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## Relationship between Goal Orientations and Educational Methods in Christian Adult Education

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Received 26 November 2007; accepted 16 April 2008

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### Summary

Christian adult education has various goals and educational methods. From a theoretical perspective the authors' task is to formulate a relationship between goals and methods. Their distinction between goals is based on whether the authority for Christian identity formation lies 'outside' or 'inside' the adult learner. The distinction between educational methods is based on the question whether the educator or the learner, or both, directs the learning process. With regard to the direction of the choice between goals and educational methods, this article distinguishes between three possible directions: the choice of a goal orientation leads to the choice of educational methods; the choice of educational methods leads to the choice of a goal orientation; or there is mutual influencing between the two choices. The research shows that adult educators consistently choose the goal orientation of transformation when they opt for the educational methods of experiential and mediated learning. A preference for transformation predicts a preference for mediated and experiential learning, and vice versa. Preference for transformation and the educational methods of experiential and mediated learning is influenced by four characteristics of Christian adult educators. These characteristics yield a consistent profile of educators who are open to pluralism: both in the sense of alternative religiosity, in terms of bringing modern ideas into the church (cultural openness) and not refusing membership to any person who wants to join the church (structural openness), and by rejecting restrictions on the contents and aims of adult education by the church hierarchy (orthodoxy check). The article concludes with a critical reflection on the lack of coherence between the other goals of Christian adult education and educational methods.

### Keywords

Christian adult education, pluralism, goal orientations, educational methods, Catholic Church

## **1 Introduction**

In the Netherlands religious and moral education in a Christian framework has assumed diverse forms in recent decades. There is a plurality of both goal orientations and educational methods. Thus some workers operating in this field want their educational activities to promote conformity with the religious teachings of a specific tradition (here the Catholic Church). Others focus their courses on enabling participants to decide for themselves what they want to believe and how to live in accordance with their beliefs. Yet others try to combine conformity and autonomy in Christian adult education. Apart from this plurality of goal orientations there is also a diversity of methods of instruction. Some settle for a learning style in which the educator largely directs the process. Others prefer to base their teaching mainly on participants' own experience. Again there are various intermediate forms.

This article is not so much about differences in goal orientation and methods as about the interrelationship between the two. The first question is whether there is in fact a relation between choices at the level of goal orientation and methods in religious and moral adult education. The question is important, since the ideal seems to be that there should be at least a logical connection. Theoretically it appears desirable that methods should match goals in educational processes. In reality, however, such coherence of goal orientation and methods does not necessarily exist. Maybe (some) Christian educators have other 'reasons' for selecting certain methods. Could it be that they simply 'do something' without insisting on systematic coherence? And even if there is a connection, what exactly does it consist in? Does one choose a method because it accords with the goals, or at any rate with the goal orientation? Or the other way round? Or does one choose a particular goal orientation and a particular method for the same reason, but that reason is extraneous to both goals and method?

This last possibility we find particularly interesting in the context of an issue that was part of the motive for this study. That is the issue of religious, world-view-related and moral pluralism, and how one deals with it when it comes to learning in religious and moral adult education in the Netherlands. It could be that educators consider it a good thing and therefore opt for a goal orientation and methods that leave a lot of scope for it or even encourage it. Or they may see it as harmful and strive for uniformity, also when it comes to method. What is the position in the current practice of religious and moral adult education in a Christian framework in the Netherlands?

To gain insight into the relationship between goal orientations and educational methods we conducted research among Christian adult educators in the

Netherlands. First we specify the goal orientations for religious and moral adult education that we identified in our study (section 2). Next we indicate the various methods on which we focused in our inquiry (section 3). In educational literature one finds different types of relationship between goals and educational methods, which we describe in section 4. Then we report on the design and findings of the empirical research (section 5). Finally we list our principal conclusions and reflect on these (section 6).

## **2 Goal Orientations of Religio-Moral Education**

By the goal orientation of education we do not mean the goal one tries to achieve in courses but a more distant point of orientation on which the education is focused and to which one seeks to contribute via goal achievement. Some Christian adult educators believe that religious and moral education should help people to develop their worldview-related identity (further). Others think that education should rather aim at developing their ability to participate in broad contexts like the church and/or social organisations. Those are two goal orientations. In both cases one's goal in the actual teaching could be that participants learn to judge the social doctrine of the Catholic Church critically. The latter would be a goal/objective, the first two are goal orientations. Hence a goal orientation is not an immediate goal and in a sense is more remote. After all, a goal indicates, in a concrete and testable manner, what the learner has learnt, hence the testable end result of the educational process that one seeks to achieve. A goal orientation is that which one seeks to contribute to the education of adults, but which is too broad and comprehensive to attain. Thus a goal orientation indicates in general terms in what direction one tries to help the learner to develop in adult educational.

There are many ways of classifying the goal orientations of religious and moral education, including adult education. In our research we opted for the following classical pedagogic classificatory principle (Kohn 1969). What or who decisively determines the choices we make? Is it something or someone outside the person, or something within the person, that is the person herself? Differently phrased, does authority derive from within the person or is it extraneous? We settled for this criterion, because when dealing with pluralism it is quite important who or what determines these choices, that is, where people locate authority for choices of a religious nature. If it is extraneous to the person, there seems to be little or no room for pluralism. But if people choose for themselves there is much more leeway, for instance to choose one's individual position within the Christian tradition (internal pluralism)

and for interaction between the Christian tradition and other religions (external pluralism).

On the basis of the foregoing classificatory criterion we distinguish between three main types of goal orientation in religious and moral education: conformity, self-determination and transformation. In the case of conformity the aim is that learners learn to adapt to the requirements of their social environment. Thus the authority is *extraneous*. It can also be defined in terms of identity or participation. Thus educational processes can aim at individuals' development of their religious identity, that is their ability to participate in larger wholes in conformity with the religious teachings of the Catholic Church. Through religious and moral education, adult learners opt for a Christian lifestyle. They internalise only values that accord with the Christian tradition and Christian notions about transcendent reality (God). Within this approach believers' orthodoxy is controlled, hence there is not much room for internal pluralism. As a result they do not relate much to other religions, if at all. Other religious traditions are not considered. There is no scope for religious pluralism, either within their own religious way of life or outside it.

The goal orientation of self-determination is the exact opposite. Here authority resides *within* the person. The aim is for participants to develop autonomy and maturity. Individuals should learn to make choices based on ideas to which they freely subscribe. This goal orientation offers more scope for pluralism, because the choices of Christian adults can diverge (to a lesser or greater degree) from the orthodoxy controlled by church institutions. Paradoxically, however, in this goal orientation pluralism is restrained by autonomy. Why? There is only one criterion of choosing what to believe, namely one's own reasons (whatever they are) for assenting to certain beliefs. Paradoxically, pluralism (the many) is reduced to just one option (the one). On the level of the Christian community as a whole this implies pluralism, because Christians differ in their beliefs (within certain limits of collective ideas and practices). But on the personal level there is only one option. Hence we might say that the goal orientation of autonomy is characterised by restrained pluralism.

We identify yet another goal orientation of religious and moral education: that of transformation. According to Bruner (1996) a learner is not just a passive recipient of culture but also learns to participate actively in the process. According to this view culture is not merely maintained by learners: they also create it. The learner is not only changed but also changes! And he learns to make his own contributions to cultural change. That is why we call this goal orientation transformational. Here we cannot say that authority is exclusively

intrinsic or extraneous. Everything one learns is initially presented from outside.<sup>1</sup> Individuals learn to relate this extraneous matter to their inner selves. The criterion of choosing certain beliefs or practices lies in the dialectical relation between what reaches people from outside and what they have inside them. This goal orientation allows participants to discover their own religious and moral experience through introduction in religious traditions. Thus the idea is to do justice both to the prescribed tradition and individuals' right to decide for themselves what they accept or reject. In this orientation the plurality (many) is never reducible to uniformity (the one). There is always something 'outside' the person from which he or she can learn and grow in faith. The dialectics between 'outside' and 'inside' is fundamental and cannot be overcome. Individuals are always aware that there are other choices, both within their own religious tradition and between religions. In dealing with pluralism this goal orientation takes as its criterion the dialectics between 'outside' and 'inside'. The difference from the other goal orientations is that participants do not learn from just one religion or from many religions. The goal orientation of transformation can be combined with a mono-religious or a multi-religious learning process.

### 2.1 *Goal Orientations of the Conformist Type*

Which goal orientations in religious and moral adult education are characterised by conformity? We see goal orientations as ideal types (in the Weberian sense), which means that no single author is representative of our goal orientation. Goal orientations are conceptual reconstructions of the defining characteristics of different positions in Christian adult education. Following the philosopher N. Rescher we distinguish between three goal orientations in religious and moral education, the criterion being how one seeks to teach participants to deal with pluralism. These are the preferentially monistic, the non-moralistic and the deliberative pluralistic goal orientations (Driesen et al. 2007; cf. Rescher 1993). A preferential monistic orientation means that one learns to choose one among many different moral positions, being the one that accords best with the enviroing culture. It is monistic because the person opts for just one position and it is preferential because the choice is made against the background of other options. Hence the choice of a position is not automatic but a matter of conscious choice or preference. We call the second

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<sup>1</sup> We are referring to the first general law of learning formulated by the learning psychologist L. Vygotsky, namely that everything one learns comes from outside. Learning is not a purely intra-mental activity, but is first and foremost a social (inter-mental) process of appropriating an idea, attitude or skill that is presented by someone else. Cf. Hermans 2001, 283-314.

goal orientation non-moralistic because it entails not choosing any moral position. In this approach choice on rational grounds is considered impossible. We call the third goal orientation deliberative pluralistic, because one learns to carefully consider (deliberative) different positions (pluralistic) before settling for one or more of them.

Which of the three goal orientations of moral education may be seen as characterised by conformity, hence belonging to the first type? That is indisputably the preferential monistic goal orientation, since it means that participants learn to settle for Christian values among the whole spectrum of moral preferences. It is conformist because authority derives from outside the person. Moral education is seen as initiation into a particular tradition, and not against the background of other moral traditions. Participants learn to consider and accept just one point of view.

Among the goal orientations of religious education a 'kerygmatic' orientation exemplifies the conformist type. A kerygmatic orientation means that religious education is aimed at participants' personal surrender to Jesus Christ. The Christian story is not just presented from outside as a 'grand narrative', but the teaching also aims at getting individuals to appropriate it.<sup>2</sup> Other instances of religious education with a conformist goal orientation are hermeneutically oriented education and a neo-scholastic approach (Driesen et al. 2007).

## *2.2 Goal Orientations of the Self-Determining Type*

Goal orientations of the self-determining type clearly include those trends in religious and moral adult education that focus on individual autonomy. When it comes to dealing with pluralism it leaves scope for diverse interpretations of one's own tradition (internal pluralism). Which goal orientations of religious and moral adult education belong to this type? In the field of moral education that is the universal, non-moralistic goal orientation. Participants are taught that moral arguments no longer play a role in social life. Moral considerations are relegated to the domain of private morality (Zwart 1993, 69-109).<sup>3</sup> Moral authority resides within the individual.

In religious education the goal orientation of an existential approach to catechesis belongs to the self-determining type. The envisaged result is not acceptance of the Christian tradition but clarification of the participants' own existence. The significance of existential experience is not determined by

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed description of the goal of kerygmatic catechesis, see Hemel 1986, 78-94; Van der Ven 1982, 380-382; and De Jong 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Zwart also goes into criticism of this approach. One certainly has to draw on private morality,

anyone else — the individual decides for herself. Authority resides primarily in her person.<sup>4</sup> A mystagogic and worldview-related approach to religious adult education also has a self-determining goal orientation (Driesen et al. 2007).

### 2.3 *Goal Orientations of the Transformational Type*

Finally there is the transformational type of goal orientation of religious and moral adult education. Here the outside world and the learner's inner world interrelate dialectically, hence we cannot say that authority lies either within or outside the individual. What reaches individuals from outside is related to what they have inside them. The criterion for accepting the envisaged behaviour lies in the dialectic relation between what comes to people from outside and what they have inside them. This goal orientation allows scope for pluralism among different traditions. Pluralism is fully embraced as an abiding reality that need not be eliminated and is in fact valuable (Hermans 2001, 220-238). One does not aspire to consensus (the one), but keeps searching for truth about how to become a better person. In the search process one relates critically to pluralism, both within Christianity and among religions. The diversity (the many) challenges people to reflect critically on their life choices.

We find this approach in the deliberative pluralistic goal orientation of moral education. Moral deliberation is not aimed at 'consensus', but consists in mutually critical reflection on 'moral truth'. After all, consensus can prematurely cut short the process of confrontation and searching for truth.<sup>5</sup> In a deliberative pluralistic goal orientation participants learn to consider diverse moral positions. Although the outcome of this deliberation is a decision, it is not a conclusion. Put differently, it is not the end of the process of moral deliberation. The goal orientation is to broaden and deepen the process of moral evaluation.

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*especially* when dealing with different backgrounds. If not, the diversity is glossed over so as to avoid or control conflict. Ostensibly pluralism is accepted, but in fact it is neutralised (Zwart 1993, 181-248).

<sup>4</sup> The goal of existential catechesis is described in more detail in Van der Ven 1982, 374-397; Zondag & De Jong, 1998, 27-37; and De Jong 2002, 39-57.

<sup>5</sup> Rescher also explicitly objects to approaches to pluralism that put the emphasis on consensus. Rescher 1993, 3-4: '[...] it opposes the aprioristic rationalism inherent in neo-contractarian theory — alike in the idealized communicative contract version promoted in continental European philosophy by Jürgen Habermas and in the idealized social-contract version of the theory of political justice promoted in the Anglo-American context by John Rawls'.



Participatory religious education is an example of this type of goal orientation. In this approach religion is seen as religious practices imbedded in communities of practice. It implies that people develop their religious identity by taking part in religious practices — such as reading a Bible text or manifesting religiously inspired social engagement — and then learn to reflect on it. Thus identity construction is something that emanates both from within the participant and through the impact of extraneous reality (Hermans 2001; 2002). This applies particularly to liberation catechesis and a multireligious approach to religious education (Driesen et al. 2007).

### **3 Methods of Religious and Moral Education**

The educational process not only has various goal orientations but also applies different methods. These, too, can be classified in several ways. This study is based on the classifications of Lowyck and Simons, and Van der Linden and Duffy (Simons et al. 2000, 1-15; Lowyck 1995, 215-230). Following their approach, our classificatory principle is the direction of the learning process, more specifically who directs it. Again we distinguish between three methods: guided learning, experiential learning and mediated learning.

#### *3.1 Guided Learning Method*

In this educational method learning is seen as the transfer of structured information. The educator is regarded as an expert in the field of a religious tradition and is responsible for conveying it accurately. He takes the relevant decisions and organises and plans contents, methods and goals in advance. He is also responsible for presentation and measurement. There is little opportunity for participants to contribute. Individuals' own experience has no critical function when it comes to the subject matter (e.g. church doctrine) and remains subordinate to the religious tradition (De Jong 1982, 237-246).

#### *3.2 Experiential Learning Method*

In experiential learning neither contents, nor methods, nor goals are fixed in advance. The educational premise is none of these three, but lies in the personal experience and inner motivation of participants. Learning ought to be a creative, ongoing process determined not by the educator but by the needs and decisions of the participant. Every participant is seen as an experiential expert, hence she remains largely independent. She directs the learning process herself. The educator at most guides the individual's identity construction.

There is ample scope for participants' own contributions and autonomy. This approach is adopted in existential catechesis, in which participants and their existential questions are the point of departure.

### *3.3 Mediated Learning Method*

In the mediated learning model contents, methods and goals are defined in the course of the learning process and are negotiated with the participants. Educators and participants together direct the education. There is scope for critical input, decisions and autonomy on the part of participants, but also for the educator's guidance and expertise. The learner is regarded as a participant and co-shaper of the learning process. As a result educators can gradually delegate some of the responsibility for the learning process to the participants. The joint input of educator and participants constitutes the learning contents. Both parties contribute constructively and both assume responsibility. The learner's active involvement is not restricted to the process of attuning themes to their own experience. Participants contribute actively to all educational aspects, such as choosing themes or setting goals (Maex 2003, 177-193).<sup>6</sup>

## **4 Relation between Goal Orientations and Educational Methods**

These classifications of types of goal orientation and educational methods bring us to the question of whether, and if so how, choices in both areas relate, at any rate in the minds of religious and moral adult educators in a Christian framework in the Netherlands. To find an answer we conducted an empirical study, proceeding from the following possibilities. Either goal orientations decisively influence methods, or methods determine the goal orientation, or goal orientations and educational methods influence each other mutually.

Classical curriculum theory on the whole assumes the first of these relations. To the founders of modern curriculum theory in the 1960s the educational goal was focal. It was considered to direct the subsequent learning process — as Knoers (1980, 13) puts it, it conditioned the curriculum process. Goals function as signposts and criteria determining what should be learnt, and how.

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<sup>6</sup> The hermeneutic communicative model is based on narrative identity. On this premise Maex (2003) advocates scope for participants to make an active input. Not only the educator but also the participants have their own stories, which constitute the 'interpretive framework' of their participation.

The chief function of the more specific platform of objectives is to guide the making of curriculum decisions on what to cover, what to emphasize, what content to select, and which learning experiences to stress (Taba, 1962, 197).

This approach has a long history in Western pedagogic thinking, starting with the Greek concept of *paideia*, which indicates the person's integration with the whole of civilisation, and culminating in the concept of *Bildung* (transl.: education) among thinkers like Wilhelm von Humboldt in the 18th and 19th centuries (Nipkow 1990, p.33). For Von Humboldt *Bildung* means cultivating true humanity. True humanity is not just a reflection of the actual state of humankind but also has a utopian connotation: what humanity could ideally be! This school of educational thought is marked by an ongoing debate on the relation between individual freedom and the predefined concept of what humans should be. For the purpose of this article we need not dwell on that debate. The pertinent point is that education is determined by some conception of what it is to be human. A Christian concept of a true human being determines the goal orientation of education. Educational methods flow from the decisions made in goal orientations; or, to put it differently, means follows ends (Taba 1962, 196-199; Knoers 1980, 6-14, Van Gelder 1979, 68-72).

Under the influence of developments in cognitive psychology the actual learning process has received more attention since the 1970s. According to social constructivists, for example, learning is not a process of passive assimilation but a social process in which learners actively construct knowledge. Their approach focuses on learning and *how* it happens, and then considers the envisaged effect (Lowyck 1995, 242; Simons, Van der Linden & Duffy, 2000, 2). One could see it as a transition from a 'product-oriented' to a process-oriented approach to learning. Learning is the starting point, goals are secondary. A representative of this approach is Robert M. Gagné (1977). One of his major works is entitled *Principles of instructional design* (Gagné & Briggs 1974). Designed instruction is based on knowledge of how human beings learn. It starts by analysing the task that learners have to perform on completion of the learning process. The first task analysis is called information processing analysis.

"Such analysis is carried out by identifying the sequence of decisions and associated actions involved in a performance that is a target objective. The resulting description provides a kind of flow-chart of the operations which make up the targeted performance, including the mental operations involved" (Gagné & Briggs 1974, p. 100).

Objectives are analysed as performances, including mental operations. They are what learners learn to do. On the basis of this task analysis the educator formulates instructional objectives, instructional sequences of lessons, media selection and methods of assessing students' performance (Gagné & Briggs 1974). If one compares this with the approach based on a concept of true humanity (*Bildung*), one sees that it has a completely different focus, namely the instruction process. This type of educational reasoning emerged when cognitive psychology started to study the way people process information (since the 1960s). The crux of the approach is that the instructional design directs education.

The third possibility is that one does not decide on the one aspect on the basis of the other, but that the two presuppose each other. Goal orientation and educational method are interdependent, and for effective learning they should be closely interrelated. The first two notions about the relation between orientation and method presuppose a one-way traffic from one to the other. Either one or the other is taken as the guideline and criterion, giving it priority over the other. In reality, however, neither is conceivable without the other. Goal orientation and educational methods are intrinsically linked. The choice of one coincides with the choice of the other (Lowyck 1995, 215-230). This kind of reasoning in education is exemplified by social constructivism (Hermans 2003). It is a critical reaction to the information processing approach, which divorces learning from learning contents. According to this approach the learner's whole identity is involved in the learning process. Decisions about instruction are influenced by decisions about the aim of religious education, which is defined in terms of the learner's religious identity. Hence the relation between educational methods and goal orientations is one of mutual influencing.

## 5 Empirical Research

### 5.1 *Research Questions*

Against the background of our conceptual framework we formulated the following research questions:

- (1) (a) *To what extent does a preference for educational methods (guided, experiential, mediated) influence a preference for conformity as the goal orientation of Christian adult education, while controlling for religious characteristics of Christian adult educators?*

- (b) *To what extent does a preference for conformity as the goal orientation of Christian adult education influence a preference for educational methods (guided, experiential, mediated), while controlling for religious characteristics of Christian adult educators?*
- (c) *To what extent is there a two-way influence between a preference for educational methods (guided, experiential, mediated) and a preference for conformity as the goal orientation of Christian adult education, while controlling for religious characteristics of Christian adult educators?*
- (2) (a) *To what extent does a preference for educational methods (guided, experiential, mediated) influence a preference for autonomy as the goal orientation of Christian adult education, while controlling for religious characteristics of Christian adult educators?*
- (b) *To what extent does a preference for autonomy as the goal orientation of Christian adult education influence a preference for educational methods (guided, experiential, mediated), while controlling for religious characteristics of Christian adult educators?*
- (c) *To what extent is there a two-way influence between a preference for educational methods (guided, experiential, mediated) and a preference for autonomy as the goal orientation of Christian adult education, while controlling for religious characteristics of Christian adult educators?*
- (3) (a) *To what extent does a preference for educational methods (guided, experiential, mediated) influence a preference for transformation as the goal orientation of Christian adult education, while controlling for religious characteristics of Christian adult educators?*
- (b) *To what extent does a preference for transformation as the goal orientation of Christian adult education influence a preference for educational methods (guided, experiential, mediated), while controlling for religious characteristics of Christian adult educators?*
- (c) *To what extent is there a two-way influence between a preference for educational methods (guided, experiential, mediated) and a preference for transformation as the goal orientation of Christian adult education, while controlling for religious characteristics of Christian adult educators?*

We formulated three research questions on the dependent variables in our research. The first question concerns the goal orientation of conformity, the second that of autonomy and the third that of transformation. What relation do Christian adult educators see between goal orientations and educational methods? Logically, this relation can have three different directions: (a) preference for educational methods influences preference for goal orientations; (b) preference for goal orientations influences preference for educational methods; or (c) there is a two-way influence of goal orientation on educational

methods and vice versa. For the rationale behind this threefold relation, see section 3.

We have no expectation on theoretical grounds about the direction in which Christian adult educators' educational reasoning will proceed. Regarding the question of which educational method relates to a specific goal orientation we can formulate some expectations. We expect the educational method of guided learning to relate to the goal of conformity, because a conformist goal orientation stresses authority 'outside' the learner. Educators with such an orientation will probably assume a directive role and hence choose guided learning as their educational method. We expect the educational method of experiential learning to relate to autonomy as goal orientation, since it stresses authority 'within' the learner. Christian adult educators who prefer this goal will give learners freedom in the instruction. This would imply a preference for experiential learning, which is an educational 'journey' for both learner and educator with no fixed goal. We expect the educational method of mediated learning to be connected with the goal of transformation. Transformation presupposes a dialectic or diacritical relation between authority both 'outside' and 'inside' the learner. Christian adult educators who prefer this orientation will opt for a learning process that is influenced by both learner and educator. This is precisely what the method of mediated learning is about.

For each research question this influence is controlled for religious characteristics of Christian adult educators. In other words, is the relation the same for educators from different backgrounds? The theoretical framework on which we based our distinction of different types of goal orientations centres on whether authority for acceptance of beliefs lies 'outside' (external) or 'inside' (within) persons. In our research we controlled for the following religious characteristics:

- Concept of the church, in which we distinguish between three dimensions of openness versus control: (1) cultural openness, which implies that religious beliefs should keep pace with changing ideas in society; (2) structural openness, which implies that church membership should be open to everybody; and (3) hierarchic Church model, in which the process of decision making rest with the Church hierarchy (scale from Jeurissen 1993)
- Degree of church involvement, which includes being a regular churchgoer (at least once a month) and being active in church life (scale from Felling, Peters & Scheepers 2000)
- Intensity of prayer life (from 1 [often] to 4 [never])
- Interest in new religiosity such as New Age, esotericism, astrology, yoga (scale from De Hart 1990)

- Degree to which people report having had mystical experiences, defined as moving beyond the limits of time and space, being united with all things, an experience of holiness (derived from Hood 1975; 1993)
- The question of who decides on the content and aim of Christian adult education: the bishop or the adult educators themselves (either in conjunction with colleagues in the same organisation or not).

We can formulate expectations about possible influences of these religious characteristics on a goal orientation based on the ‘outside’ or ‘inside’ criterion of authority. We expect Christian adult educators to prefer a conformist goal orientation if they disagree with cultural and structural openness in the church, if they agree with the hierarchic Church model, are involved in church activities, have an intense prayer life, see the bishop as the one who determines the contents of Christian adult education, have little interest in alternative religiosity and report few mystical experiences. Mystical experiences are a type of religiosity that can also be found outside the institutional church. Our expectation with regard to the goal orientation of autonomy is the reverse of conformity. We expect Christian adult educators to prefer autonomy as a goal orientation if they agree with cultural and structural openness in the church, disagree with a hierarchic Church model, are less involved in church activities, have a less intense prayer life, want to decide on the contents of Christian adult education themselves, are interested in alternative religiosity and report more mystical experiences. With regard to the goal of transformation, we expect a positive attitude in respect of all the religious characteristics: agreement with cultural and structural openness of the church; involvement in church activities; less intense prayer life; interest in alternative religiosity; and more mystical experiences, and disagreement with a hierarchic Church model. We also expect a preference to decide for themselves what the contents of the education should be. But the reason for this expectation is different than for autonomy. Transformation implies a balance between the influence of learner and educator. If the contents and goal of the education are decided on beforehand by the bishop, this would restrict the scope for active participation in the learning process. Therefore we expect that educators will want to determine the contents and goal themselves and will prefer not to be subject to the bishop’s authority.

## 5.2 *Research Design*

We investigated the extent to which goal orientation and educational methods are interrelated in the minds of educators, as outlined above, by means of survey research. We used questionnaires to gain insight into the preferred goal

orientation and educational methods of practitioners in Catholic religious and moral adult education in the Netherlands. The study is meant to be exploratory and explanatory (Segers 2002, 119). It is exploratory because theorising on Catholic adult education in the Netherlands is not sufficiently robust as yet to permit hypothesis testing. There has been too little research into goal orientations and educational methods in the field of adult education, both locally and internationally. Studies to date focus on goals and not on the more abstract level of goal orientations. The research is explanatory because it seeks to determine the relations between the choice of a goal orientation and an educational method, and how these relate to educators' characteristics.

### 5.3 *Sample*

The research was conducted among adult catechists and counsellors working in a Catholic context in the Netherlands. They include the following:

- Adults catechists in parishes
- Pastors charged with adult religious education
- Counsellors at religious counselling and meditation centres
- Teachers at pastoral schools
- Theologically trained volunteers experienced in adult religious education

We researched the entire population. We obtained address lists from the administrations of dioceses and deanships. According to these lists 618 professionals are involved in courses in religious and moral adult education in a Catholic context. It turned out, however, that they included people that did not belong to our target group. We tried to clean up the address list by sending everybody on it a letter requesting them to notify us if they do not fall within the target group. We received 78 responses from professionals who said they were not, or no longer, employed in the field of adult education. Thus the research population comprises at most 540 persons. Church administration proved to be an unreliable framework. We surmise that there is oversampling of the population, hence we cannot give its exact size. In May 2003 we sent out the questionnaires, of which 151 completed ones were returned. Each educator that participated in the study was active in the field of Catholic adult education.

### 5.4 *Research Instruments*

The dependent variable in our research is the goals of Christian adult education. We distinguish between three types of goal orientation: conformity,



autonomy and transformation. In section 2 we referred to different goals of moral and religious education that can be considered part of one of the goal orientations. Within the goal orientation of conformity we mentioned monistic moral education, neo-scholastic education, kerygmatic education and hermeneutic education. Within the goal orientation of autonomy we identified non-moralistic education as a moral educational goal, and worldview-related and existential education as religious goals. Within the goal orientation of transformation we distinguished pluralistic moral education as a goal for moral education, and participatory, multireligious and mystagogic education as religious educational goals. For the scale construction of the goals of religious education we refer the reader to previous publications on this research project (Driesen, Hermans & De Jong 2005; 2008), and for the goals of moral education to Driesen, Hermans and De Jong (2008).

To test our theoretical assumptions we carried out a factor analysis of the scales that were constructed and validated in our research. It is a second-order factor analysis, because it is not performed on the items but on the scales. The results of the analysis appear in table 1. They confirm our theoretical ideas about the three goal orientations, except for the second goal of autonomy. An existential approach to Christian adult education consists in encouraging religious identity construction by means of interpersonal clarification of experience. The meaning of existential questions and experiences is discovered in interaction with other religious people. This does not mean, however, that one simply takes over the other's identity. It is rather a case of interaction, in which others awaken ideas that lie deeply hidden in oneself. The two goals left in the scale (F2) are non-moralistic education and worldview-related education. Both goals are critical for the role of religious institutions in modern society. Non-moralistic education seeks to make learners aware that moral arguments are not considered rational in societal life. Justifications of moral preferences are only relevant at an individual level. Individuals make autonomous choices according to their own moral preferences. The goal of worldview-related education is to critically confront the vacuum left by religion in its institutional manifestations. The role of religion in present-day society has shrunk to near irrelevance, but people still seek transcendence and struggle against experiences of meaninglessness throughout their lives. Autonomy refers to the freedom of individual people to construct their own religious ideas. Without the existential goal this factor is confined to scales which are critical of religion in its institutional manifestation, hence we give the second factor a new label, namely a religio-critical goal orientation.

**Table 1: Oblimin rotated factor matrix, factor loadings (>.20), communality ( $h^2$ ), reliability, explained variance, mean and standard deviation of goals of moral and religious adult education.**

	$h^2$	f1	f2	f3
Preferential monistic	.57	.75		
Neo-scholastic	.59	.74		
Kerygmatic	.54	.72		
Hermeneutic	.51	.56	.32	-.30
Non-moralistic	.60		.72	-.26
Worldview-related	.34		.59	
Participatory	.50		-.21	.67
Pluralistic	.36			.59
Multireligious	.31			.55
Mystagogic	.34		-.30	.50
Liberation	.23			.48
Alpha		.76	.63	.68
Mean		3.43	1.94	3.84
Standard deviation		.70	.70	.47
Explained variance	44.5 %			

Legend:

\* Scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (agree strongly)

f1 = conformist goal orientation

f2 = religio-critical goal orientation

f3 = transformational goal orientation

The intermediate variable in our research is educational methods. The factor analysis appears in the appendix to this article. For a more detailed description of the scale construction we refer to a previous publication (Driesen, Hermans & De Jong 2006).

### 5.5 *Design of Analysis*

To analyse the predictors of goal orientations of adult educator we used the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM technique) (cf. Kline 2001). We want to know which variables predict agreement with goal orientations in Christian adult education. In each research question we formulated three predictive directions:

- Choice of educational method predicts level of agreement with a goal orientation
- Level of agreement with a goal orientation predicts choice of educational method
- Choice of an educational method predicts agreement with a goal orientation and vice versa

To carry out an SEM analysis one needs to build a model. In our analytical model educational methods and goal orientations are endogenous variables, which means that they are at the heart of the model. Our aim is to build a theory about these variables and, more precisely, the direction of influence between them. The value of the endogenous variables is determined by the values of the other variables in the system. The religious characteristics of the educators are so-called exogenous variables (x-variables), because their value is determined by factors extraneous to the model. The value of the religious characteristics (such as level of interest in alternative religiosity) can influence the value of the endogenous variables (i.e. agreement with educational methods and goal orientations). In each of our research questions this is referred to as “controlling for religious characteristics of Christian adult educators”. Figure 1 gives an overview of the variables in our analytical model.

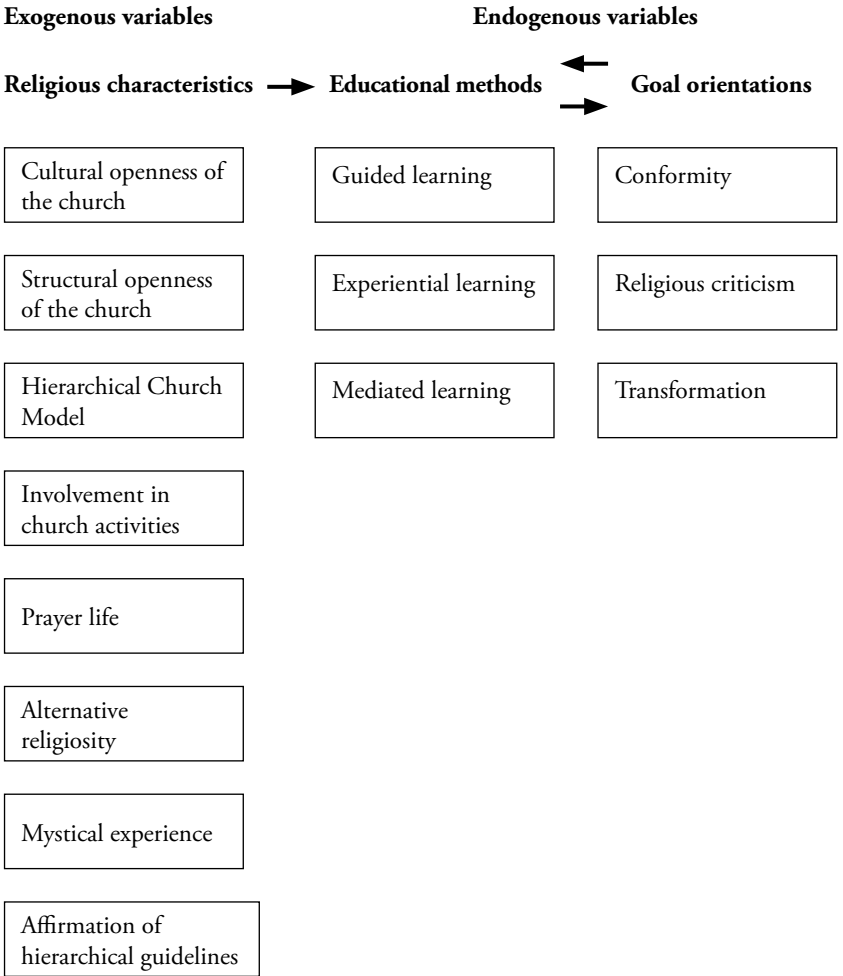
## 6 Results

With the help of the LISREL program we made an SEM analysis for each of the formulated research questions. Altogether there were nine analyses: three research questions with three sub-questions each. Only one analysis yielded an adequate level of fit, namely research question 3(b). Although this may seem disappointing, the result is not surprising considering that we did not know in which direction the influence of Christian adult educators’ educational thinking might go. In the next section we return to this result, more specifically the fact that it was impossible to build a model for the goal orientations of conformity and religious criticism.

Research question 3(b) was: *To what extent is there a two-way influence between a preference for educational methods (guided, experiential, mediated) and a preference for transformation as the goal orientation of Christian adult education, while controlling for religious characteristics of Christian adult educators?*

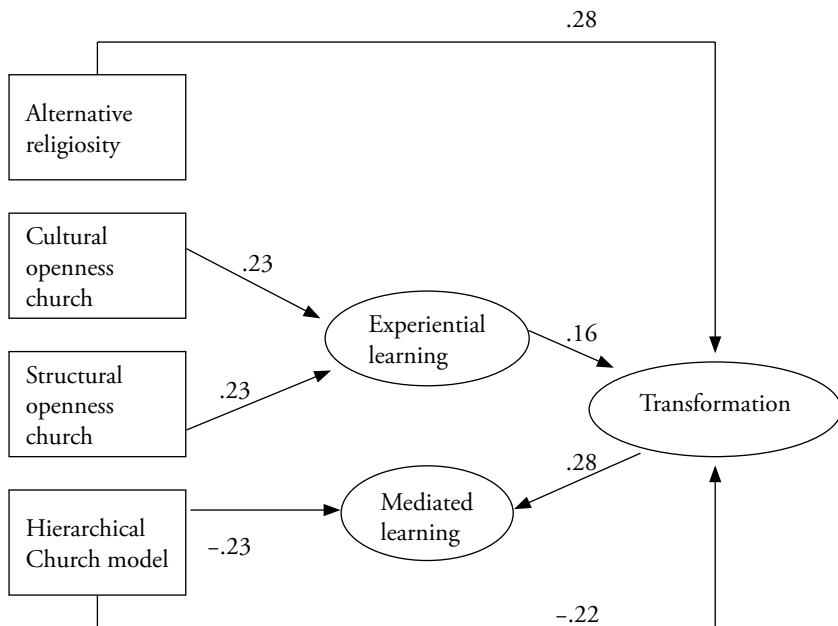
The result of our analysis is reflected in figure 2. The goal orientation of transformation is connected with two educational methods. In our model greater agreement with experiential learning predicts the goal orientation of

**Figure 1: Structural model to analyse the direction of influence between educational methods and goal orientations of Christian adult education while controlling for religious characteristics of Christian adult educators.**



Legend:  
➔ indicates direction of the prediction

**Figure 2: Structural model of the direction of influence between educational methods and the transformational goal orientation while controlling for religious characteristics of the Christian adult educators (beta coefficients).<sup>7</sup>**



transformation, and transformation predicts greater agreement with mediated learning. But the direction of influence between transformation and one of the two educational methods could also run the other way. To be more precise, greater agreement with mediated learning predicts greater agreement with transformation and greater agreement with transformation predicts greater agreement with experiential learning. Both models would yield the same goodness of fit. In an SEM model the prediction cannot run in both directions at the same time, so figure 2 shows the model in which greater agreement with experiential learning predicts the goal orientation of transformation, and transformation predicts greater agreement with mediated learning. But we repeat: the direction could also be the reverse. This result is in remarkable: we expected a relationship with mediated learning, but not with experiential learning. We will return to this result in the discussion.

<sup>7</sup> The goodness of fit of the model is quite high:  $\chi^2 = 7.031$ ; d.f. = 7;  $p = .042$ ;  $gfi = .993$ ;  $agfi = .902$ ;  $nfi = .985$ ;  $rmsea = .026$ .

Both the goal orientation of transformation and the educational methods of experiential learning and mediated learning are influenced by some religious characteristics of Christian adult educators. First, we see a direct influence of level of interest in alternative religiosity on transformation ( $\beta .28$ ). We expected this prediction, because transformation is more open to pluralism. Next, we see two predictors representing adult educators' ecclesiological ideas. Greater agreement with a culturally open church predicts greater agreement with experiential learning ( $\beta .22$ ). Also, greater agreement with a structurally open church predicts greater agreement with experiential learning ( $\beta .22$ ). Finally, educators who affirm a hierarchic Church model agree less with mediated learning ( $\beta -.23$ ). In other words, educators who reject hierarchical guidelines agree more with transformation as a goal orientation. Affirmation of a hierarchic Church model also predicts less agreement with transformation: educators who disagree with it, are more in favour of transformation; those who agree with a hierarchic decision making process in the Church disagree more with transformation ( $\beta -.22$ ).

## **7 Summary and Discussion**

What are the results of our research and how do we assess them in the context of dealing with pluralism in Christian adult education?

Our findings concern the two-way influence between a preference for a particular educational method (guided, experiential, mediated) and a preference for transformation as the goal orientation of Christian adult education. Our research shows that adult educators consistently choose the goal of transformation in connection with the educational methods of experiential and mediated learning. This consistency is understandable, because the goal of transformation presupposes a dialectical relationship between authority 'outside' and 'inside' the learner. To put it differently: learners learn to make their own reasoned religious and moral choices, and at the same time they are challenged to scrutinise their identity critically and constructively from the perspective of a religious tradition (the Christian tradition[s], but not only Christianity). The research shows that the relationship between choices of a goal orientation and educational method does not go in one direction only. The choice of an educational method influences the goal orientation, and vice versa. To put it differently, the choices of educational method and goal orientation influence each other mutually. There are two predictors for the goal orientation of transformation: rejection of a hierarchical Church model, and greater interest in alternative religiosity. Rejection of a hierarchic process of

decision making in the Church also predicts more agreement with mediated learning. Two other notions about the church are predictors for experiential learning: cultural openness and structural openness of the church. None of the other characteristics influence the goal orientation of transformation or the educational methods in our model. Together these characteristics present a religious profile of Christian adult educators as being open to pluralism — both as regards alternative religiosity, introducing modern ideas in the church (cultural openness) and not refusing anybody church membership (structural openness), and by rejecting a hierarchic policy in the Church (not being open to democratic process in the Church). Three out of four religious characteristics in our model are images of the Church. For the Christian adult educators, apparently their notion of the Church is decisive for the level of agreement of the goal orientation of transformation.

This finding has two striking features. Firstly, the only relationship is that between the choice of educational method and the goal orientation of transformation. There are no significant relations between choice of educational method and the goal orientations of conformity and religious criticism. Secondly, there is an unexpected correlation between the goal orientation of transformation and the choice of a particular educational method. We expected this goal orientation to correlate with a choice of mediated learning as an educational method. This expectation proved correct: having a transformational goal orientation indeed influences the choice of mediated learning. But we did not anticipate that there would also be a relation with the choice of experiential learning as an educational method. How do we explain these two results?

Firstly, how do we evaluate the absence of a relation between preference for the goal orientations of conformity and autonomy and educational methods? Lack of clarity about the relation between goal orientation and educational method can impede participants' learning. In this case the Christian adult educators choose a goal orientation and an educational method which are dissonant. It could entail, for example, that an educator with a conformist goal orientation favours experiential learning as educational method. This method, however, does not fit the desired goal of conformity. This could be judged a fortunate inconsistency if one rejects conformity as the goal of Christian adult education. Maybe the adult educators are aware that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church favours a type of Christian adult education aimed at conformity, so their preference for this goal mirrors the institutional expectation. However, on different grounds they might favour an educational method that allows adults greater input and influence on the learning process. They might also have experienced in their professional practice of adult education that guided learning does not work. Christian adults might have an aversion to this

kind of instruction. For either of these reasons adult educators might favour educational methods other than guided learning. But from an educational point of view this inconsistency is a matter of concern. It is confusing for learners, because the result of the learning process may not be what they expected. And for adult educators the result of the education is frustrating because they do not achieve what they aimed for. It should be clear to both learners and educators what they are doing.

The second unexpected result is that the choice of experiential learning as an educational method in its turn influences the goal orientation of transformation. This finding does not conflict with our theoretical assumptions regarding authority. In experiential learning authority resides within the individual and the learner is personally responsible for the learning process. Since the transformational goal orientation allows scope for both the authority and expertise of the educator and the authority of participants, this relation seems explicable. It means that there is a relation between the degree of responsibility for the learning process that is left to the participant and a transformational goal orientation that entails a dialectic relation between authority within and outside the individual. Since there is no relation with the educational method of guided learning but only with the experiential learning method, these results justify the conclusion that a transformational goal orientation accords with an educational method that leaves the participant scope for directing the process. Both educational methods meet this requirement, with experiential learning offering maximum scope for self-direction. It also seems to involve two groups of educators. The first comprises educators with a democratic concept of the church opting for a democratic educational method (experiential learning), which influences the choice of a transformational goal orientation. The second group consists of educators with a transformational goal orientation who opt for the mediated learning method because they reject a hierarchic image of the church.

Finally, which goal orientations and educational methods offer the broadest perspective on learning to cope with pluralism? The conformist type assumes that there is only one truth, to which people must conform. The ultimate aim is to achieve uniformity. But this endeavour does not accord with a pluralistic society. The goal orientation of self-determination does allow for pluralism, but the different conceptions simply exist alongside each other. It is a matter of individual development and each individual is entitled to his own views, but these views are never correlated. It is a case of letting everyone be. The transformational goal orientation, whilst allowing for differing views, also offers tools to decide between them. This is done by critically relating individuals' differing ideas not only to each other but also to the perspectives of



various religious traditions. The transformational goal orientation does not profess to have absolute certainty and leaves scope for not knowing. Hence this type is most apposite for the complex reality of religious and moral pluralism. When it comes to choosing an educational method, mediated learning is most appropriate. Mediated learning can overcome the biases of guided and experiential learning by allowing for both the Christian tradition and the educator's expertise, and the critical input and experience of participants. This educational method teaches participants to view a problem from diverse angles through cooperation. It confronts them with the fact that people do not share the same views, that not all trends within Christianity have the same religious ideas, and it stimulates them to respect this diversity (Lowyck 1995). That is a vital condition for dealing with pluralism constructively. Mediated learning proceeds from the reality of dissent in a pluralistic social context and equips participants with the necessary skills to cope with such an environment.

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## Appendix

**Table A1: Oblimin rotated factor matrix, communality ( $h^2$ ), reliability ( $\alpha$ ) and percentage explained variance, means and standard deviation of educational methods in Christian adult education**

Item	$h^2$	f1	f2	f3
I find it normal for participants to be critical of the educator	.51	.71		
it is important to take the wishes and interests of participants into account in courses	.50	.70		
participants are responsible for their own learning process	.23	.42		
as an educator it is my task to ensure that participants understand the learning material	.23	.42		
it is my task to see to it that participants achieve the learning objectives	.20	.39		
the contents, goal and method of the course should not be decided beforehand	.58		.66	
learning is a voyage of discovery and participants can decide for themselves what it should be like	.42		.61	
I have no fixed learning objectives. They are determined by circumstances, personal motivation, learners' experiences, etc.	.31		.52	
the educator should take decisions pertaining to the contents, goal and method of the course	.56			.66
the educator should allow participants to co-determine the way the instruction is offered	.43			-.57
as the educator I determine the learning objectives of the course	.27			.51
Alpha		.69	.62	.62
Mean*		4.01	2.57	3.34
Standard deviation		.51	.71	.72
Explained variance		38.6 %		

\* NB. Scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (agree strongly)

F1 = mediated learning

F2 = experiential learning

F3 = guided learning