

Last week’s article named a number of false beliefs that are common today, but without going into any of them. Spelling out all of those various popular beliefs will be the “meat and potatoes” of these articles and will be taken up in future articles. This article, however, will continue with an introduction to this topic, starting with the impact that these false beliefs have had on our society. Transgenderism is one example. Transgenderism is taken to mean that a person can choose to believe they are whatever gender they want to be and that belief alone makes it true. I can simply “identify as” – call myself – male or female and that alone makes it true. First, to be sure, people can have all kinds of problems – physical, psychological / spiritual, and so on. God does expect us to be compassionate towards the problems and difficulties of others. In that context, it has to be remembered that real mercy seeks to help the person with their problem, not call the problem something good and encourage it. If a person has cancer and the doctor says: cancer is good, congratulations, we’re going to celebrate it – it’s time to find a new doctor. Likewise for the plethora of other human difficulties. Likewise, incidentally, for my own problems and difficulties, my own sins and inclinations to sin. I *do* want to hear there is mercy for them and that I can overcome them, but I *don’t* want someone telling me they’re ok, let’s celebrate them.

Coming back now to the question at hand – seeing the effects of these “isms” (a “shorthand” term for all of these common but false beliefs; their names all end with “ism” – hence the shorthand term that is often used). The widespread acceptance of transgenderism is just one example of relativism. This is not saying that a person who believes themselves to be transgender doesn’t have a real difficulty. What we are talking about here is the *widespread acceptance* of the claim that a person can simply believe they are, or claim to be, a certain gender and that alone makes it true. This belief is an example of relativism applied to physical reality. Relativism is a topic in its own right and one that will probably need a whole article unto itself. Briefly, though, relativism means that the only truth is whatever is true to the individual person. There is no absolute, objective truth. If you say the sky is green and grass is blue, that’s true because the only truth is what’s true to you. If I say the sky is blue and grass is green, that’s true because that’s what’s true to me. It might sound absurd but relativism is now widely accepted. It was first applied primarily in the area of morality (only the individual person can say what is true to them and thus what is morally right) and now, being firmly established as popular belief, relativism is being applied to physical reality as well. Something like transgenderism could not just crop up and become widely accepted. The groundwork had to be laid and that groundwork is largely an acceptance of relativism. These “isms,” then, are not inconsequential. What man holds as true or false does have consequences, for both this life and this world, and *of course* for eternal life.

But how did all of this, all of these isms, get started? Where did these false beliefs come from and how were they propagated, how did they become popular mentalities / common beliefs? If we begin by thinking in very broad and general terms, it could be said that they began with the rebellion of Lucifer and the other angels. We might go further and say it started (in this world) with the sin of Adam and Eve, which was prompted by Satan. We might skip to the 1500’s and say that what really enabled these false beliefs to become unleashed was the big break from (rejection of) the teaching authority of the Church. All of those things are true. The isms almost certainly would not have gained a foothold without them. They are contributing factors. At the same time, they are more “remote” or distant causes. In the early 1600’s, for example, many of these false beliefs were not common, they were not *popular* beliefs – part of “what everybody knows.” So there had to be a more immediate or direct cause, a turning point if you will; some concrete, decisive step(s) in this direction.

While it might be difficult to nail down an exact moment, event, person, or philosophy that corresponds to *the* turning point, what can be said is that what we are now living with are the consequences of “philosophies” promoted during the so-called “Enlightenment” period of history, which was roughly 1700 to 1900. Let us first of all consider the names that have been given to various periods of history – names like the “Enlightenment” or the “Dark Ages.” These names themselves are meant to convey a message, a teaching, a judgement. Can the names be trusted? Are they accurate, a true teaching? Who says? “Who says” brings to mind an old adage: history is written by the victors. The period of history ranging from about the year 400 to about 1300 has been called the Dark Ages; almost everyone has heard that term. The name itself is meant to be descriptive, a

teaching that most accept; we heard it even in grade school, after all, so it must be true – everybody knows it. “Dark ages” conjures up certain images in our mind – drudgery, oppression, overcast skies, lack of knowledge and understanding – a dour, miserable, unhappy time. The name itself says a lot, the name itself is meant to sway man’s beliefs and...it has. Is it accurate? Was this a “dark” time in the world?

St Augustine, St Albert the Great, and St Thomas Aquinas – as just a few examples – all lived during the so-called ‘dark ages.’ Some of the great religious orders like the Dominicans and Franciscans were born during this time period. It was a time of tremendous growth in true philosophy and theology, a growth in knowledge and understanding of both man and God, and thus a time of tremendous growth in an understanding of how man’s deepest desire, that for ultimate happiness, is to be fulfilled. Yet it is called the Dark Ages. Why? Historian Tritan Hughes, writing for historyhit.com, said it’s because “many suggest that this period saw little scientific and cultural advancement.” Hughes himself discounts that claim but the point here is that the criterion used for judging and thus naming various periods of history is the satisfaction of man’s base desires and how much stuff he has – how many material goods, his physical comforts and material opulence – i.e., a materialistic viewpoint is the criterion, not (say) the status of marriage and family life, not correspondence to what God has revealed, certainly not getting to Heaven. No, the criterion for judging and naming periods of history is the (supposed) state of “scientific knowledge,” material well-being, the number of comforts and conveniences.

Now the term “enlightenment,” of course, conjures up an image that is the opposite of ‘dark ages’ – one of great understanding, progress, brightness, and cheery happiness; of throwing off the yoke of darkness and undue restraint, a time of lifting up your head and living out your desires, of...material well-being. So who is the victor that now writes history? It is the materialists, those who abide with materialism; it is they who command the minds and hearts of modern man. There can be no question about it. Business practices and personal choices both reflect it. Businesses producing goods for sale run 24-hour shifts, 7 days a week and it’s just accepted since this is what is necessary to...to do what? Ensure good marriages, family life, spiritual life? No, in order to ensure material opulence. Sports for kids on Sundays. Is it good for them, for families? Of course, modern man answers, otherwise they’ll be left out, they’ll fall behind – in what? Well in the world of course. Couples living together outside of marriage often say it’s for financial reasons, and they say it as if that should end any discussion right there. Of course it should, because...everybody knows materialism is right.

So do these beliefs that we will be talking about (the isms) have consequences? Are they relevant? **They run your everyday life**, and ruin your eternal life. At the root of contemporary spiritual combat is materialism, whether outright materialism (the belief that material existence is the only existence) or practical materialism (I live as if that is the case, abiding, for example – to one degree or another – with some of the other various isms).

While some of the isms may have cropped up here and there throughout history, they took hold during the so-called enlightenment. But how were they promoted? They may have started with some odd duck sitting in a tower but they are now popular beliefs. How did that happen? There is much that can be said on that but the most important part of the answer is...generally, very *subtly*. Notice the subtlety in using names like Dark Ages and Enlightenment. They carry with them a huge message and no one thinks to question it; it’s just slid in there, there’s no discussion about it. Look at the examples of materialism. If you start to wonder whether businesses running around the clock is a good idea, the criterion of goodness is never questioned; it’s just understood to be material gain. Consider Mark Cartwright’s description of “the Enlightenment” given in worldhistory.org: “The Enlightenment (Age of Reason) was a revolution in thought in Europe and North America from the late 17th century to the late 18th century. The Enlightenment involved new approaches in philosophy, science, and politics. Above all, the human capacity for reason was championed as the tool by which our knowledge could be extended, individual liberty maintained, and happiness secured.” Boy it sounds so nice and good. It was the age of reason, implying of course that preceding ages – Augustine, Aquinas, Albert the Great – did not use reason. What does he mean by “reason,” incidentally? What he means is what’s called rationalism, but that’s not brought out. It is all very subtle. The serpent was the most subtle of the creatures that the Lord God had made. Next time we will start taking up specific isms. *God bless you, Fr Kuhn.*