

KU LEUVEN

Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI)

The *Post-Critical Belief Scale*. Cognitive belief styles as building blocks for Catholic school identity

Prof. Dr. Didier Pollefeyt – Drs. Jan Bouwens
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Post-Critical Belief

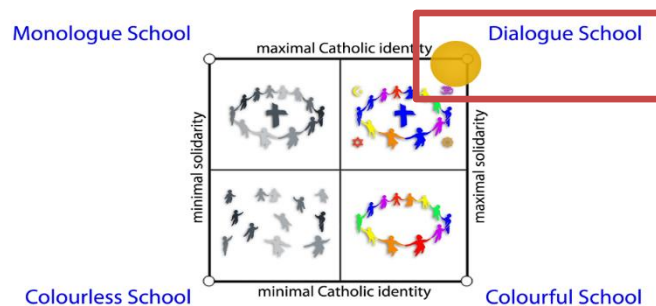
The precondition for *Recontextualisation*



In the first lecture we spoke about the *Catholic Dialogue School* of the *Recontextualising* type. In the second lecture, we then explained what *Recontextualisation* is. But what are the preconditions for *Recontextualisation*? What does it take to form somebody to do this? How can we have confidence that this can work? What strengths, expertise and spirituality is needed?

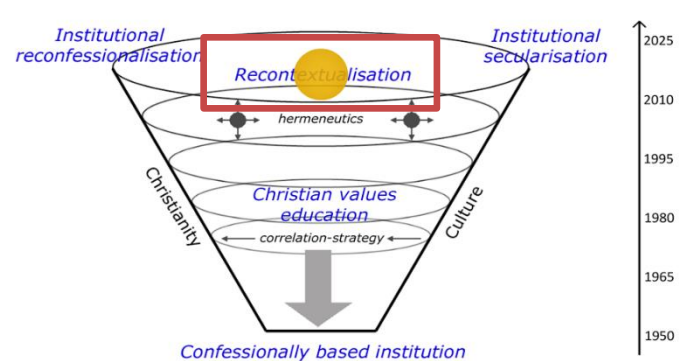
→ *Post-Critical Belief*. Without PCB, there can be no RECONT, and no CDS.

Victoria Scale: *Catholic Dialogue School*



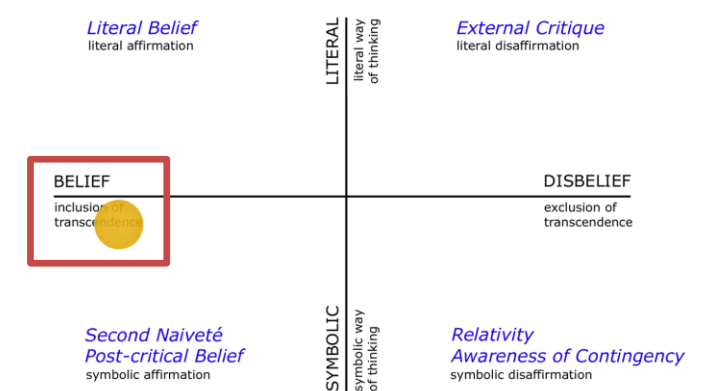
→ How to relate to diversity at school?

Melbourne Scale: *Recontextualisation*



→ How to relate to the Catholic faith tradition at school?

PCB Scale: *Post-Critical Belief*



→ Which belief style is needed for that?



Post-Critical Belief Scale

Cognitive belief styles as building blocks for Catholic school identity

Post-Critical Belief Scale

Typology based on two axes



Epistemological: truth is a fact, objective, unchangeable and certain.
It exists outside of us as an external reality and is there 'for the taking'.
Psychological: anxiety reduction

God actually exists — and *I believe*. The immanent reality is 'touched' by the transcendent reality and refers to it in all times and places. Ontological epistemology.

BELIEF

inclusion of
transcendence

Existential response to
an ontological truth claim

LITERAL
literal way
of thinking
SYMBOLIC
symbolic way
of thinking
Epistemological approach
to the religious phenomenon

DISBELIEF

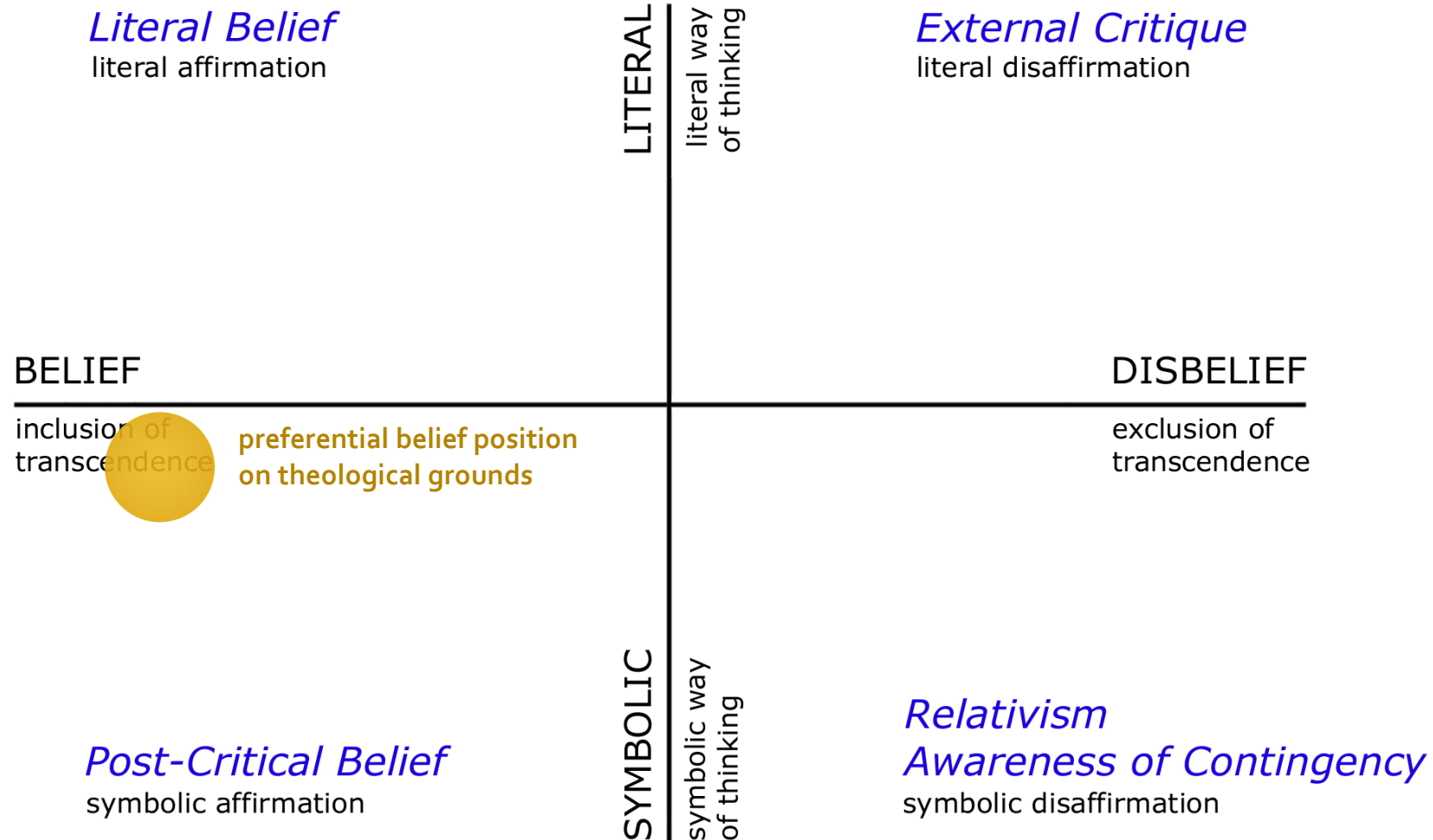
exclusion of
transcendence

'god' is a human invention. There exists only this immanent reality, that stands on its own. Constructivism.

Epistemological: truth is found in the search for meaning and value, in the continuous *interpretation* of the world. All things are interpretative (including myself). Truth exists in its existential appropriation by a person who strives to find meaning, significance and purpose.
Psychological: capacity to deal with complexity

Post-Critical Belief Scale

Diagram



Prof. Pollefeyt explains the 'golden dot': ECSI's normative position on theological grounds.

< Knowledge Clip: theological normativity
according to the *PCB Scale* typology >

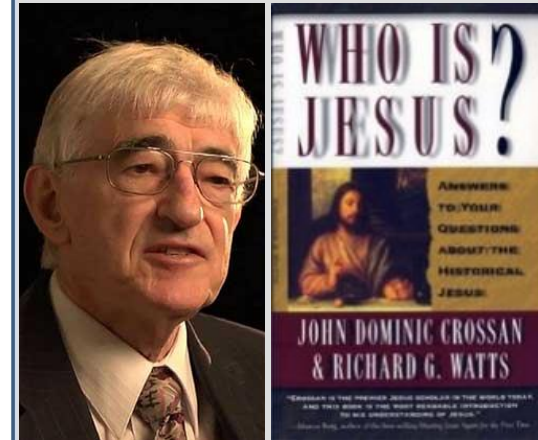
On Bible stories

Post-Critical Belief vs Literal Belief

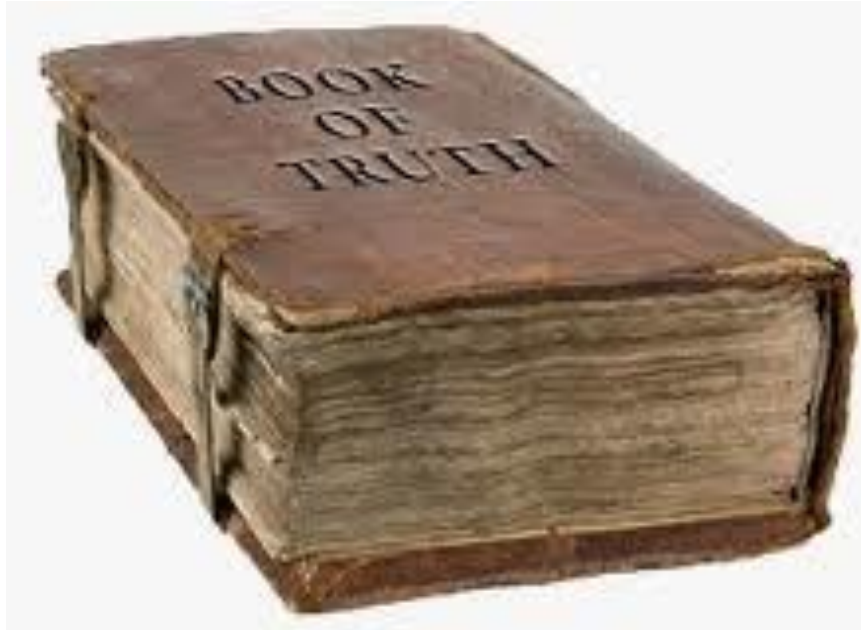


“ My point, once again, is not that those ancient people told literal stories and we are now smart enough to take them symbolically, but that they told them symbolically and we are now dumb enough to take them literally.

John Dominic Crossan (Ireland 1934), historical Jesus scholar and Professor Emeritus in the *Department of Religious Studies* of DePaul University in Chicago, US.



Quotation: Who Is Jesus? Answers to Your Questions About the Historical Jesus, 1996. Picture: <http://liturgy.co.nz/all-the-bible-is-true-some-of-it-happened>, 28 August 2016.



Literal Belief



**Post-Critical
Belief**

Is faith fixed and determined by the printed page? Or guided by tradition, forging into the unknown?

Authors: Jan Bouwens and Chelsea Schofield
Images: stock photos

Religion is ...

Post-Critical Belief



Religion is...
lust for financial gain

Religion is...
a source of
violence

Religion is...
abuse of power

Religion is...
covering-up
sexual abuse

Religion is...
sentimentality

Religion is...
irrationality

Religion is...
possessing the
one and only
truth

Religion is...
intolerance

Religion is...
ideology

Religion is...
imposing one's
will onto others

Religion is...
a sect

AND YET... God has touched me personally and aroused my desire.

I cannot ignore it now, I have to share with others that which fulfills me.

Despite everything I have no choice but to love, and to be vulnerable when
doing so. *Beyond all critique* I inevitably keep searching for God.

Post-Critical Belief Scale

Cognitive belief styles illustrated: Cartoons



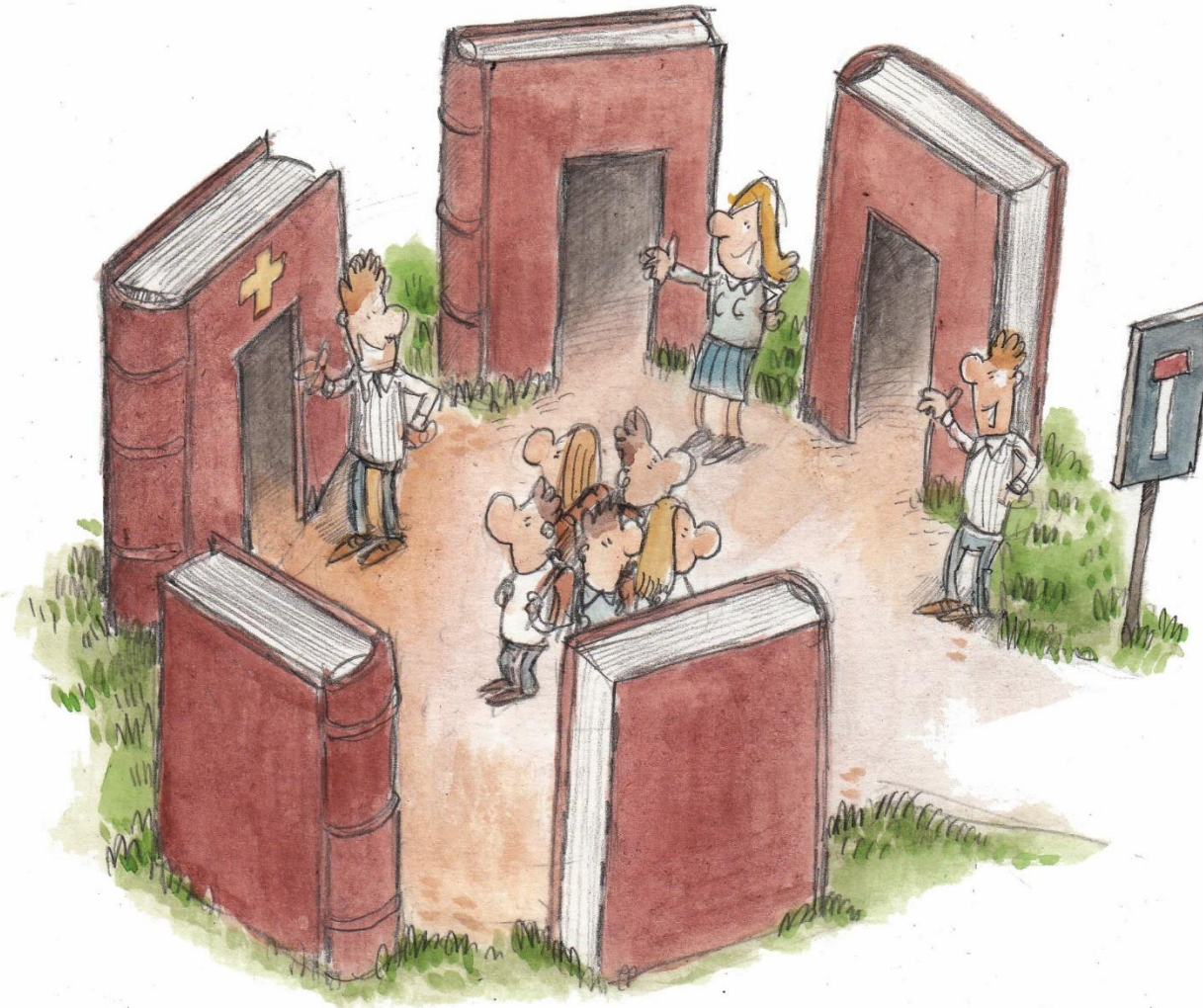
Cartoon: *Literal Belief*

Cartoon image courtesy of Joirs Snaet, 2013.



Cartoon: *External Critique*

Cartoon image courtesy of Joirs Snaet, 2013.



Cartoon: *Relativism*

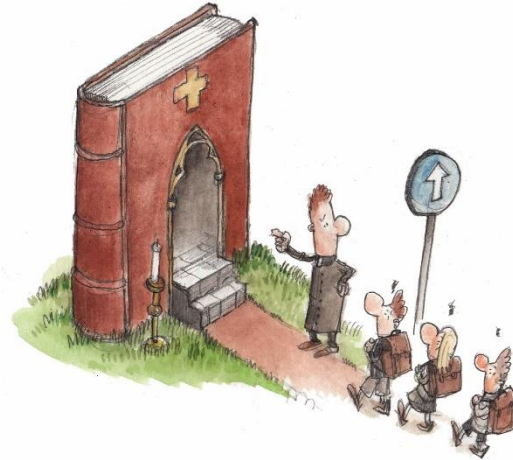
Cartoon image courtesy of Joirs Snaet, 2013.



Cartoon: *Post-Critical Belief*

Cartoon image courtesy of Joirs Snaet, 2013.

Literal Belief



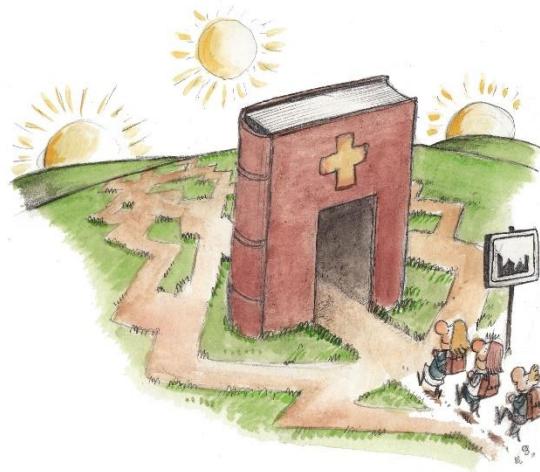
BELIEF

LITERAL

External Critique



DISBELIEF



Post-Critical Belief

SYMBOLIC



Relativism

Post-Critical Belief Scale

The *Ontological Referent* (a.k.a. God)

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

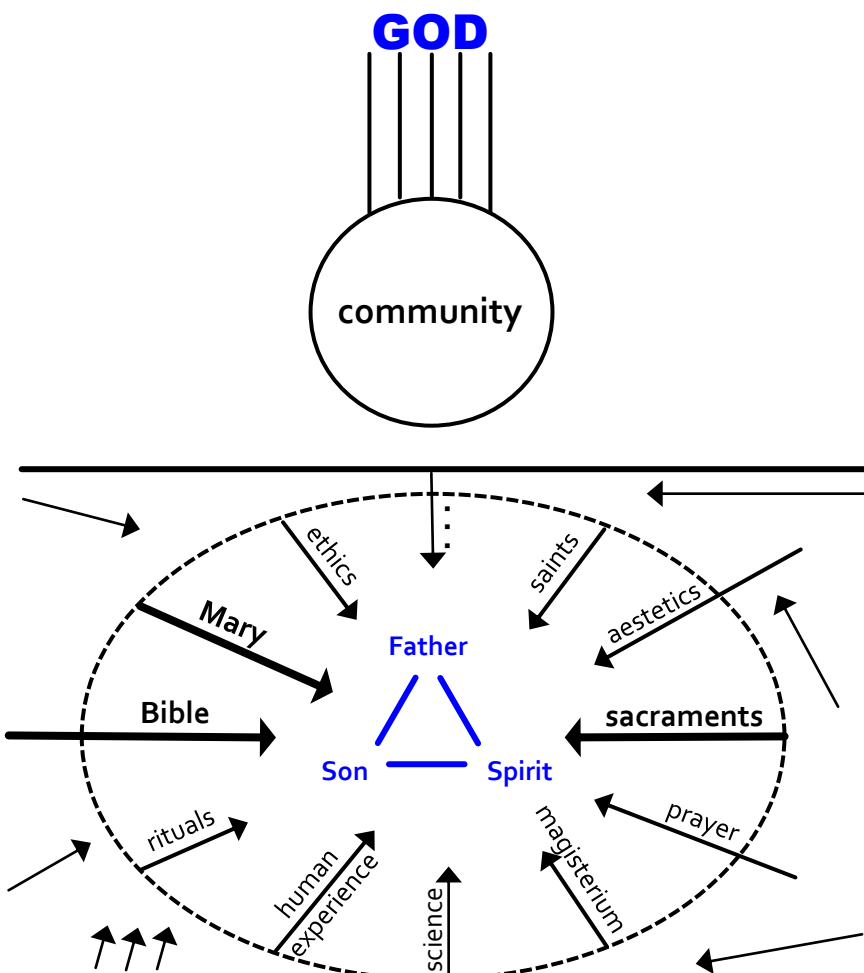
The ontological referent

Summary diagram

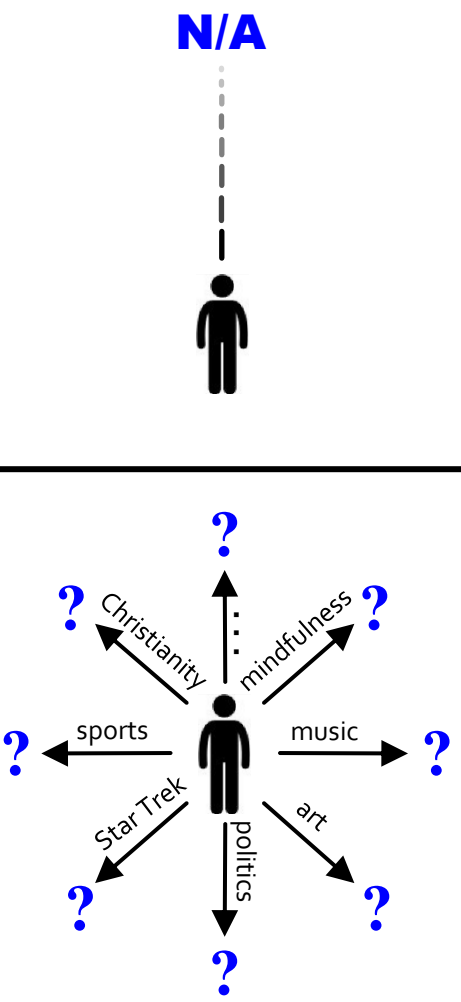


direct availability

no transcendent reality



convergent: available through mediations

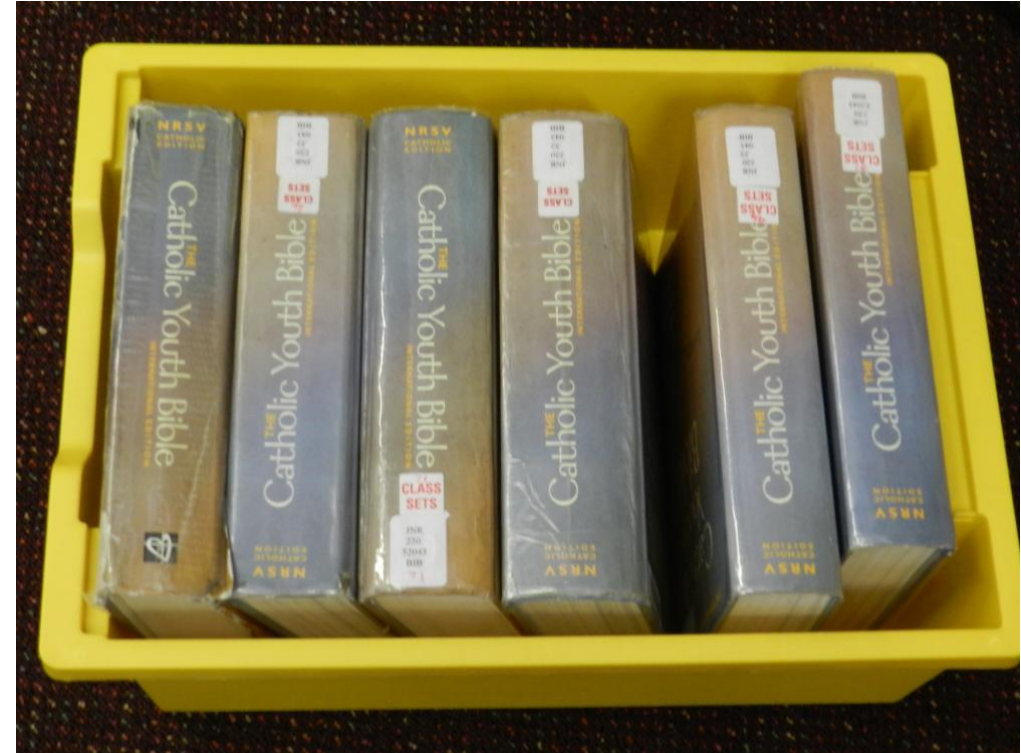


divergent



Using the Bible at school: **the 'storage box phenomenon'**
Catholicism as a unique mediating structure?

Photo: courtesy of Jan Bouwens.
Scholen van de Zusters van Vorselaar,
2012

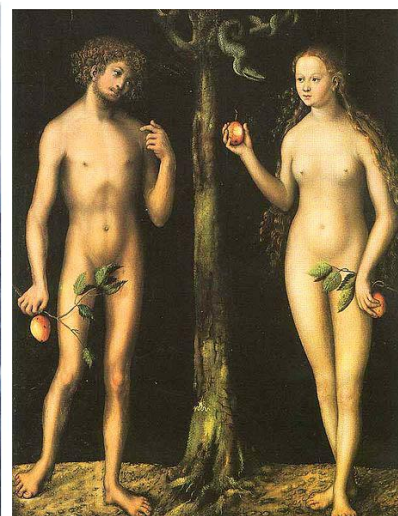


Using the Bible at school: **the 'storage box phenomenon'**
Catholicism as a unique mediating structure?

Photo: courtesy of Jan Bouwens.
Catholic secondary college, Victoria

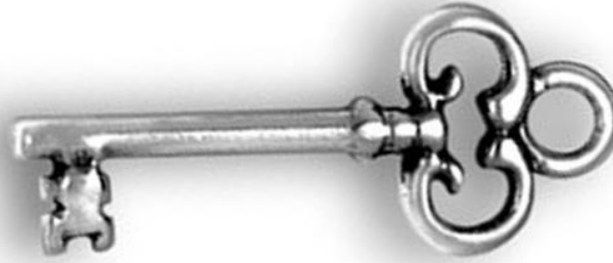
Post-Critical Belief Scale

Cognitive belief styles illustrated: Pictures



Literal Belief. The images above show a literal sense of faith: Jesus ascends to heaven and walks on water, Adam and Eve are seen as the first couple that is the cradle of all humanity, Lazarus rises from the dead and the ark of Noah really exists.

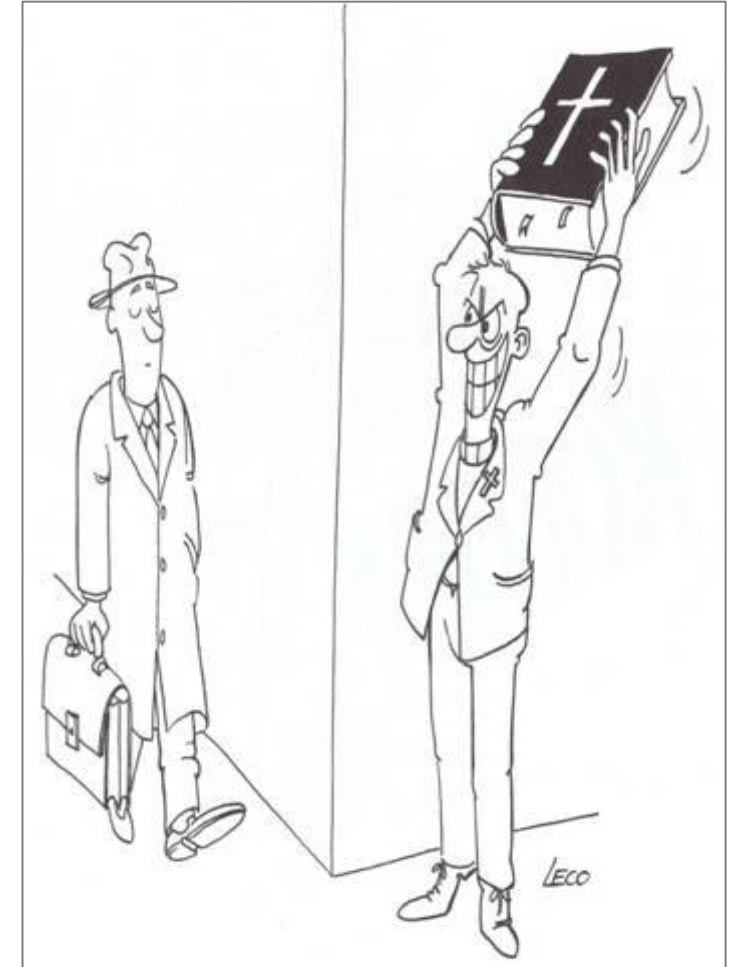
Photo's: Thomas Fotodatabank
Collage made by Jan Bouwens, 2011



Literal Belief. Black and white thinking about Catholic beliefs. Faith is presented as the ultimate 'key' to all important questions of life. Eucharist and Scripture, devotions and prayer play a central role. There seems to be an immediate connection between the transcendent and the immanent.

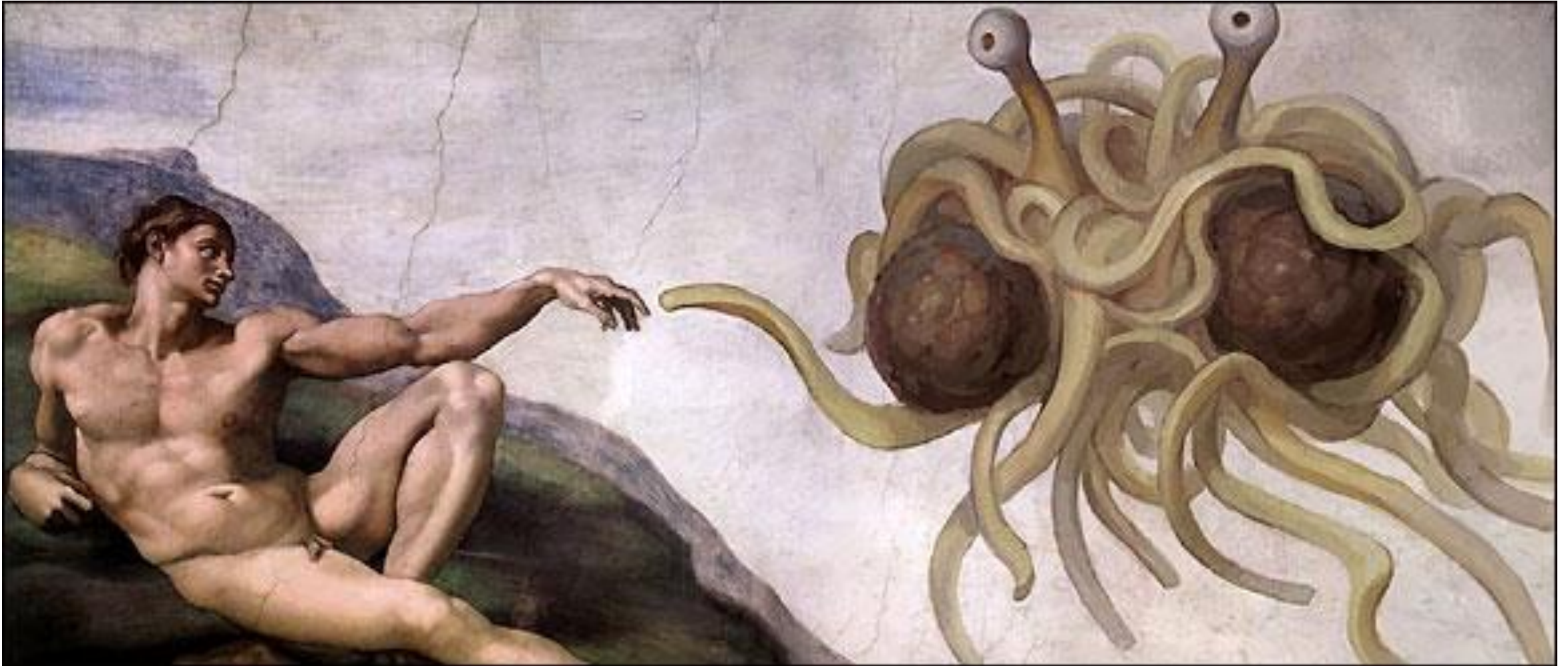


Literal Belief. The one and only truth is clear and can be objectively known. There is one God who shows the right way, to whom humanity should surrender. *Binary thinking patterns:* all alternatives are incorrect. God is a ruler on a throne that blesses and judges from beginning to end.



Literal Belief. These cartoons criticise the Bible as a direct source of revelation, values and divine knowledge. In this way, the Bible serves as 'blinders' that induce a tunnel vision. 'Pumping people up' with scripture quotes, or 'beating them to death' with the Holy Book leads to uncritical belief, superstition, or an aversion to religion. The Bible is not a closed story, a collection of fixed answers to fixed questions.

<http://onwardtoholiness.blogspot.be/2010/04/baltimore-catechism-cartoons.html>
(21-03-2014).



External Critique. 'The Flying Spaghetti Monster' is the god of 'The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster' of pastafarianism. The 'Church' originated in Kansas in 2005 as a charge against creationistically inspired education. In that same year, Niklas Jansson parodied *Adam's Creation*, replacing the image of God with a blob of spaghetti.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flying_Spaghetti_Monster
<http://www.venganza.org/>
(21 maart 2014)



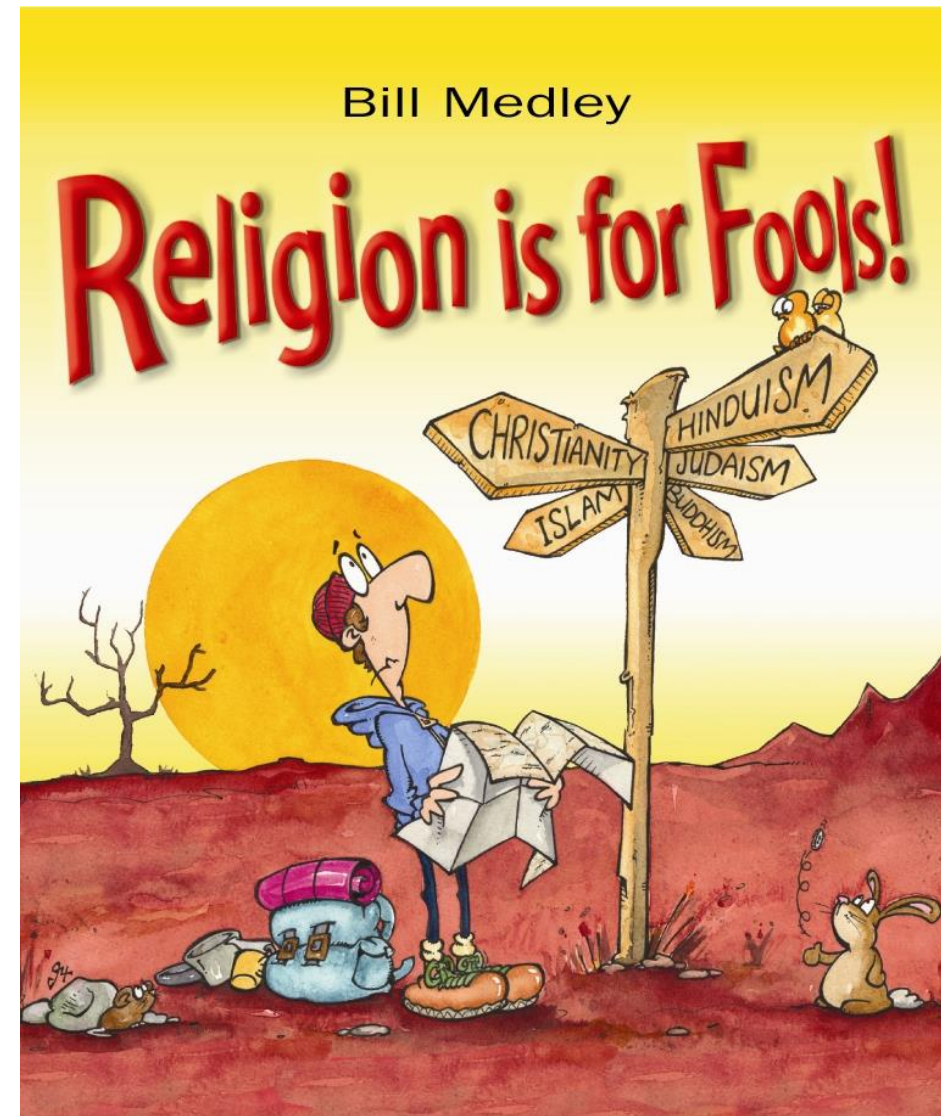
£140,000 billboard campaign by British atheist group in 2009. Posing in the photo is Prof. Richard Dawkins. This sign appeared on 200 buses in London and 600 others across England, Scotland and Wales, next to 1,000 advertisements in the subway systems in and around London.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1106924/Theres-probably-God--stop-worrying-enjoy-life-Atheist-group-launches-billboard-campaign.html>

< Fragment documentary Richard Dawkins >

Prof. Richard Dawkins on religious indoctrination of children (14-11-2010).
"Religion is a dangerous virus." Religious education is 'child abuse'. (1.41 min)

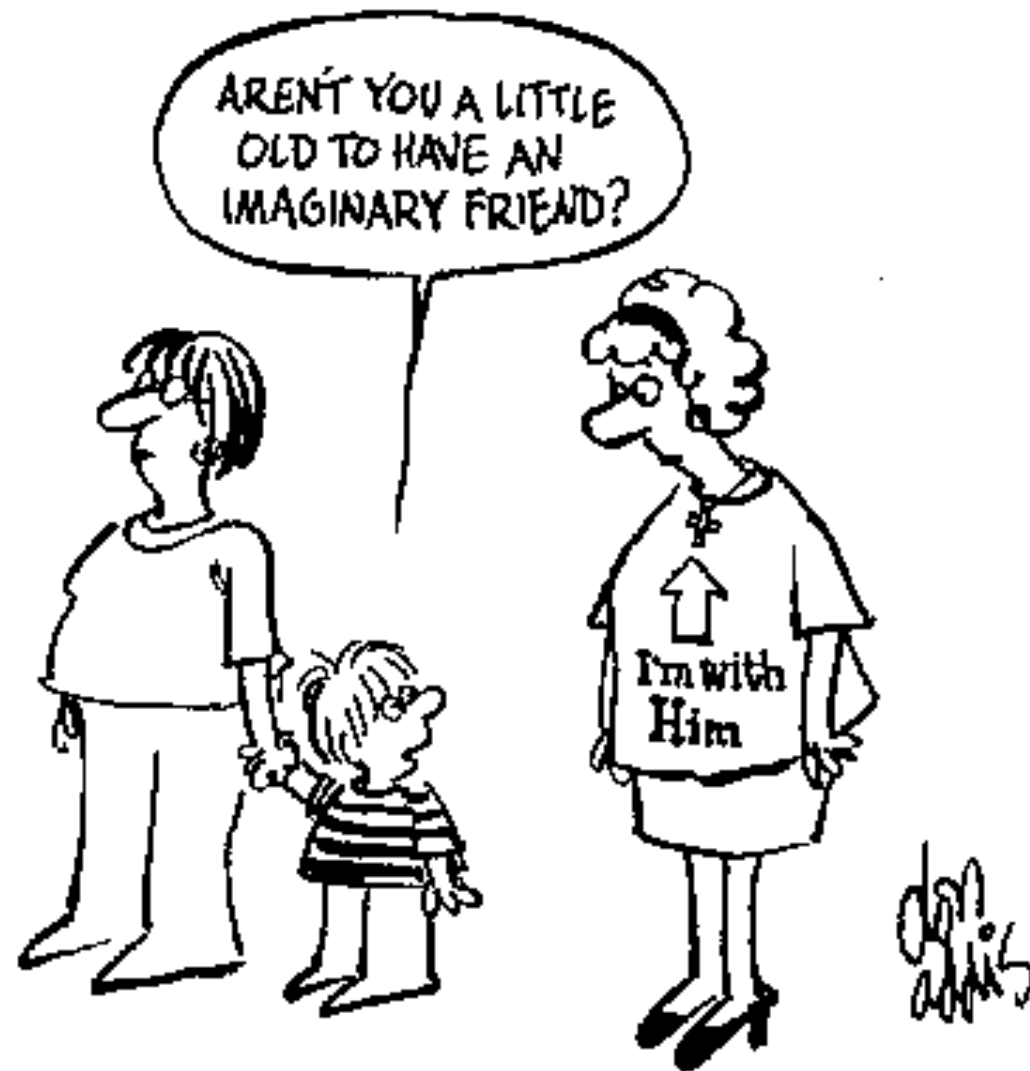
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDKKJfT_5RE&ab_channel=R
equiem](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDKKJfT_5RE&ab_channel=Requiem)



External Critique. Religion is for fools! Every religion is nonsense, it does not matter which one you belong to. None of them are true, they are all equally false and worthless.

BILL MEDLEY, *Religion is for Fools!*, Authentic Media, 2005, p. 160

20 maart 2014



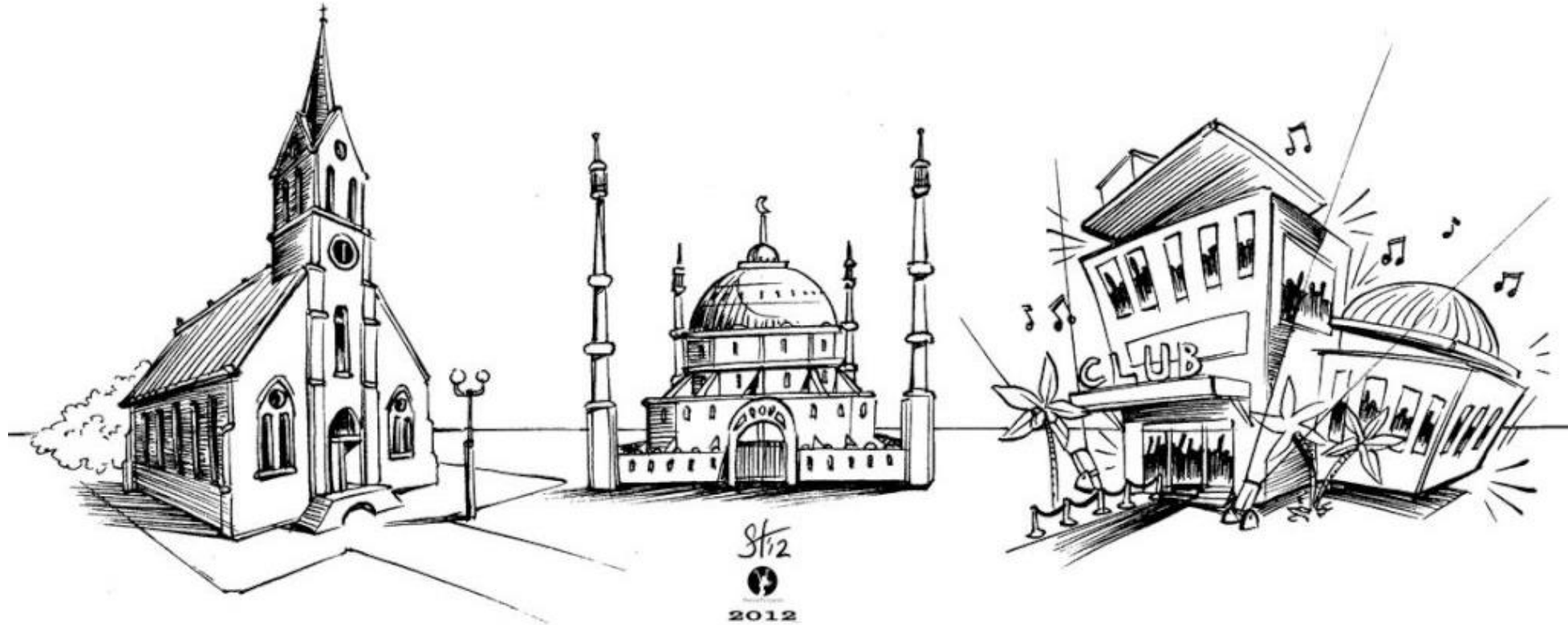
External Critique. Imaginary Friend. Does the truth come out of the mouths of children? God does not exist because you do not see him. The cartoon criticises believing adults for behaving childishly. You do not believe that your teddy bear lives, why believe in an imaginary friend?

www.blogspot.be (02-04-2011).



Relativism. Empty signposts that point to various directions. Take your pick: which direction do *you* want to go? Faith and truth are personal, subjective and relative, depending on accidental circumstances and chance. All choices are equally true, which means that in the end they are all equally contentless and untrue.

Religions of the World

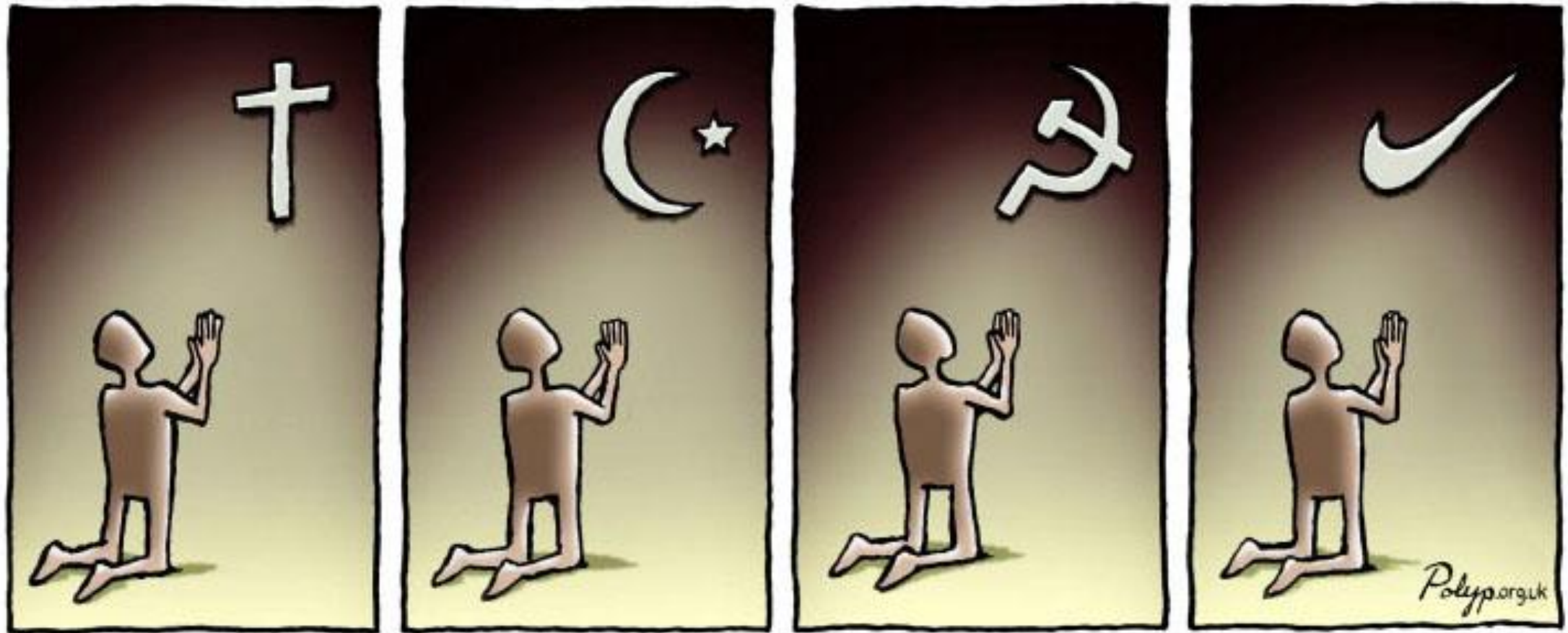


Christianity...

...Islam...

...House!

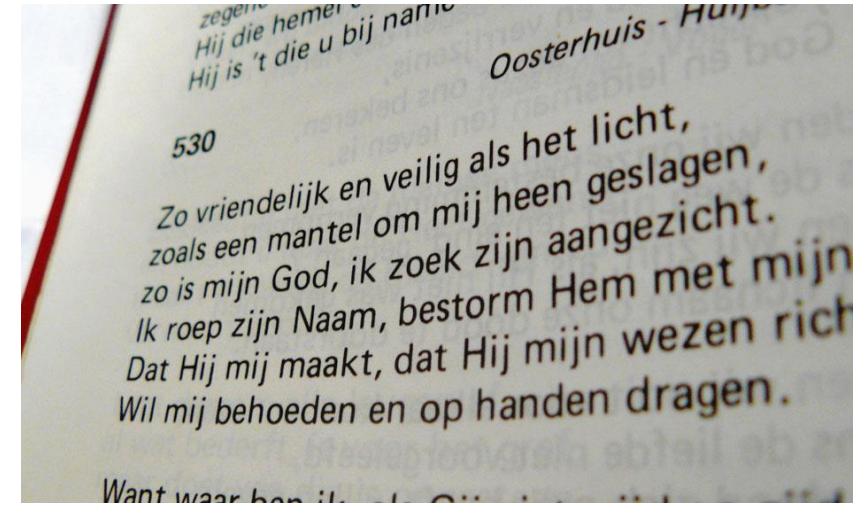
Relativism. Comparison of Church, Mosque, House. This cartoon shows a secularising perspective on world religions. House and the 'club' are presented as a new religion. You can, of course, ask yourself in what sense houses of prayer and clubs can be compared. The 'club' is about making fun, about immanent affairs and not about transcendence.



'DOGMA'

Relativism. Relativising the 'dogma' of Christianity, Islam, Communism and Capitalism. It does not matter who/what you pray to. It is all equally true and thus untrue. Any ideology and philosophy of life is interchangeable, depending on personal preference. The concept of 'dogma' itself is being undermined.

http://www.polyp.org.uk/religion_cartoons/cartoons_about_religion_and_dogma.html (15-12-2013).



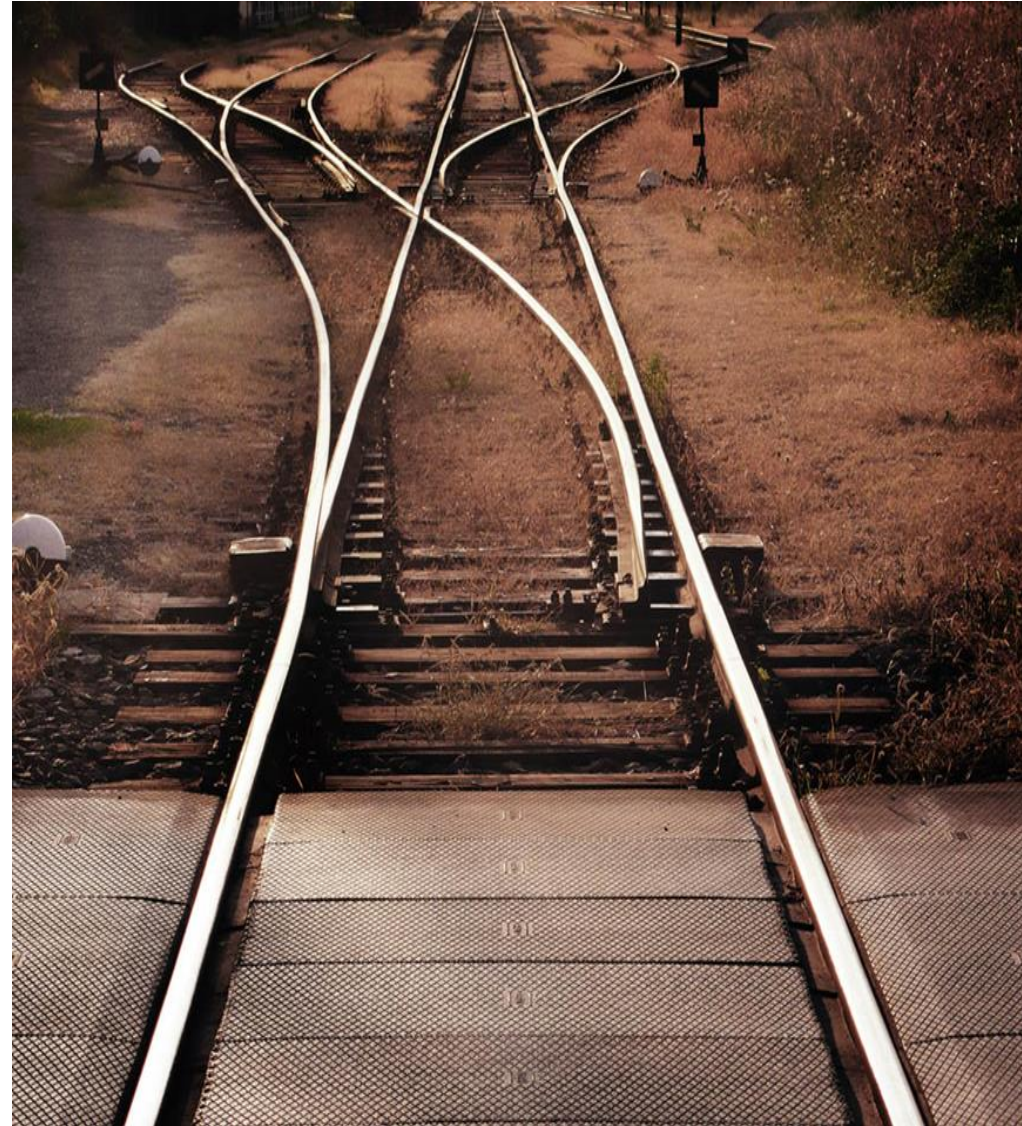
Post-Critical Belief. traces of God. Looking at the same reality deeper and differently. You see God in little things, inconspicuous, vulnerable things. There where life is born in barren lands, a little feather on the sand, a shining drop on a stalk, a footprint on the beach that is about to be wiped out by the waves, or as a small light that warms us. This belief is vulnerable, modest and without great words.

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Post-critical Belief. Look closer, look further, look over the fence, look 'out of the box', look with different eyes, look through new glasses, never stop looking. Learning to look at the world around you in multiple ways. There is more than one interpretation. You can search for divine traces in reality. 'Real' seeing is looking for insight.

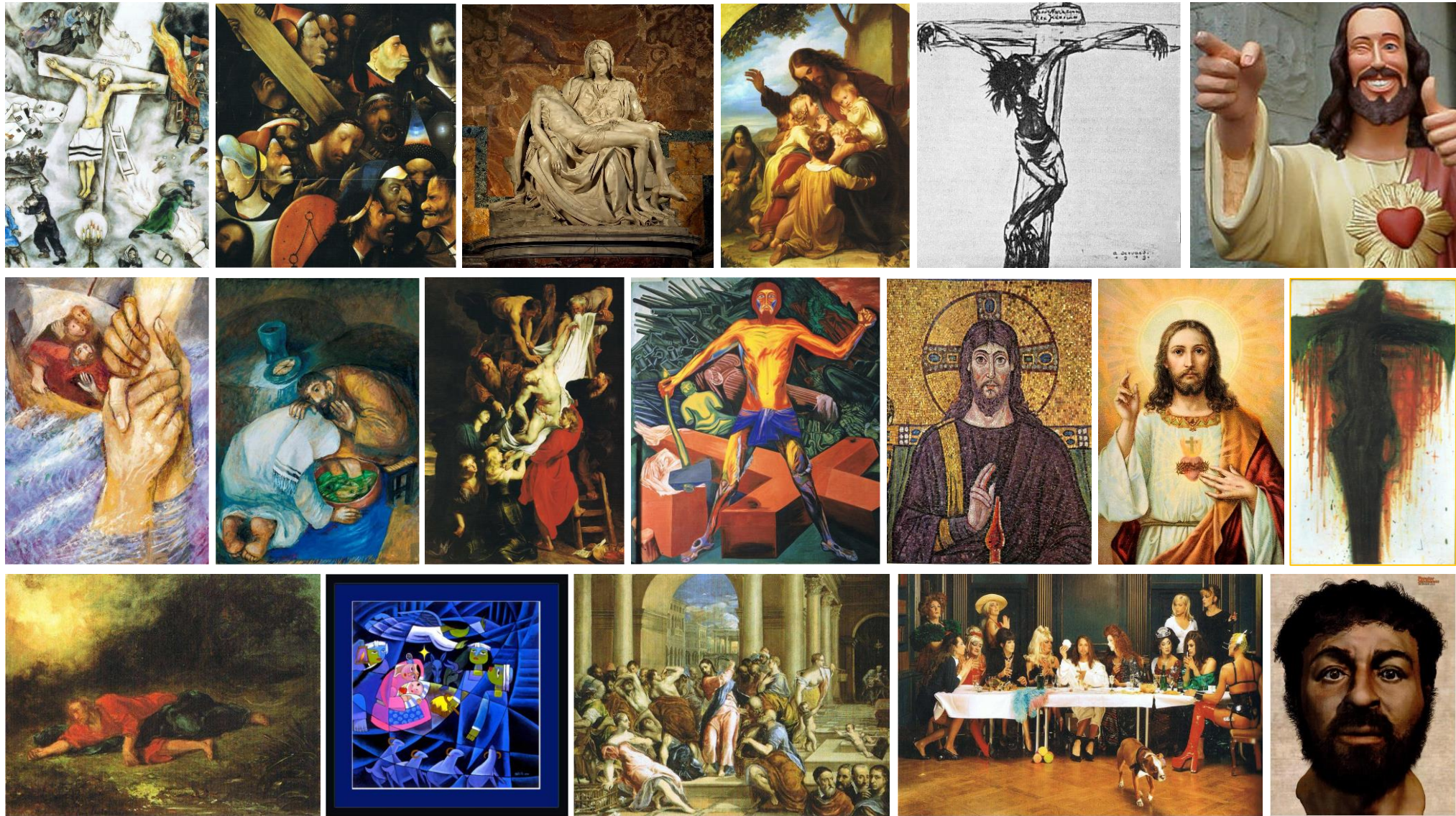
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Post-Critical Belief. Dare to discover new paths, engage with faith and tradition in a new, creative and interpretative fashion. A cluster of wires, layers of meaning, that you need to untangle. There is a plurality of perceptions in which you continuously need to seek religious meaning.

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Post-Critical Belief. Who is Jesus? Where is Jesus? How is Jesus? When is Jesus? Why is Jesus?

Compilation of images from various sources.



Creative and very effective use of the symbol of **the grape vine**. Note the gold drawings, signs and symbols on several grapes.

The 'kerygmatic dialogue' is present in this church in a modest way, at the same time undeniably clear AND very open.



A Catholic hermeneutical sacred space that induces **Post-Critical Belief**.
Kuokkala Church in Jyväskylä, Finland (2010)

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Five criteria for *Post-Critical Belief*

Going deeper

Criteria for Post-Critical Belief

Overview



1. Strong symbolism
2. Focus on the content of faith (initiation)
3. Requiring a strong faith commitment
4. Taking on the complexity of faith and life (hermeneutics)
5. Positive as well as negative theology

1. Strong symbolism

Criteria for Post-Critical Belief

1. Strong symbolism

"A symbol is a reality which coincides with another reality which it represents visibly."

Derived from the Greek word *sym-bolon* which literally means 'throwing something together'.

A symbol is:

- a common object, action or event which receives a specific expressiveness in particular circumstances and therefore reveals more than it usually does
- the representation of something that transcends us: throughout an immanent object or event it reveals something transcendent which is not tangible
- a tool which helps to pass thoughts and feelings that reach further than words could describe
- the bearer of ambiguous meanings

Strong symbolism vs weak symbolism.

2. Content of faith

Criteria for Post-Critical Belief

2. Focus on the content of faith (initiation)

Faith doesn't come natural. "Nobody is born a Christian. One becomes Christian."

Faith education is not merely inviting inductive or subjective points of view.

Faith education is appropriating the Catholic tradition as a way to encounter God through Christ in a personal way and in community (the Church), in the changing context of day, with the eschatological future in mind.

Traditional criteria for PCB, avoiding relativism:

1. Biblically inspired
2. Grounded in Tradition
3. With respect to human experiences
4. Taking (new) scientific insights into account
5. In dialogue with the *sensus fidelium*
6. Loyal to the concerns of the Magisterium

3. Faith commitment

Criteria for Post-Critical Belief

3. Requiring a strong faith commitment

Relativism says: "ultimately, there is no commitment towards particular philosophies of lives, since they are merely exchangeable alternatives."

Two kinds of interreligious dialogue:

- based on Post-Critical Belief
- based on Relativism

Post-Critical Belief defends a faith commitment!

ECSI is missionary endeavour. It is an expression of 'new evangelisation', for new people in new times.

4. Faith complexity

Criteria for Post-Critical Belief

4. Taking on the complexity of faith and life (hermeneutics)

Educating PCB means teaching people to deal with complexities, ambiguities, dilemmas, paradoxes, tensions, conflicting interpretations. To deal with complexities, we need hermeneutical competences (PCB).

Often, RE classes lack complexity. Young children WANT complexity! They want to think about stuff. So raise the level. Not too sweet, peacable, gentle, boring, harmonising or even 'sedating'... (parentification) Spice it up! Don't use the same stories over and over again. Introduce new stories and new learning points.

Don't avoid complexity – love it!

Examples:

- a. **Biblical Studies:** e.g. dealing with 'texts of terror' in the Holy Scriptures
- b. **Church History:** e.g. dealing with violence in the history of Christianity
- c. **Systematic Theology:** e.g. the relation between religion and science (creationism)
- d. **Moral Theology:** e.g. welcoming a transgender student
- e. **Pastoral Theology:** e.g. a divorced teacher in a Catholic school

Tomáš Halík on the complexity of faith

"Faith requires the courage to live with the mystery."



< Fragment interview Tomáš Halík >

Duration: 1 min 34 sec

Tomáš Halík on the complexity of faith

"Faith requires the courage to live with the mystery."



The question as God is connected with some deeper problems: what is the sense, what is the meaning of life? What is the meaning of the world?

I think there are no simple answers. Faith is not here just to give us the simple answers. Actually, there are some questions that are so good, that it's better not to destroy them by simple answers.



People are looking for some simple answers for difficult questions, from fundamentalism and so on; but there are no right, authentic, simple answers to the difficult questions. I think sometimes we must withstand the open questions. The faith is the courage to enter the cloud of the mystery and to live with the mystery, to live with the paradoxes in life.

I think now is the time for the faith of the mature, adult people.

5. Positive as well as negative theology

Criteria for Post-Critical Belief

5. Positive as well as negative theology

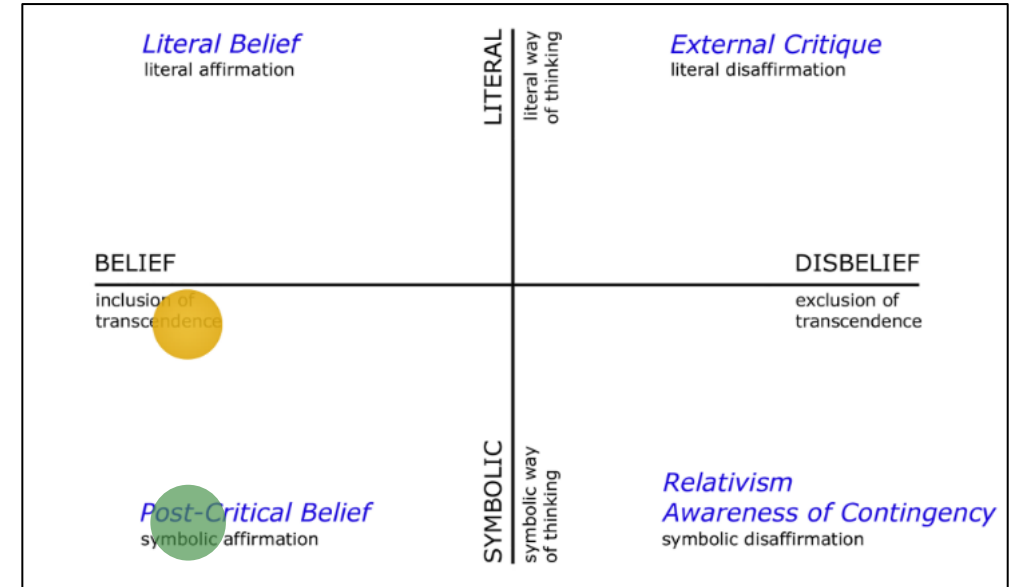
Original sin.

The eschatological reserve.

Epistemological modesty (Fowler).

There is no final answer, no closed system, no certainty.

Having no answer, and the position of *not-knowing*, remains a possibility that should be regarded with esteem.



Deus semper maior.

Criteria for Post-Critical Belief

Overview



1. Strong symbolism
2. Focus on the content of faith (initiation)
3. Requiring a strong faith commitment
4. Taking on the complexity of faith and life (hermeneutics)
5. Positive as well as negative theology

PCB Scale profile

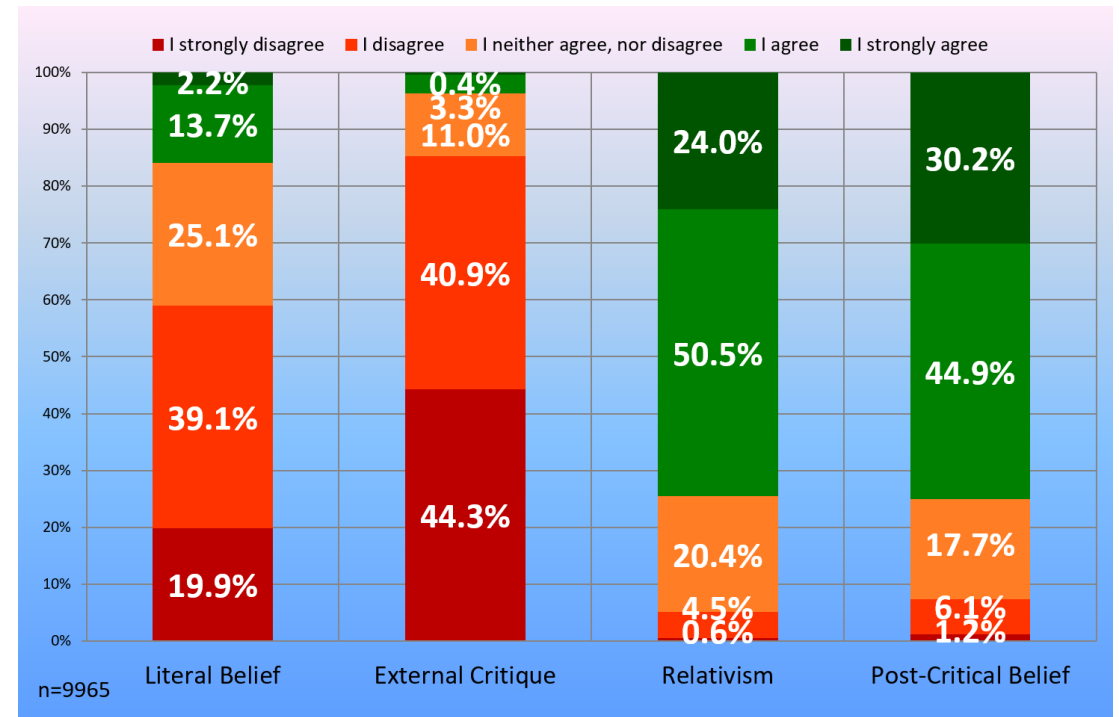
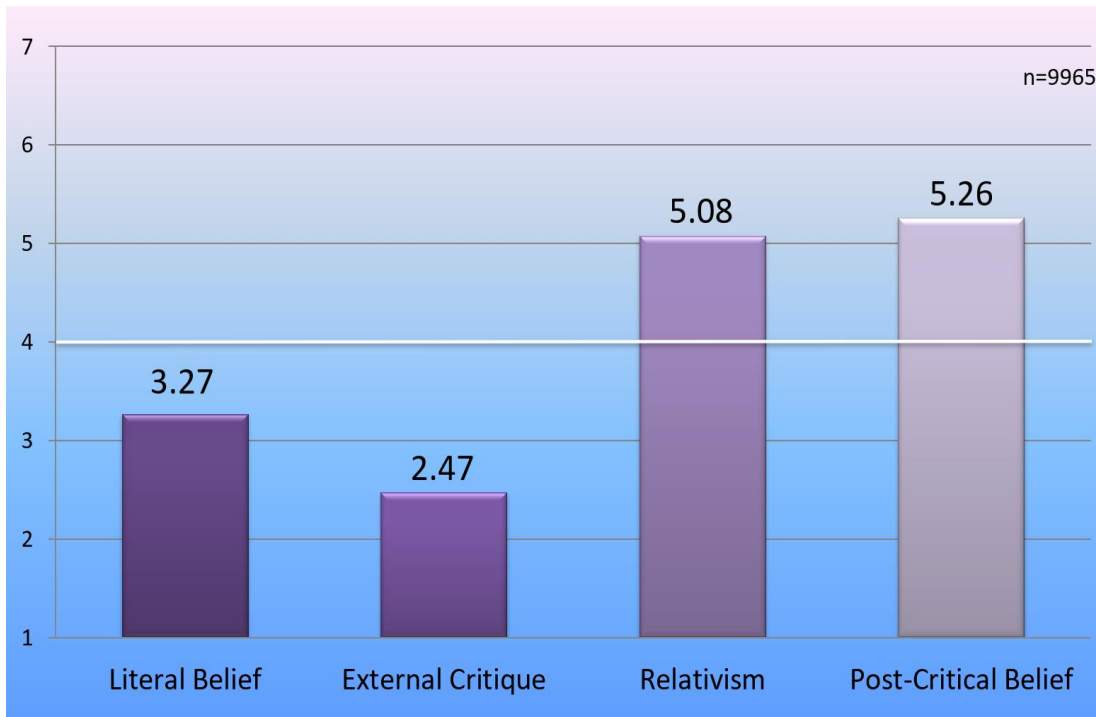
Composite profile of adults and students in Catholic schools

Victoria Scale results

Mean scores and percentages, Melbourne Archdiocese, 2019-2022



School staff PRIM + SEC

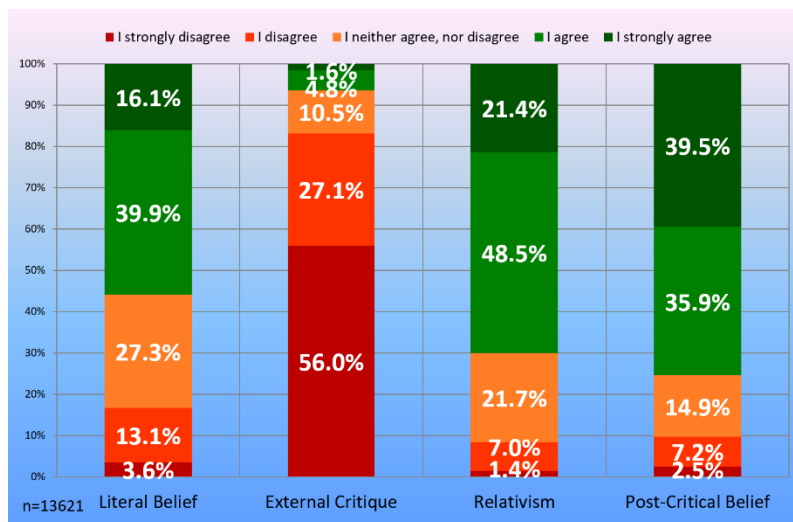
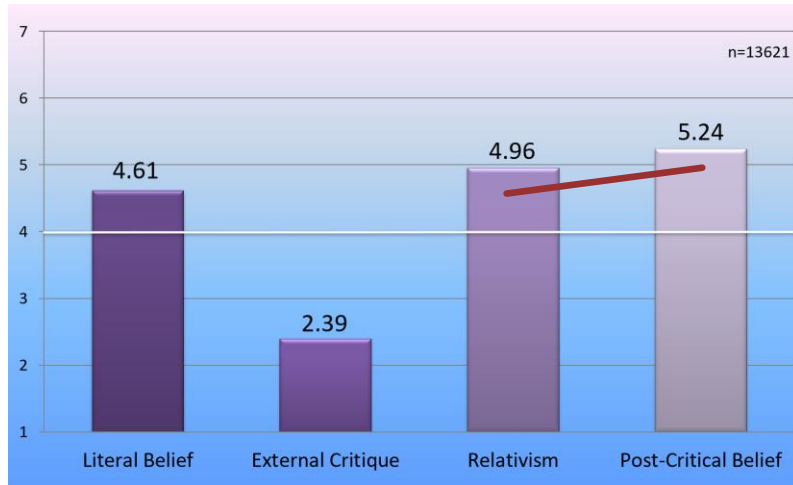


Post-Critical Belief Scale results

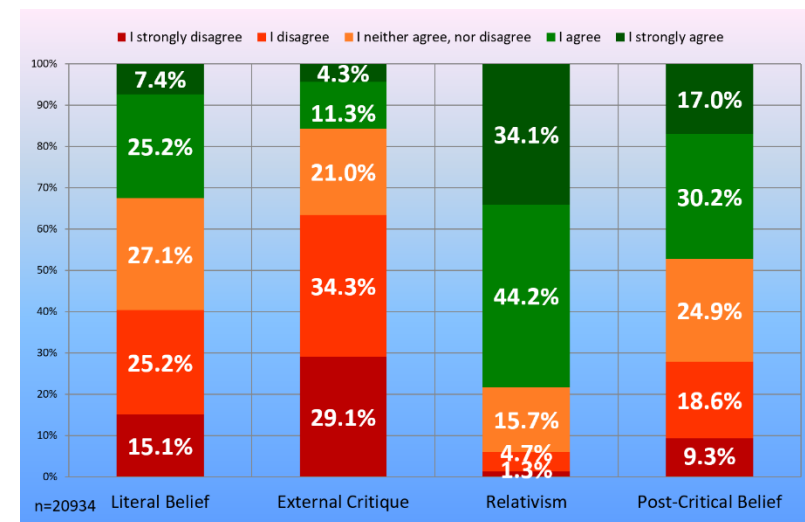
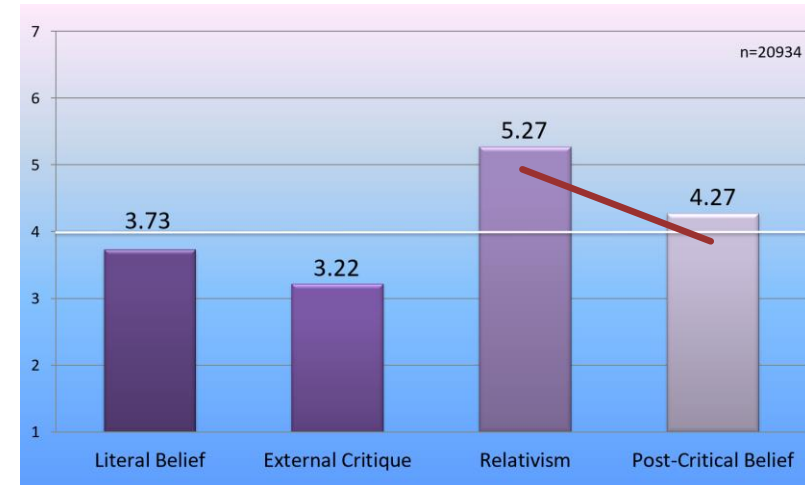
Mean scores and percentages, Melbourne Archdiocese, 2019-2022



Students PRIM



Students SEC

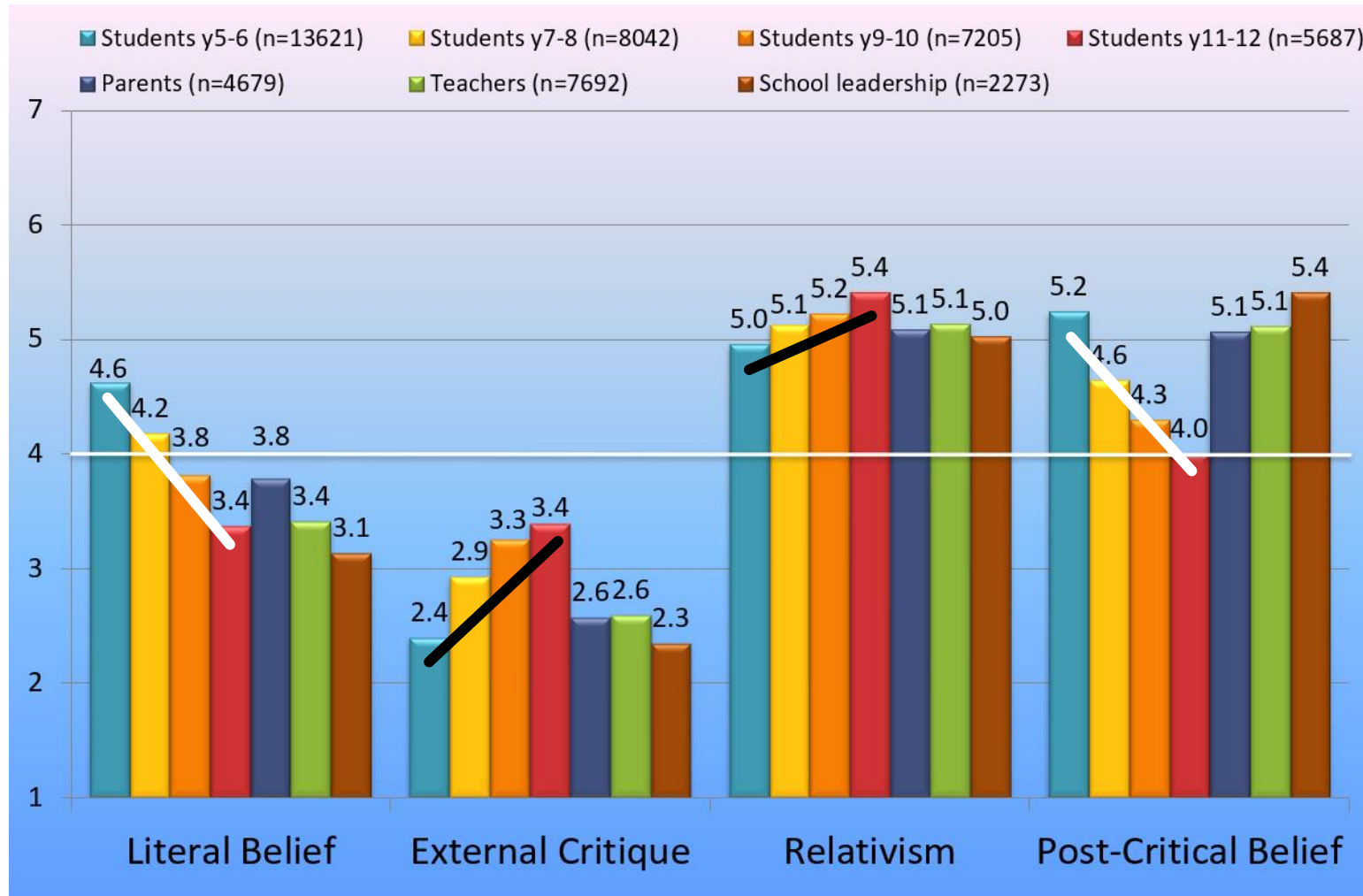


Post-Critical Belief Scale results

Differentiated mean scores, Melbourne Archdiocese, 2019-2022



All respondent groups compared

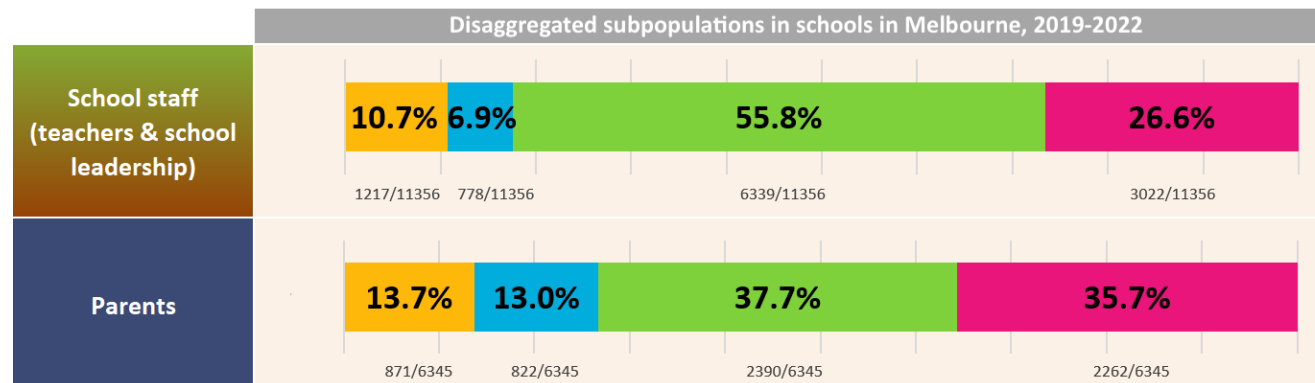
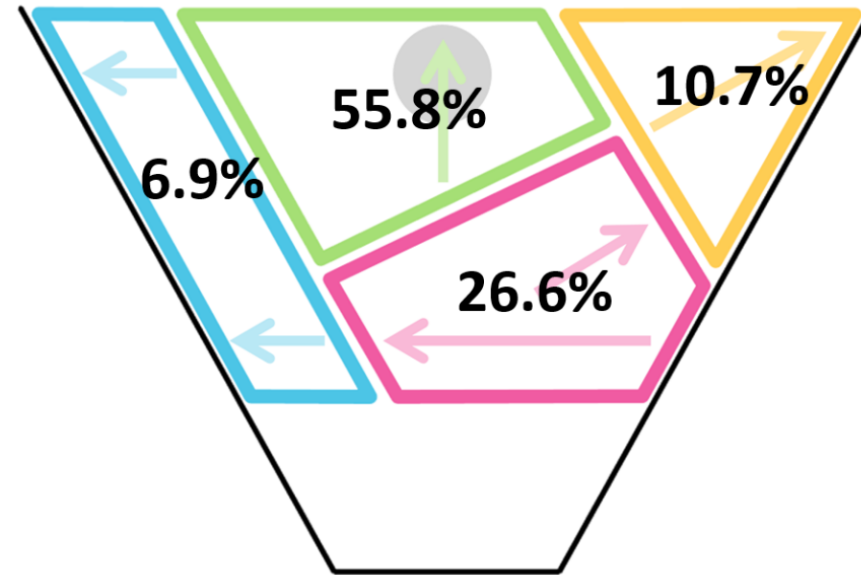
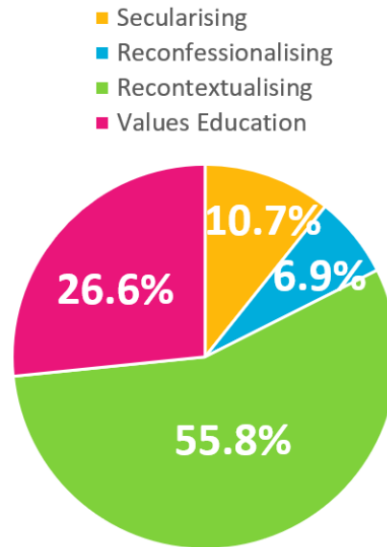


Subpopulations among school staff

Melbourne Archdiocese, 2019-2022

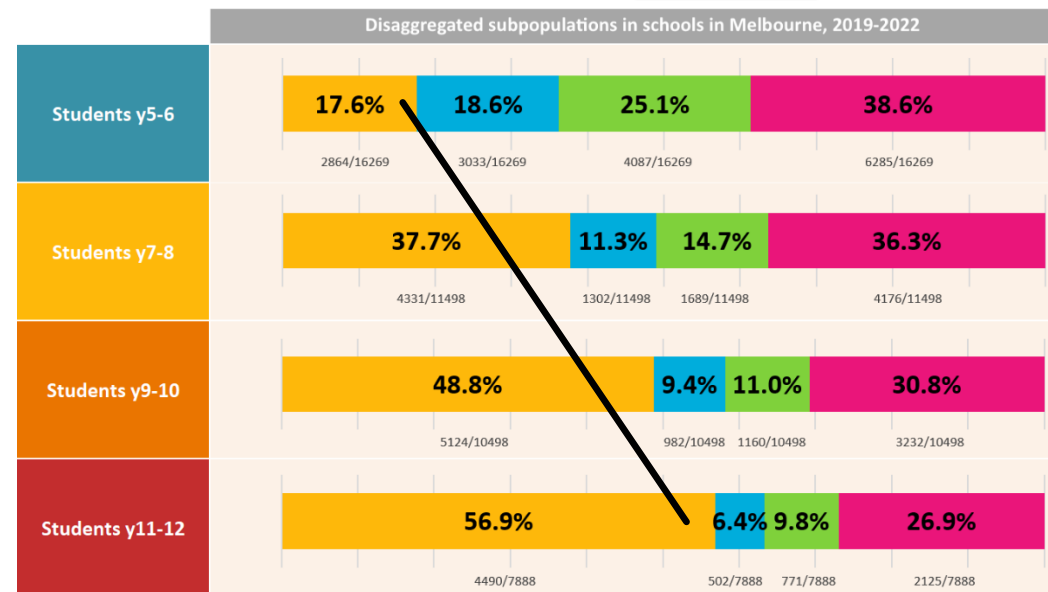
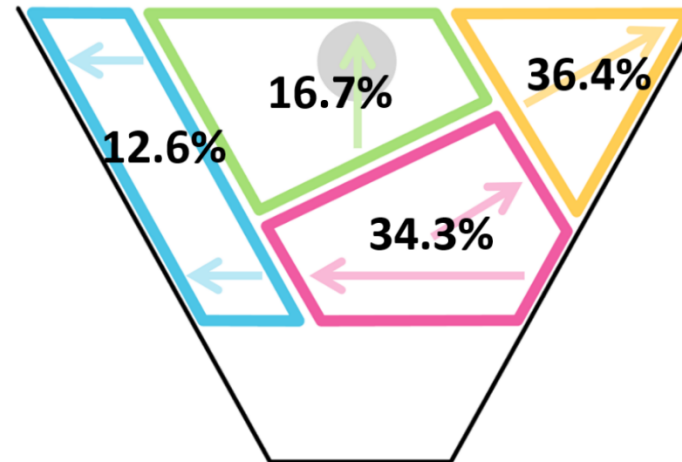
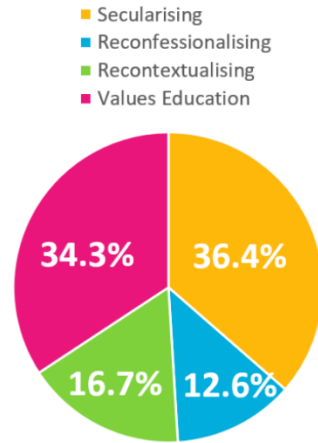


School staff PRIM & SEC



Subpopulations among students

Melbourne Archdiocese, 2019-2022

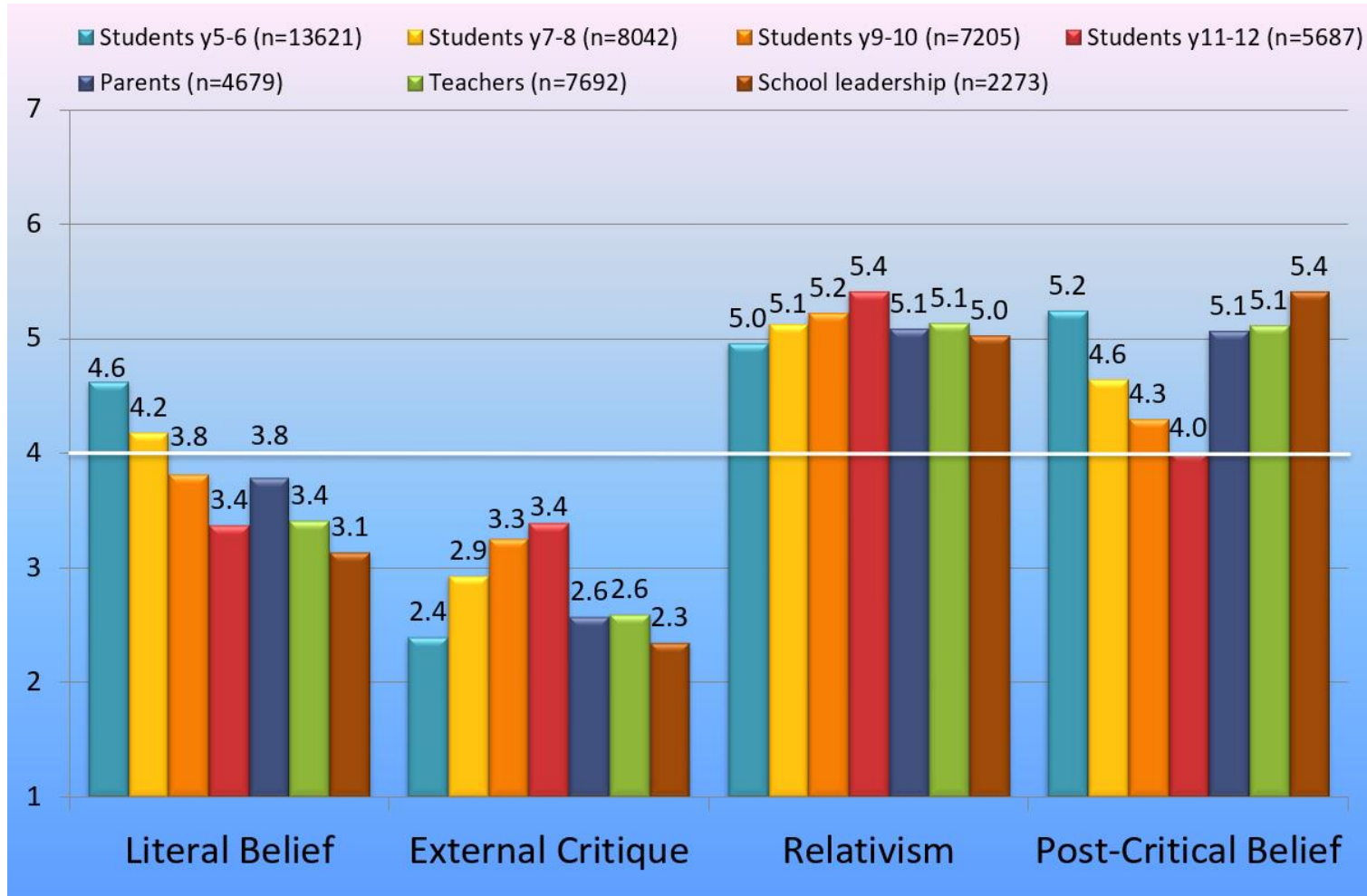


Summary of the challenge

Or how Catholic school identity is in trouble... (and what would be the way out)

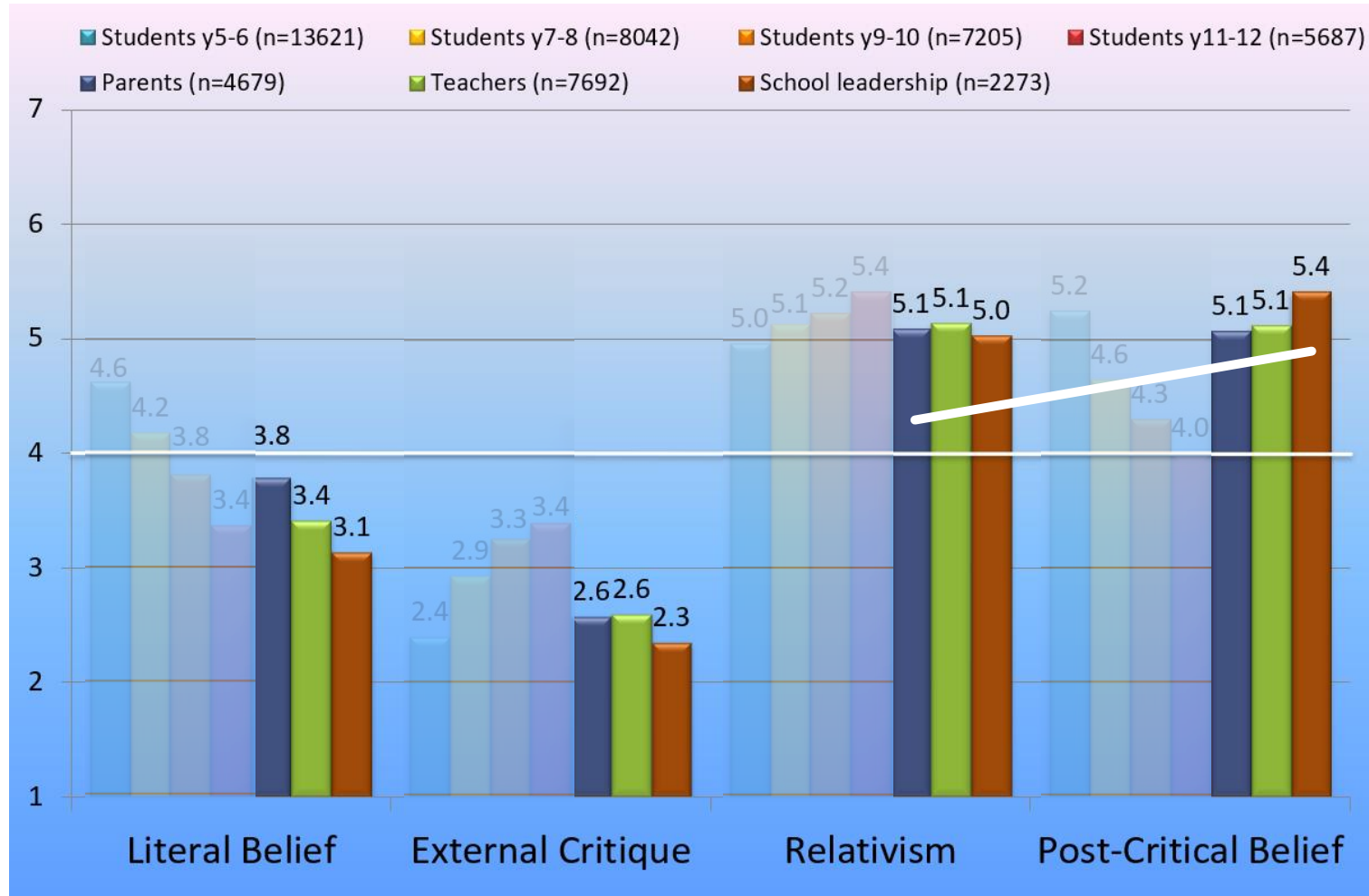
Results of the *Post-Critical Belief Scale*

All respondent groups in the Melbourne Archdiocese, 2019-2022



Results of the *Post-Critical Belief Scale*

All respondent groups in the Melbourne Archdiocese, 2019-2022



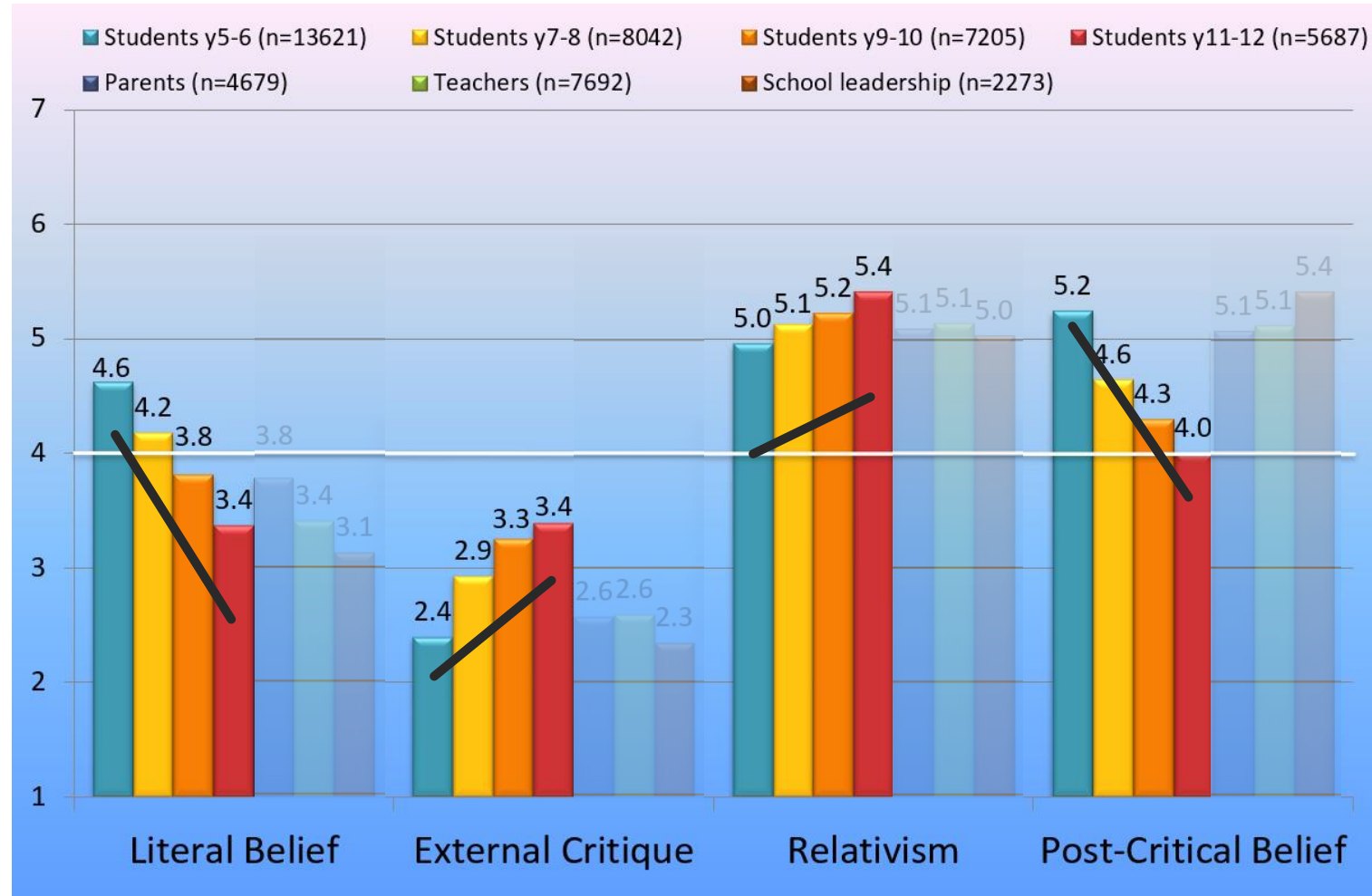
Adult
groups

Results of the *Post-Critical Belief Scale*

All respondent groups in the Melbourne Archdiocese, 2019-2022



Student
groups



The challenge presented by the *PCB Scale*

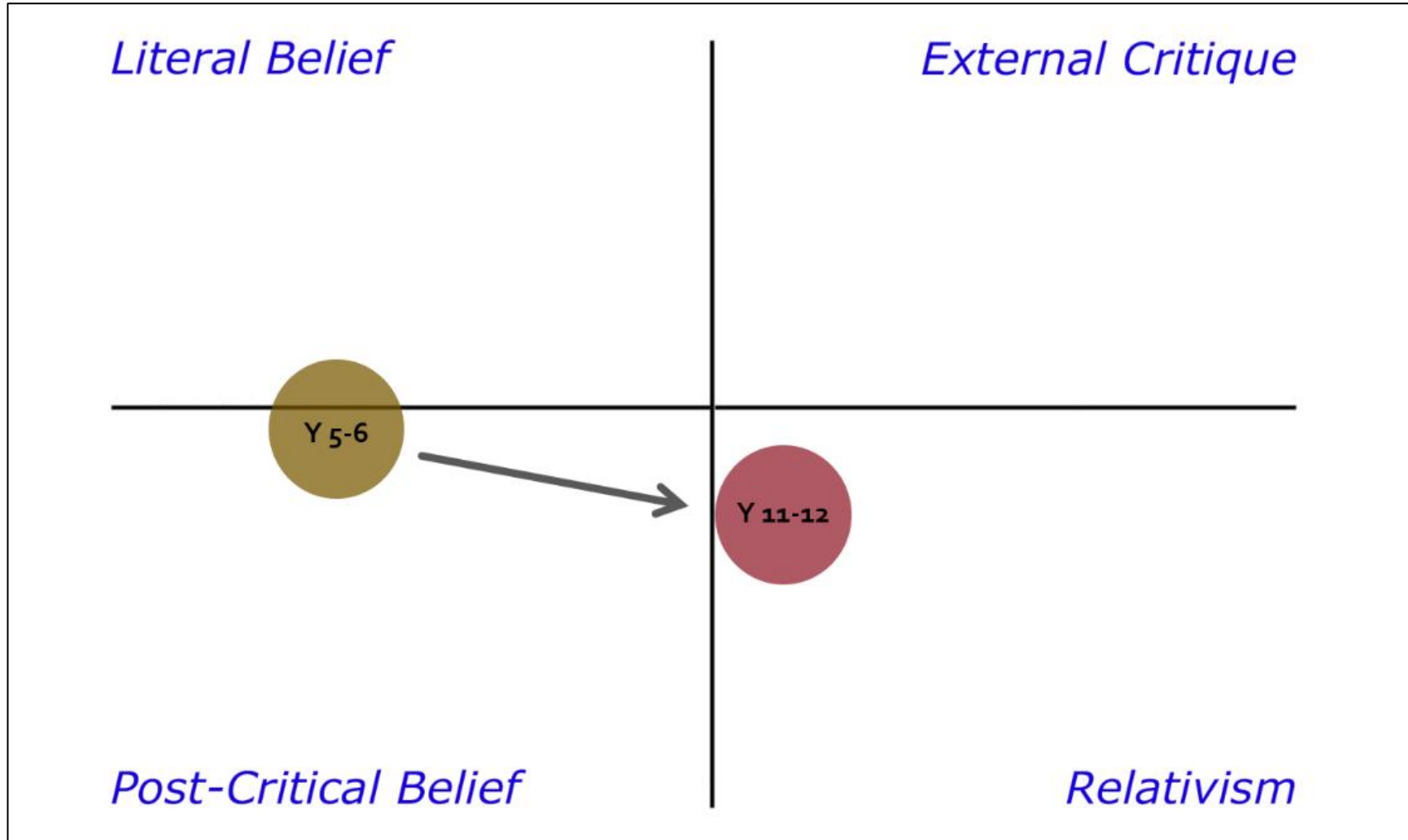
Strong disaffiliation from Church and Catholic faith

The story as revealed by the student data:

- Early Catholic education induces high levels of *Literal Belief* in children.
- This *Literal Belief* does NOT transform into *Post-Critical Belief* as the students grow older.
- Instead, Catholic schools are confronted with increasing *Relativism* and *External Critique*, the two unbelieving cognitive styles.
- A majority of the students adopt the general cultural pattern of *relativism* and *pluralism* present in their social environment, including a critical, dismissive undertone towards religion.

From *Post-Critical* and *Literal Belief* to *Relativism*

Time to wake up



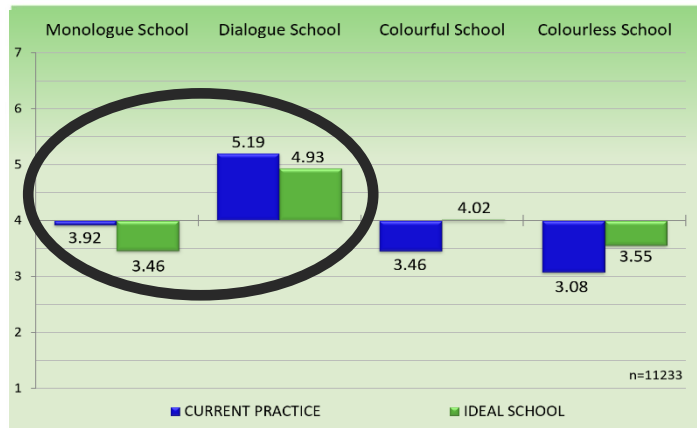
Results of the *Victoria Scale*

Primary school students and staff in the Melbourne Archdiocese, 2019-2022

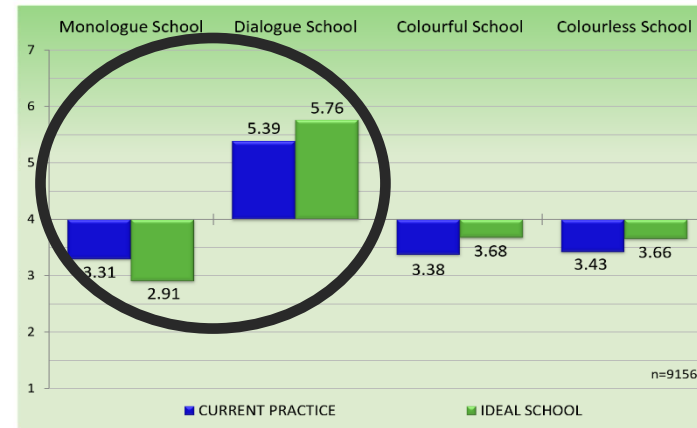


'Kerygmatic
Dialogue
Schools'

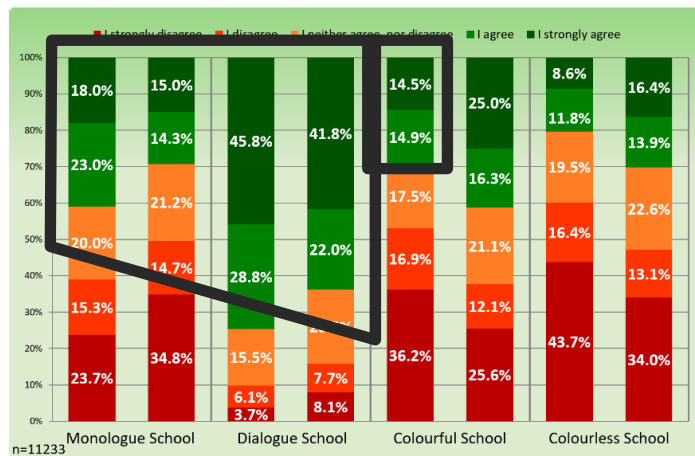
Students PRIM



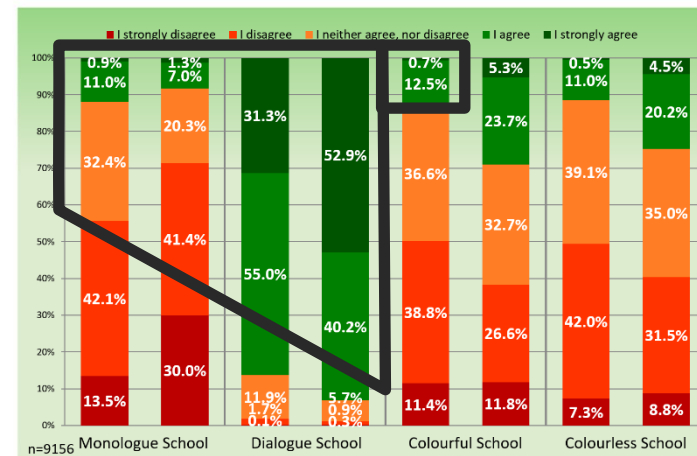
School staff PRIM



1



2

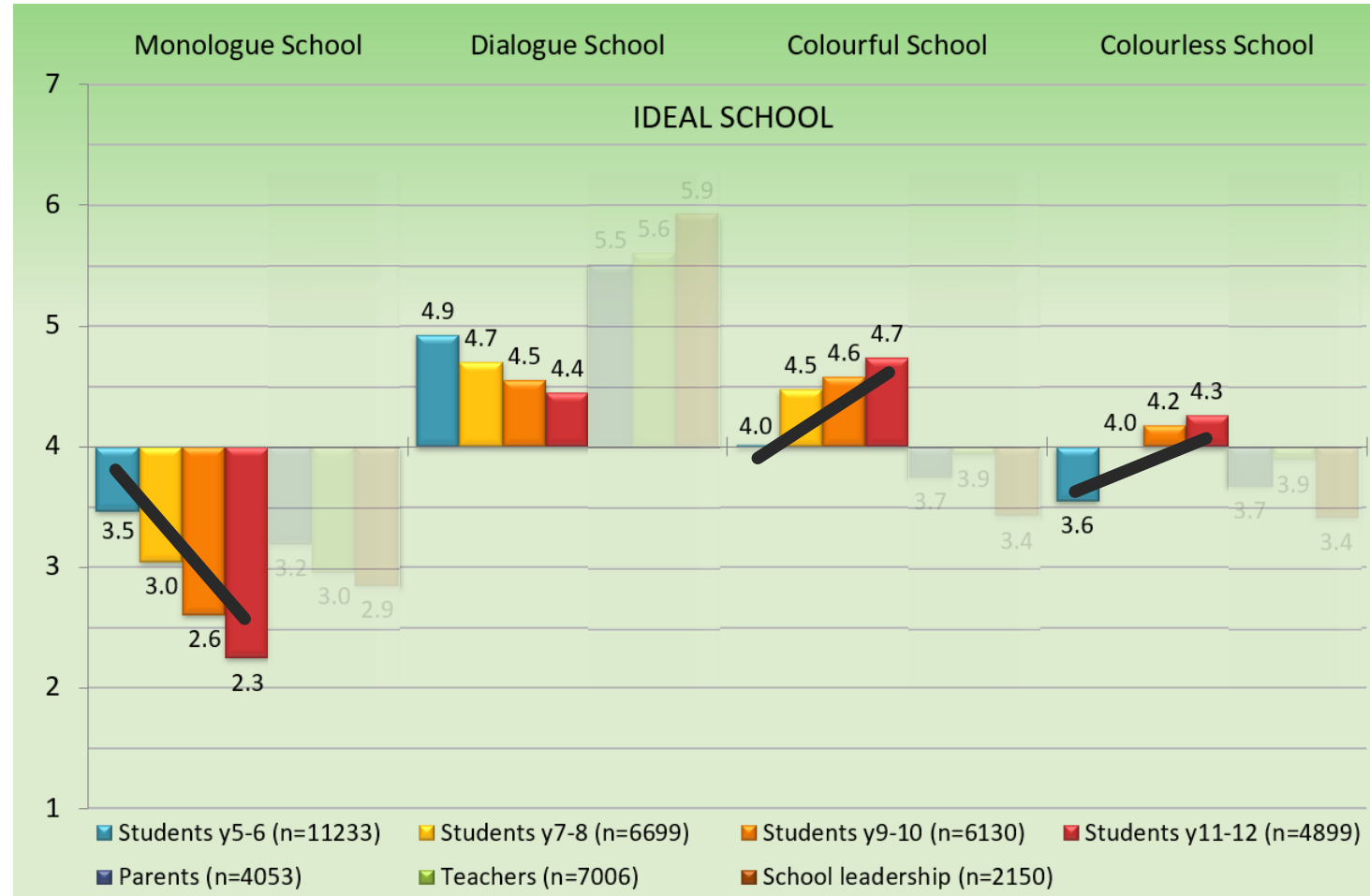


Results of the *Victoria Scale*

All respondent groups in the Melbourne Archdiocese, 2019-2022



Student
groups



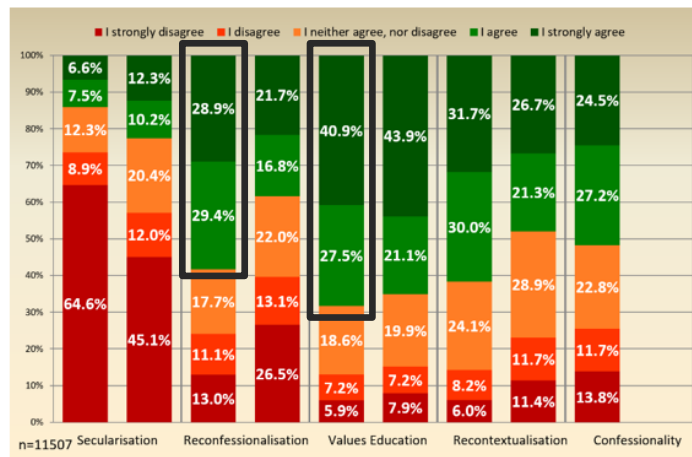
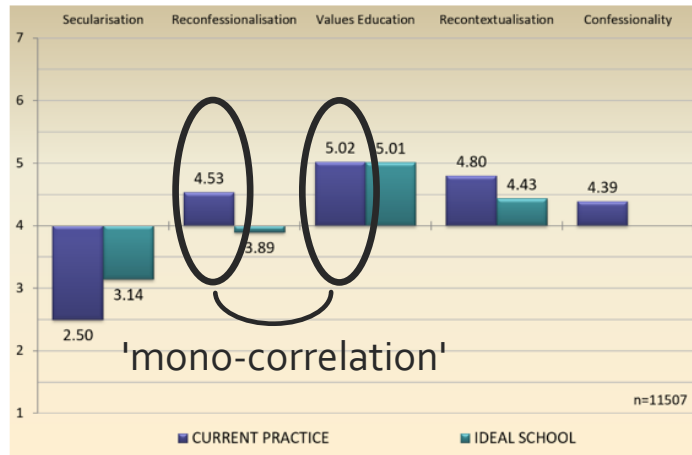
Results of the *Melbourne Scale*

Primary and secondary school students in the Melbourne Archdiocese, 2019-2022

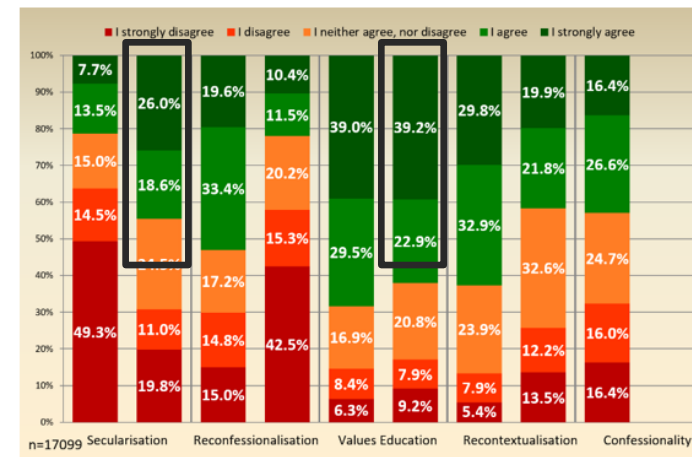
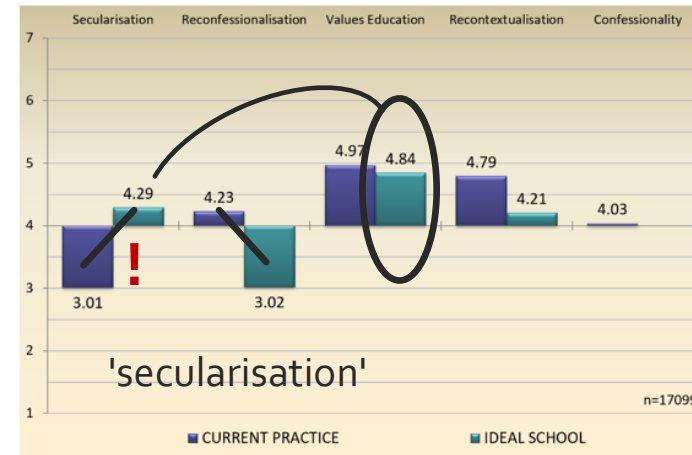


Students
y5-6

Students PRIM



Students SEC



Students
y7-12

The challenge presented by empirical data

The story as revealed by the student data



- *Christian Values Education* turns out to be counterproductive: the intention and the actual effect of this strategy are opposite.
- The monological use of 'dialogue' is *interrupted* by other voices. The real world and real life experiences present complex challenges — that are not 'solvable' by a one-to-one correlation.
 - The result is not just the decline of *Literal Belief* but also of *Post-Critical Belief* and religious awareness in general.
 - Not just the *Monologue School*, but also *Dialogue School* is surpassed and gradually replaced by the *Colourful School*.
 - Not just *Reconfessionalisation* but also *Recontextualisation* is surpassed and gradually replaced by the desire to *Secularise*.
- Most secondary college students have come to reject all forms of religiosity, literal and symbolic alike, as they approach graduation.

Thirteen proposals

From an ECSI perspective

1. Do not underestimate nor suppress the religious capacities of children

- Never treat children in terms of cognitive, moral, or religious *deficiency*.
- Childhood is an integral part of the future identity of a person.
- Younger students possess extraordinary qualities and possibilities. They question, wonder, explore and interpret in a natural way.
- RE that suppresses the capacities of children risks becoming ineffective and counterproductive.



2. Contact and exchange between leaders and staff of primary and secondary schools



- Primary and secondary schools should be aware of each other's approach with regard to religious education, and coordinate their efforts to guide the faith journeys of the students.
- Common analysis & collaborative approach
- Knowing the faith journeys of the students and understanding the actual effect on the longer term of the religious pedagogy used at school could be a crucial learning experience for every school leader and teacher.



3. Reduce the impact of the transition from primary to secondary school

- Primary and secondary schools are distinct entities that operate in different ways. Transitioning from the one to the other is a profound experience, from a developmental and a religious perspective.
- Concerning faith formation, the gap between primary and secondary schools is disruptive for many students. A common approach could help bridge the gap.
- Create a common approach for children in years 5-6 (the final years of primary school) and teenagers in years 7-8 (the beginning of secondary school).

4. Socially imposed positive theology: recognise its signs and attitudes

- Students are well-accustomed to positive psychology and positive theology, and the strong bond between them.
- Students have been tutored and 'trained' to speak the religious language that is expected. They conform to the religious behaviour that is taught by example.
- But where is the line between initiation and *indoctrination*?
 - How does your school respect personal freedom of conscience and expression?
 - How does your school tolerate and invite creative thinking and critical questions?
 - How open is your school to a diversity of responses and expressions?



5. Protect the religious and spiritual integrity of every single student

- The importance of protecting the integrity of the human person, and of the vulnerable child in particular..
- ..is why schools put a lot of effort into protecting the physical and psychological safety and well-being of all the students.
- But what about the spiritual integrity of children? Why is the concern for the specific sensitivities, vulnerabilities and requirements of individual students often not extended to the realm of religion, spirituality, ethics and life views?
- Become aware of the diversity in this area, and consciously differentiate between the students in religious education.



6. Avoid teaching students religious insights that you do not believe yourselves

- Never teach something that you do not understand, that you disapprove of, or that lacks plausibility for you as an educator.
- Teachers whose personal *PCB Belief* is poorly developed or who are not themselves religious, opt for the 'safest' option of introducing *Literal Belief* in students. They simply apply the 'mechanics' of mono-correlational *Christian Values Education*.
- Often, *Literal Belief* is installed in young people that is not only misguided and unnecessary, but also counterproductive in the longer term.



7. 'Do theology' with children, and among school staff

- The voices of children are authentic sources for theology. How children believe in God is as authentic as how adults believe.
- Make space in RE for children to ask their direct and 'naive' questions, to make 'funny' arguments, to pray in overly 'pious' ways and to come up with 'strange' insights.
- In allowing children to ask theological questions, we allow them to prepare themselves to become resilient believers in the future.



8. Compliant as well as resistant relationships with the faith tradition and the Divine

- Traditionally, Christians are accustomed to identifying their religious belief with *compliance* and *obedience*.
- In the Jewish faith tradition, we find another relationship with the Divine that has too often been forgotten in Christianity: the Talmudic custom of *wrestling with the Divine*, dialoguing, debating and even contending with God.
- Cf. Biblical figures such as: Abraham, Job, and Jesus. Jacob who wrestles with the angel.
- Wrestling with and resisting the Catholic tradition is a theologically legitimate form of building relationship with God — with the God who reveals Godself through that tradition, with the God who *wrestles back*.

Young people today inadequately learn how to be 'unhappy'. Beware of too much positive psychology at school



“ *We make princes and princesses of all of them.*

We pamper them to the extreme and we confuse this with love. We cry out to them: 'You are capable of everything!'; 'You can do everything you like!'; 'As long as it is fun!'; 'As long as you become happy!'; 'You can do all the studies in the world!'; 'You can have all possible jobs!'.

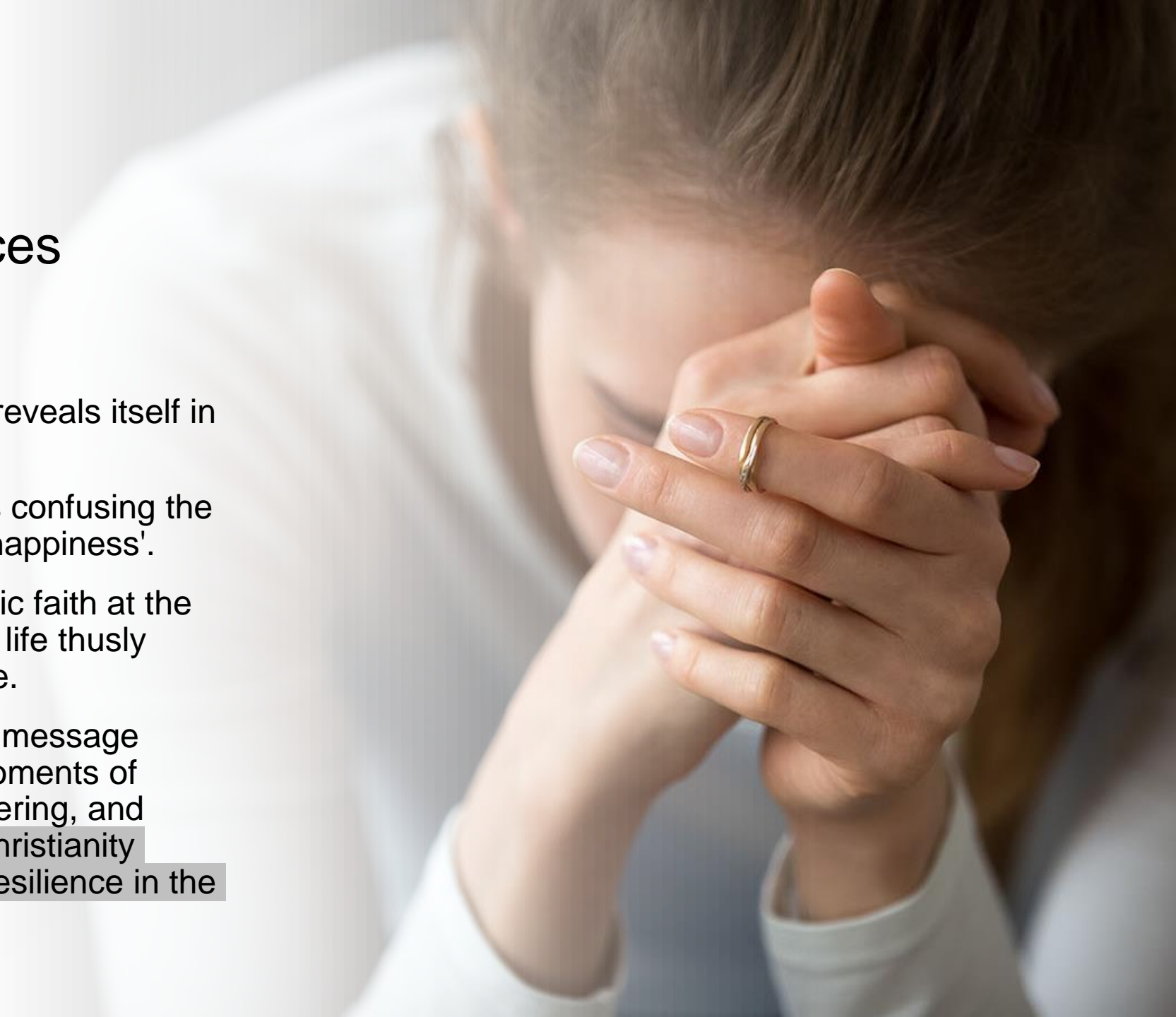
But, of course, this is completely untrue. This freedom is an illusion.



<https://www.knack.be/nieuws/gezondheid/dirk-de-wachter-het-risico-op-een-heruitgave-van-de-ratrace-is-reeel/article-longread-1607793.html>
(28-05-2021)

9. Consider positive and vulnerable life experiences in the light of faith


- The core of human life sometimes reveals itself in the most difficult moments.
- Too much positive psychology risks confusing the highest good of Christian life with 'happiness'.
- Price to pay: *rejection* of the Catholic faith at the inevitable moment when (religious) life thusly understood cannot keep its promise.
- Tragic irony, because the Christian message becomes particularly relevant at moments of unhappiness, brokenness, sin, suffering, and death. Especially in tough times, Christianity shows its relevance and provides resilience in the life stories of the human person.



10. Do not avoid the difficult aspects of religion, especially in the Bible

- It is a real challenge to extract Bible didactics from positive theology.
- When teaching young children and teens, the Bible is often presented as containing one cohesive overarching and moralistic message – which is not the case.
- The Bible is a complicated collection of texts that necessitates a didactics that allows for dialogue *with* the text, the original context, and the reader's context.
- We need a Bible didactics that fosters a resistant attitude, and a willingness to wrestle with the text.
- Revelation happens not so much in the text itself, but between the text and the reader(s).



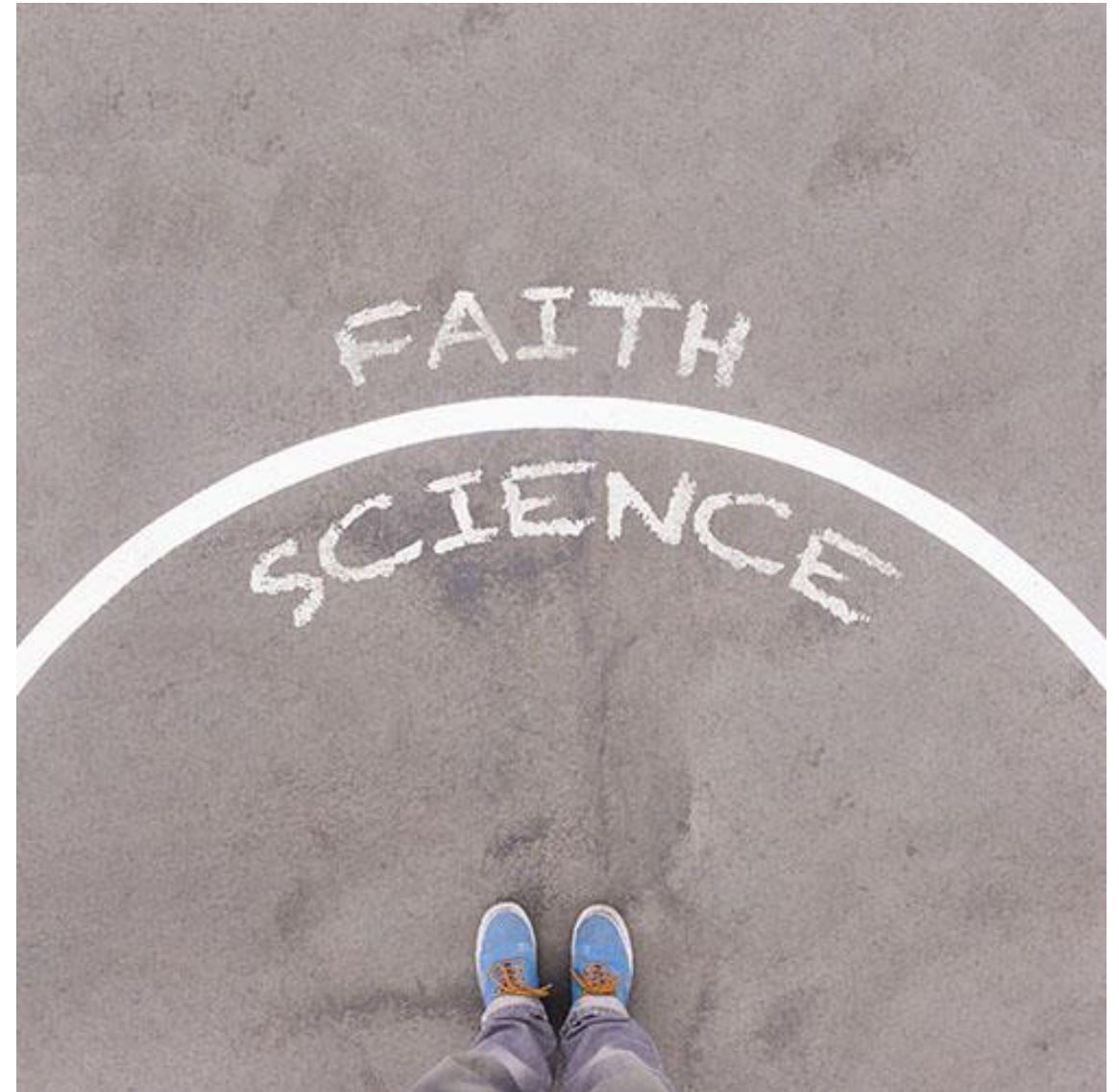


11. Foster an attitude of inquiry and dialogue regarding faith matters

- ECSI encourages *inquiry-based learning* in Religious Education.
- In this way, learning is achieved through questioning, investigation, and thinking critically.
- Students become active learners of the Catholic faith tradition and can take ownership of the content, making the meaning of religion relevant to their personal lives.
- When presented like this, RE becomes an invitation to discover and explore the spiritual diversity and depths within the Catholic tradition.

12. Create a dialogue between science and faith

- Mono-correlational pedagogy risks instilling *Literal Belief* in young students, which can reinforce a binary cognitive approach.
- Oftentimes, when religious belief is abandoned, *Literal Disbelief* takes hold.
- One all-encompassing worldview is replaced by another: science holding all the answers to life's questions.
- Encouraging a critical dialogue between science and faith is paramount.
- Science does not simply confirm Christianity (*Literal Belief*) nor is it just a rejection of religion (*External Critique*), but instead is a partner in the search for understanding humanity and the world in which we live.





St Thomas Aquinas

(1225-1274)

"Ultimately, we know God
as *unknown*."



13. Take it seriously when students reject God: look for God in the negation

- "I no longer believe in God", is a genuine theological statement, and should be taken seriously.
- Is it a critique of a too-positive theology? Clarifying who God is *not* can be as useful as trying to understand how God is being positively revealed.
- Teenagers often reject a God who lacks cultural and personal plausibility. They might have a point.
- Could this rejection perhaps create the necessary space to discover God anew in a different way? Can we accompany our students on this *via negativa*? Can we help them to discover God through the negation?

What is a true, authentic Catholic school?

From an ECSI perspective

What is a true, authentic Catholic school?

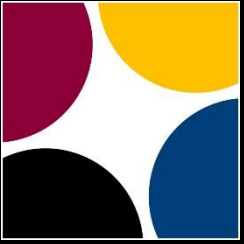
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What is a Catholic school?

Definition



- (1) A Catholic school is an inclusive learning community, an '**open space**' of meanings and relationships,
- (2) where **mediations** such as stories, symbols, rituals, values, rules for living etc. are offered and animated in a conscious and caring manner.
- (3) All members of the **community** are invited and are given the opportunity to stand through these mediations in a living **relationship** with a **transcendent reality ('God')**, uniquely **incarnated in Christ**,
- (4) a relationship that is **transformative** for both the educational context of the school and the **total personal development** of every community member.



KU LEUVEN

Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI)

The *Post-Critical Belief Scale*. Cognitive belief styles
as building blocks for Catholic school identity

Prof. Dr. Didier Pollefeyt – Drs. Jan Bouwens
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