

# Martin Luther on Education

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*Deur hierdie artikel word eerstens gepoog om 'n gesistematiseerde uiteensetting van Martin Luther (1483-1546) se idees aangaande die opvoeding te bied aan die hand van 'n literatuurstudie van hoofsaaklik primêre bronne. Tweedens bring dit ook sy sieninge in verband met die hedendaagse verskynsel van multi-religieuse onderrig aan Suid-Afrikaanse skole. Luther se religieuse-opvoedkundige, sekulêre opvoedkundige en nasionaal-opvoedkundige doelstelings, asook sy sieninge aangaande die kurrikulum, opvoedingsdissipline en onderrigmetode, word bespreek. Daar is bevind dat Luther se sieninge aangaande die bogenoemde aspekte rakende die opvoeding relevansie toon met sy religieuse opvoedingsdoel naamlik die daarstelling van 'n liggaam van ware Christelike gelowiges. Wat die relevansie van Luther se opvoedingsdenke en multi-religieuse onderrig betref, word die belangrikheid waarmee Luther die ouers se rol in die Christelike vorming van hul kinders speel uitgelig. Enkele opmerkinge oor die hedendaagse relevansie van sy sieninge aangaande opvoedingsdissipline word ook gemaak.*

## **1. Introduction**

Martin Luther (1483-1546) is acknowledged as one of the driving forces behind the religious reformation which shook the foundations of the

Catholic Church in the early 16th century. Much research has been conducted on his doctrinal beliefs as well as other aspects of the reformer's life, especially during 1983, during the commemoration of his quinquennial anniversary. ((For the commemoration of his quinquennial anniversary in 1983 in particular, Luther has once again become a focal point of research. The following are but a few events commemorating his birth: The *Luther Quinquennial Conference* held at the University of Michigan; the *International Lutheran Conference* presented by the International Lutheran Renewal Centre in Minneapolis; the *Lutherfest* held at Wheaton College, Illinois; and the *Symposia Encounters with Luther and Martin Luther Lives!* organised by the University of McGill, Montreal and the University of South Africa respectively. Many issues other than Luther's doctrines were dealt with in scientific and popular articles: for example, his involvement in the peasants's revolt of 1524-1525 (cf Landman 1983: 44-54), his subsequent antagonism towards the Jews (cf Rappoport, 1984:19-23) and the fact that he could be regarded "a liberated man" because of his acceptance of women as human beings in their own right (cf Ludolphy, 1984:153-155; 161.))However, for many decades, research on his views related to education seems to have been neglected. This article, based on an extensive literature study of mainly primary sources, is firstly aimed at analysing Luther's educational ideas. An analysis of these ideas is impossible without referring to his religious views, which, as we shall see, were indeed found to embrace his educational thought.

This scrutiny of Luther's educational thought, however, is not only aimed at scholars in History of Education. It is also hoped that the exposition of Luther's educational thought will stimulate the thought of Christian parents and teachers who are concerned about the issue of religion education in South African schools. Religion education has become a much debated issue, especially since the announcement of the *National Policy on Religion in Education* which Parliament approved on 4 August 2003. This policy, based on ideas expressed in the Ministry of Education's 2001 document entitled, *Manifesto on values, education and democracy*, introduced multireligion education as a compulsory subject in the learning area, Life Orientation (Baloyi, 2004:179; Ministry of Education, 2001:43-44). It stated that the public school has an educational responsibility for teaching and learning about religion and religions, and for promoting these, but that it should do so in ways that are different from the religious instruction and religious nurture provided by the home, family, and religious community" (DoE, 2004a:3). Religion education found expression in Learning Outcome 2 of the 2003 Life Orientation *Teachers guide for the development of learning programmes*: "The learner is able to demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to constitutional rights and responsibilities and shows an understanding of diverse cultures and religions" (DoE, 2003b:20).

The appropriateness of this historical-educational study to the modern-day South African phenomenon of religious education is based on the author's belief that many of the views of educationists of the past, irrespective of the periods during which they lived, remain relevant, and that those of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Christian educationist, Luther, would therefore also be applicable to 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians. Besides relating Luther's educational ideas to religious education, the author intends to briefly highlight other Lutheran ideas which could be of relevance to contemporary education.

In order to present a logical and comprehensive representation of Luther's ideas on education, the author commences with an explication of Luther's educational aims, followed by a discussion of his proposed curricular content, his thought on instructional method, and his views on educational discipline.

## **2. Luther's educational aims**

As might be expected, Luther's educational aims were an extension and propagation of his biblical religious conviction. Even his more secularly shaded educational directives complemented his religious educational aims because of their common religious foundation.

Since Luther did not provide any classification of his educational aims, an attempt will be made to extrapolate at least some form of logical systematic framework. Luther's two best-known and most famous educational treatises, namely his *Letter to the mayors and aldermen of all the cities of Germany on behalf of Christian schools* (1524) (hereafter abbreviated as "*Letter to the mayors*") and *The sermon on the duty of sending children to schools* (1530) will mainly be used to provide a schematic exposition of Luther's ideals since they emphasise educational matters. Other of his writings which also concern education, such as certain sermons and letters, will also serve as points of reference.

What Luther ultimately wanted to achieve via education had a dual purpose, namely the establishment of a body of true believers (Luther, in Kretzmann 1940:19) and an effective secular government (Luther, in Painter 1889:243).

### **2.1 Luther's religious-educational aim: the establishment of a body of true believers**

Since Luther believed that faith was the key factor in man's salvation, his all-embracing educational aim can be regarded as being the transformation of the people of the German states of the Holy Roman Empire into a body of true believers, or a body of so-called "priests". This is because he argued that every true believer was indeed a priest in the spiritual realm (Luther, in Dillenberger, 1961:407-408). This overall religious-edu-

cational aim is supported by the envisaged aims which had to be realised by both parents and schools.

### *2.1.1 The inculcation of Christian principles by parents.*

Parents, according to Luther, were vital in advancing his religious-educational aim. The inculcation of biblical Christian principles as a secondary religious-educational aim could only be realised if parents provided religious education at home and encouraged their children to embrace an ecclesiastic career.

#### **The provision of religious education at home**

Parents had to perceive a child as a “precious, eternal treasure entrusted to them by God to keep, lest the devil, the world and his flesh steal the child and put him to death” (Luther’s *Sermon on the estate of marriage*, in Kretzmann, 1940:20). They therefore had to inculcate Christian principles in their children. In this regard Luther stated the following (Luther’s *Exposition of Genesis 10:1-2*, in Kretzmann, 1940:5):

The children should be properly instructed in the fear of God, for if Christendom is again to come into power, it is necessary to begin with the children, then it will become an excellent thing. It would please me well if this work were to begin in the cradle.

A positive snowball effect of the spreading of the Word of God was envisaged.. Commenting on Deuteronomy 6:20 he (Kretzmann, 1940:23) stated that

parents are to be children’s schoolmasters, and the children are in the sequel to teach also others, are to instruct their descendants, that it be kept in memory how God let them out of Egypt.

Using John 2:1-11, Luther argued that the father had to represent the bishop and pastor at home, ensuring that his children were brought up according to Christian principles (Kretzmann, 1940:13). Luther sometimes seems to have assigned an inferior role to the mother because it is she who has to see to the physical welfare of her children. Yet, Luther, referring to Exodus 20:12 stated that a father and mother become like God, for they are rulers, bishops, pope, doctor, ministers, preacher, schoolmaster, judge and lord (Kretzmann, 1940:18).

#### **Encouraging children to embrace an ecclesiastic career**

Luther was familiar with the fact that a religiously well-equipped ministerial (clerical) office was essential for his “newly” proclaimed Christian faith.

Since the future of prospective ecclesiastics was growing dimmer - a situation aggravated by Luther’s share in revealing certain malpractices in

the Catholic Church – increasingly more youths were being attracted to and persuaded by their parents to follow a career in business. In his *Letter to the mayors* and *Sermon on the duty of sending children to school*, he therefore set out well-substantiated arguments for embracing an ecclesiastic career via non-Catholic schools. *The letter to the mayors*, it seems, was intended to gain the attention of mayors and councillors alike. It stresses the importance of establishing Latin Christian schools. Its strong emotional overtones (cf Painter, 1889:178) were probably used to accentuate parents's duty in securing an education for their young which would serve the establishment of a sound pastorhood. The sermon, on the other hand, was circulated amongst preachers and was intended to serve as an exemplary sermon to be used to convince parents to send their children to school. In this sermon, Luther stated that sons who became pastors and proclaimed the Word of God would, on the basis of Daniel 12:13, “shine as the brightness of the firmament ... as the stars forever and ever” (Schultz, 1967:224). Parents who submitted their children to serve the spiritual realm could rejoice, because God had personally selected them for this task (Schulz, 1967:228-229). If, however, they refrained from providing children for God's service, they and their children would be “damned, not only here on earth but eternally in hell” (Schulz, 1967:223).

### 2.1.2 *The schools had to extend the Christian faith*

As alluded to in the previous section dealing with parents's inculcation of Christian principles in their children, schools were viewed as a significant instrument in serving Luther's overall religious-educational aim. Since the entire German populace could be reached spiritually by the products of the Christian faith, Luther felt that the establishment of schools was indeed an essential component of preserving the faith (Luther's *Letters to the mayors*, in Painter, 1889:91):

The school must stand next to the church, as the institution in which young preachers and pastors are begotten, who are then to be placed in the stead of those who die. And the house of the citizens stand next to the school, as that which furnishes pupils; then the courthouse and the castle, which are to protect the citizens, that they may beget children for the schools, and that the schools train the children for the ministry, and thereupon the pastors can again produce churches and children of God whether these may be ordinary citizens, princes or emperors.

### 2.1.3 *Education had to be compulsory*

Compulsory education, in Lutheran terms, included both boys and girls (Luther's *Letter to the mayors*, in Painter, 1889:91), although it focused mainly on Christian tuition for boys since they were to become the future defenders of the Christian faith. Christian education of a lower standard was to be provided for the girls, because this would enable them to plant

the seed of Christian faith in the hearts of the future generation. Bright boys, capable of serving in the spiritual sphere, were to be "... kept longer at school, or set apart wholly for study" (Luther's Sermon in Painter, 1889:196, 200, 224, 226).

Luther's favourable attitude towards universal education was expressed in 1520 in his *Appeal to the ruling class of German nationality as to the amelioration of the state of Christendom* in which he stated the following (Dillenberger, 1961:51): "Would to God also that each town had a girls' school where, day by day, the girls might have a lesson on the Gospel whether in German or Latin." In 1524, Luther proposed that ordinary boys spend one or two hours at school per day to enable them to fulfil household duties or learn a trade simultaneously, whereas girls were only required to spend an hour at school to allow them sufficient time to perform household duties at home. As mentioned, talented boys had to either attend school for longer hours or even be completely relieved of their household duties (Luther's *Letter to the mayors*, in Painter, 1889:199-200).

## **2.2 Luther's secular educational aim: the establishment of an effective secular government**

Luther's secular educational aim is interlinked with his religious aim, namely the establishment of a true body of believers. He believed that if secular authorities were believers, it would bring about effective government and lead to the propagation of the new faith in the territories under the various governors's jurisdiction (Luther's *Sermon on the duty of sending children to school*, in Painter 1889:246-247). He considered the spiritual sphere to be superior to the secular: "As far then as eternal life surpasses temporal life, so far does the ministerial office surpass the secular office, the one is the substance, the other the shadow" (Luther's *Sermon on the duty of sending children to school*, in Painter, 1889:242). His radical statement that the Holy Spirit does not operate in the secular sphere seems to specifically refer to a non-Christian secular sphere since he advised chancellors and the city clerks to "Ado the work of the council and the city, and that all with honour and the blessing of God, which gives happiness and salvation" (Luther's *Sermon on the duty of sending children to school*, in Painter, 1889:246-247). The achievement of Luther's secular aim, like the realisation of his religious educational aim, can also be viewed in terms of the aims that parents and the school had to fulfil.

### **2.2.1 Parents had to inculcate obedience in children**

According to Luther's exposition of the commandment on respect for parents (the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment according to Luther): "all authority flows and is propagated from the authority of parents" (Kretzmann, 1940:11). This implies that Luther regarded obedience of children towards parents as

a precondition for prospective citizens's obedience to their rulers in the secular sphere. Because Luther considered obedience to temporal matters to form part of Christian behaviour – even if governmental forces consisted of non-Christian members – one could rightfully infer that he would accentuate obedience of children towards parents, particularly since he believed that education at home would be reflected in adult behaviour (Luther's *Secular authority: to what extent it should be obeyed*, in Dillenberger, 1961:366; *Luther's Sermon on Luke 1:39-56*, in Kretzmann, 1940:58).

### *2.2.2 Parents had to encourage children to undergo formal education*

According to Luther, the effective maintenance of law and order could only be achieved if boys were subjected to formal education which would equip them for employment in the governmental sphere (Luther's *Sermon on the duty of sending children to school*, in Schulz, 1967:241). As he did with parents who refrained from sending their boys to school to become servants in the spiritual sphere, he also threatened with hell, parents who failed to submit able children to school in preparation for secular occupation: "What do you think you deserve? Are you even worthy to dwell among men? What will God say ...? Is it not serving God, if we help to maintain his ordinance of civil government?" (Luther's *Sermon on the duty of sending children to school*, in Painter, 1889:250). The illogicality of posing the same threat for two virtually opposing neglects could perhaps be resolved by arguing that Luther's primary intention was to secure a formal, Christian-based education for as large a number of children as possible, leaving the actual choice of either an ecclesiastic or secular career for boys to be decided upon at a later age.

### *2.2.3 Schools had to secure an efficient civil government*

Luther saw the establishment of a municipal school system as the principal deterrent to chaos as far as the civil government of the German states of the Holy Roman Empire was concerned. He therefore made an appeal to mayors and councillors to step in to prevent the Germanic people from being ruled by "ignoramuses and blockheads" by establishing municipal schools (Luther's *Letter to the mayors*, in Painter, 1889:182, 196-197). In this regard it should be mentioned that Luther was concerned about the general poor educational state of the German people which had resulted in other nations looking down on them. In a derogatory and rhetorical manner he asked whether the Germans did not deserve to be called "German dunces and brutes that only know how to fight, eat and drink" He (Luther's *Letter to the mayors*, in Painter, 1889:181) further argued that

... all the world, even among the heathen, school-masters and teachers  
have been found necessary where a nation was to be elevated.

Even if the religious purpose of schools were to be ignored, Luther argued, municipal schools would still serve the praiseworthy aim of securing civil order (Luther's *Letter to the mayors*, in Painter, 1889:195-196).

### **3. Luther's proposed curricular content**

This section shows that Luther's proposed curricular content was clearly linked to his main religious-educational aim. For the purposes of this article, Luther's proposed curricular content is classified into two sections: content to be taught at schools and universities, and content to be taught at home. It should be borne in mind that Luther refrained from providing any well-defined classification, and that this author's suggested classification should therefore not be considered absolute.

#### **3.1 Content to be taught at school and university**

Having considered Luther's educational aims, one could rightfully deduce that Luther would consider religious content to constitute the main subject matter to be taught at school and university.

##### **3.1.1 Content of a religious nature**

Religious content gained the ascendancy over secular disciplines, because Luther considered the Holy Writ to constitute the basis of all instruction (Luther's *Lectures on Genesis 31-37*, in Pelikan, 1970:335).

In his earliest work which dealt with education, *An appeal to the ruling class of German nationality as to the amelioration of the state of Christendom* (1520), Luther accentuated the importance of the Scriptures: "Should not every Christian be expected by his ninth or tenth year to know all the Holy Gospels ..." (Eby, 1971:44). In his other two educational treatises, the *Letter to the mayors* and the *Sermon on the duty of sending children to school*, he advocated the teaching of the Bible at school (Painter, 1889:190, 216).

The Scriptures also had to be studied at university level. The Scriptures, and not Lombard's *Sententiae* had to form the core of the qualification of Doctorate of the Holy Scriptures (Luther's *To the Christian nobility of the German nation respecting the reformation of the Christian estate*, in Eby, 1971:40):

Since then we hold the name and title of teachers of the Holy Scriptures, we should verily be forced to act accordingly to our title, and to teach the Holy Scriptures and nothing else. ... But as it is, under the rule of the Sentences [Sententiae] we [true Christians] find among theologians more human and heathenish fallacies than true knowledge of Scriptures.

Luther realised that it would be impossible to teach the entire Scriptures to the Teutonic youth, a goal revealed in his *Appeal to the ruling class of*



*German nationality as to the amelioration of the state of Christendom* (1520) after his joint visitation with the educationists, Bugenhagen and Melancton, to the Latin schools in the electorate state of Saxony. Hence towards the end of 1528, he wrote the *Catechisms* (the *Kleine Catechismus* and the *Grosse Catechismus*) which, according to him, contained the essence of Scriptures. These, published in both Latin and German, were intended for use at both school and home.

### 3.1.2 *The secular disciplines*

Luther viewed secular content as a necessity, “both for understanding the Holy Scriptures and carrying on the civil government ...” (Luther’s *Letter to the mayors*, in Painter, 1889: 183). He approved of a varied school curriculum: “A ... if I (Luther) had children and were able I would have them learn not only the languages and history, but also singing, instrumental music and the whole course of Mathematics” (Luther’s *Letter*, in Eby, 1971:70). A large variety of disciplines were not only to be presented at schools, but universities were also to teach “not only the Holy Scriptures, but law, and all the sciences ...” (Luther’s *Letter to the Margrave of Brandenburg*, in Eby, 1971:98). He nevertheless accentuated certain secular subjects, namely music, dialectics, rhetoric, history and languages.

#### **Music**

According to Luther, musical training should be subject only to religious instruction: “ ... I plainly judge and do not hesitate to affirm, that except for theology [music] alone produces what otherwise only theology can do, namely, a calm and joyful disposition ...” (Luther’s *Letter to Louis Senf*, in Krodell, 1972:361). He therefore regarded a sound training in music to constitute an essential criterion for the selection of teachers and ministers, who would strive to achieve his religious-educational aim (cf Tarry, 1973:36; Towns, 1975:115).

Christian song was especially significant to Luther, himself an accomplished musician and composer (Painter, 1889:104; Tarry, 1973:355). Hymnody would enhance a number of functions such as allowing the Holy Spirit to fulfil its work by strengthening man’s faith, casting out the devil, proclaiming the faith and preaching the Gospel (cf Luther’s prefaces to *The Weiss hymnal* 1528; Rhau’s *Symphonical Iucundae* 1538 and *The Babst Hymnal* 1545 in Leupold, 1965:315-316; Luther’s *Table Talk* in Tappert, 1981:420). The achievement of Luther’s secular educational aim, namely the establishment of an effective and therefore orderly government, would also be facilitated through musical instruction at school since music to him was “... a mistress of order and good manners which makes the people moral and reasonable, that is,

active and sensible in the faculties of wise and true thought” (Tarry, 1973:356).

### **Dialectics and rhetoric**

These two disciplines are grouped together, since Luther clearly indicated that the one would serve as the basis for the other (Luther’s *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5*, in Pelikan, 1958:191-194).

Although Luther sometimes seems to have refuted the reasoning power of man by comparing it to “the Devil’s bride or harlot” (Eby, 1952:191, 194), he was in favour of the inclusion of dialectics in the curricula of schools and universities. Luther only appeared to refute the reasoning power of man if he ignored godly intervention when dealing with theological matters. He stated that “without The Holy Spirit reason is entirely devoid of Knowledge of God” (Luther’s *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 6-14*, in Pelikan, 1960:42). Dialectics, according to him, could indeed be utilised to provide “sound and strong arguments” to prove the case of the new faith. Whilst dialectics pertained to the crux of a religious argument, rhetoric could “adorn it” (Luther’s *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 15-20*, in Pelikan, 1961a:191). The superior position of dialectics over rhetoric becomes clear from the following quotation (Luther’s *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 15-20*, in Pelikan, 1961a:191):

*... it is one thing to teach and another to exhort. Rhetoric, which is useful for exhorting, often plays games and often hands you a piece of wood which you suppose is a sword. But dialectic(s) carries on war and busies itself with matters that are serious. Therefore it does not show the opponent pieces of wood; it shows iron”. ((Luther’s comments on dialectics and rhetoric referred mainly to the interpretation and proclamation of the Scriptures. However, he also stated that condensed versions of Aristotle’s *Logic and Rhetoric* and Cicero’s *Rhetoric* should be studied at tertiary level because they would be useful in proclaiming the Word of God (Luther’s *Appeal to the ruling class of German nationality as to the amelioration of the state of Christendom*, in Eby, 1971:37). In the school plan for Saxony, which followed the visitation of schools in Saxony by Luther, Bugenhagen and Melancton, and which was aimed at providing a school curriculum for Latin schools, it was suggested that advanced students study the works of Ovid, Virgil and Cicero. The emphasis, however, was on the explanation and interpretation of the teacher (Melancton’s *Book of visitation school plan* in Eby 1971:186).))*

## The languages

Luther propagated the establishment of municipally controlled Latin schools. ((Only on one occasion known to this author did Luther pronounce himself in favour of formal education in the vernacular. In 1520 he wrote that : "... and would to God that each town had a girls's school, in which girls might be taught the Gospel for an hour daily, either in German or Latin" (Luther's *Appeal to the ruling class of German nationality as to the amelioration of the state of Christendom*, in Eby, 1971:41). Luther probably argued that a knowledge of Latin would be unnecessary for mothers to inculcate in their young the basics of the Christian faith at home. German books were considered to be used at home (Luther's *Letter to the mayors*, in Painter 1889:213). Contrary to his 1520 view, his view of 1524 pointed to the establishment of schools in which both boys and girls could be educated in Latin (Luther's *Letter to the mayors*, in Eby, 1971:199).))

His objection to the use of German books at school can be linked to his desire to put the Lutheran faith on a secure footing. He probably argued that prospective leaders of the new Lutheran faith had to be familiar with the official language of the Catholic Church to be able to offer sound opposition to the Catholic faith.

Luther focused on Latin schools operating on an advanced (secondary) level in which the medium was to be Latin, with Greek and Hebrew to be taught to gifted boys (Luther's *Letter to the mayors*, in Eby, 1971:200). Luther stated that God had chosen Hebrew as the language of the Old Testament and Greek for that of the New Testament. Hence God intended His Gospel to be spread through the Roman Empire by means of the Latin and Greek languages (Luther's *Letter to the mayors*, in Painter, 1889:184-185). The languages were "the casket in which the jewel (Word of God) (is) enshrined; the cask in which the wine is kept; the chamber in which the food is stored" (Luther's *Letter to the mayors*, in Painter, 1889:186). Luther also linked the advantages of the languages to the establishment of an orderly secular government (Luther's *Letter to the mayors*, in Painter, 1889:196). Relating the study of languages to orderly temporal government, was also perhaps an ingenious stratagem that Luther employed to induce mayors and aldermen, who were perhaps more inclined to secular than religious matters, to establish schools at which the above-mentioned languages could be taught. The foundation of such schools would, of course, indirectly serve Luther's main educational aim, namely the establishment and expansion of a body of true believers since Hebrew and Greek would give access to the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament.

## History

Luther believed that a knowledge of history would result in the Germans' acquisition of virtues related to the Christian faith: "This then is the goal of all histories, namely to teach and to learn faith, fear and humility and to reprove pride, presumption, and trust in the flesh" (Luther's *Lectures on Isaiah*, in Pelikan, 1969:169). History would thus help, enabling scholars to regulate their lives in accordance with God's will and distinguish between good and evil. A knowledge of the successes and failures of the past would lead to the acquisition of wisdom (Luther's *Sämtliche Schriften, Vol. XIV*, in Eby, 1971:197):

There (through the study of History) we learn what things those who were pious and wise pursued, what they shunned, and how they lived, and how it fared with them, or how they were rewarded; and again, how they lived who were wicked and obstinate in their ignorance, and what punishment overtook them.

The importance that Luther attached to History certainly shows that he intended it to be taught at schools and universities.

## The natural sciences

Luther considered himself and his contemporaries to be in "the dawn of a new era, [in which] we are beginning to recover the knowledge of the external world that we lost through the fall of Adam. We now observe creatures properly ... We already recognise in the most delicate flowers the divine goodness and omnipotence of God ..." (Painter 1889: 66, 163). It is evident from this quotation that Luther regarded the natural sciences as agents effecting a closer walk with the Creator owing to man's clearer understanding of His creative power.

Since Luther regarded a study of the natural sciences to contribute towards a harmonious relationship between man and God, one could safely assume that he wished them to be taught at Latin schools and universities.

### **3.2 Disciplines to be taught at home**

Luther emphasised religious content, music and manual activity to be taught at home. Since parents fulfilled an essential role in establishing a body of true believers, Luther advocated that religious instruction be given at home. To make the Bible accessible to the German peasantry, he translated the Bible into German. For teaching sound Lutheran doctrine he also wrote the Catechisms in German. That these, especially the *Kleine Catechismus*, be taught at home can be deduced from his demand that the father be responsible for catechetical teaching to children and servants (Luther's *German mass and order of divine service*, in Kretzmann, 1940:65).

Luther's urgent plea for the composition of German psalms "so that the Word of God may remain among the people in the form of song also" (Luther's *Letter to Spalatin*, in Eby, 1971:88) shows that Luther wished music to be taught at home. This view is further evidenced by his proposals regarding the provision of German lyrics for hymns to be sung by the man in the street: "In order to be understood by the people, only the simplest and commonest words should be sung ..." (Luther's *Letter to Spalatin*, in Eby, 1971:157).

Luther took into consideration the fact that a section of the peasantry was heavily dependent on the physical labour of their sons in securing a livelihood – hence his statement that boys who did not excel in a formal instructional environment should only attend school for two hours a day. This would enable them to apply themselves to manual labour which implied the learning of a trade, at home (Luther's *Letter to the mayors*, in Painter, 1889:199).

#### **4. Luther on educational discipline**

Luther's views on educational discipline broke away from the harsh disciplinary measures practised at the ecclesiastic schools of his time. He strictly disapproved of the conduct of teachers at ecclesiastic schools "who only know how to beat and torment scholars ... [and] whose schools were nothing but so many dungeons and hells, and themselves tyrants and gaolers" (Luther's *Commentary on Galatians 3:24*, in Eby, 1971:21). According to him, schools should no longer be "a hell or purgatory, in which children are tortured over cases and tenses, and in which with much flogging, trembling and anguish and wretchedness they learn nothing" (Luther's *Letter to the mayors*, in Eby, 1971:21).

##### **4.1 The basis for Luther's views on educational discipline**

Luther's views on discipline are clearly related to his view of God and of childhood.

Parents had to become mirrors reflecting God's nature: "For father and mother [should] become like God (Luther's *Sermon on Exodus 20:12*, in Kretzmann, 1940:31) and present a "fine picture of the way in which God feels towards us (Christians) and we toward Him" (Luther's *Gross Catechisms*, in Kretzmann, 1940:39). The crucified Lord should be interpreted as a revelation of the Father's love for mankind and not in terms of God's wrath; Jesus should be viewed not as a terrible judge, but as a loving God who bears man's sins; and the Holy Spirit should be seen as a daily forgiver of believers' sins and a resurrector of the dead on the last day (Boehmer, 1960:106; Luther's *Lectures on Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, in Oswald, 1976:224, 300, 329; Luther, 1970:33). Based on his belief that parental discipline should echo divine discipline, Luther wanted at all

costs to prevent disciplinary measures from being responsible for an estrangement between parent and child. He stated that divine chastisement should lead offenders to approach God and not to flee from Him (Luther's *Lectures on Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, in Pelikan, 1969:216).

Luther's concept of childhood, too, is borne out by the Scriptures. He tenderly and approvingly commented on Christ's attitude of accepting children (Luther's *Sermons on the Gospel of St John*, in Pelikan, 1961b:14-16):

... when He has the children brought to Him He caresses and kisses them, and act toward them in such a childlike manner that the disciples rebuke those who brought them ... with children and with simple people He is childlike, as though they were all He knew.

Luther recognised the necessity for children to play: "Children should be allowed to leap and jump, or have something to do, because they have a natural desire for it which should not be restrained ..." (Luther's *Letter to the mayors*, in Eby, 1971:70). Luther wished all parents to take the vulnerability of their children into consideration, in particular their susceptibility to "poisonous talk of obscene things" and topics of an immoral nature (Luther's *Commentary on the sixth commandment*, in Kretzmann, 1940:22). Man's propensity for evil, dating from Adam's fall, resulted in the unfortunate situation that a "boy needs a schoolmaster and a switch because he is bad" (Luther's *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5*, in Pelikan, 1958:29; *Sermon on the Gospel of St John, Chapters 1-4*, in Pelikan, 1957:138). Hence to Luther, a proper education included admonishment of children, based on the Holy Writ (Luther's *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 15-20*, in Pelikan, 1961a:50).

## **4.2 Characteristics of Luther's views on educational discipline**

The characteristics pertaining to Luther's view on educational discipline which can be distinguished will now be discussed.

### **4.2.1 Disciplinary measures are crucial for successful education**

Since Luther related human educational discipline to divine discipline, his belief in the need for disciplining children was rooted in the acceptance of God's omnipotent authority. This conviction would not offer any precept to follow other than the perfect example set by God. This view is supported by his statement that "A ... we shall have to let God, our Lord, be the single supreme authority over all that is created, and we shall all have to be utterly subordinate to Him" (Luther's *Commentaries on selected Psalms*, in Pelikan, 1956a:195). People would not reform without

chastisement and therefore the rod was as essential as bread for the proper development of boys (Luther's *Lectures on Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, in Pelikan, 1969:111, 215).

#### 4.2.2 *Love is the cornerstone of disciplinary measures*

Luther compared the task of corporal punishment with that of a medical doctor who has to amputate an arm or a leg in order to save a life. Parents therefore sometimes had to resort to corporal punishment to save a child's soul (Luther's *Christliche Kinderzucht*, in Du Toit, 1954:120). However, the parent's attitude, even whilst punishing, had to remain loving. Although he did not object to an outward manifestation of anger such as a sharp voice or a rough fist while punishing, he viewed disciplinary dissatisfaction as "an anger of love, one that wishes no one evil, one that is friendly to the person but hostile to the sin ..." (Luther's *Commentary on the sermon on the mount*, in Pelikan, 1956b:76). This statement shows how well Luther understood the sensitive perception of the child who, he believed, had the ability to distinguish between punishment administered through love and that prompted by malice. It is therefore logical that he should equate the sad outcome of the latter to the adding of fuel to fire (Luther's *Sämtliche Schriften*, in Eby, 1971:33).

#### 4.2.3 *Discipline goes hand in hand with objectivity*

Extremes of strictness would, according to Luther, cause fear, timidity, hatred, sullenness and distrust in the child, whilst parents refraining from admonishing their children were responsible for destroying them (Luther's *Sämtliche Schriften*, in Eby, 1971:23-24, 29). Luther regarded flattery and Christianity as irreconcilable because "Christianity is something direct and simple [which] looks at things as they are and speaks accordingly" (Luther's *Letter to Wolfgang Fabricus Capito*, in Krodel, 1963:374). The truth could not flatter evil and ungodliness: "... nothing should be spared, bypassed or excused so that the unshackled, pure and clear truth remains victoriously among us" (Luther's *Letter to Wolfgang Fabricus Capito*, in Krodel, 1963:375).

#### 4.2.4 *Parents have authority over their children*

Religious grounds once again provide the basis for the authoritative role which Luther assigned to parents in the education of their children. This authoritative position of parenthood portrayed God's intention of instituting the leading of orderly lives (Luther's *Sermons on the Gospel of St John, Chapters 1-4*, in Pelikan, 1957:94). Obedience to parents, as required by the fourth commandment, had to originate in a heart willing to obey God; it could not be based on deceit as had been the case with Jacob, who flattered his father in order to obtain his blessing (Luther's *Sermon on the Gospel of St John Chapters 15-20*, in Pelikan, 1957:527). The fourth

commandment which demands obedience to parents, was subordinate to the first commandment which requires man to put God before all things (Luther's *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 15-20*, in Pelikan, 1961a:93-94). Obedience to parents, which was based on obedience to Christ, would result in a unification of believers within the Church, which, in its turn would draw them closer to Christ (Luther's *Sermons on the Gospel of St John, Chapters 1-4*, in Pelikan, 1957:446).

Luther did not overlook exceptional cases which might actually require disobedience on the part of children. The circumstances in exceptional cases pertained to parents requiring their children to act contrary to God's will (Luther's *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 15-20*, in Pelikan, 1961a:240):

... neither the authority of parents nor the love for children must mean so much ... that we are willing to perish with them. Then all compassion must be forgotten, in accordance with the example of Lot, who abandons his wife, when contrary to the Lord's command, she looks back while she is on her way.

#### ***4.2.5 Educational discipline implies harmony between freedom and restraint***

According to Luther, educational discipline should not go too far to either the left or the right (Eby, 1971:24). He ascribed unsuccessful education to either foolish fondness or unbending severity. Luther's objection to the former was clearly illustrated in his accusation that parents, who always fondly approved of their little girls's every action, were in fact leading them to prostitution (Townes, 1975:117). Even if correction had to go hand in hand with the experience of grief, disciplinary action had to be taken against offending children, but such action had to be rooted in love (Luther's *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 31-37*, in Pelikan, 1970:226).

#### ***4.2.6 Educational discipline should be subject to God's supremacy***

The supremacy ascribed to God by Luther in his views concerning educational discipline, are obvious if one considers the fact that his disciplinary views were based on the Scriptures. The acknowledgement of God's supremacy in terms of educational discipline is demonstrated by his belief that a positive educational response shown by children could not be correlated with educators's actions, but with the blessing of God upon their educational ventures (Luther's *Notes on Ecclesiastes*, in Pelikan, 1972:73). A father ruling over his wife and children, had to "commit the entire outcome and success (of his educational effort) to God" (Luther's *Notes on Ecclesiastes*, in Pelikan, 1972:35).



## 5. Luther on method

As can be expected, Luther focused on the teaching of content of a religious nature. However, he never really differentiated didactically between the teaching methods he envisaged and concentrated on the manner in which children should be taught..

### 5.1 Religious instruction

In the preface to the *Kleine Catechisms*, Luther provided the instructional method according to which the *Summa doctrinae* (the creed, the ten commandments and the Lords prayer as well as other components of the *Kleine Catechisms*). ((Apart from the *Summa doctrinae*, the *Kleine Catechismus* contains questions and answers to the Sacrament of the Altar and brief sections on morning and evening prayers, grace which should be said at table and table duties)) had to be taught to the young. This preface also provided some explanation of the manner in which the content of the *Gross Catechisms*, namely the *Summa doctrinae*, the Baptism, the Sacrament of the Holy Altar and the Confession had to be taught to more advanced students (Tappert, 1979:339-340).

Luther was somewhat restrictive in his prescriptions on the instructional method for teaching the young (Tappert, 1979:339):

... when you are teaching the young, adhere to a fixed and unchanging form and method. Begin by teaching them the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's prayer, following the text word for word so that the young may repeat these things after you and retain them in their memory.

Luther certainly wanted to prevent any chance of misinterpretation by choosing the deductive methodological principle as opposed to the inductive methodological principle. The former implies that a fixed statement is provided at the beginning of the teaching of a concept and that an explanation follows thereafter (see Painter, 1889:151-152). The mere memorisation of content by means of the question and answer method provided in the *Kleine Catechismus* was to be extended by explanation (Luther's preface to the *Gross Catechisms*, in Tappert, 1979:364):

... it is not enough for them [the children] simply [to] learn and repeat the parts verbatim. The young people should also attend church, especially at the time designated for the Catechisms, so that they may hear it explained and may learn the meaning of every part. Then they will be able to repeat what they have heard and give a good, correct answer when they are questioned, and thus the preaching will not be without benefit and fruit.

Luther also briefly considered play as an educational method when it came to the teaching of religious content. He suggested that scriptural verses be correlated to coins which children had to, depending on their content,

place into one or two sacks – either the golden sack of faith or the silver sack of love. In turn, each sack had to contain two bags into which the coin (the scriptural verse) had to be placed. The golden sack of faith contained the bags, *the corruption of man* and *the redemption of man*, whilst the silver sack of love contained the bags referred to as *service to mankind* and *suffering and endurance* (Luther's *German mass and order of divine service*, in Kretzmann, 1940:65).

Once the *Kleine Catechismus* had been mastered the teaching of the *Grosse Catechismus* was to be taught. Adults, too, were to be tutored by means of the *Grosse Catechismus*. The *Gross Catechisms* provided additional information on topics featured in the *Kleine Catechismus* and suggested a more liberal manner of conveying knowledge. Information in other relevant books could be used and explanatory examples pertaining to Christian doctrine could now be linked more directly to the environment of the student when it came to the teaching of the ten commandments (Luther's preface to the *Kleine Catechisms*, in Tappert, 1979:340).

## **5.2 Teaching of secular subjects**

The rigidity displayed in Luther's proposals regarding the teaching of scriptural content—did not feature in his views on the manner in which secular subjects were to be taught. As far as teaching the secular subjects was concerned, Luther included the inductive methodological principle, which adopts as its point of departure the input of personal experiences given by students to eventually deduce the essential. As far as secular instruction was concerned, Luther mainly emphasised the way in which grammar and the natural sciences had to be taught.

Luther wished the natural sciences to be taught through observation (Luther, in Painter, 1889:163-164):

Why shall we not instead of dead books, open the living book of nature? Not the shadows of things, but the things themselves, which make an impression in the senses and imagination, are to be brought before youth. By actual observation, not by a verbal description of things, must instruction begin ... .

His statement that man “already recognise(s) in the most delicate flowers the wonders of divine goodness ...” (Painter, 1889:66,163) implies that the observation of concrete examples would lead to the discovery of general concepts which can be regarded as a characteristic of the inductive methodological principle.

The following rhetorical questions posed by Luther reveal that he also favoured inductive methodological principle as far as the teaching of Greek and Latin grammar was concerned (Luther's *Sämtliche Schriften*, in Eby, 1971:165):

Tell me, where was there ever a language, which men could learn to speak with correctness and propriety by the rules of grammar? Is it not true that even those languages like Latin and Greek, which possess the most unerring rules, are much better learnt by use ... than from these rules?

## 6. Conclusion

Luther's educational directives were permeated with scriptural influences and aimed at inculcating the Christian faith in learners. Education as a whole had to serve the biblical God. Educational aims, educational content (including the teaching of secular subjects at school) educational discipline and educational methods all had to be congruent with what the Bible taught and to further Christianity. Both home and school had to fulfil an important role in fortifying the Christian faith, even though Luther considered the home's role in this regard to be more significant.

The significance Luther attributed to the parental influence on spiritual matters merits the consideration of parents in South Africa's new educational dispensation. As stated in the introduction, religion education has been introduced in this country, with the intention of making people of different cultures more tolerant of one another's religion (DoE, 2003a:9; DoE, 2003b:44). Tolerance of others's constitutional right to express their views which they believe to be right as an educational aim cannot be criticised, especially if one considers South Africa's sad educational past which was characterised by inequality that was defended by an ideological interpretation of certain scriptural content. Nevertheless, these days, Christian parents and the parents of any other monotheistic religion such as Islam and Judaism, are compelled to assume their parental duty in the spiritual development of their children, when their children are formally exposed to the teachings of other religions. This is in line with Luther's conviction that religious teaching is primarily the function of parents. In Lutheran terms, Christian fathers and mothers should once again be the bishops, preachers and ministers of their homes (see sec. 2.2.1). No longer can parents (of any faith) continue to (wrongly) think that the issue of religion can be left to the school. Christian parents should also endeavour to draw the link between the content of secular subjects to religion since this function (which Luther accentuated) can obviously not be performed in multireligious schools.

As far as educational discipline is concerned, the essence of Luther's views (see secs. 4.1- 4.4) are still valid from a Christian perspective. Corporal punishment, which Luther at times thought necessary to be inflicted at home, is debatable. Parents should teach their children that certain wrong choices result in the undesirable outcome of admonishment and punishment and that this also applies to their behaviour at school. Not only is this in line with Christian principles, but it also prepares children

for a society which operates on being accountable for one's deeds even though it sometimes seems that society advocates the so-called "humane view" that children should not be admonished or punished.

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