

Bible fatigue and Biblical didactics

(Mis)using the Bible at school

Prof. Dr. Didier Pollefeyt – Drs. Jan Bouwens

KU Leuven, 2014 ©

Bible fatigue and Biblical didactics

Structure of this presentation



1. Introduction. The BIBLE at school:

Where...? Which...? When...? HOW...?

2. The use of the Bible at school: 'Bible fatigue'

- A. Biblical fundamentalism
- B. Scientific fundamentalism
- C. The Bible as ethical recipe book
- D. Cyberspace: abyss or opportunity?

3. Remedies for Bible fatigue:

the future horizon as the locus of revelation.



The use of the Bible at school

Introduction

Introduction

Where...? Which...? When...?



- When assessing Catholic identity, one of the important questions asked should be: **"Is the Bible being used at school?"**
- If the Bible is not used (anymore), the Catholic identity of a school must be put into question...
- If the Bible is read, it is worth considering your school's current practices by asking these questions:

Where are
the Bibles
located in
your school?

Which
version(s)
is/are
preferred by
the school?

When is the
Bible read?

Where are the Bibles located in school?



- Do the students possess their own Bible?
- Is there a Bible located in each classroom?
- Do the classes have shared Bibles in boxes?
- Are there Bibles in the school library?
- Are Biblical stories or passages present elsewhere in the school environment?

Where are the Bibles located in school?



Are the Bibles stored away?

Where are the Bibles located in school?



**Are the Bibles present in
the classroom?**

Where are the Bibles located in school?



Are there Bibles in the school library?



Which version is preferred by the school?

Questions to be considered...



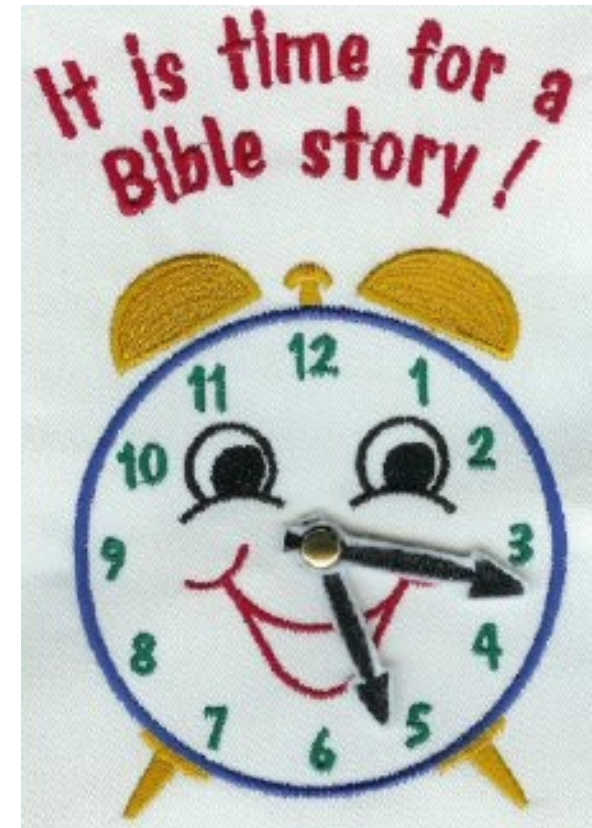
- How close is the text to the 'original' text? Do the annotations and appendices promote a *Post-Critical* understanding of the Bible stories?
- Are strange expressions 'translated' or explained? Is a symbolic understanding promoted?
- What image of God or Jesus is presented? Are both the Old and New Testaments included?

(Visualisation of textual cross references found in the Old and New Testaments)

When is the Bible used at school?



- During Religious Education classes?
- During pastoral care activities?
- In school liturgies?
- Bu prayer groups?



Introduction

Where...? Which...? When...? **HOW...?**



The next and
most central
question is:

***How** is the Bible
used at school?*

A close-up photograph of a person's eye, looking down at a book. The book's cover is dark with the words "HOLY BIBLE" printed in large, gold, serif capital letters. The person's eye is light-colored and focused on the text.

HOLY BIBLE



The use of the Bible at school

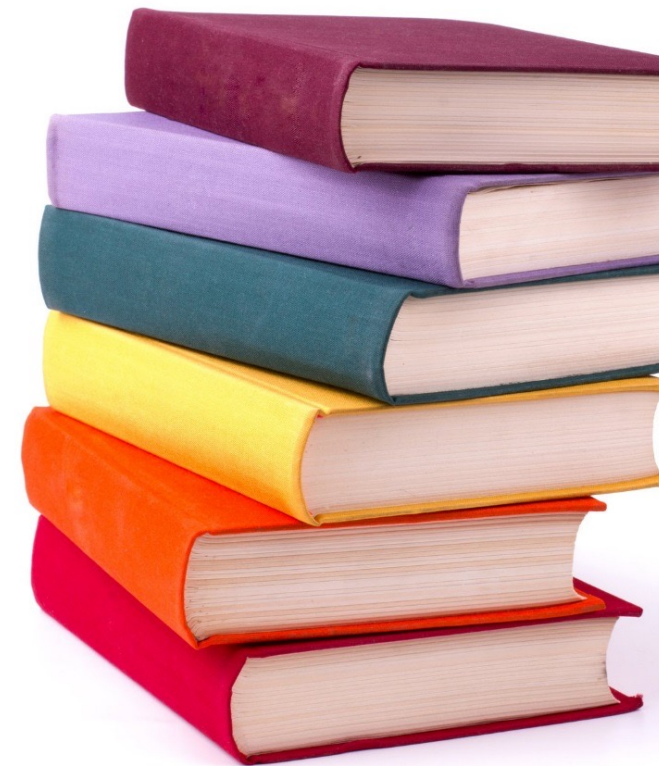
The causes of Bible fatigue

Bible fatigue

Introduction



- The causes of Bible fatigue:
 - **Biblical fundamentalism**
 - **Scientific fundamentalism**
 - **The Bible as ethical recipe book**
- **Cyberspace**: abyss or opportunity?
- **Remedies** for Bible fatigue:
the future of the Bible



Bible fatigue

Introduction



- The Bible is the **most influential formative text** of Western culture and has inspired believers for generations
- The Bible has fundamentally shaped our languages, ways of thinking, literature, visual art, architecture, music, etc.
- Yet recent studies indicate **a sharp decrease in students' interest in the Bible** in Religious Education.

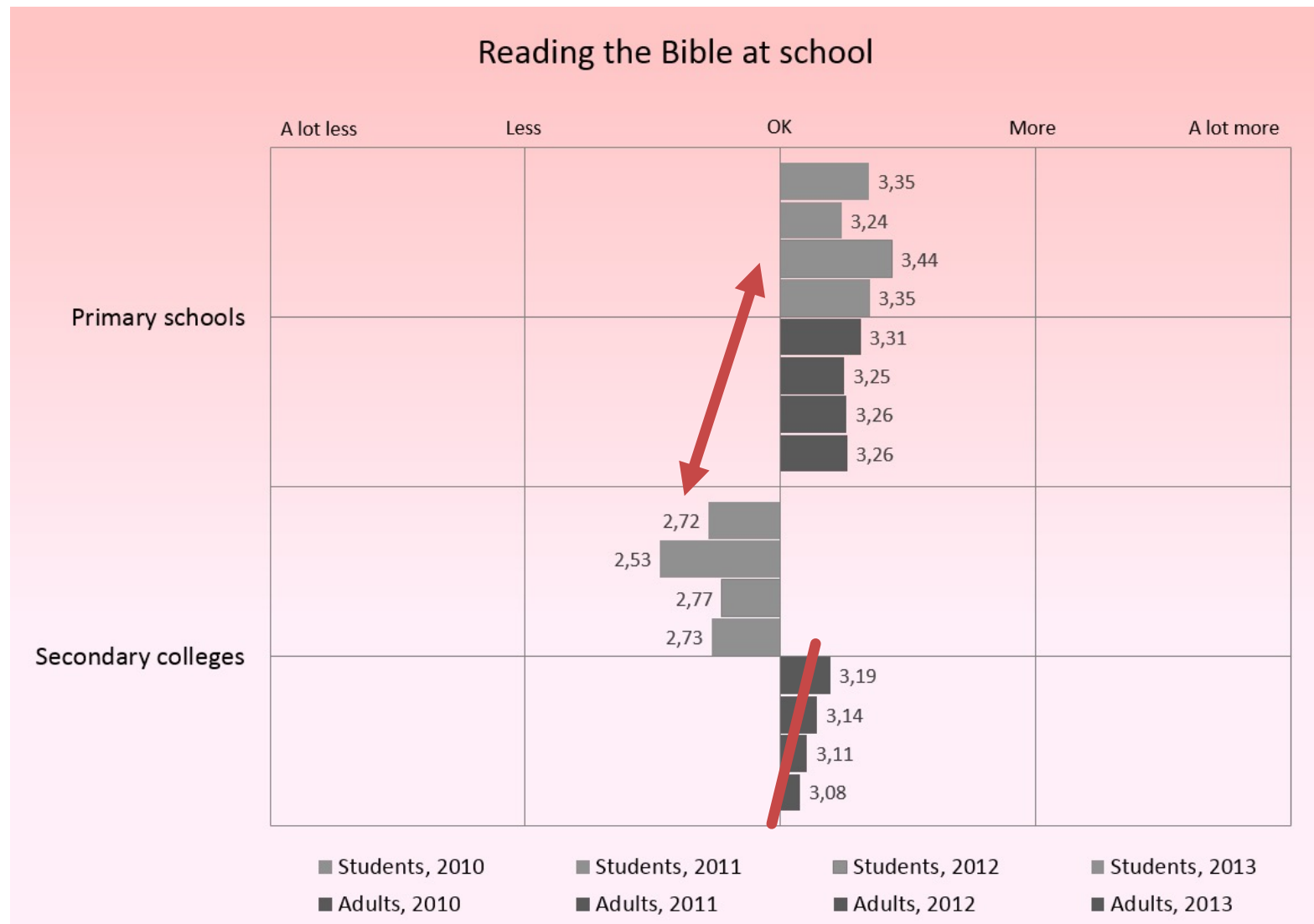


=



Bible fatigue

Doyle Questionnaire: *Reading the Bible at school: more or less?*
(Victoria 2010-2013)



Bible fatigue

Introduction



- The Bible can no longer be taken for granted as the foundation of Religious Education, especially due to the widening gap between biblical and contemporary culture.
- Even positively disposed listeners frequently experience difficulties when reading certain biblical passages.
- **Should we then simply forget about the Bible at school?**
- **Certainly not:** for Christianity, like Judaism, is a religion of the book, in which God speaks to his people through the Scriptures. **Bible = source of revelation.**

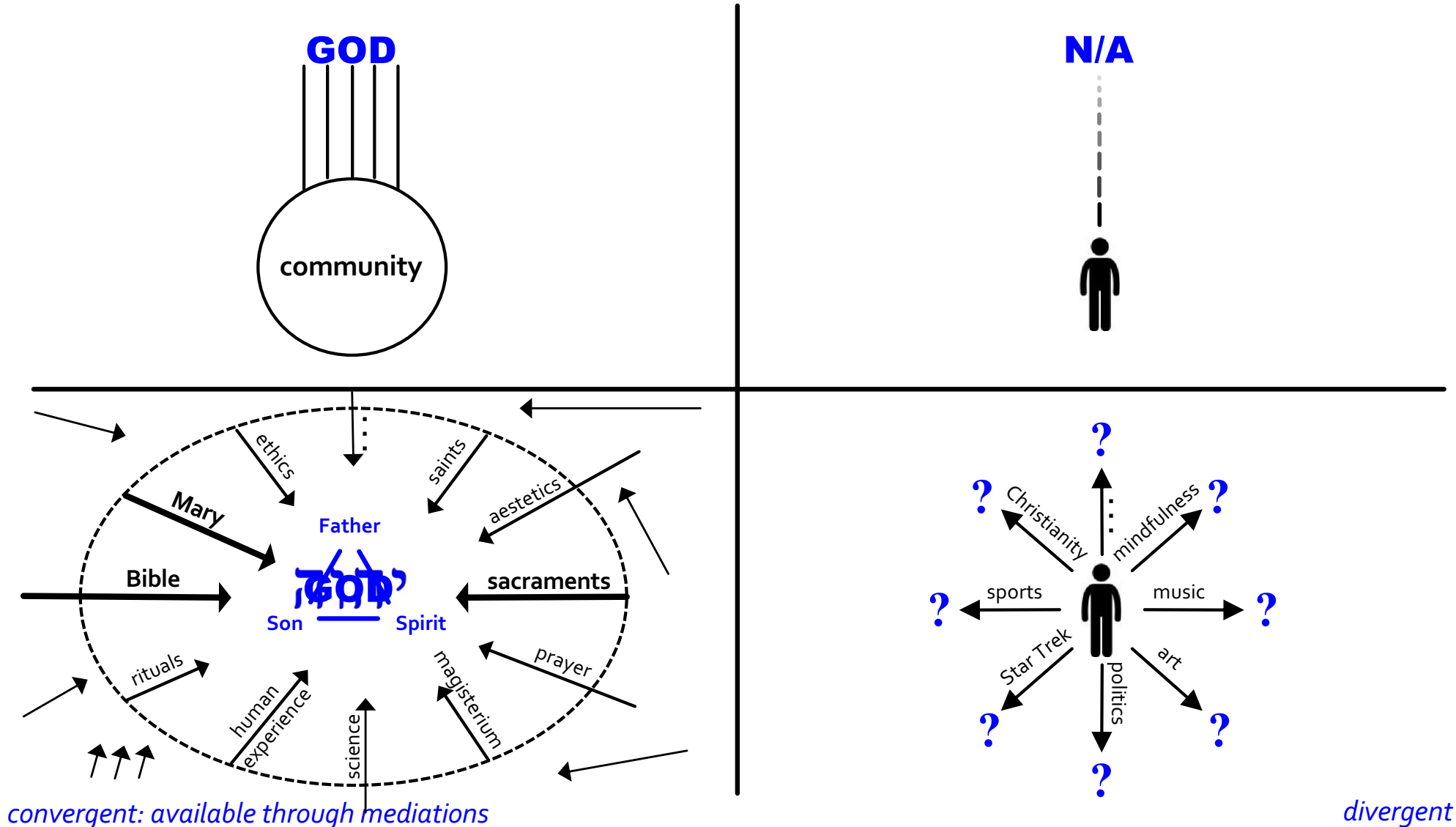
The Ontological Referent

Summary diagram



direct availability

no transcendent reality



Where are the Bibles located in school?





The use of the Bible at school

A. Biblical fundamentalism

A. Biblical fundamentalism

The literal meaning of the text as locus of revelation



- The Bible in its entirety is viewed as the **infallible expression of God's Word**.
- **The Bible is read literally** – down to the very last detail.
- The text is treated as if **God dictated** the entire book word for word, with no consideration for the unique point of views of the human authors.
- The Bible's **archaic mythology and cosmology** are uncritically embraced.
- The Bible is expected to provide **answers** for all of today's questions.



The Lord Answering Job out of the Whirlwind
William Blake, 1826

A. Biblical fundamentalism

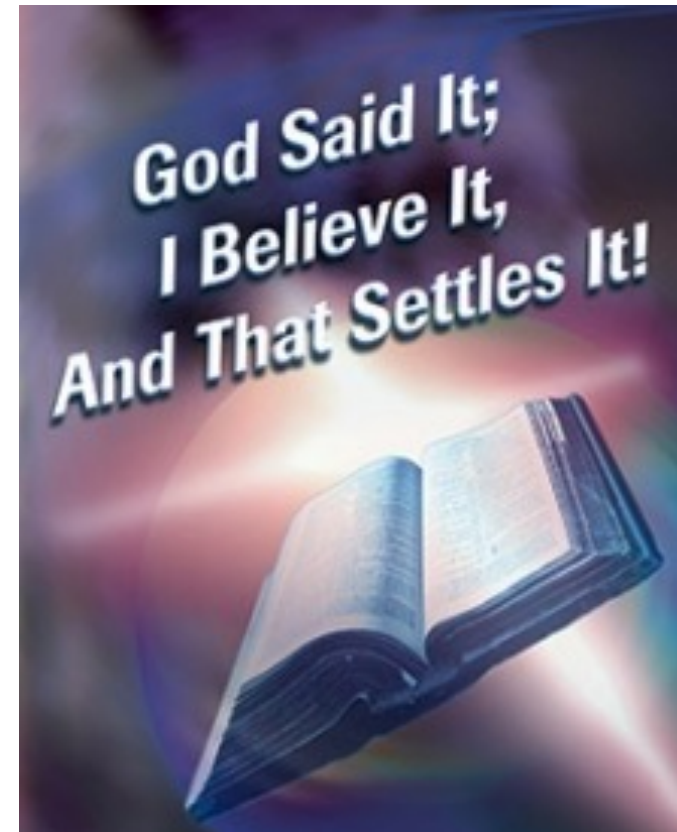
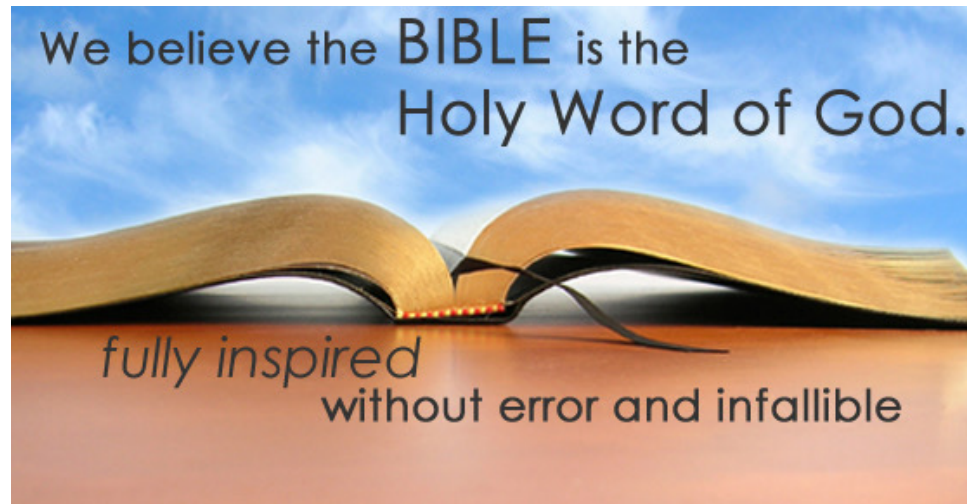
The literal meaning of the text as locus of revelation



Wall mural at The Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, USA

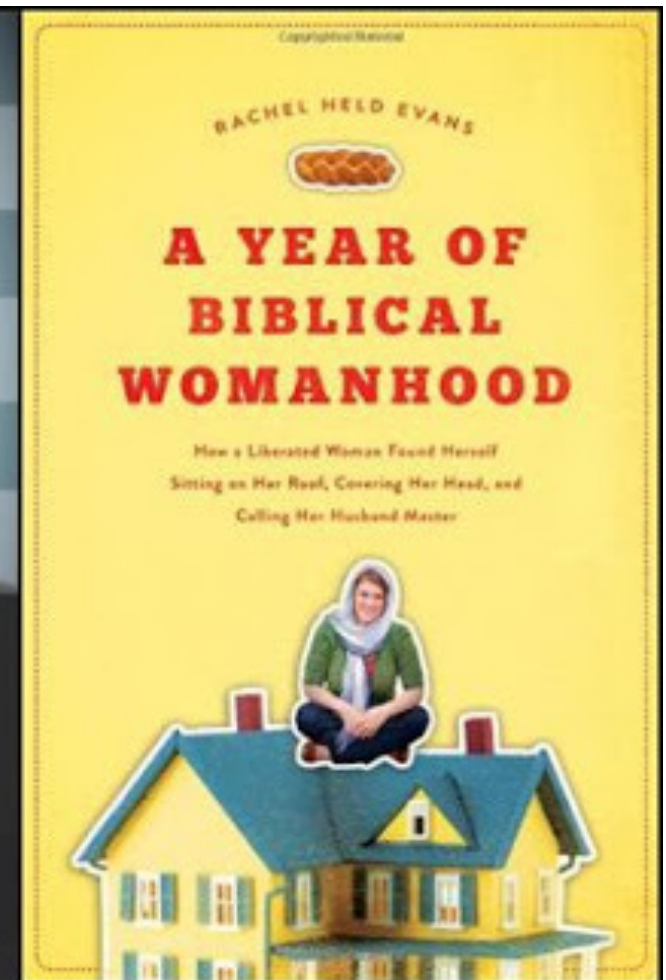
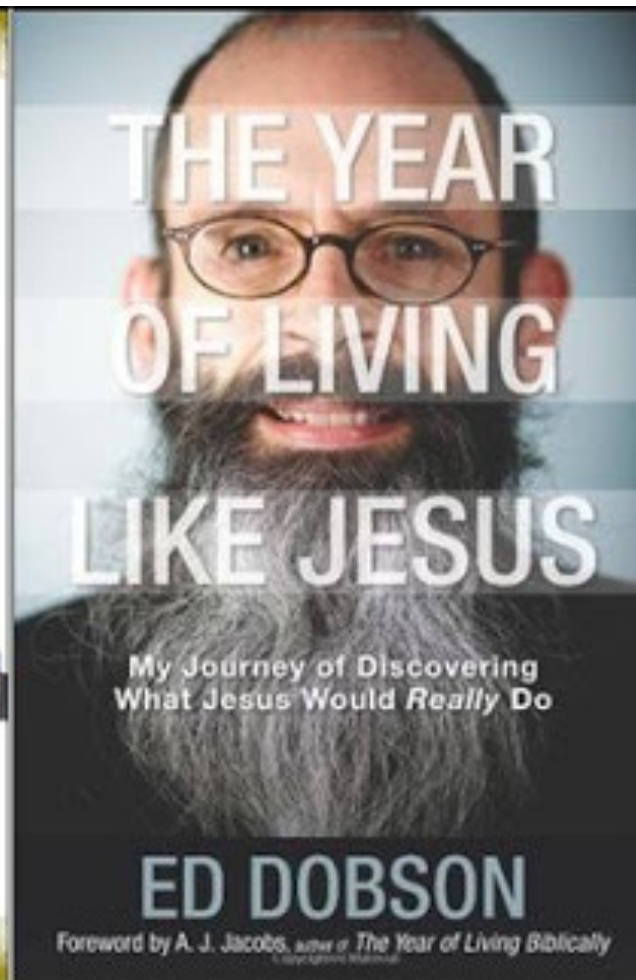
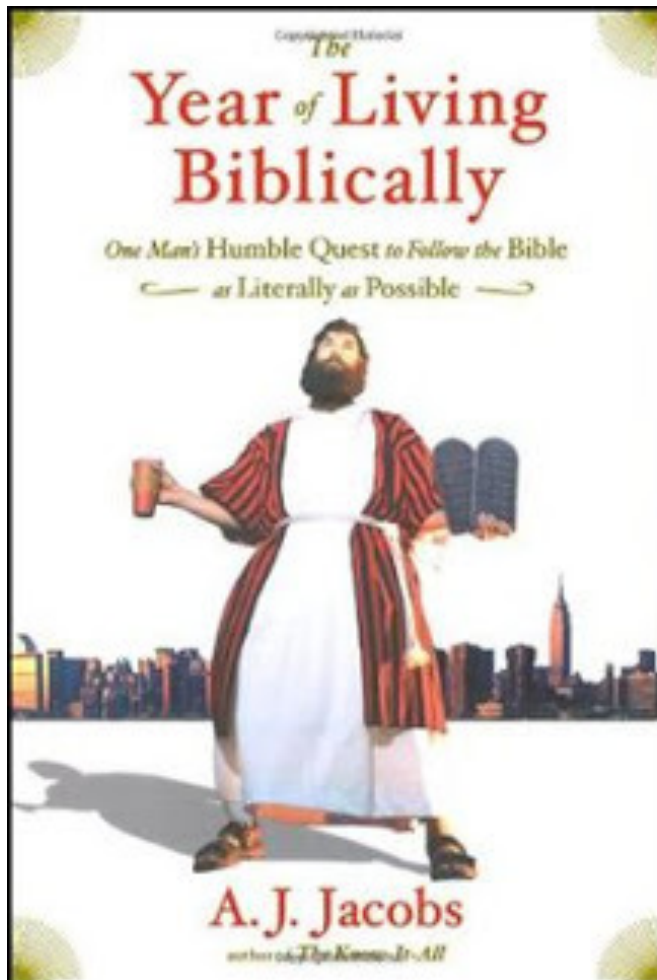
A. Biblical fundamentalism

The literal meaning of the text as locus of revelation



A. Biblical fundamentalism

The literal meaning of the text as locus of revelation



A. Biblical fundamentalism

Problems!

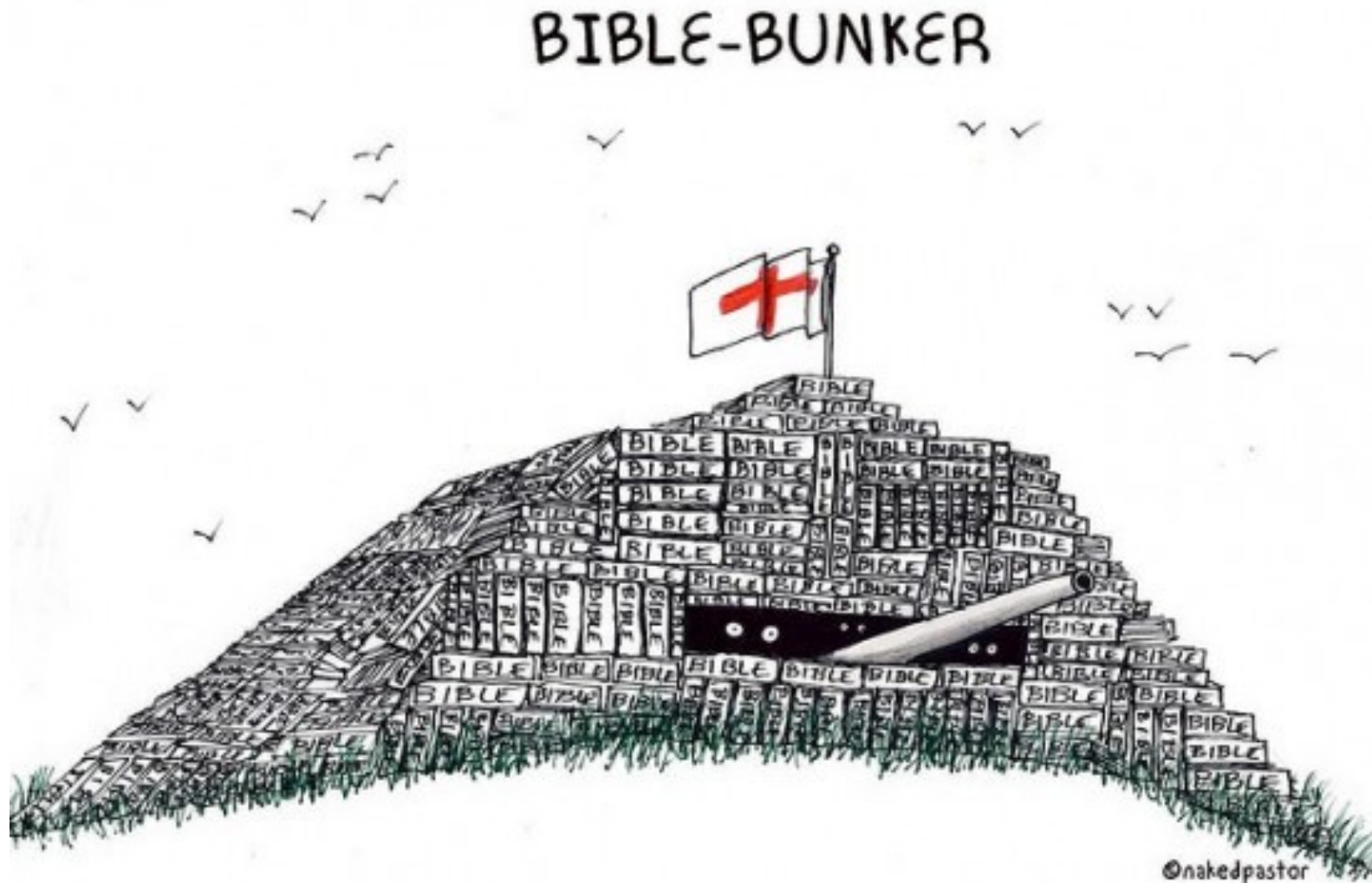


- The rejection of fundamentalism **usually** results in a complete rejection of the Bible.
- Due to the gradual developments of modernity, especially since the Industrial Revolution, **today's culture is strikingly different from the biblical context.**
- In expecting Scripture to have an answer for every question, biblical fundamentalism **manipulates verses and passages for its own purpose** – which is a detriment to the Bible and often risks oversimplifying today's complex world.



A. Biblical fundamentalism

Problems!

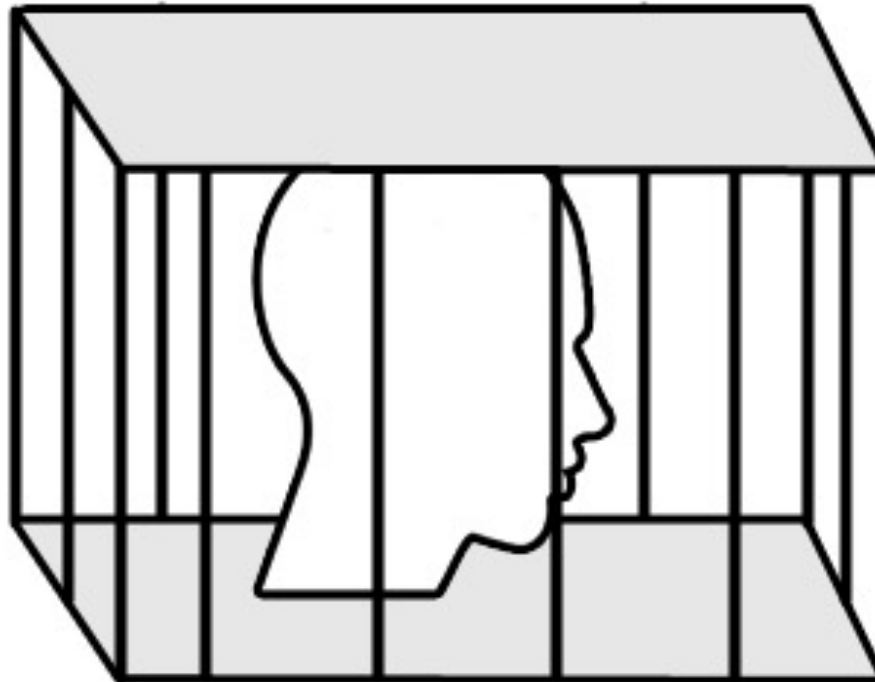


A. Biblical fundamentalism

Problems!



Hard-line fundamentalism uses specific biblical passages to legitimise ideologies and unjust social practices.



A. Biblical fundamentalism

Problems!



A. Biblical fundamentalism

Problems!



While less conspicuous than hard-line fundamentalism, **mild biblical fundamentalism** may be more pervasive – and shows up in some unlikely places!

"Doesn't the Bible say that...?"

CHRISTIANS

"You can prove anything with the Bible – so it's just flimsy."

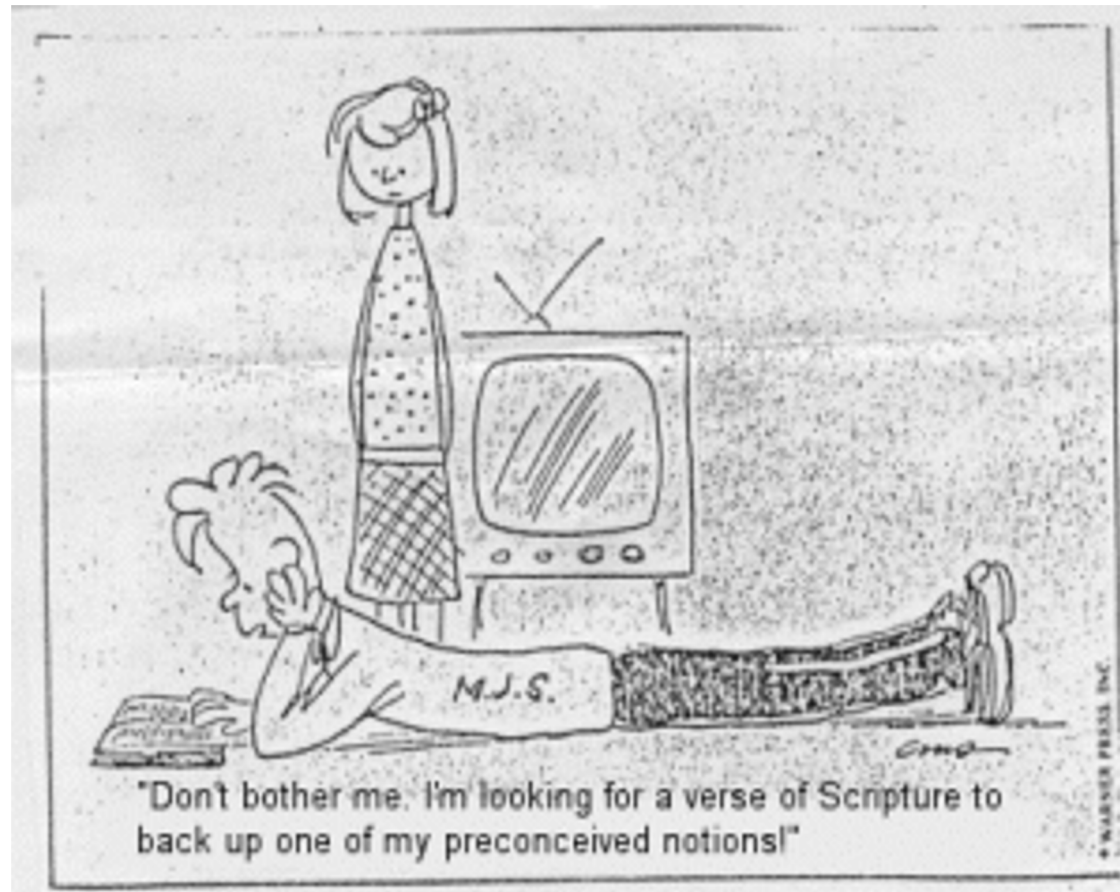
RELATIVISTS

"See how it contradicts itself...?"

ATHEISTS

A. Biblical fundamentalism

Problems!



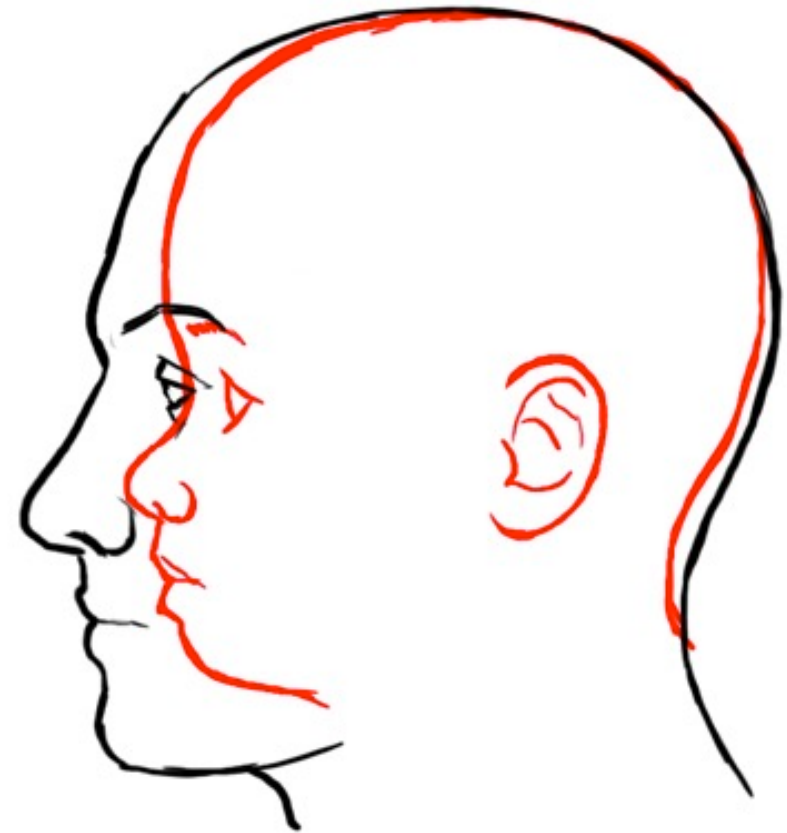
'mild fundamentalism'
'anonymous fundamentalism'

A. Biblical fundamentalism

Problems!



Discussions about the **literal meaning** of the Bible are the unavoidable **growing pains** of moving from an **adolescent** to an **adult way** of reading the Bible.





The use of the Bible at school

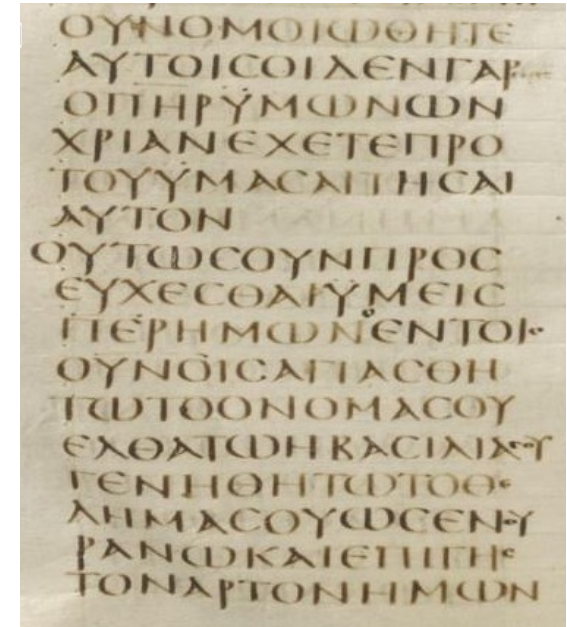
B. Scientific fundamentalism

B. Scientific fundamentalism

The historical reconstruction of the (con)text as locus of revelation



- **The historical-critical method** is the best antidote to biblical literalism or fundamentalism and needs to be fully integrated into the study of the Bible.
- Historical criticism adopts **scientific methods** in its approach to the Bible as a historical book.
- The text is respected by keeping in mind its historically-situated origin, context and meaning.
- Sacred Scripture is **God's Word in human language**:
 - Human authors!
 - Different manuscripts!
 - Variant readings!
- Historical criticism can keep readers from projecting their own problems back into the Bible.



Codex Sinaiticus, mid-4 c. CE
Mt 6:9-11, Lord's Prayer

B. Scientific fundamentalism

The historical reconstruction of the (con)text as locus of revelation

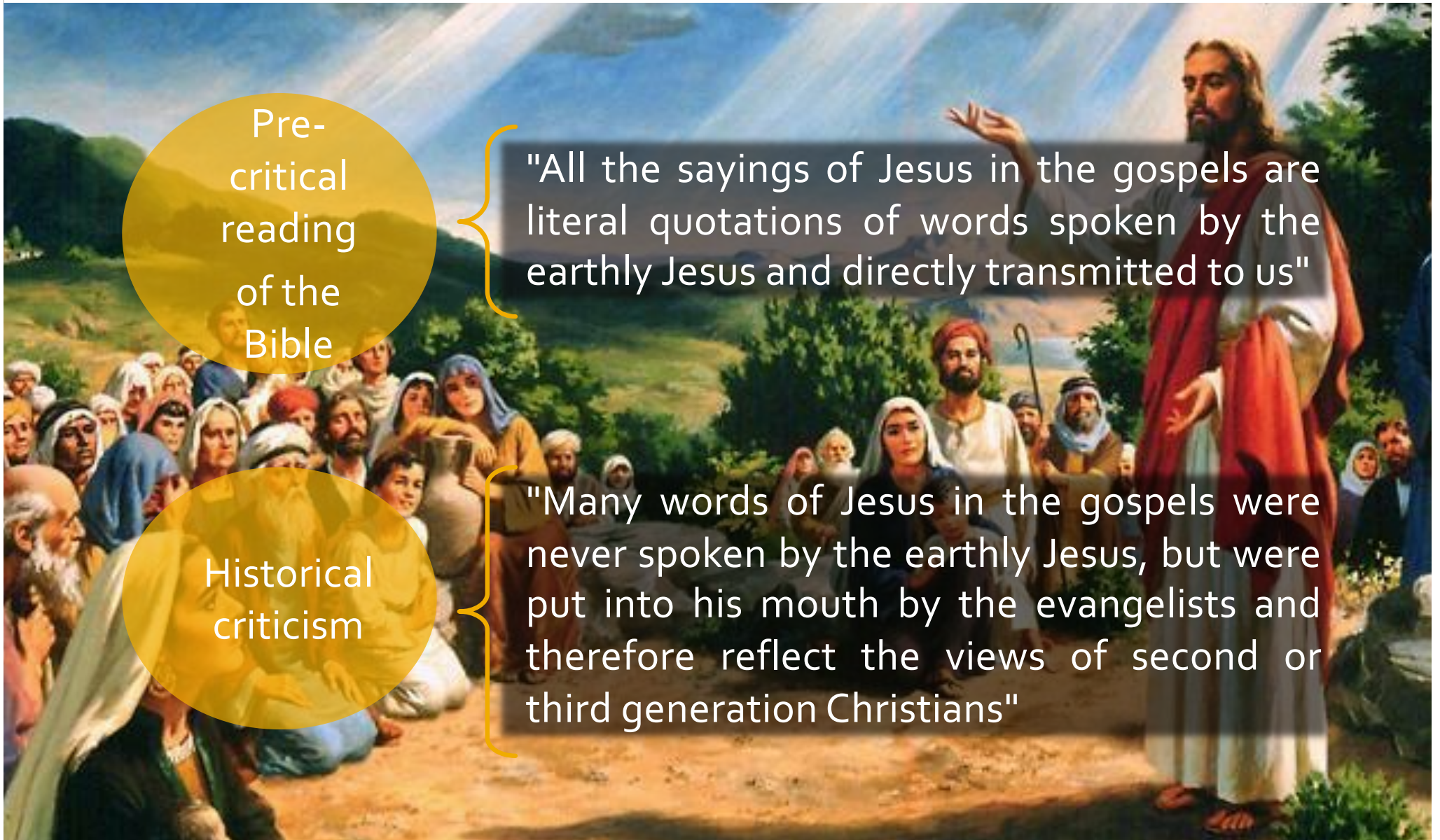


Pre-
critical
reading
of the
Bible

"All the sayings of Jesus in the gospels are literal quotations of words spoken by the earthly Jesus and directly transmitted to us"

Historical
criticism

"Many words of Jesus in the gospels were never spoken by the earthly Jesus, but were put into his mouth by the evangelists and therefore reflect the views of second or third generation Christians"

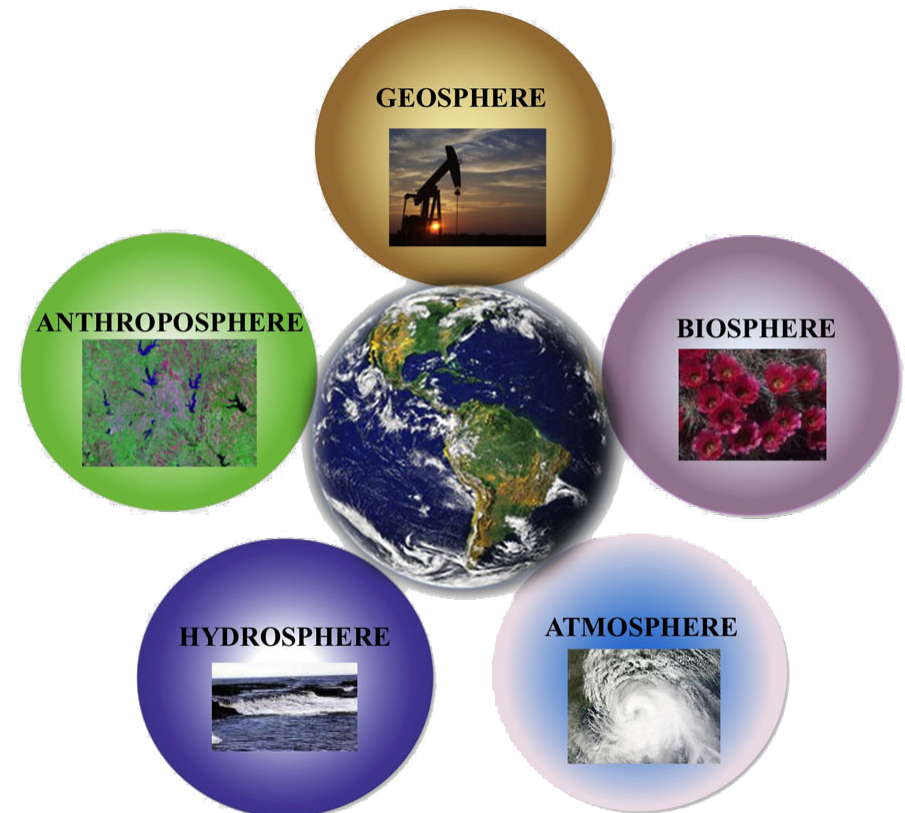
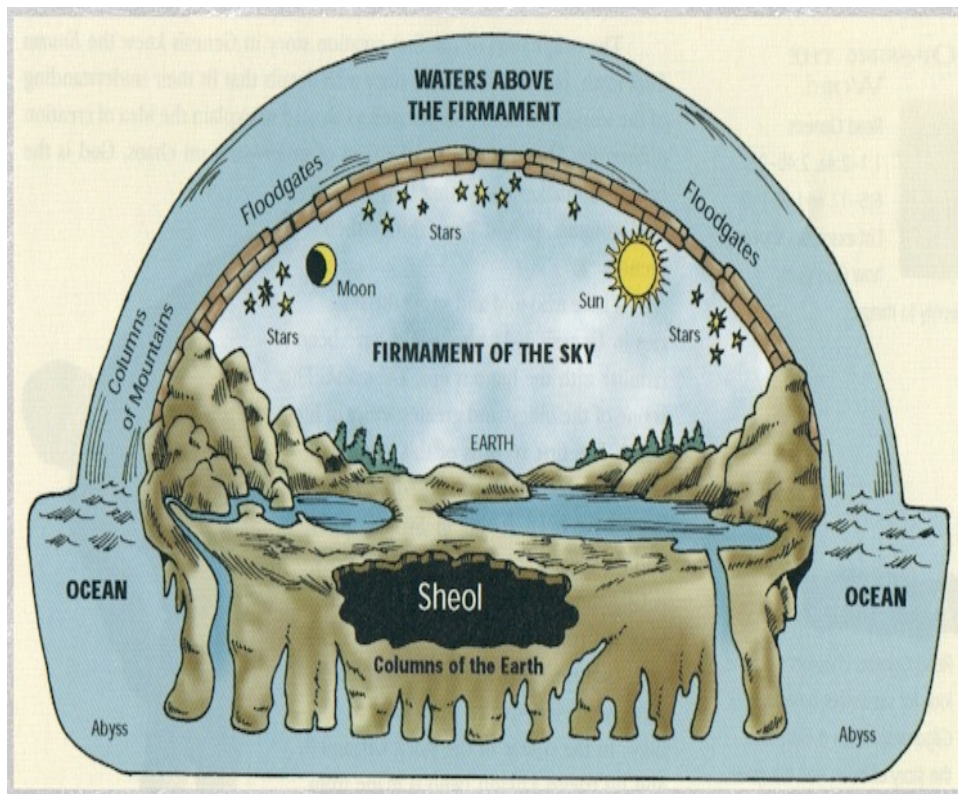


B. Scientific fundamentalism

The historical reconstruction of the (con)text as locus of revelation



The historic distance **between then and now** is an enormous challenge for biblical instruction and even upholds the risk that the Bible is considered **irrelevant** for our contemporary lives.



B. Scientific fundamentalism

Problems!

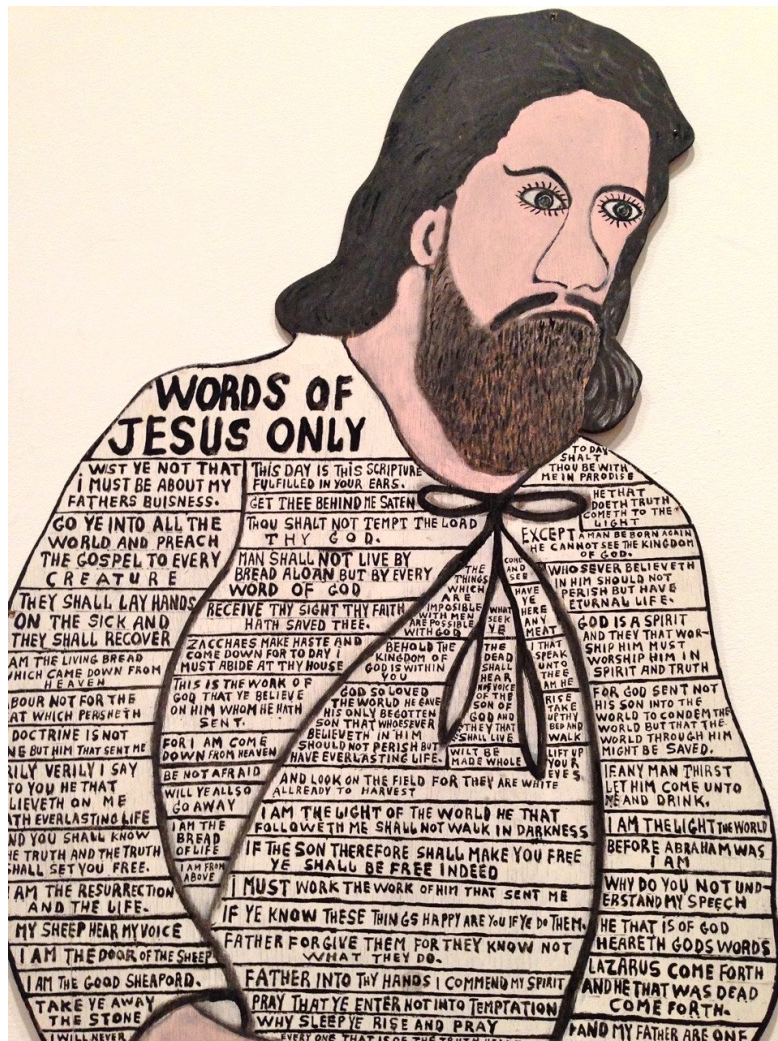


- While scientific fundamentalism has an important objective – to go back to the historical bedrock of the Bible – it can be overly driven to find words and deeds that **actually happened**.
- For example, the attempt to reconstruct Jesus' very own words (*ipsissima verba*) as precisely as possible is done in an effort to close the gap between fact and fiction.



B. Scientific fundamentalism

Problems!



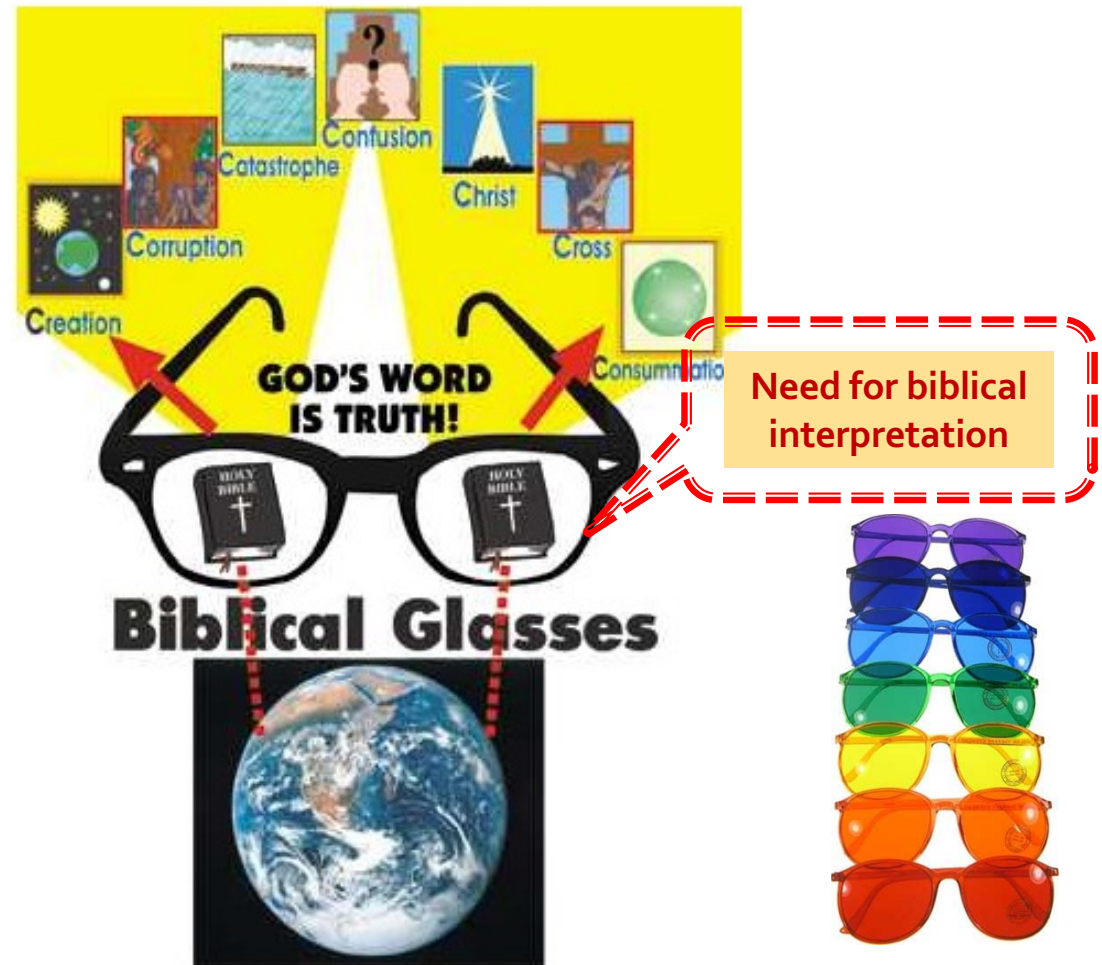
- “When we have reliably reconstructed the words and deeds of the historical Jesus we have direct and unfailing guidelines for our faith and morals which **need no interpretation.**”
- This desire to find a hard core of the Bible – what is really original and inspired – comes from a **fear of relativism.**

B. Scientific fundamentalism

Problems!



- Yet it remains **impossible to reconstruct** and fully grasp the historical core of the Bible!
- Even *if* we could, we would still **need to interpret and apply the meaning** to ever new situations.



What do your
'biblical glasses'
say about you?

B. Scientific fundamentalism

Problems!



- If our reconstruction demonstrated that Jesus was influenced by the patriarchal society in which he lived, would that mean that we had to uncritically accept the patriarchal structures in our societies?
- **The Bible is more than a history book or literary construct.**



B. Scientific fundamentalism Problems!



- Truth is not strictly in the past, but also in both the present and the **future**.
- The Bible is the historical and the literary result of the faith witness of the **people/ communities who believe in the God of Israel and in Jesus**

B. Scientific fundamentalism

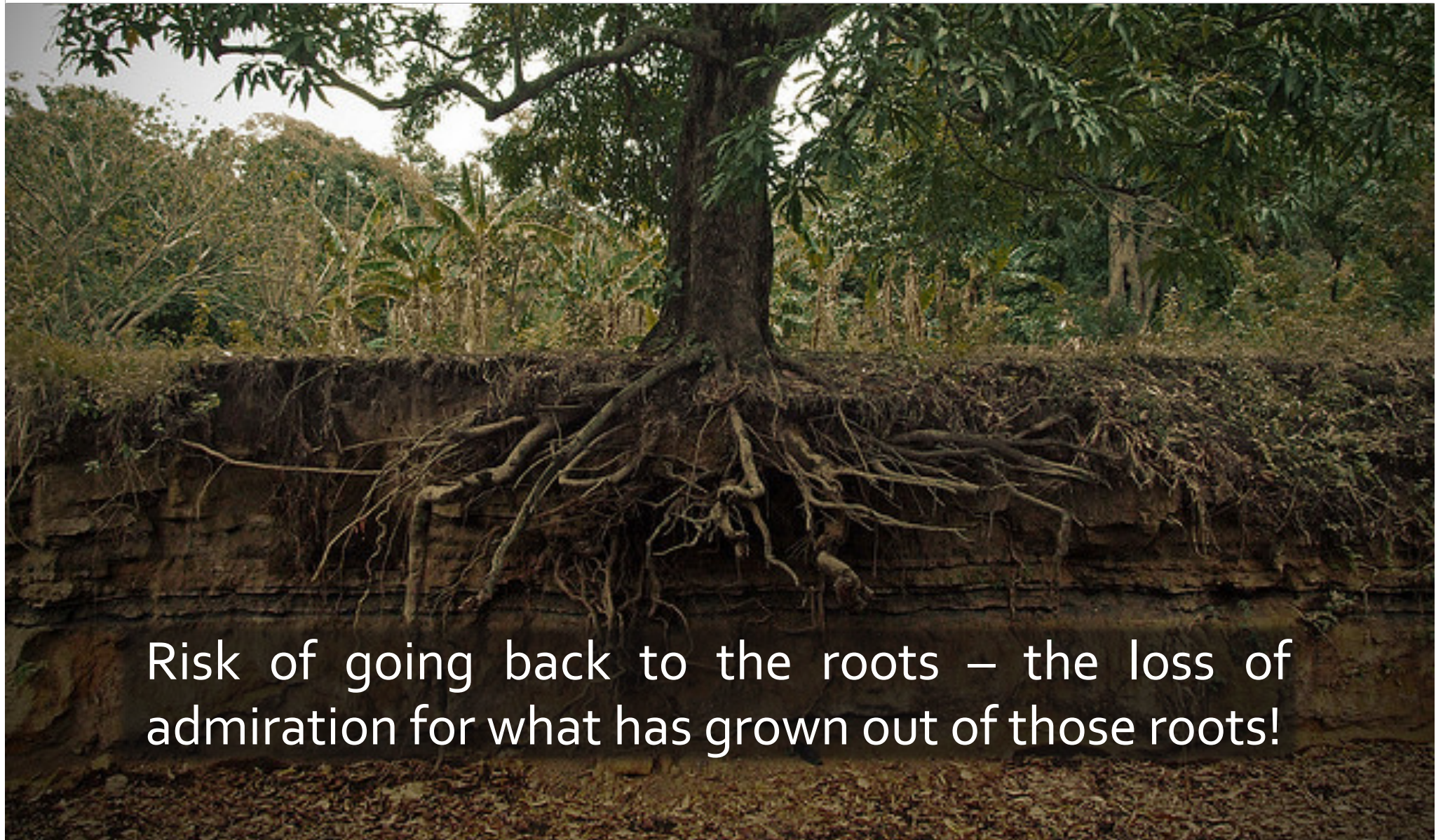
Problems!



- Scientific fundamentalism risks only speaking *about* the Bible, which **flattens it**, and never *from within* the Bible, which **enlivens it**.
- The historical background, context and literary genres of biblical texts are all important, but it is also important **not to objectify the Bible**.
- The text should be appreciated in all its '**otherness**'.

B. Scientific fundamentalism

Problems!



Risk of going back to the roots – the loss of admiration for what has grown out of those roots!



The use of the Bible at school

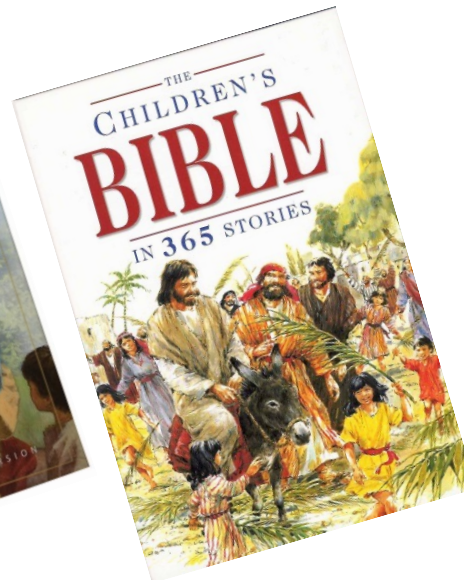
C. The Bible as ethical recipe book

C. The Bible as ethical recipe book

The moral message of locus of revelation



- The Bible is, with regard to ethics, viewed as a transparent and uniform book, offering simple and clear **solutions to all ethical problems**.
- The Bible is seen as a holy book containing a **beautiful and comfortable** ethical message.



"Just do
what the
Good Book
says!"

C. The Bible as ethical recipe book

The moral message of locus of revelation



- However, to get such a consistent message requires a **selective use of the Bible**.
- This **reduces** the Jewish and Christian faiths **to ethics**, where texts about the human encounter with God are edited out.
- **Moralising the message** causes a decrease of interest in the Bible, because the same stories are used over and over again.
- Religious education aims at teaching the ability to **truly enter into texts** and discourages reducing texts to consumer goods.
- In religious education, **resistant reading** is as valuable as a **compliant reading**.
- The Bible ought to be presented as a **complex book** which reflects both the holiness and the sinfulness of human life.

C. The Bible as ethical recipe book

The moral message of locus of revelation



- When the Bible is taught and read as a **stainless moral mirror**, it comes as a **shock** to learn the Bible contains expressions of **brutal violence**.
- Teaching the Bible should involve **rational explanations** and a fair amount of wrestling with the text.

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Mt 21:33-41)

³³ "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. ³⁴ When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵ But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. ³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' ³⁹ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰ Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" ⁴¹ They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time." (NRSV)

C. The Bible as ethical recipe book

The moral message of locus of revelation



Solomon's wisdom
(I Kings 3)



Solomon's excesses:
force labour
(I Kings 9:15-22)

C. The Bible as ethical recipe book

The moral message of locus of revelation

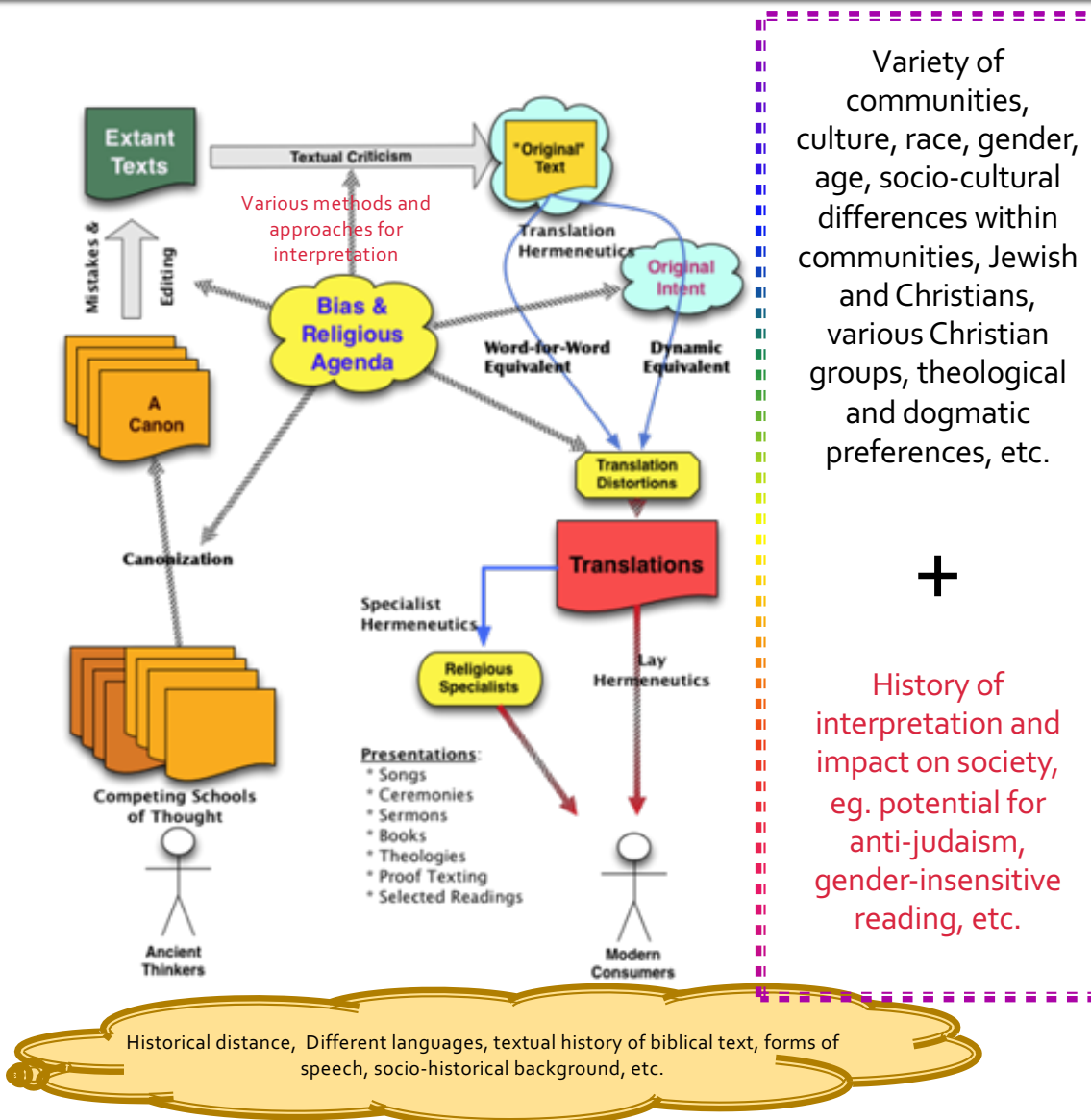


- Take a moment to think about the place of the Bible in the Religious Education programme at your school.
- Are lesser known Bible texts studied – or are only the easy favourites considered?
- Are the same stories always greeted with the same answers?



C. The Bible as ethical recipe book

The moral message of locus of revelation



The Bible requires **'multidirectional reading'** because it is not just one cultural-historical canonized perspective, but the biblical message contains **ethical and religious plurality**.

Biblical instruction needs to move from the idea of one 'grand story' (metanarrative) to many, often unknown, little stories.

C. The Bible as ethical recipe book

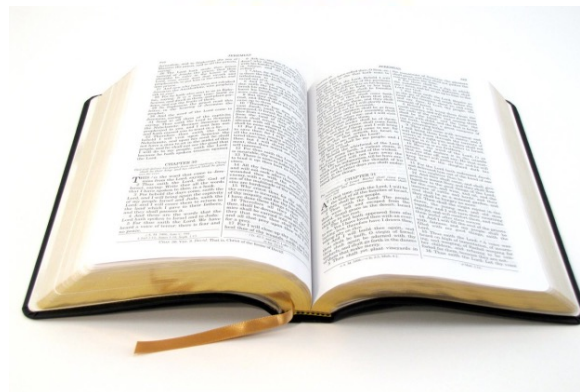
The moral message of locus of revelation



- If an absolute meaning is imposed on a text, then the biblical text is made into a **ventriloquist of a priori fixed views**.
- Selection of texts → takes hardly into account the larger **contexts of the Bible passages**.
- The 'correct' answers are already known beforehand.
- Danger: one-sided interpretation, e.g. no affective and depth-psychological dimension.
- Students do not **learn from within the Bible** nor discover their own interpretations.

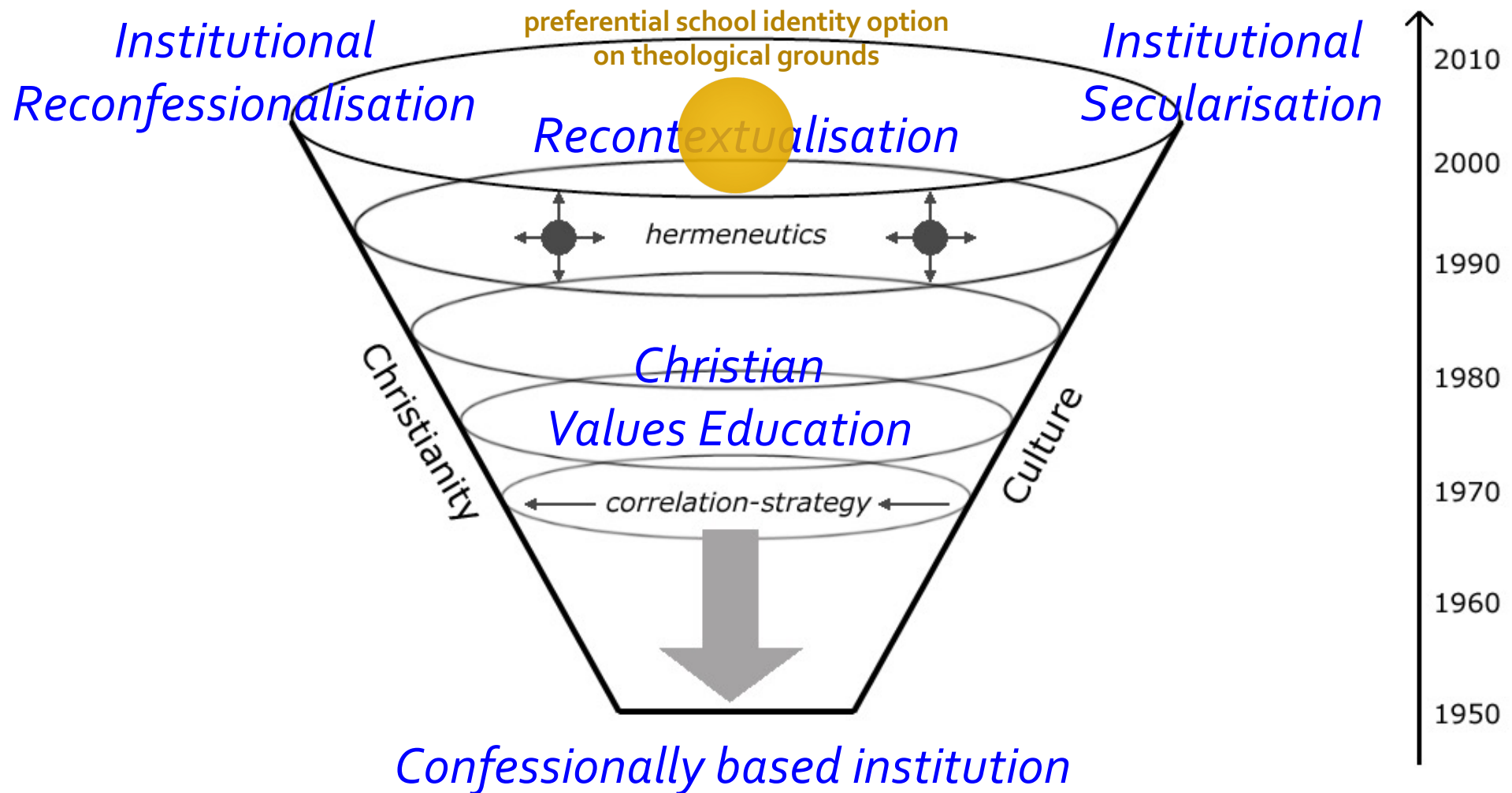
C. The Bible as ethical recipe book

The moral message of locus of revelation



Melbourne Scale

Diagram





The use of the Bible at school

D. Cyberspace: the abyss of revelation or new frontier?

D. Cyberspace: abyss of revelation or new frontier?



Electronic reading and study context: from sequential approach of the Bible (printed version) to a multi-sequential *event* (digital version).



D. Cyberspace: abyss of revelation or new frontier?



Those who continue to be interested in the Bible might turn to the **digital environment**.



D. Cyberspace: abyss of revelation or new frontier?



D. Cyberspace: abyss of revelation or new frontier?



Demands for teaching the Bible in digital age:

- Availability of versions
- User-friendly tools
- Online accessibility of the course
- Essential: high quality Bible didactics

Examples:

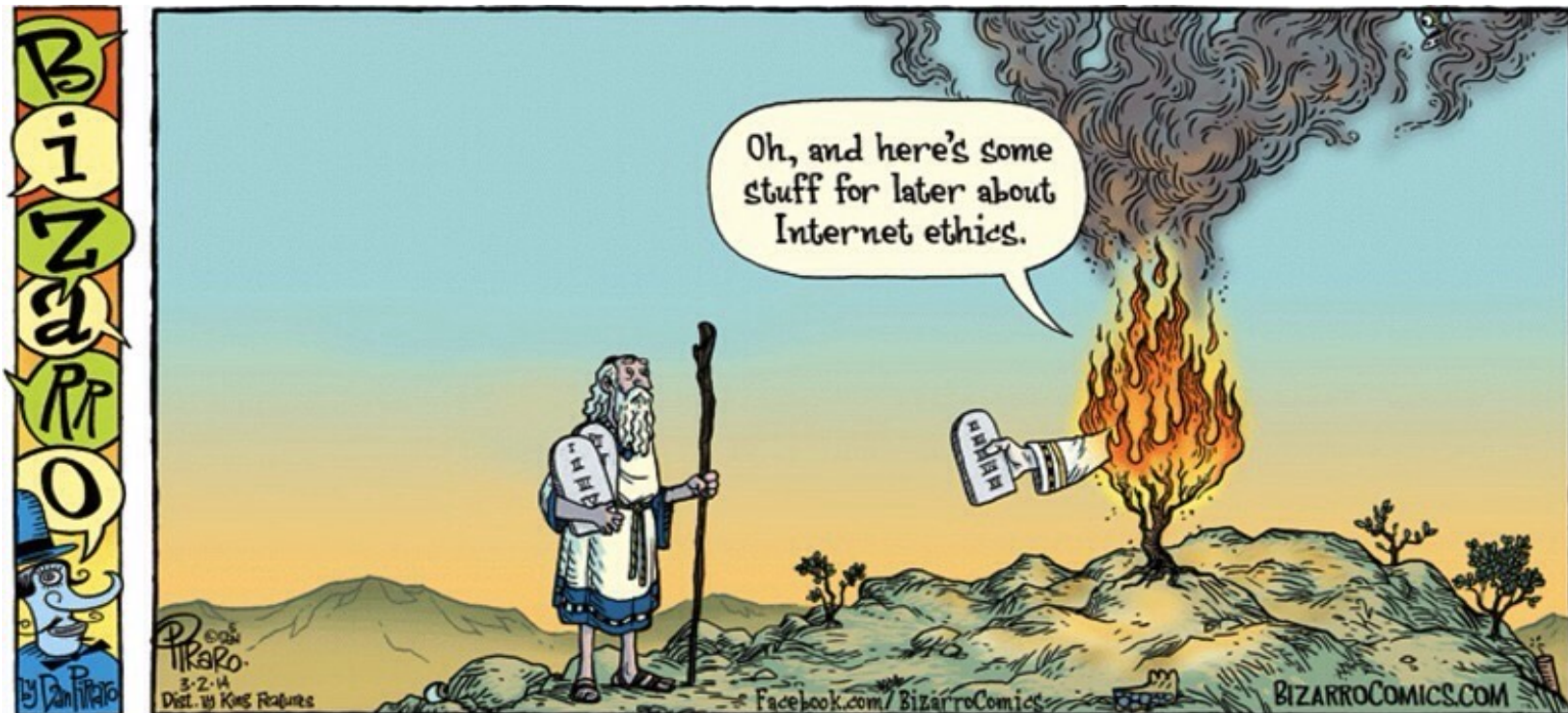
- Gospel parallels: <http://sites.utoronto.ca/religion/synopsis/>
- Parallel Bible versions for comparison: <https://www.biblegateway.com/>
- Bible and Liturgy: <http://liturgy.slu.edu/18OrdAo8o314/main.html>
- Catholic resources: <http://catholic-resources.org/>

TIP: look for university based websites for more reliable information.

D. Cyberspace: abyss of revelation or new frontier?



- Possible risk: **fundamentalist websites** that lack any historical, doctrinal, communal or moral context.
- How can we escape complete **subjectivism** in our approach to the Scriptures?



Bible fatigue and Biblical didactics

Summary



The three approaches have a common denominator: each identifies in the Bible a secure and reliable **locus of revelation**:

More
prone
to Bible
fatigue

- **Biblical fundamentalism**: the literal meaning of the texts.
- **Scientific fundamentalism**: reconstructing the earliest layer of the text and the historical core of the Bible.
- **Ethical approach**: universal moral principles and humanist messages derived from the Bible.
- **Digital approach**: the text is abandoned to the rules of the free market of continuously changing interpretations of individual users. At this stage it is impossible to identify a potential *locus of revelation*.

Bible fatigue and Biblical didactics

Links to ECSIP



Biblical fundamentalism: *Literal Belief, diabolisation, exclusivism, Monologue School.*

Scientific fundamentalism: *Relativism, External Critique, Secularisation, Colourless School.*

Ethical recipe book: *Christian Values Education, Monologue School, Kerygmatic Dialogue School, Literal Belief.*

Digitalisation of the Bible: *Relativism, Colourful School, but also Reconfessionalisation.*

Remedies for Bible fatigue

The future horizon as the 'locus' of revelation



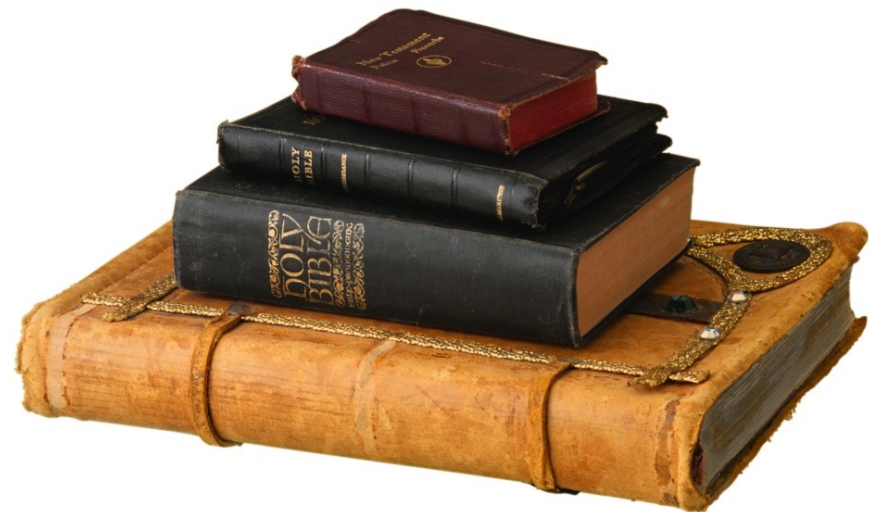
Remedies for Bible fatigue

The future horizon as the 'locus' of revelation



The text as 'classic'

- A text which expresses a truth which is so fundamental that it can be read and understood in a totally different context of respectively new readers, e.g. Shakespeare.
- Biblical instruction: invite young people to enter into a 'fictional contract' with the Bible.



Remedies for Bible fatigue

The future horizon as the 'locus' of revelation



The Bible is a witness to the ongoing dialogical process of revelation and communication between God and humans.

- The process of tradition is an ongoing dialogue with God, telling, retelling and '**translating**' the traditional stories.
- In dialogue with their new situations of reception, new stories and new '**translation**' spring forth.



Remedies for Bible fatigue

The future horizon as the 'locus' of revelation



http://www.kuleuven.be/thomas/page/codex/view/57958/

Scriptura Project - Thomas ...

Over ons Sitemap Zoeken Links Helpdesk Contact Nieuwsbrief Registreren Login

Woensdag 06 augustus 2014

thomas
www.godsdiensonderwijs.be

Algemeen Basis Secundair Buitengewoon Hoger Pastoraal

U bent hier: Thomas - Algemeen - Lesimpulsen - Bijbel - Scriptura Project

Scriptura Project

• Naar de startpagina

Marcus-evangelie

Bekijk het volledige Marcus-evangelie

Perikoop	Schrijver
Mc 1, 1-10	Ines Van Assche
Mc 1, 11-20	Renske Van Der Jagt
Mc 1, 21-30	Danielle Manfort
Mc 1, 31-40	Bert Van Valckenborgh
Mc 1, 41-2, 5	Mia Schepers
Mc 2, 6-15	Antoon Verhelst
Mc 2, 16-28	Piet Van Pelt
Mc 3, 1-10	Jana Binon
Mc 3, 11-20	Hadewijch Wouters
Mc 3, 21-30	Annemie Vandenberk
Mc 3, 31-4, 5	Carine Devogelaere
Mc 4, 6-15	Marleen Ingels
Mc 4, 16-25	Ine Pauwels

<http://www.kuleuven.be/thomas/page/codex/view/57958/>

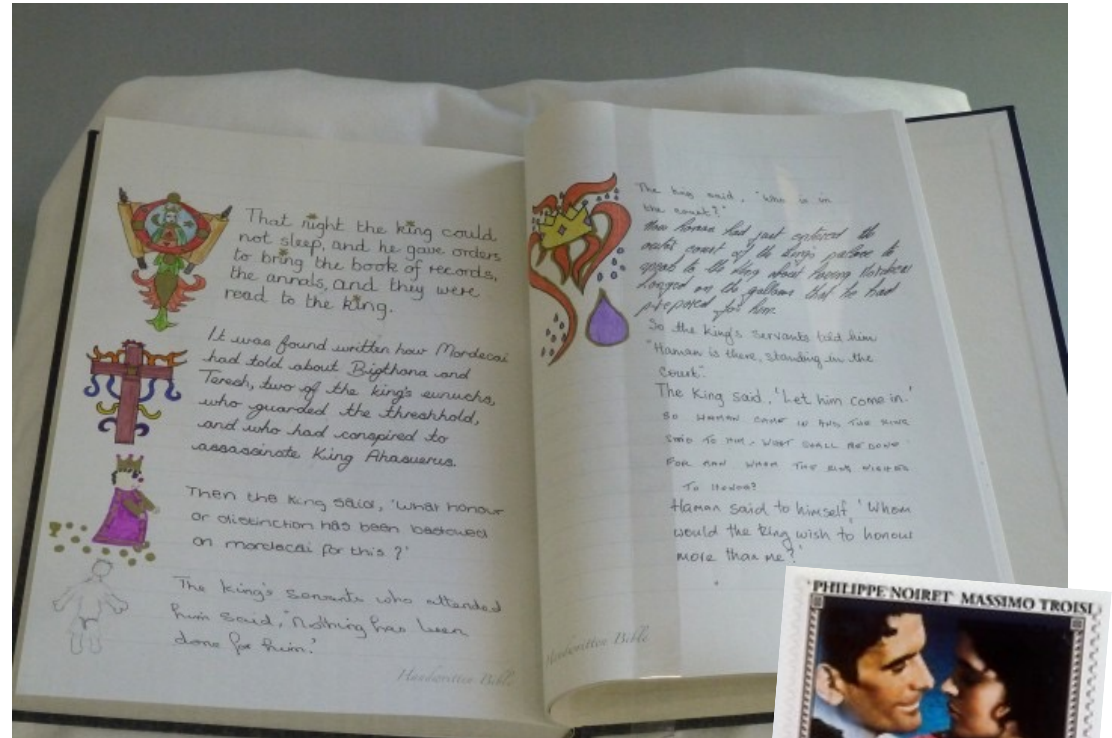
Remedies for Bible fatigue

The future horizon as the 'locus' of revelation



The Bible ≠ 'be all and end all'.

- Entering into a personal relationship with God, albeit in dialogue with the Bible.
- Witnesses of the ongoing rewriting of the tradition.
- We are invited to discover new meanings and to develop new interpretations in dialogue.



"Il Postino... in his discovery of metaphorical language, the postman is empowered to participate in the universe of poetry. He learns to interpret and change the world with the eyes of the poet, in the sphere of interpersonal love as well as in the sphere of social commitment...."



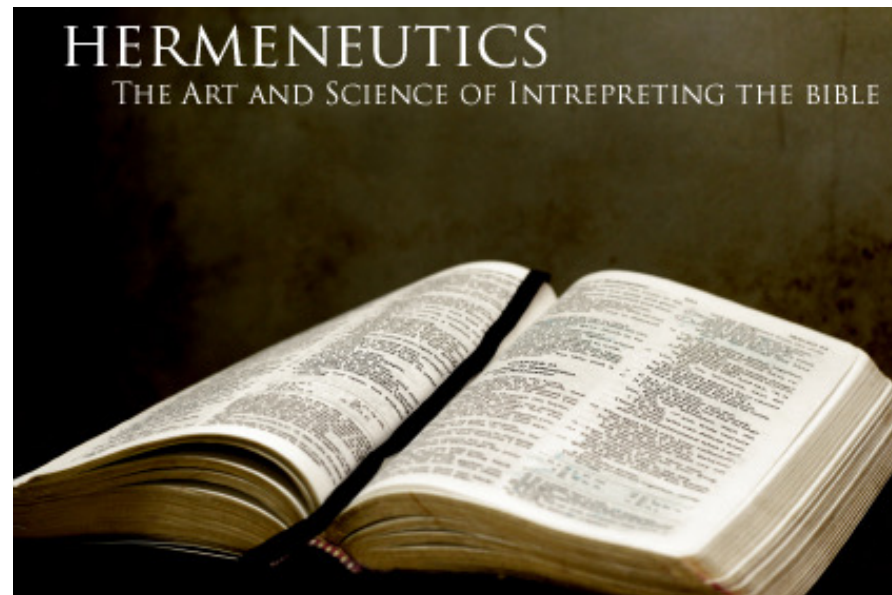
Remedies for Bible fatigue

The future horizon as the 'locus' of revelation



Hermeneutics

- The Bible: a mystery which challenges each new generation to **interpret it** and to put it into practice.
- Questions, doubts, resistance, indignation and criticism are parts of the dialogical process of revelation, **critical dialogue** with the Bible and **creative interpretation**.
- Young people: critical dialogue = liberating.



Remedies for Bible fatigue

The future horizon as the 'locus' of revelation



Multiplicity of stories

- People can step into the biblical world through a variety of different gates and travel many different trajectories in reading the texts.
- Biblical texts have different roles or meanings for people in each phase of their lives.



Remedies for Bible fatigue

The future horizon as the 'locus' of revelation



- The Bible offers help to young people in their search for their spiritual identity:
 - 'turn to biography'- the many stories will inspire young people in giving shape to their own life story



- 'mere subjectivism' is prevented when historical-critical method and the inner dynamics of a hermeneutical reading are taken into account ; use of various biblical methodologies and approaches

Remedies for Bible fatigue

The future horizon as the 'locus' of revelation



Hermeneutics of alienation:

- We do not only challenge the text with questions, etc.
- The otherness of the text also challenges us.



Remedies for Bible fatigue

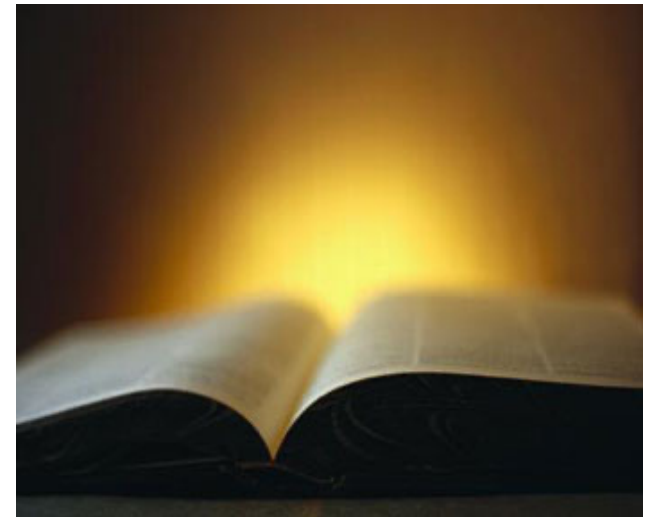
The future horizon as the 'locus' of revelation



Criticism on hermeneutics: might lead to pure subjectivism, individualism and relativism.

The criterion should not only be looked for in the past, e.g. in what Jesus really said, but in the **future** which we encounter in the 'world' of the biblical texts.

- Some literary texts offer **utopias** or '**alternative worlds**' and invite readers to assist in realising them.
- E.g. synoptic gospels: alternative world = 'kingdom of God'.
- This is the horizon in the light of which each interpretation needs to be tested.



Remedies for Bible fatigue

The future horizon as the 'locus' of revelation



The Bible has a future, if its interpretation thwarts all attempts to deprive people of their future and if it empowers people to work for a future in accordance with God's dream for all people.

Remedies for Bible fatigue

The future horizon as the 'locus' of revelation



*GOD'S DREAMS FOR US
are ALWAYS better...
than OUR OWN*

'That you may know the hope to which he has called you, the (unsearchable) riches of his glorious inheritance and grace' Ephesians 1:18 Ephesians 3:8

'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you ... plans to give you hope and a future.' Jeremiah 29:11

INSPIRIT - YESTOFOREVER.COM

What is 'God's dream for all people' ?

- It cannot be determined by one individual or by one group of people
- It cannot be fixed 'once and for all'
- it is not unaffected by human limitations and sin
- Every generation in its own context will have to pick up the Bible and confront it with tradition and human experience in order to keep the dream of God alive in this world

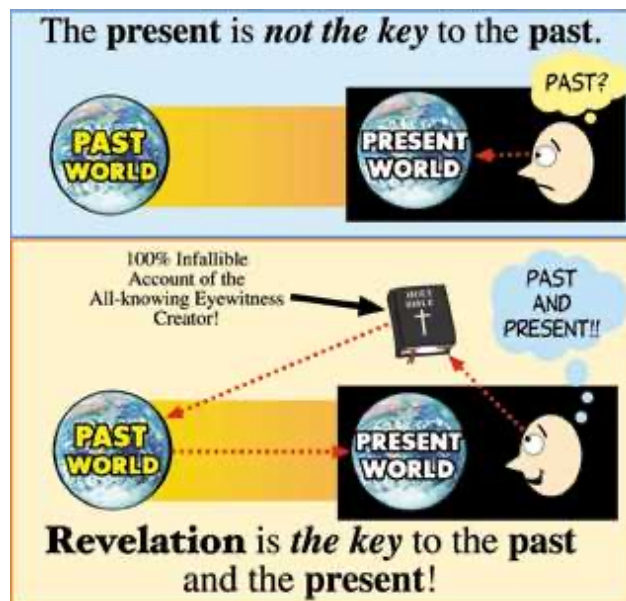
Remedies for Bible fatigue

The future horizon as the 'locus' of revelation



Normativity of the future

- Biblical hermeneutical approach developed by Reimund Bieringer (KU Leuven) and Mary Elsbernd (Institute of Pastoral Studies, Loyola University Chicago).
- Most approaches start from a locus of revelation in the past or in actualisation of the text.



... what does God's
dialogical revelation say
about the future?

Remedies for Bible fatigue

The future horizon as the 'locus' of revelation



- God has not only revealed Himself in the past to a limited group of people, but God continues the self-revelation through ongoing history.
- God steps into a relationship with people and dialogues with them.
 - In Christ this dialogue has reached a climax for Christians, He is the ultimate revelation of God.
 - However, the process of revelation has not stopped, it continues through the reading/interpreting of His Word.
 - Imagination and hope for what God dreams for us is not limited by what we know.

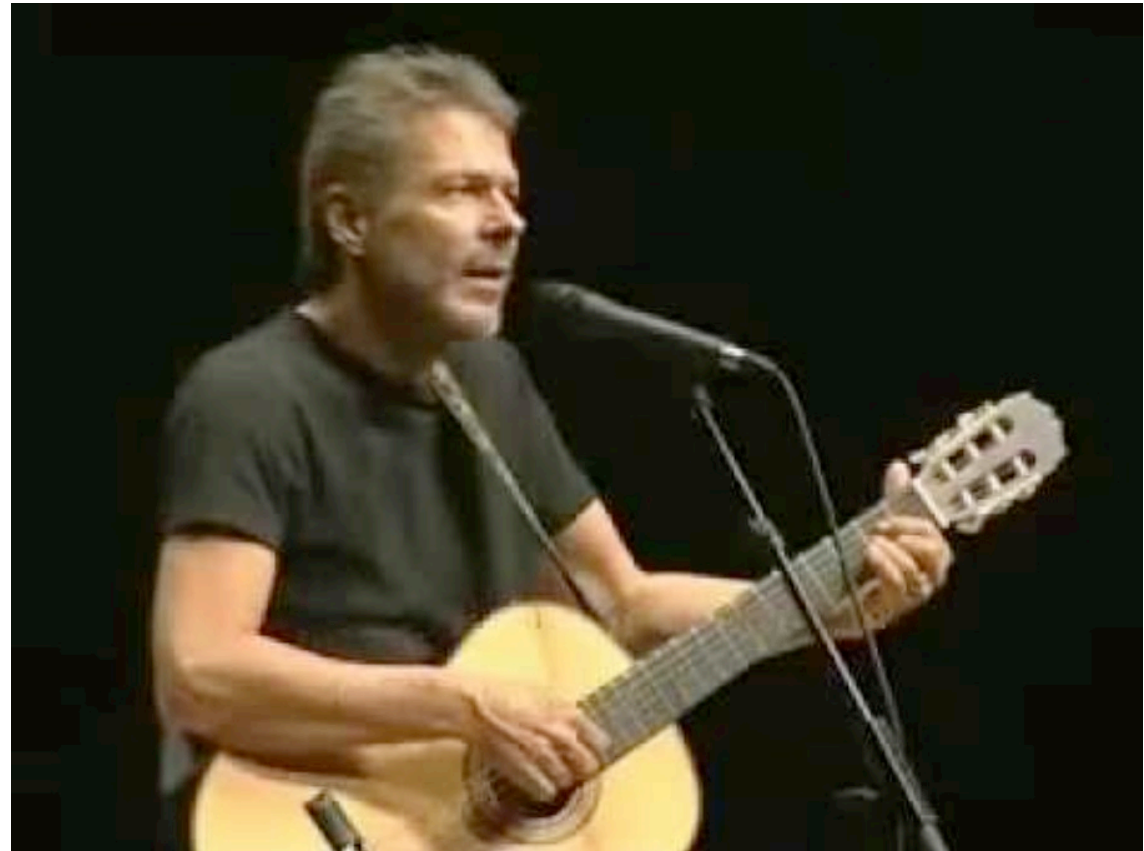
The Workers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16



1 "The kingdom from heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. 2 After agreeing to pay the workers one denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing in the marketplace without work. 4 He told them, 'You go into the vineyard, too, and I will pay you whatever is right.' 5 So off they went. He went out again about noon and about three o'clock and did the same thing. 6 About five o'clock he went out and found some others standing around. He asked them, 'Why are you standing here all day long without work?' 7 They told him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He told them, 'You go into the vineyard as well.' 8 "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard told his manager, 'Call the workers and give them their wages, beginning with the last and ending with the first.' 9 Those who were hired at five o'clock came, and **each received a denarius**. 10 "When the first came, they thought they would receive more, but each received a denarius as well. 11 When they received it, they began to complain to the landowner, 12 'These last fellows worked only one hour, but you paid them the same as us, and we've been working all day, enduring the scorching heat!' 13 "But he told one of them, '**Friend, I'm not treating you unfairly. You did agree with me for a denarius, didn't you?** 14 **Take what is yours and go. I want to give this last man as much as I gave you.** 15 **I am allowed to do what I want with my own money, am I not? Or are you envious because I'm generous?**' 16 "In the same way, the last will be first, and the first will be last, because many are called, but few are chosen."

Reinhard Mey: Zeugnistag (School report day)



Reinhard Friedrich Michael Mey (1942), German singer / songwriter

Reinhard Mey: Zeugnistag (School report day)



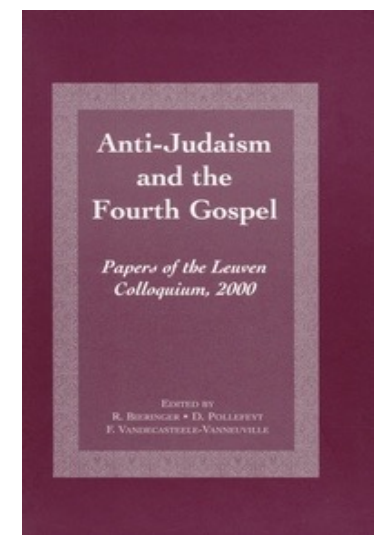
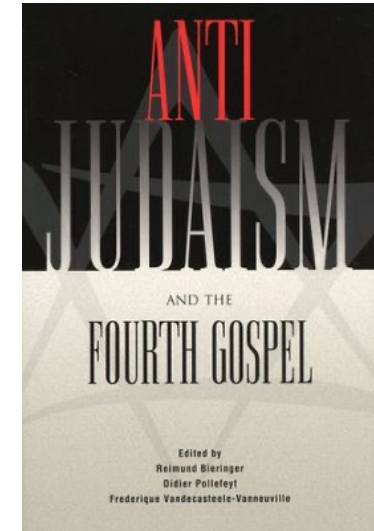
Remedies for Bible fatigue

The future horizon as the 'locus' of revelation



Dialogue School

- The endeavour to *Recontextualise* the biblical interpretation based on *Post-Critical Belief* means dealing with the Bible as an act of *Dialogue* in various ways.
- We advocate training teachers and students to acquire *Dialogical* skills: they are invited to enter into an active *Dialogue* with: ...
 - (1) the biblical text itself.
 - (2) with the history of its interpretation that continues today.
 - (3) with other people within the Catholic tradition.
 - (4) with other Christian communities.
 - (5) with other religions, especially Judaism with whom Christians share the Torah or Old Testament.



Bible fatigue and Biblical didactics

(Mis)using the Bible at school

Prof. Dr. Didier Pollefeyt – Drs. Jan Bouwens

KU Leuven, 2014 ©