

Last week's article took a step back from presenting the specific isms to come back to the crucial point that these mentalities are widespread and are expressed in a variety of subtle ways in everyday life. Their very subtlety makes them even more effective and thus more insidious, more dangerous. Simply defining them leads a person (at least Church going Catholics) to think – no, I don't ascribe to that, and/or: that's not the way it is here, and so the person disregards them. Thus, the more we can bring out their expression, their effect, the more we will be able to recognize them and defend against their domination of ourselves and future generations.

We return now to the particular isms, starting with what's called: **Pragmatism**. In simplest terms, pragmatism is often described as making that which is “practical” the highest truth or goal or that which governs everything. What is “practical” is the sole decider of what's true, it is the sole decider of what to believe and what to do. Pragmatism says that the only terms that a person can even think in terms of are “what is practical.” Pragmatism says that something is true or real only insofar as “it works.”

This is probably hard to grasp yet. It is to me as well. The reason is because it's too vague. In particular, what is meant by “practical” or “it works?” We will come to that question but let's first turn to a fairly good description of pragmatism provided on the internet (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DlizC_dU7fQ):

Pragmatism says any theory (idea, belief) that proves itself more successful in predicting and controlling our world than its rivals (some other theory, idea, or belief) can be considered nearer the truth.

Pragmatism says that the meaning of any concept (idea, belief) can be equated with the conceivable operational or practical consequences of whatever the concept portrays.

Now that might initially sound like a lot of goobly-gook but it is helpful. What it's saying is this: suppose we are talking about something – it can be anything ranging from (say) the existence of God or how to build a church or whether or not to put a new storm drain in town. Pragmatism says: forget any “preconceived” notions about what is right and good and true. The only thing that matters, *the only real truth*, are the tangible consequences in this world and this life. Notice pragmatism says: you can't be guided by God or Revelation – only by what “real-world” consequences are. Now pragmatists might say that pragmatism is not necessarily materialistic (and thus atheistic) but that's just not true. Pragmatism might deny absolute atheism by saying something like: well if religion or some religious practice or teaching makes man feel good in the here and now or if it contributes to *man-made* and *man-approved* standards for society, then it can be accepted. That is not faith, that is not true religion, that is not even remotely consistent with what our Lord has revealed.

So what does “practical” or “it works” mean in terms of pragmatism? Does “practical” (or useful) mean: it helps get us to Heaven? Of course not. The question of getting to Heaven does not even lie in the scope of pragmatism. “Practical” or “it works” is entirely in terms of effects in this life and this world – does it suit man's fancies? Is this consistent with the faith? Of course not. In fact, it's directly opposed to the faith. Think of the Beatitudes, for example: blessed are you when they persecute you and utter every kind of evil against falsely for my sake – yours is the Kingdom of Heaven. Pragmatism says no way, that's not even on the radar, that's not even real. The only thing that matters are the “practical” consequences of the here and now. It is thus intrinsically materialistic, it is intrinsically anti-Christ.

One of the things we want to do in this series of articles is bring out that people are bombarded with these false beliefs in countless ways in everyday life, and thus affected by them, without even realizing it. When a person is led towards these isms, they are then led away from the Lord and thus away from Heaven, away from eternal happiness. Imagine going down a staircase, descending into darkness and suffering. If we start to speak and think in terms of pragmatism or relativism or any of the isms, we haven't really chosen outright to deny the Lord; in fact we believe that we are still following Him. But the reality is that these isms have discreetly, subtly started you down the stairs – maybe not all the way to outright atheism but far enough to effectively break your relation with God, thus allowing the person to progress farther and farther towards outright atheism. Recall our Lord's warning: many of *you* (He was speaking to *Israelites*, who professed belief in God, not to pagans or agnostics or atheists)...many of you (who are now condemned, who are locked out of the Kingdom, and are

now wailing and gnashing your teeth) will say: you taught in our streets, we ate and drank with you but I will say to you: I do not know you. By being so subtle, the isms allow a person to maintain some illusion about belief in God or even love of our Lord while at the same time robbing the person of that very relation. They lead a person down the steps without the person even really realizing it. A big help in combatting the isms, then – brought out in previous articles – is exposing how they are subtly and discreetly expressed or lived out in everyday life. Attention is thus now turned to expressions of pragmatism in everyday life.

Before coming to actual examples of pragmatism, it might be helpful to recall that these isms are generally “birds of a feather that flock together.” What that means here is that pragmatism is very much related to things like utilitarianism (maximizing personal pleasure), relativism, consequentialism (consequences determine truth), and scientism. So in talking about real-life expressions of pragmatism, it might sound like we’re talking about some of these other isms, and indeed that can be the case – they are “birds of a feather.”

So now, once again, what are some things that express pragmatism in everyday life? Sadly, and somewhat disconcertingly, pragmatism is so prevalent that it sometimes penetrates even the human dimension of the Church, seemingly at times even individual clergy, individual “theologians,” and even individual members of the Magisterium. In talking about this, let us remember that our Lord *guaranteed* that He would not allow the *definitive* teachings of the Church to ever be in error. It has happened before that many individual members of the Church, including clergy (Magisterium as well), have abided with false teaching (heresy) but in spite of that, the Church never proclaimed these false teachings to be truthful. The Arian heresy of the early Church is a good example. Remember what St Jerome said about the prevalence of Arianism – the whole world was Arian. That was hyperbole but it expressed just how widespread it was, including amongst clergy, including a number of bishops. Yet today no one abides with Arianism, the Church overcame it.

We come back now to expressions of pragmatism in everyday life, starting with expressions in the human dimension of the Church that have arisen. One big one that is coming to be more and more popular is the “argument” or standard of “the Lived Experience.” Frankly, I find this sickening; it’s like throwing dung in the face of our Lord with a sort of wicked, underhanded pleasure. What it says or does is this: listen, set aside all this dogma, teachings, doctrine, revelation – the way to decide if something is right and good and true is...the lived experience. It is pure pragmatism. Although not by any means the only area, one area in Catholicism it frequently comes up in is sexual morality. Listen, pragmatism says, we have to set aside dogmatic truth, things the God-given teaching authority of the Church has proclaimed, and say instead “what does the lived experience of (say) same-sex “marriage” tell us? Well, people feel good about it – that’s the lived experience – and so (as per pragmatism) that means it is good. This adherence to pragmatism (the lived experience) dominates many areas of the human dimension of the Church. What’s good in liturgy (the celebration of Mass)? Theology doesn’t matter, what God has revealed doesn’t matter, the instructions of the Church don’t matter – what matters is “the lived experience” – i.e., whatever tickles my own personal, immediate desires, not true worship of God. How many people actually abide with this? I can tell you I’ve heard it frequently. Unfortunately it seems to infiltrate the Church at times even at higher levels. For example, someone might say: we’re going to evaluate practices that are implemented. But what standard is used for “good” or useful or practical or “success?” The standard of our Lord and His Church is: getting to Heaven but that is intrinsically immeasurable – you can’t know/measure that. So what standard is used? Standards of worldly “success,” which usually end up translating to standards (or measures) of popularity. It is pure pragmatism. Pragmatism, however, is expressed in many areas of life. We have already mentioned some. Work and sports schedules that preclude fulfilling the command to make holy the Lord’s day has a strong element of pragmatism. Hey, this is what we want, this is the practical way to bring it about.

Pragmatism makes a claim on what is right and good and true. The actual reality revealed by God is that what is right and good and true is what God says it is, and God is absolutely unchanging and thus His truths do not change over time. What God has revealed precedes and trumps any lived experience or any practicality. We have to choose: am I going to fix that firmly in my mind or am I going to bow down the god of pragmatism?

God bless you, Fr Kuhn.