

Triumph

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Contra Gentiles

If a French clergyman starts talking to you about integrism, you had best discover a pressing engagement elsewhere or at least take two aspirins, because in France the subject is vast and about as tractable as the rights and wrongs of the Dreyfus case. In America, on the other hand (and thank God), the word "integrism" is still but little used, for we seem to be able to smite our theological foemen without the aid of that particular slur. Yet there are cases where even tainted words have a use; and I contend, therefore, that a few moments spent on establishing a clear and just American semantics for "integrism" will not be time wasted.

By way of a pocket definition, integrism is an error which holds that everything in the Church and in the social order forms part of one, huge, "organic" system and that nothing in the Church or the social order should ever be changed from the form that prevailed just before the outbreak of some revolution, ordinarily the French. Classically, then, integrism was a nineteenth-century movement on the European continent. It was intensely political and "socially aware"; but, misled by an almost Burkean skepticism about reason as well as by an uncritical reliance on the organic metaphor, integrism fastened upon the whole, undivided fabric of the *ancien régime* as the only possible solution to the task of Christianizing the social order. In strictly religious affairs, integrism was the victim of an evolutionary understanding of the development of dogma, holding, as it did, that later (e.g. Tridentine) theologians were better than earlier (e.g. the Fathers) and that the Church was in better possession of her Faith in the nineteenth century than in, say, the thirteenth because, in the meantime, more articles had been made *de fide definita*. But the same integrist conviction of the superiority of the present (or immediate past) often led to opposition against any new Councils or new definitions. Ignaz Döllinger was an integrist before he was an "Old Catholic."

Integrism in America I

Now until very recently there was no such thing as integrism in the United States. In fact, American Catholics always tended toward a different (and in some ways opposite) extreme. Far from making a model of pre-revolutionary Europe, they shared the general American suspicion of that society. They tended to see the "New" World and its American "Way" as the most hopeful and profitable social context for the Church and her mission. Hence, working against the organic metaphor, they tended to dissociate religion and social order; but at the same time, working against the grain of the *Syllabus* and many another papal teaching, the American Catholics tried to de-politicize their religion and to de-religionize their politics (or rather: to de-Catholicize their politics and then re-religionize the same with an almost Confucian cult of the Founding Fathers). Moreover, in strictly ecclesiastical affairs, the American Church was too unintellectual (and too clerical) to have much truck with the integrist controversies, just as Americans had little truck with Modernism.

Now the reference to Modernism is by no means just a convenient aside at this point. For integrism and Modernism have a great deal in common. In fact, Modernism presupposes integrism by taking the latter's evolutionism and organicism and putting them to the service of the revolution rather than the counter-revolution. Modernism always contends that some revolution or bunch of revolutions has produced a "new world" and that everything in the Church, therefore, must be made to jibe with this "new world" as organically as yesteryear's Catholicism allegedly jibed with the "old world."

Many people have noted that post-Conciliar "liberal Catholicism" is a revival of Modernism. This observation, it seems to me, is confirmed by a look at the likeness between the same liberal Catholicism and, of all things, integrism! Consider four points: (1) both integrism and liberal Catholicism rely more heavily on sociology

than on strict theology in evaluating proposed changes in the Church; (2) both consummate a marriage of religion and politics that obliterates vital distinctions; (3) both argue from a social model to erroneous conclusions about what is changeable and unchangeable in faith and morals; and (4) both assume that liturgy reflects social order and therefore must be made relevant (whether as a happy reminder of the old world or as a "dynamic" immersion in the new).

But American liberal Catholicism is after all Modernism and not integrism because, like Modernism, it is not simply at the service of a new culture but of an open-ended revolutionary ideology. Liberal Catholics often speak of adapting the Church to various features of America's life-style, but what is sought more profoundly is trimming Catholicism to fit the revolutionary promises inherent in the "American Dream." Liberal Catholicism is a politics-religion that wants "alabaster cities" to gleam "undimmed by human tears" and firmly believes that some native Messiah can build them. The power of this curious Modernism to sweep the American Church, however, lies just in this: that everybody who believes in the central promises and premises of American politics believes in that native messianism! In a curious and frightening way, it was the a-politicism of the older American Catholic Church that protected its orthodoxy.

But to return to where we started: is there an American integrism? In the full sense of the word, the answer has to be no. American culture is such that anyone who tries to build an integrism upon it will find himself turning into a Modernist instead. But if we leave aside the social and political aspects of integrism and concentrate solely on the ecclesiastical, then I contend that an American integrism is indeed in the making. The revolution which it rejects is precisely Vatican II, and the touchstone of its loyalty is the Mass as it was in, say, 1960.

—WM

(To be continued)