



Catholics
in
Encounter

STUDENT'S BOOK



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FACE2FACE

CATHOLICS IN ENCOUNTER

STUDENT'S BOOK



EDUC8

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INTRODUCTION

NAVIGATING THE BOOK

Terrorism, war, authoritarian regimes, poverty, natural disasters, violence... Things do not seem to be going well in the world. Our society is very diverse and consists of a multitude of worldviews. Often religion and violence are linked. In a world full of violence, how can we find the good? In this book we start from the Catholic tradition to find an answer to this question. We will journey together and discover more about the Catholic faith.

How does the book work?

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

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

Figure 1
Video Clip



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

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

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

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

Getting started

At the beginning of each deep module, you will see a **video clip**. In this video clip, you will see friends going on different adventures. Throughout the video clip, **quiz questions** are asked. After watching this video clip and answering the quiz questions, you will start working with the **exercises** in this textbook.

Good luck!

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

—— POPE FRANCIS, 2021

1



ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER:
DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

MODULE ONE

DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

1.1 THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN JESUS AND THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN: VIDEO CLIP



Figure 1.1
The Video Clip

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

1.2 TIME TRAVEL: JESUS IN HISTORY

1.2.1 JESUS' ENVIRONMENT: WHERE DID HE LIVE?

ASSIGNMENT. Read the text below and answer the corresponding questions.

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

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

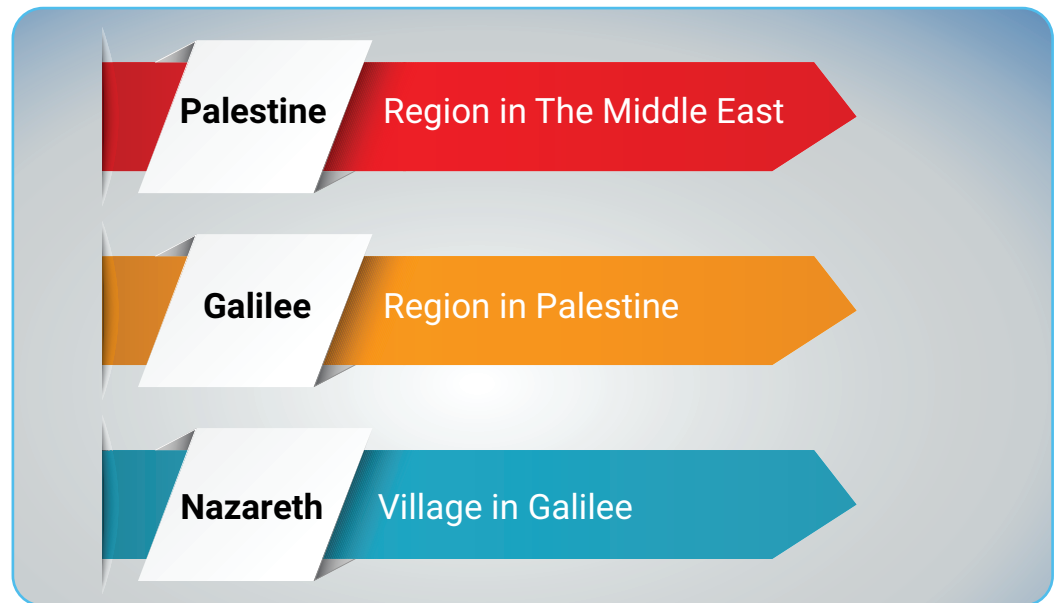


Figure 1.2
Jesus' Environment

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

Religious life in Tyre was mainly characterized by polytheism. The term 'polytheist' refers to someone who does not believe in one god, but in multiple gods. The term 'polytheism' therefore refers to a religion with several gods.

At the time of Jesus, this was unacceptable for the Jewish people. That's why they called Tyre "*the land of the pagans*". People who did not believe

in the God of the Jews were considered unclean. Jews themselves are not polytheists, but monotheists because they believe in one god (and that is Yahweh). Thus, the term 'monotheism' refers to a religion with one god.



Figure 1.3
First century Judaea
province

ASSIGNMENT. Read the text on the previous pages and fill in the correct places.

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

1.2.2 THE SOCIETY OF GALILEE

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

Jesus – religion – Jewish – monotheism – polytheism

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

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

ASSIGNMENT. Answer the questions below.

1. What is the difference between monotheism and polytheism?

2. Right or wrong: all the inhabitants of Galilee were Jews.




Figure 1.4
Footprints
Image: © Christopher
Sardegna | Unsplash

1.3 THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN JESUS AND A SYROPHOENICIAN WOMAN

1.3.1 A REMARKABLE STORY FROM THE BIBLE

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


 *Did you know that 'gospel' comes from the Greek word 'euangelion'? This means 'good news' and refers to the good message brought by Jesus Christ.*


The evangelist Mark tells in his gospel about an encounter between Jesus and a Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24-30). In this story Jesus meets a Syrophenician woman, who comes to Jesus to ask for his help. Her daughter is possessed by an unclean spirit, and she hopes that Jesus can grant her daughter salvation and deliverance. Here you will find the first part of this Biblical story:


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

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

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


 The evangelist Mark emphasises that Jesus and his followers left Galilee and travelled to the region of Tyre. Jesus lived and preached mainly in Galilee. In Tyre, they are no longer surrounded by fellow Jews. Rather, when they leave for the areas of Tyre and Sidon, they become 'foreigners'.

 The story shows that the woman is Greek and of Syrophenician descent. So she wasn't Jewish. The name 'Syrophenician' is a combination of 'Syrian' and 'Phoenician', and probably comes from the fact that Phoenicia was then part of the Roman province of Syria. So for Jesus and his followers she was **a stranger, a 'pagan'**.

 In the gospels, one often speaks of 'demons' or 'unclean spirits'. The medical knowledge we have today was unknown at the time of Jesus. Therefore, diseases were often associated with the existence of demons or unclean spirits. Today we no longer speak of demons or unclean or impure spirits, but of tumours, viruses and bacteria. Also, in the culture of that time, psychological problems were attributed to negative forces or evil spirits.

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

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

 In Jesus' time, a dog was an unclean and inferior animal.

ASSIGNMENT. What does Jesus mean by the answer: *"Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs"* (Mark 7:27)?

ASSIGNMENT. How does the woman react? What does the woman mean by her answer: *"Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs"* (Mark 7:28)?

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

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

ASSIGNMENT. What attitude does Jesus take after the woman’s response? Doesn’t he want to help ‘other believers’ in need? How can this be seen as a story of depolarization?





Figure 1.5
Image: © Priscilla Du
Preez | Unsplash

1.3.2 SUMMARIZED INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLICAL STORY

Jesus' first answer


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

 Jesus refers to the woman as a **'dog'**, and strongly insults her in this way. With this reference to 'the dogs' Jesus seems to emphasise that everyone who does not belong to the Jewish people is labelled as a pagan. A pagan is differently believing, and therefore a non-believer. This explains why Jesus initially rejects this woman and her request for help.

 In addition, Jesus refers in his answer to **'the bread'**. The bread here symbolises the power Jesus gives to his followers. Jesus indicates that this bread is primarily meant for the Jewish people. **What if there is not enough 'bread'? Surely it cannot be shared with other believers?** Jesus wants to be there for the Jewish people in the first place. The bread that is meant for 'the children' (the Jewish people) should not be fed to 'the dogs' (other believers).


The woman's answer


The woman doesn't give up. She confronts Jesus with the following answer: *"Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs"* (Mark 7:28).

 What does the woman mean by saying this? She wants to point out to Jesus that even now there's something for 'the dogs' under the table, there's enough 'bread' for everyone. In fact, the woman means that the hope and salvation that Jesus brings is not only for the Jewish people. Despite the differences between the Jewish people and the pagans, the 'bread' is not meant only for the children of Israel.


How does Jesus react?

After the reaction of the woman, Jesus gives her the following answer: *"For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter"* (Mark 7:29).

 Jesus understands the woman. The woman's strong faith in Jesus makes a great impression on Him. Even though the woman and her daughter are of pagan descent, Jesus helps the woman and her daughter. The daughter is freed from the unclean spirit thanks to the power of Jesus.

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

himself who changes his mind because of the other. From that moment on, Jesus doesn't want to be there just for the Jewish people, the children of Israel. On the contrary, **the proclamation of the Kingdom of God has a universal scope** and therefore applies to everyone.

 It is important to frame this story in the context of that time. The gospel of Mark was written at a time when most Christians were in fact Jews, who thought that Jesus' message was only for Jews. However, over the years, other people, 'pagans', also felt drawn to the faith in Jesus' message. This caused a discussion among the first Christians. Was Jesus' message also meant for other people, for pagans? The Jewish Christians asked themselves the following question: **Was the extension of Christianity to non-Jews clean?** Or was it unclean? This question seemed to be an important discussion at the time Mark was writing his gospel. The encounter between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman, a pagan, should be read in this context. **The evangelist Mark makes it clear that non-Jews also belong to the Kingdom of God.**

Here you can read the complete Biblical story.

'The Syrophenician Woman's Faith'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Source: NRSV, Mark 7:24-30.

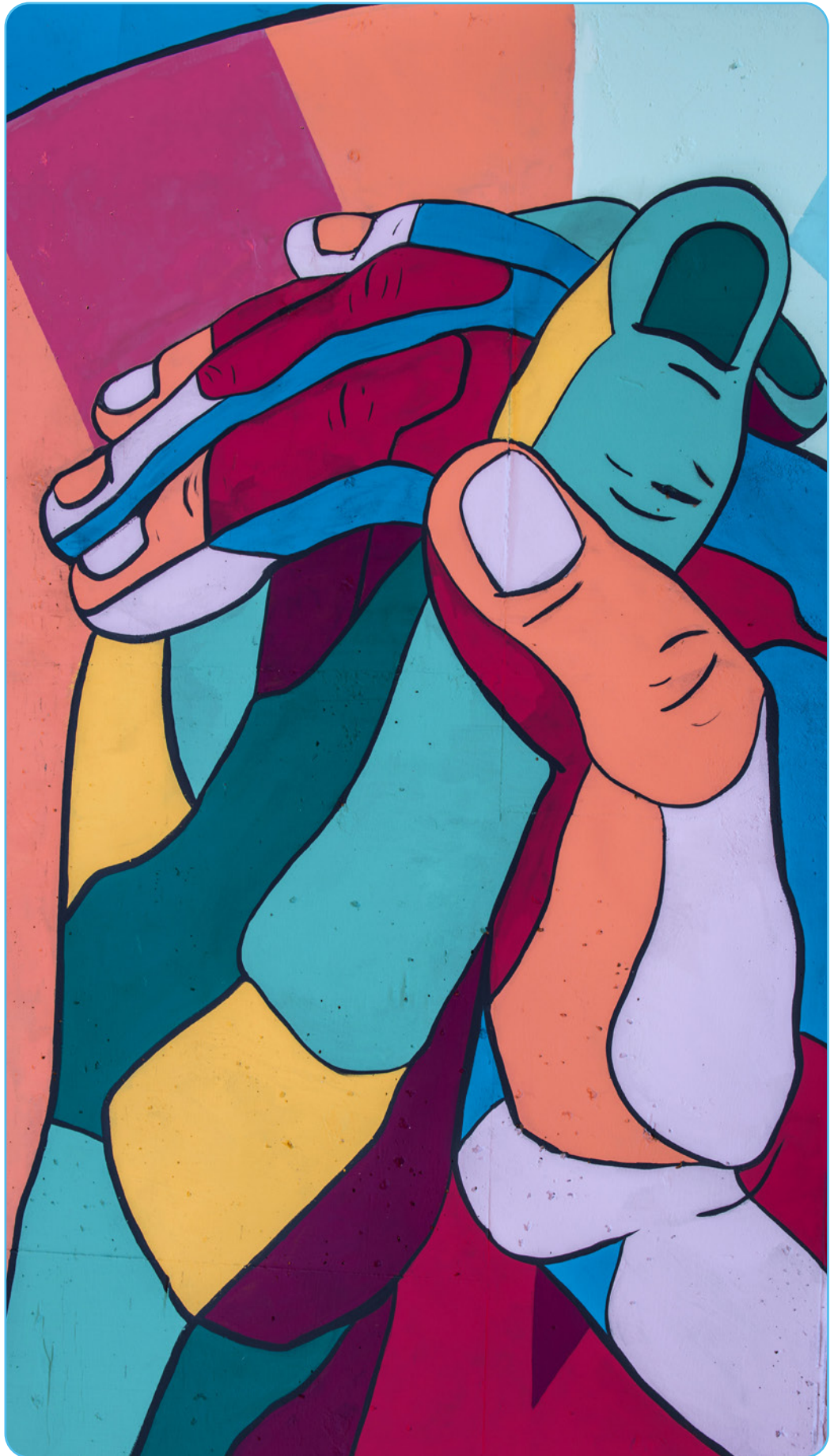


Figure 1.6
Image: © Tim Mossholder
Unsplash

1.4 GLOSSARY

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

Children of Israel

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

Devout

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

Galilee

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

Gospel

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

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

Kingdom of God

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

Middle East

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

Monotheism

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

Nazareth

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

Pagans

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

Palestine

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

Phoenicia

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

Polytheism

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

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

Syrophoenician

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

Tyre

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

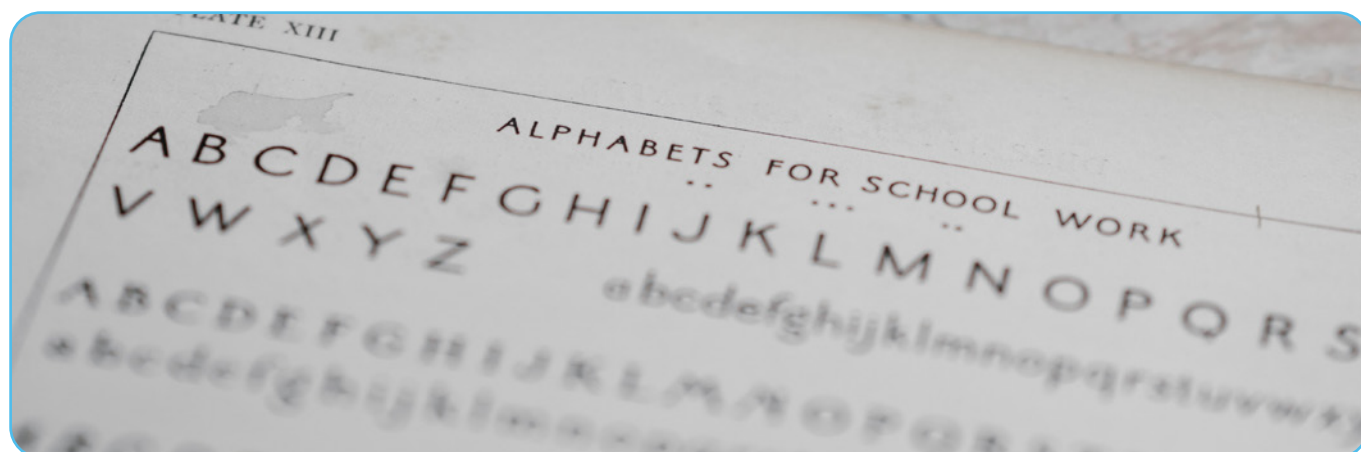


Photo: Annie Spratt | Unsplash

1.5 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

1 INT CLASSROOM DAY

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

Teacher (exhausted and cynical):

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

The class boos to the teacher.

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

The class boos even louder...

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

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

Pieter-Jan: Yeah?!

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

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

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

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

2 INT SCHOOL DAY

We see Ahmed going towards Sarah.

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

Sarah hesitates

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

She starts to look into her bag.

Sarah: Oh no, I lost my notes!

All other kids look at Sarah.

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

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

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

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

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

Lindsay: "What do you mean?"

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

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

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

Lindsay (confused): What?

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

This last answer was definitely heard by Ahmed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 INT LIBRARY –DESK DAY

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

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

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

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

The kids look to each other in confusion..

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

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

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

3 INT LIBRARY – iChrist's personal space DAY

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

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

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

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

Ahmed: The what? woman?

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

All kids are looking in disbelief towards iChrist!

Everyone: whaaat?

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

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

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

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

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

TRANSITION TOWARDS BIBLICAL TIME

4 EXT ANCIENT PALESTINE DAY

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

TEXT IN IMAGE: TYRE 28 AC

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

5 INT ANCIENT PALESTINIAN HOUSE DAY

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

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

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

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

6 INT LIBRARY – iChrist's personal space DAY

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

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

7 INT ANCIENT PALESTINIAN HOUSE DAY

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

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

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

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

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

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

8 EXT ANCIENT PALESTINIAN ROAD

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

9 INT ANCIENT PALESTINIAN HOUSE OF WOMAN

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

10 INT LIBRARY – iChrist’s personal space DAY

We see the iChrist finishing his story.

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

Sarah: Huh? What does that mean??-

Ahmed: I don’t understand it either!

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

Sarah: Indeed, you see, foreigners are dogs!

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

11 EXT ANCIENT PALESTINE DAY

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

VOICE OVER iChrist: The woman then contradicts Jezus. She replies: ‘even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’”

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

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

Children: wow, ok...

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

12 INT LIBRARY – iChrist’s personal space DAY

Sarah: ...

Ahmed: ...

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

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

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

13 EXT SCHOOL DAY

We see everyone entering the schoolgates.

TEXT IN IMAGE: Next week

14 INT CLASSROOM DAY

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

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

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

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

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

Ahmed (relieved): Phew I passed!

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

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2



ENCOUNTER WITH SACRED TEXTS:
TEXTS OF VIOLENCE

MODULE TWO

TEXTS OF VIOLENCE

2.1 THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC: VIDEO CLIP



Figure 2.1
The Video Clip

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

2.2 THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC: INTERPRETATION

2.2.1 THE STORY: EXPLORATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For a longer version of this biblical story, see: NRSV, *Genesis 22:1-19*.

ASSIGNMENT. Read the story of 'the Sacrifice of Isaac' (Genesis 22:1-19) and answer the questions below.

In the biblical text, indicate verses ...

• that you do not like;

• that surprise you;

• that you do not understand.



Figure 2.2
Caravaggio – 'The
Sacrifice of Isaac' (1603)
Image: Wikimedia
Commons: [https://
commons.wikimedia.
org/wiki/File:Sacrifice_of_
Isaac-Caravaggio_\(Uffizi\),
jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sacrifice_of_Isaac-Caravaggio_(Uffizi).jpg)

How does the story unfold? What do you think God's purpose is when He asks Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac? What do you think of this?

2.2.2 HOW TO READ A BIBLICAL STORY?

💡 The Sacrifice of Isaac is not a regular biblical story. At first glance, it seems to be a dramatic story about a gruesome command from God. The Sacrifice of Isaac is part of the First Testament's first book: Genesis.

💡 In this story, God asks Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Does God really want Christians to sacrifice people? If you read the story literally, it does seem that God commands people to do such horrible things. Yet, this is not the message or meaning of the story. It is important to always look for **the symbolic meaning of a biblical story**. You must look, think, and reflect beyond the words that are written down. Above that, you should not look for facts in biblical texts, but rather look at symbols that are used to express a vision of God, the world, and human beings.

💡 The Bible is a centuries-old book that is more than 2000 years old. Back then, the world was very different from the one we live in today. In order to understand a story from the Bible properly, it is important to have knowledge of the world of that era. After all, the world in which you live always influences your thoughts and actions.

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



Figure 2.3
Video Clip

The stories of the First Testament were originated centuries ago in the culture of the Middle East. At that time, society was not global but strongly concentrated in rural areas, local cities, and small villages. Electricity had not yet been invented, nor had the internet. Industry did not exist, the people supported themselves economically mainly through agriculture and fishing, handicrafts, and trade. Christianity did not exist either. In general, religious life in the Middle East was characterized by polytheism. The term 'polytheist' refers to someone who does not believe in one god, but in multiple gods. The term 'polytheism' therefore refers to a religion with several gods. **All these elements had an impact on the Biblical stories.**

2.2.3 DOES GOD TRULY DESIRE HUMAN SACRIFICES FROM HIS BELIEVERS?

Back to our story. In Genesis 22:1-19, we can read that God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. At that time, about 2000 years ago, offering a sacrifice to (a) God was common. People did this to appease the gods and to honor them. Abraham does what God commands. He goes to the land of Moriah with Isaac. On top of the mountain, Abraham is about to sacrifice his son to God.

Can we use this story to legitimize religious violence?

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

Why did you pick this answer?

STATEMENT. *“The Sacrifice of Isaac is a gruesome biblical story that approves human and child sacrifices.”* Do you agree? Why?

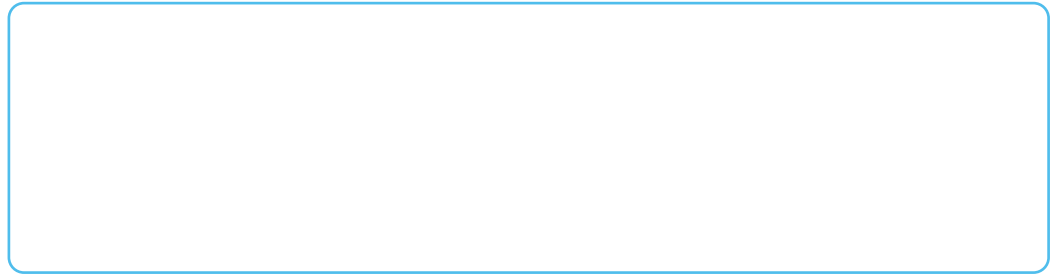



Figure 2.4
The sacrifice of Isaac
street art Brussels,
Belgium.
Source: Sparrow
via Wikimedia Commons,
Licensed under the
Creative Commons
[Attribution-Share Alike
4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)
The picture has not
been changed and
can be found at [https://
commons.wikimedia.org/
wiki/File:The_sacrifice_
of_Isaac_street_art_
Brussels_02.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_sacrifice_of_Isaac_street_art_Brussels_02.jpg)



 **The story of Abraham and Isaac does not approve of sacrifices at all.** For at the last moment, God stops Abraham, and He even provides a sacrificial animal (a ram). This is an important part of the story that shows that God resists human and child sacrifices. God does not want human sacrifices, because He does not want people to pay a price to secure His favors. The story criticizes sacrifices to God. **This story says that violence is wrong and can certainly not appease God.**

2.2.4 AN ALMIGHTY FATHERHOOD?

The message of Genesis 22:1-19 goes beyond the prohibition of human sacrifice. It is also an affliction of Abraham, an affliction that does not involve sacrificing Isaac but **teaching him to let go of his son**. God ultimately asks Abraham to sacrifice a ram. In ancient times, this animal was a symbol of masculinity, leadership, and violence. The story shows that Abraham is sacrificing power over his son instead of his son himself.

This is also being showed at the end of the story. Abraham leaves on his own, without Isaac. So, this story not only disapproves of human sacrifice but also says that children are not just the property of their parents. As a parent, you cannot just simply determine what will happen to your child. The ram that is eventually sacrificed is a symbol of masculinity and power. By sacrificing this ram, Abraham shows that as a father, he cannot and will not fully rule over his child.

The story of Abraham and Isaac has a double symbolic meaning, but which one? Indicate the correct answer.

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

2.3 OFFERING AN ISAAC SACRIFICE

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

Have you ever had to offer an Isaac sacrifice? Explain.



Figure 2.5
Video Clip

Can you imagine that even today people sacrifice their lives, or the lives of others, for their ideals, like a god? What would you say or ask to these people?

2.4 GLOSSARY

Genesis

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

Isaac sacrifice

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

Middle East

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

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

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

Polytheism

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

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

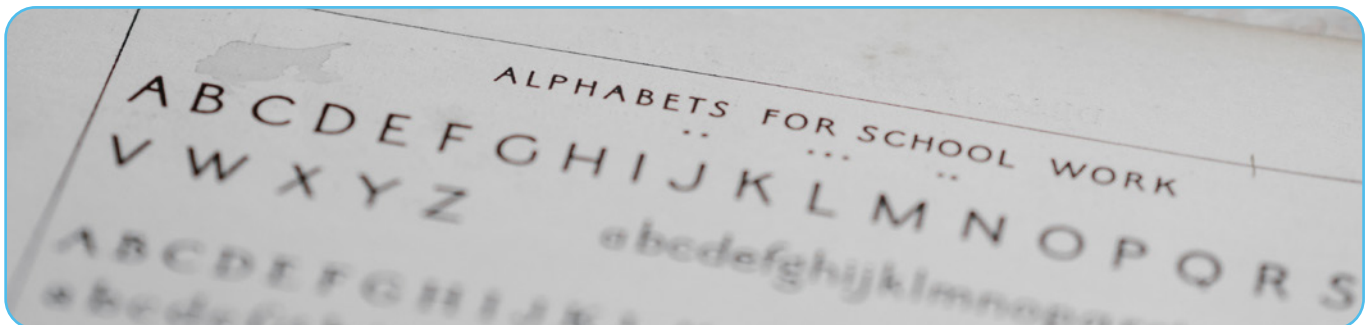


Photo: Annie Spratt | Unsplash

2.5 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

1. EXT PLAYGROUND DAY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Michael: What? That's not true?

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

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

Sarah steps into the conversation

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

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

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

Sarah: Can you tell us the story about Isaac?

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

Michael: What does that mean?

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

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

[BIBLICAL STORY, part 1]

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

Genesis 22:2-9

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sarah: Let's get back to the story.

[BIBLICAL STORY, part 2]

Genesis 22:10-19

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

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

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

EXT PLAYGROUND

Returning to the students, they look confused.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sarah swipes left and another question appears

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sarah pushes on the question button:

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

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

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

Pieter-Jan: Sorry I called your religion violent.

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

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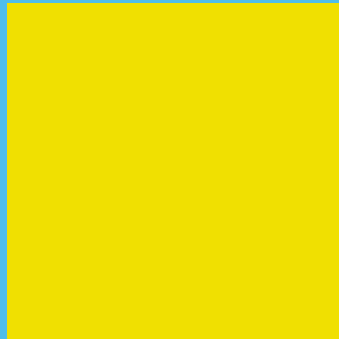
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3



ENCOUNTER WITH THE
ENVIRONMENT: SOCIAL AND
ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

MODULE THREE

SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

3.1 SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES: VIDEO CLIP



Figure 3.1
The Video Clip

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

3.2 CARING FOR OUR PLANET: TIME FOR ACTION?!

"Global warming is causing extreme weather conditions. Extremely hot and dry weather increases the number of natural fires."

"The rate at which Antarctica is losing its ice has risen sharply in recent years."

"Every year in the Amazon, an area the size of about one million soccer fields disappears from the forest. This accelerates climate change."

"If we do not take action against climate change, one-third of all plant and animal species on earth will become extinct within a century."

"The earth is sick and exhausted."

ASSIGNMENT. Read the statements above and answer the following questions:

Are you worried about climate change? Why do/do you not? What worries you the most?

In what way do you try to take care of the earth?

Do you have any idea how the Catholic Church handles the care of our planet?



Figure 3.2
The Video Clip

3.3 THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE CARE FOR OUR PLANET

3.3.1 INTRODUCTION

Things are not going so well with the earth, environment, and climate right now. Humans have polluted the earth, and this has led to the current climate crisis. The climate crisis manifests itself, particularly in global warming. This warming has several serious consequences for man and nature, such as health problems, the extinction of animal species, water scarcity, the deterioration of available fertile land, natural fires, extreme weather conditions, conflicts between population groups, and so on.

For Christians, caring for the earth is very important. Christians believe that God created the earth. The earth is thus **God's creation** and Christians want to take care of all of His creation.

To better understand this, we are going to read **the story of creation**. This is a story from the book of **Genesis**, the first book of the Old Testament.



Figure 3.3
Image: © Ben White |
Unsplash

3.3.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF GENESIS 1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ASSIGNMENT. In the text, indicate verses

- **that you do not like;**

- **that surprise you;**

- **that you do not understand.**

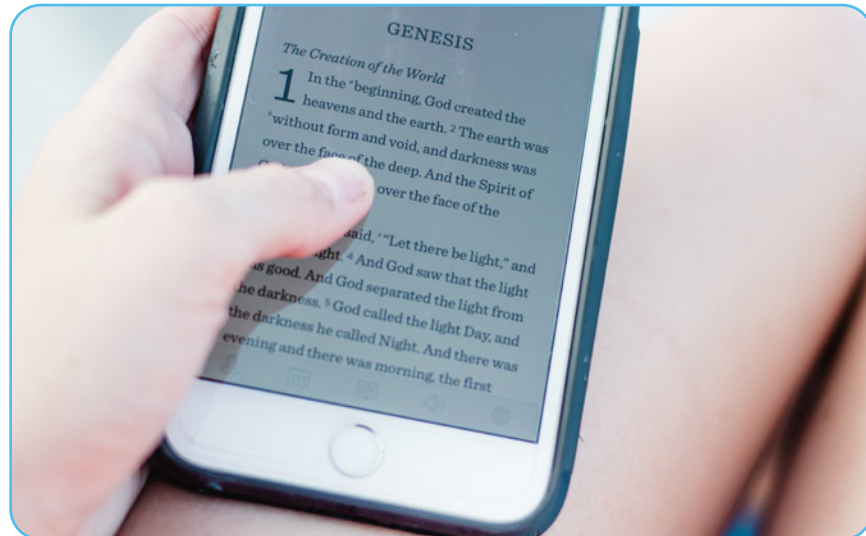


Figure 3.4
Image: © Jenny Smith
Unsplash

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

If we think about the relationship between man and nature, what can we learn from the creation story today? We will discover this step by step below.

3.3.3 ALL HUMAN BEINGS ARE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

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

Source: NRSV, Genesis 1:27.

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

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

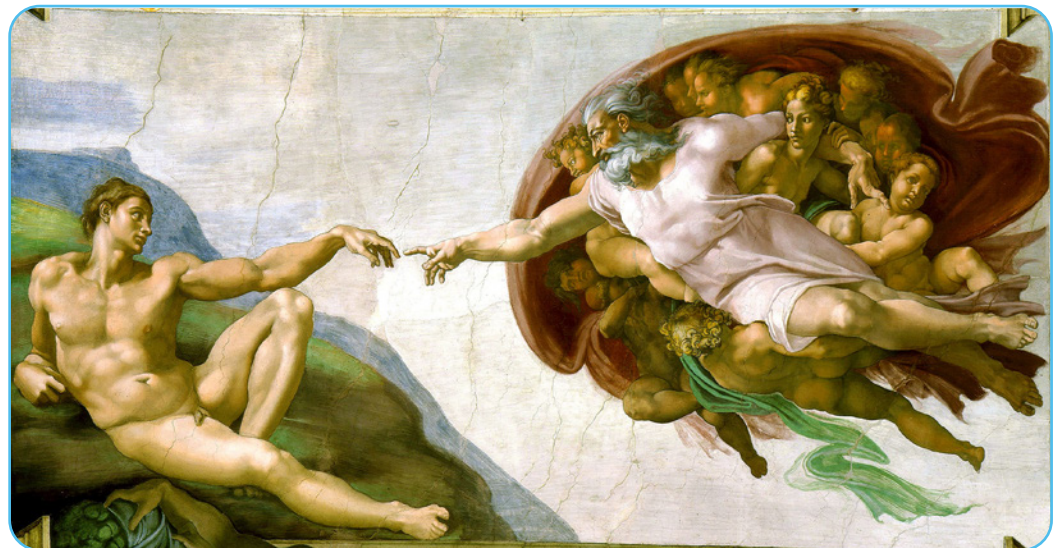


Figure 3.5
Michelangelo - 'The Creation of Adam'
Image: Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Creation_of_Adam.jpg

ASSIGNMENT. Read the text below, and fill in the missing words.

care – responsible – symbolic meaning – reign – literally

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

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



Figure 3.6
Image: © Noah Buscher
Unsplash

**3.3.4 MAN WILL
'RULE'. WHAT DOES
THIS MEAN?**

ASSIGNMENT. Below you can find the Bible story again. Indicate in the Bible story the verses that make it seem that man is allowed to rule over the earth.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Source: NRSV, Genesis 1:26-31.



In the Bible fragment we can read that man must **'rule over'** creation. Important! This does not literally mean that man is allowed to be in charge of creation just like that! With the word 'rule' the story refers to the responsibility that man must bear towards all life on earth. So, we can better understand the word 'rule' as **'serve'**. Man is given the task by God to 'serve' the earth by taking care of life in creation: nature, animals and other people.

ASSIGNMENT. Do you think that humans today, as rulers, abuse the earth, nature and animals? Why yes/no? Is this an appropriate attitude?

ASSIGNMENT. “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Would he think so today? Why yes/no? What would you ‘recreate’ in the existing world?



Figure 3.7
© Li-An Lim | Unsplash

3.4 AND WHAT ABOUT CARING FOR OUR FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS?

The story of creation does not only want to tell us something about how humans should deal with nature. Man, just like all plants and animals, is part of creation. So, the story of creation is not only about caring for nature and animals, it is also about **caring for others**.



Did you know that climate change has a major impact on human relationships? Climate change can lead to a shortage of drinkable water or food, health problems, extreme weather (heat, drought, torrential rains), and so on. Because of the consequences of global warming, the living environment of more and more people is under threat. This can lead to a source of frustration and discussion among people! **So, caring for the climate is also related to caring for each other!**

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

– Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* (202)

ASSIGNMENT. Read the quote above. Do you agree with this quote? Why do you/do you not?

ASSIGNMENT. What can you personally do to take more care of the earth and of others?

3.5 GLOSSARY

Anthropocentrism

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

Genesis

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

The story of creation

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



Photo: Annie Spratt | Unsplash

3.6 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

1. SCHOOL

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

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

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

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

Lindsay's friends look bewildered and irritated by her.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sarah: What? That is not true!

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

Michael: What?

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

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

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

2. HOME ARIELLA (after school)

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

3. NEXT DAY: CAMPING TRIP

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Michael and Sarah look sad and confused.

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

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

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

The children nod.

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

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

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

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

"Adam": That's right, Michael.

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

5. IN LINDSY'S HOUSE

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sarah, Michael and Ariella start laughing.

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4



WHEN ENCOUNTER BECOMES CONFLICT:
JUST WAR AND JUST PEACE

MODULE FOUR

JUST WAR AND JUST PEACE

4.1 JUST WAR AND JUST PEACE: VIDEO CLIP

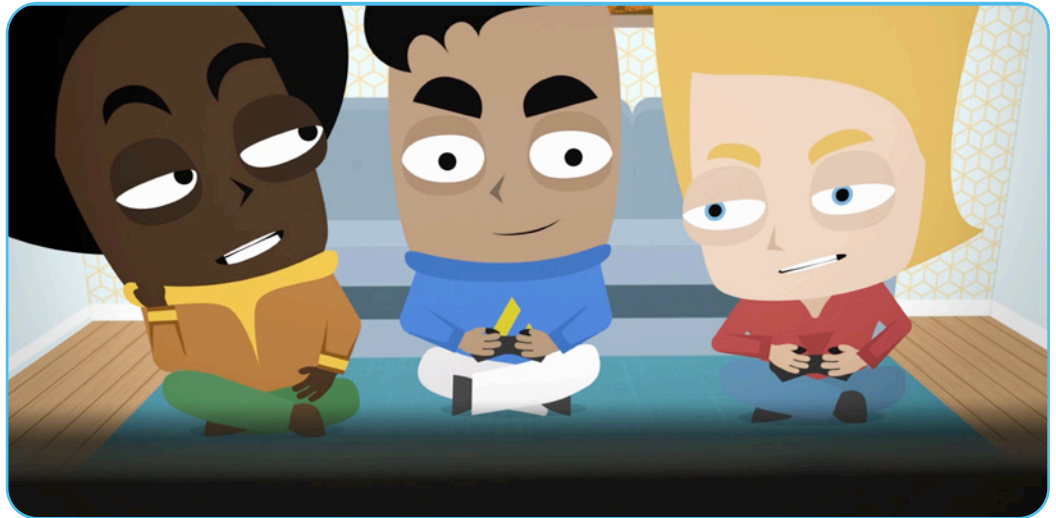


Figure 4.1
The Video Clip

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

4.2 PACIFISM AND HOLY WAR

The just war theory was born out of the discussion about the use of violence: when is a country allowed to use violence? When is a country allowed to go to war? These questions are centuries old and have a long history of origin within the Catholic Church.

When talking about war and peace, different positions can be taken. Two examples are: **'pacifism'** and **'holy war'**.

ASSIGNMENT. Connect the correct term with the correct explanation.

Pacifism	Holy war
It is an attitude that strives for peace and always resists war and violence. There is always an attitude of non-violence.	War waged based on religious beliefs. War is waged by a divine obligation, or in defense of 'holy' territory.



Figure 4.2

💡 **Pacifism** is an attitude that strives for peace and always resists war and violence. There is always an attitude of non-violence. Violence and war can never be good!

💡 According to the **holy war tradition**, the use of violence is acceptable to achieve certain religious goals. This concept is often seen as the opposite of pacifism.

ASSIGNMENT. Think about the vision of pacifism. What do you think of this attitude? Why?



Figure 4.3
Image: © Priscilla du Preez | Unsplash

4.3 THE JUST WAR THEORY

Pacifism and the theory of holy war are two extreme attitudes. We are now going to look at a possible intermediate position in which the use of violence is permitted based on certain conditions: **'the just war theory'**.

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



Figure 4.4
St. Peter's Square in
Vatican City
Image: © Alan Liu |
Unsplash

Throughout history, a tradition has been developed and further elaborated according to context, time and place, about the use of violence and war. This development was given the name **'just war theory'**. **The use of violence is allowed based on certain conditions.**

It is important to remember that 'the' just war theory does not exist. It is a tradition through time in which, depending on the time and place, answers were given about the use of violence and war. Discussions about the conditions of 'a just war' occur in all times. So, this theory can also change through time, even today.

How can we understand this just war theory? Does the just war theory want to allow the use of violence and war? Does this theory make war, military intervention and violence 'normal'?



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

In sum, **the just war theory** wants to prevent and contain war and violence as much as possible. It gives an overview of conditions to determine in concrete circumstances whether the use of violence and war can be justified.

In general, the following conditions are set today for starting an armed conflict within **the just war theory**. Only when all these six conditions are addressed in a certain situation, is warfare 'justified':

- 1. Just cause:** war may only be waged for a just cause, and not out of self-interest. There must be a thorough and just reason to go to war. War must be aimed at restoring peace.
- 2. Right intention:** the intention behind the war must be right and fair. It must be aimed at a fair and just goal: the restoration of peace. There must be no unjust ulterior motives: for example, saving one's own economy or conquering a new piece of land.
- 3. Last resort:** violence and war should be avoided as much as possible. War can only be a last resort. One must first try all other non-violent means(s) to solve a conflict.
- 4. Probability of success:** if one wants to go to war, there must be a reasonable chance of achieving the goal: peace. Soldiers, but also civilians, must not suffer and die unnecessarily.
- 5. Proportionality:** the degree of violence must not exceed the evil to be combated. The means used must be in proportion to the aim pursued by the war.
- 6. Competent authority:** war may only be entered into and waged by a lawful authority. An authority is a recognized government, the political authority of a community that is responsible for the welfare of its people.

ASSIGNMENT. Read the six conditions of the just war theory and answer the following question:


Do you think these conditions are enough to avoid war? Why do/do you not?



Figure 4.5
Image: © Pixel2013 |
Pixabay

What does the Catholic Church think about this?

From what perspective is this theory viewed in the Catholic Church? Within the **Catholic Church**, this theory still has a great impact on thinking about war and peace, both in the past and today.

 For the **Catholic Church**, war, military intervention and violence is an ongoing and disturbing thought. Counteracting all kinds of injustice and oppression is also a first and foremost concern. Christians must not only prevent violence and war as much as possible, but they must also stand up for the rights, freedoms, and welfare of victims of violence.

For the Catholic Church it is not about just war, but about **just peace!** It is also about **building a just society** where violence and oppression do not exist.

ASSIGNMENT. How can the just war theory be understood in the Catholic tradition?

- It is a theory that condemns any use of violence.
- The use of violence and going to war to spread and protect the Catholic faith is justified by this theory.
- This theory is not meant to condone violence just like that. It is a way to first look for peaceful solutions in a conflict and to avoid the use of violence and war.



Figure 4.6
Image: © Sunguk Kim |
Unsplash

ASSIGNMENT. Read the statements below and choose the one that appeals to you the most. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why do you agree or disagree?

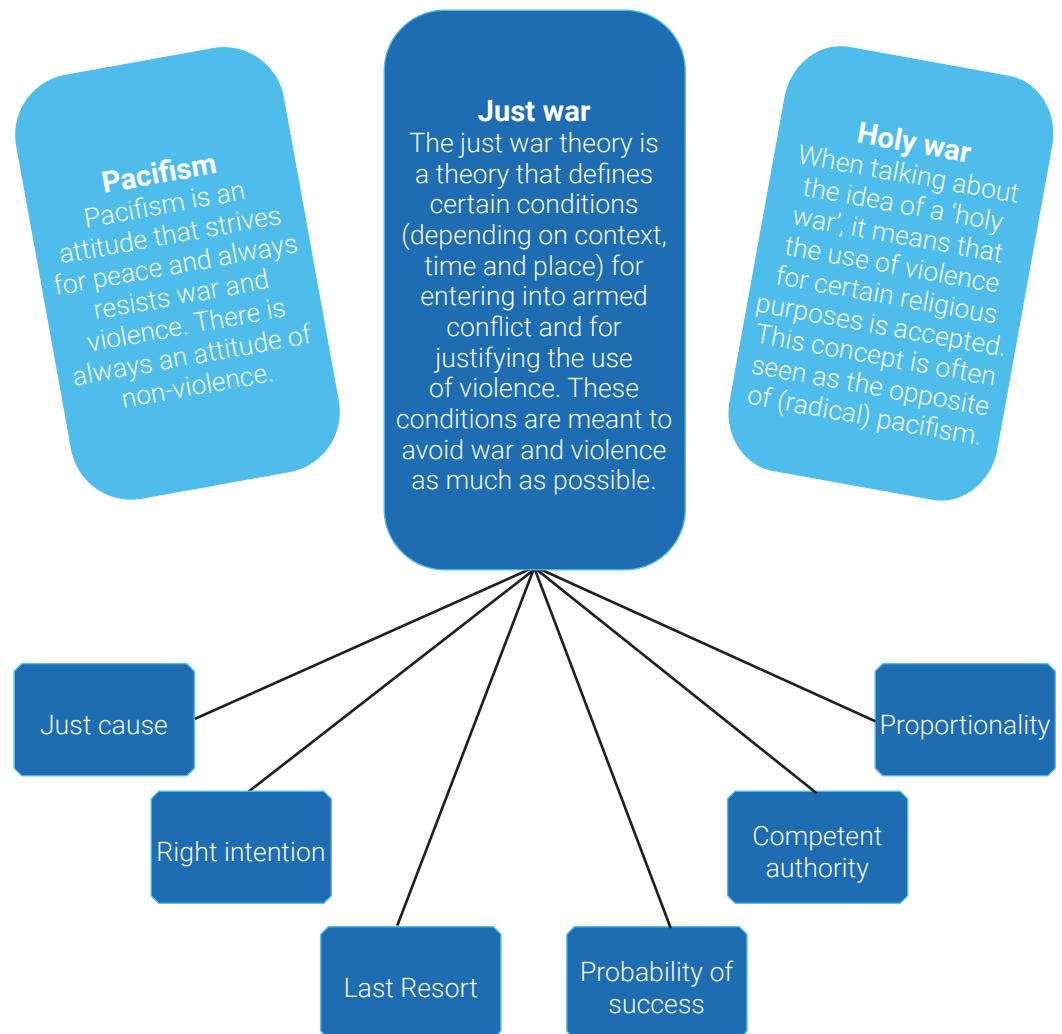
- *"War is never justified."*
- *"Peace can only exist if there is also war."*
- *"Never do anything in a war that will make reconciliation impossible afterwards."*
- *"A world without violence is not realistic."*
- *"Violence begins or ends with yourself."*
- *"Even in times of peace, it is important for a country to invest in weapons."*
- *"Risking your own life for strangers in a foreign country is pointless."*
- *"The just war theory allows the use of violence."*



Figure 4.7
Image: © Free-Photos |
Pixabay

4.4 SUMMARY

In this diagram, you can find a summary of the most important concepts from this module.



4.5 GLOSSARY

Holy war

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

Pacifism

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

Just war

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

Just peace

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

Righteous/Unrighteous

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



Photo: Annie Spratt | Unsplash

4.6 TRANSCRIPT OF THE VIDEO

INT LIVING ROOM

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

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

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

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

Ahmed: Watch me!

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

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

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

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

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

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

Michael: Well, maybe he's right.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

An intro starts to play

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

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

Sarah: let's find out!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. *PROPORTIONALITY*: “The means used for violence must be in proportion to the end that the war seeks to achieve.”

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

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

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

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

Sarah: look there is a VR experience!

We see the kids putting on VR glasses

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sarah: I don’t get that at all...

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

Michael: Like diplomacy?

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

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

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

INT LIVING ROOM

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

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

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

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

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

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