

One of the goals for the pastorate has been for the priests to get directly involved in teaching CCD, mainly for upper high school grades. We started this year with a Jr-Sr class for Alexandria-Emery-Bridgewater. The reason for starting in this way is because development of a “curriculum” is still a work in progress and so it’s helpful for both priests of the pastorate to do it together in order to develop it. Then, either next year or the year after, we will probably have two Jr-Sr classes – one north of I-90 and one south of I-90. The first topic we are taking up is the isms. So far we have talked about man’s deepest, inescapable desire – namely that for happiness. There was some good and helpful class participation for this topic. The isms ultimately lead to a frustration of that desire and if we don’t get past the isms in this life and this world, they will lead to eternal frustration of that desire – the misery of hell. Not only do we not want that to happen, but it is also our God-given duty to work to the best of our ability, with His grace, to prevent it.

The reason for starting with this introduction is because I want to come to something we covered in our Jr-Sr CCD class. One of the hard things in teaching about the isms is bringing out their often subtle existence in the world, in our lives, in society, in culture; remember subtle does *not* mean small effects, it means: hard to notice. Much like the tempter they hide, they’re often implied without being stated outright. This is the hardest thing in teaching about the isms – illustrating that they not only exist in people’s minds but that they are common, widespread and have big effects. It’s fairly easy to define them explicitly but when we do that, people look at the definition and say: no, I don’t believe that, I don’t ascribe to that. And I believe them. Yet, when we start bringing out how these things are expressed in everyday life, people begin to realize that they have slid in that direction at least some; they begin to realize how much these mentalities affect everyday life, including work. This happened to me in seminary as well, when our good teachers taught us these subjects.

Given a definition of these isms, the most helpful question, the question we are taking up now, is: what are examples of expressions of these various isms in everyday life? **It would be very helpful if this could be a pastorate-wide project**, where all of you become clear about the meaning of each of the isms, think about them, and then begin to notice their expression in everyday life, and then we compile a list of these expressions. Expressions can be verbal expressions – things people say – or practices, such as business practices for example. That would be very helpful in teaching this subject and preparing young people for what they will very soon face in the world. I will try help initiate this project by saying what we did in the CCD class.

Giving these examples is essential to teaching the subject and we had to do it in our Jr-Sr class. The isms are good at hiding so it is the toughest part. One of the things that finally occurred to me is that a good place to start might be with materialism. It is the root of all the other isms. At times, some of the isms might seem to even contradict each other (e.g., relativism and scientism). But at the root, they are all chewing meat off of the same bone – namely materialism. Let’s begin, then, with a reminder of the “definition” of materialism:

It is a belief (“philosophy,” if we can dignify it with that term) that says that the only reality is material reality. The only things that exist are material things. There is no such thing as immaterial reality; immaterial things do not exist. Thus, there is no such thing as spiritual reality. Therefore, there is no God (who is pure spirit), no human soul, no angels. Materialism is intrinsically atheistic.

The goal now is to demonstrate that this mentality, this belief, has infiltrated our world, our society, our culture, our minds *to a large extent*, that it is a popular belief. Your first inclination is almost certainly going to be: no, I don’t believe that. I believe you, but stay with it to see if, at the very least, it doesn’t affect your everyday life. So what are some expressions of materialism in everyday life?

- Have you ever wondered if God really does exist? Has that thought ever crossed your mind? In fact, I know it has affected even Catholics, young and old alike, who are trying to be faithful to the Lord.
- Have you ever wondered, or known anybody who’s wondered, if the Bible is just made up, if it’s really true?
- Think about the statement: Science explains the world. Do you agree? Notice how tricky this is. You can’t really say no, I don’t agree; science does give *some* explanation of the world. But if you say yes, what are

you saying yes to? The statement seems to be (or certainly could be) saying: Science explains the *whole* world. Science *alone* explains *all* of existence. But it doesn't come *right out* and say that. It is...subtle. It lets you fill in the blank. The serpent was the most *subtle* of the creatures the Lord God had made

- Didn't Darwin or "evolution" disprove the creation accounts given in Sacred Scripture (in Genesis), thus proving the Bible wrong and thus that there is no God? After all, Scripture is saying that God created the world in 6 days but Darwin *proved* otherwise, didn't he? Do you not believe in science?
- Think about how much importance people give to material stuff vs the attention they give to their soul or virtue or having real character, or building relation with the Lord. Can I really say that material stuff is not the most important? Is money the most important thing? Don't a lot of people think this will bring them happiness? Why? Because money will get them to Heaven? Of course not. It's because they believe that money and material stuff will bring them happiness. This is leaning heavily towards a belief in materialism. In fact, Pope St John Paul II called it: Practical Materialism – living as if materialism is true. John Paul spoke repeatedly about this because he saw how common this trend has become in the modern world.
- Think about sports or even education. What is the goal? Is the main, overarching goal that directs everything else something like: building virtue, character, integrity, learning the truths of life, discovering the truth about myself? Or, for sports, is it winning, glamor, being part of the crowd, doing what everybody else should be doing? Not that an athlete shouldn't play to win, but the point is rather that even that goal is second to (or serves the goal of) becoming a person of real virtue, character, and integrity. How about education? Is the main, overarching goal to learn real truth and thus become the way that I am meant to be? Or is it *just/primarily* to learn how to make my way in the world? The latter is a materialistic viewpoint.
- Think about career or work and how much emphasis this gets – all too often even over family life. Why? Because achievement in work is believed to bring happiness – i.e., material well-being, not spiritual well-being. This branch of materialism is called careerism.
- If you were going to make one of these 2 statements, which would you use:
 - Abortion is wrong. (period), or: Abortion is wrong, *to me*?
 - The second one is often an expression of relativism, which is intrinsically atheistic and thus materialistic as well.
 - Catholic adults might be willing to make the first but young people today have it drilled into their heads that if they are going to dare say such a thing at all, it had better be the second form.
- Does the "practical" (production of stuff, making a living) take precedence over what is right and good and true? This form of materialism is called pragmatism. Take work schedules for example. Some companies (right here in South Dakota) run production plants (we're not talking about necessary services here like medical or police) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week because it maximizes profit; that's practical, after all. But is it good for people, for families, for faith to have these kind of work hours, hours that often prevent people from even getting to Mass on weekends? John Paul insisted on this question (is this or that practice good for man) because he saw these ways that materialism was encroaching more and more on modern man.
- Do people really "Keep Holy the Sabbath day?" Are Sundays truly days of leisure that I set aside for rest and relaxation, yes, but especially a day to stop and think about the big questions of life, a day dedicated to the Lord, to the betterment of my soul? Or is it just another day to run here, there, and everywhere?
- Communism is probably the most hard-fisted "expression" of materialism-atheism. Is Communism really dead? First, it is still formally the rule of law in much of Asia. But is it dead in Europe, Canada, or the U.S.? By no means. As our own society leans more and more towards materialism, it leans more and more towards full-blown Communism. I recently saw a report on North Korea that said that each home has to have a picture of both the current and former ruler of North Korea in their home and it has to be cleaned every day. If there is a fire in the house, the person is obliged by law to save these pictures first, even before their own life or the lives of others in the house. One family did indeed have a house fire and the mother saved her children but not the pictures and she was arrested and imprisoned. As we think about the move of our own society towards greater and greater acceptance of materialism, perhaps we would do well to ask ourselves if this is what we really want.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn.