

985 What shall we tell the children? ... an email exchange

My blog 984: Should parents be allowed to enforce religion on their children? elicited this question from a reader:

My question to you is - how does your view on this translate to those children who simply grow up in their parent's religion by sheer osmosis? By this I mean, the kids go to church with their parents, they celebrate the religious days, etc but the parents do not make any attempt to influence their kids with it ... do you think this is a subliminal form of indoctrination as well?

The answer is an uncomfortable: Yes.

Do you think the parents should make a conscious effort to remove their children from their religious activities once they can understand a basic grasp of it?

Probably not, as long as parents help their children to inform themselves - age appropriately - about other religions, as well as secularity; but the important part is that parents should not be dogmatic about their religion toward their children. And that is probably difficult for many parents who feel strongly about their religious culture, because Christianity - like most others - is soaked in dogmata. But I believe religious culture does not necessarily have to be dogmatic. I do believe one can enjoy the 'trappings' of religion - the festivities, the singing, the community - without falling into the trap of dogmatic and intolerant indoctrination; at least I hope so.

... but the parents do not make any attempt to influence their kids with it ...

I believe the influencing happens by stealth. At church the kids will be subject to a degree of indoctrination ... which they have no defenses against (Richard Dawkins: The God Delusion).

In my essay GOD 3 I say it is important children are taught ethics at school, instead of scripture. And then they may join a religion at age 14, or so. However, that of course is fought against tooth and nail by the religious hierarchies. As the famous saying goes: *"Give us a child till s/he's seven, and we'll have them for life."* (The Jesuit maxim; see my blog 984.) The formative years are hugely important for religious indoctrination, because it is possible that well educated children at age 14 will not join a religion, or - indeed - may not remain in the religion they were brought up in. I was 14 when I excommunicated myself ... see my essay MISSIONARIES.

I think once children are ten, twelve, fourteen years old, they are probably ready for an education based on facts and science as well as tolerance and syncretism. I think at that age children may add to earlier questions like: is Santa real? The tooth fairy? about God and Jesus. Are they real? Parents must think about what to say when those questions come up. I believe it is a great responsibility when bringing up children to tell them the truth. Of course it is easy to say ... "oh, that's just what we believe."

In the video *What Shall We Tell The Children?* on my carstenburmeister.com/unity.aspx page, the professor answers: Science. Whatever you talk to your kids about ... bear science in mind.

So, what about God? Is He real? Well, yes ... if you define God as the good in us, as compassion, understanding, wisdom, truthfulness, love etc. And what about Jesus? Jesus adds to the above humility and forgiveness. See GOD 2 and JESUS.

But if you define God as the being up in heaven who tells us how to live our lives ... what about the suicide bomber who shouts out the very last words you'll hear: "Allahu Akbar" (God is great)?

Nevertheless, with all I have said, let me point out my essay GOD 4. It's one of my favourites re: religion, God and beliefs. Don't miss the story about the two priests discussing if God exists. So, remember the footnote at the very bottom ...

A 45 year old regular church-goer said "when I was in my teens I was called to confirm my belief in a traditional God, the virgin birth and the resurrection of Christ. I said to the minister 'I just think this is all rubbish' and he replied "well, you know, I think you're right.""

... obviously it is possible not to believe the nonsense that forms part of the indoctrination agenda of religions, but at the same time enjoy being part of a supportive religious community. And I make this brazen claim: It really doesn't matter which religious community one belongs to ... as long as it is tolerant and peaceful; preferably with the absence of any proselytizing.

Cheers, C.