

## CHAPTER 2

### The roots of infant education in the Western world

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## 2.1 Introductory remarks

Although a formal educative programme specifically for infancy was only devised by Pestalozzi a scant two hundred years ago (cf. chapter 5, par. 5.2.4.2), the interest in the progression of, and the weal and woe of infant education goes back many centuries. Contemporary educative theory and practice resulted from the interaction between, among others, survival, altered living circumstances and changing views concerning the nature of the child which evolved from the scientific study of the child, his growing up and his education.

A study of the way small children were instructed and educated in different countries and at different times creates not only an awareness of the multitude of approaches to instruction and education of the pre-school child, but also brings about an understanding of why some of these approaches were more successful than others. This understanding and insight is essential for an accountable judgement or evaluation of present as well as future theories and practice concerning the instruction and education of little ones. In terms of this evaluation a choice of the options for action can be made by all who are concerned with the education of pre-school children – parents, students, planners of education, politicians and teachers.

In this chapter as well as the four following chapters (which form a unit) an overview of infant education throughout the ages will be presented. Only a few periods, streams, trends and representatives will be used as examples to illustrate different aspects of the progression of infant education. Diagram 1 (at the end of this book) clearly indicates how these periods, streams, trends and representatives were always related, influenced each other and how the imprint of the "old" theories and usages are still to be found on the "new". The Middle Ages did not suddenly cease to exist on a specific day and date; on the contrary, cer-

tain moments of the existing reality (e.g. living conditions, image of the child, educative theory and practice, etc.) continued to exist and exert their influence even after the end of the Middle Ages. Change was gradual until a new era, stream, philosophical view or philosopher/practitioner became so prominent that the old gradually faded but did not necessarily disappear completely.

The beginning of infant education in the Western world (which is the topic of this chapter) may be traced to four very old cultural eras or cultural directions – namely, the Greek, Roman, Jewish and Christian eras. These four so-called Western founding cultures (also known as the antique or classical founding structures of civilization) are universally looked upon as the cradle of Western civilization. These cultures are responsible for the heights to which Western civilization has risen. The following statement of Thaddeus Zielinski in this connection deserves mention:

All of us have two Fatherlands, – the one is the land from which we take our name, the other is antiquity. In body and soul, we belong to our own country, in spirit however, we are, or should be, one with the great past. (Gulick 1963:7)

In this chapter an attempt will be made to determine what the educative thought and practice, specifically concerning informal (home) education of the small child (or present pre-school child) were and how certain views on and the practical "handling of" infant education have remained intact through the ages. In this reflection attention will also, among others, be given to the influence of the spirit of the times on family life in each of the four Western founding cultures and an attempt will be made to indicate to what extent views on the practical "presentation" of infant education have survived through the ages until this very day.

## **2.2 The family and informal education in the founding cultures of the West**

### ***2.2.1 The heritage of the Western founding cultures from the earliest primitive times***

Educative events in the early ages usually occurred within the extended family – consisting of parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts and even slaves. Everyone, to a greater or lesser degree, exerted an influence on the small child. The higher the level of civilization became the more complex man's culture became and the smaller the family circle as educative

institution became. Today this primary education milieu of the child usually consists of father, mother and child(ren) and possibly the grandparents.

The family is still, as was the earlier extended family, the primary educative milieu that presents to the child the essential social and educative structure in which he can progress towards adulthood. Here attitudes are formed to what is important and to what is less important; what is good and less good; what is valuable or worthless, the significant and the meaningless. It is from this educative milieu that the child has to step out into the larger social reality and eventually into the world of the adult. If this important life-world for some reason or other is pedagogically inadequate, the child will, in the words of Kotzee (1969:176): "go about, crying in his heart even although he has reached the age of twenty-three or four. He will cry because he is deprived, disinherited of his childhood" (author's translation).

In the earliest primitive times, long before the classical or antique civilizations under discussion, education was literally a preparation for life, that is, it was completely practical in nature. Youth had to take over from the older generation the responsibility for survival as the universal aim in life. The education of the child was consequently aimed at making him independent and preparing him for survival. The child's education was considered complete as soon as the boy knew as much as his father and the daughter's knowledge was on a par with that of her mother. The goal was an exact reproduction of the knowledge and skills of the parents.

During these primitive times the child was usually not seen as an individual. He had no right of existence in his own right. As chattel of his father who had absolute power over him, the child's survival depended on his father's choosing. Abortions and infanticide (as a result of a shortage of food, too many children or a physical deformity of the child) were common practice. The status of the child in the family was thus very little better than that of a small animal. This does nevertheless not imply a lack of affection in these primitive societies; on the contrary, the parental instinct was usually very highly developed, yet it could easily revert into a type of bestial emotion and did not always reveal itself as self-sacrificing love and intelligent caring.

The mother seldom had a high status; together she and the child were usually considered inferior and were often deemed to be no more than possessions. It is thus not surprising that education in the family, measured against contemporary criteria, was of a relatively low standard. It was, in fact, little more than mere habit formation through slavish imitation of the examples set by the parents and random learning by participation in the daily toil of the parents. The outcome of this type of education was conformity to the norms of the group for the sake

of survival. Apart from imitation, play fulfilled an important educative role: toys, pets and the playful imitation of their parents' activities prepared the child for both the physical and spiritual spheres of life.

If the baby had the necessary strength to survive the harsh living conditions, his education and training in respect of the following could commence:

- *Practical moulding*: The child was taught to feed and dress himself and to protect himself against the elements and other dangers. For this reason he had to learn the skills of hunting, war and the making and maintenance of weapons and other implements.
- *Social and moral moulding*: The parents instructed their children concerning the history, composition, rites, ceremonies and habits of the group. Narratives, oral repetition of traditions, sagas and epics were an important part of daily life.
- *Religious moulding*: This consisted of the parents initiating their children into the practices of their religion with all its superstitions, taboos and intricate procedures aimed at placating the gods and making them understand illnesses, death, natural disasters, accidents and failures in terms of the displeasure of certain supernatural powers and evil beings.
- *Ethical moulding*: Under the guidance of his parents the child learnt how to decorate toys, weapons and implements and through dancing he learnt how to become skilled, graceful and supple – which gave him the opportunity to attend unconsciously to man's desire for the artistic and beautiful.

These introductory remarks concerning informal education (that is, not formal school education) in primitive communities should serve to facilitate a better understanding of the informal education of infants during the classical period.

## 2.2.2 *The spirit of the times in classical Greece*

The Greeks are an Indo-European nation who came to Greece from South-Eastern Europe many centuries before the birth of Christ. The famous Greek civilization gradually evolved in various city states particularly in the period 1000-750 B.C. Sparta and Athens were the most important city states.

### 2.2.2.1 *Sparta*

Sparta was originally ( $\pm$  800 B.C.) a small community in a valley on the Laconic flats at the south-eastern tip of the Pelopnesian peninsula. By

700 B.C. Sparta had already developed into an eminent city state (polis). Owing to mountains and inadequate harbours Sparta was geographically isolated and also cut off from the outside world in the fields of culture and trade. In their attempt to survive and at the same time exercise control over the original inhabitants of the area (the Helots), who were continuously trying to regain their lost freedom from their Spartan conquerors, it was essential that every Spartan had to be trained to become a hardy and obedient fighter who revered the interests of the state above all else. Individualism and family life were thus subordinated to the interests of the state.

In the light of these conditions it stands to reason that the educative aim of the Spartans was directed at moulding a patriotic, battle ready citizen; a physically perfectly developed being who possessed the qualities of obedience and drive.

#### **2.2.2.2 Athens**

The city state of Athens was situated in Attica, in the most eastern part of central Greece. The inadequacy of their natural resources forced the Athenians, in contrast to the Spartans, to make contact and trade with remote countries such as Russia, Sicily, Egypt and the Danubian enclave. To the Athenians, far different from the situation of the isolated Spartans, strangers and outside influences were everyday occurrences. The Athenians, although not unaware of the dangers of giving strangers free access, were not opposed to these divergent elements in their community.

They also differed from the Spartans in that in Athens education and teaching were private family matters. The state had only a general interest and attempted to ensure a harmonious relationship between the individual, the community and the state. In Athens education was thus based on a democratic foundation in contrast to the socialist policy of absolute state control which prevailed in Sparta.

The Athenians believed that the individual would serve his state to the best of his abilities if his particular gifts were fully developed/moulded and, although citizenship was highly revered here (as was also the case in Sparta), the individual and the family were allowed a freedom which was totally unheard of in Sparta. Athenian education rested on the three pillars of individualism, a happy family life and freedom. In early Athenian history ( $\pm$  776-449 B.C.) the ideal man was seen as the person with drive and courage who would defend his personal freedom as well as the freedom of his state. At a later stage ( $\pm$  479-338 B.C.) this ideal broadened and the ideal person was then typified as someone with wisdom who carried within himself the qualities of goodness, truth and beauty.

## 2.2.3 Informal education in classical Greece

### 2.2.3.1 Sparta

In the city state of Sparta the education of even the small child who was still cared for at home was diligently scrutinized, planned and controlled according to the prescriptions of the state. Until his seventh year, while the child (boy) was still in the care of his mother or nurse (fathers lived in state barracks), three goals were striven after: firstly, to toughen his body and teach him to endure hunger and pain; secondly, to teach him always to respect his parents and betters and thirdly, to saturate his imagination with heroic deeds from mythology or past history in order to develop a love for and loyalty towards traditions and existing practices. Plutarch, a learned Greek (Athenian) expressed the following views concerning informal as well as formal education in Sparta:

[T]heir training was calculated to make them obey commands well, endure hardships, and conquer in battle.

(Plutarch 1967: 'Lycurgus', XVI.6)

As far as a girl was concerned, the educative ideal was to make her capable of bearing strong healthy children; to make her a worthy mother of soldiers. To achieve this goal, and in order to rid her of all tenderness and fear, she was subjected to the same education in the home as boys.

As marriage in Sparta was a compulsory state transaction with the choice of marriage partner decided by the state (and the parents) love was not highly evident. A child was thus not necessarily seen as a gift of love or the affirmation of the bond of love. The sole purpose of marriage was to produce children in order to increase the population and ensure the continued existence of the state.

Children in themselves were of no significance and being a child was merely a necessary phase in the developmental progression of the ideal citizen. New babies were not always accepted into the family. Exposing a child to the elements and virtually certain death (i.e. the child was simply "discarded" in some isolated place) was an accepted practice which served to limit the size of the family and as a means of getting rid of weak or disabled infants.

In Sparta the newly born were officially examined in a place known as the *Lesche* by a board of citizens and if the child was found to be crippled or weak, permission to raise the child was withheld. Such a child was then exposed at a place named *Apothetae*, a deep cave near the

*Taiyotos* mountain. Another method was washing the new-born baby in wine instead of water. According to Plutarch only the strong, healthy, vital baby could survive this immersion in wine. It was believed that epileptic or weak children would faint and atrophy after such a bath "while the healthy ones are rather tempered by it, like steel, and given a firm habit of body." (Plutarch *Ibid.*:XVI.1-3). If a child was accepted he was entrusted to the care of his mother for seven years. She was, in reality, no more than a state nurse. It is, however, interesting to note that concerning the status of the mother (and daughter) in the family, the mother was considered the equal and helpmate of the man, and not his inferior. The time spent outside the home, the Spartan's profound involvement in politics and his participation in wars left no opportunity for any home-life. The presence of a wise mother in the home was therefore essential.

Spartan mothers were well known for their skill and their handling of the small child. Through songs and singing and the discipline which she enforced, she taught her children to be self-controlled, obedient and brave. They were taught to control feelings of fear, anger, hunger and pain, to overcome their fear of the dark, to fast, to wear thin clothing (even in winter), to sleep on a hard bed and to exercise vigorously in the open air. Silence, obedience, honouring and respecting his elders, were held up as examples of virtues which had to be adhered to.

Within this system the child was state property. As soon as he reached the age of seven the boy had to leave home to spend the rest of his life in the company of his peers in a "military school". The virtues mentioned before were more deeply imprinted there. The reason for this strict prescriptive policy of education maintained by the state and the removal of the child from the protection of his family as early as possible, was the deep-seated doubt which Lycurgus (the founder of Sparta and perpetrator of the state laws) had about the effect a closeknit family life might have on the future citizen of the state. His view was that family life emphasized the interests of members of the family which might lead to diminished devotion to the community and consequently become a threat to the safety of the state.

### 2.2.3.2 Athens

In contrast to Sparta where the state was firmly in control of all education, infant education included, education of the infant in Athens was mainly a private matter for which the family took full responsibility. The state was only concerned with general supervision. By means of family education the Athenian hoped to form the character, body and intellect of the child in a manner which eventually led him to become a "good" person and a "good" citizen.

Marriage in Athens, which was as a rule arranged by the parents or members of the family, was considered important for the sake of the existence of the individual, the family and the state. A wedding was looked upon as a pious matter and the ceremony was considered holy.

In spite of the high regard in which marriage was held, children did not receive the same consideration. In Athens there was also little understanding of the child as child. Being a child was only a phase of progression towards adulthood, a phase which had to pass as quickly as possible. The child as eventual adult, as guarantor for the continuation of the family and the state, was nevertheless important and for this reason the birth of a child (and particularly a boy) was a joyful occasion. A citizen of Athens who saw an olive branch on the door of a friend's house shared in the happiness and good fortune of the birth of a boy; at the birth of a girl, wool replaced the olive branch.

Views on the nature of the child must not be confused with affection and love of children. In Athens there were numerous examples of family affection, parental love and mutual respect between parent and child. Even so exposure of the child was an accepted practice in Athens, as it was in the entire world of antiquity, and disabled and unwanted children were abandoned to their fate in isolated places. Many of these abandoned children were placed in earthenware pots in the vicinity of temples or other busy areas and they were often rescued and brought up as slaves. Mothers often attached some distinguishing mark to such a child in the hopes of being able to identify him at some unknown time in the future.

After birth the child was placed at his father's feet; picking the child up indicated that he accepted his responsibility as father. This acceptance of fatherhood was followed by three affirmation ceremonies:

- On the fifth to the seventh days after the birth of the child a family feast was held during which a nurse or female family member carried the child around the family hearth. This served to place the child under the care of the *aegis* (family gods) for ever and to affirm his family membership.
- On the tenth day the father formally accepted responsibility for the protection and education of the child and he was given a family name.
- At the time of the annual family feast in autumn, all children who had been born during the preceding year were introduced to the members of the father's family who decided by vote whether the boy or girl would be accepted as legitimate and legally a child of Athenian parents. If accepted, the child's name was entered in a family register which entitled him to citizenship and confirmed him as heir to his parents' possessions.

Athens was "a man's world". The status of an Athenian woman was considerably lower than that of a woman in Sparta. She had virtually no rights and was a "chattel of her husband". In contrast to the relative freedom of movement in public enjoyed by the women of Sparta, moral standards demanded that Athenian women should avoid appearing in public apart from the practice of her religion and attending funerals – and even then she was expected to be accompanied by her husband and be heavily veiled. The Greek poet, Menander remarked in this respect that: "The life of a respectable woman [was] bounded by the street door." (quoted in Goodsell 1934:87). Isolated from the outside world and confined to the women's quarters of the home she had only her children and slaves for company.

This discrimination against the woman of Athens notwithstanding, within the family sphere her treatment was most certainly not lacking in honour and respect. Within the home she exercised full control and was responsible for the education of the boys until they went to school (at the age of seven) and of the girls until such time as they were married. Even after they had left home the children were often still profoundly influenced by their mother.

During his first year of life the Athenian child was usually cared for by his mother, but also in many instances by a Spartan nurse and then a governess – often an old, trustworthy slave – took over his care. As a rule she fed the child honey, milk and similar light and sweet substances and she also had to ensure that he got enough fresh air and that he wore his amulet to protect him against evil spirits.

The mother's share in the education of the infant was chiefly aimed at laying the moral and religious foundations for his later life. Fables, simple myths, legends and stories about gods and heroes from the past were recounted and songs were sung which the children were in time expected to memorize and emulate. All kinds of animals, figurines and shapes were modelled in clay. There is sufficient evidence that the infant in Athens had enough toys with which to amuse himself. All types of children's games were played and the children even had pets.

Discipline was strict from the very start. Disobedience was rewarded with hidings or children were told terrifying stories to frighten them back into line. An interesting description of such discipline is recorded by Plato in his work *Protagoras*:

They teach and admonish them from earliest childhood till the last day of their lives . . . . If he readily obeys, – so; but if not, they treat him as a bent and twisted piece of wood and straighten him with threats and blows. (Plato 1962:325 c,d)

### 2.2.3.3 The views of a few Greek philosophers on infant education

Any discussion of the infant education of the classical Greeks would not be complete without reference to the views of a few of the important philosophers of the time on this matter. Although most of their views on this topic were not immediately incorporated into the educative practice of their time, they nevertheless eventually became of vital importance to Western educative thought and practice.

#### (a) *Plato (427 - 347 B.C.)*

Plato envisaged a utopian community strictly stratified (class division) – not based on wealth or birth, but on the ability of the individual to benefit from his education. His ideal community would consist of the following classes:

| <i>Social class</i> | <i>Function in community</i>                            | <i>Specific virtues</i>    |
|---------------------|---|----------------------------|
| Men of bronze       | Labourers (producers, farmers, merchants and craftsmen) | Obedience (desire)         |
| Men of silver       | Guards (civil servants)                                 | Bravery (willpower)        |
| Men of gold         | Philosophers (rulers)                                   | Wisdom (intellect, reason) |

In his comprehensive work, *The Republic*, Plato described a detailed version of his system of education as a component of the socio-political system. The system of education was without doubt expected to serve as an instrument to ensure that his ideas were implemented. Plato was of the opinion that every individual was born with natural abilities which had to be developed to their full realization by means of education in order that he might perform that function in the community to which he was best suited. This would result in a society where social justice would reign supreme and individual interests would be subjugated to the interests of the state. Such a society, however, could only be achieved by the institution of compulsory, state controlled education for both boys and girls – with the understanding that children would be removed from their parents shortly after birth in order that they could be properly educated by the state.

There were two reasons for Plato's suggestion of this strategy: he was convinced of the importance of the first influences on the child's mind, and he considered the influence of the family on the child to be detrimental to the interests of the state. According to him the family was a source of self-interest which would again lead to social injustice. He also believed that citizens could not fulfil their duty to live and work for the state if they were also expected to bring up children.

The educative goal of state pedagogics of this nature would thus be to shape human desire, will and intellect (reason) by means of proper state education to achieve the virtues of obedience, bravery, and wisdom which together would constitute the idea of justice.

Although Plato's state philosophy did not leave any room for the child's becoming an adult within the secure space of his home, he was nevertheless fully aware that being a child was a mode of being human. He was one of the first Greek philosophers who became aware of the small child's need for assistance, and he realized that it was for exactly this reason that the child was extremely vulnerable to detrimental and negative environmental influences and matters which were essentially of concern in adult life only. He described childhood as "the time at which character is being formed and the desired impression is more readily taken." (Plato 1953: 'Republic', 377 b). It was therefore necessary for the child to be protected (by adults) against everything in the life-world, but in particular against narratives, fables and songs which were false, dirty, immoral, violent and slanderous.

For a young [child] cannot judge what is allegorical and what is literal; anything that he receives into his mind at that age is likely to become indelible and unalterable . . . (Plato *Ibid.*:378 d-e)

A young child, as future citizen of the state, had therefore to be educated in an "approved" social environment. Plato was not, however, concerned with the happiness and wellbeing of the child as a person in his own right, but with the child's growing up to become a useful future citizen within his utopian state.

Another interesting view held by Plato is that the progression of the child towards adulthood should be divided into two periods:

- *From birth to age two:* The biological mother or a suitable nurse is responsible for the initial physical care and moral moulding of the infant. Concerning the physical care of the child Plato gave the following detailed advice:
  - A pregnant mother ought to go for walks and when her child is born, she ought to mould him like wax while his limbs are still supple. He must therefore be carefully wrapped during his first two years of life.

- The nurse should carry the child everywhere until he is strong enough to stand on his own. Even then the nurse should continue to carry the child until he is three years old in order to prevent malformation of the legs by too much strain. (Plato 1953: 'Laws', 789 d)

A newborn baby will scream and cry naturally when he is unhappy about something. If, however, he is allowed to express his dissatisfaction in this manner, he will grow up with the weakness of having an excitable nature. A tranquil nature and correct handling will, however, ensure that the child grows into a calm person who is not susceptible to fits of depression and self-pity.

- *From three to six years of age:* During the period from the age of three to six, children should meet regularly at the temples of the city to participate in games. The nurses should see to it that the children behave properly and are orderly. The objectives of these games should be:
  - (1) to ensure that the child learns to play in an orderly manner with other children;
  - (2) to teach the child (through participation in games) to control his will (moulding of character);
  - (3) to accustom the child to obeying the rules of the game, so that he will in later life obey the laws of the state; and
  - (4) to arrive at an indication of the child's characteristics, possibilities and abilities, by observing him at play, in order to decide upon the most suitable occupation for him in adulthood. In this way it was possible to prepare the child eventually to fit into one of the three social classes of utopia, i.e. the class of philosophers, guards or labourers.

Plato expressed this as follows:

The soul of the child in his play should be guided to the love of that sort of excellence in which when he grows up to manhood he will have to be perfected. (Plato *Ibid.* :643 d)

In his opinions on the chastisement of the child Plato was aware of the balance which should be maintained between freedom and authority. When punishment was deserved it had to be neither too severe nor too lenient. The aim of punishment was to improve the self-confidence of the child and not to create subservience and fear or slackness. Through discipline the insubordination of the child had to be controlled because "of all animals [man is seen as belonging to the animal species] he [the child] is the most unmanageable; in as much as he has the fountain of

reason in him not yet regulated, he is an insidious and sharp-witted animal, and the most insubordinate of them all. . ." (Plato *Ibid.* :808 d-e).

(b) *Aristotle (384 - 322 B.C.)*

Aristotle, who was a pupil of Plato, believed, as did his master, that good statesmanship (the art of directing society so that most people can live together happily) was of cardinal importance. In his well-known work, *Politics*, in which he expresses his opinions on education as part of his policy for the state, he also states that happiness is the most important aim of education, an aim which should be pursued by statesmen and by means of the administration of the state. This state of happiness (of the single individual and of the numerous individuals who together constitute a community) can only be achieved if the educative intervention leads man to voluntary acceptance of a pattern of conduct based on virtue and moral wisdom. According to Aristotle there are three preconditions for virtue and wisdom: "nature", "habituation" and "reason" (rationality).

The specific means by which the proposed objective (i.e. happiness based on virtue and wisdom) could be achieved, was, *firstly*, the family which would carry the responsibility of the first phase of education from 0 to 6 years (the development of the body, the physical part of the soul). Aristotle, in contrast to Plato, considered the family as an essential institution in community life. *Secondly*, a state system of education would handle the second phase of education, the learning phase from 7 to 14 years (the development of the instincts, the irrational part of the soul) as well as the third phase of education, the maturing period from 15 to 21 years (the development of reason, the rational part of the soul).

As far as infant education was concerned, Aristotle also placed a high premium on the important pedagogic principle of sensual experience or observation as a means of acquiring knowledge. He maintained that the small child, up to the age of seven years, acquired knowledge only through observation. He believed, as did Locke some centuries after him (cf. chapter 4, par. 4.2.2.4), that the child's mind at birth was a *tabula rasa* (unwritten/blank page) and that the observing or experiencing of reality by means of the senses allows the mind to develop (fills it with knowledge; commences "writing" on the "blank page").

His *tabula rasa* theory led Aristotle to insist that there should be great circumspection concerning any environmental influence which may be spiritually detrimental to the child and disadvantageous to his character formation. Influences such as, for instance, indecent language, undesirable pictures and dramatic presentations, violent and vulgar games, fables and narratives and consorting with slaves. In fact:

... youth should be kept strangers to all that is bad and especially to things which suggest vice or hate, [because] even at this early age [first years] it is to be expected that they should acquire a taint of meanness from what they hear and see.

(Aristotle 1961 'Politica': 1336 b)

Aristotle was thus fully aware of the effect of environmental influences on the character formation of the young child.

From the above it is clear that Aristotle evidenced greater concern for the natural becoming of the child than was shown by Plato. Apart from this positive aspect of his image of the child, Aristotle was also inclined to have a certain degree of contempt for the phase of being a child. He for instance described the child as just as "feeble and false in mind as ... a madman". (Aristotle *Ibid.*:1323 a). Aristotle was in favour of abortion and exposure of crippled or deformed children during periods of undesirable population growth. He said, for example, that "no deformed child shall live ... [and] that on the ground of an excess in the number of children ... let abortion be procured before sense and life have begun." (Aristotle *Ibid.*:1335 a).

Referring to the education of infants Aristotle expressed the interesting opinion that this consists of two phases or periods, namely the pre-natal phase and the phase from birth to seven years.

- *The (potential) pre-natal phase* commenced when the wedding was solemnized. According to Aristotle the continuity and survival of the state depended, among others, upon healthy babies and for this reason he favoured state control of marriages. The state had to give direction on such matters as the age at which marriage was permitted, the spiritual and physical requirements which the marriage partners had to fulfil and the age at which parents may conceive children. The expectant mother also had to be subjected to "legislative control" to ensure the fulfilling of the following prescriptions:

Women who are with child should be careful of themselves: they should take exercise and have a nourishing diet. The first of these prescriptions the legislator will easily carry into effect by requiring that they shall take a walk daily to some Temple, where they can worship the gods who preside over birth. Their minds, however, unlike their bodies, they ought to keep quiet, for the offspring derive their natures from their mothers as plants do from the earth.

(Aristotle *Ibid.*:1335 b)

This intervention in the marriage and pre-natal care would, according to Aristotle, ensure control over the "nature" of the future infant.

- *From birth till seven years.* Aristotle was of the opinion that infant education should commence at the time of birth and should take place within the family as primary educative milieu. This education was to continue until the child was seven years old. Particular attention was to be given to the physical care of the child. A diet rich in milk and enough freedom of movement in accordance with the stage of development of the child was essential for the growing child. Exercise should not be too strenuous and should not over-excite the child. Even at a very early age he had to become accustomed to extremes of climate; this would assist him to withstand physical hardship in adulthood. Everything which children should become accustomed to had to receive attention from the start. It should, however, not be expected of the infant to work or study as this would stunt his growth and deplete his limited reserves of energy. Games would ensure sufficient physical exercise and habit formation. Particularly during the last two years of this phase, games should culminate in the imitation of adult activities. Although Plato and Aristotle did not emphasize the child's being a child in their thoughts on education, they nevertheless showed insight into certain of the essentials of being a child which in time fundamentally influenced Western educative theory and practice.

## *2.2.4 The spirit of the times in Roman times*

Rome was founded in  $\pm 753$  as a small city state, a trading centre, at a ford in the Tiber river. The Latin speaking population of Rome (later known as the Romans) originally experienced great welfare under the rule of the Etruscan kings. In 510 B.C. this monarchy was discarded and replaced by a republic which was ruled by patricians (aristocrats) at the expense of the plebeians ("common" people). In time the Romans not only conquered and absorbed the other nations of Italy, they also conquered other parts of the world and built a mighty empire.

The Romans, in contrast to the Greeks, were an extremely practical and industrious nation and seldom made much of abstract opinions and concepts. They attached great importance to a close family life and love for their country. These qualities together probably contributed to their successful campaigns against other European nations.

For a number of centuries after the mythical founding of Rome (i.e. during the so-called early Roman period, 753-146 B.C.), the home was the only institution which was directly involved in the education of the child. In every Roman home the necessary education and training was given so that the child could acquire such virtues as obedience, bravery, honesty, seriousness, worthiness and modesty.

After Rome had become a great and mighty empire, many strangers

flocked to Italy and practically every family started taking slaves into service from the areas which had been conquered (mainly from Greece which was conquered in 146 B.C.). The slave element soon became the ruling factor in most homes, which resulted in the acclaimed homeliness (and also family education) of the earlier Roman times starting to fade. Decadence, loose morals and excessive corruption in all strata of the population also led to a weakening of family ties. Naturally these events also affected infant education.

## 2.2.5 *Informal education in classical Rome*

### 2.2.5.1 The early Roman period

The good which was striven for in early Roman home education (an education which lasted until the sixteenth year) encompassed four aspects, namely the *moral ideal* of which the essence was moulding the conscience by imprinting moral values; the *family ideal* (known as the *mos maiorum*) which aimed at introducing the child to national traditions and achievements and also at inculcating respect and loyalty for parents and family members; the *religious ideal* which was concerned with obedience to the gods, patriotism and conscientiousness, and the *ideal of cultivating the virtues* of diligence, thrift and seriousness.

The Greeks were inclined to negate the importance of family life, but the Romans emphasized and held a simple and well ordered family life in high esteem. (The family consisted of father, mother, grandparents, sons, daughters, daughters- and sons-in-law, grandchildren, all servants, slaves, the *Lares* (spirits of their forebears), *Penates* (household gods), and so forth.)

The Roman love of home and family was very profound, even sacred; for the Roman it was the alpha and omega of his life. The most moving proof of the Roman's belief in the sanctity of house and home was expressed as follows by the well-known Roman teacher, Cicero:

What is more sacred, what more inviolably hedged about by every kind of sanctity, than the home of every individual citizen? Within its circle are his altars, his hearths, his household gods, his religion, his observances, his ritual, it is a sanctuary so holy in the eyes of all that it were sacrilege to tear an owner therefrom.

(Cicero 1923: 'De Domo Sua', 109)

No institution in Rome was thus more important for the moulding of character or in determining the status of its citizens, than the family. It disciplined all the members of the family, determined their tasks and economic functions. It is thus not hard to understand that the family, as

seen by the early Romans, was the place where children should grow up and be educated. Education, which was free of interference by the state, was viewed as "a reverence for childhood which made every boy and girl an object of almost religious veneration." (Barclay 1959:145).

From this it can be concluded that marriage was intended to safeguard the family and to produce people who could serve the state in times of peace and war. The marriage contract (based more on respect than love) and the marriage ceremony both referred to the bearing of children as the purpose of marriage. In fact, they believed that a curse rested upon the man who was childless and for that reason marriage was seen as a serious religious duty. It could only be entered into with the consent of, and under the protection of the gods. The birth of a child, and especially of a boy, placed the seal of success on the marriage. Girls were, however, not considered valueless as they had to assist at the religious ceremonies of the household.

The high premium on children in the Roman household was chiefly the result of strong family ties. Profound and natural *pietas* (piety) or respectful love between parents and children was something with which early Roman children were certainly not unfamiliar. (Inscriptions on tombs in the cemeteries are evidence of the love that existed between parents and their children.) The bond between parents and their children was not the only bond as the children were also bound to other family members by religious ceremonies.

Children were the seat of and hope of the family cult. An ancient law in Roman history (which can be traced back to Romulus, the legendary founder of Rome) stipulated that a father was obliged to bring up and educate *all* his sons and his *eldest* daughter and that no child could be killed *before* its third year. This at least guaranteed the child's life, to some extent, especially since affection for an infant would certainly grow in three years. The life of any deformed or sickly child could, nevertheless, depending on the consent of the five closest family members, be terminated immediately.

Family life in the early Roman period was completely under the jurisdiction of the father. For the duration of his life he had absolute authority over his wife, sons, unmarried daughters and slaves. As matrimony was based on respect, the wife (mother) did enjoy a higher status in the home than her Greek counterpart. She occupied an important place and exercised great influence in the family hierarchy. She was honoured as wife and mother and within the household she was seen as her husband's equal. This is borne out by a phrase from the wedding ceremony and matrimonial contract: "ubi ego Gaius, tu Gaia" (where you are master, I am mistress). Because she was so highly honoured and her position as spouse protected by law, the wife felt that the protection of the family honour was her responsibility. The high moral standards of

the early Roman woman are renowned and so is the influence which she had on the education and character of her children.

Together with the father the mother was responsible for the education of her children. The Roman historian, Tacitus, remarked in this respect that a baby is cosseted and educated at his mothers breast, and that her highest praise derived from her management of her household and the care of her children: "Religiously and with the utmost delicacy she regulated not only the serious tasks of her youthful charges, but their recreations and also their games." (Tacitus 1980: "Dialogus Oratoribus", 28. 4-6). He adds that if the mother were not competent to fulfil her task adequately, an experienced, respected member of the family could be chosen as governess to care for the children. The Roman citizen did not accept the assistance of an unknown hireling or nurse in the education of his children.

Family education was essentially a schooling in moral values, religious beliefs, childlike obedience, humility in bearing and behaviour and self-discipline. A simple, informal method of instruction and learning, namely imitation of the parent, was followed. As soon as a child was able to pay attention to his surroundings he attempted to imitate the behaviour, actions and activities of his parents.

A learned Roman, Pliny, in his work 'To Titus Aristo' book VIII, xiv (Pliny 1972:4-6) commented on the way young children became acquainted with moral values during early Roman times. They did not receive their early moral instruction merely by listening to fitting stories or by an appeal to their reason. They were introduced to the art of self-control, simplicity of life and virtues such as diligence and perseverance by observing their parents' behaviour and way of life. More formal instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic (although this was minimal) was conducted by the mother.

Having had regular discipline from early childhood, the Roman citizen learnt to be orderly. In the early Roman period in particular, parental discipline was strict. Both Cicero and Seneca, a Roman orator, pleaded for more kindness and for discipline which took the child's awkwardness and helplessness into account.

### **2.2.5.2 The Greco-Roman period**

During the Greco-Roman period, (from  $\pm$  146 B.C., when Roman social life was profoundly influenced by Greek culture), many of the traditional opinions of the early Romans on family life, matrimony, the authority of the father, and in particular on education, began to fade. These changing views led, for instance, to diminishing marital steadfastness. The belief that marriage was a holy duty to state and family and that it was a lifelong commitment slowly disintegrated, owing to the idea that it was a

transient adventure of limited spiritual importance, and that it could be looked upon as a non-binding contract.

During Cicero's lifetime (106-43 B.C.) there was an alarming drop in the number of marriages and children were viewed as a nuisance. Slave nurses were used to give parents more time to engage in social activities and public matters. The Romans freed themselves from the responsibility of educating children by making liberal use of abortions and the exposure of children to the elements. (A number of reasons were propounded as justification for these exposures, such as illegitimacy, female gender, deformity, undesirability, poverty and ill health. Juvenal, a Roman satirist, remarked that old established families were dying out because women were evading becoming mothers. (Juvenal 1957: "Satires", xiv.)

The decay of family life during this period, owing to the gradual change in moral values and marriage commitments and the slaves which were soon playing a major role in educative activities, led to the decline of the former well-known domesticity, purity and chastity of the Roman woman. The traditional mother figure (*matrona*) of the past started receding in the light of the mother who was merely a supervisor over a household where her own personal stamp could no longer be observed. She allowed slaves to take over her domestic responsibility as well as the education of her infants, for the sake of extra-mural interests and pleasures. Tacitus found this phenomenon of nurses becoming substitutes for mothers and intervening in the lives of the children repugnant. He expressed his disgust as follows:

Nowadays . . . our children are handed over at their birth to some silly little Greek serving-maid, with a male slave, who may be any one, to help her – quite frequently the most worthless mother of the whole establishment, incompetent for any serious service. It is from the foolish tittle-tattle of such persons that the children receive their earliest impressions, while their minds are still green and uninformed; and there is not a soul in the whole house who cares a jot what he says or does in the presence of his baby-master. Yes, and the parents themselves make no effort to train their little ones in goodness and self-control; they grow up in an atmosphere of laxity and pertness, in which they come to lose all sense of shame, and all respect both for themselves and for other people.

(Tacitus *Ibid.* : 29. 1-3)

The evil effect on society (and education) which resulted from the disintegration of tried and tested principles was according to Tacitus very prevalent in Roman society. Not all mothers and wives were blinded by the luxurious, wealthy existence, however, as proof exists that there

were mothers who never neglected their educative duties. The Greek author, Plutarch, for instance described how a mother named Cornelia, took upon herself the management of the entire household and the care and education of her children and thus proved herself to be a wise housewife and a loving mother (Plutarch 1967: 'Tiberius Gracchus', 1-4). Pliny, (as quoted in Balsdon, 1969:105) spoke appreciatively about normal, happy families with parents who still took the education of their children seriously.

### 2.2.5.3 The views of a few Roman philosophers on infant education

#### (a) Quintilian (35 - 95 A.D.)

Quintilian who was one of the most prominent Roman educationists, saw the "good" in education as the training in the art of oratory. In the preface to his most significant work on education, the *Institutio Oratoria* (Education of an Orator) he worded his educative aim as follows:

My aim, then, is the education of the perfect orator. The first essential for such an one is that he should be a good man, and consequently we demand of him not merely the possession of exceptional gifts of speech, but of all the excellence of character as well.

(Quintilian 1958: Preface, par.9)

This work by Quintilian was dedicated to the moulding of the public orator and might at first sight appear to be irrelevant as far as infant education is concerned. In fact the direct opposite proves to be true as Quintilian believed that education should commence from the cradle. His approach to the education of the infant was not so much a condemnation of existing parental laxity but rather one of constructive suggestions for reform.

He also contended that the early education of the future public orator should be in the hands of his parents. He thus emphasized the active educative role of the parents and their influence on the infant. He was also of the opinion that if a child showed signs of a lack of character in later years it could be traced to educative neglect in his early years. For this reason he emphasized parental responsibility and even placed emphasis on a "programme of schooling" for parents: "I should like to see them as highly educated as possible, and I do not restrict this remark to fathers alone." (Quintilian *Ibid.*: book I, 1-6). Illiterate parents who had themselves received no education, should not, according to Quintilian, lose heart on that score and be even less supportive of their children. On the contrary, they should be even more diligent in their educative at-

tempts and ought to concentrate on matters in which they may be of service to their children (Quintilian *Ibid.*: 1-7).

Quintilian was prepared to accept the contribution of the nurse in infant education but only with some reservations: she had to be of good character and should strive to use pure and correct language, because "it is the nurse that the child first hears, and her word that he will first attempt to imitate . . . . For, while what is good readily deteriorates, you will never turn vice into virtue. Do not therefore allow the boy to become accustomed even in infancy to a style of speech which he will subsequently have to unlearn." (Quintilian *Ibid.* : 1-5).

His final warning concerning infant education touched on inflicting corporal punishment. From his views on corporal punishment it is clear that Quintilian understood the individuality and helplessness of the child as well as the unfavourable influence which corporal punishment and force could have on the child mind. He wrote on this topic as follows:

I disapprove of flogging, although it is the regular custom, . . . because in the first place it is a disgraceful form of punishment and fit only for slaves, and is in any case an insult . . . . Secondly if a boy is so insensible to instruction that reproof is useless, he will, like the worst type of slave, merely become hardened to blows . . . . Moreover when children are beaten, pain or fear frequently have results of which it is not pleasant to speak and which are likely subsequently to be a source of shame, a shame which unnerves and depresses the mind and leads the child to shun and loathe the light . . . . I will content myself with saying that children are helpless and easily victimised, and that therefore no one should be given unlimited power over them. (Quintilian *Ibid.* :3. 13-14, 16-17)

#### (b) *Plutarch (46 - 120 A.D.)*

Plutarch, who was a contemporary of Quintilian, gained prominence for his biographies of famous people. Although he was of Greek extraction, he worked for many years in Rome, which accounts for his views on infant education being discussed here under the Greco-Roman period.

In his *De Liberis Educandis* (The education of children) he emphasized infant education in and by the family. He demanded that the family should be entirely responsible for education and teaching until the child is ready to attend school. He also pointed out the detrimental influence of the broader community when he requested that parents should keep their children as far removed as possible "from the nonsense of ostentatious public discourse" and suggested that they should adhere to "uncorrupted and sound education". (Plutarch 1969:6 par. 9.)

In order to start infant education off on the right foot he insisted on

the care of the mother instead of foster care. He looked upon foster-mothers and nurses as being insincere as they were in the first instance concerned with the material remuneration they would receive for their services. He also felt that the conduct and actions of the father in the presence of his children were of particular importance. According to Plutarch the child imitates the father and if his life style is exemplary, this would withhold the child from shameful words and deeds.

Concerning what the infant should learn in the home, Plutarch was in agreement with Plato that only edifying stories should be told to prevent pollution of the child's thoughts "lest haply their minds be filled at the outset with foolishness and corruption." (Plutarch *Ibid.* : 3 par. 5). Plutarch, like Quintilian, made high demands on educators. Their words and deeds had to be impeccable; "unimpeachable in their manners, and in experience the very best that may be found." (Plutarch *Ibid.* : 4 par.7).

Another aspect on which Plutarch and Quintilian were in agreement was their condemnation of corporal punishment and ill-treatment of infants. Children should rather be corrected by means of encouragement and reasoning. Praise and reprimand are worthy disciplinary measures; praise encourages the child to be honourable and reprimand prevents him from dishonourable and shameful conduct.

The logical reasoning of Quintilian and Plutarch concerning parental responsibility was like a voice in the desert of a decadent society. Their diligent attempts to bring about a system of education which would, among others, make provision for a responsible approach to infant education, had little success in their time. Roman morality was deteriorating and this could neither be improved nor the decline prevented by the efforts of a few individuals.

## 2.2.6 *The spirit of the times in Palestine*

Jewish history begins with the immigration of Abraham from Ur to Palestine in approximately 2150 B.C. The height of development of the Jewish nation – its golden era – occurred during the reign of King David (who died in  $\pm$  960 B.C.) and his successor, King Solomon (who died in  $\pm$  925 B.C.). The covenant of the Lord with Abraham and his descendants and their conviction that they were the chosen people of God, led the Jews to believe that they were religiously and culturally unique. God's will, as revealed to the Jews on a number of occasions, was recorded in the *Torah* (known as the *Pentateuch*, the first five books of the Old Testament).

This *Torah* (or Law of God) moulded and directed Jewish lives and history throughout the ages. Absolute obedience to the will of God influenced every aspect of Jewish life and beliefs – and in particular also their educative views and practices.

Ancient Jewish education took place within the family with the father as the accountable figure of authority. It was based on a particular God-man relationship where God was honoured as the beginning and end of everything. The aim of education was obedience to the will of God and fulfilling the demands of the covenant as contained in Leviticus 19:2: "Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy."

### ***2.2.7 Informal education of the ancient Jews***

Ancient Jewish education strove after the religious, moral, socio-national and practical moulding of man according to the laws of the *Torah*. The aim of education was not concerned with achieving an intellectual grasp of reality, but with the voluntary acceptance of a life to the glory of God.

The Ancient Jewish life-style centred in the family at home in the narrow sense, and in a wider sense with the other relatives. Firm family ties were the bonding factor in their social order. Ancient Jewish literature (the Old Testament and the Apocrypha) emphasized the influencing of the child by the home environment and the behaviour of adults with whom he came into contact in his progression towards adulthood.

The integrity and preservation of family life, which originated with two people entering into matrimony, was considered to be a bounden duty. The sanctity of marriage was emphasized by the fact that it had to be accepted as an image of the covenant of trust between God and his people.

Unlike the Greeks, the Ancient Jews did not look upon marriage as a duty towards the state, but as ordained by God to increase the human race by bringing forth and educating children) and so filling the earth. In the light of this commission it is obvious why a childless marriage was the cause of great grief and was even deemed to be sufficient reason for a divorce.

As a religious matter the child, as continuation of family and national existence, was seen as a gift from God (and not as a by-product of marriage). God also created the child and therefore he had human dignity, a sign of God's blessing. The child was therefore never an entity on his own but was always bound in a relationship to God as his birth was seen as the outcome of fulfilling a command and a continuation of the covenant. (Cf. Psalm 127:3-5.) Although the parents were concerned about the well-being and education of the child and accepted him as a gift of God, he was nevertheless thought to be sinful by nature, inclined to irresponsibility, rebelliousness and foolishness. A badly brought up child was a source of shame to his parents.

The father was lord and master of his family: the family centred in him and the community thus bore the stamp of patriarchy (Genesis 18:12). The father was patron, business manager, judge, priest and also

educator. His authority was inviolate. The mother, however, also fulfilled an important role. The poet of the Book of Proverbs gave the following description of this relationship:

My son, hear the instructions of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck. (Proverbs 1:8-9)

The place and role of the wife and mother in the family should be evaluated according to the story of creation in which it is clearly stated that both man and woman were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 2:20-23). Although the woman looked upon the man as her lord and master, she was nevertheless respected and loved. She was considered to be a "possession", but a valuable possession who had to be well cared for. Notwithstanding the father's high position of authority his companion also had an undeniable social and religious status within the family; she took part in religious feasts and ceremonies, she could own and sell her own possessions and, together with her husband, she shared responsibility for the education of their children.

The mother usually breast-fed her own child who as a general rule was only weaned at two to three years of age (Genesis 24:59). In particular the mother also bore the responsibility of the moral education of both boys and girls during infancy. As a result of the important role of the mother in respect of the education of her children, there was generally speaking a closer relationship between mother and children than between the father and his offspring. The special bond of love between Hannah and Samuel, Leah and Reuben, Hagar and Ishmael, Sarah and Isaac, Rebecca and Jacob and Rachel and Joseph indicates the tenderness which mothers lavished on their children.

According to Mosaic law it was the duty of the father to educate his children from their earliest years in the fear of God and a knowledge of the Law (Genesis 18:19 and Deuteronomy 6:1-7), to teach them religious truths and inculcate in them the traditions of the nation (Deuteronomy 6:20-21). The mother undoubtedly assisted him in these duties (Deuteronomy 21:18). In Proverbs reference is often made to the *mûsar* (upbringing, discipline) of the father and the *tôrâh* (teaching) of the mother (Proverbs 1:8).

In the light of the importance attached to family life and religious prescriptions in respect of the children's education, it stands to reason that the child was surrounded by a moral and religious atmosphere which gave direction and meaning to his life from his very earliest years. The parents, as parents in the Covenant, instructed their children in the moral and religious codes of the nation (Deuteronomy 11:18-19) so that they might eventually lead their own independent lives as members in the Covenant (Deuteronomy 6:1-9). In this educative environment they strove to combine religious truths with the practical duties of life.

Boys and girls became familiar with the history of their nation and the acts of God, the different codes of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), the beautiful lyrics of the Psalms and the wisdom of the Proverbs. Their teaching and education was not in any way academically or technically orientated but was an education aimed at piety.

In the educative environment within the home the child was constantly in contact with the adult members of the household and his moulding was enriched by their example. His powers of observation, linguistic ability, intelligence and judgement were refined by this contact. Over and above this the son, who would follow his father's occupation, was constantly under the influence of his example. He was instructed in his father's trade, as neglecting this would mean that the boy would be forced to steal in order to live. The daughter was drawn into the duties of housekeeping and educated to live a moral life in accordance with Hebraic laws. In this environment she was constantly within the protective sphere of motherly love. The Proverb: "As is the mother, so is the daughter", as uttered by Ezekiel (16:44) is a clear indication of this influence.

An important part of infant education (and also that which took place later in his life) consisted of being part of day-to-day life. Thus the religious feasts fulfilled an educative role within the family: folklore, moral codes, religious beliefs and a sense of solidarity towards family and nation were transmitted in this manner. As soon as a boy was able to walk, he was escorted to the Temple by his father in order to attend the most important Jewish festivals. This custom represented an introduction into the formal aspects of religion.

Education within the home was of a completely oral nature, and children were expected to learn most of the study material (Bible texts, Bible stories, Proverbs, Psalms, religious songs and simple prayers) by heart. The contents of ancient Jewish family education served the Jewish religion in all respects. Children were instructed in the history of the tribes of the community from an early age (Deuteronomy 32:7-9), not only because this history depicted Jewish traditions, but also because it was a field of knowledge which reflected the unique religious experiences of the group.

The most important means of education was habit-formation: cleanliness, avoidance of forbidden foods, respect and obedience were the most important virtues which the parents, by word and deed, imprinted and cultivated as good habits in their children. Household religious objects such as the *Mezuzah* (a small casket, attached to the doorpost, which contained verses from the Bible written on parchment) were for instance designed to encourage the child to ask questions about its significance.

On the whole discipline was strict because: he that spareth his rod, hateth his son. The *Talmud*, a collection of the literary works of learned

Jews between 200 B.C. and 500 A.D., sounds a warning against unnecessarily severe punishment and insists upon moderation in respect of disciplinary measures. By loving reproof the child acquired wisdom (Proverbs 13:24, 29:15). Jewish discipline was also aimed at creating a general atmosphere of profound gravity. Sedateness in the home created an atmosphere which was conducive to a reverence for the godly. Any disobedience on the part of a child would result in the disapproval of his parents as well as the disfavour of the Lord God.

It is clear that a high premium was placed by the ancient Jews on influencing the child in his progression towards adulthood, with this influencing stemming from the family environment and his contact with adults.

### 2.2.8 *The spirit of the times in the early Christian period*

The early Christian period spans approximately 500 years commencing with the birth of Christ and coming to an end during the time of the church fathers. The early Christian period is that era during which the Christian religion, after persecution, vilification and spilling of blood, eventually gained recognition in 313 A.D. when the Roman Emperor, Constantine the Great, granted religious freedom to the Christians with the Edict of Milan. In 391 A.D., with the assistance of the emperor Theodosius, the Christian religion was declared the official religion of the then mighty Roman Empire.

The early Christian period should not be seen as completely free from the influence of the Greek, Roman and Jewish cultures from which it originated. The Christian world did not immediately and completely break away from the old, it more likely had an ennobling influence on it. On the other hand the influence of the spiritual lives of the Greeks, Romans and Jews on Christian culture and thus also on education must also be taken into account. This influence becomes obvious when one takes into consideration that the Christian life-world was geographically and politically encircled by the Roman Empire with its hellenistic (Hellenes = Greeks) ideals, usages and institutions. In particular the Jewish views on the education of the child were accepted, strengthened and extended by the Christians.

In spite of the influencing mentioned above, it must be remembered that the doctrines of Christ brought about drastic shifts in emphasis which changed the entire pattern of life (and also education). The following shifts in emphasis are of special importance:

- Through the passion and death of Christ the possibility of everlasting life in the heavenly hereafter was revealed. Flowing from this sacred truth it became necessary for man to cultivate *an entirely new philoso-*

phy of life; the focus had to shift from the worldly to the eternal, from the here and now to the hereafter.

- Where education towards citizenship was an important goal in the Greek and Roman communities and formal education (after it had been introduced) was only for the children of the aristocracy, Christianity favoured *universal education*. Wealthy or poor, boy or girl, Jew or Gentile, honourable or rejected, everyone without exception was entitled to and in need of education. (St. Matthew 28:19-20).
- *Obedience, humility*, and above all a *love* of God and his fellowman became a prerequisite in all life relationships.
- The teachings of Christ brought about a shift in the emphasis from Jewish education and its complete obedience of the Law, to a *total acceptance of Christ's death and the remission of sins* so that all who believed in Him would not be lost but would inherit Life Eternal.
- Christ, as the *ideal teacher*, by His love and respect for the child, indicated the road to the educators. His gentleness, patience and masterly example – the essential components of His education – made of Him a worthy example for all to follow.

### 2.2.9 *Informal education of the early Christians*

To the early Christian family, education – with parents as educators – was the primary instrument towards realizing the lofty educative goal of eventual perfection in Jesus Christ (St. Matthew 5:48). Christ was to receive embodiment in the life of man through morally religious education, in order to ensure the extension of God's kingdom on earth and the inheritance of Life Everlasting (Ephesians 4:13-15). The Christian educative goal was based on a triadic relationship, GOD-MAN-FELLOWMAN by means of which the morally religious uplifting of the individual and the community was striven for. This uplifting was to be achieved within the climate of the decadent social environment of the Roman Empire (which included loose morals and an overabundance of corruption) which was a contemporary of early Christianity.

Within the Christian family the loose family relationships which were characteristic of the ancient Greco-Roman period were once again united and this unity became the foundation of the entire society. As was the case in ancient Jewish communities, the family was the centre of communal life for the early Christians. The sanctity of family relationships was a reflection of the relationship between God as Father and man as child, between Christ as head of the Church and His congregation (Ephesians 6:5-6 and Colossians 3.)

Early Christian family life was a continuous religious act in the Name of Christ and to the glory of God. The home was considered to be the most natural environment within which the spiritual life of the child

could grow to the glory of God. The family was the first and most important Christian educative institution. The church father Jerome (331-420 A.D.) contended that the education of the small child was the responsibility of his parents (St. Jerome 1980: 'To Laeta' CVII).

The child was viewed as a divine blessing of marriage. He was given in sacred trust to the parents as a gift of God. Both Jewry and Christianity believed that man could only be understood as a creation of God. Being a child was therefore also to be understood in this way, because the child was created by God, he was bound to God and was in a particular relationship to God.

Christ's love of children, His interest in them and His opinions about them (for instance, in St. Matthew 18:1-14 He describes the child as the greatest in the kingdom of heaven) without doubt led to a purer and more profound image of the child and placed it within the scheme of human existence. He elevated the characteristics of a child (such as humility, simplicity, impartiality, trust) to conditions for inheriting the the Kingdom of God, saying:

Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. (St. Matthew 18:3-5)

This indicated the God-given place and calling of the child on earth and his human dignity and uniqueness as a person were recognized and emphasized. This is obviously different from the antique Jewish concept of the child as merely being an heir.

The views of the Apostle Paul (first century A.D.) on the education of the child show a new quality of tenderness towards the child. Also during the time of the church fathers ( $\pm$  the fourth and fifth centuries A.D.) there was clearly an awareness of the child and his desires. The letters of St. Jerome indicate a particular degree of understanding of the child. St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.) also shows some signs in his works of his remarkable insight into child behaviour. St. Chrysostom (347-407) described the soul of the child as a city which had to be approached with the greatest circumspection. He believed that the delicate, malleable mind of the child could be moulded to a character acceptable to God by means of a gradual education which took the highly receptive capacity of each child into account.

The nature of the relationship between parent and child also underwent a remarkable change during this period. Children were still, in accordance with the first commandment, duty bound to obey their parents

(Ephesians 6:1-3), but parents and children were no longer *opposed* to each other but formed a single community in God. This implied that parents had to educate their children in the teachings and admonitions of the Lord and the children had in turn to love and obey their parents in the Lord (Colossians 3:20-21). Together they formed a chosen generation, a sacred nation, a royal priesthood (Peter 2:9). Through Christ a close bond was once again established between parent and child.

The early Christian image of the child already indicates the degree of acceptance which the child enjoyed. Jesus Himself set the example for this acceptance by pointing out that the child was a fellow-sufferer and companion in Christ (St. Mark 10:13-16). Paul, with his plea that children should be tutored, emphasized their acceptance (Ephesians 6:4).

The killing of children, either before or after birth was not permitted. Destroying a young life through exposure, abortion and infanticide was forbidden. The early Christian church condemned these practices and often took rejected children into its care and educated them. The sale of children as slaves and future beggars was considered to be a heinous sin.

The impression may exist that with this image of the child held by the early Christians there was an immediate improvement in the child's circumstances. In reality many centuries were to elapse (cf. following chapters) during which the child was still misjudged, ill-treated and abused (a practice which is even now, at the dawn of the twentieth century, still rearing its head!).

The father and mother were jointly bearers of authority in the early Christian family. Although the woman was subordinate to the man (1 Tim. 2: 11-13), this did not cause her to be an inferior figure of authority. Since its very inception the early Christian church emphasized the spiritual equality of men and women: both had been saved by Christ and their immortal souls are equally precious before the eyes of God. The woman became a mother in the true sense of the word; not only a begetter of children but also their educator. Through the Virgin Mary motherhood became hallowed; through the birth of Christ from a woman, women received an honoured position in the home. Christ's first appearance after His resurrection was to the woman, Mary Magdalene, whom He instructed to convey the message to His disciples (St. John 20:11-18). This act indicates that woman was not merely responsible for temporal care but also for the spiritual care of those with whom she was in close contact – the members of her family.

It was stipulated by Christian doctrine that the woman was to be a helpmate of man and co-inheritor of Eternal Life (Galatians 3:27-29). Through this she gained her own, independent personality and became someone with her own thoughts and volitional life. Her status was thus elevated to a higher moral level by the change wrought by Christ concerning man's attitude to her (St. John 4:27 and 19:26-27). Owing to her

inherent desire to serve, the early Christian church entrusted to the woman the care of the elderly, the poor, the sick and above all the education of her children. The church depended on her example and modest yet conservative influence on her husband and children to convert humanity to the Christian faith.

The care and education of the infant was the responsibility of both parents (Ephesians 6). The church fathers also unanimously agreed that early education should be left to parents. Later on a father more especially took responsibility for the education of his son and the mother for the education of her daughter. Indeed, every Christian adult bore a profound responsibility for the child; Christ himself had in fact said:

And whosoever causes one of these little ones that believe in me to sin, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. (St. Mark 9:42)

Education within the home was chiefly concerned with early habit-formation and for this reason the church fathers in particular emphasized a religious education (including love of God and one's neighbour) within the family circle. This moral and religious education was to prepare the child for both the temporal as well as the future Eternal Life. From an early age the child had to become acquainted with family devotions and the Christian belief, and had to learn those portions of the Holy Scriptures which were easy to understand. Active participation in religious practices was ensured by prayers, sacrifices and religious festivals.

The early Christians were aware of the influence of adults' example on children and thus tried to live irreproachable lives according to the Word of God. Like Christ had done, they attempted to instruct more by their works than their words (St. John 10:25). The New Testament clearly states that educators' actions always had to be responsible and accountable, so that the child was not led into sin through adult behaviour which was neither normative nor responsible. (Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21). The church fathers, particularly St. Clement, St. Jerome and St. Chrysostom, stressed the importance of correct parental example. St. Chrysostom for instance pointed out the adverse effect which servants and nurses, who had not been selected with care, could have on children:

(E)ven as plants need the greatest amount of care when they are tender shoots, so also do children, and so let us take thought for good nurses that a fair foundation from the ground up be laid for the young and that from the beginning they may receive nought that is evil. (Chrysostom 1951: "Address on vainglory and the right way for parents to bring up their children", par. 37)

Chrysostom maintained that parents had to be a living example to their children in all things, because only in this manner would a child learn to control his passions.

It was obvious to the parents that as bearers of authority they had to lead the child away from and protect him against licentiousness and dissolution. The child was therefore bound to obey his parents completely as they represented the Image of God, the True Teacher. The emphasis was nevertheless on the interaction between love and authority in education. All authority and disciplinary measures were not only employed as confirmation of that which is right and prevention or eradication of that which is wrong, but also to ensure the development of the entire personality in the light of what ought to be. Discipline and love were not seen as opposites, but as being mutually corrective with discipline being tempered by love.

### **2.3 The essentials of infant education as heritage for the present and the future**

The illuminating survey of the ideals and opinions of the classical founding cultures concerning infant education once again brought about the realization that certain ideals for and opinions about the pre-school child have remained constant throughout the ages. (Many of the ideals and opinions of the early educators are naturally even today only dreams in spite of the progress made by modern educational theory and educative practice.) This rich heritage needs to be recognized; we should use this legacy of essentials concerning infant education as directives in constructing meaningful and pedagogically accountable educational theory and educative practice for the present and the future.

- The child's reaching adulthood, as the encompassing goal of education, is directed at what an adult ought to be. An investigation of the educative aims of the ancient cultures indicates that their views on being human determined the educative aims of particular cultures or periods.
- Aristotle, Quintilian, the ancient Jews and early Christians made obvious the profound role of the family in respect of infant education. It is in the home that the child learns what is important and significant, what is permanent and immutable, and what is transitory and superficial.
- In all four the cultures mentioned above there was particular emphasis on the importance of the adult's example in his exemplification of the norm image of adulthood for the child's moulding. In the present it has also become essential for the parent, as primary educator

- of the infant, to pay careful attention to his way of life and his educative task. The example of the parent in connection with moral, religious, political, economic, aesthetic and intellectual matters, becomes the model for the child's views on these matters.
- The profound influence, whether for good or evil, of the environment on the infant mind was emphasized in particular by Plato, the Jews and the early Christians. Current education should, in accordance with this view, continually strive to focus the child's attention on that which is good and beautiful in his environment and to lead him away from what is evil and objectionable.
- The content of the ancient Jewish system of education was, as has been observed, of a totally religious nature, with the Scriptures being the only textbook. History has proved that this learning content can withstand the test of time and for this reason, as well as the fact that we cannot be unfaithful to our Christian heritage, the Bible should receive the place of honour in all Christian education.
- The Greek philosophers in particular emphasized that there should be a balance in the educative occurrence between the moral, emotional, intellectual and physical dimensions and that education should be organized so that each area of the child's knowledge may supplement the other parts in a harmonious relationship.
- In the home and the infant schools it is not, however, only the foundations of moral and social education which should be established, but also that of physical development by means of games and the cultivation of qualities such as cleanliness and tidiness (Plato).
- The young child is malleable and pliant, and the mother who takes such pains to ensure that the growth of his limbs will be straight, should taken even greater care in handling and moulding his spirit. Education during infancy must lay the foundations of a character which will not need pruning as time goes by but which will be firmly established and continue to grow.

The preceding discussion clearly indicates that age-old opinions and usages concerning infant education, remain and always will be of vital importance. In fact, to any person who wishes to become involved with infant education this educative past is indeed the prologue to the future, because "the conflicts that arise today, and will arise tomorrow, have their prototypes in controversies over values that have long and enduring histories." (Weber 1984: X).

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