn every recourse to violence and war in the name of God or religion, we commit ourselves to doing everything possible to eliminate the root causes of terrorism. [...] We commit ourselves to taking up the cry of those who refuse to be resigned to violence and evil, and we desire to make every effort possible to offer the men and women of our time real hope for justice and peace.

(Anastasios, (Yannoulatos, Archbishop of Tirana):  
Coexistence: Peace, nature, poverty, terrorism, values, Athens: Armos, 2016,  
p.35))

### Exercise

Having read the above excerpts from the Assisi declaration, imagine that you are a reporter in a newspaper and write a short tweet informing your public on the conclusions of this very important meeting

## 4.6 ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS: MATERIAL FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

In order to enrich the discussion that will follow in the second class hour, we use texts and works of art, to deepen understanding and encourage the development of the creative and critical thinking of the students.

It is open to the teacher to choose, depending on the ability and interests of the class, one or more texts or works of art with the corresponding activities.

### 4.6.1 A PAINTING AGAINST WAR

In order to further experience the tragedy and drama of the violence of war, we will use Picasso's iconic anti-war work, Guernica, created in 1937, as a direct response to the news of the destruction of the city of Guernica in the Basque Country by the Nazis on the 28th of April 1937. This immense canvas (3.49 x 7.77m) describes the inhumanity, violence and despair of war. The symbolic-allegorical content of the painting, as well as its monumental importance, make it relevant even today. The work is housed in the Queen Sophia National Art Museum in Madrid, and is widely available in the web, e.g. here: [https://i.natgeofe.com/n/0adb5779-42cb-4a12-ab9c-fdb6498bee50/Main\\_Guernica\\_BAT-10313\\_16x9.jpg?w=1200](https://i.natgeofe.com/n/0adb5779-42cb-4a12-ab9c-fdb6498bee50/Main_Guernica_BAT-10313_16x9.jpg?w=1200).

The elaboration of the work that will open the discussion in the classroom will be done with the routine "I See - I Think - I Wonder" by Artful Thinking, which is a method of teaching through art proposed and applied by David Perkins, developed by Harvard Project Zero in partnership with Traverse City for Michigan Public Schools. The application utilizes visual arts (painting, sculpture, architecture), musical and literary works. The tools of artful thinking are called routines. The main aim of the method is the development of critical and creative thinking of students through the dynamics of art.

Based on the routine "I see - I think - I wonder" the students answer the questions: What do you see? - What are you thinking? - What makes you wonder?

With these questions we ask the students to observe the work carefully and to give and justify an interpretation of the work, and then to formulate their own questions in relation to what they observed in the work and the interpretations they suggested. The questions set the stage for the debate over the painful consequences of war..

### **Activity**

Observe carefully the work of Pablo Picasso, Guernica

- What do you see?
- What do you think?
- What makes you wonder?

### **4.6.2 TWO INCIDENTS FROM THE ORTHODOX CHURCH TRADITION**

The following two incidents can be used in the classroom as examples of the application of criteria faithful to the Gospel, rejecting violence and practicing love to the enemy.

#### **An incident with Bishop Acacius\***

In skirmishes with Persian troops in 421, in the territories of Persian Armenia, the Byzantine army captured seven thousand Persian soldiers. These prisoners suffered a famine resulting in numerous deaths. Acacius summoned the clergy of his diocese and said to them: "Our God needs no discs or chalices\*. He neither eats nor drinks, since he has no physical needs. Thanks to the gratitude of the pilgrims, the Church has many such treasures of gold and silver, so I find it appropriate to use them to save the captured soldiers from hunger". Thus, the valuable ecclesiastic vessels were given for melting. The income from these precious metals provided food for the prisoners (despite the fact that they were of a different nation and religion), and they were provided with the supplies they needed to return to their homeland. It is said that the Persian king asked to meet bishop Acacius personally, and expressed his admiration for the wisdom of the Byzantines, who managed to triumph both in war and by benevolence..

(Papathanassiou, Th. (2008), My God, a foreigner. Texts for a truth "down in the street", Athens: En plo, p. 57-58. The incident is cited from Socrates, Ecclesiastical History, 7, 21, PG 67, 781B-784A)

### **Activities**

The dilemma faced by bishop Acacius on how to save the prisoners is summed up in the question: In the final analysis, what is the holiest, the sacred vessels of the Church or the human being, even if he is an enemy? Explain the answer he gave through his actions.

Try to take the place of the Persian prisoners learning that a bishop is saving them from starvation and captivity. Describe your feelings.

**Indicative answers:**

For Bishop Acacius, the criteria of the Gospel leading to his choice are clear. Love and care for every human being, even the enemy, is a priority as we see in every human person the image of God. After all, according to the examples of the Gospel, Christ stops the circle of violence. With his decision, bishop Acacius stops the violence of the war with his love.

From the point of view of the Persian prisoners who are released I feel joy, gratitude, but also I wonder about the kindness shown to me.

**An incident with St Carpus\***

Saint Carpus, in the 1st century, narrates the following incident: Once a pagan made him very sad because he deceived a Christian and converted him to paganism. The pagans rejoiced over this conversion and sacrificed to their gods and Carpus was filled with bitterness and hatred. At night, as usual, he got up to pray to God, protesting that it is unfair for atheists and pagans to live and distort the truth of Christ. He prayed to God to send a thunderbolt and mercilessly end their lives. As soon as he had said these words, he suddenly saw a vision of Jesus with his angels high in heaven. Looking down, into a dark chasm, he saw the people he had cursed, terrified and about to fall into the void. Below them, at the bottom of the chasm, there were snakes, ready to bite them. And then he saw Jesus looking mercifully at the two men in danger and, rising from his throne, approaching them and reaching out to help them. Surprised, Carpus heard Jesus saying to him: "So hit me too, I am ready to suffer greatly again to save people.

(From the Synaxarist of St Nikodemos of Mount Athos)

**Activity**

Read the Gospel passage (Luke 9:51-56) with the incident of Jesus rebuking his disciples and find the correspondence between that incident and Saint Carpus.

**Indicative answer**

The correspondence is clear in the content of the disciples' words to Jesus "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" and in the prayer of St Carpus to God "to send a thunderbolt and mercilessly end their lives". In both cases it seems that we humans succumb to anger and want to annihilate those who oppose our faith and to cleanse the world of evil using violence. In both cases we also see how

similar the answers of Christ are and the corresponding reaction to both incidents is clear in his answers: “The Son of Man did not come to destroy people but to save them” - “So hit me too, I am ready to suffer greatly again to save people”. Therefore, when I attack a person who insists on having a different faith from me, it is like attacking Christ himself, who came to save even the enemy with his love.

### 4.6.3 PEACE AND THE DIVINE LITURGY

Based on the following text, the teacher can comment briefly that the main request of the Divine Liturgy is for the acquisition of peace.

The Divine Liturgy ends with the exhortation “let us go forth in peace”. This exhortation invites the faithful to go out to the world with the gift of peace, to live with it and to fight for it. In essence, each individual believer, but also the community as a whole, is bidden to go out and to prove that the Mystery they experienced was truly accepted. The realization and acquisition of the good of peace is the overriding request of the Divine Liturgy. It is the amazing wealth that the Liturgy contains for this good”.

(St. Ch. Tsopanidis, “The Churches in Search of a ‘Just Peace’ in an Age of Globalization”, in Kasselouri-Chatzivasileiadi, Eleni (ed.): “Peace on Earth...”: a Vision and a Demand for Societies and Churches Today. An Orthodox Contribution, Athens: Indiktos, 2010, p. 120)

### 4.6.4 CAN THE CROSS BE A SYMBOL OF WAR OR OF DIVISION?

Observe the following drawings and photos, where the cross is used as a symbol of war or of division.



Figure 4.7  
From left to right, and up to down photos:  
1. German WWII tank / Envato Elements  
2. Wehrmacht reconnaissance zeppelin in France during WWII / Envato Elements  
3. German Air Force Panavia Tornado via [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
4. Ku Klux Klan Cross Burning, 1958, via [Wikimedia Commons](#)  
5. Hospitaller Knight Circa 1250 AD via [Flickr](#)  
6. Albigensian Crusade via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

#### Exercise:

Write a text explaining the reasons for a Christian to ask the prohibition of the use of Cross by groups or states as a symbol for warfare or similar reasons.

#### 4.6.5 SONG

The students can work with the song “Where is the love” by The Black Eyed Peas in the classroom, or alternatively they may do a project. The aim of these activities will be for the students to meet the evangelical truth regarding the prevention of violence, through their musical choices. The project is an alternative task, to be carried out outside of the school timetable.

#### **The Black Eyed Peas - “Where Is The Love?”**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpYeekQkAdc&feature=youtu.be&ab\\_channel=BlackEyedPeasVEVO](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpYeekQkAdc&feature=youtu.be&ab_channel=BlackEyedPeasVEVO)

People killin', people dyin'  
Children hurt and you hear them cryin'  
Can you practice what you preach?  
Or would you turn the other cheek?

Father, Father, Father help us  
Send some guidance from above  
Cause people got me, got me questioning

Where is the love (Love)  
Where is the love (The love)  
Where is the love (The love)  
Where is the love, the love, the love

#### **Activities**

##### **Question:**

Can you find lyrics in the song which refer to the Gospel, as well as concepts and views that we encountered in today's lesson? (Group discussion)

##### **Project:**

In the song, identify references to the points of our discussion on the example of Jesus in preventing violence. Why do violence and war still prevail? What do you consider to be the responsibility of Christians in establishing justice and cultivating harmonious coexistence? Search the internet for examples of Christians who defended peace and create a virtual museum with their history.

## 4.7 GLOSSARY

**Abstention (from Holy Communion):** The Church, for pedagogical reasons, sometimes imposes abstinence from Holy Communion as a penance for certain serious transgressions or failures. Penance is an act proposed by the priest during confession, in order for the believer to comprehend the magnitude of his transgression and to move towards goodness. In the Orthodox Church, common penances include intensive prayer, study, fasting, and acts of charity. For more serious sins, the penance can be abstinence (ie exclusion) from Holy Communion.

**Acacius, saint:** Became bishop of Amida, an Armenian city, at the beginning of the 5th century. In 419 the emperor Theodosius II sent him as ambassador to the king of Persia and his presence there helped to strengthen the faith of the Orthodox believers of the region. Acacius visited Persia for the second time at the invitation of the Persian king himself, who asked to meet him after his miraculous act of freeing 7000 Persian captives captured by the Byzantines. The Orthodox Church commemorates him on April 9.

**Canon:** The provisions that have been formulated from time to time by the Church for regulating and dealing with the various daily problems that arise in ecclesiastical and social life. The purpose of the rules is to guard and protect spiritual life.

**Carpus, Saint:** Lived in the times of Nero (52 AD), and is one of the seventy disciples of the Lord. He was a collaborator of St Paul and, according to his 2nd Epistle to Timothy, worked for the dissemination of the Gospel in the region of Troy. Later he became a bishop in Varna, Thrace, where he was the spiritual father and a shining example for all the people of his diocese. The Orthodox Church celebrates his memory on May 26.

**Fatalism:** A view or opinion according to which all events are irrevocably predetermined by a higher power, such as fate.

**Passivity:** Behavior that implies acceptance of a situation and does not act or seek to change it.

**Plow:** An agricultural tool drawn by a tractor or animals to plow the land

**Samaritans:** They were the inhabitants of Samaria. Samaria was attacked by other tribes who had a pagan faith and its population was completely changed due to cross-marriages. Although they maintained their faith in the one God of the Jews, they introduced into their faith several pagan customs and ceremonies. They worshipped God on Mount Gerizim and not in Solomon's Temple. In the New Testament, the word Samaritan signifies the unclean (sinful) and hated person (John 8:48).

## 4.8 TRANSCRIPTION OF THE VIDEO

Characters:

YIORGOS

APOSTOLOS: Yiorgos' father

TEACHER: A teacher of Religious Education

STUDENTS

DOG

### SCENE 1

Yiorgos and his father Apostolos are heading to school early in the morning. Apostolos will then continue to his work. Yiorgos feels drowsy and his father teases him.

*FATHER: (smiling) Hey Yiorgos, get a move on! If we go on like this it'll be time to come home before you get there!*

*YIORGOS: Leave off, Dad, I feel so sleepy... (yawns)*

*FATHER: Then you should get to bed earlier, so that you wake up easier in the morning.*

*YIORGOS: (He doesn't answer and yawns again)*

Suddenly as they are walking on the sidewalk and passing through a yard, a dog appears, barking furiously. Yiorgos and his dad are frightened by the ferocity of the barking.

*YIORGOS: That scared me!*

*FATHER: (angrily) Stupid dog! It terrified us.*

*YIORGOS: What is it about dogs that makes them bark like that sometimes? Why do they make so much noise?*

*FATHER: He is a guard. He thinks that by acting like that he is protecting the house from intruders.*

*YIORGOS: Well, we didn't try to get into his home.*

*FATHER: It doesn't matter. He has no way of knowing if we are going to try to enter, or not. He protects it anyway.*

*YIORGOS: Probably he takes his job too seriously.*

*FATHER: (in a playful mood) I don't know if he is a good guard, but he is certainly good at waking people up. He definitely woke the neighbors, but he also managed to wake you up too, ha ha!*

*YIORGOS: Pff...very funny.*

We see their backs as they continue on their way

### SCENE 2

Yiorgos arrives at school with his father. They wave goodbye to each other and Yiorgos enters the schoolyard. He suddenly hears noises from one side of the schoolyard and, along with many kids, he heads over there out of curiosity. Two students are quarreling over their football teams. Some other students are trying to restrain them. Yiorgos observes without interfering.

*STUDENT 1: You are a fool and you deserve a good beating.*

*STUDENT 2: Just you dare to come closer and you'll see what happens.*

*STUDENT 1: Do you think I'm afraid of you? We all know what a coward you are. You always hit from behind just like your team does on the field. You bribe the referees and then you win the matches.*

*STUDENT 2: Not at all, I will hit you straight in the face. As for my team, better get used to seeing our backs in the stands, because you'll never get ahead of us.*

A teacher sees the fight and intervenes. She stops them and has a short dialogue with the kids. Yiorgos is still watching the scene.

*TEACHER: Hey boys what's all the fuss about? I can't believe it! You are high school students and you fight like small children.*

*STUDENT 1: He started it, Miss.*

*STUDENT 2: Why don't you tell the truth? He insulted me first, Miss.*

They yell at each other and their voices mingle with the voices of the other students who are present at the incident.

*TEACHER: (loudly) Everyone please stop! (She speaks calmly to the first student) So tell me now, how did he insult you?*

*STUDENT 1: Eh, well...he did not exactly offend me, but he spoke against the football team I support.*

*TEACHER: (Speaking to the other Student). And how did he insult you?*

*STUDENT 2: Well, he spoke against my team too.*

*TEACHER: So, if I understood you correctly, you were fighting with each other because of your teams and not for yourselves.*

*STUDENT 2: (He shouts loudly with bared teeth and clenched fist) Yes, and if he does it again, he will pay for it...*

Everyone speaks loudly. The noise is reduced as Yiorgos looks at Student 2 and makes a logical association. As he sees him growling, threatening and showing his teeth to the other student, he brings to mind the dog that scared him with his barking a few minutes ago (he remembers that the dog was also showing his teeth). For a few seconds Yiorgos imagines that the student has been transformed into a dog. Yiorgos laughs out loud at this thought and returns to reality. The "dog-student" turns into a human being again and the surrounding voices come back.

### **SCENE 3**

The scene takes place inside the classroom. The teacher is the same one who stopped the quarrel at the schoolyard.

*TEACHER: I believe that many of you were present at the quarrel. It is certainly not uncommon for people to fight, especially if they consider that something of their own is threatened.*

*STUDENT (GIRL): Yes Miss, but what happens when both of them feel that this "something" is really valuable?*

*TEACHER: Since this is an RE lesson, shall we see what Jesus says about quarrels? Please open the Bible at Matthew, chapter 5, verse 38.*

The children look for the verse and the teacher reads.

You have heard that it was said: "An eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, "Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also."

*STUDENT 3: (Obviously perplexed) Sorry Miss, but if I understand correctly, what Christ is saying is to let the others take advantage of us. Is that right?*

*STUDENT (GIRL): Yes, that's how I see it, too. But if I act like that the whole school will make fun of me!*

The children start a rowdy but creative discussion, and the teacher walks among the desks and listens to them. As she passes Yiorgos, who is sitting at the last desk, she leaves a note on his desk and winks. Yiorgos looks puzzled and surprised. He unfolds the note and reads the following:

"We are going to play a game in the classroom. Whatever happens, please do not hit anyone back, even if others urge you to do so. There is reason for this."

The teacher walks back to the front and announces to the class:

TEACHER: OK, so we all have different opinions . Shall we play a game?

Everyone is excited.

CLASS: Yeees

TEACHER: Great. Here's what we are going to do. Each of you will give a tap on the arm, shoulder or back of the person sitting next to you. Let's do it in turns, one after the other, like a domino effect. But be careful, not too hard, alright? I'll go first.

The teacher taps the student sitting at the first desk. Then this student laughs and taps the student next to him. The other student gives a tap to the student behind him and so on. Sounds of laughter fill the room. Another student gets up and approaches Yiorgos, hitting him a little harder. Yiorgos winces with pain but does not react, as the teacher had told him not to retaliate.

STUDENT 4: (laughingly) Come on Yiorgos. Hit him!

Yiorgos doesn't react.

STUDENT (GIRL): (laughingly) Hey, what are you waiting for? Stand up and hit him.

YIORGOS: No, I don't want to.

STUDENT 3: (Obviously irritated). What do you mean? That's the game..

YIORGOS: I'm telling you no. I'm not going to hit anyone.

STUDENT (GIRL): (angrily) Miss, tell him! . Yiorgos is spoiling the game.

TEACHER: Yiorgos, don't you want to continue the game?

YIORGOS: No Miss, I don't like it.

TEACHER: Then I'm afraid we have to stop. You see, this is how the game is played: we all have to hit the one sitting next to us. If someone stops, the game stops too.

CLASSROOM: (Exclamation of disappointment. They stare at Yiorgos in a hostile way).

STUDENT 4: See what you've done?

TEACHER: But on the other hand, what Yiorgos has done by choosing not to hit anyone else is to save many of you from being hit by the others.. Yiorgos broke the chain of violence when it reached him. Is he really a spoilsport, or does the half the class owe him a favor because actually he saved them from being hit? Maybe violence and evilness is something like a pandemic. It is transmitted from one person to another.

YIORGOS: Are you saying that what Jesus suggests is the solution to our quarrels?

STUDENT (GIRL): (hesitantly) And ... What about the pandemic?

TEACHER: Quarantine has always been a solution to prevent the spread of a disease. Aren't violence and evil diseases too?

The students look at each other silently.

#### SCENE 4

Yiorgos walks with a classmate as he returns from school.

STUDENT (GIRL): Hey, Yiorgos. Do you really believe that you could do what Jesus suggested?

YIORGOS: What exactly?

STUDENT (GIRL): To not react when others harm you.

YIORGOS: I don't know. It's really difficult. It seems to me that most of the time we react with "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth", as they say.

STUDENT (GIRL): Yes, that's right.

YIORGOS: But if you think about it, what Christ suggests is probably the smartest thing to do. Who would want to live in a world of blind and toothless people?

STUDENT (GIRL): You're tho right in what you're thaying. I would not like thuch a world at all. It would be a meth...

Yiorgos and his classmate laugh out loud. We watch their backs as they walk away laughing.

## 4.9 REFERENCES

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