

Faith as walking on water

**The Post-Critical Belief Scale:
Religious Building Blocks for Catholic School Identity.
Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project, 2013.**

Prof. Dr. Didier Pollefeyt – Jan Bouwens

KU Leuven, 2013 ©



Towards a Catholic anthropology

Antropological presuppositions of *Post-Critical Belief*

Point of departure: man as Gods image

Catholic anthropology



Confessional coloured anthropology.

- Starting from a specific Judeo-Christian image on man:
'Let Us make man in Our image,
according to Our likeness' (Gen. 1, 26)
- BUT: prohibition of 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 predestinated: freedom, receptivity, responsibility, interpretation.
- 'Soul': the inner part, the essence, the meeting place of God and man.

1. Man as hermeneutical space

Structural receptiveness



- Man 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. Man as 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. *Fragile* hermeneutical space

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



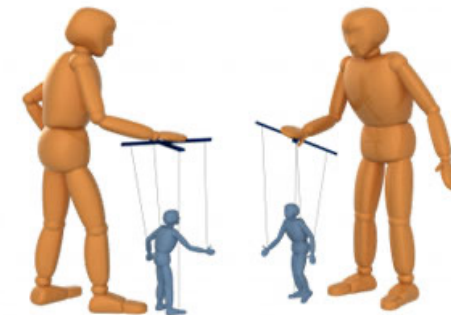
■ Learning to deal with plurality

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

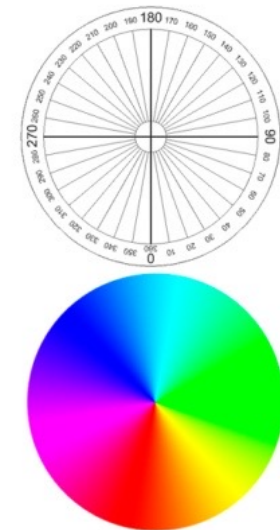


■ Positive attitude towards other life options.

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: man as God'g~

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

5. Bearing witness of 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.

5. Bearing witness of the Christian 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.

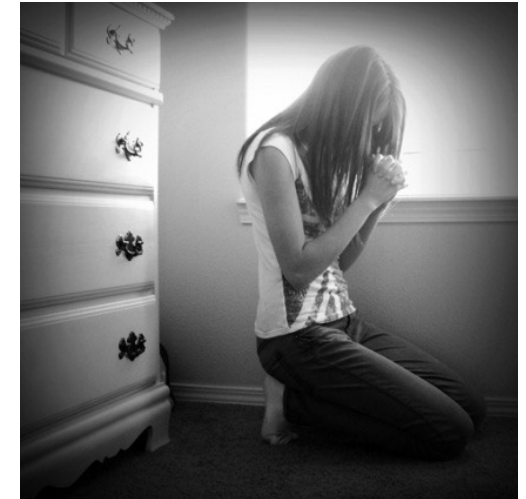


5. Bearing witness of the Christian tradition

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.

6. Searching for self-understanding

Aim: supporting Catholics as well as others



Catholic education for Catholics as well as others.

Different outcomes of religious education:

1. Students who become better Christians (rooted in their own tradition) (**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 learn the Christian tradition as an important cultural and moral value in Western society (**pre-evangelisation**).

6. Searching for self-understanding

Catholicism as a unique mediating structure



7. Four aims for religious education

Conclusion



- AIM 1.** Making pupils receptive to religious questions.
- AIM 2.** Becoming aware of the plural voices in society and among the students (discernment).
- AIM 3.** Giving testimony to and presenting the richness of the Catholic tradition.
- AIM 4.** Inviting and supporting students to grow in religious self-understanding.

⇒ *Post-Critical Belief*

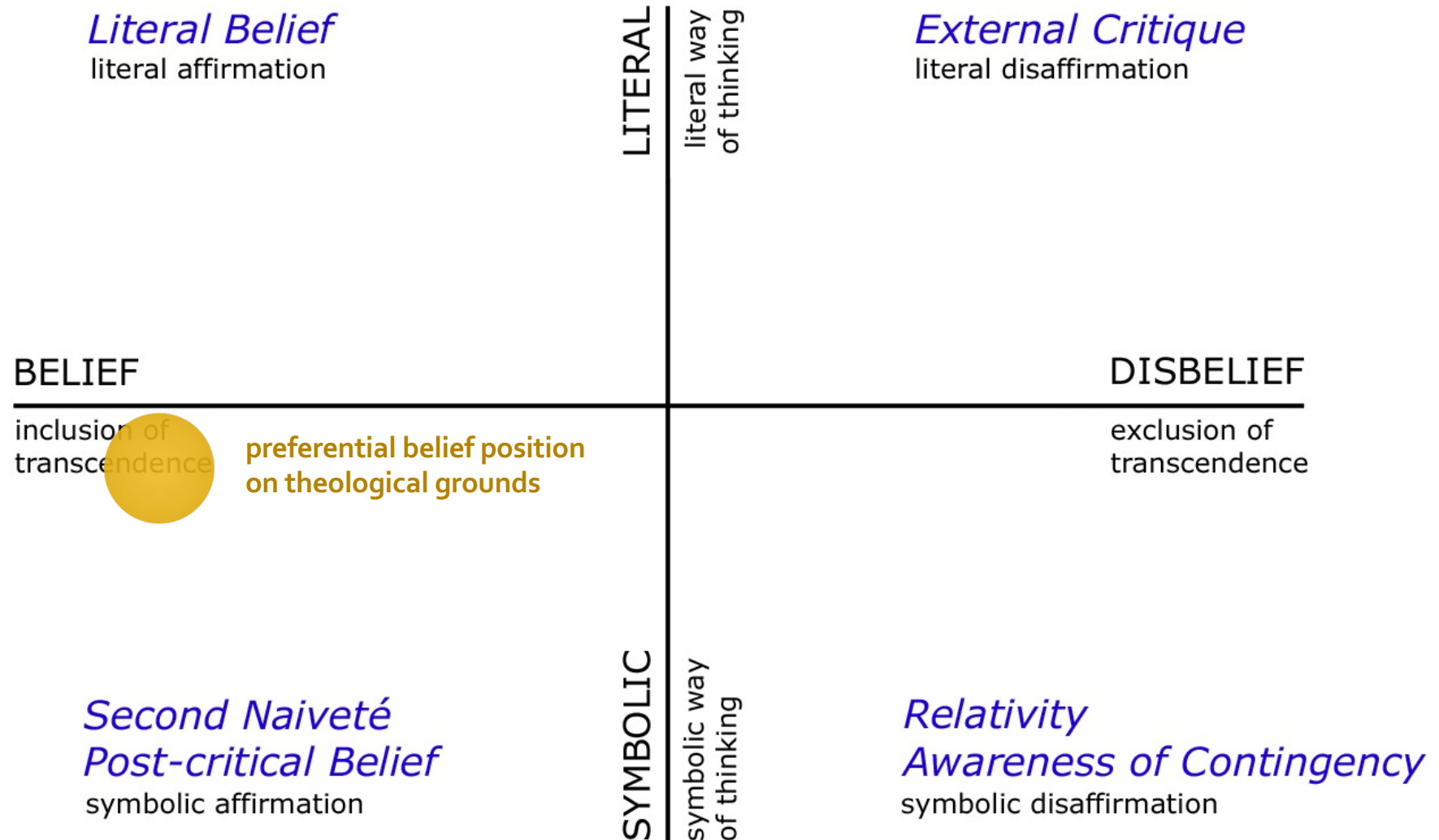


Post-Critical Belief Scale

Cognitive belief styles as building blocks for Catholic school identity

Post-Critical Belief Scale

Diagram

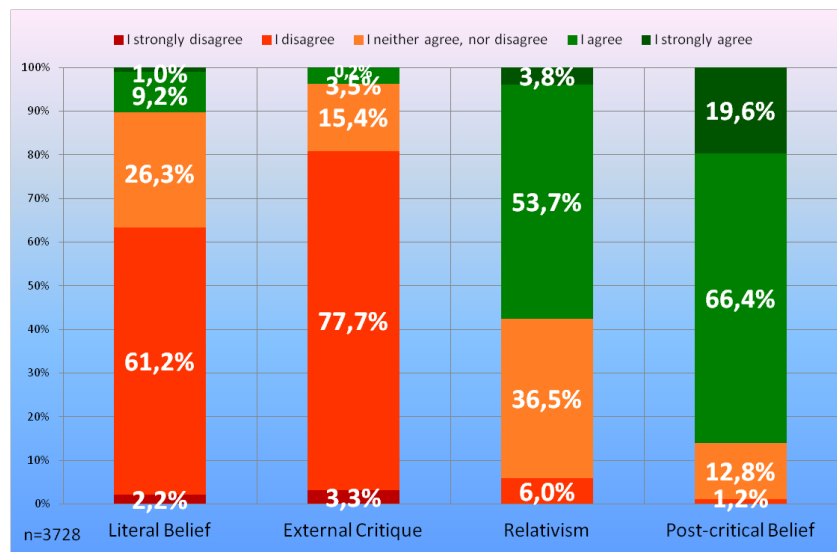
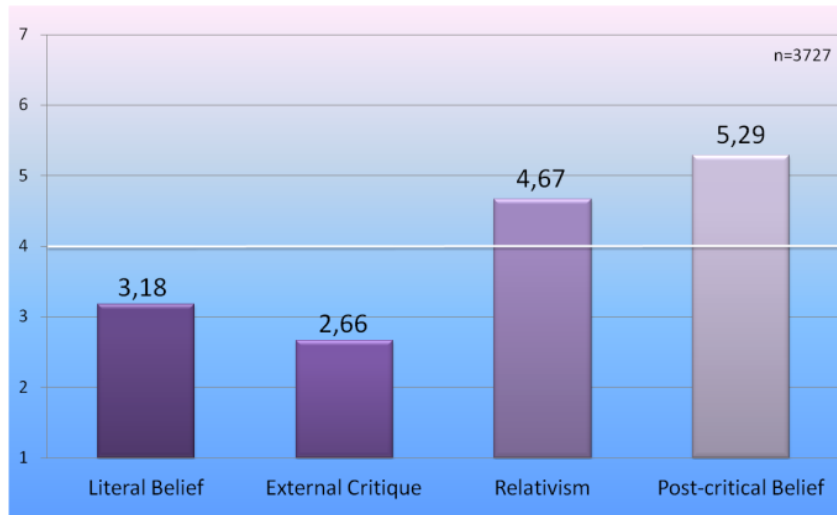


Post-Critical Belief Scale

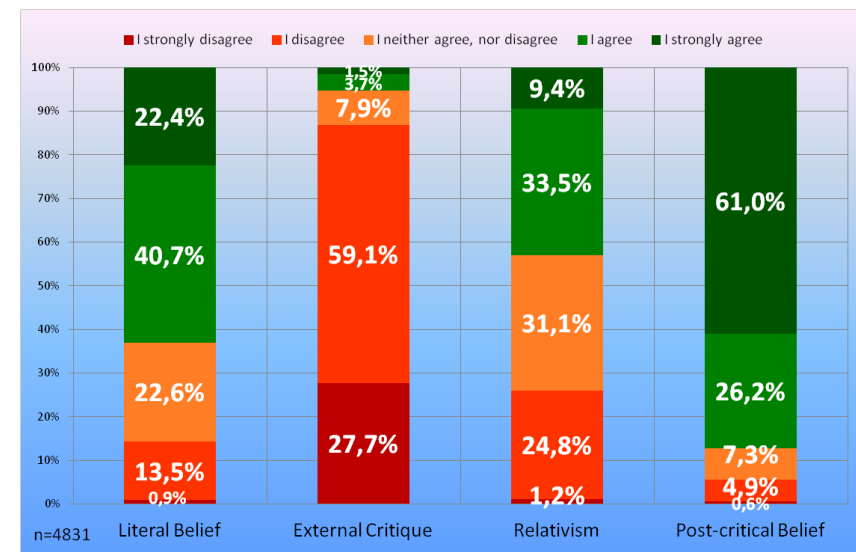
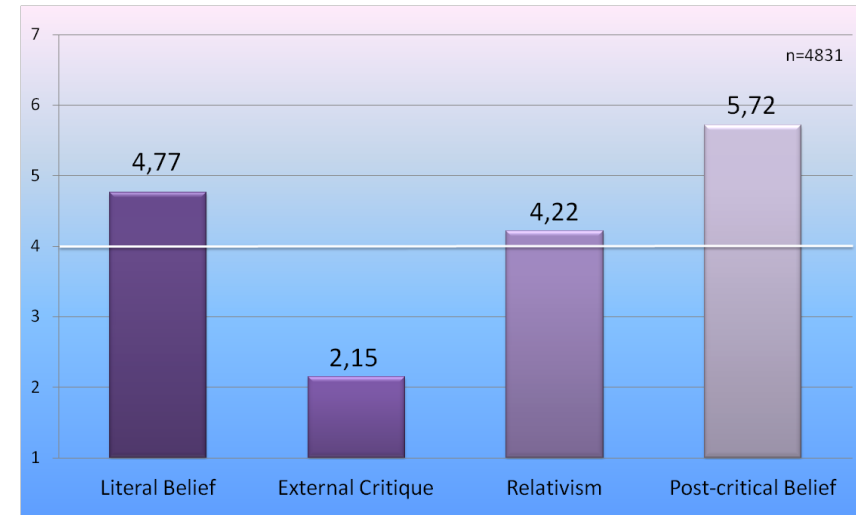
Scale means & percentages (2012)



Adults, primary schools



Students, primary schools

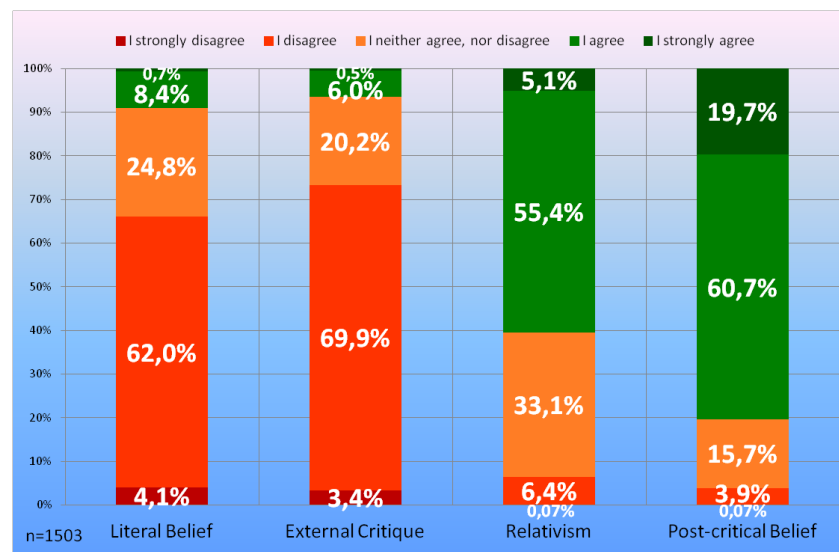
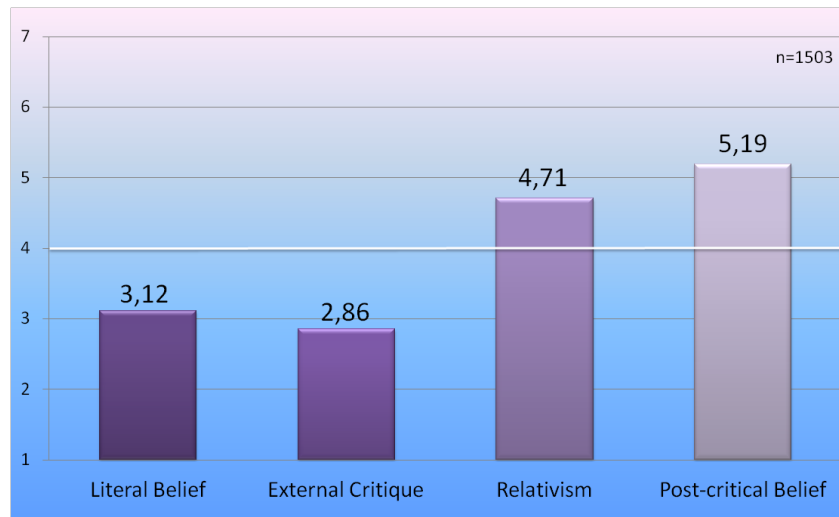


Post-Critical Belief Scale

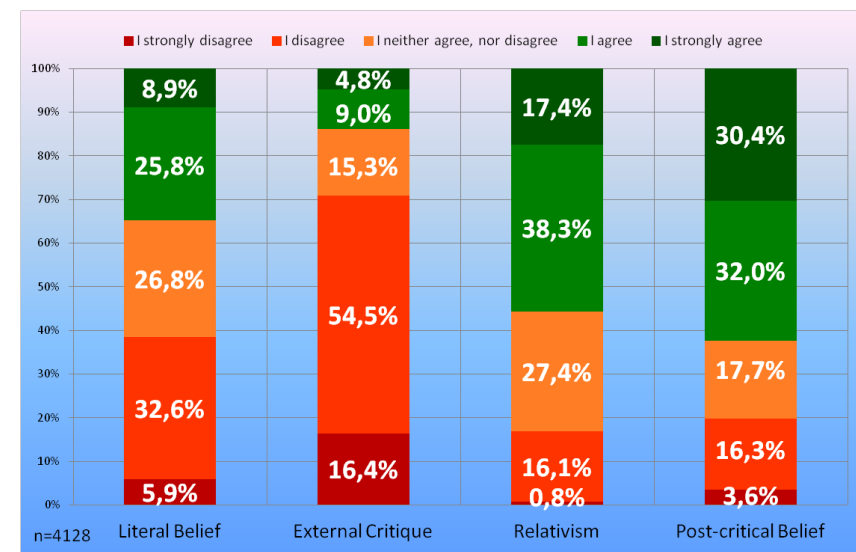
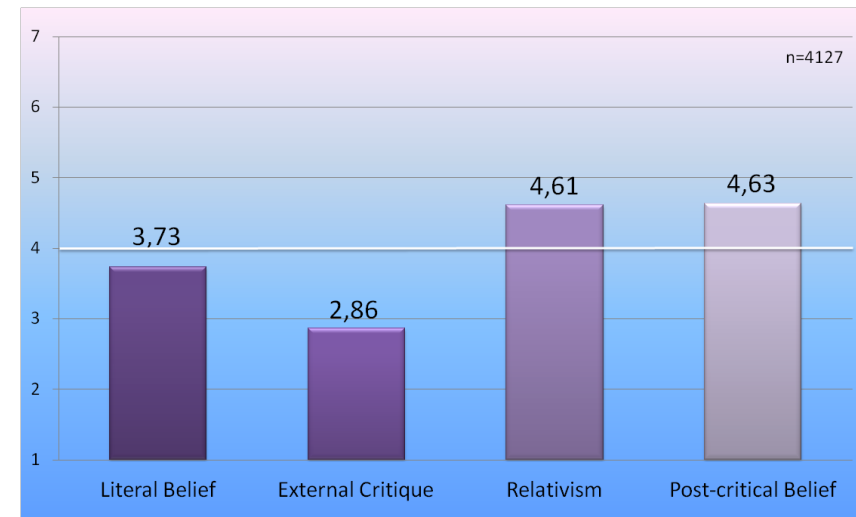
Scale means & percentages (2012)



Adults, secondary colleges



Students, secondary colleges

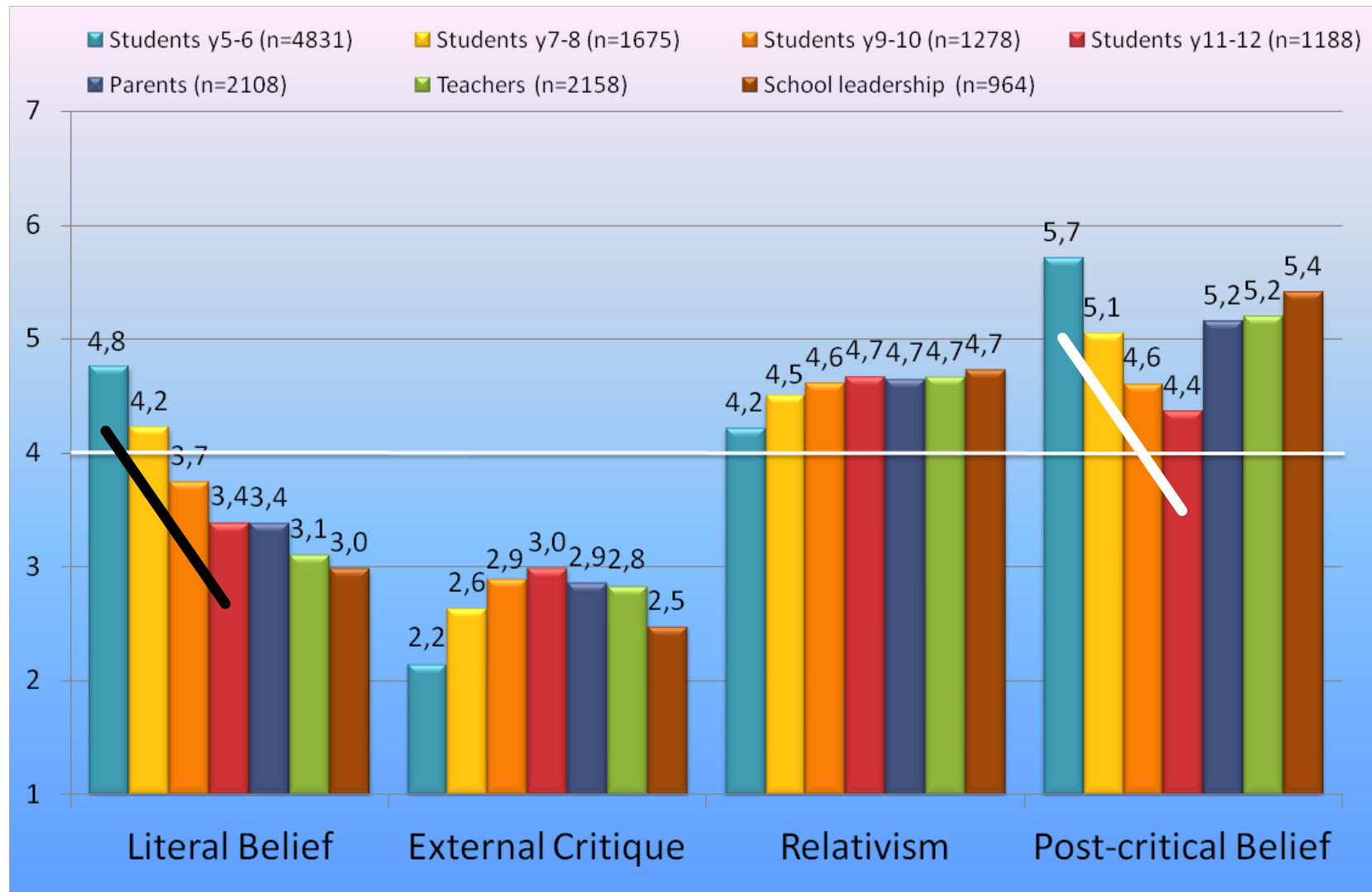


Post-Critical Belief Scale

Differentiated scale means (2012)

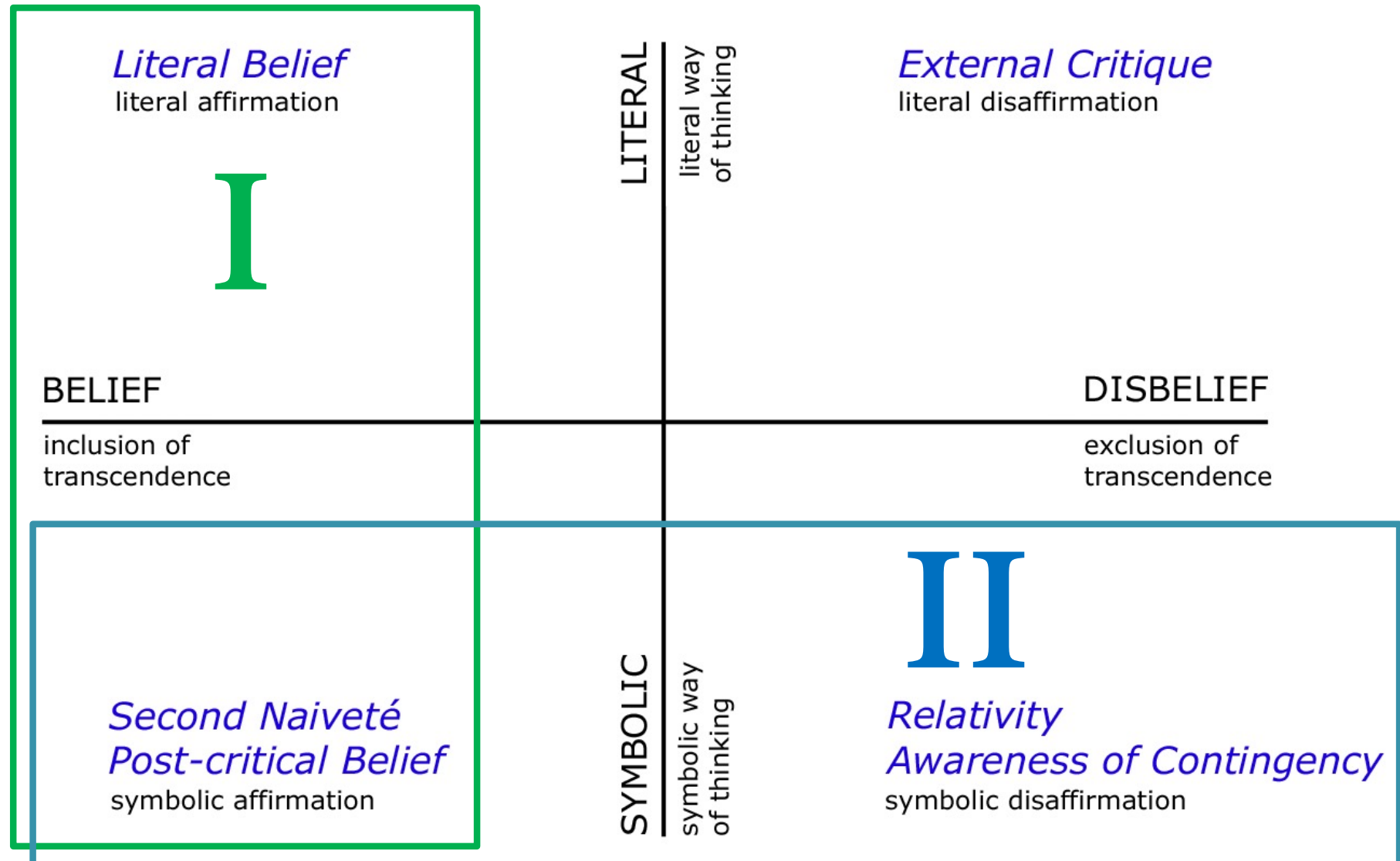


All respondent groups compared



Post-Critical Belief Scale

Diagram



Pontifical Biblical Commission

Plea for a metaforical approach to miracle stories (1994)



The Pontifical Biblical Commission on the literal interpretation of the Bible

(Document: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, 18 March 1994)

"Fundamentalist interpretation starts from the principle that the Bible, being the word of God, inspired and free from error, should be read and interpreted literally in all its details. But by 'literal interpretation' it understands a naively literalist interpretation, one, that is to say, which excludes every effort at understanding the Bible that takes account of its historical origins and development. It is opposed, therefore, to the use of the historical-critical method, as indeed to the use of any other scientific method for the interpretation of Scripture."

"Fundamentalism (...) accepts the literal reality of an ancient, out-of-date cosmology simply because it is found expressed in the Bible; this blocks any dialogue with a broader way of seeing the relationship between culture and faith. Its relying upon a non-critical reading of certain texts of the Bible serves to reinforce political ideas and social attitudes that are marked by prejudices (...) quite contrary to the Christian Gospel."

"Numerous examples could be cited showing the necessity of a collaborative effort on the part of exegetes and psychologists: to ascertain the meaning of cultic ritual, of sacrifice, of bans, to explain the use of imagery in biblical language, the metaphorical significance of miracle stories, the wellsprings of apocalyptic visual and auditory experiences."

Pope Benedict XVI

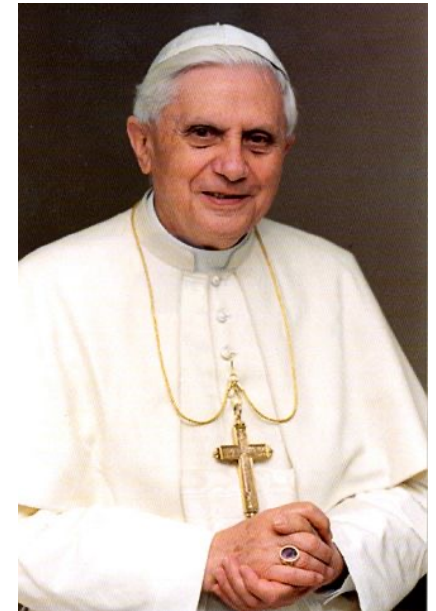
"The dictatorship of relativism"



Pope Benedict XVI on relativism

(Homily of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Mass for the Election of the Supreme Pontiff, St. Peter's Basilica, 18 April 2005)

"How many winds of doctrine have we known in recent decades, how many ideological currents, how many ways of thinking. The small boat of the thought of many Christians has often been tossed about by these waves - flung from one extreme to another (...). Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labeled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be 'tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine', seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires.



We, however, have a different goal: the Son of God, the true man. He is the measure of true humanism. An 'adult' faith is not a faith that follows the trends of fashion and the latest novelty; a mature adult faith is deeply rooted in friendship with Christ. It is this friendship that opens us up to all that is good and gives us a criterion by which to distinguish the true from the false, and deceit from truth.

Post-Critical Belief

In opposition to Literal Belief and Relativism



Literal Belief is unsustainable – from various perspectives:

1. Developmental psychology
2. Cultural plausibility (the increasing importance of science)
3. From exegetical perspective (cf. Benedict's plea for the historical-critical method)
4. From theological perspective (magisterium, biblical commission)
5. From the perspective of religious pedagogy (closing the hermeneutical space)

The crisis of *Literal Belief* and its consequences.

- The *Literal Believer* sees no alternative for Literal Belief.
- Unbelief and *Relativism* seem to be the only outcome of the crisis of *Literal Belief*.
- Post-Critical Belief seems to retain insufficient plausibility as a valid alternative.
- ▶ Either walking on the water, or drowning in the sea of *Relativism*!

1. What is the difference between *Literal Belief* and *Post-Critical Belief*?
2. What is the difference between *Post-Critical Belief* and *Relativism*?

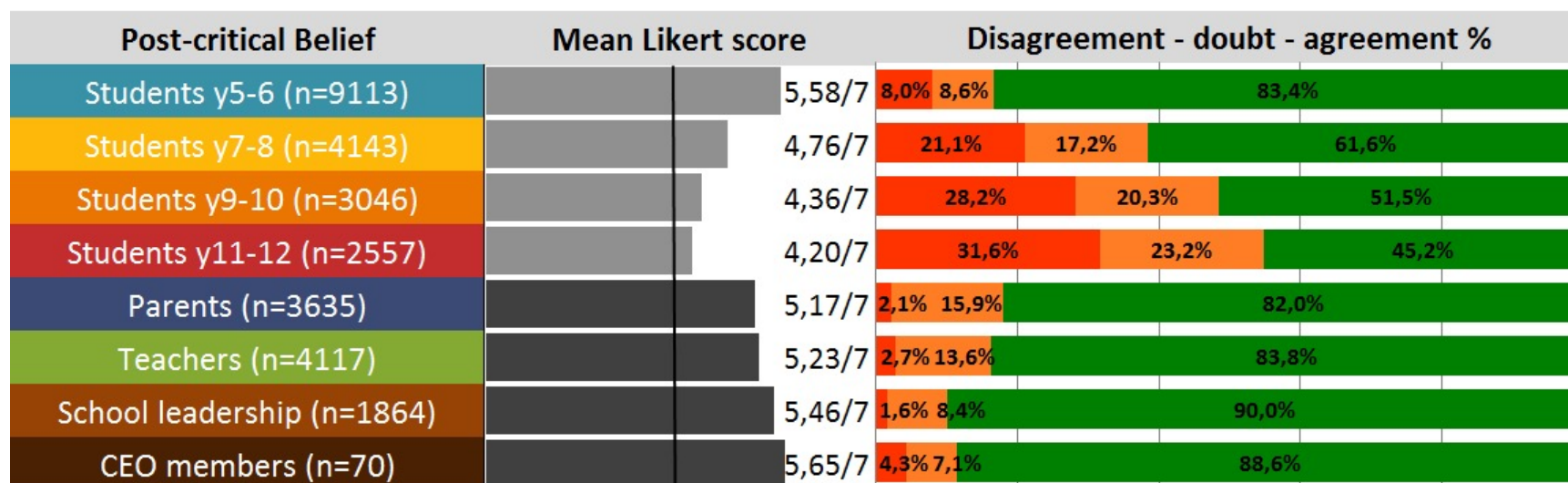
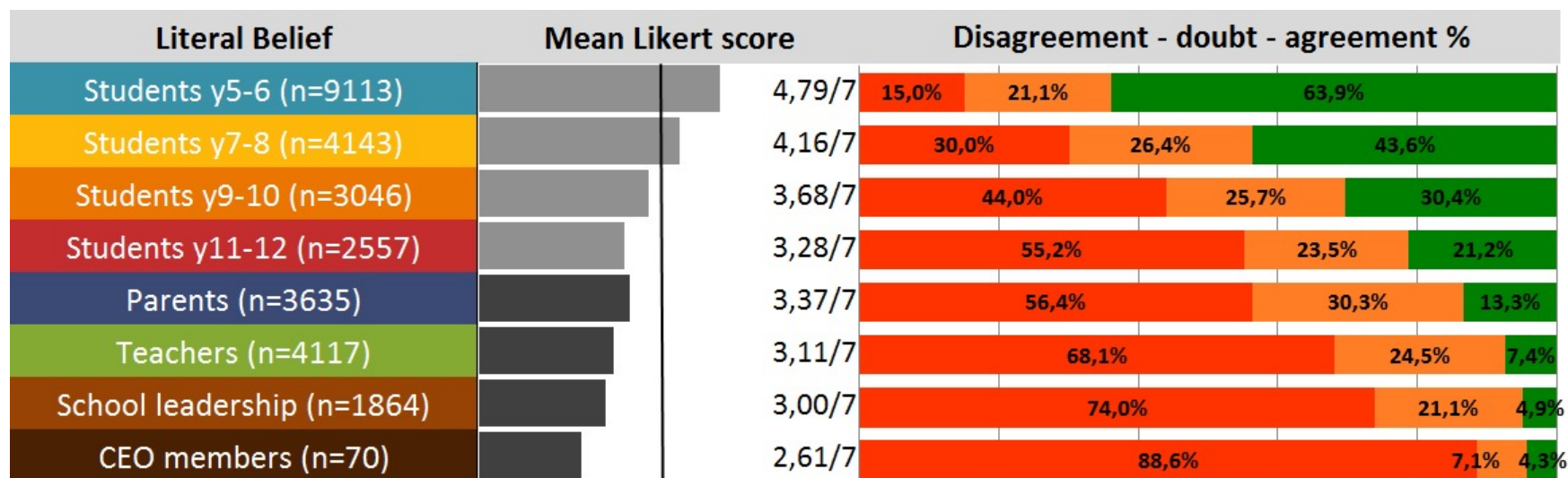


Walking on the water | FEAR FACTOR

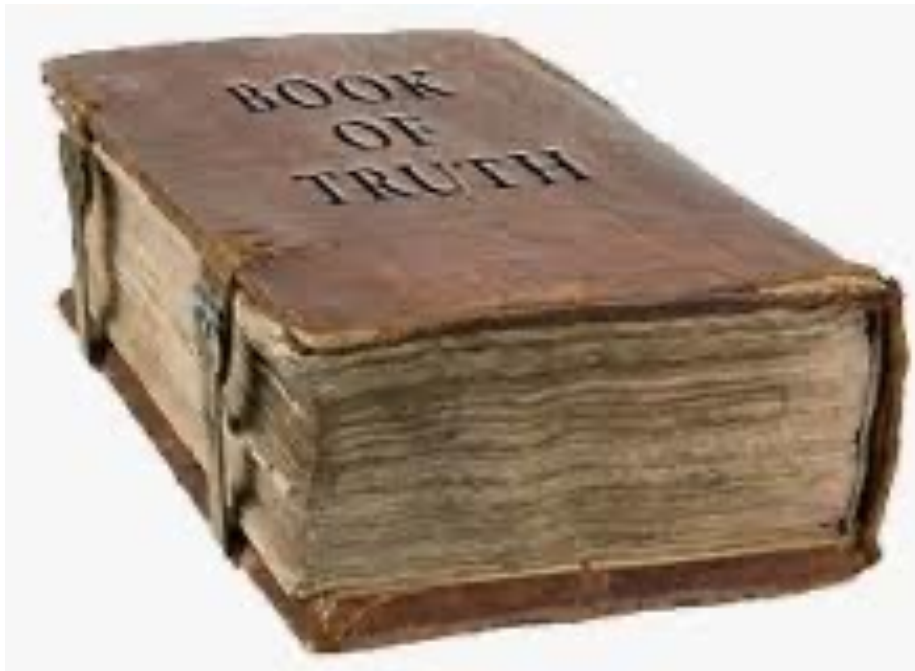
The difference between *Literal* and *Post-Critical Belief*

Literal Belief in Catholic education

Empirical research results 2011-2012



Literal Belief in Catholic education



Literal Belief



Post-Critical Belief

From Literal to Post-Critical Belief

Exercise: Jesus walking on the water (Mt. 14:24)



24 Meanwhile the boat, already a few miles offshore, was being tossed about by the waves, for the wind was against it. 25 And early in the morning He came walking toward them on the sea. 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid'. 28 Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water'. 29 He said, 'Come'. So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!' 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?' 32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God'. 34 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. 35 After the people of that place recognised him, they brought all who were sick to him, 36 and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

From Literal to Post-Critical Belief

Daniel Bonnell – Jesus Walking On The Water



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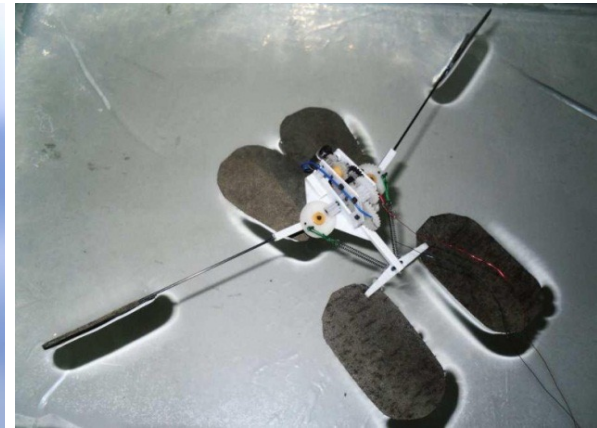
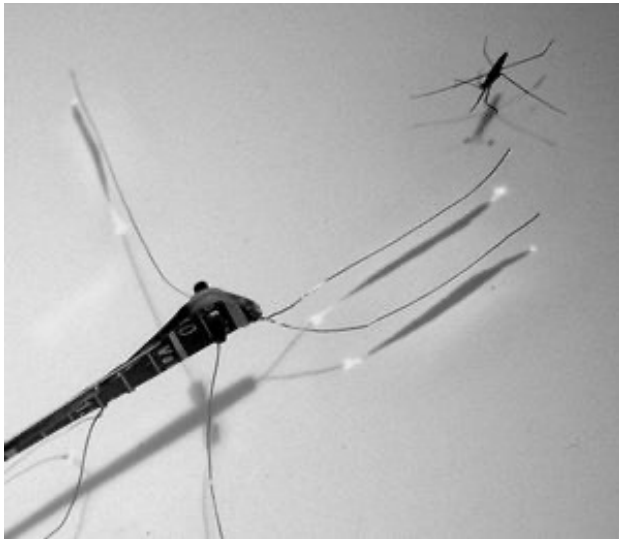
Write in the open centre of the word cloud, using key words:

- (3 minutes)



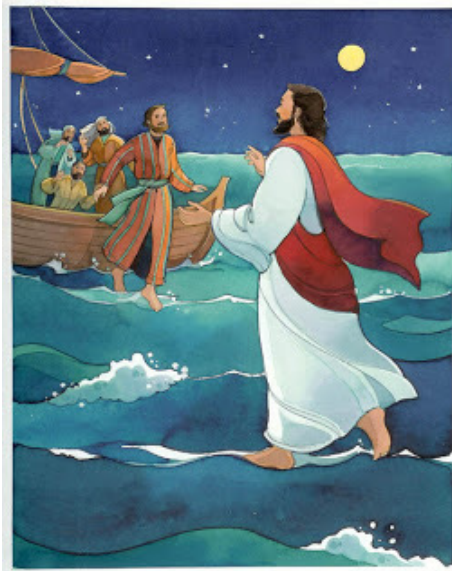
Walking on the water (*Literal Belief*)

Certain animals (and robots) walk on the water's surface by relying on surface tension to stay afloat



Walking on the water (*Literal Belief*)

Jesus (and Peter) walked on the water — purely on faith?



Walking on the water (*External Critique*)

Cartoons that create a comic effect by contrasting a literal interpretation of a supernatural event with the limited nature of everyday life.



Walking on the water (*Relativism*)

Certain humans walk on the water's surface
by means of special mechanisms, tricks or visual deceptions



[illegible]

A PCB perspective on walking on water for secondary college students: FEAR FACTOR



A famous Belgian rock singer and entertainer Walter Grootaers has graced the TV screen with his spectacular reality TV show *Fear Factor* (commercial channel VTM) which pushes the envelope with heavy doses of fear, denial and pain. Contestants on the show are expected to transcend their personal boundaries and eliminate five opponents in three spectacular stunts.



For the contestants, it is always terrifying to see what tasks they have to successfully complete. And they have to do them completely alone, without any help.

Over and over, they break out in a cold sweat. If they want to go further, they have to overcome their emotions. Only the brave make it to the third and final test, where only one of them can win the prize of 5000 Euros (~ 6697 AUD).

FEAR FACTOR



FEAR FACTOR

Teaching Suggestions



From the video clip:

- Would I dare to do this? Why would I (not) do it?
- In whom does this person trust? What is it that allows her to conquer her fears? What does she believe in? Herself? Her family/kids? (quotes from the clip: 'Jesus', 'My God!', 'I can do it', 'Boys, I can do it', 'Mommy's hanging in there', 'I did it')
- Are not her trust and sense of security actually based on the lifeline she's ultimately hanging onto? Isn't this some kind of deception (viewers)? Wouldn't the show be way more 'exciting' if there was not a lifeline? Or would that make the show immoral? But is it even exciting the way it is?
- What does this clip have to do with creating (real) fear? Is there a difference between orchestrated fear and genuine fear? Can we take pleasure in the fear of others ('sadism')?
- Do people in real life always hang by a strong lifeline? What lifeline do I have in my own life? Is the rope strong? Or am I unaware of the lifeline that holds me? Do all people eventually find happiness? Or are there also people who find themselves in dangerous situations without a lifeline?
- Bloody knees: 'It's all part of the game!' ('That's life!'). What way of speaking about suffering lies behind this?

FEAR FACTOR

Teaching Suggestions



From the scripture reading:

- Which verse or words speak to you, and why?
- Apply the following to your own life, either of today or of the past:
 - You need to go to the other side, but you don't see it happening.
 - The wind is against you.
 - You find it difficult to endure.
 - It's night and you're scared.
- When have you ever had to 'learn how to walk on water' in your own life?
 - How long did the 'night' last?
 - What 'other side' did you reach?
 - Who gave you a hand?
- For whom could I reach out my hand? For whom would I want to? Or have to?

FEAR FACTOR

Teaching Suggestions



- Have you ever believed in someone but nevertheless sometimes doubted, as if the relationship began to 'sink'?
 - Do trust and doubt exclude each other?
 - Is believing in someone or something the same as having absolute certainty?
 - Are you only able to feel secure if you have absolute certainty?
- Have you ever thought that Jesus was a 'ghost'?
 - Relationships – both those between people and those between God and people – often have two sides to them. Sometimes there's intense closeness ('I'm here'), and sometimes there's great distance ('on the other side'). How do I deal with that?
 - Can't we also sometimes see this double-sidedness in the attitude of Jesus? 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' versus 'Into your hands I commend my Spirit'.

FEAR FACTOR

Theological reflections



The connection between the scripture reading and the video clip ('teaching from/to reality'):

1. People encounter dangerous situations in their natural environments and in their interactions with others, which they never have fully under their own control. Nobody can find absolute security and certainty within him/herself. *To live is to be vulnerable.*
2. People may know how to handle unsafe situations, but this never brings *absolute* security: the rope can snap or one may sink into the water.
3. Life is always about an interaction between security and insecurity: hanging onto a rope and risking to fall, to be carried through the water and sinking, having wind in the sails and meeting a headwind.
4. **The big difference:**
 - a. In the video clip, the protagonist trusts in him/herself and in technology (*fides quarens intellectum*).
 - b. In the scripture reading, the protagonist (Peter) trusts in the words of another (*fides ex auditu*).
 - c. The big difference is that in the video clip, the bystanders are competitors who hope that their opponents will fail, while in the scripture reading, it is the connectedness that stands central.

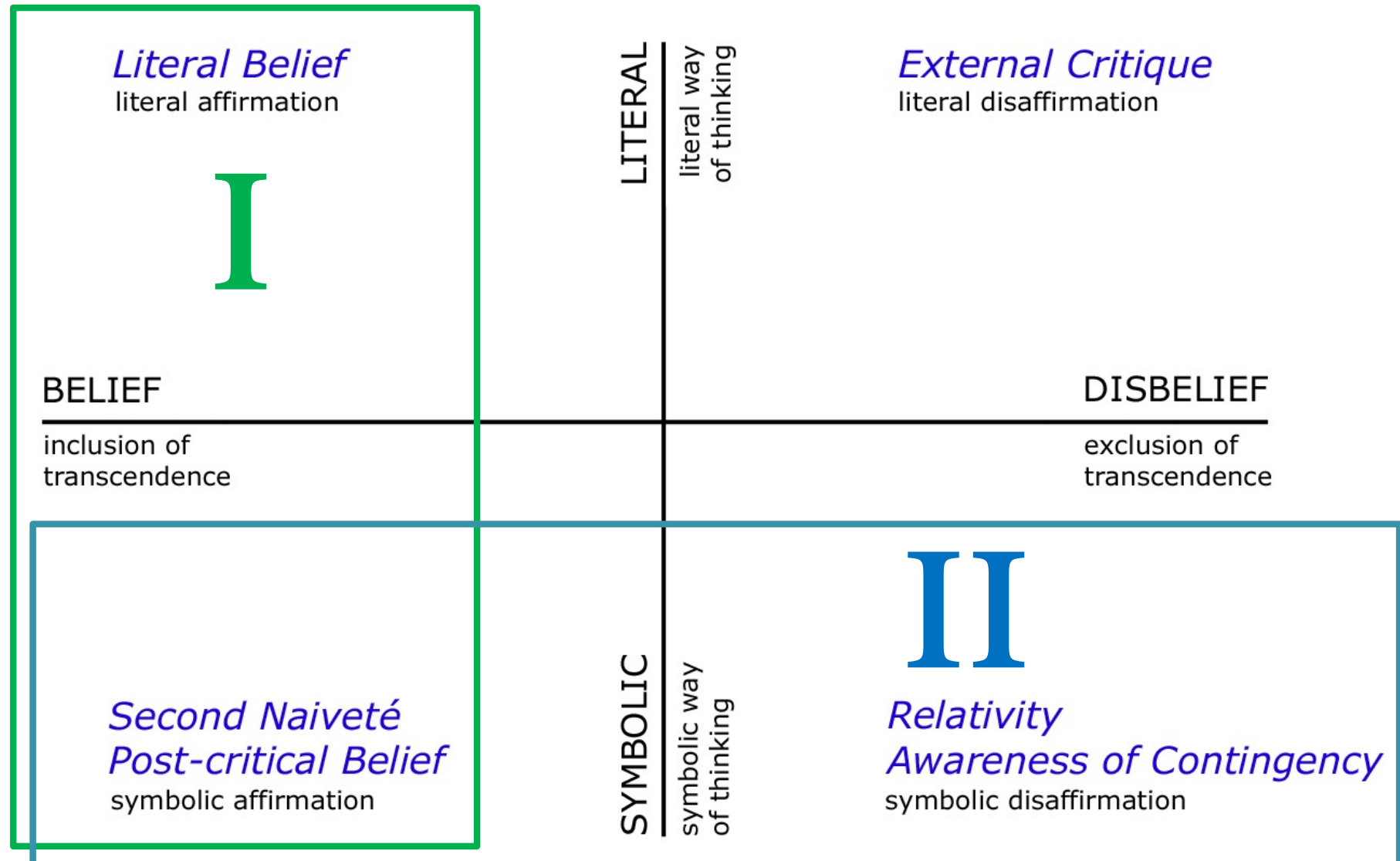


Coca Cola | Wedding ring

The difference between *Relativism* and *Post-Critical Belief*

Post-Critical Belief Scale

Diagram



A group of students from sixth grade who are to receive the sacrament of Confirmation during a Mass in our Catholic school, were encouraged to think of ways to make the ceremony more relevant to their daily lives. Their most striking proposal was to replace the sacramental wine with *Coca Cola*. “We are not allowed to drink wine because we are too young”, they argued, “while Coca Cola is our daily drink”.

Literal Belief

I find this proposal ludicrous and even blasphemous. How dare these children even ask! Without wine the Eucharist would simply not be valid. If they have no respect for the Church’s tradition they should not be admitted to Confirmation at all.

External Critique

To me, it’s all equally meaningless, regardless whether you use Coca Cola, wine or water. I don’t think most of these students believe in it anyway. In my experience, they only go to Confirmation to please their grandmas and receive presents.

BELIEF

I am pleased that the students find sacraments important enough to engage with them critically. However, the Eucharist needs to be rooted in historical tradition as well as in the daily lives of believers. From the beginning, bread and wine have been crucial elements of this sacrament. Letting go of the wine runs the risk of rendering the symbol unintelligible and no longer related to the person of Christ. Still, the children are right that the Mass should also be linked to their experiences. Perhaps they can make that connection in some other creative way, for example offering something from their daily lives together with the bread and the wine?

Post-Critical Belief

LITERAL

Coca-Cola

SYMBOLIC

DISBELIEF

What a fun and creative idea! It is an expression of the children’s individual conviction and that is what really matters. If they are willing to believe that Christ can be present in a cup of Cola, it is just the same as them thinking that He is present in wine, wouldn’t it be?

Relativity

What is it like to believe in a *Post-Critical* way, in distinction from the alternatives?

A burglar stole my wedding ring! How do I respond?

Literal Belief

I am so sad and angry that my wedding ring is stolen! What fiendish person would do such a thing? This was the ring that my wife gave to me at our wedding. It has great value and is irreplaceable. Being separated from my ring, our bond of marriage itself seems to be damaged. I'm going to go to the police at once to report the theft. I count on them to catch the thief and retrieve the ring!

LITERAL

External Critique

I didn't wear that ring anymore, anyway. It may just as well be gone. To be honest: I don't really understand my wife and daughters' hysteria about the significance of a piece of metal. Let's be clear: I hate thieves, but I am more upset that they took our stereo as well.

BELIEF

DISBELIEF

My wedding ring means a lot to me. I am very sad that it is stolen, because for my husband and I, it is an irreplaceable symbol of our love in marriage. However, we realise that what matters is not the ring itself, but what it refers to: our eternal love for each other. Therefore, we should search creatively for new ways to symbolically express our love, in line with our history as a couple. Perhaps we could once more present each other our engagement rings, along with a love letter and our favorite flower? We could have the new old rings consecrated and renew our marriage vows at the occasion of the Baptism of our youngest daughter. Perhaps something good can come from this loss.

SYMBOLIC

What a pity, I was rather fond of that ring. But hey, it is not the end of the world. In fact, I saw a gorgeous golden ring at the jewellery store the other day. I will ask my partner to present it to me during our cruise in the Caribbean next Summer, to celebrate good times. I am not too upset about the lost wedding ring. After all, unmarried couples in a common law relationship don't wear rings either, although they do love each other too. There are many ways to show affection.

Post-Critical Belief

Relativity

What is it like to believe in a *Post-Critical* way, in distinction from the alternatives?



Post-Critical Belief

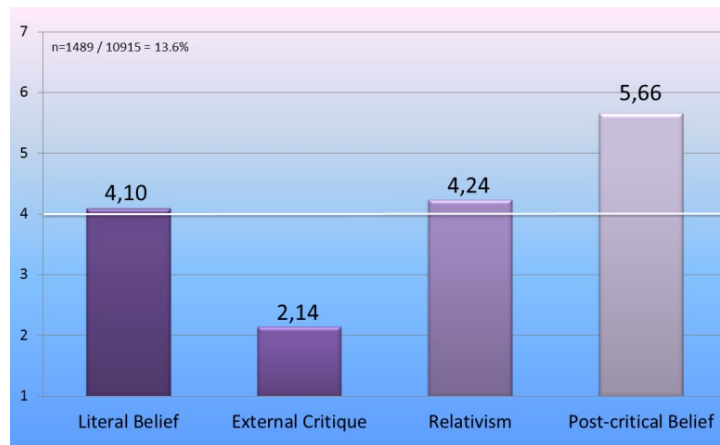
Can it be done with children and teenagers?

Post-Critical Belief

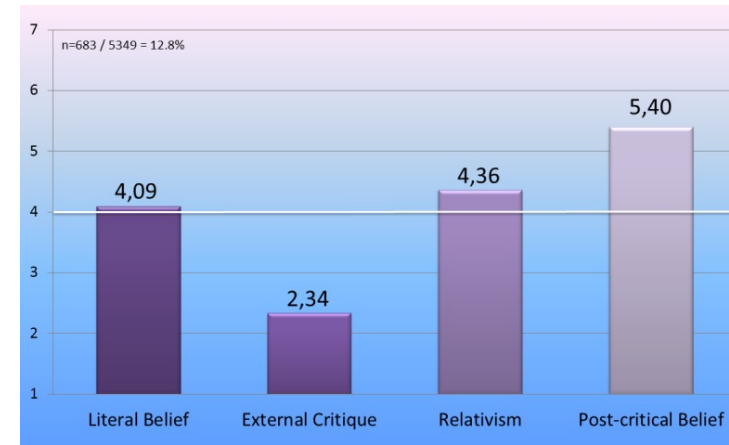
Can it be done with children and teenagers?



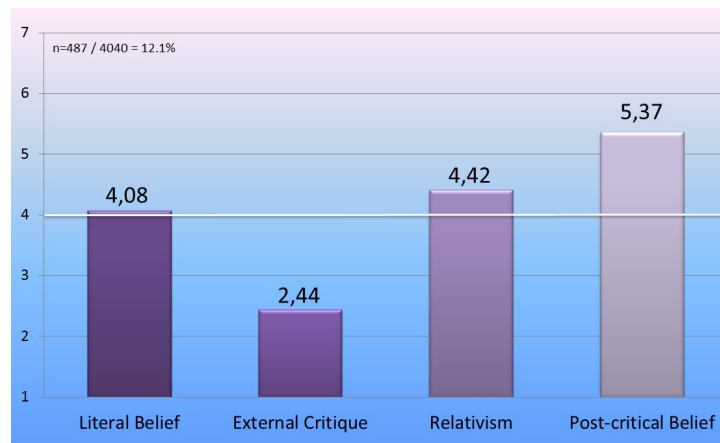
Clearly positive score for Post-Critical Belief AND moderately positive score for Literal Belief.



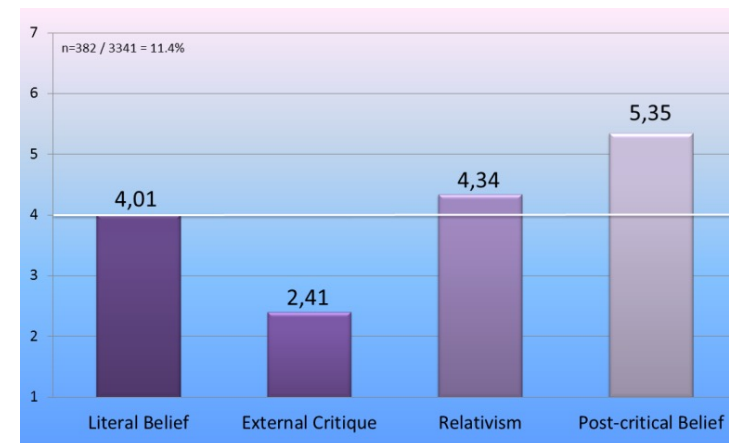
Students primary, grade 5-6 (13.6%)



Students secondary, grade 7-8 (12.8%)



Students secondary, grade 9-10 (12.1%)



Students secondary, grade 11-12 (11.4%)



The Ontological Referent

Summary diagram

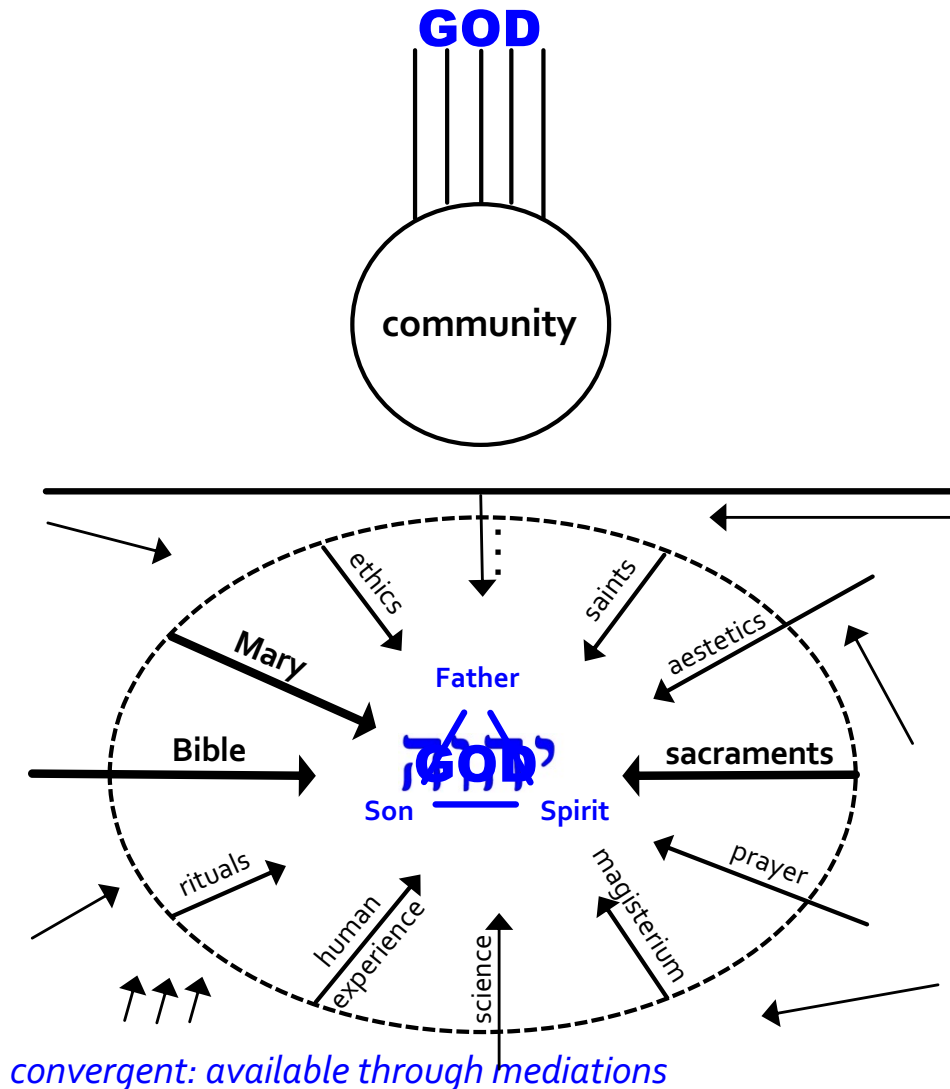
The Ontological Referent

Summary diagram

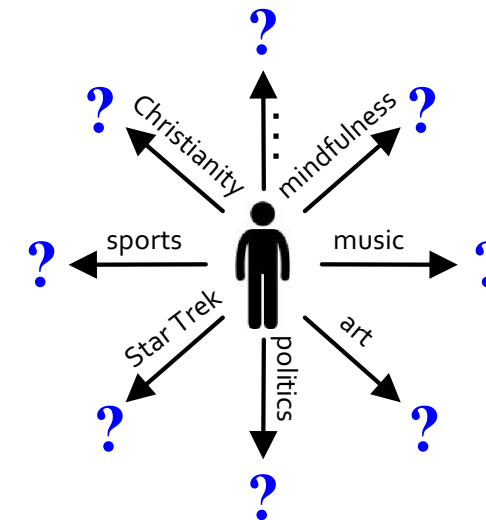


direct availability

no transcendent reality



N/A



Post-Critical Belief

Transparant crucifix



Faith as walking on water

**The Post-Critical Belief Scale:
Religious Building Blocks for Catholic School Identity.
Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project, 2013.**

Prof. Dr. Didier Pollefeyt – Jan Bouwens

KU Leuven, 2013 ©