

I would like to get the issue of the false beliefs that have captured the minds of modern man and are leading him further and further into atheism and thus self-annihilation (the isms) wrapped up. So we will come shortly to the 2 big ones – relativism/subjectivism and (secular) humanism. First though, it might be worthwhile to touch at least briefly on another one that is gripping our society today, namely **careerism**. Careerism means pretty much what the name implies. The American Heritage dictionary describes it well:

1. Pursuit of professional advancement *as one's chief or sole aim*.
2. The practice of advancing one's career *at the expense of one's personal integrity*.
3. The overwhelming desire or urge to advance one's own career or social status, usually at the expense of other personal interests or social growth.

I grew up on a small family dairy farm with 5 brothers and two sisters and had hardly ever left Adams County IL before going to college. Although there was a lot of work, faith-family-virtue-integrity were central, they were of the highest importance. After college, I ran smack-dab into careerism. I was shocked by it, troubled by it, and yet didn't really know how to handle it. Looking back on it, I probably should have known but it was never brought out to me explicitly. So I was left wondering – is this right? It went against my desires but I thought that maybe this was a sacrifice I was called to make. A person of faith, then, can be uncertain about how to deal with it or even if it's right or wrong.

There might be some tendency to think that this does not affect people in rural South Dakota, or at least its effect is indirect and perhaps minimal. But that expectation needs a great deal of caution. If there is a virus in the air, less congested areas might be less affected, but they won't be left unaffected. The same is true with careerism. Careerism will affect people more in so-called professional positions but even self-employed people like farmers, plumbers, electricians and so on can be drawn into this. It can affect priests as well. It appeals to pride, which man is so susceptible to, regardless of how smart he is or thinks he is. "Being successful" is what counts – you don't have to be a lawyer or doctor or PhD scientist to be affected by that. How often do corn yields go up 5 or 10 bushels per acre, just while standing there talking about them?! How many magazines are called something like: The Successful Farmer? How many young mothers today would be ashamed to say that they are stay-at-homes moms? My mom would sometimes watch those early evening game shows and they would have people introduce themselves beforehand. Every one of them would have to tell how they work for this or that *major* firm – they're wheelers and dealers; frankly, it was kind of pathetic but they all knew they had to display their badge of honor, a badge that says: oh my yes, I am onboard with modern thinking, I abide with careerism. If you don't have or are not part of a big, "successful" operation, you're nobody. The expectation in most "professional" positions today is that career is #1; you sacrifice for it first and foremost; if not, you're out.

Young people in rural South Dakota might be sheltered from this, more or less, by their family/parents or maybe CCD classes, but then, when they get out on their own, they will face it. They need to be prepared. A good example from their parents is a good teaching but more is needed, explicit teaching is needed. The traps that people will face need to be taught. Our Lord did this as well. He not only taught us what is right and good and true but also the multitude of traps that face us. This is teaching about what *not* to do. A person must not say: oh, that's not me or my family, it would never happen here. Mentalities like careerism have a way of playing precisely on those who have a decent work ethic, a sense of responsibility, and a sense of self-sacrifice; careerism is just saying: well now, this is how & what you sacrifice yourself for, first and foremost. It can affect, and infect, even people who start out with a deep (and good) desire to help their family, maybe even their mom & dad. Maybe mom and dad don't have a lot financially, the son or daughter knows that and they also see the great sacrifices their parents made for them, and now they want to help them out. And here comes good ole careerism rearing its ugly head saying: this is the way and the only way to fulfill that good desire. The young might start out with a pure intention to know truth – the truths of Divine Revelation and of "natural revelation" and so they enter into a scientific discipline. But then they will run into both materialism and careerism. They need to be prepared for the traps, explicit teaching is needed, otherwise the beast will consume them.

So what is this teaching? It requires real clarity or a person will go in one wrong direction or another. Arguing against careerism could lead somebody to something like socialism or communism; or it could just lead them into plain old laziness: careerism is bad, that means work is bad, that means I sit on the couch with the expectation that the government (somehow) provides everything I want for free. These are all falsehoods. To address careerism, then, all of the truths that God has revealed have to be held together; exclusion of one or another leads to error, which leads to hell. To avoid the types of errors just mentioned, then, we should start with what God has revealed about work. God created work for the good of man – but not as man’s ultimate fulfillment; it is a means to an end, not an end itself. God is the sole “end” (true destiny) of man. God created work. This was true even before original sin. However, before original sin, work was an enjoyable activity. After original sin, it became toil – by the sweat of your brow you shall earn the bread you eat. It became one of the means to make up for sin. But then, we also see God often chastising the Israelites for “worshipping the work of their hands.” This did not change in the New Testament; we have to keep these 2 things together.

Previous articles have presented the true nature and purpose of work, as revealed by God, so this article won’t go into greater detail on that. Enough has been said here to come to the main point. Rejection of careerism does not mean rejection of work; it does not mean it’s ok to be sloppy or lackadaisical or lack diligence and attentiveness in the work a person does; it does not mean a person is not responsible for themselves; it does not mean that people don’t have to work to provide for themselves. Catholics should be the ones who are the most diligent in the work they do, while at the same having nothing to do with careerism. There are *not* just 2 choices relative to work or career: 1) laziness or socialism/communism, or 2) career/work is god. Neither of these are true, both are corruptions. As our Lord said...narrow is the path to Heaven, broad is the path to perdition; broad is the path means there’s a lot of ways to get onto the path to perdition.

Rejection of careerism first and foremost means possessing the right thinking, right belief, about work or “career.” Perhaps it would be most helpful to explain more what is meant by: work/career is a means to an end, not an end in itself. What does it mean for something to be an “end” or an end in itself? Think of making a trip – say you’re going to Hawaii. Then Hawaii is the end itself, the target, the end-point, the ultimate destiny. Making travel plans, packing, buying tickets, making hotel reservations, going to the airport, getting through airport security, etc – all of these are means to that end (getting to Hawaii) but none of them are the end itself (being in Hawaii is the end itself, the target, the goal, the ultimate destiny, the purpose). Man’s true ultimate end (his target in this life, his true ultimate destiny) is Heaven, being united with the beloved (God) for all eternity; this is his ultimate happiness, and the only one that there is. Heaven is the Hawaii in the analogy just used. Everything else, including work/career, has to be subordinate to that goal, meaning that they are done for the purpose of attaining that goal (this is true even for the greatest things in this life – like the sacraments, prayer, marriage, and family life, all of which are sacred things. They are not the end in themselves but a means to an end.). Careerism says NO: your true fulfillment – what you sacrifice for first and foremost, what has to be number one in your mind, your first and foremost goal – is “career.” Careerism says that career/work is the end itself, not a means to an end – and it’s a blatant falsehood. If you fall into this, then you will be lucky if it leads to a sort of depression in this life, because that will be what’s trying to lead you out of this path to self-annihilation. A diagram might help to bring out “end itself vs means to an end.”

#1 Goal in Life: Relation with God, Getting to Heaven – this is the true end to seek, the ultimate fulfillment.

- Sacraments, Prayer, Following the commandments, growing in true virtue, purification
- Work, Marriage, family life, priesthood, even sleep – all other things

All of the bullet points are things for accomplishing the ultimate goal; they are done for the sole purpose of attaining that goal. They are means to that end, not the end itself. This is what “subordinate to” the ultimate goal means. This is the truth revealed by God.

Careerism says NO. Career and self-promotion is the ultimate destiny, everything else is subject to it. Note that even placing everything on the same plane, saying something like: well, career, family, church, etc – these are just all equal parts is NOT true. Be careful not to say too quickly that careerism has had no effect on me.

Elements creep in and then begin to take more control; don’t be afraid of the truth. *God bless you, Fr Kuhn.*