34 To Hear (*Audire*)

Although seeing and hearing are two senses for learning, according to the Philosopher,[[1]](#endnote-1) however according to diverse ways and other ways of learning one thing and another. For sight is instructed through things, but hearing through signs of things, just as Augustine teaches, the first book, *De doctrina Christiana*.[[2]](#endnote-2)

¶ Therefore, since all theology is handled through things and signs, according to Augustine, as above,[[3]](#endnote-3) hearing serves us necessarily for learning about God if we are absent from that reality about which is our theology. Therefore, the Apostle says to the Rom. 10[:17]: “Faith then,” which is of things not apparent, “comes by hearing.” Wherefore just as is evident in Gen. 27[:18-25], in the meal of Isaac, all his senses were lacking except hearing, and thus it is in the reception of the Eucharist.

¶ In the future, however, when faith is withdrawn, and we see a thing just as it is [1 Cor. 13:10], in the way that we believed, sight will serve us more than hearing. Therefore Job 42[:5] has said, “With the hearing of the ear, I have heard you, but now my eye sees you.” Wherefore, in civil law, demonstration of the matter is held by tradition, and it is placed through seeing as if in possession, because in no way can it happen through hearing.

¶ Furthermore, it is to be known that for hearing the doctrine of Christ, it ought to move us because just as the announcement of our damnation was made through hearing the word of God from a teacher. Wherefore Luke 11[:27]: “Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.”

¶ Wherefore, says Bernard, in the book *De diligendo Deo,[[4]](#endnote-4)* that among all the senses hearing most greatly moves the soul to work. Therefore, Job [21:1] says, “Hear, I beseech you, my words, and do penance,” and it follows [Luke 3:8]: “Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of penance.” Therefore, Job [34:28] wishes to suggest that man “came together, to hear the word of God,” [Acts 13:44]. And afterward to proceed to work.

¶ Secondly, what ought to move us to hear the doctrine of Christ is that he, effectively only twelve years old, sat in the temple for hearing by the elders and not for learning since he was of God. Virtue and wisdom are to be given to us, the example in Luke 2[:46-52]. Again, in Luke 11[:31] it is said that “The queen of the south … came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.” Therefore, he will condemn these things, therefore, I have known this one, 3 Kings 4[:34].

¶ Again, Luke 8[:8], Jesus cried out, “He that has ears to hear, let him hear.” According to the Philosopher,[[5]](#endnote-5) bees do not have ears for hearing. Therefore, they must be very prudent for making homes for themselves and acquiring food and for setting out to battle. However, they are not learners because of the lack of hearing.

¶ Thus those men who do not have ears for hearing the doctrine of Christ should be very prudent for these worldly things “for the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light,” Luke 16[:8]. Since the sons of God are not without hearing. Therefore, Isai. [51:1]: “Give ear to me, you that follow that which is just, and you that seek the Lord,” but concerning some men it is just as concerning the asp, according to Isidore, 12 of the *Etymologies*,[[6]](#endnote-6) because when an enchanter wishes to extract him from his hole through an incantation, and purge him of his venom and thus make him tractable, he puts one ear to the ground and blocks up the other ear with his tale, lest he hear it. The Psalm [57:5-6] touches on the same, “Their madness is according to the likeness of a serpent: like the deaf asp that stops her ears,” etc., up to “wisely.” Thus, when the preacher wishes to extract a sinner from the ditch of sin, that one wishes that he might block up one ear with delight of earthly things and the other with the promise of a long life.

¶ Concerning the first kind was Pharaoh who because of the riches of the earth did not want to hear the Lord. And wherefore Exod. 5[:2] says, “Who is the Lord, that I should hear his voice? … I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.”

¶ Concerning the second kind of men, it ought to be known that it is against nature that an old man should hear better than a youth. This was evident in Berzellai the Galaadite, the old man who could not hear the voices of the singers in the house of David, Psal. [70:9]. On old age, 2 Kings 19[:31-35]. Thus, it rarely happens that those who put off hearing good doctrine in youth that they would succeed in old age. Wherefore Ambrose says in his *Hexameron[[7]](#endnote-7)* that those who live near a raucous river cannot hear well because of the noise of the water. Thus, neither do men living near the din of the world hear well the word of God.

¶ For this, note that those wishing to sleep pleasantly do not wish to hear terrible strife, but rather pleasant sounds, such as the cithara or some melody. Thus, those who wish to rest sweetly in sins do not wish to hear the threat of the justice of God but flattering things by which they can be moved to being slothful. Wherefore Chrysostom, *Homily 83 on Matthew*,[[8]](#endnote-8) fear not that some contemn what things are said, rather a greater penalty is begotten from the contempt of hearing. And if the servants do not hear the threatening of the Lord, they will not do the precept, and they go unpunished.

¶ But this is the occasion of greater pain, etc., but listen to those hearing the preaching of Jonas [3:10]: “they were turned (from their evil way).” But against this the Lord laments, Jer. 32[:32-33]: “The men of Juda, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem have turned their backs to me, and not their faces; when I taught you … and they would not hearken to receive instruction.” Wherefore, says Augustine, in the book *De decem cordibus*,[[9]](#endnote-9) now the Lord is silent, but he will not be silent hereafter. Therefore, listen now to his word while he is silent, lest there would not be time for you hereafter to listen when he will not be silent in judgment. Therefore, the sons of Israel have said, Exod. 20[:19]: “You speak to us, and we will hear; let not the Lord speak to us, lest we die.” Wherefore Bernard,[[10]](#endnote-10) the naked will stand about before the tribunal of Christ, so that they may hear the voice of the judge, those who blocked up their ears to the voice of counsel.

¶ Therefore, what now does God say, “Do penance,” [Job 21:2]? But many do not have ears, namely, the ones saying, “This saying is hard,” [John 6:61]. “Not so the wicked, not so,” [Psal. 1:4]. For when the harder saying comes, “Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire,” [Matt. 25:41]. Prepare reasonably that way to hear the one counseling, consoling or many times blaming and threatening which in the last bitter day to hear him hastening to the judging, they condemn each other, some things are to be heard. Some things are not to be heard, not the deceptions of the destroyers, because they spoil, Eccli. 9[:4]: “Use not much the company of her that is a dancer, and hearken not to her, lest you perish by the force of her charms.” There is the example of the sailor who did not willingly hear the siren,[[11]](#endnote-11) as happened with the companions of Ulysses returning from the Trojan war, Psal. [37:13-14]: “They spoke vain things. … But I, as a deaf man, heard not.”

¶ Again, do not be detained by vituperations, because they kill, Psal. [30:13-14]: “I am become as a vessel that is destroyed. For I have heard the blame of many that dwell round about.”

¶ The example of the asp [Psal. 58:5-6] who does not hear the voice of the enchanter, Psal. [58:8]: “A sharp sword is in their lips; for who has heard us?” Again, not the blandishments of the flatterers because they pervert, Eccli. 28[:28]: “Hear not a wicked tongue.” The example of the wild animals who do not willingly hear the barking of the dogs. And the example of the sick man who does not willingly hear the mention of death.

¶ But the useful things are to be heard and particularly the words of God because they heal from fault, thus, therefore, he hears the words of the physician, Job [42:5-6]: “With the hearing of the ear, I have heard you,” and following, “Therefore I reprehend myself.” Secondly, because they restore in general just as the exile willing hears the words of reconciliation, Psal. [84:9]: “I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me; for he will speak peace unto his people.”

¶ In the third place, because they train in wisdom, thus scholars willingly hear one speaking of their fatherland, Psal. [47:9]: “As we have heard, so have we seen, in the city of our God,” namely, the words are to be heard diligently, Eccli. 5[:13]: “Be meek to hear the word” of God, not like those who in hearing make camps in Spain. Secondly, obediently, Psal. [17:45]: “At the hearing of the ear they have obeyed me.”

¶ Thirdly, memorably so that he may retain it, Psal. [77:3]: “How great things have we heard and known,” not like the net which is extracted from the water, bearing nothing with it.

¶ Fourthly, joyfully like the friend joyfully hears good of his friend so that he may please, John 3[:29]: “The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him.” And finally the voice of God is to be heard universally by all just as the bell ringing at the capitol, John 5[:28]: “All that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son [of God].” Which certainly will be a good voice, delightful just as the familiar noise of the feast, Psal. [50:10]: “To my hearing you shall give joy and gladness.” The evil [voice] in truth will be terrible just as the evil rumor of a hanging, Isai. 21[:3]: “I fell down at the hearing of it, I was troubled at the seeing of it.” Eccli. 27[:16]: “Their cursing is a grievous hearing.”

1. Aristotle, *Sense and sensibilia* 1, 437a4-16 (Barnes, 1:693-694): That all the attributes above enumerated belong to soul and body in conjunction, is obvious; for they all either imply sensation as a concomitant, or have it as their medium. Some are either affections or states of sensation, others, means of defending and safe-guarding it, while others, again, involve its destruction or negation. Now it is clear, alike by reasoning and observation, that sensation is generated in the soul through the medium of the body. We have already, in our treatise On the Soul, explained the nature of sensation and the act of perceiving by sense, and the reason why this affection belongs to animals. Sensation must, indeed, be attributed to all animals as such, for by its presence or absence we distinguish essentially between what is and what is not an animal. But coming now to the special senses severally, we may say that touch and taste necessarily appertain to all animals, touch, for the reason given in On the Soul, and taste, because of nutrition. It is by taste that one distinguishes in food the pleasant from the unpleasant, so as to flee from the latter and pursue the former: and savour in general is an affection of nutrient matter.

Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Sentencia in libri De anima* lib. 2, lect. 14, no. 19.: Sed in immutatione visus est sola immutatio spiritualis: unde patet, quod visus inter omnes sensus est spiritualior, et post hunc auditus. Et propter hoc hi duo sensus sunt maxime spirituales, et soli disciplinabiles; et his quae ad eos pertinent, utimur in intellectualibus, et praecipue his quae pertinent ad visum. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 1.2.2 (PL 34.19): Omnis doctrina vel rerum est vel signorum, sed res per signa discuntur. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 1.2.2 (PL 34.19): Omnis doctrina vel rerum est vel signorum, sed res per signa discuntur. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Bernard, *De diligendo Deo* 1.1 (PL 182.974-975): Vultis ergo a me audire, quare et quomodo diligendus sit Deus? Et ego: Causa diligendi Deum, Deus est; modus, sine modo diligere. Estne hoc satis? Fortassis utique, sed sapienti. Caeterum si et insipientibus debitor sum (Rom. I, 14); ubi sat est dictum sapienti, etiam illis gerendus mos est. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Aristotle, *History of Animals* 9.40, 627a16-19 (Barnes 1:975): Bees seem to take a pleasure in listening to a rattling noise; and consequently men say that they can muster them into a hive by rattling with crockery or stones; it is uncertain, however, whether or no they can hear the noise at all and also whether their procedure is due to pleasure or alarm. They expel from the hive all idlers and unthrifts. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.4.11 (PL 82.443): Hujus diversa genera, et species, et dispares effectus ad nocendum: fertur autem aspis, cum coeperit pati incantatorem, qui eam quibusdam carminibus propriis evocat, ut eam de caverna educat, illa cum exire noluerit, unam aurem ad terram premit, alteram cauda obturat et operit; atque ita voces illas magicas non audiens, non exit ad incantantem. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Ambrose, *Hexameron* 6.9.62 (PL 14.268): Tenaces praeterea sermonis accepti ipsos esse anfractus aurium usus ipse nos docet. Siquidem velut in concavis montium, vel in recessu rupium, vel in anfractu fluminum vox auditur dulcior, et responsa suavia referens echo resultat. Ipsae quoque sordes aurium non inutiles quae ligant vocem: ut tenacior ejus in nobis et memoria sit, et gratia. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. John Chrysostom, *Super Mattheum* 1.7 (PG 58:988): Et certe propter hoc Deus gehennam minatur, non ut eam nobis inferat, sed ut fugere persuadeat illam gravissimam consuetudinem. Nos vero e contrario cuncta agimus, et quotidie in illam viam, quae illuc ducit, irruimus. Nam praecipiente nobis Deo, non modo ut audiamus quae dicuntur, verum ut cum omni etiam devotione faciamus, nos nec audire curamus. Quando igitur ea quae dicuntur implebimus? Responde, quaeso, quando incipiemus operari, [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Augustine, *Sermo* 9.1.1 (PL 38.75): Parcit, dum tacet. Tacet, sed non semper tacebit (Isai. XLII, 14). Audi dum non tacet in verbo, ne non tibi vacet audire dum non tacebit in judicio. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Bernard, *Sermo* 5.2 (PL 183.555): quoniam nudam et apertam oportebit te stare ante tribunal Christi, ut audias vocem judicii, quae vocem consilii contempsisti. Ecce enim quid loquitur Deus: Agite, inquit, poenitentiam (Matth. III, 2): et dissimulant multi, et continent aures suas, et dicunt: Durus est hic sermo, Non sic impii, non sic dissimulare poteritis, cum sonabit asperum illud verbum, et auditio mala: Ite, maledicti, in ignem aeternum (Matth. XXV, 41). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. The Second Vatican Mythographer, 123: On the Sirens in Ronald E. Pepin, trans. *The Vatican Mythographers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), (p. 148): When sailors were enticed by their songs and approached the rocks where the Sirens sat as they sang, they were led to ruin. Their ships wre dashed upon the cliffs, and the Sirens devoured them. Ulysses killed them by spurning them, for when he was sailing past the Sirens, he blocked the ears of all his companions with wax so tht they did not her them. He ordred that he himself be bound to the mast of his ship. Thus he heard the sweetness of their song and escaped danger. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)