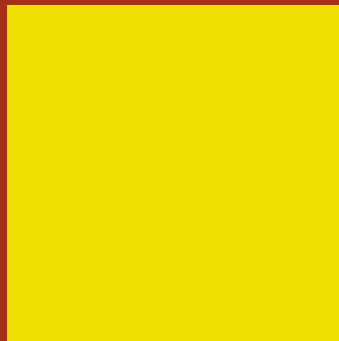


4



WHEN ENCOUNTER
BECOMES CONFLICT: JUST
WAR AND JUST PEACE

MODULE FOUR

JUST WAR AND JUST PEACE

1. "BETWEEN PEACE AND VIOLENCE" (LUKE 6:27-35; REVELATION 19:26-32): VIDEO



Figure 4.1
Scene from the video

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

4.1 BETWEEN PEACE AND VIOLENCE

A TV screen shows tanks and army trucks slowly entering a village. A man with a gun suddenly jumps out of one of the trucks. As he runs down a side street, the screen changes and you are now looking from the man's eyes. It is now possible to control him using a controller. There is no doubt about the objective: "kill the enemies" that appear. Then, as a door opens, a woman with a child appears. Is there a need to shoot?

The above scenario could have appeared in a video game. It is a war situation in which you, the player, are actively involved by achieving the game's goals. But a woman and child are already visible in the game. Surely, they can never be the enemy? What if the game offered the option to shoot the woman and child?

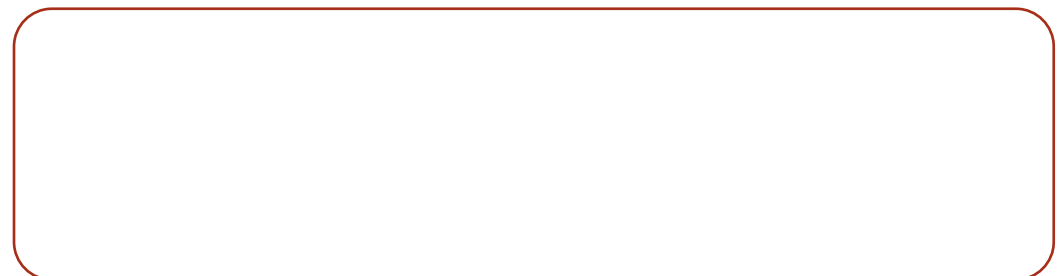
This example may be innocent, because nobody really dies in the end. Yet in reality, wars continue to take place in which innocent civilians are often killed. Thus, in these places there is no peace, but often a gruesome battle takes place. Is it possible to wage war without killing innocent civilians? Or is war always something we should avoid?

These questions may not seem relevant to you. Yet these questions are very important in today's world. What would you do if your own government called you to join the army and fight in another country? And how do you view people fleeing war or mandatory military service in their country?

According to some Christians, war should always be avoided. Others argue that war can actually be used to bring about peace. In this lesson, we will focus on examining the use of violence on a larger scale. This larger scale consists of violence committed by nations, people groups, or other social groups. How can we, as Christians, reflect more deeply on this topic?

Exercise 1

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



Luke 6:27-3

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

Revelation of John 19:11-16, 19

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

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



Figure 4.2
Depiction of the slap on the cheek, 1984.
Source: Jim Padgett, courtesy of Sweet Publishing, Ft. Worth, TX, and Gospel Light, Ventura, CA via Wikimedia Commons. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license. No change has been made. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gospel_of_Luke_Chapter_6-15_\(Bible_Illustrations_by_Sweet_Media\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gospel_of_Luke_Chapter_6-15_(Bible_Illustrations_by_Sweet_Media).jpg)

4.2 THE WORLD OF THE BIBLE

The book of Revelation of John is the last book of the New Testament and is named after its author, John. This John claims to have received a revelation from Jesus.



The book of Revelation contains a lot of **imagery** that can be difficult to understand. Examining a book in its entirety can sometimes help to clarify what a specific passage means and make some words or arguments become easier to understand.

The book begins with a series of letters addressed to seven churches in Asia Minor. In the next section, an image of heaven is described, in which a **sealed scroll** is visible. Only a sacrificed lamb, who appears on the scene, can break the seals of this scroll.



The **lamb** is usually interpreted as Jesus. This is one of the many ways in which Jesus is depicted in the imagery of this book.

The book concludes with the image of a new heaven and a new earth. In this image, God dwells among humans. In addition, there are no more wars since there is an eternal peace. The previous chapters, on the other hand, describe the story of a **battle**. At the start of this battle, Jesus condemns the world for its injustices. The next three chapters describe a scene in which bowls are emptied on the earth and then various events occur that serve as punishment. In chapter 18, judgment is passed on an image of evil, Babylon. Finally, in chapter 19, a **rider on a white horse** appears and goes to war.

Exercise 2

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

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

4.3 THE WORLD OF TEXT

Luke 6:27-32 depicts Jesus instructing his followers **to love their enemies**. The text can be found in a section called “the sermon on the plains”. In this section, Jesus is teaching his disciples about how to live. Revelation 19:11-16, 19 describes a picture of a rider on a white horse leading an **army** and going to war.



The rider on a white horse is often interpreted as an image of Jesus.

Exercise 3

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

Wars have been waged throughout human history. Examples of wars include the Roman conquests, the American civil War, Napoleonic Wars and the two World Wars. Wars have also been described in the Bible, such as the Babylonian conquest of Judah.



Wars are conflicts between two or more social groups (for example, countries, ethnic groups, religious groups, etc.), during which all sides use weapons to achieve their goals. Not all armed conflicts are always specifically described as a war. Minor conflicts within social groups can also result in **armed violence**, but they are not considered as wars.

Figure 4.3

Armed soldiers
Source: Official Navy
Page from United
States of America LAC
Amanda McErlich/U.S.
Navy via Wikipedia
(Public Domain) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Zealand_disruptive_pattern_material#/media/File:Flickr_-_Official_U.S._Navy_Imagery_-_New_Zealand_Army_soldiers_from_Alpha_Company_clear_buildings_as_part_of_the_Military_Operations_Urban_Training.jpg.



Exercise 4

Read the statements below.

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

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

How can you as a Christian deal with war and other armed conflicts? One way to respond to this question is to reject war completely. This position is called 'pacifism'.



Pacifism is the rejection of war and violence and as a result, the refusal to use weapons to achieve one's goals. In addition, pacifists strive for peace without using weapons.


It is also possible for Christians to embrace war as a means to achieve religious ends. A very prominent position in history is that of 'holy war'.



Holy war is the waging of war to achieve a religious goal. Usually, a divine obligation is also given as a reason. The Crusades are an example of a series of 'holy wars'.

For many European Christians nowadays, the use of the term 'holy war' is difficult to imagine. Yet some reactions in our society are consistent with this way of thinking. An example of such a reaction is when people talk about waging "war" to defend the "Christian world" in response to terrorist attacks.

Most Christians today who approve the use of war in some way will not defend the concept of holy war. Instead, these Christians usually speak of waging a just war.

 The **just war tradition** holds that under certain conditions one can wage war and qualify it as just. In order for a war to be considered just, the following conditions must be met:

- *With a just reason:* The motive behind the war must be just. Just reasons include protecting citizens and nations from unjustified attacks or restoring human rights when they have been violated.
- *With the right intent:* A war should only serve to obtain a better and more just peace than existed before the war.
- *As a last resort:* All other means of achieving a peaceful solution must have been explored. There must no longer be any other way to reach a peaceful solution without violence. A peaceful solution is always preferable.
- *With a probability of success:* It must be very likely that the intended objective will be achieved by waging war. Wars without a probability of success are never just.
- *Be Proportionate:* The force to be used must be proportionate to the evil to combat. The evil done by the war must never be more than the evil being combated.
- *Under right and competent authority:* War can only be declared and waged by a legitimate authority. Legitimate authorities are governments recognized as having political and social authority as well as representing the interests and welfare of their citizens.



Figure 4.4
UN Peacekeepers send out with the mission to prevent a possible violent conflict and protect civilians, 2016. Source: US Embassy in Ghana via Wikimedia Commons: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peacekeeping#/media/File:Ghana_IntPeaceCorps_2016-05-29_B002a.jpg.

Revelation 19:26-32 describes an image of Jesus fighting for humanity. This image indicates that fighting is a part of the **story of Jesus**. This text can be used as an argument by just war advocates that war can sometimes be necessary to establish peace. Pacifists reject this idea. They often refer to Luke 6:27-31 to argue that Jesus **teaches** pacifism.

Exercise 5

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

Adherents of both pacifism and just war do ultimately work toward the same goal. Indeed, both positions strive for just peace.


 In the Bible, the word **peace** does not only mean the absence of strife, but it can also be used to refer to the well-being of a person or society. In fact, the Hebrew word “shalom” means, besides peace, completeness. Peace can thus also be described as the situation in which everyone can completely live in peace and with a sense of security. A peace that exists in combination with justice and fairness is also called **just peace**.



Figure 4.5.
Different symbols for
peace
Source: Pixabay

Exercise 6

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

Exercise 7

What can you do to ensure peace?

Throughout history, Christians have thought about wars, armed conflicts, and peace. Several Protestant thinkers have developed their views on this issue. The ideas of four of these thinkers are briefly explained below.



Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that the primary goal of the Christian life is **to follow Jesus at all costs**. It is not without risk for a person to follow Jesus, and one must also be prepared to experience the consequences of doing so. This person thus accepts oppression and violence while not resisting it violently. According to Bonhoeffer, resisting with violence can actually cause more **harm** than good. It was also his opinion that Christians should not participate in war as the Christian community should not take part in politics.

Figure 4.6
Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Source: Bettina
Rott via Wikimedia
Commons: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dietrich_Bonhoeffer_\(um_1938\).jpg?uselang=de](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dietrich_Bonhoeffer_(um_1938).jpg?uselang=de)

Daniel Bell

Daniel Bell defends waging war for just reasons. He writes that true justice in war situations can only be achieved through **Christian discipleship**. Discipleship means following Jesus. To Christians, a just war should not be a political question, but instead a question of **fairness and morality**. Thus, the goal for a Christian is not to follow a set of rules that determine whether a war is just, but rather to honor God through how they live. This can only be accomplished by being virtues. Bell describes **virtues** as beliefs and habits that enable people to behave consistently. In doing so, we are striving to achieve a higher purpose than our own self-interests.



Walter Wink

Walter Wink advocated **active nonviolence**. As Christians, we must not be passive toward injustice or violence, but resist violence in a nonviolent way. Indeed, according to Wink, Jesus revealed a nonviolent God to humanity. Wink describes the life of Jesus as that of actively resisting violence. Active nonviolence means a constant resistance to violence by responding with nonviolent alternatives. For Wink, Luke 6 a crucial text because it shows that Jesus expects from his followers a **radically different response** than the use of violence.

Slapping someone on the right cheek is often done with the palm of the hand. In the Jesus' time, this was intended to humiliate a person and so a "violent" counterreaction was expected. Jesus calls to turn the **other cheek** and not to lower oneself to the level of a violent counterreaction.

Reinhold Niebuhr

Reinhold Niebuhr was a theologian who initially developed pacifist ideas. Later on, he rejected these ideas because he felt that pacifists strive toward a situation that will never work in reality. He argues that people possess **freedom**. As a result, they often do **wrong** things, which we call sin. According to Niebuhr, this situation makes it **impossible** to develop a pacifist society. Christians sometimes have to abandon the ideal of the Kingdom of God because of human freedom and sin. This means that the use of violence is sometimes necessary to **fulfill** Jesus' demand of bringing peace and justice.

Figure 4.7
Walter Wink
Source: Fellowship
of Reconciliation via
Wikimedia Commons:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Wink#/media/File:Walter-wink.jpg.

Exercise 8

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

This lesson is about whether Christians may consider war as an acceptable or objectionable means. Another issue is whether or not you, as a Christian, may participate in wars and other armed conflicts. As you can see, the opinions are divided on this issue. This is a particularly difficult question to answer. On the one hand, there is the **harsh reality** in which war and violence take place. On the other hand, we are also **invited know** a God who reveals Jesus to be *warm and loving*. At the same time, this God in the Bible is working to bring just peace, although at times it seems to happen in a rough way.



Through his life, Jesus tells us that the most important lesson is to **love our neighbor and even our enemies**. Christians should live by this principle and let it guide their lives. Especially when discussing conflict and violence.

Exercise 9

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

4.5 GLOSSARY

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

Disciple

A disciple is a follower of Jesus.

Enemy

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

Evil

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

Just

Just means that something is right or fair.

Just War

A just war is a war that aims to establish peace and meets several preconditions. In order to start a war, the following preconditions need to be met: (1) have a just cause; (2) have the right intention; (3) use war as a last resort; (4) the war needs to have a high probability of success; (5) be proportionate to combatted evil; (6) be started by a proper and competent authority.

Pacifism

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

Peace

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

Revelation

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

War

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

4.6 TRANSCRIPT OF VIDEO

1 INT ROOM

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

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

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

We see a man is talking on the TV screen.

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

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

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

Sarah: That is very terrible news.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We focus on Sarah, David and Anna talking

David: Is he talking to us?

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

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

We focus on the TV.

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

We focus on Sarah, David and Anna talking

David: Uhm, is it not pacifist.

Sarah: Indeed, it is.

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

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

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

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

We focus on the TV.

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

We focus on Sarah, David and Anna talking

David: Uh well I do not know.

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

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

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

We focus on the TV.

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

We focus on Sarah, David and Anna talking

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

David nods his head.

David: Yeah, neither can I.

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

David looks surprised.

David: What? I thought Jesus was a pacifist.

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

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

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

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

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

We focus on the TV.

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

We focus on Sarah, David and Anna talking

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

Thus, in this case, yes.

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

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

We focus on the TV.

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

We focus on Sarah, David and Anna talking

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

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

Anna: Yeah, I agree with that.

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Jelle Creemers (1978) is Associate Professor at the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Leuven (Belgium). He is Chair of the Department of Religious Studies and Missiology and he coordinates the Institute for the Study of Freedom of Religion or Belief (ISFORB). His research focuses on minority religions in Belgium and their relations to the state and to society. He teaches courses on sociology of religion and on interchurch relations. He is a member of Comité PEGO, the organizing body of Protestant Evangelical Religious Education in Flanders.

Samuël Velinga (Rotterdam, 1996) is associate researcher at the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit Leuven in the Department of Missiology and Religious Studies. He graduated from Utrecht University (Netherlands) with a bachelor's and master's degree in Educational Sciences. He is currently pursuing a master's degree in Theology & Religious studies at the ETF.



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