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FAMILY EDUCATION AND ADOLESCENTS' APPROACHES TO RELIGION

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Abstract

A written inquiry in Flanders by 1224 pupils with an average age of 17 years shows that a positive attitude towards faith and/or a symbolic, interpretive capacity to think about questions of faith is related to significant parental involvement in a child's faith and a generally supportive and engaged style of education. This research shows that young people most often experience support from the mother concerning general education and religious education. Fathers who are more involved in faith seem generally to be experienced by their children as more responsive and more engaged in religious education than fathers who are less involved in faith. A divorce of the parents seems to be most important in regards to the child's perception of the education given by the father. This research shows that the experience of parental divorce has no direct influence on adolescents' attitudes towards faith.

Key Words: Religious education, family education, adolescents.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education in families is a great concern for many people. Delinquent behaviour of young people and other worrisome phenomena are often attributed to a failing family education. Parents can be too permissive and many literature suggest that the father is often too frequently absent in families (Anatella, 1998). More and more initiatives are taken in order to support parents in their educational task, from parental courses to various books and magazines about 'good education'. Often, these pedagogical actions are legitimised on the basis of parents' educational insecurity.

These rather pessimistic assumptions about family education are not shared by everyone. Some pedagogues state that the parental quest for more information shows that parents are more involved in the education of their children (Zwiep, Ligtermoet & De Ruyter, 1996, p. 81). Although so called new fathers, highly engaged in family work and child care, are rather scarce, many fathers and mothers in our western society are very positive about the bigger investments of fathers in the education of their

children (Laga, 1999, p. 90). It does sometimes happen that things go wrong in the family education, but in general we can speak about a 'happy and satisfied majority' and only a small minority of families, parents and children with real educational problems, as it becomes clear in research of the Flemish children's rights commissioner (Ackaert, Stevens, Van den Bergh, 2003).

In the literature about family education we remark about a tension between defeatism and hopeful trust. In Flanders, the more optimistic approach seems to be persuasive – which does not mean that problems do not exist. This optimism, however, is often notably absent concerning one aspect of family education, namely, in families' religious education. In general pedagogical research this theme of family religious education is quasi absent, but it is a considerable concern for people working in the church or the field of religious education. Many teachers of religious education and catechists believe that in western society a lot of children do not get a proper religious education at home. Parents do not know themselves how to believe and how to educate their children in faith or they may think it would be better to give the child a free choice regarding what he or she believes.

In this contribution we want to investigate how young people of about 17 years old consider the religious education they got at home. Further, we want to find out how the perception of that religious education correlates with their experiences of education in general. The underlying research question is whether the family situation and the general education by the father and/or mother play a role in the religious education (or vice versa). Is it possible to be positive towards the religious education of young people today on the basis of a hopeful perspective concerning general education? Or should religious education of young people be seen as something problematic in contemporary western society?

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS, HYPOTHESIS AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Three concrete research questions are central in this contribution. In the first place we explore whether the opinions of young people about Christian faith correlate with their experiences of education in general and concerning religion. In the second place, we look to see if there is a correlation between the family situation in which young people grow up, their experienced education and their position concerning faith and religion. Thirdly, we focus on the differences and similarities between the experiences of education by the father and by the mother.

American research shows that conservative Protestant parents (who often interpret the Bible literally) frequently educate their children in a more strict sense than others (Mahoney et al., 2001, p. 577). This can be explained by a general way of thought, characterised by fixed rules. We want to test if in Flemish families, which are usually Catholic, a correlation can be found between thinking about faith and religion and the experienced education. Besides the mentioned American study, we research the aspect 'faith' from the perspective of the young person him or herself. We wish to find out whether young people who think in a more literal way about faith also experience their parents as more strict. On the basis of the qualitative empirical research of the Dutch religious psychologist Vergouwen (2001), we suggest that children adopt their parents' structure of thinking more than the specific content. We suppose therefore that those children who experience their parents as strict will think more literally concerning faith, independent of their positive or negative attitude towards the content of a religion. The research of Niggli (1988, p. 335) shows that young people who are obliged to participate in religious practice also reject the religion in some cases. We suppose that a strict education in general, but surely also in the domain of religion, can lead to an adoption of the parents' faith, with a similar structure (literal thinking), as well as to a rejection of the faith of the parents, also on the basis of literal thinking, but then as reaction against the faith.

The supposition that literal thinking about faith and religion is promoted by a strict education, does not only follow from the structural similarities between 'strictness' in education and 'literal thinking about faith and religion' and from the transmission of the literal thinking about faith and religion from parents to children on the basis of imitation and model-learning. The supposition about the correlation between literal thinking and strict education is also based on the fact that a strict education does not leave much space for a critical-constructive questioning or other ways of dealing with faith and religion. Because literal thinking, expressed by thinking about faith and religion via a strict educational style, is based on a dual distinction 'for' or 'against' faith as it is transmitted and because it leaves little room for alternative approaches to the same reality, symbolic forms of thinking about faith and religion or a choice of nonbelief on the basis of a more interpretive, symbolic approach does not have much opportunity to grow.

We suppose that those who experience little commitment towards faith and who receive a lot of freedom in taking a position concerning faith and religion will be less eager to call themselves 'believers' than those

who experience more parental commitment and even a form of pressure in faith questions. This supposition is related to the idea that it will be most often unbelieving parents that choose to let the child freely choose his or her faith and religion because faith, for them, is not an essential part of life. When children who do not experience much commitment concerning faith, experience their (often unbelieving) parents as the model, they will often adopt the unbelief of their parents. For this supposition we find a basis in the theory about model-learning (Bandura, 1977), which states that children and young people learn from the example of socially significant persons with whom they have an affective relation (especially parents), and which they 'imitate' in a certain sense.

On the basis of the research of Myers (1995, p. 858) we expect to find a certain coherence between the family structure and the faith position of young people. In line with Myers' study, we expect that children of divorced parents will be less positive towards faith and religion than others. Divorce has many consequences for the parent-child relation. Because we also examine some educational variables, in addition to the family structure, we expect to find the character of the (religious) education primarily determining the differences in childrens' positions towards faith and religion when comparing married and divorced parental situations.

When comparing the relationship between the mother's and father's level of commitment to (religious) education we expect primarily high scores concerning maternal education. When seeking the correlation between the commitment to (religious) education on the one hand and the level of belief in young people and their fathers and mothers on the other hand, we expect the highest correlations for the mother's commitment to (religious) education. We suppose that education is still viewed as a 'female' occupation (Vandooorne, Decaluwe, Vandemeulebroecke, 2000, p. 65), just as an active commitment to faith and religious education is also seen this way (Goedseels, Decaluwe, Hutsebaut, 2000, p. 296).

3. METHOD

3.1. *Sample survey*

The data about education in families were gathered through questionnaires for young people. The parents were not questioned directly. The results mentioned in this article concern the perception of young people and do not say anything about the factual educational style of parents. From other research we know that the perceptions regarding education correlate between

youngsters and parents, but that young people are in general more critical than their parents, who are themselves more positive about their behaviour (Vandooorne, Decaluwe, Vandemeulebroecke, 2000, p. 63). In this sense, youngsters' perceptions on education give perhaps a more realistic picture of the factual education than the answers of parents.

The sample survey of this research counts 1224 pupils from the third degree of general and technical secondary education in Flanders and Brussels. Around 20% of the schools were public state schools, whereas 80 % were Catholic schools. 57% of the pupils in the survey were girls, 43% were boys. The average age is 16.91 years. In the period of September until November 2002 these pupils were asked by their teachers to fill in written questionnaires during their Roman Catholic religious education class. Therefore we had previously asked for the collaboration of the teachers and the headmasters of the schools. We sent approximately a total of 2000 questionnaires to 100 schools. From each class we selected the questionnaires that were fully filled in.

We remark that in Flanders around 83% of pupils attend courses in Roman Catholic education, which is taught in Catholic schools (as obligatory) and in public schools (where pupils have to choose a course of religious or moral education according to their own religion or world view) (Pollefeyt et al., 2004). 82.35% of the pupils in our sample said to be educated at home in a 'Catholic' or a 'Christian' way. 14.04% said to be educated without religion or with an atheistic or liberal-humanistic world view. A small minority have been educated as Muslim (1.56%), Protestant (0.25%) or with a combination of elements from different traditions (1.81%).

3.2. *Measuring instrument and scales*

The questionnaire that was given to the pupils contained four major parts. In addition to background variables, scales concerning family education, religious education and the possibility of interreligious learning within religious education were offered. In this contribution we limit ourselves to the results from the pupils of general and technical secondary education concerning family experiences. Here we will not explore the two other parts of the research, which concerned religious education and the results of the survey by religious education teachers and pupils from professional secondary education. Some data about the family experience (such as the scales 'conflict', 'cohesion', 'traditional' and 'non-traditional family-thinking') are also not discussed in this contribution. For a full overview of the

research results, we refer to the volume 'Godsdienstonderwijs uitgedaagd' ('Religious education challenged') (Pollefeyt et al., 2004).

The research questions mentioned above are reflected through different scales. We asked the respondents to give a score on a Likert 6-point scale, whereby 1 means 'I totally disagree' and 6 means 'I totally agree'. To discover the opinions about faith and (Catholic) religion, we used the post-critical belief scale of Hutsebaut, existing in four subscales, namely, 'second naïveté', 'relativism', 'external critique' and 'orthodoxy' (Hutsebaut, 2000; Duriez, Fontaine & Hutsebaut, 2000). Each of these (sub)scales contains eight items. The scales 'orthodoxy' and 'second naïveté' refer to a more believing attitude (a positive attitude towards transcendence), whereas the two other scales tend to say more about unbelief (a negative attitude towards transcendence). The scales 'orthodoxy' and 'external critique' refer to a literal way of thinking, whereas the two other scales refer to a more symbolic and nuanced way of thinking. The orthodoxy scale refers to a commitment to faith and a literal perception of religious beliefs and dogmas. This scale contains, among other items: "Religion is the one thing that gives meaning to life in all its aspects" and "Only the major religious traditions guarantee admittance to God". Second naïveté refers to a faith attitude whereby faith elements are approached in a positive, open and engaged, but also critical way. A second naïveté thinker does not reject faith, although his first naïve faith has been defiled. The second naïveté scale contains, among other things, the following items: "Despite the fact that the Bible was written in a completely different historical context from ours, it retains a basic message" and "Despite the high number of injustices Christianity has caused people, the original message of Christ is still valuable to me." The scale relativism refers to an attitude whereby the (Christian) religion is seen as one opinion amidst others, and where the respondent does not show a lot of commitment. This becomes clear in following relativism items: "The manner in which humans experience their relation to God will always be coloured by the times they live in" and "Secular and religions conceptions of the world give valuable answers to important questions of life". External critique refers to an attitude whereby the meaningfulness of religion and faith is questioned. Some items on this scale are: "A scientific understanding of human life and the world has made a religious understanding superfluous" and "In the end, faith is nothing more than a safety net for human fears". In the appendix of this article a full overview of the different items of each scale is included.

Concerning education in families we used the scales 'responsivity' (8 items), 'autonomy' (6 items), 'strictness' (5 items) and 'supervision'

(6 items), as used in the research 'Education in the Netherlands' (Van Ammers, 1998). These scales were offered to the pupils concerning both the mother and the father. Traditionally, educational styles are perceived around two axes, namely, 'support' and 'control'. There is however a lot of discussion about the unidimensionality of 'control'. We opted therefore to operationalise the dimension 'control' into two scales, 'strictness' and 'autonomy', that are not automatically two ends of the same continuum, but are two different styles of disciplining (Ten Haaf & Janssens, 1994, p. 319). The scale 'strictness' refers to a very strict education, with clear rules and stress on the hierarchy. This scale contains, among others, the following items: "My mother wants me to do what she says, even if I do not agree with her arguments" and "My mother gets angry when I say that I do not agree with her when she is in the company of her friends". Autonomy refers to a high level of independence given to a young person. The following two items are part of this scale: "My mother keeps pushing me to investigate things independently" and "My mother gives me the freedom to find a solution for my problems on my own". 'Support' was measured on the basis of the unidimensional factor 'responsivity'. Responsivity is answering the questions and needs of the child or young person and giving him or her warmth and affection. The two most weighty items within the scale 'responsivity' are: "If I am worrying about something or if I am sad, my mother understands what is going on" and "I can count on my mother to help me out, if I have some kind of problem".

Besides 'support' and 'control' (autonomy and strictness) scholars often distinguish a third factor, 'supervision', that contains both aspects of 'support' as of 'control' but is actually something different than either. 'Supervision' can also be called 'monitoring' or 'following up'. This scale measures the degree to which the respondent thinks his or her parents know about and are interested in and committed to the occupation of the young person (Vandoomme, Decaluwe, Vandemeulebroecke, 2000, p. 69). Some items in this scale are: "How much does your mother know about where you are after school?" and "How much does your mother know about what you do in your spare time?" In the appendix we give a full overview of the items in these scales and the scores on the factor analysis.

Further, we asked the respondents to fill in a score on two self-constructed scales concerning religious education, namely, 'religious commitment' (2 items) and 'religious autonomy' (4 items), each time concerning both the father and the mother. 'Religious autonomy' measures the degree to which the respondent experiences freedom in his or her attitude towards religion. Here are two items as examples: "My mother supports me in my

own attitude towards (un)belief, even if this is against her own attitude" and "My mother lets me take decisions on my own concerning faith and religion". 'Religious commitment' measures the degree to which the respondent finds support from the father or the mother for his or her own questions concerning religion and the degree to which he or she considers the parent to be committed to the child's way of dealing with faith and religion. This scale contains two items, namely: "When I have a question/doubt concerning faith I can ask my mother for support" and "My mother knows very well the way in which I am dealing with faith and religion". In table five the mean scores, the standard deviation and the internal consistency of these scales is shown. In the appendix we give an overview of all the items belonging to these scales, as well as the scores on the factor analysis.

In addition to the three groups of scales (post critical belief scales, educational scales and scales concerning religious education) we also asked many other questions to the pupils concerning their own faith, their family situations and religious education. We asked, among other things, about their own religious practice, the frequency of praying, the relevance given to world views and if they believed in or were in doubt of their own faith. We also asked the question whether the parents were married, divorced or living together without being married. Other questions we posed concerned religious socialisation, as for instance the questions whether the pupils were baptised or confirmed, which kind of religious education they had received (Christian, Catholic, Muslim, etc.), the amount of religious education at home, the experience of various forms of family religious education, the faith and the religious practice of the parents and the degree of religious communication with the parents.

4. RESULTS

We give first some general scores on the different scales. We report for the three groups of scales (post-critical beliefs scales, educational scales and scales concerning religious education) the mean score, the standard deviation and the chronbach alpha and then the correlation between the scales within one group. For the educational scales we report the results concerning the mother and the father. In a second step we give the data concerning the research questions, namely, by reporting the correlations between scales from different groups.

4.1. Mean scores, standard deviation, cronbach α and correlations between subscales within one group

The mean score on the post-critical belief scales, the standard deviation and the internal consistency (chronbach alpha) is reported below in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean scores, standard deviation and chronbach α for the post critical belief scales

	Second naïveté	Relativism	External critique	Orthodoxy
Mean	3.40	3.61	3.45	2.12
SD	0.93	0.78	0.91	0.86
Chronbach α	0.77	0.65	0.76	0.79

The pupils questioned on average score highest on the scale of 'relativism'. The correlations between the different subscales of the post critical belief scale are reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlations between post critical belief scales

	Second naïveté	Relativism	External critique	Orthodoxy
Second naïveté	+++	.63***	-.15***	.36***
Relativism		+++	.21***	.10**
External critique			+++	-.10**
Orthodoxy				+++

***: level of significance <0001, **: level of significance <0.01, *: level of significance <0.05, n.s.: not significant

The internal consistency, standard deviation and the mean of these educational scales are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean, standard deviation and chronbach α for educational scales

	Res. F.	Res. M.	Aut. F.	Aut. M.	Stric. F.	Stric. M.	Supe. F.	Supe. M.
Mean	3.55	4.45	3.90	3.86	3.26	3.50	4.30	4.86
SD	1.17	1.11	0.89	0.88	0.97	0.95	1.00	0.87
Chronbach α	0.92	0.94	0.69	0.74	0.60	0.64	0.82	0.83

The scores for the mother are in general higher than the scores for the education by the father, except for the scale 'autonomy'. The scores on

the scales 'responsivity' and 'supervision' are rather high. We report the correlation between these educational scales in Table 4.

Table 4. *Correlations between the educational scales*

	Res. F.	Res. M.	Aut. F.	Aut. M.	Stric. F.	Stric. M.	Supr. F.	Supr. M.
Res. F.	+++	.29***	.33***	.12***	-.18***	.07**	.55***	.14***
Res. M.		+++	.11***	n.s.	-.08**	-.16***	.22***	.52***
Aut. F.			+++	.48***	-.11***	n.s.	.13***	n.s.
Aut. M.				+++	+++	-.09**	n.s.	.13***
Stric. F.					+++	.25***	n.s.	n.s.
Stric. M.						+++	.06*	-.16***
Supr. F.							+++	.48***
Supr. M.								+++

***: level of significance <.0001, **: level of significance <.01, *: level of significance <.05, n.s.: not significant

The mean scores, the standard deviation and the internal consistence of the scales concerning religious education are reported in Table 5.

Table 5. *Mean, standard deviation and Chronbach α for the scales of religious education*

	Religious autonomy of the father	Religious autonomy of the mother	Religious commitment of the father	Religious commitment of the mother
Mean	4.83	4.77	2.96	3.52
Standard deviation	1.06	1.11	1.37	1.35
Chronbach α	0.69	0.72	0.42	0.43

Also, concerning 'religious autonomy' the scores for fathers are higher than the scores for mothers, as is the case for 'autonomy' in general. Concerning 'religious commitment' the young people give higher scores for their mothers. Parents express greater 'religious autonomy' than 'religious commitment'. The pupils questioned experience little support from their parents in their quest concerning religion. In general, the young people are given a lot of freedom concerning religion.

The scales 'religious autonomy' and 'religious commitment' are significantly correlated (for the father: $r = .10$, $p < 0.01$, for the mother: $r = .13$, $p < .0001$), although the correlation is not very high. Religious autonomy of the father is strongly correlated to religious autonomy of the mother

($r = .67$, $p < .0001$). The same is true for the religious commitment of the father and the mother ($r = .60$, $p < .0001$).

4.2. *Connections between the different scales and results in light of the research questions*

We first summarise some general results. The dimensions of control ('strictness' and 'autonomy') in the experienced education are connected with the axis of 'literal or symbolic thinking about faith and religion'. The degree of 'support' ('responsivity', and eventually also 'supervision') is connected with the axis of 'acceptance of the rejection of transcendence' or 'belief/unbelief'. More strict control is connected with literal thinking (*in casu* 'external critique'); pupils who are positive towards faith and religion frequently report more supportive education. When young people have a lot of freedom concerning religious education, the chance of them being believing is less. Young people who think in a symbolic way or who are believing experience a higher degree of commitment from their parents in their own quest for faith than pupils who think in a literal, unbelieving way ('external critique'). The family structure as such is not connected with the way in which pupils think about faith and religion. Mothers are in generally more committed to religious education, but we find also that the father plays a role in young persons effectively coming to faith.

4.2.1. *The connection between religious thinking and family education*
Very small correlations were found between the post-critical belief subscales and the family education subscales. We report the significant correlations in Table 6.

Table 6. *Significant correlations between educational scales and post critical belief scales*

	Responsivity of the father	Autonomy of the father	Strictness of the father	Supervision of the father	Responsivity of the mother	Autonomy of the mother	Strictness of the mother	Supervision of the mother
Orthodoxy	.16***			.06*				
Second naïveté		.10**		.08**	.05*			.05*
Relativism		.09**				.06*		
External critique						.06*	.08**	

***: level of significance <.0001, **: level of significance <.01, *: level of significance <.05, n.s.: not significant

We found a correlation between an orthodox style of faith of the young person and the responsiveness of the father ($r = .16, p < .0001$). The scales referring to a positive attitude concerning faith (orthodoxy and second naïveté) are connected with support (responsivity and supervision), while the scales that express a less committed or even negative attitude towards faith are more connected to control scales (autonomy and strictness).

On the basis of the (rather limited) correlations between the post critical belief and educational scales we can conclude that young people who think in a symbolic way (scales 'relativism' and 'second naïveté') in general do not experience their parents as more or less strict than others. The scales referring to symbolic thinking about faith show a small correlation to scales referring to a democratic education, whereby there is a relatively high level of autonomy, responsivity and supervision of the mother or the father. Young people who reject faith on the basis of a literal way of thinking generally experience the mother as most strict.

When we have a closer look at the results of the research and when we ask the young people also for external or simple characteristics of religious faith, we discover some significant connections with the experienced strictness of the parents. For the most part these connections are rather weak. We show in the following tables the complexity of the relations between 'religion' in the broad sense and a 'strict education'.

Table 7. *Religious practice of youngsters in relation to strictness of the mother*

Religious practice	Strictness of the mother			Variables with a significant difference	
	N	$\bar{x}$	σ		
Never	435	3.4366	0.9725	Never – monthly and more (-0.3073)	
Seldom	610	3.4799	0.9283	Seldom – monthly and more (-0.2641)	
Monthly/a few times a month/every week	168	3.7440	0.9456		

$p = 0.0013$, R-square: 0.0109

The youngsters who attend a religious service every month or more experience their mothers, on average, as stricter than those who attend never or seldom a religious service. A similar relations is found between praying and the strictness of the father, as Table 8 shows.

Table 8. *Prayer of the youngster in relation to the strictness of the father*

Prayer	Strictness of the father			Variables with a significant difference	
	N	$\bar{x}$	σ		
Never	402	3.2512	0.9591	Seldom – sometimes/daily (-0.2723)	
Seldom	402	3.1869	0.9597		
Sometimes	253	3.2916	1.0156		
Often/daily	135	3.4592	1.0189		

$p = 0.0438$, R-square: 0.0068

The pupils who pray often or daily report, in general, a higher strictness of the father than those who pray only seldom.

Table 9. *Strictness of the parents in relation to the confirmation of the child*

Variable	Confirmed		$\bar{x}$	σ	p-value
	Yes	No			
Strictness of the father			3.2730	0.9734	0.0087 (pooled)
	Yes	No	2.9571	1.0083	
	Difference		0.3159	0.9754	
Strictness of the mother			3.5173	0.9429	0.0120 (pooled)
	Yes	No	3.2261	0.9902	
	Difference		0.2912	0.9457	

This TTest shows that those youngsters who have received confirmation experience their fathers and their mothers as stricter than the youngsters who did not receive confirmation.

Table 10. *Character of the religious education in relation to the strictness of the father*

Character of religious education	Strictness of the father			Variables with a significant difference	
	N	$\bar{x}$	σ		
Catholic	681	3.3066	0.9857	Catholic – un-religious (0.2671)	
Christian	302	3.2875	0.9691	Christian – un-religious (0.2480)	
Islamic	19	3.6315	0.9597		
Liberal-humanistic, atheistic, without religion (un-religious)	162	3.0395	0.9359		

$p = 0.0054$, R-square: 0.0108s

Those children who are educated in a 'Catholic' or a 'Christian' way experience their fathers, on average, as stricter than those who are educated without religion ($p < 0.01$).

Table 11. Degree of general and specific religious education in relation to the strictness of the parents

	Strictness of the father	Strictness of the mother
Degree of religious education	.09, $p < 0.01$	.09, $p < 0.01$
Experience of specific forms of religious education	.08, $p < 0.01$	.09, $p < 0.01$

Children who are educated in a highly religious way, as is shown in their general evaluations about the degree of and the different specific forms of religious education they received at home, experience more strictness from the father and the mother than others.

Table 12. Belief of the father in relation to the strictness of the father

Belief of the father	N	$\bar{x}$	σ	Variables with significant difference
Believing	377	3.3580	0.9988	Believing - unbelieving (0.2260)
Unbelieving	277	3.1320	0.9949	
He doubts	39	3.1892	0.8120	
I don't know how my fathers regards himself	445	3.2749	0.9778	

$p = 0.0278$, R-square: 0.0076

Fathers who are perceived as believers are mostly seen as stricter than others.

The variables 'own faith', 'importance of world view', 'faith of the mother', 'religious practice of the mother', 'religious communication with the mother', 'religious practice of the father' and 'religious communication with the father' do not show significant connections with the experienced strictness.

In addition to the connections between general educational scales and variables concerning the faith of young persons, we looked for connections between scales concerning religious education on the one hand and general education and cognitive belief styles on the other hand. The scales 'religious commitment' and 'religious autonomy' are rather starkly correlated

with the scales of the general education on the one hand and the post-critical belief scale on the other hand. We give an overview of these correlations in Table 13.

Table 13. Correlations between the scales of religious education, educational scales and the post-critical belief scales

	Religious autonomy of the father	Religious autonomy of the mother	Religious commitment of the father	Religious commitment of the mother
Responsivity of the father	0.17***	0.08**	0.48***	0.22***
Autonomy of the father	0.14***	0.07**	0.20***	0.11**
Strictness of the father	-0.17***	-0.12***	-0.09*	-0.05*
Supervision of the father	0.13***	n.s.	0.30***	0.10**
Responsivity of the mother	0.08**	0.17***	0.13***	0.36***
Autonomy of the mother	0.08**	0.13***	0.08**	0.13***
Strictness of the mother	n.s.	-0.14***	n.s.	n.s.
Supervision of the mother	0.06*	0.11**	0.06*	0.23***
Second naiveté	-0.06*	n.s.	0.13***	0.15***
Relativism	0.07**	0.08**	0.11***	0.14***
External critique	0.14***	0.13***	n.s.	n.s.
Orthodoxy	-0.26***	-0.21***	0.14***	0.17***

***: level of significance < 0.001 , **: level of significance < 0.01 , *: level of significance < 0.05 , n.s.: not significant

These results show us that the responsibility of the father and the mother play an important role in the degree of commitment experienced towards the faith of young people. To a lesser degree also the autonomy and the supervision of the mother play a role. Concerning the dimensions of 'control', we find a certain connection between the general experience of education and the experience of religious education. This connection with 'control' however is smaller than the connection concerning 'warmth', 'support' and 'commitment'. Children who generally experience their parents as more strict experience also less freedom in the area of religion, while those who have a lot of autonomy in general, often also experience 'religious autonomy'.

As we saw connections between the post critical belief scales and the experienced education, we also see a connection between 'support' (religious commitment of the father and the mother) on the one hand and 'symbolic thinking' on the other hand (second naiveté and relativism). A high degree of support in the area of faith is related to a positive affirmation of transcendence (having faith) (orthodoxy and second naiveté). The

degree of 'control' (or the inverse of religious autonomy) is related to literal forms of thinking about faith. Much autonomy concerning faith goes with external critique while little religious autonomy goes with orthodoxy. The relevance parents give to religion and the parental thinking about faith has an influence on the religious education, as we learn from the correlation between the variables 'belief of the mother' and 'belief of the father' (question: 'does your mother/father call her/himself', with the possible answers: 'believing', 'unbelieving', 'she/he doubts about faith', 'I don't know how my mother/father sees her/himself') and 'religious autonomy'. If the mother or the father is seen as 'unbelieving' or 'in doubt', the young persons experience on average a much higher 'religious autonomy' than in the case when the parents are seen as 'believing'.

If parents are highly committed to the faith of their children, this often goes along with a generally high commitment to the child and a positive attitude towards faith. If parents give their child little freedom concerning religion, this generally goes along with the relevance parents give to faith and, to a lesser degree, the strict educational style or a style where little autonomy is given to the child. We see that the general educational style is primarily important concerning the commitment to a child's faith and less regarding his or her freedom in faith. We also see that this is true more for fathers than for mothers. When fathers are perceived as committed to the faith of their children they are, in general, also more often seen as supportive. For mothers this connection is smaller – probably because the general commitment of the mother to education is higher. This connection between the general support and the religious support of fathers can be interpreted in two directions. One can suppose that fathers who are more committed to general education will continue with this attitude also concerning faith and religion. One can also expect that fathers who are more committed to faith and to the religious education of their children would react in a more responsive way to their children (Mahoney et al., 2001, p. 582).

4.2.2. Family structure

Around 82% of the pupils questioned say that their parents are married. Nearly 15% of the pupils have divorced parents. Around 3% have parents who live together without being married or who have another family structure. The fact that parents are married or divorced has no direct influence on the faith of the pupils. However it is the case that children of divorced parents experience significantly more religious autonomy from their parents than children of married parents. Divorced fathers are generally less com-

mitted to the faith of their children probably because these young persons see their fathers less often. The religious commitment of the mother is not significantly different when she is married or not. Concerning the general educational scales, we see a difference especially in the perception of the father. Children of divorced parents experience significantly less responsibility, strictness and supervision from their fathers than children of married parents. Concerning the mother, however, there is only a difference in supervision: children of married parents experience more supervision. The mean scores of the significant relations (p -value lower than 0.05) are reported in Table 14, which gives the results of a T -test.

Table 14. Mean of the educational and religious educational scales, ordered by family situation

Variable	Family situation	Mean deviation	Standard deviation	p -value
Responsivity of the father	Married	3.58	1.11	0.0175
	Divorced	3.30	1.63	(satterthwaite)
	Difference	0.27	1.17	
Strictness of the father	Married	3.33	0.95	<.0001
	Divorced	2.91	1.05	(pooled)
	Difference	0.41	0.97	
Supervision of the father	Married	4.44	0.90	<.0001
	Divorced	3.52	1.20	(satterthwaite)
	Difference	0.91	0.95	
Supervision of the mother	Married	4.90	0.83	0.0047
	Divorced	4.66	1.04	(satterthwaite)
	Difference	0.23	0.87	
Religious autonomy of the father	Married	4.78	1.07	0.0139
	Divorced	5.00	1.02	(pooled)
	Difference	-0.22	1.06	
Religious autonomy of the mother	Married	4.71	1.10	<.0001
	Divorced	5.08	1.13	(pooled)
	Difference	-0.37	1.10	
Religious commitment of the father	Married	3.00	1.36	0.0038
	Divorced	2.67	1.42	(pooled)
	Difference	0.33	1.35	

Regarding married parents the group that attends regularly religious ceremonies (16,33% by the fathers, 19,77% by the mothers) is significantly higher ($p < 0.01$ (father) and $p < 0.01$ (mother)) than the subgroup of divorced parents seen as regularly practicing religion (respectively 10,24% and 14,77%). The group of parents who are seen by their children as

believing, forms also a significantly ($p < .0001$) larger part of the married parents (33,37% – father, 49,54% – mother) than of the divorced parents (22,62% – father, 36,93% – mother). In an indirect way – via the belief and the religious practice of parents, the general education and the specific religious education – the family situation possibly has an effect on the faith of young people, but the connection cannot be shown directly on the basis of this research.

4.2.3. *Differences in the experienced education from father and mother*
The mean scores for the experienced responsiveness (4.45), strictness (3.50) and supervision (4.48) from the mother are higher than for the father (respectively 3.55, 3.26 en 4.30) (see Table 1). Young people experience, on average, more autonomy from their fathers (3.90) than from their mothers (3.86), but the difference is very small. Mothers are experienced as more committed to the general and religious educations (see Table 5). The number of youngsters who indicated that they speak sometimes, often or daily with their mothers about faith (21,84%) is higher than the number of those who indicated that they speak sometimes or more with the father about faith (15,49%). This goes along with the fact that, on average, youngsters experience their mothers (47,56%) more often than their fathers (31,55%) as believing. The youngster clearly knows less about the father's faith than about the mother's attitude towards faith. 37,40% of pupils questioned say that they do not know how the father sees himself. For the mother this is 'only' 26,26%. If the mother is unbelieving, the possibility that a young person calls him/herself believing is lower than when the father is unbelieving. If the father is believing, the possibility that a young persons will call him/herself believing is higher than when the mother is believing.

Table 15: *Belief of the parents in relation to the belief of the children*

Belief of parents/belief of youngster	Believing	Unbelieving	Doubting
Believing father	48,53%	19,47%	32,00%
Unbelieving father	9,35%	66,91%	30,11%
Believing mother	42,06%	23,04%	34,90%
Unbelieving mother	4,37%	76,60%	19,13%

From the youngsters with 'believing fathers' 48,53% claim themselves to be believing; 19,47% claim not to believe and 32% are in doubt. From the youngsters with 'unbelieving fathers' 9,35% claim themselves to be

believing and 66,91% claim not to believe; 30,11% are doubting. From the group of youngsters with 'believing mothers' 42,06% claim they themselves believe and 23,04% say they are unbelieving; 34,90% are doubting. From the young people with 'unbelieving mothers' 4,37% say they believe; 76,60% say they do not believe and 19,13% are doubting. The mother plays a crucial role in encouraging the faith of youngsters. In order to really reach faith, the father's faith and education from him are, however, also important as supporting the mother. This could be explained by the fact that mothers are usually more occupied with religion and religious education than fathers. The father has an important complementary role.

5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this conclusion we summarise the answers given on the three previously mentioned research questions and we search for possible explanations and practical options for the pastoral field. First we inquired whether the opinions of young people regarding (Christian) faith go along with their experiences of general and religious education. From the above mentioned research questions a certain correlation between general education and the thinking about faith and religion seems to exist. This correlation is, however, rather limited. We find minor correlations between educational variables that indicate a democratic education (responsivity, autonomy, supervision) and symbolic thinking about and a positive attitude towards faith and religion.

The connections between the dimensions of the post critical belief and education scales could be declared partly on the basis of the cognitive belief styles of the parents. Other research has shown that parents who think more symbolically would rather use a more democratic educational style (Duriez & Soenens, 2004). A democratic educational style is empirically operationalised by different factors. One can state that a democratic education exists in a situation characterised by a high degree of responsiveness, little strictness, rather a lot of autonomy and a high degree of supervision (Lamborn et al., 1991). The cognitive belief style is possibly 'transmitted' directly from parents to children. The educational style could then be a variable that is related to the cognitive belief style (and is possibly dependent upon this cognitive belief style). This hypothesis cannot have been proven however on the basis of our own research, in which we did not include the parents. In the literature, we find mostly data about the connection between the educational style and the belief of the parents, without including

the children (Mahoney et al., 2001, p. 582; Gunnoe, 1999). The qualitative research of Lia Vergouwen by a small group of Dutch Protestant adolescents and their parents shows us the connection between a 'democratic education' and a 'reflexive faith style' of parents and young people. (Vergouwen, 2001, p. 288). The 'reflexive faith style' has similarities with the axis 'symbolic thinking', in which 'second naïveté' and 'relativism' can be situated. An 'authoritarian educational style' is mostly a characteristic of parents (and youngsters) who think in a conventional way, we learn from the research of Vergouwen. This can be compared with the connection between the strictness of the mother and the external critique as a form of literal thinking. It is, however, remarkable that in our research we did not find a connection between orthodoxy and strictness or between one's own belief and strictness.

Some relations between strictness and background variables concerning religion and religious education show that youngsters who are educated in a more religious way at home experience their parents sometimes as stricter than others. These results correspond with the research results of Zinnecker (1998, p. 354), whereby youngsters from religious families often characterise their education as strict. At the same time, in our research strictness does not have a positive correlation to religious commitment (second naïveté or orthodoxy), but does correlate with the radical rejection of faith (external critique). These results show us that the connections between the dimensions of control and religiosity in education are very complex. The idea that 'more strictness' in education leads to 'more religiosity' has to be approached in a very nuanced way when one is speaking about the Flemish population. We can state that a religious education goes along with a 'hard hand' only in a limited way.

In pedagogical sciences high scores on autonomy, responsiveness and supervision and low scores on strictness are seen as the most valuable aspects for fostering the wellbeing of children and youngsters (Lamborn, 1991). In (Catholic) theology second naïveté thinking can be seen as the most desirable because this is a positive attitude towards faith, but also because it is an interpretative position that avoids fundamentalism. The results of the empirical research show us that these sets of 'desirable attitudes' go together in a certain sense, and that what are seen as rather undesirable attitudes in pedagogics and in theology, namely, 'strictness' and 'external critique' (as a form of 'authoritarian control') strengthen each other. Maybe there could be a deeper personality structure on the basis of the correlation between educational and cognitive belief styles (Mahoney et al., 2001, p. 577). As 'second naïveté' is an interpretive hermeneutical approach that implies 'commitment', so do responsiveness and supervision

and the rejection of a strict and authoritarian form of control request openness, interpretation and commitment from the other. When religious education strives for a form of second naïveté as its aim, it is important also to create space in the educational style for positive and constructive ways of dealing with different interpretations as well as avoiding a literal and strict way of thinking and acting. A democratic education takes into account a plurality of interpretative possibilities and opinions, as does second naïveté (symbolic thinking) of the post critical belief scale.

The correlations between general educational scales and religious thinking can be explained on the basis of possible structural similarities in the perception of faith and the education of the parents, which both have an influence on the religious thinking of youngsters. Based on the relative weakness of the correlations between the general educational styles and religious thinking we can suppose that the religious attitudes of youngsters are also determined by many other factors than the general education at home. One of these other factors is the religious education: youngsters exhibit a significant commitment to the faith when he or she does not stand alone in developing his or her faith attitude. A high level of faith autonomy often goes together with a non-committed attitude towards faith. The correlations we found between the general educational scales and those concerning religious education offer a plausible explanation for the correspondence between the general educational style and the faith attitudes of young people.

In the second place we searched for possible correlations between the family situations in which young people grew up, the experiences of education and their positions towards faith. We did not find a direct connection between the family situations and the faith of youngsters, operationalised in categories of answers: 'believing', 'unbelieving' and 'I doubt'. Although there was no direct connection found between family structure and faith, we did find a connection between faith and general education and especially religious education. Children of divorced parents are generally given more freedom in their own search for religious attitudes than children of married parents.

The results of this research put the pastoral praxis and its theory on the path towards a supportive approach to children and parents who have experienced divorce. A divorce is not, as such, a stumbling block for coming to faith and, especially in the case of the mother who is often the most committed to the child after a divorce, has little direct influence on the general and religious education. Youngsters often feel able to ask their mothers for support after a divorce and when it concerns questions of faith. These results promote the development of a special sensitivity in

catechetical and pastoral settings to prevent mechanisms leading to exclusion of divorced parents and their children.

Thirdly we looked for differences and similarities between the experiences of the educational behaviour of the father and the mother. In general, mothers are perceived as more committed to the education of the child than fathers. This is also true for religious education. Young people know, on average, more about the faith of their mothers and they more frequently consider their mothers as believing as compared to their fathers. They experience also that the mother is more concerned about religious education. This is consistent with a lot of other research, which show that mothers are more often believing than fathers and they have a higher impact on their children concerning faith (for an overview of the literature, see Christiano, 2000, p. 60). Our own research shows that if mothers are not believing, there is a relatively lower chance that the child will call him or herself believing than when fathers are seen as unbelieving. When fathers are believers, the belief of the father seems to play an important role in his child coming to faith. The role of the father should not be minimised too quickly, our research shows.

From a pastoral theological perspective, which considers coming to faith and especially a 'symbolic, interpretive belief style' as important, it seems desirable to stimulate the contributions of fathers in both general and religious education. In our society 'the absent father' is a widely used concept (from a psychoanalytical framework the absence of the law is mostly stressed). This would be related to a declining belief in transcendence (Lacroix, 2000, p. 186). Based on the results of this research we want to focus on the importance of support, supervision and commitment from fathers in the children's education, rather than on the relevance of 'strictness' or a 'limited autonomy given to the child'. This research can be a stimulus to support the call for 'new fathers' from the domain of religious educational research as well.

These research results show a complex relationship between religion and faith, religious education and education in general. The educational relationships between parents and children are partly reflected in the religious education. Direct correlations between certain faith attitudes and the experienced general education are limited. It is desirable that the pastoral concern about religious education be oriented to education in general as support for the religious education. At the same time, religious education requests a clear engagement with one's own faith and the faith of the children. A relativising attitude is not easy when it concerns the religious education of children and young people. The growth of the number of

divorces does not have to be seen as the most problematic factor for religious education. It is, however, desirable to give special attention in pastoral and catechetical support of parents to the commitment of all parents to the faith attitudes of their children.

In this contribution, we did not offer data about the broader social context that plays a role in education and in visions on faith. Further research about contextual factors, such as the educational level of parents or the economic situation, is desirable, as well as research whereby the complex relation between different variables are further analysed. In light of further empirical research, it would be desirable to integrate into the research method the actual thinking about the 'child as actor' in its education (Shehan, 1999). The presented research results deal mostly with the way in which young people experience the education given by their parents, and less with the role these young people themselves play in their interaction with parents. It would be desirable to look how youngsters perceive their own contribution and how parents value the contribution of children in the parent-child relationship, both in general education and religious education. Does the contribution of the child in the parent-child relationship have similarities with the way in which the child (the youngster) thinks about faith? And are there similarities between the perception of this contribution and the faith attitudes of the parents? Future research into these and other questions is necessary.

APPENDIX: OVERVIEW OF THE ITEMS AND SCORES ON THE FACTOR ANALYSIS

1. *Post critical belief scales*

For the subscales of the post critical belief scales the items are not reported in the order of their weight. The items are classified on the basis of previous research made by prof. Dirk Hutsebaut. The results of the factor analysis were quite unclear (probably due to the difficulty of the questions), which is why we opted for a theoretical classification.

The scale *second naïveté* measures a symbolic interpretation of faith. It refers to a positive commitment towards faith and can be interpreted as a hermeneutic way of thinking about religion.

Despite the fact that the Bible was written in a completely different historical context from ours, it retains a basic message.

Despite the high number of personal injustices caused by Christianity, the original message of Christ is still valuable to me.

The Bible holds a deeper truth which can only be revealed by personal reflection.

The Bible is a guide, full of signs in the search for God, and not a historical account.

If you want to understand the meaning of the miracle stories from the Bible, you should always place them in their historical context. The historical accuracy of Bible stories is irrelevant for my faith in God.

Ultimately, religion means commitment without absolute guarantee. I still call myself a Christian even though a lot of things that I cannot agree with have happened in the past in name of Christianity.

The scale *relativism* refers to a symbolic way of thinking about religion. Besides 'second naiveté', this scale is related to 'unbelief' or a 'non-committal' attitude towards the (Christian) faith tradition.

The manner in which humans experience their relationship to God will always be coloured by the times they live in.

Secular and religious conceptions of the world give valuable answers to important questions about life.

I am well aware that my beliefs are only one possibility among many others.

God grows along with the history of humanity and is therefore changeable.

Each statement about God is a result of the time in which it is made. Official Church doctrine and other statements about the absolute will always be relative because they are pronounced by human beings at a certain moment in time.

There is no absolute meaning in life, but only directions, which are different for every one of us.

Because Jesus is mainly a guiding principle for me, my faith in him would not be effected if it were discovered that he never actually existed as a historical individual.

The scale *external critique* refers to a literal attitude of unbelief. One rejects faith on the basis of a literal understanding of religion.

A scientific understanding of human life and the world has made religious understanding superfluous.

In the end, faith is nothing more than a safety net for human fears. The world of Bible stories is so far removed from us that it has little relevance.

Religious faith often is an instrument for obtaining power and that makes it suspect.

God is only a name for the inexplicable.

Faith is more of a dream which turns out to be an illusion when one is confronted with the harshness of life.

Too many people have been oppressed in the name of God for one to still have faith.

Faith is an expression of a weak personality.

The scale *orthodoxy* refers to a literal affirmative conception of belief that inclines towards a form of fundamentalism.

Theology is the only thing that gives meaning to life in all of its aspects.

Only the major religious traditions guarantee admittance to God.

Only a priest/religious leader can give an answer to important religious questions.

Even though this goes against modern rationality, I believe Mary was truly a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus.

Ultimately, there is only one correct answer to each religious question. God has been defined for one and all and therefore is immutable.

I think that Bible stories should be taken literally as they are written. You can only live a meaningful life if you believe.

2. Educational scales

Responsivity of the father

I can count on my father to help me if I have some kind of problem. (0.82760)

My father knows exactly when I have difficulties with something. (0.81710)

If I am worrying about something or if I am sad my father understands what is going on. (0.81218)

If I am not doing well my father can comfort me. (0.77579)

I can have a good conversation with my father about all kinds of themes. (0.75391)

If I am sad or have any kind of problem my father will have noticed this. (0.73325)

If I talk with my father about my problems, he really helps me. (0.71419)

My father knows very well what I want or feel. (0.68434)

Autonomy of the father

- My father keeps pushing me to investigate things independently. (0.57126)
- My father tells me that I am responsible for what happens to me. (0.55304)
- My father often says that I have to think for myself about life. (0.49745)
- My father encourages me to be independent of him. (0.49654)
- My father gives me the freedom to find solutions for my problems on my own. (0.49608)
- My father lets me take many decisions on my own. (0.42640)

Strictness of the father

- My father wants me to do what he says even if I do not agree with his arguments. (0.53436)
- For most of the things I do I have to ask my father for permission. (0.48768)
- My father gets angry when I say that I do not agree with him when he is in the company of his friends. (0.42835)
- My father often worries about me doing things that do not please him. (0.39908)
- (inverse) My father is not very strict. (-0.56764)

Supervision of the father

- How much does your father know about where you are after school? (0.76267)
- How much does your father know about what you do in your spare time? (0.74960)
- How much does your father know about where you go out? (0.74549)
- How much does your father know about the things you spend your money on? (0.67236)
- How much does your father know about who your friends are? (0.59689)
- How much does your father know about your school marks? (0.43500)

Responsivity of the mother

- If I am worrying about something or if I am sad my mother understands what is going on (0.85964)
- I can count on my mother to help me if I have some kind of problem (0.85548)

- My mother knows exactly when I have difficulties with something. (0.84484)
- If I am not doing well my mother can comfort me. (0.82589)
- If I talk with my mother about my problems she really helps me. (0.80397)
- I can have a good conversation with my mother about all kinds of themes (0.79848)
- If I am sad or have any kind of problem, my mother will have noticed this (0.78887)
- My mother knows very well what I want or feel. (0.74460)

Autonomy of the mother

- My mother keeps pushing me to investigate things independently. (0.64470)
- My mother gives me the freedom to find solutions for my problems on my own. (0.59270)
- My mother encourages me to be independent of her. (0.57963)
- My mother tells me that I am responsible for what happens to me. (0.56254)
- My mother often says that I have to think for myself about life. (0.54516)
- My mother lets me take many decisions on my own. (0.49731)

Strictness of the mother

- My mother wants me to do what she says, even if I do not agree with her arguments. (0.64107)
- My mother gets angry when I say that I do not agree with her when she is in the company of her friends. (0.47769)
- My mother often worries about me doing things that do not please her. (0.47609)
- For most of the things I do I have to ask my mother for permission. (0.44099)
- (inverse) My mother is not very strict. (-0.53058)

Supervision of the mother

- How much does your mother know about where you are after school? (0.76508)
- How much does your mother know about what you do in your spare time? (0.76381)
- How much does your mother know about where you go out? (0.73929)

How much does your mother know about the things you spend your money on? (0.70359)
 How much does your mother know about who your friends are? (0.65122)
 How much does your mother know about your school marks? (0.46796)

3. Scales religious education

Religious autonomy of the father

My father supports me in my own attitude towards (un)belief, even if this is against his own attitude. (0.71290)
 My father lets me take decisions on my own concerning faith and religion. (0.63552)
 When I got older, I was not obliged by my father to go regularly to a religious service. (0.55514)
 (inverse) My father finds it important that I take his own attitude towards faith. (-0.54794)

Religious commitment of the father

When I have a question/doubt concerning faith I can ask my father for support. (0.54490)
 My father knows very well how I am dealing with faith and religion. (0.50444)

Religious autonomy of the mother

My mother supports me in my own attitude towards (un)belief, even if this is against her own attitude. (0.78636)
 My mother lets me take decisions on my own concerning faith and religion. (0.72062)
 When I got older, I was not obliged by my mother to go regularly to a religious service. (0.52819)
 (inverse) My mother finds it important that I take her own attitude towards faith. (-0.57681)

Religious commitment of the mother

When I have a question/doubt concerning faith I can ask my mother for support. (0.54381)
 My mother knows very well how I am dealing with faith and religion. (0.51778)

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TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF GENERAL AIMS OF CHRISTIAN ADULT EDUCATION

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Abstract

This article deals with the variety of general aims of Christian adult education in a pluralist society. The authors propose a theoretical framework of possible aims to Christian adult education. This framework consists of two dimensions: a formal dimension consisting of the goals or orientations of Christian adult education, and a material dimension that concerns the content of the (religious) identity formed by the education process. Based on these two dimensions a typology of aims to Christian adult education is presented. This typology proved to be very helpful in describing the mindset of Christian adult educators within the Catholic Church in the Netherlands. The empirical research shows that these educators have a positive attitude with regard to educational orientations of self-direction and transformation. Educational aims focussing on the supra-personal aspect of religious identity are largely rejected. This may give rise to tensions considering the institutional context in which Christian adult educators carry out their work.

Key Words: Christian adult education, pluralism, educational orientations, identity development

1. INTRODUCTION

What are the aims of Christian adult education in a pluralist society? Is the goal to hand down Christian religious teachings as established by the church authorities? Is it to impart to the participants an awareness of their own religiosity by means of experiential clarification? Or is it to provide an introduction to a variety of religions and worldviews? What choices must Christian adult educators make? Are they able to make these choices in the context of the church in which they are active? Is one type of goal more important than the others?

We begin this article by proposing a theoretical framework of possible aims to Christian adult education. This framework consists of two dimensions: a formal dimension consisting of the goals or orientations of Christian adult education, and a material dimension that concerns the content of the religious identity formed by the education process. We begin by examining the differences between conformity, self-direction and transformativity as educational orientations (section 2). We then look at three aspects of identity,