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etNova Vetera

The English Edition of the International Theological Journal

The Influence of Charles Cardinal Journet

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ROMANUS CESSARIO, OP

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NOVA ET VETERA

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THE NEW English edition of *Nova et Vetera* provides an international forum for theological and philosophical studies from a contemporary Thomistic perspective. *Nova et Vetera* was founded in 1926 by future Cardinal Charles Journet in association with Jacques Maritain and is now published in French, Italian, and most recently in English. By way of fostering an international conversation, the English edition of *Nova et Vetera* will include not only new English articles, but also translated articles from other editions of *Nova et Vetera*, particularly the French edition. *Nova et Vetera*, English edition, welcomes articles and book reviews in theology, philosophy, and biblical studies that address central contemporary debates and discussions. We seek to be “at the heart of the Church,” faithful to the Magisterium and teachings of the Second Vatican Council, and devoted to the work of true dialogue, both ecumenically and across intellectual disciplines.

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Introducing the English Edition of *Nova et Vetera*: The Influence of Charles Cardinal Journet

THE EDITORS

AT THE AGE OF THIRTY-FIVE, Father Charles Journet (1891–1975), later to become a cardinal and already on the way to a brilliant theological career, founded *Nova et Vetera* as a Catholic periodical for his native Switzerland. Seventy-seven years later, we are privileged to introduce the new English edition of *Nova et Vetera* (now published in distinct French, Italian, and English editions). It is worth examining the purposes that the distinguished founder of *Nova et Vetera* had in mind—the purposes that inspire us to inaugurate an English edition of his journal (abbreviated *NV Eng*). For the first issue of *Nova et Vetera* in 1926, Charles Journet composed a brief “Definition of Principles and Aims.”¹ Using this “Definition,” we will explore Journet’s vision for his journal and compare it to our own.

Journet was concerned about a widespread ignorance of the Catholic intellectual tradition, and he recognized in the culture of his day certain negative influences leading away from faith. His primary purpose, therefore, was evangelistic. For the sake of bringing the riches of the Gospel to a culture that no longer seemed either knowledgeable of or amenable to the Catholic faith—to a culture that was also sorely in need of dialogue between Catholic and Protestant believers—Journet founded *Nova et Vetera*. We share this evangelistic goal.

1 Our article is built around excerpts from Paul Gondreau’s translation of Cardinal Journet’s “Definition.”

In his article, Journet argues that in order to be able to evangelize in this way, Catholics must come to know their tradition—must “deepen our appreciation of the riches of which we are too often the unconscious depositories.” Moreover, even though the Holocaust and the Gulag were yet to come (the bloodiest century in the history of humanity had already begun with World War I), Journet is painfully aware of the impact that false ideas were having in his day. Given the unspeakable horror of infants being sacrificed in their mothers’ wombs, and of people who are no longer “useful” being euthanized, we find ourselves in a similar position. As Journet writes, “We live in a decisive time, when the most extravagant and catastrophic of ideas become fixed in stone with rapid and prodigious violence.” Journet is motivated, as we are, by a concern for truth, and a belief that theological work requires, as guided by the Holy Spirit, fidelity to the Magisterium through which we hear the fullness of the apostolic witness to the truth that is Christ Jesus. As a Catholic intellectual, Journet strives to be in sincere and respectful conversation with those who do not share his views. Yet, he does not minimize the difficulty of witnessing truthfully to the Catholic faith given “the spirit of our times.”

In Thomistic thought, Journet finds resources for engaging Scripture and tradition in an open and contemporary manner:

Our faith rests upon authenticated sources, namely, sacred Scripture as expounded and interpreted by the great Councils of Nicaea, Orange, Trent, Vatican I, and by papal documents. We seek to understand these sources by the guidance of that Doctor whose name we hold dear: St. Thomas Aquinas. Whatever the time period or culture through which these sources come to us, we believe that that which is truly Catholic will help us to live more fully and with greater integrity in our own respective cultures. Do not the rays of light which bathe our fields and which ripen our produce and do not the winds that whisper through our trees come from all directions?

As he goes on to remark with regard to the task of appropriating Scripture and tradition for contemporary theology: “To work from within consists principally not in destroying but in bringing to completion.”

Journet is careful to note that Thomistic reflection upon the sources of revelation is not a return to the thirteenth century, but rather is a way of identifying a solid path for philosophical and theological development in the present. "Let us avoid potential misunderstanding. We do not seek a 'return to the past.' We do not wish to do away with electricity or speak old French; we believe not that art should coagulate and cease to develop but *change* to reflect the sensibilities of the times and cultures in which it is born. We insist that education and sociology, national and international politics, have more of a crucial role to play in today's world than simply in reproducing the appearances of bygone institutions." While encouraging development, he emphasizes that the past and future do not need to be set in opposition to each other, as if the past must be rejected in order for true development to emerge. He beautifully defends the project of seeking truth that, when it appears, is both old and new:

We consider ourselves neither retrograde nor adventurers, since both types oppose the past and future, both new things and old. Such an enterprise offers us little pleasure, particularly since it implies the choice of one *over* the other. We reject this dilemma. We instead seek to discover in each moment in time those numerous threads that can connect the past, present and future. We must set our sights high enough to allow the delicate hierarchy of spiritual values to reveal themselves, values that are capable of ordering, under the sign of God and of his Christ, the most noble and humble of manifestations of the intellectual and affective life, of the artistic and moral life, of the individual and corporate life, of national and international affairs, whether they be of yesterday, today or tomorrow. When they become aligned unto these spiritual values, human endeavors, works and institutions appear to possess a parcel of divine peace, no matter if they serve the usefulness of the moment or satisfy a purely passing need. At such moments, they give the impression of order, continuity and stability. They are at the same time known and unexpected, familiar and surprising, *ancient AND new*. Through them shine the rays of the Beauty that is ever ancient and ever new, *tam antiqua et tam nova*, at which St. Augustine marveled (*Confessions*, Bk. X, ch. 27); and the scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the head of a household who, to give joy to his family, pulls from his treasure

expected yet always delightful jewels, what is old but always new, *Nova et Vetera* (Mt 13:52).

Yet, is not “truth” simply what today appears to be true, and thus will stand in need of revision tomorrow? Journet makes an important distinction: “The world of *sensible* reality is quite different from the world of *spiritual* reality. The first is fluid, the second is unchanging.” Anticipating *Fides et Ratio*, Journet argues that the “measuring rod” of eternal truth is found in revelation and metaphysics; thus, the timeless (even if forgotten) truth of the *vetera* must be newly appropriated in order for true *nova* to emerge. Continually studying the *vetera*, or insights of the past, enables the philosopher or theologian to develop, in light of his or her contemporary context, the *nova*, or new insights that deepen and develop the Catholic tradition. Journet’s position resonates with Alasdair MacIntyre’s theory of traditions of inquiry.

If the Catholic tradition contains timeless truth, how should we expect this truth to be related to culture? In tune with the Second Vatican Council that would open its doors thirty-six years later, Journet is strongly opposed to those who would connect Catholic truth with reactionary modes of thought:

[T]o seek to keep certain rules of art, of social and technical life, of political life from changing is the error of a narrow and fatal conservatism: we would subscribe to this *if* the artist were obliged to design Platonic definitions or essences, or if the sociologist and politician, once and for all and in certain institutions of time and place, could confine in a pure state the “golden mean” of all the moral virtues. Theology or philosophy (moral, social and political) can certainly help us understand the nature or the role and object of the virtues, of legal justice and of commutative or distributive justice, of capital and guiding definitions. But the approaches, organizations, laws, and forms of government that best realize, in a given place and time, these notions remain to be determined. Past institutions cannot simply, and lazily, be copied. Even in the best cases, they are merely variations on a lasting and inspiring theme, and they represent nothing other than useful paradigms. At the same time, a perennial element is undoubtedly found at the origin of art, whether it be gothic or modern; yet neither the ‘living and eternal rules’ that the artist holds in mind nor even the traditions,

techniques and procedures bequeathed from his predecessors can prevent him, because he works in changing realities, from being a person of his present day, from being renewed.

Distinguishing between the practical arts (*praxis*) and metaphysics and theology (*theoria*), Catholics should oppose any reactionary application of Catholic truth to the prudential realms of culture. Were Catholics to adopt the practical arts as a model for philosophy and theology, however, they could no longer do justice to the reality of timeless truth. Speaking to philosophers and theologians, Journet warns against understanding the philosophical and theological task to be a facile transposition of the insights of the past into the cultural forms of the present. Rather, the real work of the philosopher or theologian is to appropriate *truth* interiorly:

Our task is not to mold physical and moveable realities in a purely *outward* manner. Rather, our task consists in an *interior* act, in molding our minds according to a spiritual and immovable reality. We do not seek to *update* or *remake* the truth. Truth is neither made nor updated. It is discovered, it is understood and believed, it spreads without deterioration, and it reaches out. Faith of an intellectual sort is not a *modernization* but an actuation and contemplation of the mind, and a *progress* towards doctrine, that is to say, an interior, homogenous and organic growth of a spiritual heritage. Intellectual progress is the manifestation, through new concepts, of that which already contains, though implicitly, a first concept. There is *progress* when one passes from the definition of a triangle to an understanding of its properties, from the definition of divine immutability to an understanding of eternity, from the spiritual nature of the soul to its incorruptibility. But there looms here no shadow of *modernization*, *transposition* or *adaptation*. Such a fundamental principle of the intellectual life, so familiar to the Church and so clearly present in the thought of St. Thomas, is still far from penetrating liberal Protestantism or modernism. One of the mysterious applications of this principle is how it allows us to understand the way in which we can benefit from the errors of our opponents—even if our opponents are of marked intelligence and good faith. Their errors, which usually stem from an ignorance of one or more Catholic truths and which we have been able to keep from calling to mind, prevent us from falling asleep, *oportet haereses esse*.

Nova et Vëtera, then, invites philosophers, theologians, and biblical exegetes to practice more fully their calling to apprentice themselves to the Catholic tradition and thereby to appropriate the truths of revelation and metaphysics, though always in dialogue with those who do not share their views. In articulating and defending Catholic truths, the Catholic theologian frequently makes claims that appear strange to the non-believing world. The teaching of *Humanae Vitae* is an example today of such a truth. Recognizing this tendency, Journet emphasizes that the answer lies in discovering for ourselves the beauty of the Catholic faith:

[W]e should also recognize the natural tendency in each one of us, when confronted by our opponents, to diminish or divide the truth which is entrusted to the Church, a truth that remains far above us because it is divine. 'In defining her principal doctrines, the Church seems not only to profess contradictory things but, what is more, to allow these things to break out into a kind of artistic violence that would otherwise be associated only with anarchists.' Here Chesterton converges with Pascal: 'There is thus a great number of truths of both faith and morals which appear to be repugnant but which exist in a most admirable order. The source of every heresy is the exclusion of one of these truths . . . This is why the best way to hinder heresies is to instruct in all the truths.' Created image of the uncreated Being who identifies in himself all apparently contradictory perfections, such as freedom and immutability, or justice and mercy, the Church reconciles in her heart all those seemingly antithetical actions. She speaks at the same time of rational evidence and the dark night of the soul, of reasonable faith and the folly of the cross. She claims to unite prudence and simplicity, hierarchy and the mystical life, freedom and authority, religion of the spirit and sacramental instruments, intransigence and condescension, strength and gentleness, fixity and mobility, unity and diversity. She wishes to govern the world without being of the world, to remain Roman yet also catholic, monarchical while at the same time receptive to the three classical forms of political rule: democracy, aristocracy, monarchy. She embraces art while also preaching mortification . . . It is indeed most difficult to enumerate all the aspects of our Catholic richness. We do an injustice to the Church and we divide her soul each time we separate her complementary aspects.

What topics belong especially to *Nova et Vêtera*? Who is the audience of the journal? Journet, a friend of Jacques Maritain, emphasizes Maritain's interests: "Our concern is with problems of religion and philosophy, problems of morality and education, of law, sociology, and political science, which are found throughout the world. We reserve a special place for literature and the arts. They represent the Beauty that is—as St. Augustine, the Middle Ages and Bossuet recalled better than us—one of the names of our God. At the same time, they mark the way by which many people access the world of the spirit." The English edition, likewise, desires to promote this broad and fruitful engagement with contemporary culture. Like Journet in 1926, the English edition hopes to energize Thomistic engagement with contemporary intellectual movements. Such work will be both "contemporary" and lasting, since it will be able to deepen and develop the insights that the masters of the past have uncovered in the Bible, the liturgy, the creeds and councils, metaphysics, and the practices of profound spiritual life. Today one often finds Thomistic scholarship listed under the rubric of "the history of philosophy" or "the history of theology." As Journet recognizes, however, Thomistic philosophy and theology would die if they became purely historical rather than primarily and energetically speculative.

The audience of the journal is intended to be wide-ranging. Educated readers will find here the resources that contemporary Thomistic thought offers to the intellectual formation and evangelizing mission of the Catholic Church, in which the human person realizes his or her full calling. As Journet says, "It is in the Church that we can breathe. Perhaps those who yet do not know this experience will one day discover it. Without ever trying to 'popularize,' that is to say, reduce or cheapen Truth and Beauty, *Nova et Vêtera*, which we shall strive to publish with the greatest care and clarity, should be able to be read and followed by any person interested in things of intelligence. We wish to keep it varied, as Catholicism is opposed to monotony."

Thus, being a broadly Thomistic journal does not mean that we intend to be "monotone," as if St. Thomas could not be friends with St. Bonaventure. For readers interested in exploring the insights of speculative philosophy and theology, along with the important

contributions of biblical studies, *Nova et Vetera* hopes to offer a variety of perspectives and styles: "If there is a multiplicity of tastes, sensibilities, and temperaments, it is in order to refract the eminent simplicity of the divine Light in a multiplicity of fashions. Shall we make one choose between the Spanish school and the Flemish school, or between the portal of St. Trophime and those of Chartres? Are there any more refined and intensely marked *personalities* and *individualities* than those of the saints, who are nonetheless united by their heroic love?" Authors will disagree with each other not only in style but also in substance, and we hope and believe that these disagreements will be fruitful; indeed, we intend to encourage debates that concern, in Journet's phrase, "essential and primary questions."

In such debates, truth is our object. Journet makes a nice distinction: "We do not confuse hatred for error with a narrowness of spirit. The latter is a shortcoming that we can all possess but which we must seek to rid ourselves of. The former is a quality that we must ask to grow in our hearts. Is this quality ever more needed than in our own day, when ideas are not distinguished from the persons who hold them, or when the gravest of errors are transmitted out of a sense of sympathy?" In the intellectual debates of philosophy, theology, and the other disciplines, the desire for truth must govern. The articles in *Nova et Vetera* will seek to expose and defend, rather than compromise or conceal, the truths revealed to us in Christ Jesus and taught by the Magisterium. Because we are Christian intellectuals committed to truth, we rejoice in the truth revealed in the Catholic Church, and we eagerly anticipate deepening our understanding of truth through dialogue with the contemporary world. As Journet remarks, "How can this Revelation, which has come to us through various means and for which countless martyrs have joyously given their blood, whose light, which shall never be extinguished, has illumined the Middle Ages, not be found in the secret and profound connivances of the world today?" We are thus seekers for truth even as we rejoice in the infinite light that is Truth.

The English edition of *Nova et Vetera* intends to be a Thomistic journal that renews and energizes profoundly Christian engagement with the contemporary world. We hope to inspire, through philosophical and theological work, the increase of Christian

contemplation of the highest mysteries of our faith, and we hope also to inspire Christian action on behalf of the unborn and the poor. We hope to serve the reunion of Christian churches. We hope to foster a new integration of medieval and contemporary theology, and we hope to assist in the reintegration of speculative theology and biblical studies. We hope to help promote a renaissance of Catholic thought within the academy. As Journet concluded in 1926, "Yet we serve a cause that can do without us, and if our ambitions appear somewhat exaggerated, we take solace in the hope that through our efforts we might lead one of our readers to see an error dissipated, or a prejudice destroyed, or a truth manifested, or enjoy a bit of consolation and true freedom." N V

