

A Model of Communication

1. What is communication? As early as 1970, almost 100 definitions had appeared in print (see Mortensen, Communication, p. 14)! A very general definition is

Communication occurs whenever persons attribute
significance to message-related behavior.

This definition implies several postulates (Ibid., pp. 14-21; compare this with Porter and Samovar, "Approaching Intercultural Communication", p. 30):

- a. Communication is dynamic: it is not a static "thing" but a dynamic process which maintains stability and identity through all its fluctuations.
 - b. Communication is irreversible: the very fact that communication has occurred (or is occurring) means that the persons in communication have changed, however subtly. "Once the transaction begins, there can be no retreat, no fresh start, no way to begin all over again."
 - c. Communication is proactive: in communicating we are not merely passive respondents to external stimuli. When we communicate, we enter the process totally and are proactive, selecting, amplifying, and manipulating the signals that come to us.
 - d. Communication is interactive on two fronts:
 - i. Intrapersonal: "where a person assigns significance to messages apart from the presence of another person"
 - ii. Interpersonal: "it takes place between two or more parties and consists of a complex process whereby each maintains a shared frame of reference, or coorientation, . . ."
 - e. Communication is contextual: it "never takes place in a vacuum; it is not a 'pure' process, devoid of background or situational overtones; it always requires at least one's minimal sensitivity to immediate physical surroundings, an awareness of setting or place that in turn influences the ebb and flow of what is regarded as personally significant.
2. For us as Christians, what is the purpose of all communication? A biblical consideration of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

- i. Paul exhibited a "willingness to accommodate himself to whatever social setting

he found himself in, so as 'to win as many as possible' [i.e., evangelism]. . . . Thus Paul's first concern in such matters is not whether he offends or does not offend--although that too is a concern (10:32)--but whether the gospel itself will get its proper hearing (cf. 10:33)." (Fee, Corinthians, pp. 426-7)

- ii. Paul makes the choice to live within his context freely, and does so in light of the Gospel. Though on the behavioral level his actions are inconsistent, they follow a higher priority (and integrity) than simple slavish behavioral observance.
 - iii. In this context, he specifically deals with food bought in the open market place. He draws the line in the fact that he remains under Christ's law (or legal obligation to Christ; Barrett, Corinthians, p. 212) even when living like a Gentile (e.g., he would hardly murder someone no matter how favorably the culture looked upon it!).
 - iv. "This passage has often been looked to for the idea of 'accommodation' in evangelism, that is, of adapting the *message* to the language and perspective of the recipients. Unfortunately, despite the need for that discussion to be carried on, this passage does not speak directly to it. This has to do with how one *lives* or *behaves* among those whom one wishes to evangelize (not, it needs to be added in passing, with social taboos among Christians). What needs to be emphasized is the point expressed clearly by Bornkamm: 'Paul could not modify the gospel itself according to the particular characteristics of his hearers. The whole of his concern is to make clear that the changeless gospel, . . . empowers him to be free to change his stance.'" (Fee, Corinthians, pp. 432-3)
- b. Robert Webber points to thirteen biblical principles for Christian communicators (God Still Speaks, pp. 202-7):
- i. The task of the church is to communicate Christ to the contemporary world.
 - ii. The *problem* of communicating Christ is defined as follows: building bridges between Christ and the cultures of the world.
 - iii. The *issue* of Christian communication is the awakening of faith.
 - iv. The eternal point of reference for communications is in the Trinity. Communication is part of God's very essence, and He is the One who has established the principle of communication.
 - v. Communication in this world is grounded in God's act of creation.
 - vi. God has communicated to the world through revelation. These forms of God's revelation are models for our own methods of communication:
 - (1) God's revelation is *historical*. Our communication must relate to everyday experiences, the trials and troubles of existence. It must be a message to man in the midst of his suffering, oppression, poverty, hunger, and need. It dare not be out of touch with life.

- (2) God communicates through *language*. In our own use of words we must preserve the language of essential Christianity, making sure that what we communicate is biblical truth.
 - (3) God communicates through *vision*. We must recognize that man is not merely verbal but also visual, and therefore seek to use the visual as a proper channel of communication.
 - (4) God communicates through *incarnation*. In the incarnation God set forth the ultimate standard of communication. If we would reach others as God reached us, we must be willing to identify with the very life, the social context, and the needs of those with whom we communicate.
- vii. Man is created in the image of God: Thus man is to project God's image in every respect, including his ability to communicate.
 - viii. The fall of man has drastically affected communication in every aspect of man's existence.
 - ix. Christ is the new image of man: As the Second Adam, He re-creates the old creation and makes all things new.
 - x. The church is the locus of the new order. It is here, in the church, where communion with God has been restored and where potential healing of the breakdown in communication is found.
 - xi. There is a need today to restore symbolic communication within the church. Rational discourse alone is inadequate in an age of imaginative and visual images.
 - xii. There is a need today to restore the sense of the church as a nurturing community. The church, which is in inseparable union with the Holy Spirit, is the context in which growth in Christ is communicated.
 - xiii. The church communicates outside of herself to the world in three stances:
 - (1) She is part of the world
 - (2) She is against the world
 - (3) She is victorious over the world.
3. Five points to note in regard to communication:
- a. Everything that we do "communicates"--it is **impossible** for us to stop communicating (Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson, Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of International Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes, p. 48; cited in Kraft, Communication Theory, p. 75)!

- b. The goal of communication is always more than just to impart information--persuasion is behind everything we do. Even a simple "Hello" is an act that is requesting a response (or an acknowledgment of your existence and relationship with the person to whom you say "Hello").

David Berlo notes: "Our basic purpose in communication is to become an affecting agent, to affect others, our physical environment, and ourselves, and to become a determining agent, to have a vote in how things are. In short, we communicate to influence--to affect with intent." (Berlo, The Process of Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Practice, p. 12; quoted in Hesselgrave, Communicating Christ, p. 58).

- c. The communication process is generally more complex than most people realize:

To some it seems that communication must be a simple thing because we communicate all the time. After all, experts reduce the number of basic elements involved in the communication process to three . . . or to no more than five . . . These include the context, the source or sender, the message, the delivery system, and the receptor or receiver. But peruse even the most elementary introduction to communication and it will be apparent that the process is exceedingly complex. The supposed simplicity quickly evaporates as one encounters such notions as signs and symbols; encoding and decoding; linguistic and nonlinguistic codes; vehicles, channels, and media; and feedback. Even that is but the beginning. (Hesselgrave and Rommen, Contextualization, p. 180; see also Filbeck, Social Context and Proclamation, pp. 2-3).

- d. We always communicate our messages through more than one channel and we always communicate more than one message. At times, these "multiple" messages may contradict each other, causing our audience to respond negatively to our primary concern. At other times, they enhance and reinforce our message, helping to elicit a more positive response from our audience (see Kraft, Communication Theory, p. 76).

- e. If we seek to communicate effectively across cultural barriers, the foundational consideration for all our communication should be "What can I do to build trust on the part of the audience?" (see Marvin K. Mayers excellent discussion on building trust and mutual respect in Christianity Confronts Culture, pp. 30-79)

4. What do we mean by "intercultural" and "cross-cultural"? (Gudykunst and Kim, "Preface", Methods, p. 8):

- a. **Intercultural** is when two people of diverse cultures meet and interact.
- b. **Cross-cultural** is when we study the same phenomena in two different cultures and compare them.

In this course, we will be looking at both aspects, depending on the framework of discussion.

5. What do we mean by "intercultural communication"? *"Intercultural communication, then, refers to the communication phenomena in which participants, different in cultural*

backgrounds, come into direct or indirect contact with one another." (Kim, "Creative Integration", p. 16)

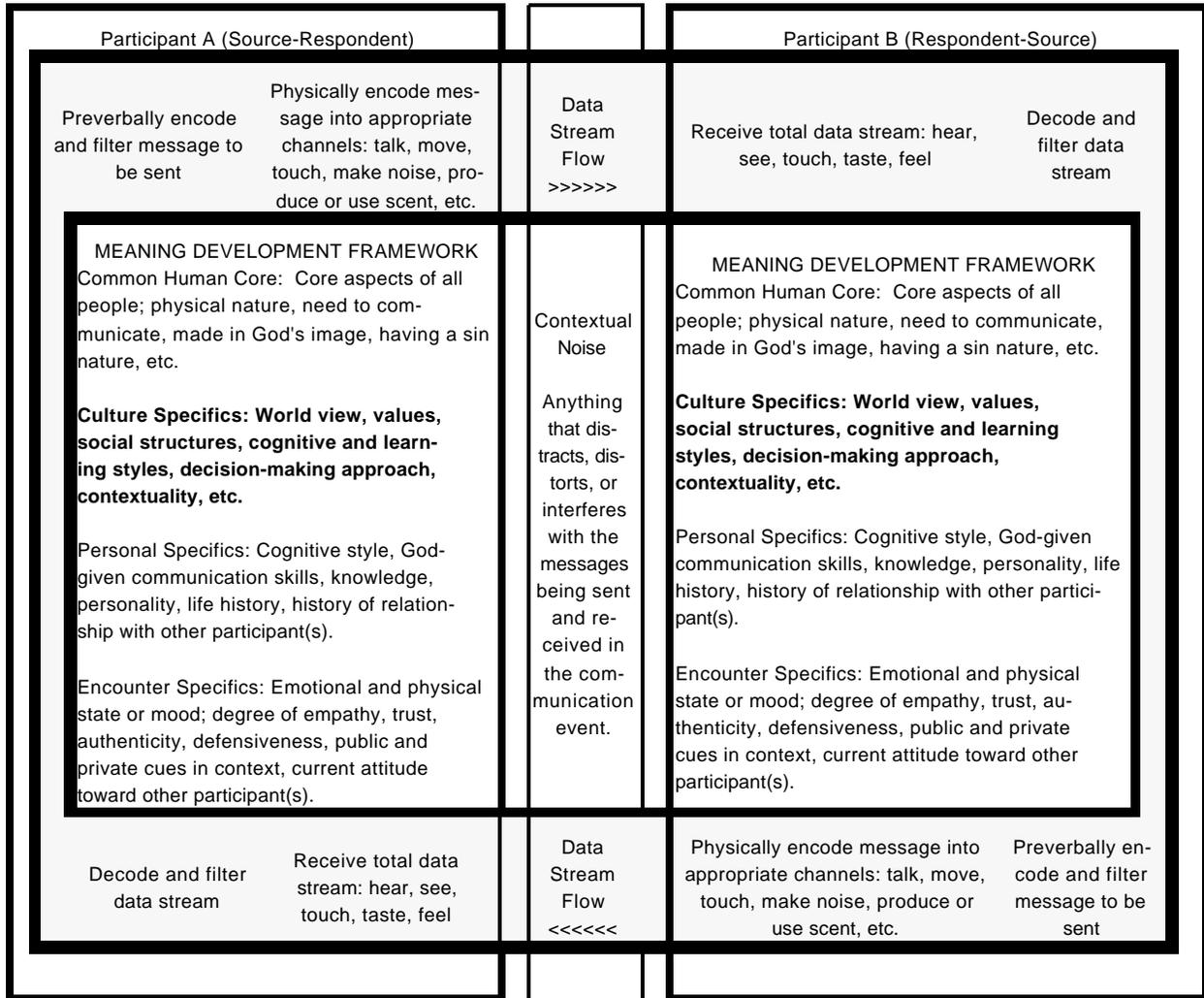
6. Three levels of communication may be proposed (adapted from Applbaum, et al, Fundamental Concepts, pp. 9-10 and Mortensen, Communication, pp. 23-5), together with the essential components for analyzing each:

Level	Essential Components
Intrapersonal	Psychological Orientation Human Information Processing
Interpersonal	Interpersonal Contacts Nonverbal Interaction Verbal Interaction
Sociocultural	Social Influence Networks Situational Geography

7. The full range of possible social communication events is presented in this typology (from McQuail, "Sociology and the Concept of Communication", p. 58):

System Level	Intention/Purpose/Message Type					
	Guidance Power Assymetrical		Exchange Power Symmetrical		Expressive Open-Ended	
	Regulation High	Regulation Low	Regulation High	Regulation Low	Regulation High	Regulation Low
Interpersonal	Manager-worker face-to-face contact	Parent-child conversation	Salesman-customer contact	Conversation be- tween neighbors	Playing Beethoven on cello	Singing in bath
Group	Instructor-class contact	Children's playgroup with leader	Cooperative work group	Juvenile gang inter- action	Ceremony, e.g., wedding, christening	Crowd demonstration
Society	Promulgation of national tax law	National tele- vision news broadcast	National election campaign	Advertising cam- paign	Ceremony, e.g., inauguration, coro- nation	Popular enter- tainment on televi- sion
'Normal' type of receiver orientation	Response	Attention	Calculation	Participation	Identification	Satisfaction

8. A working model of the communication process (resources include Singer, Intercultural Communication, p. 70; Applbaum, et al., Fundamental Concepts; Hesselgrave, Communicating Christ; Mortensen, Communication; Poyatos, New Perspectives in Nonverbal Communication and Dodd, Dynamics, p. 5):



a. The communication **participant A (source-respondent)**:

i. The **message**: The exact "origin" of any "message" in a person may be debated. In our diagram, we have simply indicated a vague "stimulus-response" center out of which "message" and "response" are initiated.

(1) **What do we mean by 'meaning'?** "Meaning is in a sense contractual. Only by agreement in the area of semantics can we think about the same 'thing.' Only by agreement on the relationships that exist between linguistic symbols can we say anything significant *about* the 'thing.' And only as we agree on *standards* of right and wrong, truth and error, and good and bad can we make value judgments about any 'thing.'" (Hesselgrave, Communicating Christ, p. 40; note Carson's interesting discussion on this area in "The Limits of Dynamic Equivalence", pp. 207-8). On the different theories of how things "mean", and the steps we take to discover "meaning", see Hesselgrave (Communicating Christ, pp. 44-50.)

(2) **Meaning development framework ("data storage bank"):** A lifetime of sensory inputs forms a reservoir of meaning in the individual. Past experiences and future expectations interact with the 'now' to produce meanings. No two persons receive identical sensory impressions of a single event, nor do individuals respond in the same way that others respond. Each person develops a unique 'meaning system' that is constantly changing. There are four major areas which interact in the total meaning development framework:

- (a) **Common Human Core:** These are core aspects of our humanity common to all people. They are to be discerned from biblical revelation, and appear to include being made in the image of God, having a sin nature, having the requirements of God's law written on our hearts, and having an innate awareness of God.
- (b) **Cultural Specifics:** These include world view, religion, values, social structures and roles, decision-making rules, etc.

[N.B. See the significant discussion in recent anthropology on underlying presuppositions of western anthropologists who have gone out from their culture in attempts to define "otherness" and justify themselves (and their culture) in the process in Fabian, Time and the Other and Mudimbe, The Invention of Africa.]

- (c) **Personal Specifics:** These include cognitive style, God-given communication skills, knowledge, personality, total history of relationship with other(s), and life history and experiences.
- (d) **Encounter Specifics:** These include emotional/physical state or mood, degree of empathy, trust, authenticity, defensiveness, public and private cues in context, and the current attitude toward the other(s).

ii. **The coding process:**

"The word *communication* comes from the Latin word *communis* (common). *We must establish a "commonness" with someone to have communication. That "commonness" is to be found in mutually shared codes*" (Hesselgrave, Communicating Christ, p. 31). Steps in the coding process include preverbal coding and the actual physical coding, which is part of the transmission process (Applbaum, et al., pp. 36-38).

Preverbal coding: A need to communicate is felt and is encoded from meanings generated by the source. Much of this stage involves feelings for which words are not attached. The meaning is private and frequently is not verbally expressed. Feedback loops operate within the individual as he examines the preverbal encoding process in preparation for the next stage. For example, the individual may decide to use a particular word, and then, when he thinks about it, he may select a different word as more appropriate. This process occurs before the actual physical coding.

b. **Transmission of the message through physical coding.** At this point there is an emission of signals (verbal and extraverbal) based on the preverbal coding. The kinds of encoding effected (see below) depend on the individual's needs in the situation and his experience with communication.

i. **Verbal codes** refer to language, whether written or oral. Though words (especially nouns) have an external referent, the actual words which we use do not "contain meaning" in-and-of themselves. Their meaning is an agreed upon one chosen by the group using that code. "Friend" could mean anything an English-speaking culture (or audience) wants it to mean, but the meaning in common use today is a person who is on good terms with you. The meaning of "friend" is not inherent in the word, but in the English-speaking world's agreement over its use.

Note that within this tonal stresses and emphases are also codes in the communication process. As with the words themselves, tonal emphases derive their meaning from the people who use them, not from an inherent quality.

ii. **Extraverbal codes** come in a bewildering variety of forms. They include oral signals, hand gestures, posture, eye-contact, smell, space (e.g., between source and respondent), position (placement of the head higher or lower than the head of the respondent), touch, leg position, etc. Each area can carry many messages that the intercultural communicator may miss or communicate improperly if he or she is not sensitive to his or her audience. We will deal with more fully in a later lecture.

iii. **Media** is the "vehicle" used in transmitting the message. The type of media chosen will have a definite impact on how the respondents will perceive the message. Each media channel has its own advantages and disadvantages, which should be understood if we are to communicate as effectively as possible.

iv. **Redundancy:** all messages have redundant elements, often simply because they are communicated along more than one channel simultaneously. Note this sentence:

MST PPL HV LTTL DFFCLTY RDNG THS SNTNC

The missing vowels are not even necessary for most people to understand the sentence. They do reinforce the message, and help to ensure its clarity, but they are not necessary.

v. **Entropy:** every message suffers from a certain degree of randomness or uncertainty. Whether this happens in transmission (due to deterioration in the encoding, the transmission itself, or in the decoding processes) or in distortion caused by noise and context, it affects all human communication to some extent. Note this sentence:

GODISNOWHERE

The effects of entropy are seen when one has to decide whether to read "God is no where" or "God is now here".

- vi. **Noise** is any sensory data which is part of the context of communication but is not part of the actual communication event itself. It may either enhance or detract from the communication process. Do not confuse "noise" here with merely sounds--it also includes non-auditory "noise" (the feelings or mood of one of the communicators, a room that is too dark or too light, too hot or cold, etc.)
 - vii. **Total data stream:** Verbal codes, extraverbal codes (including redundant elements), entropy, and noise all combine to produce the "total data stream", which refers to all the sense information that reached the respondent in the communication event.
- c. **Participant B (respondent-source)** serves somewhat in mirror fashion to the source (respondent). Based in part on the total data stream, the respondent determines what he/she understands the message from the source to be. This does not mean that there is no message in an absolute sense. It only means that the recipient of the communication is the one who decides what he/she understands the message to be.
- i. **Reception** of the total data stream: All physical senses come into play in receiving the total data stream. The respondent hears, sees, feels, (possibly) smells, and (possibly) tastes the data sent by the source, which is by now intermingled with the noise of the context.
 - ii. **Decoding** the total data stream: The physical data are then decoded. Sound waves are turned into words, words are translated into the appropriate thoughts, etc.
 - iii. **Filtering** the decoded data stream: The total data stream contains far more information than is needed for the communication event to take place. Therefore, the respondent, both consciously and unconsciously, filters out what he/she perceives to be irrelevant data (e.g., traffic outside the room, the hum of machinery, the smell of food from next door, the coolness of air blowing on skin, etc.). The selection of "relevancy" is determined by a variety of factors included in the meaning development framework of the respondent.
 - iv. **Interpreting** the decoded and filtered data stream into a "message": Once the message, at least on the literal denotative level, is understood, it is interpreted on the connotative level. For example, if the respondent believes that the source is an habitual liar, his/her message will not be believed no matter how sincere it may appear on the surface. Again, the interpretation stems from the totality of factors in the meaning development framework.
 - v. **Responding** to the perceived message through **feedback**: In the process of feedback, the receptor and the source trade places. The receptor may give encouragement, ask for explanation, challenge, etc. In large group settings, this feedback will be mostly extraverbal. In interpersonal and small group

communication, it will include both verbal and extraverbal.

In this stage, the respondent (source) decides what to do with the communication once they have received and interpreted it.

- vi. As with the source, all receiving, decoding, filtering, interpreting, and responding takes place within the respondent's **meaning development framework**.

- d. The net effect is that the respondent determines his or her understanding of the message we seek to convey. Thus, our focus in intercultural communication must be on the audience as much as on the message. Not only must we be sure we have perceived the message clearly, we must seek to make that message clear to the audience *in their terms*. Two other activities of the receptor that are important are (Kraft, Communication Theory, pp. 97-105):
 - i. Granting, withholding, or even withdrawing permission for the source to enter their "communicational space".
 - ii. Engaging in the activity of maintaining their equilibrium. Messages that challenge them too radically for change may be ignored or answered in defensive modes. The range of acceptable change for the respondent will be determined in his or her meaning development framework.

- 9. What are the various theoretical approaches to intercultural communication? The following chart gives a brief overview (adapted from Dodd, Dynamics, pp. 25-29):

Theory	Description
Uncertainty Reduction Theory	Because we want to reduce our own uncertainty in a new setting, we initiate change (in ourself or in the culture) so that we may fit in more appropriately.
Adaptation Theory	We gradually adapt our communication skills in the process of acquiring intercultural communication competency.
Coordinated Management of Meaning and Rules Theory	The goal of communication is not <i>co-orientation of understanding</i> but <i>coordination of meaning</i> --the pattern of interaction that makes sense and is coherent to participants.
Rhetorical Theory	Based on rhetoric theory in communication; pays particular attention to context and event in communication.
Constructivism Theory	People have a cognitive system by which then can interpret the meanings and actions of others in an accurate and differentiated but sensitive way.
Social Categorization and Attribution Theory	We categorize socially, which is the basis we use to evaluate people and contexts.
Conflict and Culture Theory	Conflict is normative behavior, a form of social interaction that is regulated by cultural norms. These norms shape our conflict processes

- 10. Application: some suggested steps for a source to take to help facilitate accurate communi-

cation in a group context (Kraft, Communication Theory, pp. 198-207):

- a. Identify the particular group in your audience to which you will address your message.
- b. Identify with your chosen audience, and develop your message from within their frame of reference. Five steps can be utilized to help you in this regard (Kraft, Communication Theory, pp. 207-10):
 - i. Try to understand your audience
 - ii. On the basis of your understanding, empathize with the audience
 - iii. Seek to identify with your audience
 - iv. Based on the first three steps, participate in the life of your audience
 - v. Give yourself to the audience (self-exposure) in the process of seeking to become a "genuine, credible human being" in their eyes.
- c. As much as possible, seek to maintain control of the vehicles used in the communication interaction (including language, dress, space, furniture, etc.).
- d. Give solid attention to presenting both your person and your message so that it is within the receptor's range of tolerance.
- e. Seek to maintain credibility (note that the receptor's reference will determine how this will be accomplished)--a messenger without credibility is not listened to even if he has a good message.
- f. For a message be credible, it needs to be relevant, relating to needs felt by the receptors.
- g. The content of the message must be specifically tailored to meet the needs of the chosen audience.

11. What of modern communication theory?

- a. Hesselgrave and Rommen point out several concepts that seem well-accepted by scholars in the contemporary secular literature on communication (Hesselgrave and Rommen, Contextualization, pp. 187-8):
 - i. The very structure of language is rooted in prescientific world views and myths, in our human nervous system, and in our particular environment. It is not rooted in the world as it really is.
 - ii. Language is cast in a subject-predicate form in which the 'is' of identity is fundamental. Thus the word tends to become the thing. This is the chief cause of communication breakdown.

- iii. Language reflects and reinforces a one- and two-valued axiology in which things, people, and events are good or bad, fair or unfair, desirable or undesirable. A multivalued axiology corresponds much better with the actual world.
 - iv. Our symbol systems make it all too easy to employ (and confer an objective quality on) abstractions. We begin by labeling a behavior or an event as bad or good and end up by talking about badness and goodness as though these labels referred to something that has independent existence. It is important to remember that a statement can be true or false, but there is no such thing as truth per se.
 - v. The widespread employment of absolutes disguises the fact that they are nothing more nor less than the unwarranted objectifications of our subjective experiences and feelings. To say that a waterfall is beautiful is really to say, "To me the waterfall is beautiful." Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. There is no objective, empirically discoverable standard of beauty which enables us to say that all people should react to the waterfall in the same way.
 - vi. Meaning is in people, in sources and receptors, not in words or events or things. Words as such have no meaning. The source of a message entertains an idea which he or she then expresses in the words and phrases of a language code, but the meaning stays in the source's head. The receptor is stimulated by the words and phrases (the message) that he or she decodes into a certain meaning which, in turn, corresponds more or less to the meaning entertained by the source. But the meaning is to be located in the two minds, not in the message.
 - vii. The communication process is dynamic, not static. To understand what is happening in any given instance of communication, the interpreter must 'get into' the context, understand the world view, and examine the give and take (and much more) of the communication event in question.
- b. How can Christian communicators benefit from the insights of modern language theory? Hesselgrave and Rommen suggest five ways (Hesselgrave and Rommen, Contextualization, pp. 188-90):
- i. While surface structures among languages vary widely around the world, the deep-level similarity of all languages "has been proposed by Robert Longacre and others as an argument for the fact of creation and the existence of the *imago Dei* in humankind". Further, the study of "myth" (in the anthropological sense), in combination with that of deep-level language studies, "would enable the contextualizer to get closer to the heart of a culture--closer to its center of change" (see Conn, Eternal Word and Changing Worlds, pp. 321-9; see also Hexham and Poewe, Understanding Cults, pp. 25-45)
 - ii. Semantics and communication theory remind us that language is not the solid, rock-ribbed communication vehicle we often assume it to be. How easy it is to suppose that when we have delivered our message we have also communicated our meaning. . . . After all, word symbols are not independent of word users. *Persons* attach meaning to words, *persons* change those meanings, and *persons*

determine whether a symbol is actually a word, that is, whether or not it has meaning.

- iii. Modern theory helps us to remember that to lay hold of a symbol is not to lay hold of the referent for which it stands. It is entirely possible to know all about the symbol *God* without knowing God himself. It is possible to know the theology of salvation without being saved.
 - iv. Contemporary theorists do well to remind us that if high-level abstractions are economical . . . they also mislead because they cover up differences in reaching for similarities. Thus 'salvation' is a good word, but unless we use it advisedly it may evoke five different meanings in five different receptors . . .
 - v. Semantic theory has resulted in greater attention to the meaning of meaning itself.
- c. At the same time, we must be aware of some of the implications of modern semantic theory with which the Christian will find at least some discomfort if not outright disavowal (Hesselgrave and Rommen, Contextualization, pp. 190-1):
- i. Absolutes are now viewed with great skepticism.
 - ii. Modern semantics carries great suspicion about religious language, which necessarily deals with ethics, morals, values, etc., instead of empirical facts.
 - iii. When the instrumentalist, functionalist view of language is taken to its extreme, the emphasis shifts from propositional truths to dispositional attitudes. The focus tends to move from the fidelity of the message to the autonomy of the source and receptor, from content to impact, from form to function, from adherence to the conventions of language usage to the convolutions of the receptor's brain.
 - iv. The more rigorously we apply some of the principles of modern communication theory, "the more difficult it becomes to retain consistency and the more impractical its principles become for everyday use".