

Triumph

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Contra Gentiles

In the March TRIUMPH, this column argued that "Integrism" in its full, European sense did not and could not exist in America. But it was also argued that there is a narrower sense of the word, a purely ecclesiastical sense, in which there is an American Integrism, perceptibly taking form since Vatican II. Herewith, an attempt to examine this native movement more carefully.

Take the ordinary texture of lay Catholic life as it was ten years ago. It was a fairly typical routine of American family life on which religion impinged primarily through universal devotions and obligations: Lenten fasts, fish on Friday, Sunday Mass, the Holy Days of obligation, the rosary, abstinence from birth control, marriage within the Church, Easter duties, Mass cards when a relative died. There was, of course, a great deal more, especially for those who took their faith extra-seriously or for those whose membership in a distinctive ethnic bloc provided a dense cultural "flesh" for the bare bones enumerated above. But I think it will be generally agreed that the elements listed were the really salient ones. For instance, among lay people it was only converts and a few intellectuals who thought much about dogma.

Now when this "texture" of Catholic life is viewed from the standpoint of the Magisterium (and of clergymen well grounded in magisterial norms), distinct, concentric zones become visible within it. The smallest innermost zone is of divine origin and hence immutable. Around this is the zone of things established by ecclesiastical law alone, and again around this is the zone of mere custom. But when the same texture is viewed from the standpoint of the average layman (and the ill-educated cleric), these differentiations largely disappear. To the unreflective, Friday abstinence and Sunday obligation, saying the rosary and avoiding contraception are all pretty much on the same level, more or less of a piece. The tendency is to take all or nothing and hence to regard everything as "up for grabs" once any one thing has been markedly changed. Thus A. Greeley's

Integrism in America II

research has shown that many people believed the birth control ban would be lifted *because* the Friday meat ban had been lifted already. Alternatively, zones of importance may appear which contradict the lines drawn by the Magisterium. In the unreflective or inauthentic experience of Catholic life, various secondary phenomena (latinity, cultivation of Thomism, the political stand, perhaps, of the average priest or bishop) may appear to be truly essential to Catholicism, while the real heart of our religion (faith in the Trinity, the Incarnation, the grace of the Sacraments) may be so taken-for-granted as virtually to disappear from people's thinking.

Now this undifferentiated experience of Catholic life is not itself Integrism. Rather, it is the source thereof. It is this experience which makes any particular Integrist thesis broadly plausible. To be sure, if I were to condense this experience into a proposition and say, "All the elements of Catholic life as it was in 1960 are equally essential to its continuation today," or if I were to say, "Nobody would give a damn if the Church changed the dogma of the Trinity, but if she changes the Latin, Catholicism will be destroyed"—then, most people would be quick to disagree. But *unarticulated*, the same or similar propositions form the hidden premise of many an Integrist (and Modernist!) argument.

From all of the above, it should be clear that this unreflective experience is not the exclusive property of either end of the ideological spectrum. In temperamentally right-wing circles, this experience will nourish an ecclesiastical Integrism. But in left-wing circles (the labels here are *very* inexact), the same proto-Integrism experience will nurture Modernism. In fact, the most common example of Integrism thinking in America today is as native to the Catholic left (cf. A. Greeley and G. Wills) as it is to the extreme right. I refer to the argument that because the Council introduced various changes in traditional, "Tridentine" Catholicism, all of the old things that were not changed (e.g. papal

infallibility, clerical celibacy) must inevitably fall apart. The Modernist concludes that historic Catholicism, being doomed, must transform itself into something radically new. The full-fledged Integrism differs only in saying that the same historic Catholicism, being doomed, must repudiate Vatican II.

Integrism, then, amounts to either one of two things. Either it is the contention that something really not divine and not essential to the constitution of the Church is divine and essential (e.g. the *Ordo* of St. Pius V); or else, among the more educated, it is the contention that the Magisterium's classification of things into essential and inessential is really irrelevant, that is, that the survival of the Church really depends upon things that may indeed be inessential theologically but turn out to be most essential sociologically or historically. Intellectual Integrism has always been the temptation of the historically-minded and of conservative social theorists. An historico-sociological problematic is set up alongside the theological, in such a way that the latter is reduced to irrelevance. As though the survival of the Church depended upon correct natural solutions to historical and sociological problems, and not upon the Holy Spirit working precisely through the Church's divine elements!

Obviously, though, we are on somewhat slippery terrain here. The left-wing Integrism is easy to spot because he quickly falls into heresy (Modernism) by denying that the deposit of Faith is immutable. The crude right-wing Integrism is also easy to spot because he claims that something which the Church has already changed was really immutable, and so he falls into despair or schism. But between the extremes, there are many intermediate positions which one may hold without being an Integrism at all or without being wholly under the dominance of Integrism. Many sound and excellent Catholics hold these intermediate positions, and our next task will be to rescue these good people from Integrism-as-slur.

—WM

(To be continued)