

# Triumph

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# Contra Gentiles

Having argued for something that can be defended, hopefully, as a just semantics of "integrism" in two recent columns, one turns to the complementary task of resisting a widespread but unjust semantics of the same, slippery term.

I have distinguished two kinds of integrism, crude and refined. The crude is a theological error, being the contention that some particular teaching or practice in the Church is divine in origin and hence irreformable, when in fact it is nothing of the kind. Such is the mistake of those who misuse *Quo Primum*.

Refined integrism, on the other hand, is not theological at all. It is an historicist's kind of naturalism, which consists in saying that the Church can be undone through attempting to change some teaching or practice—not because on strict theological grounds the matter is unchangeable, but because certain historical or sociological laws forbid such changes. In the case of recent liturgical controversies, for example, a refined integrist position might go something like this: granted, the Church has the right to change almost anything in the Mass save the form of the Sacrament itself; granted that Paul VI has a right to impose his new *Ordo*; granted, even, that the vernacular Masses said in this country are generally "valid," at least to judge by the external criteria; nevertheless, there is a deeper question than the technical theology of validity. There is the human and civilizational question of worship itself as an available possibility. Granted that this new rite puts Christ on the altar, if the Pope says it does; the question remains, who will worship Him there? Who *can* worship Him through a rite made-up the day before yesterday, through words only Dick-and-Jane could find inspiring, through vestments that evoke nausea and music that evokes the bar-room at best? No, says the refined integrist, worship is by nature an inherited form. For the Hottentots it may be boomlay-boomlay-boom, but for us it must be the Tridentine, Latin Mass.

Now, my purpose in setting forth the integrist position is not primarily to

# Integrism-as-Slur

disagree with it (though I do); my point is to win agreement as to what exactly the position is, so that anti-traditional elements in the Church can be enjoined from calling "integrism" the wide variety of good people whose positions may sound similar to what I have just described but are not really the same thing at all.

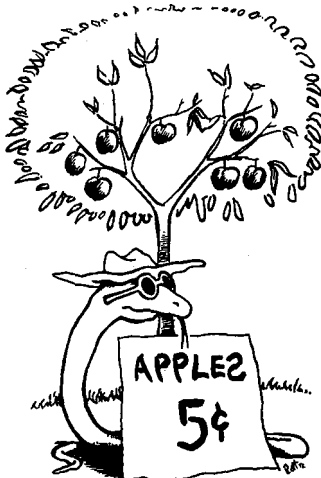
For instance, many people want the Tridentine Latin Mass preserved or even re-imposed universally because, aesthetically, they simply judge it to be superior to what has come since. There is nothing integristic about that. In fact, I wonder whether there exists a tenable, alternative point of view, except to say that the Mass of St. John Chrysostom is even better. *De gustibus*, they say, *non disputandum*; but surely this maxim holds good only when there is good taste on both sides of the question! Whoever says that the Latin of the New *Ordo* (*expectantes beatam spem*—ugh) is superior to the language of the old is just no Latinist. And whoever says that the (ICEL) English is superior in beauty to either version of the Latin is beyond doubt a Babbitt. A hick. And I will not soil the page with the adjectives that would have to be applied to anyone who

one who says, "Yes, of course, the old was more beautiful, but for *pastoral* reasons the majority had to be given the new stuff." Such a person is wrong in my opinion, horribly and ruinously wrong, but not for reasons of Babbittry. Nor, by the way, is it integrism to adopt an opposite line of pastoral reasoning. Look, suppose I say that somewhere, undoubtedly, there is some small group which is going to derive immense spiritual betterment from an ICEL-style liturgy; I don't know any such people, and I certainly don't want to know them; but I concede for the record that they may exist. However, for the great majority, the sounds, sights, attitudes and gestures which characterized the *old* Mass were a much better medium, a much better vehicle of the sacred than anything we have now. Pastorally, I argue, it is highly advisable to bring back that old medium. Am I right or wrong? For present purposes, I don't care how you answer, so long as you recognize the fact that the pastoral argument, so stated, contains not a drop of integrism.

Other statements may not be so pure.

It is not integrism, finally—and let us for once leave the liturgy question—to invoke the natural law against the advocates of change, *provided* the natural law is really against what they want to do. If somebody says that a Catholic is at liberty to work for a Marxist revolution, it is not integrism to oppose him. It is simply to recognize, with Leo XIII, that society has a natural constitution which is normative and which is incompatible with the corrupt and corrupting ideals of the Revolution. What *is* integrism is to invoke the law of nature all over the place where, in strict philosophical reason, it has nothing to do with the case. Claim that an iron law written into the nature of things will bring the fabric of Christendom down to wrack and ruin if the priest turns around and faces the people, and then you are an integrist.

I am happy to let the shoe be worn where it fits; but I will not suffer the sleazy likes of Andrew Greeley to cast imputations on feet whose shoes' latchet he is unworthy to fasten. —WM



*aesthetically* preferred American hymnody to Gregorian chant.

Now, just as the charge of integrism does not apply in this case, so in justice the charge of Babbittry does not apply to