

KU LEUVEN

Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI)

**The human being as an 'open hermeneutical space'.
Hermeneutical Religious Education.**

Prof. Dr. Didier Pollefeyt – Drs. Jan Bouwens
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Agenda of this presentation

Creation theology

20 m

Human beings created 'in the image of God'

The human being: an 'open hermeneutical space'

25 m

Anthropological presuppositions of *Post-Critical Belief*

Post-Critical Belief

5 m

Catholic anthropology manifests in *Post-Critical Belief*

Hermeneutical learning in religious education

15 m

The hermeneutical-communicate model (HCM) for RE

To conclude. The hermeneutical space of Saint Peter's Square, Vatican City

5 m

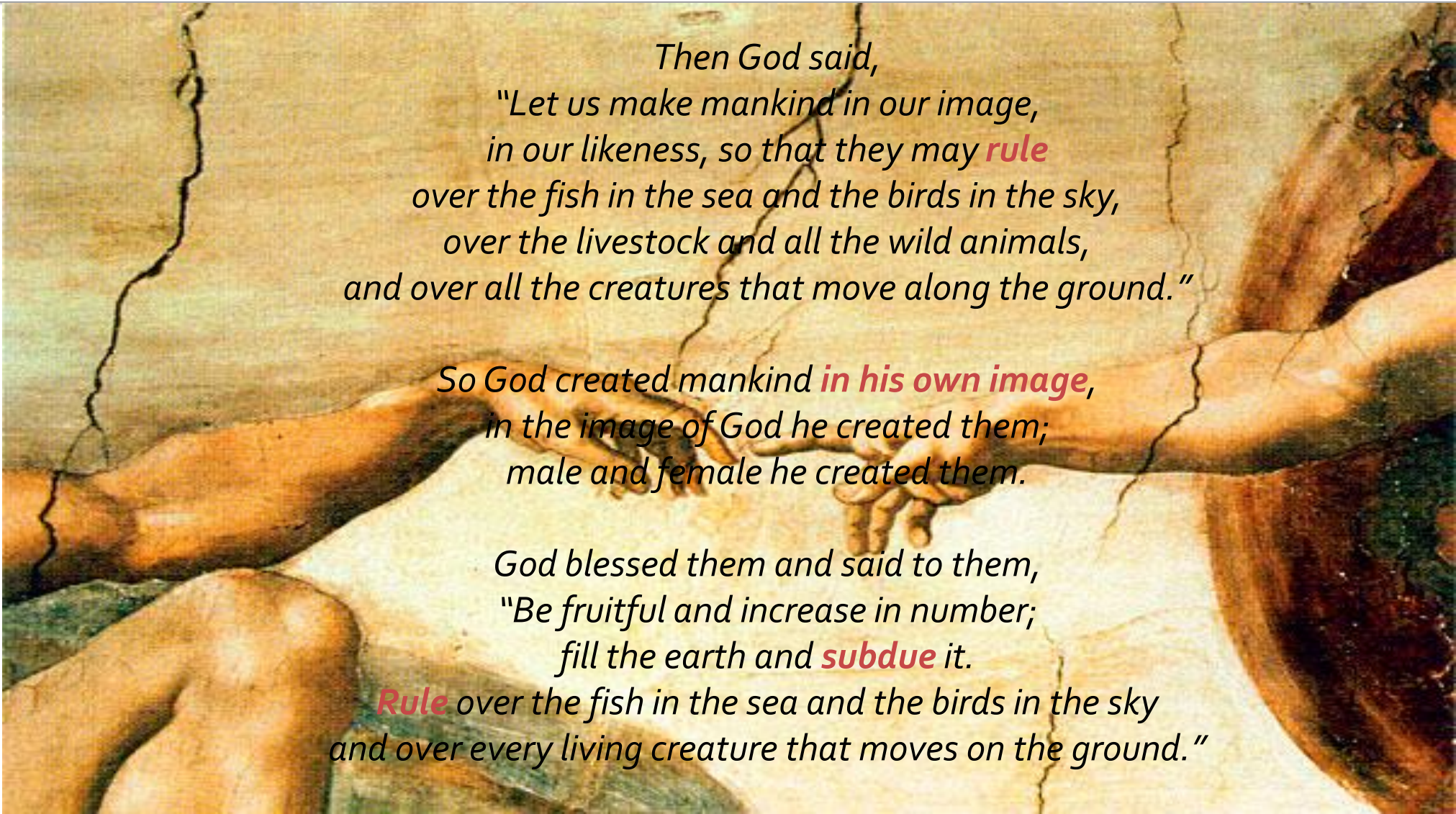
Extraordinary *Urbi et Orbi* blessing by Pope Francis in 2020, the height of COVID

Creation theology

Jewish-Christian Theological Perspectives on Ecology (Humans and Nature)

Genesis 1, 26-28

Relationship between God, humans and nature



Then God said,
"Let us make mankind in our image,
in our likeness, so that they may **rule**
over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky,
over the livestock and all the wild animals,
and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

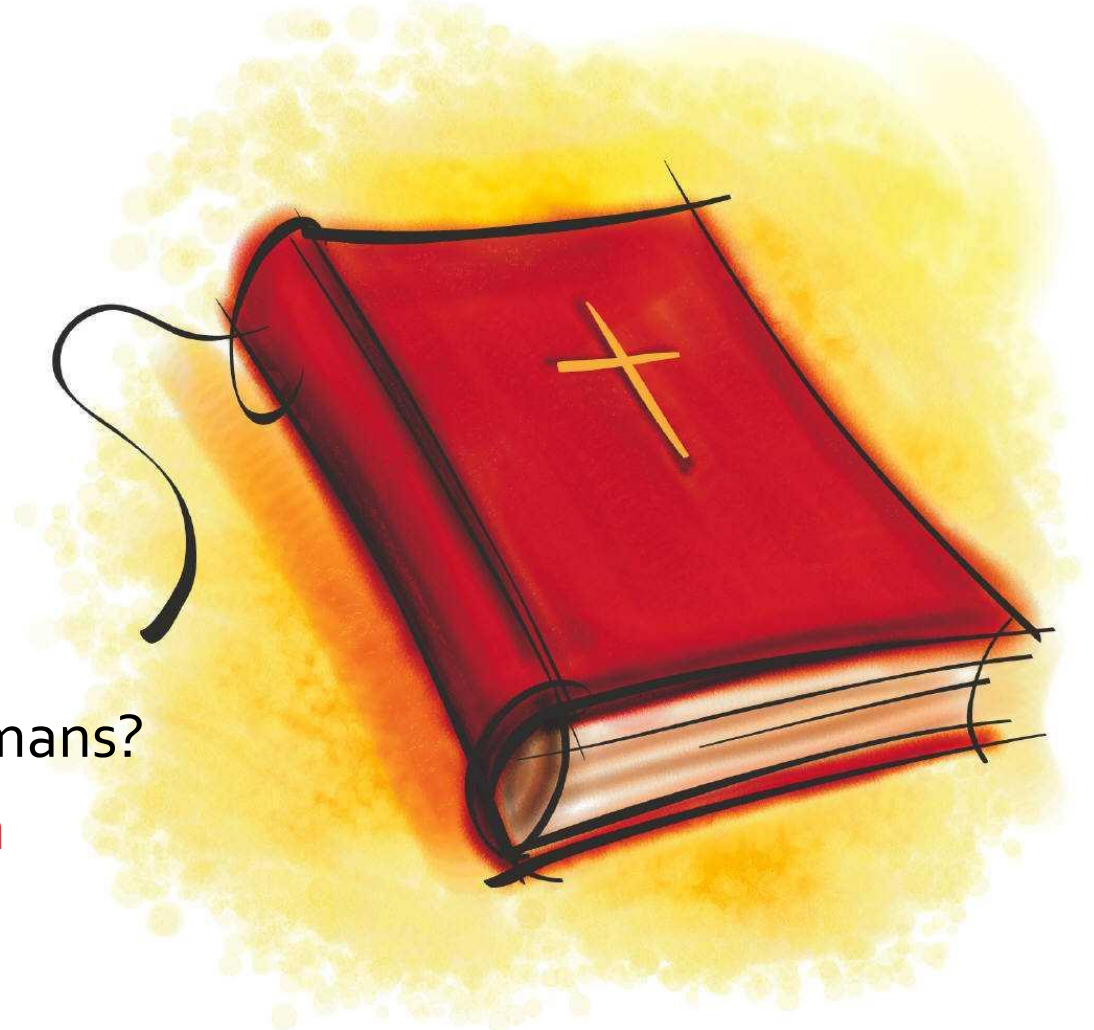
So God created mankind **in his own image**,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them,
"Be fruitful and increase in number;
fill the earth and **subdue** it.

Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky
and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Humans beings created 'in the image of God'

- **Pretentious view on human beings?**
 - The anthropological pinnacle of nature
 - Made in God's likeness
 - Mission to 'have dominion' over nature and 'subdue' it
- What is the Bible suggesting?
 - Nature merely as the object of the capriciousness and self-glorification of humans?
 - 'Made in the image of God': **justification for instrumentalist anthropocentrism?**



Pope Francis – Laudato Si'

Current stance of the Church



"We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judaeo-Christian thinking [...] has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as *domineering* and *destructive* by nature. This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church.

Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures.

The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate **hermeneutic**, recognizing that they tell us to 'till and keep' the garden of the world (cf. *Gen* 2:15)."



Laudato si', 201

What is 'hermeneutics' ?

Basic definition: meaning-making



**Hermeneutics is the science and the art
of discovering and giving *meaning* to things.**

Hermeneutics deals with the big questions of life: what
does it all mean? What is the significance of life?

Why are things the way they are?

What is the purpose of life?

Why is it important?



The ancient Greek god *Hermes*,
the messenger of the gods.

Directory for Catechesis

Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization

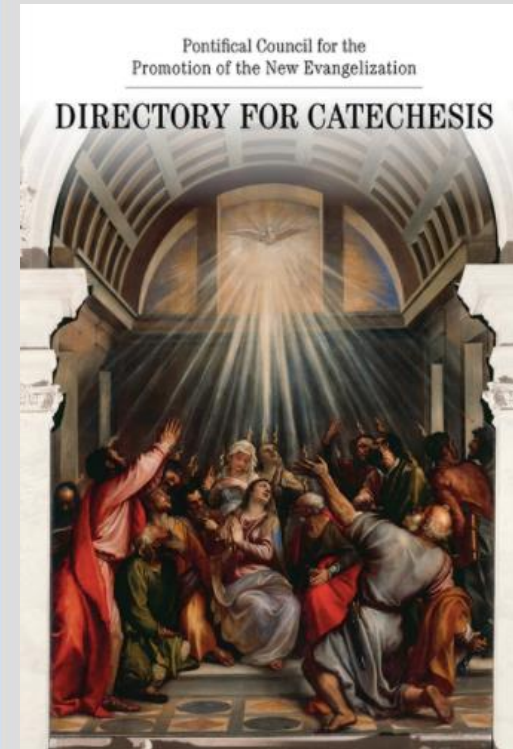


Since the Church does not have a method of her own for proclaiming the Gospel, an effort of discernment is needed so as to test everything and keep what is good (cf. 1 Thes 5:21).

Catechesis can evaluate, as it had one repeatedly throughout history, methodological approaches centered more on the realities of life or based more on the message of the faith. This depends on the concrete situations of the subjects in catechesis. In both cases, it is important to employ a principle of interrelationship that connects both aspects.

The personal and social events of life and history find a light of interpretation in the content of the faith; this [content], on the other hand, must always be presented by showing the implications it has for life.

This procedure presupposes a hermeneutic capacity: existence, if interpreted in relation to the Christian proclamation, is manifested in its truth; the kerygma, on the other hand, always has a value of salvation and fullness of life.



PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING THE
NEW EVANGELIZATION, *Directory for
Catechesis*, Rome, 2020. Quote taken
from paragraph 196.

Causes of the demise of the ecological dimension in the Jewish tradition



- Jewish history of exile:
 - Alienation from their country
 - Dissociation from nature and its rhythms. No immediate contact with nature.
- Distancing themselves from pagan idolatry, with its deification of natural forces.
- View of nature as comfortless desolation, surrendering human beings to alien forces of being (il y a ~ Levinas).
- View of God as absolutely transcendent and totally 'other', completely different from the world (*autrement qu'être*).

The face of nature

Emmanuel Levinas, French jewish philosopher



- Nature as 'il y a':
 - Formless and impersonal swarming
 - 'Being without a face'
 - That which depersonalises
- Sitz im Leben:
 - Internment in a *Wehrmacht* camp: 1939
 - Struggle for life as a basis for his notion of 'il y a'
 - Do not romanticize nature
- God reveals Himself in the vulnerable face of the other, not in the merciless, unpredictable forces of nature.
- Nazism: God is in nature, God is nature (Hitler as vegetarian, prohibition on vivisection and ritual slaughter, Jewish prohibition to play with the pigeons or on jewish veterinarians, etc.)



Traces of nature

Catherine Chaliar



- Nature is not the *face* of God, because nature has no face.
- God reveals Himself in the *traces* He has left in nature by creation.
- Alternative to the one-sided views on the relationship between God and nature:
 - Pagan *identification* of God with nature
 - Modern day *desacralisation* of nature



God as Other?

- **Creation story:**
 - God's transcendence over the world
 - Criticism on pagan deification of nature
 - God is not a diffuse, supportive ground for Being, but a Biblical 'opposite'
- **Mission of human beings:**
 - God has placed someone in creation who can seek Him out in His separation and respond to Him.
 - The entire cosmos contains *traces* of God's creative action:
 - There is no absolute distance between God and the world
 - It is up to humans to uncover and unravel the traces God has left in His creation



Towards a hermeneutics of nature

- Jewish tradition: rabbinic passion for the study of Scripture
 - Exegesis of the text
 - Examining verses to find hidden faces
- Nature may not be divine, but it does testify of God
 - Nature as a great 'book' which has to be interpreted to know Him.
 - The Creator of nature and the Giver of the Torah are the same God.
 - The Scripture says to look to nature as a work wherein God has left *traces*.
- Hermeneutics:
 - Nature as a riddle, as exegesis, not as dogma.
 - Torah has seventy faces: every new reader is important.

Laudato Si'

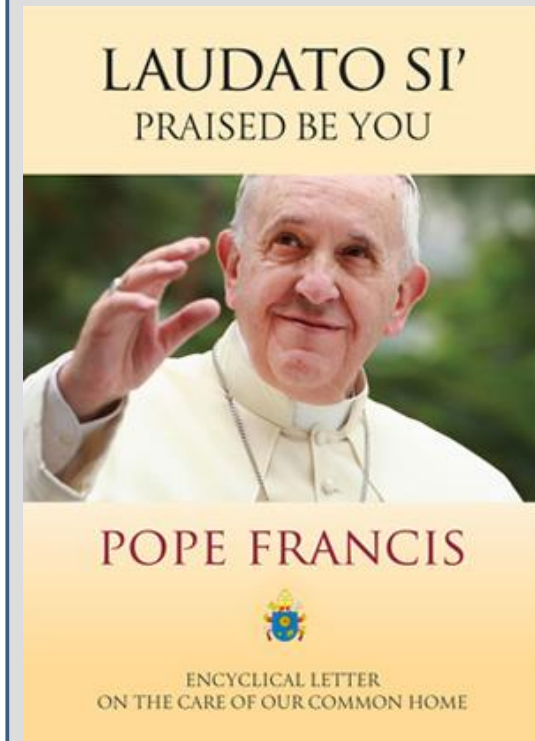
Pope Francis



"What is more, Saint Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness.

'Through the greatness and the beauty of creatures one comes to know by analogy their maker' (Wis 13:5);

indeed, 'his eternal power and divinity have been made known through his works since the creation of the world' (Rom 1:20)."



Encyclical Letter Laudato Si', May 2015, §12.

Hermeneutical openness and paralysis

- To read creation hermeneutically, you need to have the correct attitude.

- Story of Job

- Immense **suffering**, God remains silent for a long time: Job arraigns God.
- No theoretical answer to the question of Job
- His creation is His reply to Job's misery (Job 38,4)
- The misery was an **obstacle** in understanding the language of creation.



- Suffering and vulnerability can cause **hermeneutical paralysis**

- Absorbed in the interest for one's own being (Levinas)
- Inability to see nature as the work of God.
- Unable to safeguard some space within to receive the other
- Only saints can always leave space for the beautiful, even in the face of death and destruction

Suffering as a road to receptivity

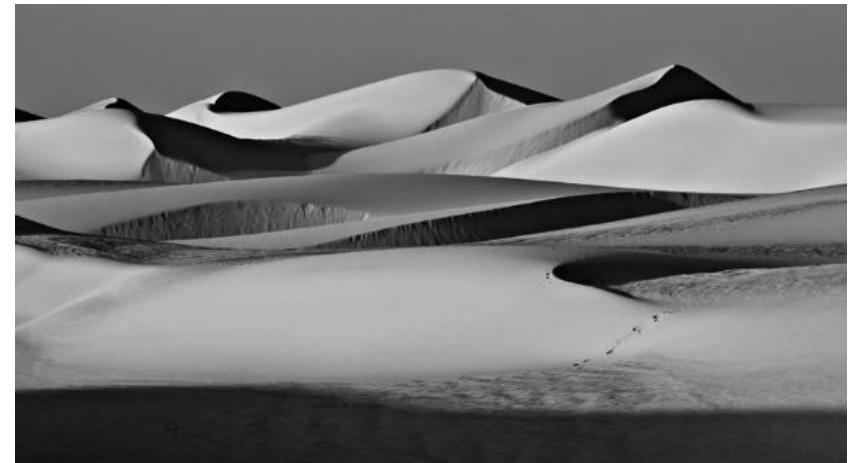


■ Etty Hillesum:

- Nazi camp in Westerbork
- Touched by a blooming jasmine
- In a place where all is lost and abandoned, she learns to listen to nature.

■ Desert experiences (Catherine Chalker):

- When stripped of everything, humans are almost forced into an extreme listening to the meaning that manifests.
- In the Sinai, the Torah was received: there is first the prohibition of ownership before one can enter the promised land
- Contemplation of nature to overcome self-interest and to become open for the infinite



The human being: an 'open hermeneutical space'

Catholic anthropological presuppositions of *Post-Critical Belief*

Point of departure: the human being created in God's image

Catholic anthropology



Confessionally coloured anthropology

- Starting from a specific Judeo-Christian image on the human person: 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness' (Gen. 1:26)
- However: a prohibition on making images: 'You shall not make for yourself an idol' (Ex. 20:4)

The *un-image-able* reality within human beings

- Human beings > biology + psychology + sociology
- Not everything is predestined: freedom, receptivity, responsibility, interpretation
- 'Soul': the inner part, the essence, the meeting place of God and the human being

1. The human person as a 'hermeneutical space'

Structural receptiveness

The human person as a '*hermeneutical space*'
(in contrast to animals)

Open for transcending our own reality

- Animals: *Traces of God*
- Human beings: *Faces of God*
 - Searching for sense, longing for sense, receiving sense
 - Structural openness for the meaning of life
 - Hermeneutical paralysis in suffering and pain (Job, Jesus)



Every human person deserves unconditional respect starting from conception (origin of the hermeneutical space, first in potentiality) until illness and death (decline of the hermeneutical space).

1. The human person as a 'hermeneutical space'

Transcendent capacities

Awareness of our transcendent capacities

- Every human being has a 'hermeneutical space' (Catholic inclusivism)
 - Notwithstanding his/her philosophical background
 - Consequently, all human beings are structurally connected (children of God, brothers and sisters)



Catholic pedagogy: opening the hermeneutical space

- Helping to discover and break open the hermeneutical space in every child, in every young person, in every adult
 - The ups and downs of life, beauty and consolation, pain and suffering, the mystery and the incomprehensiveness, the merciful character and the harsh side of reality, but also: the fragile, vulnerable and debarred neighbour, the frailness of nature, the yearn of our hearts.
- Nothing is self-evident, Catholic education has to 'touch'

2. Beyond constructivist pedagogies

The hermeneutical space is occupied



The hermeneutical space of every human being is already *furnished and occupied*.

- Nobody is neutral: we are not completely autonomous, nobody starts from scratch.
- We are touched by reality.
 - Everybody brings up a part of the truth, but nobody possesses the truth as a whole.
 - No one is without sin, no one lives detached from history (the original sin).

2. Beyond constructivist pedagogies

The hermeneutical space is occupied

No mere *constructivism*

- I can only choose my personal identity up to a certain extent.

Marked by the fears and dreams of our parents, the structure and the social climate of our family life and our place within it. The schools we attended, the friends we (did not) find, the books we (did not) read, the poetry and music we listened to, the evil and suffering that struck us, the people we met by coincidence, the culture, the tradition, the spirit of the times, et cetera.

- Cf. *Invisible loyalties* (I. Nagy, Hungary, 1920-2007)

There are existential connections and loyalties between generations that are intergenerationally determined, constitute my identity, to which I am personally devoted and that I am unwilling to put into question or criticise. Cf. Christians defend the Bible, including the controversial passages.

3. The hermeneutical space is *fragile*

Polyphonic identity

The hermeneutical space is *fragile*.

- Questions, possibilities and temptations offered by a spiritual market invade my hermeneutical space.
- Threats:
 - Physical vulnerability.
 - Literal (un)belief and fundamentalism.
 - Relativism and nihilism.
 - Liberal market economy: a new *Grand Narrative* occupies my hermeneutical space and fills it with economic desires and answers (R. Girard).
- Radically polyphonic identity.



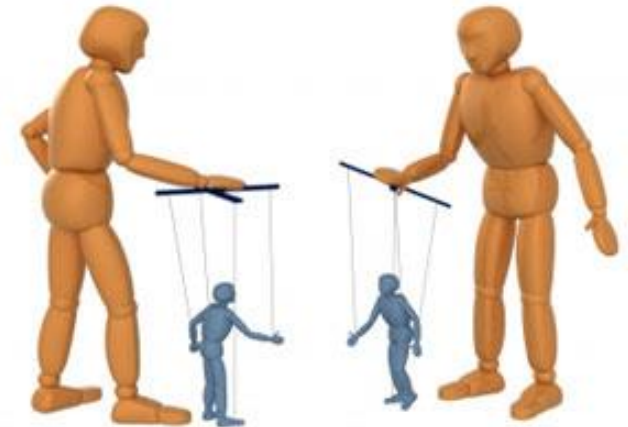
4. Respect for plurality

Learning to deal with plurality

1. Awareness of the plurality of influences within and outside of me.
2. Deconstruction of manipulating interpretations.

Catholic education encourages a critical mindset

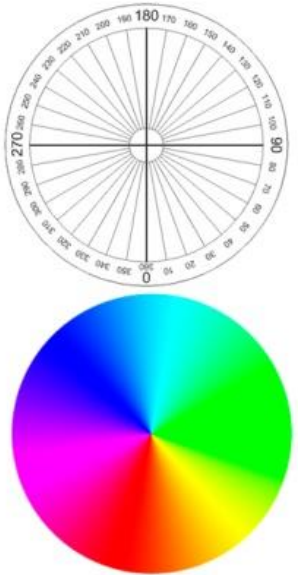
- Critical for all threats to my hermeneutical space:
 - vs. religious indoctrination
 - vs. racism and human rights violations
 - vs. materialism
 - vs. ecological threats



The intolerance of others delimits my own tolerance. (P. Ricoeur)

4. Respect for plurality

Learning to deal with plurality



Positive attitude towards other life options

Vat II, Nostra Aetate no. 2: "[The Church] regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men."

BUT no claim of neutrality

- 'Neutrality' does not exist.
- Starting from the Judeo-Christian tradition, also if the other does not stand in this tradition.
- One cannot ask of a Catholic to withdraw him/herself under the guise of openness (colourful school).
- Openness and identity are not incompatible (dialogue school).

Because of the point of departure: human beings as God's image

Which is a philosophical debatable confessional basic principle
vs. Scientism: hermeneutical space as an evolutionary 'accident'.

5. Bearing witness to the Catholic tradition

A discontinuous experience of God

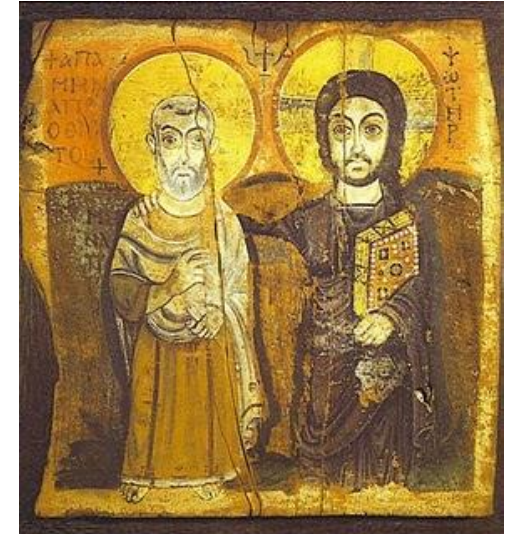
A critique on a pure *inductive* model:

- God cannot simply be found in the hermeneutical space.
- One is not born as a Catholic, one becomes a Catholic.
- God cannot just be induced from human experience.

God comes from 'elsewhere'

- God reveals Himself to and within hermeneutical spaces (cf. the liturgy).
- An unmediated relationship with God is **impossible**.

In order to experience and meet God, one has to be initiated into the very particular set of stories, symbols, rituals, traditions, et cetera that mediate the Divine and permit an encounter with God within the hermeneutical space.



Post-Christian cultural context

This will become more and more clear in a context where the overlap between Catholicism and culture is disappearing.



CAN A COW SUFFER PAIN?

(examination question)

5. Bearing witness to the Catholic tradition

Transcendent transcendence

>< Immanent transcendence

The good, the truth and the beauty as a way to transcendence
(Luc Ferry) (sports, the arts, music, sexuality, et cetera.)

Transcendent transcendence

The *Radical Other* enters into the hermeneutical space (ontological referent)

Taboo on transcendence

Challenge: growing Taboo on transcendence in the West and need for a new language to speak about God.



5. Bearing witness to the Catholic tradition

Meeting God



The relationship with the divine, or **meeting God**, can be described as the Radically Other breaking into the hermeneutical space. The Other is connecting, filling, founding and unifying those things I cannot bind together, fulfill, give foundation or unify of my own capacity; He is the one I intensely long for. For a religious person, experiencing and meeting God is like bathing in a light coming from elsewhere; a unifying, endearing light that gives me a sight of Love, that invokes gratitude, brings peace, but that also calls me to responsibility and alters my worldview.



A **Catholic education** is responsible for encouraging students to see, understand and feel how religious people can feel and break open the hermeneutical space in words, stories, prayers and rituals.

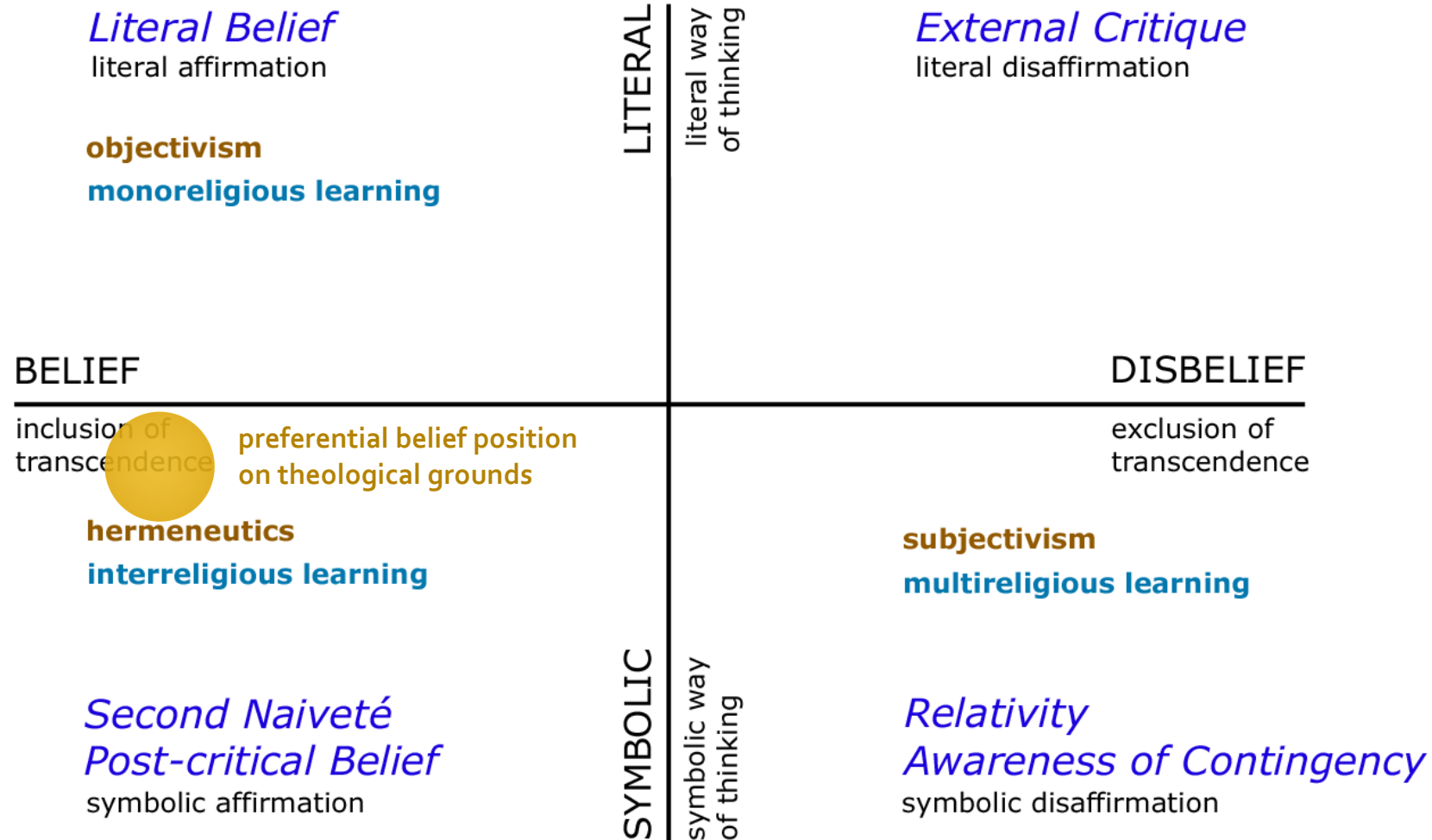
A Catholic education should *at least* guarantee that this possibility is **not blocked in advance**, despite the fact that religion and religious language are often in themselves obstacles for those transcendent experiences of the hermeneutical space.

Post-Critical Belief

Catholic anthropology manifests in *Post-Critical Belief*

Post-Critical Belief Scale

Cognitive belief styles as building blocks for Catholic school identity



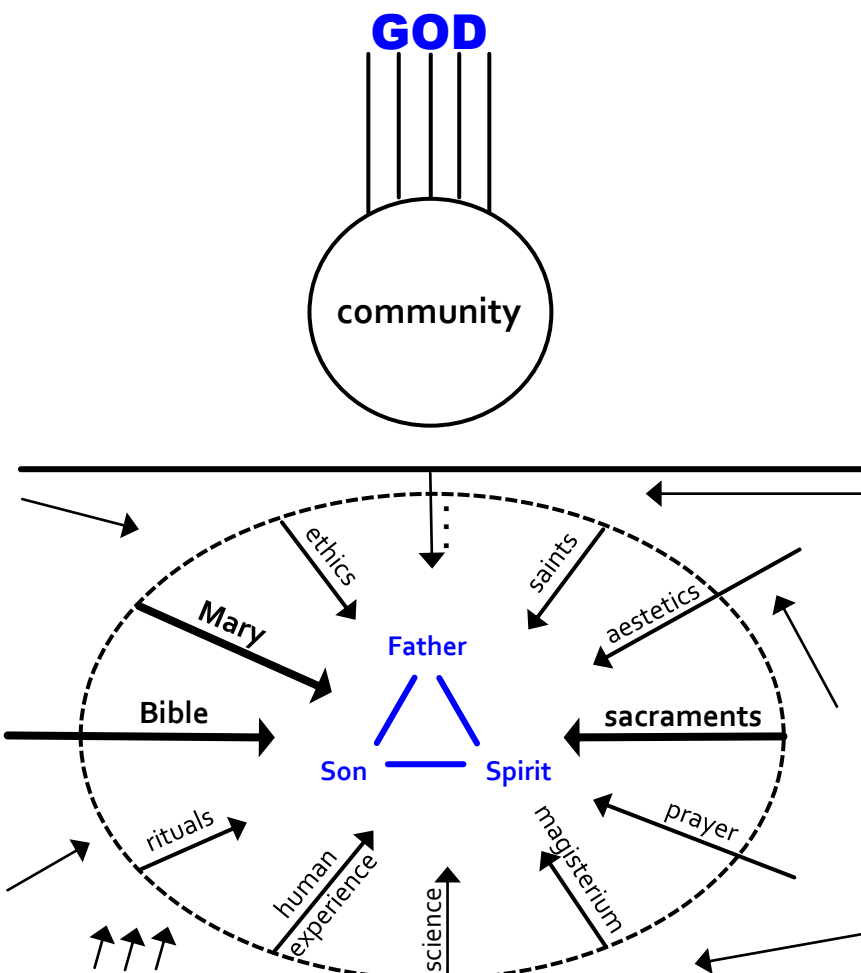
The ontological referent

The Catholic school as an 'open hermeneutical space' that mediates the Transcendent

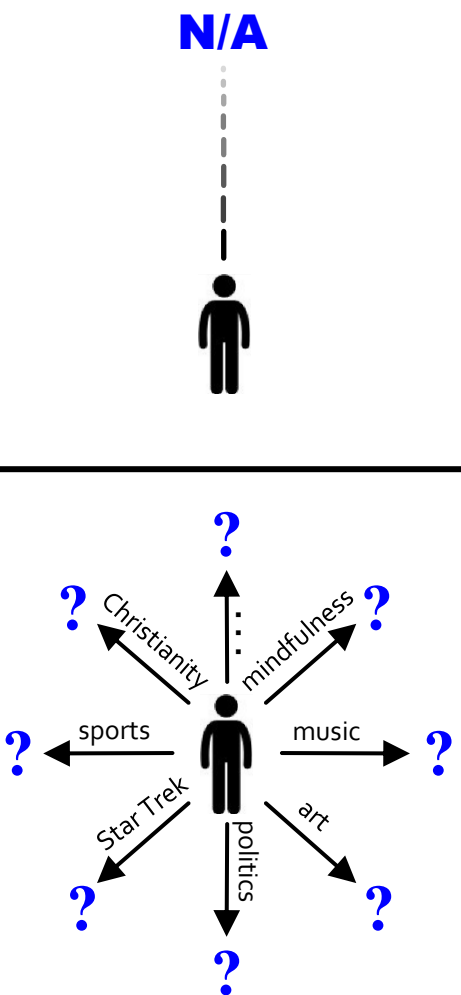


direct availability

no transcendent reality



convergent: available through mediations



divergent

Hermeneutical learning in religious education

The hermeneutical-communicate model (HCM) for RE

From a mono-correlational to a multi-correlational model



Radicalisation of the consciousness of plurality in the field of religious and worldviews.

Impact on religious education: **repositioning of hermeneutics in religious pedagogy.**

In the sixties:

- hermeneutics and mono-correlational didactics → hermeneutics of the text

In the nineties:

- hermeneutics and multi-correlational didactics → hermeneutics of the active subject
→ hermeneutics of the context

From convincing others to witnessing



The RE teacher as a 'SWIMmer':

- **Specialist** in knowledge of Catholic and other ideological traditions.
- Committed **witness** of one's own personal Catholic faith synthesis, both established and ever-evolving.
- **Moderator** of the multicorrelational search process of the students and facilitator of each student's individual identity development.

'SWIMmer' or bringer of *confusion*?

- Can the RE teacher be both a witness and moderator of philosophical conversations? (Cf. PCB scale: *Literal Belief, Post-Critical Belief, External Critique, Relativism*).
- Can the students develop their own worldview in the presence of a teacher with a prominent Christian religious profile?

→ **Need for a Catholic RE teacher with a specific faith profile: *Post-Critical Belief*!**

From humans as religious beings to humans as hermeneutical beings



Shift: humans as 'by nature' religious beings, to humans created as hermeneutical beings.

- Humans are capable of ideological thoughtfulness:
 - Hermeneutics of the text
 - Hermeneutics of the context
 - Hermeneutics of the active subject
- Humans are able to ask the question of *sense* and *nonsense*.
- Humans have an openness through which they can receive the Transcendent.

Challenges for the future:

- Challenges of the positive sciences: levelling the difference between humans and animals.
- Challenges of the human sciences: deconstructing the meaning-seeking of man (the meaninglessness of the meaning-question).
- Challenges from post-Christian, pagan religiosity: total subjectivisation of religion instead of revelation in the tension between subject and reality.

→ The hermeneutical approach is an implicit and explicit *Catholic* approach.

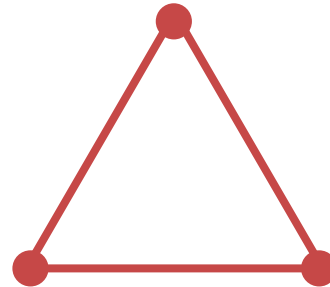
Hermeneutical learning in RE

The threefold dynamics of hermeneutical learning



Hermeneutics of the TEXT: the Catholic faith tradition

Awareness of the way(s) in which the tradition understands itself.
Catholic view on God, human beings, and the world. Theological formation reveals the content, richness, complexity, internal plurality, but also the ambiguities and tensions that exist in the faith tradition. Inner perspective of faith: creates the space for a particular religious experience.



Hermeneutics of the present CONTEXT

Awareness of the multitude of philosophical and religious perspectives that present themselves today and how our present context deals with them.
Multitude of perspectives, partially overlapping, partially clashing.

Hermeneutics of the interpreting SUBJECT him/herself

Awareness of the interpretation schemes with which one looks at reality. The 'glasses' one wears determine what is perceived, what is valued, and what is rejected.
Task of RE: create the context in which students can grow in self-clarification.

'Hermeneutical intersections' (interpretative problems)

When disagreements begin to emerge, face the differences!



As students give voice to their own perspectives, it will become clear that not all of their opinions are compatible – these are called: 'hermeneutical intersections'.

- Tensions, conflicting interpretations which refer to a plurality of presuppositions and positions in the classroom discourse about a certain subject.
- There are conflicting lines of interpretation about a certain subject, which catalyse a process of clarification about present and developing philosophical and religious presuppositions.

'Hermeneutical intersections' (interpretative problems)

When disagreements begin to emerge, face the differences!



- Hermeneutical intersections are intrinsically **linked to the essence of a particular philosophical or religious topic or issue**.
- They appear when different interpretations arise around a particular topic or life issue, either between a teacher and student, or between the students themselves.
- It is up to the RE teacher (*witness, expert, moderator*) to: **detect** — **Uncover** — **Wrestle** — **Disentangle** the hermeneutical intersections.



Sur la traduction [On Translation] (2004)

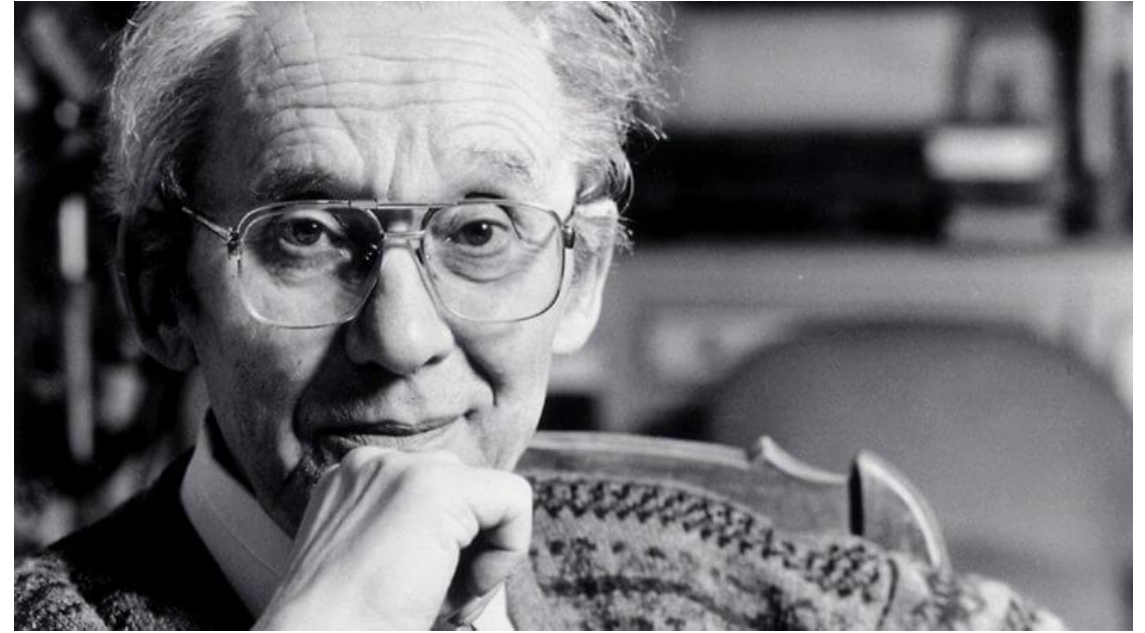
Paul Ricoeur, famous French protestant philosopher (1913-2005)

The (un)translatability of languages

Paradox between particularism and pluralism



- Influential French protestant philosopher **Paul Ricoeur** (1913-2005).
- **Translation** always risks losing or changing the meaning of the original text.
- There is no such thing as a 'perfect translation'.
- Yet translation does not stop at the potential loss of meaning, because the **potential for new meaning** emerges.
- The new meanings may have been tacit or even latent, unknown to the original speaker. **New revelation occurs!**



Hermeneutical learning in RE

Aim: Supporting Catholics as well as others



The Catholic anthropology of a human being as an 'open hermeneutical space' is intrinsically linked to **hermeneutical learning in religious education**.

Catholic education for Catholics as well as other-believers and other-than-believers.

Four target groups of religious education, with different outcomes:

1. Students who are Christians already, and who become 'better Christians' by means of the religious education course: continuing faith initiation and deepening of faith, possibly correction and reprofiling (**mystagogy, catechesis**).
2. Students who discover the Christian tradition (**evangelisation**) or who rediscover the Christian tradition (**re-evangelisation**).
3. Students of other religions who learn to become more authentically rooted in their own religion and partners in dialogue (**interreligious learning**).
4. Students who get to know the Christian tradition as important cultural heritage and a source of moral values in Western society (**pre-evangelisation**).

Hermeneutical learning in RE

Publication by the Flemish bishops



The Course of Roman Catholic Religious Education

at the Crossroads- of Society, Education and Church Community



Bischoffconferentie van België
Guimardstraat 1
B-1040 Brussel
Tel. +32 (0)2 507 05 93
ce.belgica@interdio.be

Erkende instantie
Guimardstraat 1
B-1040 Brussel
Tel. +32 (0)2 507 05 18
erkendeinstantie@interdio.be



Uitgeverij Licap-Halewijn nv
Guimardstraat 1 • B-1040 Brussel
www.licap.be
ISBN: 978-94-6196-140-7
D/2017/0279/025



9 789461 961402

Hermeneutical learning in RE

Publication by the Flemish bishops



"The course of RE is constitutive for the very nature and mission of a *Catholic Dialogue School*. Indeed, it is precisely the subject of RE that makes clear what the *Catholic Dialogue School* wants to be: **a place of learning or practice at the crossroads of individuality and openness, of identity and dialogue.**

The *Catholic Dialogue School* wants to **put forward its own understanding and approach to the Catholic faith tradition.** Not everything is the same and differences can be significant, including and especially in the realm of religion and philosophy of life. **It is important that students learn to see, name and assess these differences.**

At the same time, the school wants to **promote conversation and cooperation** between all those involved in the religious and philosophical domain. From a Christian view of mankind and the world, it wants to strengthen the (inter)philosophical competences of pupils."



The Course of Roman Catholic Religious Education

at the Crossroads- of Society, Education and Church Community

A three-fold didactic movement

The dynamics of hermeneutical learning



This threefold didactic moment forms the basic structure of the **curriculum for RE in secondary schools in Flanders**, published by the Flemish Bishops' Conference.

Hermeneutical learning in RE

The threefold didactic movement of hermeneutical learning



Step 1. Growing awareness of plurality, and one's own perspective

Where religions and world views are concerned [with reference to a particular hermeneutical intersection], the student is made aware of the multiplicity of hermeneutical perspectives on reality. The student discovers that his/her personal stance is one possibility among many views, practices and life choices. While becoming aware of one's own situatedness, the student broadens his/her perspective and looks with different eyes to reality.

Step 2. Confrontation with the insider's perspective of the Catholic faith tradition

Task for the RE teachers (*witness, expert, moderator*): to introduce the particularity of the Catholic faith tradition [with reference to a particular hermeneutical intersection] as a preferential option. It is important that the teacher personally occupies this religious perspective, and is capable of authentically speaking and acting from an insider's perspective.

Step 3. Invitation to grow in self-understanding

The student is invited to enhance one's own identity by making a free personal choice, or perhaps to deepen the choice that has already been made, in relation to the proposition of Christian faith as a preferred option against a background of diverse responses. Increasing awareness and understanding of one's own religious or world view perspective. Invitation to enter in dialogue about this with others.

A three-fold didactic movement

The dynamics of hermeneutical learning



Terrain 'Faith and context'

3rd degree

Preface & introduction Structure Terrain Horizons Guide ILC PDF

love and friendship act well hope and vulnerability **faith and context** community building and inspiration professional and personal commitment Explanations ingredients

1 **Plurality/Context**

- Ground experiences
- 200 Coincidence - fate - plan
- 201 Nihilism - indifference - radicalism
- 202 New Atheism
- 203 Faith and Science
- 204 Creation Myths
- 205 Beliefs
- 206 Faith and superstition
- 207 Tolerance - intolerance
- 208 Autonomy - heteronomy
- 209 Interphilosophical dialogue

Explanation

2 **Christian Faith/Tradition**

- 210 Grace, reflection, prayer
- 211 God and idols
- 212 Revelation
- 213 Jesus as a revelation of God
- 214 Religion - religion - faith
- 215 Recontextualization
- 216 Witnesses of Faith
- 217 Central Faith Texts
- 218 Vatican II
- 219 Pope Francis
- 220 Intra- and inter-religious dialogue

Explanation

3 **Identity/Apprentice**

- 221 ... find, receive phrase
- 222 Connectedness, indignation, powerlessness, amazement
- 223 Attention to the beautiful - the true - the good
- 224 Being Rooted
- 225 Own cognitive belief style
- 226 Philosophical Literacy
- 227 Own vision on life
- 228 Interreligious competences of dialogue and living together

Explanation

Biblical-spiritual horizon
...today I must dwell in your house (Lk 19:5)

Terrain Goals

flow Job market Double finality

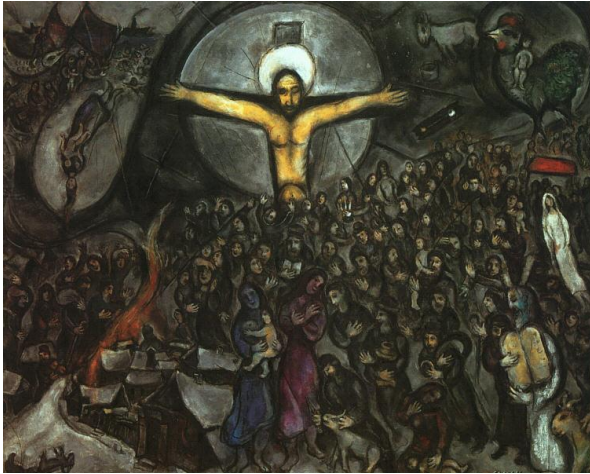
1. **give examples** of how people express (understand) ground experiences;
2. **distinguish** in life testimonies how people seek meaning, give meaning and receive meaning (analysis);
3. **explain** how faith always takes shape in a context (understanding);
4. **give examples** of the interaction between faith and context (understanding);
5. **analyze** (analyze) human, world and god images;
6. **to explain** (understand) the interplay of experience and revelation in Christian traditions ;
7. **Mapping** how Christians in time and space shape (understand) the gospel again and again;
8. **express** their view of man, the world and God;
9. **express** how a Christian view of man, the world and God relates to and/or challenges one's own view.

Theological backgrounds Contextual backgrounds Person-building backgrounds Biblical Wallpapers **All wallpapers**

Annual Progress Plan Integrated approach Evaluation FAQ

Page on the Thomas Website, in support of the RE curriculum in Flanders.

Theological foundations of HCM and the hermeneutical intersections



- **Optimistic belief in creation:** being made in the image of God, people have their own possibilities and a fundamental openness to receive the Christian message.
- **Incarnation and faith in resurrection:** God enters human history by becoming human Godself. God takes the world very seriously. God saves people from where they stand.
- **Cross experience:** not everyone chooses the Christian faith. Indifference, ridicule, resistance and hostility will always be part of the experience.
- **Faith communication as a process of the Spirit.** Freedom and creativity in the Spirit of Christ. Christian tradition is itself an unceasing process propelled by the Spirit.
- **Eschatological caveat:** critical examination of apparent 'harmony' or 'similarity' between Christian tradition and experience. *Deus semper maior*: no human interpretation or faith-communicative process is 'perfect'.

The hermeneutical space of Saint Peter's Square, Vatican City

Extraordinary *Urbi et Orbi* blessing by Pope Francis in 2020, the height of COVID

The hermeneutical space of Saint Peter's Square

Urbi et Orbi papal blessing, 27 March 2020, the hight of COVID



On an empty St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis delivered unexpectedly an extraordinary blessing *To the City and to the World* to pray for an end to the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic. In his meditation, the Pope reflected on Jesus' words to His disciples: "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?" **"God turns everything to our good."**

The hermeneutical space of Saint Peter's Square

Urbi et Orbi papal blessing, 27 March 2020, the hight of COVID



The *Urbi et Orbi* blessing is normally only pronounced at Christmas, or when a new pope takes office. At that time, a large part of the world was in 'lockdown' during the first large coronavirus outbreak.

It was an example of recontextualisation of words, symbols and rituals; an expression of vulnerability and the desire to bring Christ in dialogue with the whole world as sign of salvation.

This was the most powerful answer on the pandemic from the perspective of Catholic faith by pope Francis.

The hermeneutical space of Saint Peter's Square

Urbi et Orbi papal blessing, 27 March 2020, the hight of COVID



The square was completely empty. An unreal and interruptive experience, since it is usually crowded with over 70,000 believers. Millions of people were following this event via live stream.

Presence and absence; silence and darkness; but also light, and gold, and the rays on the monstrance.

The rain came down and the sober lights of the evening reflected on the shiny ground of the square. The deafening silence revealed the vulnerability of the moment; the extraordinary in the ordinary.



The hermeneutical space of Saint Peter's Square

Urbi et Orbi papal blessing, 27 March 2020, the hight of COVID



On the altar there stood the monstrance, built in the portal of the Basilica, with a Byzantine icon of Mary, and a famous statue of the crucified Christ specially transferred for the occasion from the San Marcello al Corso, Rome.

Francis presents the monstrance to the world and tenderly kisses the bleeding feet of the 15th century statue of the crucified Christ.

A profound symbol. Subdued. Pure. Silent. Sober. No audience. No applause. No euphoria. Slowly. Quietly. Praying. Only the crucified.

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?"

Urbi et Orbi papal blessing, 27 March 2020, the hight of COVID

Francis' homily was built around the theme of the storm on the lake (Mt. 28), and Jesus' statement: "DO NOT BE AFRAID". It was a clear expression of both aspects: vulnerability and responsibility.

The Pope explained: *"The storm [of corona] shows our vulnerability and unmasks the false and superficial certainties around us that have shaped our daily agenda, our projects, our customs and priorities. It shows how we have allowed ourselves to become indifferent and weak to those things that nourish, carry, and support our lives and our communities. [...] This is not the time of God's judgement, but of our judgement: a time to choose what really matters and what is only transient, a time to distinguish what is necessary from what is not necessary".*



"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?"

Urbi et Orbi papal blessing, 27 March 2020, the hight of COVID



A deep identification with the victims of COVID-19 worldwide.

A suffering Christ on the cross : the confession of a God who radically identifies with the suffering of every human being. No one is lost. No one is let go. Everyone is blessed.

An empty space that connects all of us. This is the true meaning of 'Catholic': '*kat-holos*', for all.

Seven months later, the pope published the encyclical letter: *Fratelli Tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship).

"Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?"

Urbi et Orbi papal blessing, 27 March 2020, the hight of COVID



In these hard times, the bishop of Rome reminds us that compassion, human growth, and mercy are the core. This immediately calls us to responsibility and concrete action. Being near to each other, providing help and support, in absolute solidarity with each others' suffering. Experiencing this in our time, precisely when mankind is trembling on its foundations so profoundly ... is a source of deep consolation, happiness and gratitude. It exposes what it means to be a Catholic.

The hermeneutical space of Saint Peter's Square

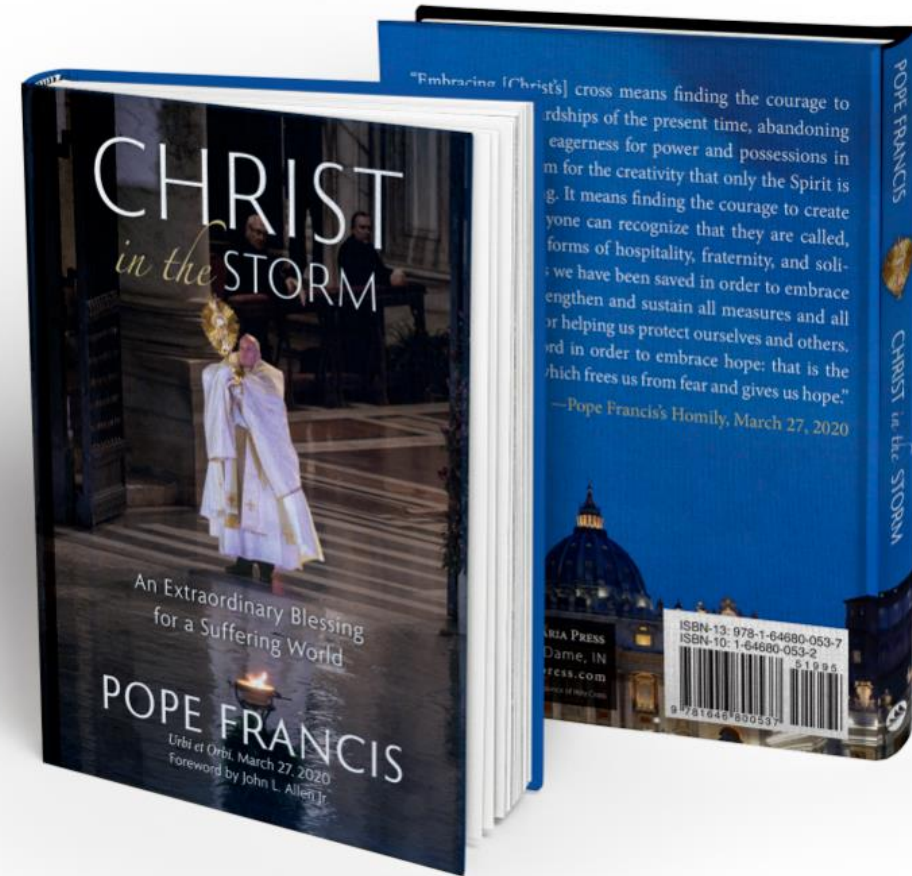
Urbi et Orbi papal blessing, 27 March 2020, the hight of COVID



For sure, this moment will become part of the collective memory of our ecclesiastical history, because it refers to the core of what Catholic faith is truly about: *"Don't be afraid. I am with you."*

Not just in words, but in everything.

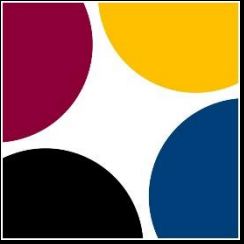
Not just in 'good vibes', but when humanity suffers. Not in political power, but in the tenderness of a blessing. Not just as the risen Christ, but as Christ in the storm.



A book has been published dedicated to this event: *Christ in the Storm: An Extraordinary Blessing for a Suffering World* (2020).

< Clip Vatican News >

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOIYQB8Twdk>



KU LEUVEN

Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI)

**The human being as an 'open hermeneutical space'.
Hermeneutical Religious Education.**

Prof. Dr. Didier Pollefeyt – Drs. Jan Bouwens
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