

“NOW *HEAR* THIS”

Mk 12: 28-30; Mt 7: 24-27; Mt 4:4

I. “He who has an Ear let him Hear”

- A. Sense Organ (cf Whittiker Chambers re daughter)—amazing anatomy
- B. Avenue to Mind (cf. Helen Keller story)
- C. Hearing:
 - 1. Noise (intensity: decibels; variations: pitch)
 - 2. Sounds (notable signals—alarm clock; background continuous)
 - 3. Music
 - a. Components—notes, harmony, tune etc.
 - b. Conduit—beauty leads to God (cf. *Surprised by Beauty*)
 - c. Uniquely human, deeply significant—Plato *et al* concerns
 - 4. Words—crucial to being
 - a. Basic to propositional language, man’s main distinctive (cf. Adler: *Difference in Man*)
 - c. *Trivium* wisdom: grammar, logic, rhetoric
 - d. Creation: God “said let there be”; “All things made by Word”
 - e. Incarnation: “Word became flesh”

II. Listen Up!

- A. Understand the process (cf. Adler: *How to . . . Listen*)
 - 1. Directing attention: concentrate; sort out sounds; hear needful
 - 2. Absorbing content: recording, repeating, writing, remembering
 - 3. Discerning differences
 - a. Verbs’ moods: indicative; imperative; interrogative; subjunctive
 - b. Relevance (re? import?)
- B. Note Diverse Sources:
 - 1. Nature
 - 2. Body: hear/heed info (cf. Rob Moll’s *What Your Body Knows About God*)
 - 3. Self (attuned to God):
 - a. Reason—divine gift, channel to Real (cf. Kreeft re Aquinas)
 - b. Conscience; “gut” talking (cf. Newman)
 - c. Experience—encounters with Real (cf. Wesley)
 - 4. Others: social beings, profit from interaction
 - 5. God: speaking through Christ; Scripture; Spirit; Tradition
- C. Messages: instructions; warnings; commands; wisdom

III. Heed (Obey)

- A. Imperative mood when God speaks
- B. Do Word

THE DIFFERENCE OF MAN AND THE DIFFERENCE IT MAKES

Mortimer J. Adler was a truly remarkable man. He wrote some 50 books, lectured widely, and espoused the philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas decades before personally coming to Christ in his 80s. One of his most durable works, *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes* (New York: Fordham University Press, c. 1967), remains in print and deserves thoughtful study.

To think rightly, we must first understand the “modes of difference” between “kind” and “degree.” Things differ in kind, first of all, when they possess unique characteristics—a triangle is three-sided, a square is four-sided; two is an even number, three is an odd number. Secondly, they have no possible intermediate objects. Something cannot “more-or-less” three sided, “more-or-less” an even number. There are, quite simply, some things that differ in “kind.” Other things differ in degree. A line can be a foot long or a mile long. There are degrees to the length of a line. A boulder can weigh a ton or five tons. There are degrees of heaviness in boulders. Regarding man, then, the great question is this: does he differ from other beings in kind or degree?

The “difference in man,” Adler argues, resides primarily in his propositional language. This explains why: “The position that man differs radically in kind is the one held by the majority of the great philosophers in the history of Western thought, from the beginning to the middle or end of the nineteenth century” (p. 51). With virtual unanimity, these philosophers attributed “man's power of thought and free choice to his possession of a non-physical or immaterial principle (call it rational soul, mind, intellect, spiritual power, thinking substance, or divine spark) absent in the material world. There is something peculiarly divine” in man, evident even to non-Christian thinkers, which lifts him above the rest of creation. Many of these philosophers, especially Aristotle and Aquinas, certainly appreciated the importance of materiality. They understood, however, that nature is stratified “as a hierarchy of radically distinct kinds (inorganic beings, plants, brute animals, and men), and they fill in the picture by seeing a continuum of degrees within each of the grades of the hierarchy” (p. 62). Within distinct kinds of things there are degrees of difference.

During the past 200 years, however, the philosophical pendulum has swung. Materialistic thinkers, insisting that the only difference between things is a matter of degree, have gained ascendancy. Adler glances at the philosophical materialists in antiquity who argued this, but he mainly devotes his attention to Charles Darwin, whose ideas have powerfully shaped the modern mind. Against Darwinian anthropology, Adler argues that man, in fact, differs *in kind* from other species! Though there are various striking differences, the main difference is revealed in human speech. We make declarative statements, using symbolic language. As Ernst Cassirer insists, man is an *animal symbolicum*. Other animals respond to signals, but they do not use conceptual language. Man thinks with concepts—and many concepts are not simplistically linked to sense perceptions. Concepts are not things, nor are they embedded in things. As Aristotle declared long ago, matter cannot think! When material beings think, something more than matter does the thinking! To Aristotle, our ability to think, to understand, demonstrates the presence of a “rational soul” indwelling and informing the body. It alone is an immaterial power; its acts are not the acts of any bodily organ” (p. 219). “Since our concepts are acts of our power of conceptual thought, that power must itself be an immaterial power, one not embodied in a physical organ such as the brain. The action of the brain, therefore, cannot be the sufficient condition of conceptual thought, though it may still be a necessary condition thereof” (p. 222). Aristotle's “Moderate Immaterialism” gives Adler a “perennial” facet to a credible philosophy.

Having established his position, Adler turns to the final question: what difference does the difference in man make? In short it makes a huge difference. Ideas really matter! You need look no further than the past century to see how people treat people when they define man as a “higher animal” rather than the *imago Dei*. If we're mere animals, we've a license to treat others accordingly. Revealingly, the Nazi's Nuremberg decrees (justifying anti-Jewish policies) stipulated: “there is a greater difference between the lowest forms still called human and our superior races than between the lowest man and monkeys of the highest order” (p. 264). It also makes a difference concerning how we shall live. Only man lives with an awareness of death. Only man paints pictures, writes history, studies medicine. Only man struggles with ethical issues—or needs to! Only man builds churches, libraries, hospitals, cemeteries. And only man has religious concerns and aspirations. Few things matter more, quite frankly, than one's definition of human nature! And Adler's encyclopedic knowledge and philosophical acumen blend to make this a book which can be read and re-read as I have done with great profit.

HEAR . . .

“How extraordinary is the fact that no effort is made anywhere in the whole educational process to help individuals learn how to listen well—at least well enough to close the circuit and make speech effective as a means of communication” (p. 5).

“Sophistry is always a misuse of the skills of rhetoric, always in unscrupulous effort to succeed in persuading by any means, fair or foul” (p. 27).

“Aristotle pointed out the three main tactics to be employed if one wished to succeed in the business of persuasion. There are no better names for these three main instruments of persuasion than the words the Greeks used for them: *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*” (p. 30).

“Listening, like reading, is primarily an activity of the mind, not of the ear or the eye. When the mind is not actively involved in the process, it should be called hearing, not listening; seeing, not reading. The most prevalent mistake that people make about both listening and reading is to regard them as passively receiving rather than as actively participating” (p. 85).

“The Greek word *ethos* signifies a person’s character. Establishing one’s character is the preliminary step in any attempt at persuasion” (p. 30).

“. . . *pathos* consists in arousing the passions of the listeners, getting their emotions running in the direction of the action to be taken” (p. 36).

“*Logos*—the marshaling of reasons—comes last” (p. 37).

“*Taxis* concerns the organization of a speech—the order of its three component parts [introduction; body; conclusion]” (p. 63).

“The final consideration is *lexis*. Here we are concerned with the language or literary style” (p. 66).

“Always risk talking over their heads!” (p. 61).

“Catching is as much an activity as throwing and requires as much skill as throwing, though it is skill of a different kind” (p. 87).

“The importance of listening is generally acknowledged. It is also generally recognized that of the four operations involved in communication through words—writing, reading, speaking, and listening—the last of these is rarely well performed” (p. 88).

“Therefore, the questions to be used in listening to a speech can be simpler than the ones recommended for reading a book. There they are: i. *What is the whole speech about.* What in essence, is the speaker trying to say and how does he go about saying it? ii. *What are the main or pivotal ideas, conclusions, and arguments?* What are the special terms used to express these ideas and to state the speaker’s conclusions and arguments. iii. *Are the speaker’s conclusions sound or mistaken?* Are they well-supported by his arguments, or is that support inadequate in some respect? . . . iv. *What of it?* What consequences follow from the conclusions the speaker wishes to have adopted?

“Saying what you mean is one of the hardest things in the world to do. Listening to what others say in order to discern what they mean is equally hard” (p. 139).

--Mortimer Adler, *How to Speak, How to Listen*

POINTS TO PONDER RE LISTENING

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand, they listen with the intent to reply.”

--Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

“We have two ears and one mouth, so we should listen more than we say.”

--Zeno of Citium

“It takes a great man to be a good listener.”

--Calvin Coolidge

“Most of the successful people I’ve known are the ones who do more listening than talking.”

--Bernard Baruch

“There’s a lot of difference between listening and hearing.”

--G.K. Chesterton

“You’re short on ears and long on mouth.”

--John Wayne

“Part of doing something is listening. We are listening. To the sun. To the stars. To the wind.”

--Madelaine L’Engle, *Swiftly Tilting Planet*

“It takes two to speak the truth—one to speak and another to hear.”

--Henry David Thoreau

“Action can give us the feeling of being useful, but only words can give us a sense of weight and purpose.”

--Eric Hoffer, *The Passionate State of Mind*

“Words, like Nature, half reveal / And half conceal the Soul within.”

--Alfred, Lord Tennyson

“Words should be weighed and not counted.”

--*Yiddish Proverbs*