

Catholic Integralism: True or False?

Kevin Vallier
Associate Professor of Philosophy
Bowling Green State University

Thesis/Question: The Symmetry Argument favors Catholic Integralism, but the Justice Argument threatens it. Which argument is stronger?

Catholic Integralism Defined

1. *Natural Authority:* God authorizes a state to advance the natural common good *G* of a community *C*.
2. *Supernatural Authority:* God authorizes the church to advance the supernatural common good *S* of all baptized persons in *C*.
3. *Supernatural Sovereignty:* to advance *S*, the church may mandate state policies *P* backed by civil penalties *E* that advance *S* directly (i.e., not merely through advancing *G*), without excessively undermining *G*, or *S* in some other respect.

The Symmetry Argument for Catholic Integralism

Key Definitions:

Natural Goods: These are basic goods that have their own worth. We should choose to promote or protect them for their own sake. Examples include knowledge, aesthetic appreciation, play, friendship, practical reasonableness, and religion.

Supernatural Goods: These are goods that transcend our natural understanding and are bestowed by divine grace. They include union with God, the supernatural virtues of faith, hope, and love, and the sacraments. Supernatural goods are basic goods, even though we do not grasp them through natural reason. Every choice of supernatural goods includes a natural good; that is, all supernatural goods pair with natural goods in the act of choice.

The Symmetry Argument

1. States should promote natural goods (natural law premise).
2. If states should promote natural goods, they should promote supernatural goods (symmetry conditional).
- C. States should promote supernatural goods (proto-integralist conclusion).

Key Points:

- a. Supernatural goods outweigh mere natural goods. For example, receiving the Eucharist trumps reading a novel and eternal salvation trumps worldly fame.

- b. Supernatural goods grant eternal life. In heaven, we can enjoy a wide range of natural goods forever.
- c. Sin obscures our ability to identify natural basic goods. Supernatural goods can heal our moral sight by bestowing God's grace upon us. With grace, we can better pursue natural goods.

Note: The symmetry argument rests on the intuition that states must promote the whole good, natural and supernatural. It explains integralism's attraction: integralism treats goodness more symmetrically than mainstream natural law theory/Catholic social thought.

The Justice Argument Against Catholic Integralism

Justice Argument: Since the act of believing pertains to the will and thus, religious freedom cannot be impeded. It is unjust to compel unbelievers to the faith, and by extension, it is unjust to compel believers to keep it.

The Baptism Dilemma:

The baptism dilemma arises from the tension between the prohibition of forcing an unbaptized person into the faith and the justification of punishing heretics and apostates who have received the faith. This dilemma is significant for Catholic Integralism, as it advocates the use of coercion to promote certain supernatural goods, but only among the baptized.

Potential Resolutions:

- a. **A Thomistic Resolution:** Baptismal Vows: Aquinas suggests that making a vow is a matter of will, while keeping it is a matter of necessity. This implies that while the act of baptism must be free, the commitment to the faith need not be. But: infant baptism creates legal citizenship, and a vow isn't involved.
- b. **Associative Obligations:** Baptism makes us members of the body of Christ, which by itself assigns enforceable responsibilities. But: associative obligations can evaporate if one's attitudes towards the organization change.
- c. **Consent, Gratitude, and Fair Play:** These theories suggest that enforceable religious duties could be explained through consent to these duties, gratitude for the opportunity for salvation provided by baptism, or the fair play involved in being a part of a religious community. However, integralists will reject consent theories, gratitude isn't enforceable, and the conditions for fair play don't apply.