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Triumph

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Contra Gentiles

Turning on the Right

National Review is consistently right about conservatives, as it is right about few things else. It is interesting, therefore, that on December 8 that magazine judged its readership to be ready, at long last, for some advice: soften up on marijuana, and get behind efforts to "decriminalize" its use. Events will soon tell how far the Buckley writ still runs; but if it runs as expected, Catholics will have yet another reason to shuck the "conservative" Movement. Herewith, seven observations.

1. Twenty years ago, when a lot of people contracted the habit of calling themselves conservatives, it was hard to tell what the Movement would accomplish. Some thought it would conserve a Christian civilization. Others supposed it might repristinate America's distinctive political institutions. Only a handful believed that conservatism would radicalize America's already substantial commitment to letting people go to ruin (and to Hell) if they wanted to. But the handful was right.

2. On economic controls, the draft, disarmament and China, Richard Nixon scored his best political upsets by seizing elements of the 60s radical program and implementing them on his own terms. Nothing could be more logical, therefore, than a Nixon move on marijuana suspiciously like the one *NR* has just advocated. This much is sure: what is good for Richard Nixon and simultaneously good for libertarianism *will be* the policy line of conservatism. Such is the new Fusionism, and it doesn't take a jeweler's eye to see it.

3. Traditionalists who still cling to the Movement have this defense: we have not yielded totally, because to decriminalize the personal use and possession of a drug is not to legalize its production, importation or sale. Oh, no? A few weeks ago a federal judge in Washington, D.C. overturned a District law against prostitution because, reasoned he, it is absurd to outlaw the sale of something that is not itself (consenting adults and all that) illegal. The ruling is expected to be influential.

4. It is said that present drug laws are making criminals out of innumerable young people. But of course! Even a permissive society needs some pretext to crush the kind of youth it produces. It is axiomatic that where religion declines, the police must thrive. Religion is the only effective support of social order, custom, prescription and taste. When faith goes, the law with its crude arms must step into the breach, or else there is anarchy. Hence the law gets nasty. Today, in the wreck of whatever faith American society used to enshrine, our laws are nastier than ever (a) because of the wreck and (b) because, today, anarchy wears a thousand disguises. Used to be, a man had to throw a bomb in order to create disorder. Now he can go on television and create a whole counter-culture.

5. The degenerate cravings of a narcotic Orient are electronically recreated throughout an "America" whose name, at last, means nothing but geography. In fact, the geographical America, through its electronic skin, has become the simultaneous presence of all options: all cultures, all drugs, all life-styles. The citizen shops in a free market-place of cultural identities and becomes, by his purchase, a tribesman: hard-hat or hippy, WASP or ethnic, etc. The result is not peaceful competition (oxymoron) but total, cultural war. Everybody's life-style is under attack. A man can't sit in his pub to have a glass of beer without being haunted by the image of some unkempt kid, pointing the finger and saying, "You're a drug-freak, too, man." Those who inherited their culture and believe in its amenities (Catholics foremost among them) will not endure this tension. They strike out against marijuana not to remove a harmful weed but to remove, by incarceration, a harmful tribe. This motive is the key to the ferocious drug laws in force on the European continent.

6. Inheritance is the key to American Catholic interest in the pot hassle. In the sour morning after the American Dream, Catholics are awakening to their ethnic and moral heritage. Increasingly, they want their children to get the same heritage, as far as possible intact. They have contempt for the sons and daughters of the assimilated, because it is clear that assimilation means only the abandonment of everything old in favor of the currently fashionable and that the assimilated have nothing to pass on to their children except, hopefully, the cash to enjoy the fads of the future. These Catholics oppose, therefore, laws that will encourage their children to grow up like everybody else's children, stoned and having no past. They want, rather, laws that will aid them in their delicate, endangered, traditionary task. Those who want to raise little Catholics and little ethnics have a vested interest in keeping Mohammedan drugs out of their neighborhood. The Catholic people want drug laws with teeth not because they are narrow-minded but because they already have a civilization, thank you.

7. Because the laws and media of America work against the preservation of Catholic peoplehood in almost every possible way, it is vital that Catholics cling to every fluke of the "system" that works to their good, e.g. the drug laws. There is no question here of anything but a holding action, obviously. The marijuana laws will eventually go, if for no other reason, because it is blindingly absurd to legitimate abortion while punishing a smoke. In fact, once America has agreed to permit abortion and overt homosexuality, it is hard to see *what* the country can logically forbid. But the strategy of Catholics must be to gain time, so that when the anarchy of our country reaches a stage deeper, we will be better organized and better in spirit than we are now. The strategy is only a gamble, of course. But it is the only gamble we have; and if the conservatives are no longer willing to stand with us, well then to Hell with them.

—WM