The Post-Critical Belief Scale *for dummies*

Questionnaire developed by prof. Dirk Hutsebaut, based on the typology of prof. David M. Wulff., about different religious faith attitudes

This empirical instrument is being used for the academic research project
'**Enhancing Catholic School Identity**'
commissioned by the *Catholic Education Commission of Victoria*, Australia.

Centre of Academic Teacher Training, Faculty of Theology,
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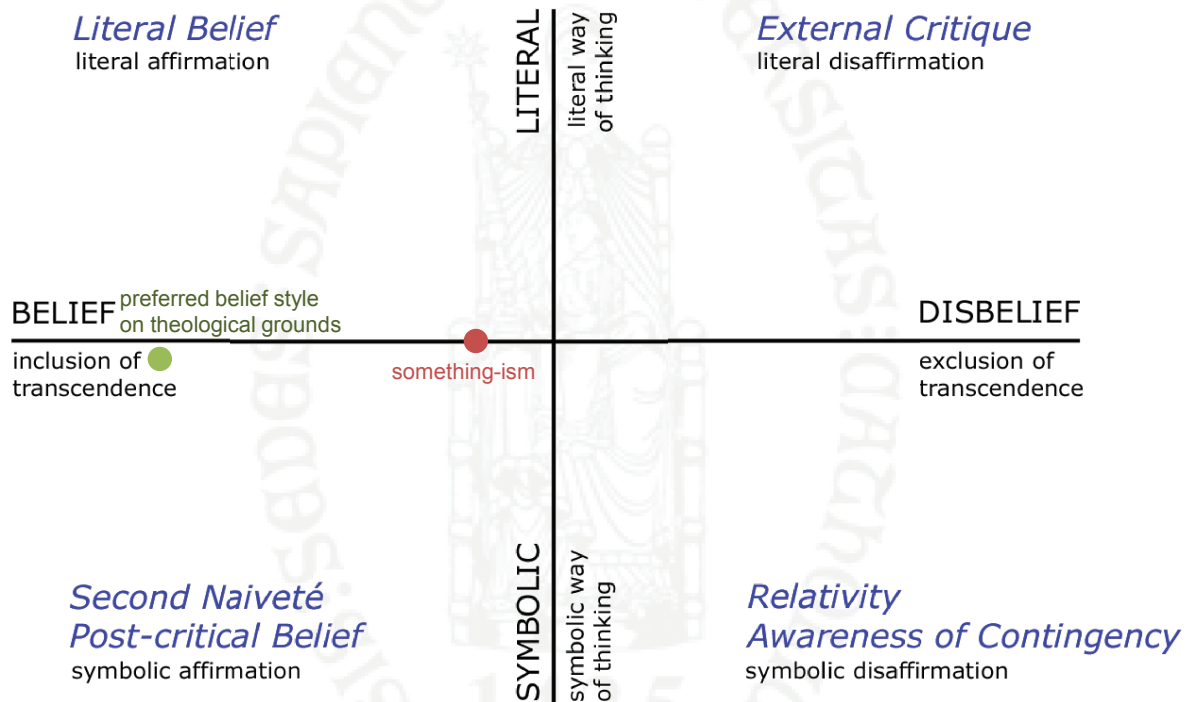Promotor of the project: Prof. dr. Didier Pollefeyt   Didier.Pollefeyt@theo.kuleuven.be
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- Designed by the psychologist of religion Prof. Dr. Dirk Hutsebaut, based on the typology of David M. Wulff (professor of psychology in Wheaton College, U.S.A.)

- Typology based on the concept 'second naiveté' / 'post-critical belief' (Paul Ricoeur).

- A two-dimensional typology:
  - ➢ **Inclusion vs exclusion of transcendent belief** (horizontal axis)
    Does someone believe in God, or not? Is there a transcendent God involved in the structure of someone's philosophy of life?
  - ➢ **Literal vs symbolic interpretation of religion** (vertical axis)
    The way in which religious content is being experienced and processed: in a literal or symbolical way.

- The specific combination of these four dimensions results in four different options for coping with religious beliefs. Four cognitive religious belief styles / belief attitudes / approaches to religion and faith:
  - ○ **Literal belief / Orthodoxy**
  - ○ **Literal disbelief/ External critique**
  - ○ **Relativism / Awareness of contingency**
  - ○ **Second naiveté / Post-critical belief**

Literal Belief
literal affirmation

External Critique
literal disaffirmation

LITERAL — literal way of thinking

BELIEF — preferred belief style on theological grounds

inclusion of transcendence

something-ism

DISBELIEF

exclusion of transcendence

SYMBOLIC — symbolic way of thinking

Second Naiveté
Post-critical Belief
symbolic affirmation

Relativity
Awareness of Contingency
symbolic disaffirmation

Literal belief
literal affirmation of belief contents

- Direct and literal belief in a transcendent God. Literal acceptance of doctrinal belief contents.

- First naiveté: believing in God in a literal way. Believing to have direct and immediate access to the transcendent.

- Bible texts are read and accepted in a literal way. For example: the world was created in exactly seven days, Noah's ark really existed, Gods voice sounded from the blackberry bush, Jesus actually walked over water, the deceased Lazarus came to life again.

- *Objectivism*: religious metaphors are objectified and taken literally. The literal believer stresses the objectivity of the truth of faith, and desires to protect it against external attacks. For example: burning a candle prior to an exam, making the sign of the cross prior to a penalty kick, praying the rosary for good weather, ... and believing that these acts actually influence the course of things, and even attempt to prove it empirically.

- A meritorious aspect of literal belief is the care for the ontological referent of the Christian faith: faith shouldn't dilute to that extent, that belief in God's objective existence would no longer be significant.

- Belief in a personal, immutable God.

- The truth of faith cannot change through time.

- Every faith question can and must have just ONE, exact, certain and unchanging answer.

- A free, subjective interpretation of faith is risky, because interpretation brings uncertainty. It isn't desirable to reflect critically about faith. Faith has priority over critical reason.

- A desire for absolute certainty in matters of faith. Critical questions, doubt and uncertainty are to be avoided. Unsure and anxious when confronted with new, complicating problems.

- Complex faith questions are best avoided.

- Great importance is attached to authority, Church hierarchy and obedience. The content and meaning of faith is derived from (Church) authority.

- Tradition is considered to be very important: things best remain the way they have always been. In a certain sense, this is akin to conservatism.

- In general, the Bible is read in a literal way. However, this needn't necessarily exclude an openness to an (additional) symbolic conscience, even though it isn't dominant and often selective.

- Literal belief often opts for *mono-religious learning* and a deductive didactics as its basic pedagogical option. Religious education is *de jure* catechesis.

- Characterized by a strong sense of values and norms. Family values and sexual values are especially considered to be very important.

- Not uncommonly, literal belief can be found in anxious people who desire stability, certainty, safety and familiarity, and who use religion as a way of reducing these fears.

- This religious attitude brings a positive relationship to God, and on the whole it gives a positive feeling of stability and affirmation. For this reason, some people are strongly devoted to a literal belief attitude.

- However, at the same time feelings of anguish and guilt, that find their origin in religion, can cast a shadow on this positive feeling: the spirit is strong, but the flesh is weak…

- Literal belief runs the risk of a rigid, strained way of experiencing faith.

- Literal belief is characterized by a relative intolerance for alternative (religious) positions.

- *In extremis* we could speak of religious fundamentalism or fanaticism.

- NB. In principle, the term 'literal belief' is preferable over the term 'orthodoxy', because the latter could cause problems in the eucumenical meeting. Moreover, it could mistakenly suggest that the other religious attitudes wouldn't be 'orthodox'.

Literal disbelief/ External critique
literal disaffirmation of belief contents

- Destructive criticism on religion and faith from an external position. A straightforward negation of any transcendent reality. In extremis: radical atheism.

- Religious language, statements, testimonies and doctrines are taken literally. But unlike the literal belief coping style, faith is here dismissed because its literal interpretation is, rationally speaking, untenable.

- Bible texts are read literally and are consequently dismissed: many facts from the Bible are untenable when taken as they are, and furthermore mutually contradictory.

- External critique is often akin to a modernist, positive-scientific epistemology.

"Believing in something supernatural is unreasonable. Religions depart from irrational and even inhuman presumptions. Believing is naive and oppressive."

"Virginal conception is a contradiction. A near-death experience is a neurological phenomenon. A conscience isn't God's voice, but an interiorisation of parental authority."

"The theory of evolution proves that the world was not created in 7 days. People cannot turn into salt pillars. Prophesying the future is impossible. No man can walk over water. No dead man can come back to life. The Bible: a book of fairy-tales."

"There's no legitimation to 'believe' something that cannot be empirically verified or rationally deduced. And no-one ever saw God, nor can God's existence be proven in a rational way."

- An external critic can't imagine how to experience and represent reality in a religious way, even if religious beliefs are expressed symbolically.

- He/she rejects certain images of God that he considers to be untenable. Since religious beliefs are taken literally, this critique leads to literal disbelief. (Besides, this doesn't mean that the critiques on certain images of God wouldn't be justified as such – from the perspective of second naiveté – while the inferences that are drawn by external critique could be highly questionable.)

- Familiar with them or not, external critique is alienated from the mythological images and the religious language that are so important in religious texts.

- An external critic emphasizes freedom and personal autonomy, in opposition to the alleged dependance and lack of freedom associated with religious belief. He/she is stressed by the tension between human autonomy and a 'capitulation' to God.

- Literal critique on faith can be an intermediate stage in an evolution from literal to symbolic belief (second naiveté). But external critique could also harden in the deconstruction, without surpassing it. In that case, external critique doesn't evolve into an internal critique of the subject, as is the case with second naiveté.

- Inspired by the 19th century 'masters of suspicion', that put religious beliefs under philosophical critiques: Freud, Marx and Nietzsche.

- Ethics is autonomous and universal, and doesn't require any sort of religious foundation. A specifically Christian ethic doesn't exist, nor would it be needed or desirable.

- The external critic longs for clarity and objective certainty, similar to that found in the positive sciences. He/she is fearful of uncertainty in matters of faith.

- Psychological reduction of faith: people believe in God in order to take away their fears, but this is an illusion. We should learn to live with the harshness of life.

- Religion is mostly associated with negative feelings.

- Ultimately, external critique implies a rather 'empty and dark' world view, that easily inspires fear. To live out this philosophy of life in a sustained and consistent way is demanding and tough.

- Sometimes people fear the fanaticism that some associate with religion. But external critique is fond of a similar urge for certainty and inflexible truth claims. For the same reason, people sometimes fear militant disbelief, as they fear religious fanaticism.

- *In extremis* we could speak of an intolerant, anti-religious fundamentalism.

Relativism / Awareness of contingency
belief contents are merely relative and contingent

- Religion is approached in a symbolic way, however belief in a transcendent God is excluded.

- Relativists are aware of the symbolic and hermeneutical character of religious beliefs. Religious texts and rituals are interpreted symbolically, rather than literally.

- However, there is no belief in a personal God: relativists don't believe in the existence of a transcendent reality 'above' or 'outside' our human world, to which we relate ourselves. Ultimatelty, there's only us.

- Different religions are merely interchangeable options. The one, true religion does not exist. The way I think about belief is only one possibility among so many others.

- Statements about God, testimonies of faith, and Church doctrines are merely relative. They are coloured by the time and the place in which they were pronounced or experienced.

- Religious creeds are always historically determined, and thus contingent. What someone believes as an adult, depends largely on the cultural context in which he/she grew up as a child. Usually this context is accidental; the same is true for religious beliefs and practices.

- Not uncommonly, relativism tries to reduce religious interpretations to non-religious variables. Religions are human constructions that can be reduced (deconstructed) to their psychological, social and cultural determinants. (*reductive interpretation*, Wulff).

- Different individuals arrive at different interpretations, without one of them being the only 'true' one. Relativists stress the contingency and the relativity of religious beliefs, practices and expressions. According to relativism, they're all merely different paths to the peak(s) of the mountain, without any one path or mountain top being priviledged.

- All religions are 'equally true', *ergo* 'equally untrue' – ultimately, they are all meaningless.

- Relativists don't reject religious attitudes in an absolute way (as external critique does), but they do relativise them.

- A positive interest in religions remains, sometimes even sympathy or fascination for religious matters.

- *Subjectivism*: religious contents or metaphors can never be objectified. They have no meaning beyond the interpretation given by the individual. Their meaning is always dependent on the individual, and can never reach beyond the subjective.

- If a relativist reads Bible stories, he reduces them to mere stories, parables with an interesting plot.

- Sometimes relativism can be a (temporary?) position of *non-commitment*: one refrains from a positive choice for a more definite life view. Options are kept open, choices are postponed, one refuses to engage oneself. (This is a possible explanation why the internal consistency of the relativism-items in the PCB Scale is often relatively low.)

- Relativism is often observed in teens and adolescents who are looking for a personal identity. Sometimes it can be an attempt to rationalise the loss of a naive, childish belief.

- However, it is also conceivable that relativism doesn't disappear when one reaches an adult age, but that is has become a characteristic of a new (dominant?) cultural pattern, in which values like 'respect' and 'tolerance' play a central role. "Every person believes what he/she wants, as long as one respects each other."

- There is no fear of complex faith questions, since they don't threaten the relativist's own life view.

- Relativism often opts for *multi-religious learning* as its basic pedagogical option (preference for comparative religious sciences).

- A relativist attitude cultivates a great openness and receptiveness for different philosophies of life and religious traditions, as long as there's no pressure or obligation.

- A relativist attitude entails no clear positive nor negative feelings concerning religion.

- *In extremis* relativism could lead to indifference, non-commitment and lack of solidarity. "All philosophies of life are of equal value, equally unworthy, equally pointless. There is no ultimate meaning, so why bother?"

Second naiveté / Post-critical belief
symbolical affirmation of belief contents

- Characterized by belief in a transcendent God and a religious interpretation of the world. However, the transcendent is not presented in a literal way, but *symbolically* represented. No literal-objective belief in the third person, but a subjective-interpretative belief in the first person.

- Contact with God never occurs directly, but is always mediated by means of symbols. Second naiveté-belief acknowledges that God is never immediately present, containable, understandable, knowable from face to face. God is the radically different One, who can never be in our power. We stand in a relation to God always through a symbolic representation, through the interpretation of a sign that refers to the uncontainable, the transcendent.

- Only through mediation can people enter into a relationship with the transcendent reality: via stories, rituals, prayer, traditions, institutions, Churches, church offices, social organisations, schools, and so forth. Faith is acquired through our active, creative and interpretative dealing with these mediations. This also means that we always need a faith-community to enter into a relation with God.

- *Hermeneutical belief attitude*: believing is a continuous process of symbol interpretation, of uncovering new layers of meaning in our symbolical interrelation to God. Believing is only possible and meaningful *after* interpretation, a process in which critical reason plays a vital role.

- Belief contents and faith attitudes have an historical character and should be construed historically. The Christian tradition continuously develops itself within the context of its point in history.

- Second naiveté is and always will be a *transcendent* belief style. For an *ontological referent* is indispensable when symbolically dealing with religion. Talking about God has to refer to something that really exists, because without referent the symbol is empty.

- *Post-critical belief* (Ricoeur): believing in God, despite critical reasons not to believe. After a restorative reinterpretation, religious contents become meaningful again, despite rational critique. Post-critical believers are well aware of the many critiques that could be raised against religion, but nevertheless they keep holding on to their faith: they choose to remain confident.

- *Second naiveté-belief* (Ricoeur): the naive literal belief belonging to childhood (*first naiveté*) is followed by a destructive critique on the sustainability of (literal) belief, which in turn is overcome by a renewed trust, despite possible critiques (*second naiveté*).

- *Restorative faith* (Wulff): to arrive at a second naiveté-belief, literal belief needs to be deconstructed and demystified first, and then restored again. This restoration is a hermeneutical process that restores the true meaning of the religious text or message, so that its authentic meaning for the believing subject can become manifest (remembered). Despair turns into confidence once more. Ricoeur speaks of "*un combat amoureux de la foi et de la non-foi*" ("a passionate battle between belief and non or disbelief") (1971).

- Second naiveté-belief is like a quest that's never complete. Faith has a dimension of a continuous 'being-in-search-for'. Religious faith always remains unfathomable, it keeps a dimension of mystery that can never be penetrated. So religious answers are never definite, final or fixed.

- Reasonably speaking, there is never absolute certainty, consistency, or clarity in matters of faith. Faith truths aren't certain knowledge. Faith = existential trust. So a symbolical style of belief introduces a form of uncertainty, one is prepared to live with. Religious contents and personal creeds can (and should be) put into question, time and again.

- Religious certainty isn't subject to rational conditions or criteria. Belief and science are separate domains of human activity. There is no contradiction between religious faith and rationality. So it is possible to be a believer despite faith critiques, without being irrational.

- According to second naiveté-belief, Bible texts and other religious writings can only be understood and believed after interpretation. The Bible is not an historical report, not a quasi-journalistic account of past happenings, that could be taken literally. The Bible employs mythological, symbolical and religious language. It creates a mythological world through which the story of God with human beings is told. So, reading the Bible requires interpretation, deciphering, translation: the second naiveté believer attempts to distinguish between the Bible's mythological imagery and the religious message for us, living here and now. Despite the fact that the Bible was written in an historical context that is far removed from our own, the Scriptures maintain a religious message that is relevant for us. For example: the literal believing person assumes that Jesus literally walked over the lake. The second naiveté-believer on the other hand is aware that the evangelist through the gospel story attempted to stress the special, divine nature of Jesus Christ by means of the available narrative patterns of his time.

- Likewise, the sacraments should be symbolically interpreted instead of taken literally. The ritual / sacramental event becomes transparent to 'the other world', from which God breaks though.

- A second naiveté-believer is prepared for re-interpretation, and hence is open for change. He/she recognises that every religious standpoint (including his/her own) is historically situated, embedded in a concrete-personal context, and consequently changeable. Meaning can be construed and expressed in more than one way, depending on the time and the place symbolical language is employed.

- There is a receptiveness for complex faith questions that nourish the hermeneutical process.

- A second naiveté-believer acknowledges that there are many ways to deal with religious questions. So he/she cherishes an openness and receptiveness towards other religious perspectives and practices.

- A second naiveté-belief opts for an *inter-religious learning* and an inductive didactics as its basic pedagogical option.

- According to Wulff, referring to Ricoeur, second naiveté is the most mature belief style, that probable is best suited for modern society and culture. Moreover, Wulff links second naiveté with the fifth stage in the faith-development model of James W. Fowler, namely *conjunctive faith* (1981)*.

- This belief style is associated with positive feelings concerning religion.

- The attitude of second naiveté should not be exclusively linked to the Christian religion. This coping style can, in principle, be found in any religion with a transcendent belief structure, not only in Christianity.

- Because of the hermeneutical nuances and uncertainty, second naiveté is a rather complex and also vulnerable faith position: a continuous searching-for without the promise of a final resting point, no certainty apart from the confidence of faith. We, positive-scientifically minded people, sometimes experience difficulty with a truth claim in the first person, without one, clear, fixed and directly fathomable meaning.

- Moreover, second naiveté is put under pressure, both by literal belief (that misconstrues it as relativism, a dilution of literal faith), as by external critique and relativism (that both suspect it to be disguised orthodoxy)…

- *In extremis* this belief style could degenerate into a 'religious' attitude with a very general and non-specific content without a clear point of reference, in which any interpretation is possible.

*J. W. FOWLER, *Stages of Faith. The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, San Francisco, Harper and Row, 1981.
(0) Undifferentiated faith, (1) Intuitive-Projective Faith, (2) Mythic-Literal Faith, (3) Synthetic-Conventional Faith,
(4) Individuative-Reflective Faith, (5) Conjunctive faith, (6) Universalizing Faith.

General remarks about the four religious attitudes

- **A typological scale**: The belief attitudes described above are idealized types: they are extreme positions in a continuum with numerous intermediate positions and mixed types.

- **No personality types**: Literal belief, external critique, relativism and second naiveté are styles of religious belief, NOT 'religious personality types'. They are characteristic patterns of dealing with religious beliefs; cognitive perspectives that people can adopt to cope with religious faith. Apart from some partial (and unstable) correlations, there seems to be no connection between the religious attitudes of the PCB-typology and certain personality types.

- **Religious attitudes aren't exclusive**: These four belief styles are not mutually exclusive. One and the same person can show traits of multiple belief styles, depending on the subject at hand, the moment in time, or the situation that person is in. Likewise there can be tendencies of multiple religious attitudes at work within the same population. The aim of the PCB Scale is to map the presence and the mutual relations of the four religious coping styles within an individual or a population as a whole. The aim is not to divide a population into four groups of religious personalities.

- **Combination of two dimensions**: The PCB scale disentangles the effects of being religious or not (inclusion vs exclusion of transcendence) from the way in which religion and religious contents are processed (literally vs symbolically). Because of this, it is able to investigate the influence of both dimensions independently of each other, which has led to some remarkable research discoveries in the past.

- **Underlying secularisation paradigm**: The decline of religious belief in Western societies in recent decennia is interpreted from the linear opposition between two extremes and all the nuances in between:

traditionalistic orthodox Catholicism ← orthodoxy — — — relativism — — — — → radical, active, atheistic humanism
second naiveté / external critique

🔴 **Something-ism**: The most minimalistic form of inclusion of transcendence. It is situated just inside transcendent belief, on the boundary between literal belief and second naiveté. Something-ists feel themselves vaguely attracted to transcendent patterns of meaning, but without being able (or willing) to describe this 'something' more concretely. Moreover, it is problematic to enter into a relationship with a 'something'. Something-ism is a comfortable middle-position, a compromise between an evasion of the harsh consequences of external critique on the one hand, and an unspecified desire for a transcendent structure of meaning on the other.

🟢 **Preferred belief style on theological grounds:** Prof. D. Pollefeyt's normative viewpoint based on theological arguments. Situated far inside transcendent belief (the inclusion of transcendence is maximal), in the quadrant of second naiveté, just *below* the boundary with literal belief (though never touching it). This is the symbolic position where the ontological referent is present the most, without ever being presented directly. The authentic believer tries to build a relationship with God as intensely as possible, but continuously withstands the temptation to cross the boundary, to grasp God. He's standing in the fullest mediation between God and man. Here, believing is an ongoing process of symbol interpretation, whereby God never allows himself to be presented directly, but breaks through from 'the other side'.

• The discussion between a literal and a symbolic interpretation of religious beliefs is as old as humanity itself. During its entire history, Christianity has struggled with the symbolic interpretation of Jesus' message. Now it is up to us to continue this struggle.

• Literal belief and external critique have in common: a desire for immediate and absolute certainty. But while the former finds this certainty in a literal acceptance of doctrines, the latter finds it in a destructive criticism on literal beliefs.

• Literal belief and external critique have in common: religion reduces anxiety. But while the former accepts this religious comfort, the latter dismisses it as an illusion.

• Making the transition from literal belief to second naiveté is easier, than the transition from relativism to second naiveté. For a literal believer is a believer already. Having a non-believer adopt faith in God, is much more difficult: faith cannot be made; it is a being touched in grace by an 'other reality'. On the other hand, the fact that a relativist is already dealing with religious content in a symbolic way, facilitates the transition from relativism to second naiveté.

• Usually, courses of Catholic religious education in Flemish schools are caught in the dynamic between relativism (that scores high among students) and second naiveté (the ambition of the course). If teachers, while being engaged in a dialogue with plurality, hesitate to talk about God and the Christian faith explicitly, then religious education in schools risks getting stuck within a relativistic discourse.

• Curiously enough, the media all too often take the stand of external critique (despite the fact that research reveals that this does not reflect the dominant religious attitudes amongst the population). Perhaps by doing so the media are attempting to be neutral, objective, and critical. However, external critique is not at all neutral nor free of values; it is a standpoint like any other.

• Believing parents are often tempted to raise their children with a literal belief: believing in God like believing in Santa Claus. They presume that their children – through a necessary crisis – will deepen their faith in a symbolic direction at a later age. Perhaps it is wiser – theologically speaking – to have children participate in the symbolic faith attitude of adults from an early age? Are children already able to personally integrate a symbolic religious coping style? Is this a legitimate educational approach, pedagogically speaking?

Empirical operationalilsation: the PCB Scale

- The **Post-Critical Belief Scale** (PCB Scale) is an empirical instrument in the form of a questionnaire, based on this typology. It aims to measure by means of a sample the degree to which the different religious attitudes are present in a population. It maps the tendencies of different approaches to religious belief that are present within a population, in their mutual relationships.

- The PCB Scale doesn't aim to measure whether people believe or not, nor the depth of their faith, but it maps their attitude(s) towards religious beliefs.

- Contrary to the Melbourne Scale and the Victoria Scale, the PCB Scale does NOT use a double measurement level. So there is no division into a factual and a normative level.

- **There are two versions of the PCB Scale:**
  1. **The teens' questionnaire** (from 10 to 16 years): 32 items, to be scored using a 7-point Likert Scale.
     Designed in the context of the PWO research project *Empirical Investigation into the Religious Development of Children aged 10 to 15 in a Plural Societal Context*, a collaboration between KHKempen and the Centre of Academic Teacher Training of the Faculty of Theology, K.U. Leuven. This scale consists of eight categories that contain four items each, representing the four religious coping styles: (1) Does God exist? (2) Proofs of God's existence. (3) Your relationship with God. (4) Coming closer to God? (5) Stories about Jesus and his miracles. (6) About praying. (7) Sometimes bad things happen in the world… (8) Life after death. + 4 evaluation questions.
  2. **The adults' questionnaire**: 33 items, to be scored using a 7-point Likert Scale.
     Designed by Prof. Dr. Dirk Hutsebaut. Eight to nine items per religious attitude, about various subject matters, selected based on empirical trials + 4 evaluation questions.

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The Melbourne Scale *for dummies*

Questionnaire based on the typology of prof. dr. Lieven Boeve
about the theological identity options of Catholic institutions
in a pluralising cultural context

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- Cultural analysis as background of this typology: the steadily increasing secularisation, pluralisation, and detraditionalisation in our postmodern and post-Christian culture during the last decennia, outside as well as inside the school walls.

- These developments put the Christian tradition, as well as the Catholic identity of schools, under pressure.

- What possible responses are available for confessional schools? What different positions can they take?

- Theologically speaking, five options present themselves (see the diagram):
    - o **Institutional secularisation**
    - o **Institutional reconfessionalisation**
    - o **Values education in a Christian perspective**
    - o **Identity formation in a plural context (recontextualisation)**
    - o **The confessionally based institution**
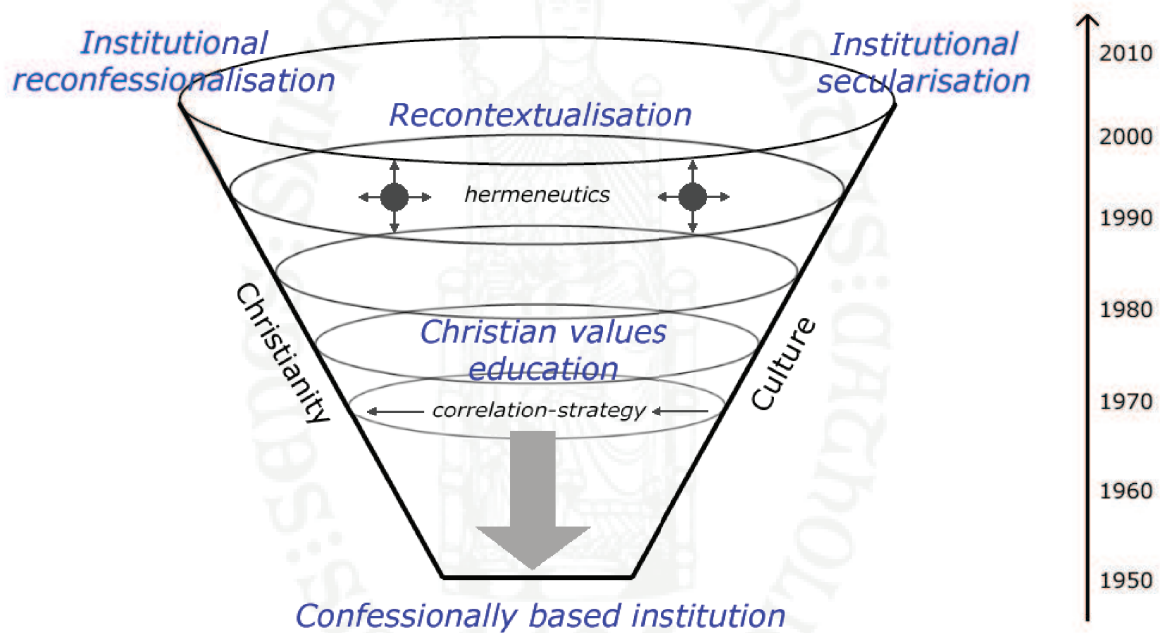
(Diagram: the hermeneutical-communicative model, prof. dr. Didier Pollefeyt)

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(1) Institutional secularisation
renouncing Catholic school identity

- This schooltype goes along with the culture that surrounds it: in our modern culture Christianity is slowly disappearing, and so the same happens in the school.

- Catholic school identity erodes slowly but steadily, until little or nothing remains in daily school life. The school's former Catholic background and its Christian inspiration are hardly of any relevance any more.

- Often this gradual erosion of Catholic school culture is an implicit process that occurs silently, rather than a conscious policy option.

- At a certain point this evolution occurs also on the organisational and institutional level: agreement grows to drop the school's official Catholic designation, and to become an officially secular school.

- The preferential position of Christianity is acknowledged no longer. The consensus grows to remove the 'C' from the school's official name. Christian signs and symbols disappear; religious rituals no longer take place; religious references disappear from the discourse at school.

- The school's population is characterized by a diversity of religious outlooks and philosophies of life. A secularized school has two options with regard to this diversity:
  1. It adopts a 'neutral' stance. One's philosophy of life is a private matter that doesn't belong in the public sphere.
     NB. Strictly speaking, a 'neutrality' of this sort is itself not neutral nor free of value options. (the colourless school)
  2. It opts for a neutral-pluralistic identity. In this case, the dialogue between different philosophical viewpoints is actively encouraged, because it contributes to the personal growth of all involved. (the colourful school)

- Compulsory courses of Catholic education are abolished. Instead the school offers courses in broad comparative cultural and personal formation, and/or Catholic education as an elective.

(2) Institutional reconfessionalisation
actively promoting a confessional Catholic school identity

- This school type desires to make its confessional Catholic identity more explicit and stronger by means of an active strategy of *re-confessionalisation*.
- The school's Catholic character is to be explicitly and publicly affirmed.
- Next to providing education, the school strives for the Catholic faith formation of all its students and staff members in a safe and secure Catholic environment.
- A school for Catholics, led by Catholics. A considerable share of the school's population consists of practising Church members. The school would prefer (if possible) to recruit mainly Catholic staff members and students.
- Catholic confessional school identity as a legitimate option in the middle of plurality: holding on to its own identity while participating in plurality. So this strategy needn't necessarily bear witness of a narrow-minded, closed mentality.
- Yet this school takes a critical and condescending stand against secular and detradritionalized culture. The Catholic faith and lifestyle are defended and promoted as a counter-story.
- The possible risk that students could grow up to be maladjusted and even alienated from the secular outside world is considered an unavoidable side-effect, rather than a valid objection.
- A service to parents that desire an authentic Catholic education for their children.
- The school wishes to improve its relationship and cooperation with the Catholic Church and the local parish. An active involvement in local community life is promoted. Priest(s) actively present at school.
- Religious education courses, celebrations of the Eucharist, sacraments, communal prayer, preparation for first communion and confirmation, et cetera, are – if absent – reintroduced and considered as crucial components of daily school life.
- Religious education at school is, in essence, catechesis: learning what is is like to be a true Catholic.

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(3) Values education in Christian perspective
Catholic school identity mediated by Christian values and norms

- This schooltype aims for a compromise between culture and Catholic tradition, in an attempt to maintain a Catholic school identity that 'goes along with the times' and is able to be reconciled with everyone.
- Strategy: ethics as mediation between culture and Christianity. The Christian inspiration is translated into an education in 'Christian' but universally recognizable values and norms*. This way the school hopes to maintain a commonly shared basis for the Christian faith among a pluralising student population. Through values education in a Christian perspective, the school hopes that the students can keep recognising themselves in the Christian faith and lifestyle, that religiously grounds these values and norms, deepens them, and leads them to their ultimate destiny.

  * helpfulness, altruism, kindness, vitality, friendship, authenticity, solidarity, respect, clemency, austerity, generosity, attention for the poor, et cetera

- Didactic method: trying to link a generally shared moral way of life with the Christian faith, that is believed to be the ultimate fulfilment of this way of life.
- Framed in a Christian personalism: being created by God, all people carry within them a Christian sense of values, that is realised and fulfilled by the Christian faith (an eschatological perspective).
- Presupposition: present-day students, living in a culture shaped by Christianity, are still accountable for the Christian faith.
- The school community consists mainly of Christians and people who positively value the Christian faith. Since Christian inspiration is presented as 'doing good', this school could attract also post-christians, other-believers, or non-believers.
- This school stimulates and supports citizenship, social welfare projects, solidarity with the third and fourth world, volunteer work, and so on.

Values education in Christian perspective (continued)
Catholic school identity mediated by Christian values and norms

Possible critiques:

- The school leadership tries to maintain the Catholicity of the school. But the more the culture detraditionalises, in other words the more culture and Christianity drift away from each other, the more difficult it becomes to make the connection between them. This strategy could even become counter-productive (inefficiency linked to predictability).

- Danger of *horizontalisation* of Christianity: spontaneously a selection is made of those elements that can be correlated easily; this could lead to a reduction of the Christian faith into little more than (commonly shared) morality.

- If the correlation movement strands halfway, without explicitly referring to the Christian faith, then the question arises whether this is sufficiently specific for Christians. Are we justified in speaking of a 'Catholic school' if the name of God and Jesus Christ are no longer pronounced?

- Isn't it pretentious to claim that the moral of all people is anonymously Christian, and that Christianity has the exclusive right to ultimately fulfil the deeper meaning of a moral life?

- Moreover: since all involved should be able to recognise themselves in the compromise, individual particularity is at risk of being be overlooked, and an active dialogue between different philosophies of life is restricted.

- Not uncommonly, values education in Christian perspective is an unconscious process of fading Catholic school identity (in other words, itself an exponent of detraditionalisation and pluralisation), rather than an intentional strategy.

- In reality this approach usually results in a post-Christian school climate in which it is pleasant to reside, but in which little explicit Christian faith remains. De facto, this approach often is an intermediate stage evolving to a secularised school identity, *even* if the school opts for values education with the intention to reconfessionalise.

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(4) Identity formation in a plural context
(recontextualisation of Christianity)
searching for Catholic school identity in the midst of plurality

- This schooltype is purposefully looking for a renewed Christian profile in a context marked by plurality, aiming for a reinterpretative understanding of Christianity in the contemporary cultural context.

- On the one hand plurality is duly acknowledged; on the other hand the focus on Catholic school identity is being preserved. The evangelical message remains relevant for people today and tomorrow. The driving question is: how, in the midst of present-day culture, to live like a Christian and to be a Catholic school?

- Our cultural context is changing, and thus the Christian faith should evolve along with it (re-contextualisation) so that it remains recognizable, believable, and meaningful for people today (tradition development).
  In and through the dialogue with plurality, Christianity is regrooved in a new context.

- Religious and cultural plurality is not only formally recognized, but also valued as a positive challenge and a chance to enrich Catholic school identity. An openness for and a dialogue with (also non-Christian) otherness is encouraged, thereby withstanding the tendency to look for the lowest common denominator.

- Not build on patterns that aim for consensus, but impelled by multiplicity and difference.

- Young people are taught to relate themselves to other philosophies of life, in dialectic tension with their own (Christian or other) profile. For through the dialogue with otherness, one comes to know oneself.

- Speak, show your distinctiveness, in tension with what is different – out of *respect* for the other as well as yourself.

- Christianity hereby serves as a preferential perspective, though never in an exclusive way. The conversation between different philosophies of life is being reflected upon against the background of a preferential option for Christianity.

Identity formation in a plural context (continued) (recontextualisation of Christianity)
searching for Catholic school identity in the midst of plurality

- The school recognizes and acknowledges plurality and the valuable input others could have, and then allows the voice of Christianity to sound out of its own strength and depth, in the middle of this diversity.

- So, the intent is not to encourage the Christian faith formation of all students *per se*, rather the intent is to have them all challenged and enriched by the offer of the Christian story.

- By means of the **hermeneutical-communicative model** students are challenged to give shape to their personal identity: through a conversation with others I become who I am, in dialogue and sometimes also in confrontation with the Catholic tradition.

- This schooltype's common basis is formed by at least a significant minority of Christians that are recognizable as such, and explicitly wish to engage themselves in the dialogue. Further, there is a diverse school population that shows openness to what Christianity has to offer.

- The principal has the function of being an identity coach: he/she encourages and moderates all school members to relate themselves to the school's Christian identity in a creative and critical-loyal way.

- What should be part of every-day life in society as a whole, is already being taught at school.

- In Belgium, this identity option is being encouraged by the official outline of the religious education curriculum in Catholic schools, in which the hermeneutical-communicative model serves as didactic background.

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(5) The confessional school
The traditional-Catholic institution

- This schooltype simply prolongs its traditional-Catholic school identity, without further reflection. The school's Catholic identity is experienced as unproblematic, despite cultural tendencies of secularisation, pluralisation and detraditionalisation outside the school walls. So far, the crisis of Catholic school identity has gone by unnoticed and without much consequence.

- The school's holding on to its confessional character expresses a passive, awaiting attitude when it comes to secularisation and pluralisation. The school chooses to ignore the analysis of present-day culture in terms of a crisis of Catholic school identity. A Catholic identity 'old style' is merely maintained.

- The Catholic faith engagement of school staff and students is considered evident, and isn't put into question by any of those involved.

- Divergent visions and lifestyles are either hardly present in this school (yet), or else they are ignored.

- It is considered perfectly normal that religious education courses, celebrations of the Eucharist, communal prayer, preparation for first communion and confirmation, et cetera, belong to every day school life.

- The school guarantees a swift socialisation of its students in Catholic thought and Catholic lifestyle. However, today there is a danger that an immersion in passive, confessional school identity alienates students from the pluralistic culture that surrounds them.

Prof. Boeve's typological model departs from a perceived *crisis* of Catholic school identity in our post-Christian context. As such, it discerns only the four school types discussed above. Despite the changing cultural context, however, there still could be traditional-confessional schools, or there still could be schools where confessional structures linger on without being experienced as problematic. To make sure that also this kind of passive confessionality is included in the empirical analysis, this fifth option was added to Boeve's original typology. Since the normative option to actively promote a school's confessional identity is already covered by the reconfessionalisation schooltype (see above), passive confessionality can only be present on the factual level.

Empirical operationalilsation: the Melbourne Scale

- The **Melbourne Scale** is an empirical instrument in the form of a questionnaire, based on this typology.
  It aims to measure by means of a sample the degree to which the different school identity options are currently present/absent, and normatively preferred/rejected in the entire school population. In other words, it measures the tendencies pro/contra the different school types as well as their mutual relationships, as they are present among school members.

- **A typological scale**: The school types described above are idealized types: they are extreme positions in a continuum with numerous intermediate positions and mixed types.

- **Two levels of measurement:**
  o CURRENT PRACTICE / FACTUAL LEVEL: the way(s) in which school members experience and interpret the current identity of their school.
  o IDEAL SCHOOL / NORMATIVE LEVEL: the school members' personal views on the ideal (Catholic) school identity, in other words the identity type school members would like to see their school evolve into in the future.

  Especially the comparison between both measurement levels amounts to interesting insights about the (Catholic) identity of a school: which future developments are most likely to happen, which alternative evolutions might also be possible, and where to focus on to achieve a desired outcome.
  NB. The fifth type, confessional school identity, is only measured on the factual level.

- **There are two versions of the Melbourne Scale:**
  1. **The teens' questionnaire** (from 10 to 16 years): easy narratives that give children and teens an adequate impression of what each school type is like, to be scored on the factual and normative level using a 7-point Likert Scale + 4 evaluation questions.
  2. **The adults' questionnaire**: 54 items (30 on the factual + 24 on the normative level), to be scored using a 7-point Likert Scale + 4 evaluation questions.

  Both empirical instruments were developed at the Centre of Academic Teacher Training of the Faculty of Theology, K.U. Leuven.

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The Victoria Scale *for dummies*

Questionnaire based on the typology of prof. W. Ter Horst & prof. C.A.M. Hermans about the pedagogical options of Catholic schools in a pluralising cultural context

This empirical instrument was created for the academic research project
'**Enhancing Catholic School Identity**'
commissioned by the *Catholic Education Commission of Victoria*, Australia.

Centre of Academic Teacher Training, Faculty of Theology,
K.U. Leuven (© 2009)

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Scientific researcher: Jan Bouwens   Jan.Bouwens@theo.kuleuven.be

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- Cultural analysis as background of this typology: the steadily increasing secularisation, pluralisation, and detraditionalisation in our postmodern and post-Christian culture during the last decennia, outside as well as inside the school walls.

- Two dimensions together determine a school's identity:

  1. Catholic identity: the degree to which a school lives from a generally shared Christian inspiration.

  2. Solidarity with people from other than Catholic subcultures: openness and receptiveness towards different lifeviews and practices.

- Every school is faced with pedagogical, moral and organisational choices concerning its Catholic identity and its solidarity with otherness. It is the combination of both dimensions that determines the identity profile of a certain school.

- Pedagogically speaking, there are four possible combinations of identity and solidarity (see the diagram):

  - **The monologue school**   (maximal Catholic identity, minimal solidarity)

  - **The dialogue school**   (maximal Catholic identity, maximal solidarity)

  - **The colourful school**   (minimal Catholic identity, maximal solidarity)

  - **The colourless school**   (minimal Catholic identity, minimal solidarity)

The identity square

Monologue school

Dialogue school

maximal Christian identity

minimal solidarity

maximal solidarity

minimal Christian identity
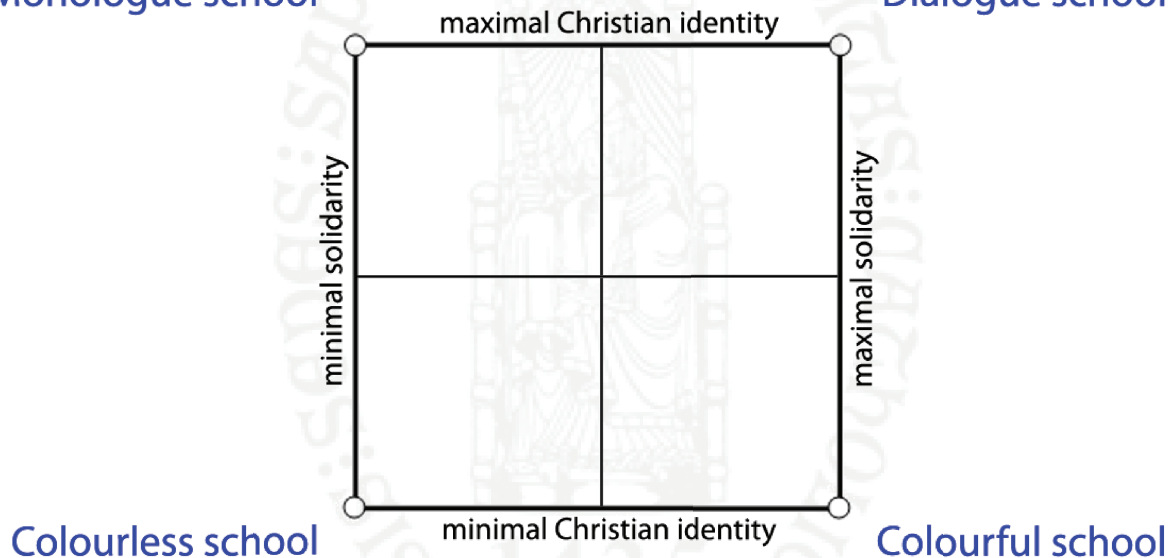
Colourless school

Colourful school

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(1) The Monologueschool
a traditional Catholic school
for Catholics, led by Catholics

- **Maximal Christian identity + minimal solidarity.** 'the air-raid shelter' 'a Catholic ghetto school'
- This schooltype strongly stresses its Catholic school identity. It promotes a traditionalistic, non-emancipatory form of Catholicism. Christianity as a 'closed narrative' with a fixed truth claim.
- Exclusivistic, but possibly also inclusivistic: also outside Catholicism salvation could be found, but still implicitly only in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit.
- Focus on safety, solidarity and pedagogical responsibility within one's own Catholic circle. The education in this school is, in fact, a service first and foremost to the own subcultural group.
- However, this school deliberately chooses not to show much openness and receptiveness for other religions and philosophies of life. There's little solidarity with the non-Catholic outside world.
- Support basis: a school of Catholics, for Catholics, led by Catholics. The Catholic religion and praxis of the majority of the school's population is considered self-evident.
- This school maintains an active enrolment policy: only Catholic students and teachers.
- This school offers its members a sense of familiarity, certainty, and security.
- However, this rather closed pedagogy runs the risk to promote of a tendency to isolation and world strangeness. Aren't youngsters anchored to such a degree in a Catholic context, that they become dependent of it?

(2) The Colourless School
a secularised and plural school environment
where the relation between individuals
remains free of engagement or obligations

- **Minimal Christian identity + minimal solidarity.** 'the meeting centre'
- This schooltype shows a far-reaching openness and tolerance of all sorts of life views and religions, but this openness is not framed in a common guiding view of life.
- Very accessible and open, but with little security. People live next to each other, without much engagement.
- The school institution adopts a 'neutral' stand: philosophy of life should not be forced upon individuals or interfered with from above. Therefore board members and teachers are requested not to show their personal views publicly.
- A (de facto) secularised school environment, where the care for a Christian ethos has eroded.
- Though there are lots of meetings and exchanges, the contact with others remains superficial: it is free of obligations or mutual engagement. People don't consider themselves accountable for the other person.
- There is much openness, but people are hardly receptive for otherness. No authentic involvement in, nor care for the spiritual well-being of fellow school members – for that's a personal matter.
- Formal tolerance, that risks leading to indifference.
- *Minimalistic ethics & no-harm principle*: personal freedom is untouchable, on the only condition that one doesn't hinder the freedom of others. A mentality of mutual *laisser faire, laisser passer* ('let happen, let go by').
- Focus on the individual, rather that the school community as a whole. Solidarity is the responsibility of the individual, not the collective. This corresponds with tendencies of individualism in society.
- The school is composed of individuals and groups of individuals, with little sense of community.
- Minimal pedagogical care for students that fall behind. Every person is accountable only for him/herself.

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(3) The Colourful School
a secularised and plural school environment
where people relate to each other in a social,
engaged and solidary way

- **Minimal Christian identity + maximal solidarity.** 'the action centre'
- This schooltype takes its pedagogical responsibility for others very seriously. The internal plurality is acknowledged, happily accepted, and duly taken into account.
- School members show great interest in the otherness of others. Meetings and exchanges do not remain superficial, but bear witness to authentic involvement and care for each others well-being.
- However, this school's Christian confessional identity has all but disappeared. There's no mention of the Gospel; religious education and pastoral activities no longer take place.
- Christianity as a preferential option amidst other visions is knowingly rejected.
- Every (in)doctrinal orientation is avoided as much as possible. A focus on Catholic (as well as any other) specificity would be experienced as an obstacle to live with others peacefully. A specifically Catholic educational project would limit the solidarity with students who believe differently: it could lead to estrangement, shutting out others, or even aversion.
- *Neutral-pluralism*: a dialogue between many philosophies of life is actively encouraged, but without preference for any one particular view.
- Respecting the other as other, implies to safeguard each other's personal freedom. To impose some 'truth' to the school community as a whole would imply suppressing each individual's 'personal truth'.
- Support basis: a rich and visible diversity, on all levels. Christians are a minority.
- This is a community of doers and helpers, at the service of those in need. The school engages itself in social justice projects, solidarity with the third and fourth world, volunteer work, and so on.

(4) The Dialogue School
*a Catholic school in the midst
of cultural and religious plurality*

- **Maximal Christian identity + maximal solidarity.** 'the oasis'
- A Catholic school that chooses explicitly to stress its Christian inspiration, while at the same time taking seriously the multicultural society.
- The multiplicity of voices, visions and practices is not tempered or restricted, but acknowledged, valued and activated as an opportunity to enrich the dialogue between people. Receptiveness and openness for what is different, offers an opportunity for the Christian faith to re-profile itself in the midst of the present-day plurality (recontextualisation).
- A preference for the Christian message sets the tone for this dialogue. The conversation between different visions is being reflected upon from a preferential option for Christianity. In the middle of plurality looking for what it means to be Christian; living as a Christian in the middle of plurality.
- Support basis: at least a significant minority of Catholics. Further a multicultural and multifaith school population that shows an openness for what Christianity might have to offer.
- Cultural and religious pluralisation challenges the Catholic school to be in the service of all youngsters, no matter their cultural background or religion. The school takes its pedagogical responsibility for all, not only in matters of education, but also what personal spiritual formation is concerned. Catholic education as a service to society as a whole.
- This school offers security and safety, while at the same time it maintains an open relation with the other.
- This school wants to be a guide for its students' personal growth, falling back on its Christian inspiration, through a dialogue between different philosophies of life.
- In Belgium, this school type is being encouraged by the official outline of the religious education curriculum in Catholic schools, in which the hermeneutical-communicative model serves as didactic background.

Empirical operationalilsation: the Victoria Scale

- The **Victoria Scale** is an empirical instrument in the form of a questionnaire, based on this typology. It aims to measure by means of a sample the degree to which the different school identity options are currently present/absent, and normatively preferred/rejected in the entire school population. In other words, it measures the tendencies pro/contra the different school types as well as their mutual relationships, as they are present among school members.

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    Especially the comparison between both measurement levels amounts to interesting insights about the (Catholic) identity of a school: which future developments are most likely to happen, which alternative evolutions might also be possible, and where to focus on to achieve a desired outcome.

- **There are two versions of the Victoria Scale:**
    1. **The teens' questionnaire** (from 10 to 16 years): four pictures of blackboards that represent the school identity of each type, to be scored on the factual and normative level using a 7-point Likert Scale + 4 evaluation questions.
    2. **The adults' questionnaire**: 48 items (24 on the factual + 24 on the normative level), to be scored using a 7-point Likert Scale + 4 evaluation questions.

    Both empirical instruments were developed at the Centre of Academic Teacher Training of the Faculty of Theology, K.U. Leuven.

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