

## Religious Indoctrination

We deny that any god or God or religion should be put before people. Belief does not come before people. We must believe whatever builds people up. This truth must be the starting point of all credible theology or philosophy. It is when people violate this truth that religion becomes trouble.

Many religions, notably Roman Catholicism, make it an obligation for Catholic parents to tell their children that the religion is true and to get them to agree with what the religion teaches. Then when the child goes to school there are classes where teachers present religion as fact to the children which results in further indoctrination. The habit of prayer, obeying the priests and going to Church is ingrained in children principally by their parents.

Is this taking advantage of the children?

The Church says it's no different to teaching a child history or maths or geography.

It is different because to teach religious doctrine is to teach faith in a religion. And what religious faith says cannot be verified. You can verify that Madrid is the capital of Spain but you cannot verify that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Just because you believe that your religion is true doesn't mean that it is true. We know that the problem with religion is that it is man-made. You can put the brightest theologians from twenty different religions in a room to debate the falsity of each others religion. And they will do that and not change their own religious allegiances.

Studies have shown that many adults put more value on the life of animals than people. They also show that children are more likely than adults to do this. A child finds it easy to see an animal as kin, as a sort of human or potential human friend. Religion uses this tendency in a child to instill devotion to God who is seen as sort of human or personal in some way.

We want children to be grounded in a material universe. It is better to err thinking there is a sixth continent called Atlantis than it is to think there is a magical city called Atlantis floating around in space. At least the first mistake can be fixed to the satisfaction of the child but the second cannot. And once you tell a child there is magic, you don't know what magical thing the child will think next - maybe that bullying redheaded children saves their souls or something. Once you preach magic you lose any right to tell the child what kind of magic not to believe in or to believe in. Remember Catholicism believes in magic and the occult but calls them graces and sacraments and miracles. Changing the terms does not change the substance.

The good parent does not act like the child's superior but the child's equal. Superiority damages the child. Thus the parent rather than enrolling the child in a religion will help the child freely and without prejudice find her or his own answers.

With so many different views around, children need to be helped make up their own minds. But Catholic religious teaching gives them only the Catholic view and that is manipulative. It would be manipulative to make sure voters hear only one side of the political debate. Children are encouraged to vote for religion by attending its worship and reciting its creeds and receiving its membership rituals.

The Church says that inculcating religious doctrine into a child makes the child more moral or gives the child the knowledge to be moral. This is the old lie that there is no morality or at least much morality where there is no religion. And surely what matters is how good an atheist or believer should be not how good they actually are! If an outlook should lead to good and doesn't, the fault is in the person not in the person being religious or non-religious.

Religion is not necessary for living a good life. The claim that if children are taught religion in a neutral way they will be confused and consider one point of view as good as another is nonsense. They will not be confused about the important things if ethics is combined with this teaching. What does confuse children is telling them to love a God they cannot see and to love him more than the people they do see. Telling them religious stuff such as Jesus being born of a virgin as if this was as important as not bullying the smaller kids is just giving them a warped view of morality that will not be taken seriously and be a temptation to bully.

So the Church then has no justification to demand the indoctrination of children.

It also has no right to do so because it is against the right of a child to be free from pressure in faith matters.

The Church teaches that even if indoctrinating children is not ideal, it is better than the alternatives. But that is assuming

that the faith taught by the Church is true and good. What if the teaching is false and unnecessarily harmful? The Church even wants obviously harmful religions to have the right to indoctrinate children through the parents. It wants to be trusted when it has no right to be. The indoctrinating is not done with the child's best interest at heart.

Children are prone to magical thinking. They will see God as a magic ghost. Indoctrinating a very young child in science might be bad unless it is the only way to stop a worse evil. For example, a child doesn't need to be indoctrinated about black holes or sunspots but does need to be indoctrinated that fire burns if you get too close. But indoctrinating a child in magic is worse because magic is based on reasoning in circles. If a child asks God's magic to get her a bike and she does not get it she might think that maybe she got a magical bike that she rides in her dreams or an invisible bike. And if a child reasons that prayer works for even if she gets the opposite of what she asked it was really what she wanted after all so the prayer did work there will be no way for the child to realise the truth if prayer does not really work.

Prayer feels good for many as it is a form of escapism - they feel they are connecting to a magical force that is going to make their problems okay. Children are prone to escapism and magical thinking which is why they are susceptible to prayer and religion. Society and religion programmes them by manipulating their childlike innocence and sometimes that programming lasts forever. Prayer is the basic form of religious indoctrination. Indoctrination is doomed to fail without it. For example, telling a child over and over again that God became a man will have no effect unless you encourage the child to think he has a relationship with this god man entity through prayer. Prayer is a reinforcement. It is an indoctrination tool.

Children are so vulnerable that all religious indoctrination of them must be understood as forced indoctrination. However, nobody denies that forced indoctrination is abuse. So why are priests etc allowed to indoctrinate children? If indoctrinating children is unavoidable then they might need a few spiritual principles but not religion.

All agree that religious indoctrination of children that seeks to encourage violence or condone it is child-abuse. Christianity excuses the violence endorsed in the Bible by God and Jesus. The seeds of violence are sown in a child who is encouraged to be complicit in Bible and divine evil by silence or by approval. If you accept evil scriptures as good and holy and from a perfect God, that still says what kind of person you are in terms of principle. Your good deeds are fake if your principles are faulty and hypocritical.

Parents force children to do many things. Religion gives them something extra to force on them as if there isn't enough. Children are not given a choice about staying away from Mass or dropping out of first communion.

Perhaps it is best that spirituality be taught in school. The philosophy of self-help, without any doubt, needs to be. Religion most certainly is the last thing that needs to be taught as true in the schools.

Religious activity no matter how compassionate or charitable it appears is always egotistical. That is why religion has led to so many wars and always will. Big arrogant egos lead to conflict and competition, the ingredients of war.

All abusers, including those who manipulate their children to believe what they want them to believe, get a power experience that they enjoy.

The thought that you need God's grace or religion to be good is not very encouraging! It is even less encouraging for a child.

If we need religion it does not follow that we need to be members of a religion. For example, if the Catholic devotions rosary and the mass really had power to do people good, it could do that without the participants being members of the Catholic Church.

No religion has the right to enforce membership of a religion on a baby or infant. A child does not worry about suffering and death and has no need for the spurious comforts of religion. A child just needs to know to be kind to others and how to be. The child must make her or his own decision about religion when she or he is older. No indoctrination of a child must take place for that results only in conditioning. Initiating a child into a religion through baptism or any other way is wrong. And the main reason is that a child CANNOT be initiated. You can make a baby a member of your golf-club but that is indistinguishable from pretending she is a member.

Roman Catholicism tries to exploit vulnerable children and convert them into committed Catholic believers. That is a refusal to love the child as a child. It does not even show real respect for the child.