

In Defense of Indoctrination

I hadn't seen my friend for over 20 years. We were close in high school but drifted apart (as happens). She was buying some books at my Barnes and Noble and we chatted for a few moments, catching up. Her three kids were teens; I only had Sophia at this point. My ears perked up when she mentioned homeschooling. I always remember something she said about the teaching her children. "Gotta get him when they're young! Indoctrinate the h*** out of them!"

Indoctrination. What an ugly word! Or is it? What does it mean, exactly? Its current usage is something like to **coercively influence and surreptitiously program**. As an experiment, I typed "indoctrinate" in my Word document, then right-clicked to see what synonyms showed. They were: *brainwash*, *proselytize*, teach, instruct. The first two are in line with the modern notion; the second two are closer to something we need to reclaim.

So, what is it really? Fundamentally, indoctrination is to literally *teach into* or **to impart a teaching**. That's it. Indoctrination is derived from the Latin noun *doctrina* (teaching) and related verb *doceo*, which means "to teach". Add the *-in* prefix and *voila!* But a cursory Google search of online dictionaries reveals the way the word has come to be used:

"to imbue a partisan belief or a biased point of view"

"to teach with a biased and one-sided ideology..."

"to teach a particular belief with the view that other beliefs will be rejected"

"to repeat a belief until a person accepts it without criticism..."

Words have no "real" meaning apart from their given context and usage. In other words, no matter what I say it really means, clearly indoctrination has come to be used pejoratively.¹ And to be fair, we all have in mind people "out there" who indoctrinate in this way. Wherever you may be on the political spectrum, both "sides" accuse the other of indoctrination.

But I am here to, as the kids say, "lean into" indoctrination. If you look closely at how the word is used online, there is a sense that indoctrination happens *without the full awareness of the person*. This is (can be) a good thing. **We should engage in indoctrination and in our various roles, become indoctrinators.** The key is: *what* is to be indoctrinated? What is the content? And how should indoctrination happen in the life of Christian?

The Myth of Neutral

Some promote the myth that we are simply *neutral beings*, floating around, without any biases or presuppositions. It is commonly assumed that the best way to "learn" (to be taught or instructed) is by evaluating all the facts, hearing all sides, gathering the information, and then make an

¹ If you want to really go down a rabbit hole, look into "radical indoctrination".

informed “choice” about what is “best for me”. Call this the *I’ll-decide-for-myself approach*. It is also assumed that world views are neutral, neither good nor bad.² So, we are blank canvases and slates, and the world and culture are full of neutral ideas that have no consequences. We are neutral brains-on-sticks³ walking around choosing our reality. This is a damaging myth! **There is no neutrality!** Know this. For the progressive hard-left⁴ does not believe in neutrality. They believe in indoctrination—a *systematic program of formation through which ideas, concepts, practices and a world view is built and shaped through persistent engagement, often in ways that are imperceptible*.⁵ Because they want you! They want your children! They want your grandchildren. They want your hearts and minds. They want your dollars. **THEY WANT YOUR WORSHIP.**

There is also no neutrality with respect to *their* desired outcomes. Their goals are clearly stated—destruction of the nuclear family, the undermining of institutions built on a Christian-Judeo ethic, and the redefining of human sexuality. That’s all. For the rest, (what sports team to root for, what dipping sauces you use for your curly fries) you can decide for yourself! So, the myth of the neutral is propagated while you are being indoctrinated in nearly every aspect of your life. Whether you know it or not. But know there is *no neutral ground, neutral people, neutral ideas*.

Indoctrination as Christian Formation

So, what is a Christian to do? How are we to combat this pervasive attack on family, faith, and morality...ON GOD’S TRUTH? **We indoctrinate.** In fact, we used to be quite good at it. **But we need to recapture indoctrination and employ it for ourselves and our children.**⁶

Therefore, I propose our own program, which is not mine, but God’s. Because indoctrination is founded upon how God created us. It’s why it’s so effective. We are human creatures designed to be indoctrinated. Indeed, indoctrination is grounded in the natural law and the creational hardwiring of humans, as articulated in Scripture. The below program is for one’s self (self-indoctrination) or for one’s family. I recently preached a sermon on Deuteronomy 6 laying out some of what I propose below.⁷

There are four parts to Christian indoctrination. They are:

1. Intention
2. Methodology
3. Time

² Though really, everyone has a concept of a world view they deem is better and certainly ones that are worse!

³ Thanks to James K.A. Smith for this image.

⁴ Not trying to be overtly “political”, but this label captures those who are secular atheists and reject norms and standards found in the teaching of the Church.

⁵ As you will see below, I agree with this approach, just not with the content!

⁶ I realize that I am speaking both to indoctrination in a family context and one that is for one’s self. Ideally both are going on!

⁷ To listen to this again, click on the link <https://stpaulsfulton.org/sermons/audio-of-sermons-and-readings/> and go to the sermon entitled “The Wholeness of Hearing”.

4. Intensity/Pressure

Intention is simply, “What is the intended result I am trying to achieve?” It speaks to having a *goal and end point*. For a Christian, that is to be *the human creature God intends*. **This is predicated on the full redemption from sin by our Lord Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit Who dwells within us.** We can talk about indoctrination from the view of what God is doing *in me* as part of my sanctification. I am speaking experientially, as we live and work and thrive in God’s creation, utilizing the gifts and tools *He provides*. But if we do not have the intention, the drive, the desire to be the person God wants us to be, then indoctrination will never get off the ground.

Methodology is the process employed. I call this *a pedagogy of purpose*. Based on Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the methodology is *repetition, inscription, binding, recitation*. Indoctrination takes place through a bombardment of messaging, a cycle of the same. Anyone who’s ever learned a skilled sport or musical instrument knows this. *Inscription* refers to being indoctrinated wherever you live, work, play, and go. The Israelites were to “write God’s Word” on their doors, houses, and gates. It is to be surrounded by the message. *Binding* is the tactile, sacramental way which God’s Word is consumed—through the ear, eye, in the mouth. It is sacramental worship. And *recitation* is the putting of God’s Word on our lips and speaking it out loud. Think of the power of jingles! What if we did this with memorization of hymns and Scripture?

People usually have intention. They may even see the wisdom of using a method. **The hard part is finding time, taking time, having time.** Because to be indoctrinated is to take the long view. *It is not quick and easy*. And we are a quick and easy society. We want it now! Give us a meme, or a Tik Tok, or a Ted Talk, or an Insty Story. We don’t want anything to take forever. But forever is exactly what we must invest. **Time**. You can’t microwave personal formation.

Finally, it takes **intensity**. Half-measures won’t cut it. I realize that the person being indoctrinated is not always the one who is intense. It is usually the indoctrinator applying the pressure! The word *character* captures this nicely. *A character is an embossment, or an imprint*. Something stamped, a likeness applied with pressure, leaving an indelible mark. That is the role of pressure and intensity. Without it, indoctrination lacks a lasting effect. Character formation is intensity of purpose that leaves a form or shape.

Indoctrinated into What?

I have talked about the process and focus of indoctrination. Lastly, we come to *content*. What is to be indoctrinated? I realize just saying “God’s Word” is so broad that many don’t know where to begin. For children, the starting place is stories of the Bible and the Small Catechism. That’s the training wheels, the milk. It is rich and wonderful. But that’s just the basics. We need the meat, to be indoctrinated in the whole of Scriptures. So, we start with the Gospels. We read them, mark them, inwardly digest them. Paul’s epistles are the next place, where he unpacks the significance of the events of Jesus and applies them to our lives. And we continue on. Finally, we

need to be indoctrinated in the entirety of the canon of the Bible, which is a lifetime project.⁸ But there are so many ways to go, so many programs to try. I have developed a tool call *The Congregation at Prayer*.⁹ That's one place to start. But if you haven't done anything, start with something small. Memorize a psalm. Speak it, pray it, read it. Then do another. And another. Set time aside daily for indoctrination. Then weekly. Attend a bible study. Read a book of the bible not once, or twice, but three times.¹⁰ Read a book ALOUD. Listen to Scripture in the car. Learn to sing a hymn from memory. I leave room for you to apply the above suggestions and fit them into your current situation in life. Go talk to your pastor. He would LOVE to help indoctrinate you. As being indoctrinated, we also became God's tool of indoctrination for others.

My hope and prayer is that we are aware of how we are being indoctrinated everyday by everything, and then inoculate ourselves through our own indoctrination program.

BECAUSE GOD WANTS OUR WORSHIP TOO. And He has so much to give us, so much He has given. But we fight fire with fire. Indoctrination of God's Word and Will is the work of the Spirit in the lives of God's people, preparing us for spending an eternity with our Lord.

⁸ The goal is not to be "finished".

⁹ Borrowed and adapted from Peter Bender and his *Concordia Catechetical Academy* in Sussex, WI.

¹⁰ I call this the "rule of three". There is something that happens with reading the same text three times. Try it!