

**Inner and Outer Word: Transcribed from Q&A, Boston College Lonergan Workshop, 1978**

**Question 2:** Fr Sebastian Moore's paper, in its concentration on Jesus, would appear to be connected with what are called in *Method* 'inner word' and 'outer word' – that is, with God's love as personal gift and as entering history. In *Method* what takes theology beyond philosophy of God is revelation. Although that is a specifically theological, not methodological, issue, can you suggest how Christian theologians might begin to define revelation or the connection of 'inner' and 'outer word' or 'the importance of Jesus'?

**Lonergan:** You will find the answer to that question in a paper delivered by Eric Voegelin, 'The Gospel and Culture,' in *Jesus and Man's Hope*, ed. D.G. Miller and D.Y. Hadidian (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1971). The book is a mine of wealth, and Voegelin's paper is tops. In it he distinguishes between information and revelation. Why did our Lord tell the apostles to 'tell no man that I am the Christ'? Because merely telling them is just at most information. Why did he say to Peter, 'Blessed are you, Simon, Son of Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven?' Because it takes an action of the Father as well as the information to give you revelation. And so I quote from my paper, 'Theology and Praxis,' delivered at the Catholic Theological Society of America, *Proceedings of the XXXII annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America* June 15-18, 1977. In St John 12.32, 'And I shall draw all men to myself, when I am lifted up,' That is the manifestation of the 'outer word.' That's what touches the hearts of men, the external sign, that manifestation of God's love. 'God sent his only Son into the world that men might be saved.' But the power of the Crucified to draw man to himself is conditioned by the prior drawing by the Father. John 6.44: 'No man can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me.' There is God's grace that causes your being drawn by the crucified, that makes that a revelation of God. And that prior drawing is a listening and learning. 'Everyone who has listened to the Father and learned from him comes to me.' John 6.45. And you have in Matthew the same thing at Caesarea Philippi when Jesus asked the disciples, 'Who do men say that I am?' And they give him the various answers, and then he asks, 'Who do you say that I am?' And Peter answers that he is the Son of God. And Jesus answered, 'Simon, son of Jonah, you are favored indeed! You did not learn that from man.' That would be merely information. 'It was revealed to you by my heavenly Father.' Voegelin comments:

The Matthean Jesus thus agrees with the Johannine (John 6.44) that nobody can recognize the movement of the divine presence in the Son unless he is prepared for such recognition by the presence of the divine Father in himself. The divine Sonship is not revealed through information tendered by Jesus but through a man's response to the full presence in Jesus of the same Unknown God by whose presence he is inchoatively moved in his own existence ... In order to draw the distinction between revelation and information, as well as to avoid the derailment from one to the other, the episode closes with the charge of Jesus to the disciples 'to tell no one that is is the Christ.' (Matthew 16.20)

That is the distinction between the 'inner' and the 'outer word' and the distinction is God's gift of his grace. So that is the connection between the inner and the outer word. You have to have the outer word. You need the information for something to be revealed. But you need God's

inner word, God's grace, to recognize in the outer word that it is divine. The importance of Jesus, again, is precisely that. He is one sent by the Father in the fullness of time to save mankind, to provide the outer word as well as the inner word. We can go from this to answer further questions regarding other religions, and so on, but these are the central points. Anything further on that?

**Question from the floor:** The outer word is necessary to make the inner word effective. Was that your formulation?

**Lonergan:** Well, the inner word is necessary to make the outer word not mere information.

**Question:** How is the inner word effective apart from the preaching of Christ in bringing the grace of God in non-Christian religions?

**Lonergan:** In the non-Christian religions you have the inner word. William Johnston studied Zen very carefully. He made his retreats in Zen monasteries under the direction of Zen masters, and so on. And he says that the Zen monks all know what's going on in the other fellow whether Christian or not. But there is a difference in the outer word. In other words, it is what Rahner calls the anonymous Christian. The outer word is not a necessity, but it is a terrific revelation that God is love, and that is an idea of God that is pretty well absent in many non-Christian religions. Johnston's most recent book to be published this fall by Harper & Row in New York, *The Inner eye of Love*, had to argue that these people know about love and the meaning of God's love but he has to argue against them and from things that they say and their implications. They haven't got it out in the same explicit form as you do get in Christianity and its predecessor Judaism. 'You shall love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole mind, and with all thy strength' occurs not only in Mark but also in Deuteronomy.

**Question:** It seems that what Sebastian Moore is talking about isn't operative outside of Christian preaching, and therefore I still have problems with how the inner word can become effective apart from that proclamation of God's word.

**Lonergan:** It doesn't become effective in the same way. It doesn't become explicit in the same way.

**Question:** It remains anonymous. Do they concretize it in other symbols?

**Lonergan:** Well, on the cover of Johnston's book you have a cross and different symbols around it symbolizing nothing. That's the way they think of God. And why do they think of God that way? Because they haven't got the idea of being that comes through the resurrection of Christ. Certainly what the mystic experiences is outside this world, and however real it is to you, you have to call it 'nothing' if you are going to use words; if you don't have the Christian expression you have to call it nothing.