Augustine on Inner Words

notes, re: Lonergan's "Introduction: Subject and Soul," *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*

In an historical note which Lonergan supplies in his *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, please attend to the Augustinian origin of arguments which allege that an *emanatio intelligibilis* [an intelligible emanation] is be found to exist within the conscious life of our human minds.[1] Besides one species of word which, as a *verbum insitum,* is to be identified with the rationality of our human minds in its various activities,[2] and a second species of word which, as a *verbum prolatum*, is to be as identified with the outer words of our human expression as this exists in the givenness of articulate, communicable language (and which was commonly viewed by many as a "diminished externalization" of that which was occurring within the life of our minds),[3] a third species of word can also be

---

1Lonergan, "Introduction," *Verbum*, p. 6. As Lonergan goes on to note and emphasize, in a text cited by Frederick G. Lawrence, "The Hermeneutic Revolution and Bernard Lonergan: Gadamer and Lonergan on Augustine's *Verbum Cordis* – The Heart of Postmodern Hermeneutics," *Divyadaan: Journal of Philosophy & Education* vol. 19, nos. 1-2 (2008), p. 59:

> ...as Augustine's discovery was part and parcel of his own mind's knowledge of itself, so he begged his readers to look within themselves and there to discover the speech of spirit within spirit, an inner *verbum* prior to the use of language, yet distinct both from the mind itself and from its memory or its present apprehension of objects.

As Lawrence himself argues: by "understanding the process in ourselves by which understanding and conceiving occur, we uncover the finite analogue for the *emanatio intelligibilis* in God." Through the instrumentality of an *emanatio intelligibilis* as applied to God's interior life (without assuming that God has an exterior life), it is possible to understand why Christ's divinity should not be seen as less than that which belongs to God the Father.

2See Lonergan, *The Triune God: Doctrines*, pp. 661, n. 85 for what he has to say about the difference between a *verbum insitum* [*logos endiáthetos*] and a *verbum prolatum* [*logos prophorikos*] which, in its original meaning, comes from a distinction that is made in Stoic philosophy. With respect to what is meant by a *verbum insitum*, in our own inquiry, to understand what is meant by *verbum insitum*, we best advert to what we do when we ask questions and think about things in order to move toward some possible understanding of things. We tend to think through an inner dialogue or an inner conversation that we conduct with ourselves. Augustine refers to this kind of inner dialogue in the *De Trinitate* 15, 17 and, so too, much earlier, does Plato in the *Sophist*, 263e: "what we call thought is speech that occurs without the voice, inside the soul in conversation with itself." In this kind of speech, words exist as remembered images of audible sounds. They are not sounded but, instead, are imagined. For further discussion about these matters, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd revised ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2000), pp. 421-422.

3Hence, one understands why, in the context of Christian theology, one cannot refer to Christ the Incarnate Word on the basis of an analogy which thinks about a *verbum prolatum* since it belongs to the Church's belief in its opposition to heretical Arian teaching that Christ's divinity is not less than the divinity belonging to God the Father. Cf. Lawrence, "Lonergan's Retrieval of Thomas Aquinas's Conception of the *Imago Dei*: The Trinitarian Analogy of Intelligible Emanations in God," 371. The Word is with God from all eternity. Hence, if one is to find an analogy that can be used to speak more adequately about the nature or the reality of this Word, one must look for an analogy that refers to

identified.[4] A *verbum intus prolatum* (that which exists as an inner word) refers to a word that is inaudibly spoken or expressed within and which functions as an intermediary between a *verbum insitum*, on the one hand, and a *verbum prolatum*, on the other. A word is spoken or expressed within (interiorily) and its status is not less than that which we experience in any act of thinking or understanding that occurs within our human minds. At the same time, this same word also exists as a word which stands apart from any outer word of speech since, in our self-awareness, it cannot be denied that outer words sometimes tend to be deficient communicators of meanings which are inchoately but more fully known and sensed from within the depths of our cognitive self-awareness. Outer words, as we sometimes experience them, can lack a fullness of meaning which seems to exist only within the context of a pregnant inarticulateness which commonly belongs to the meaning of inner words. Words are spoken within our souls or within our hearts (as Augustine speaks of it) and they are meant to speak of things that go beyond or which transcend our acts of understanding.[5]

---

something that exists or happens within God: something which exists within God's mind as opposed to something that is to be distinguished from God's mind in a manner which would suggest that a real distinction exists between the divinity of God the Father and the divinity of God the Son. Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 420, as cited by Lawrence, 371.

4Lawrence, "Gadamer and Lonergan on Augustine's *Verbum Cordis*, pp. 58-59.

5See Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 15, 19: "whoever is able to get hold of a word...not only before it is sounded, but even before the images of its sounds are revolved in fantasy [*cognitione*]...can see...in this dim reflection some likeness of that Word of whom it is said: *In principio erat Verbum*." See also Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 15, 10-15, as cited by Frederick G. Lawrence, "Lonergan's Retrieval of Aquinas's Conception of the *Imago Dei*: The Trinitarian Analogy of Intelligible Emanations in God," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 83 (2009): 372. Christ as the true Word of God exists independently of any kind of externalization which can occur if we think, for instance, about Christ's incarnation and what happens in the Christ's incarnation. Cf. Lawrence, 372. See also Frederick E. Crowe, "Some Background Notes to Lonergan's *Insight*," *Lonergan and the Level of Our Time*, ed. Michael Vertin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 19.

As Gerard Watson explains the matter in his "St Augustine and the inner word: the philosophical background," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 54 (1988), pp. 84-85, according to St. Augustine, an "inner word" exists in the human mind or heart in a way which clearly distinguishes it from any word that can be put into sound or which can be imagined to have a sound that can be then communicated to another since an "inner word" or "inner words" primarily refer to something that is meant. It is a meaning which exists within a mind as the term of an act of meaning. It is understood and known by a mind (as opposed to any datum which is grasped and known by an act of sense and which lacks the kind of meaning that is only understood and grasped by a mind). Yes, admittedly, as St. Augustine speaks about it (in *De Trinitate*, 8, 9), in some situations, the meaning of an inner word can sometimes be pictured or imagined. But, usually, an inner word is experienced and known only through an act of understanding from which an inner word proceeds and which transcends whatever can be known through any act of sense. An "inner word" can refer to either a definition of some kind or a judgment (which, as a judgment, would be known as a "true word" or as a *verbum verum*). As a true Word thus, God as Word reflects nothing of itself by itself (since it only reflects and serves as "the mirror and the image of the divine Word"). Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 420, as cited by Lawrence, 372.

In Aquinas, a word which proceeds on the level of understanding is a *verbum incomplexum* but, on the level of reflection or judgment, the proceeding word is known as a *verbum complexum* (since, in Aquinas, a judgment is formed of subject, copula, and predicate). Cf. Frederick E. Crowe,

In speaking of these matters a bit more deeply, inner words are to be contrasted with outer words for reasons that need to be understood and adverted to.[6] With respect to outer words, these always exist as human works (albeit, as linguistic works) and every human work (whether it is linguistic or not) often tends to fall short in terms of fully communicating a richness in meaning that is first known interiorly and whose expression is being attempted in a given concrete situation. In these situations, in the transpositions which are desired, words and bodily actions must always be selected, formed, and employed in a way that meets strict requirements which are imposed by the laws of sense perception if certain things are going to be sensed and apprehended by other, sensing human subjects. Certain meanings can only be apprehended by other persons if they are placed within a certain form and not

---

The Doctrine of the Most Holy Trinity (Willowdale, Ontario: Regis College, 1965-66), p. 146. As Crowe goes on to note, while the concept or *verbum incomplexum* corresponds to a thing's essence, a judgment or *verbum complexum*, corresponds to its existence. But, "in God, as essence and existence are one, so the concept and judgment are one; God utters but one eternal Word." In man, either word serves as an analogy for the *emanatio intelligibilis* of the divine Word. For an analogy that helps one to understand the procession of the Holy Spirit in God, one can refer to a third species of *emanatio intelligibilis* in Aquinas, an inner word which exists in our human willing as love flows from an inner word that reveals to us the goodness of engaging in one particular course of action rather than another. As Crowe speaks of it, p. 147, "love need not be irrational." We need not choose blindly. Something of the rationality of intellect exists in our volitional, moral life. The reasonableness of a given action determines its morality. In the kind of language which Lonergan tends to use in his mature thought, from direct understanding, an inner word proceeds as a definition; from a reflective understanding, an inner word proceeds as a judgment of fact; and then, lastly, from an evaluative understanding of things that knows about a good that should be achieved, from a judgment of value an inner word proceeds as a decision which points to the rightness of a possible course of action versus some other kind of point of view that is aware of other possible courses of action. Cf. Michael Vertin, "Judgments of Value, for the Later Lonergan," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 13 (1995): 229-230, n. 26; David P. Fleischacker, "St. Thomas on Why there are only three Persons in the Holy Trinity," http://lonergan.org/?cat=28&paged=3 (accessed November 3, 2014). All together, in their various kinds, inner words proceed within or from our human acts of understanding in a way which cuts across all cultural boundaries.

To identify St. Augustine's notion of inner word a bit more precisely and concretely, Watson cites from St. Augustine's analysis in the *De Trinitate*:

> This word is neither Greek nor Latin nor does it belong to any other language (ib. 9, 19), and it has a better claim to the title 'word" than that which is heard aloud (ib. 9, 19). It is a faithful representative of the knowledge we possess, sense or intellectual (ib. 9, 22).

However, for a more precise understanding, one can attend to what St. Augustine says in the *De Trinitate* 19, 11, n. 20, as cited by Crowe, *Lonergan and the Level of Our Time*, pp. 17-18:

> If anyone wishes to find some likeness of the Word of God...let him not study the word that sounds in our ears, or the word that is uttered with the lips, or the word that is formed imaginatively in the silence of the mind (for the words of all audible languages can be thought in silence, and we run through songs in our imagination [animo], while

within some other form.

At the same time too, inner words are to be contrasted with acts of understanding since they exist to speak about things that acts of understanding grasp and which they seek to move towards. Recall St. Augustine's prayerful observation: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee."[7] In every act of understanding, a degree of self-transcendence exists. Hence, because this is so, inner words should not be seen as self-enclosed expressions of a person's mind (as much and as truly as they exist as reflections of understanding which occur within human minds). Most significantly, inner words express things or they refer to meanings which are intended by our minds. Inner words, by their very nature, are orientated towards things as these exist in their transcendence.[8] As Hans-Georg Gadamer elaborates on this point and as he expresses it:

> The starting point for the formation of the word is the substantive content (the *species*) that fills the mind. The thought seeking expression refers not to the mind but to the thing. Thus the word is not the expression of the mind but is concerned with the *similitudo rei*. The subject matter that is thought (the *species*) and the word belong as closely together as possible. Their unity is so close that the word does not occupy a second place in the mind beside the '*species*;' rather, the word is that in

---

> the lips say nothing)... But we must transcend all these... We must come to that human word, the word of a *rationally-souled being*...that does not issue in sound, and is not formed by fantasy in the likeness of sound, for that has to be done in some determinate language, the word then that precedes all the signs by which it may be manifested. (italics mine)

6Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 15, 20. Perhaps now, in thinking about the meaning of inner words, no better introduction exists other than what St. Augustine says about the reality of inner words when he speaks about them in the *De Trinitate*, 15, 12; 15, 17-20. Inner words possess a life of their own as one begins to realize that their meaning presents a challenge in terms of how one should respond to something that has come to live within the depths of one's soul. The suggestiveness or the pregnancy of an idea or meaning, through the mediation of an inner word, measures how one chooses and forms suitable outer words and how one might also employ other related bodily actions in order to communicate a significance that seems to be always seeking a fuller, more adequate expression of itself. The power and significance of ideas possesses a species or a kind of self-movement which is endemic, a species of self-movement which connects with an understanding which Cardinal Newman later presented in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* when he spoke about the development of ideas and how ideas act as internal motors within the conscious life of human beings. Ideas enter a person's mind and, in time, they can come to fully possess and dominate it. A controlling, conditioning influence begins to transform a person's mind from within and, in turn, it reacts to condition how human persons can begin to live in their external worlds. Changes and developments of ideas in one person lead to changes and developments of ideas in others and, from there, a culture can begin to change and assume new forms. As ideas assume a life of their own and as they more fully present themselves within anybody's conscious life, they act as cognitional causes to stimulate a possible asking of new questions that can lead to new possible acts of understanding: acts of understanding from which acts of meaning proceed whose ground is always an act of understanding. Cf. *Verbum*, p. 188.

7Augustine, *Confessions*, 1, 1, cited by Lonergan, *Shorter Papers* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 66.

which knowledge is consummated – i.e., that in which the *species* is fully thought.[9]

In every act of conceptualization that follows from prior acts of understanding, another degree of self-transcendence exists. Acts of conceptualization, in their self-transcendence, build on the self-transcendence which exists in prior acts of understanding.

8Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 426, cited by Lawrence, p. 63. Inner words are not formed so that a person can go back and think about his prior acts of understanding in later acts of self-reflection. Cf. Lawrence, "Lonergan's Retrieval of Thomas Aquinas's Conception of the *Imago Dei*: The Trinitarian Analogy of Intelligible Emanations in God," 375.

9Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 426, cited by Lawrence, pp. 63-64.