

WHEN WORDS ARE MOST IMPORTANT: 4D

A Communication Grid

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What makes Situation 4D so tough is that the person you want communication from isn't present, can't be seen (even by photography, still or vid), can't be heard (even by aud), & there's nobody who can give you firsthand impressions (nobody who was ever with, or saw, or heard that person)...4D is **your situation** when you pick up your Bible to read it or listen (as in church) to it's being read.... but I'm getting ahead of myself....

....except to ask you to think slowly about this Thinksheet's title before you read what's below.

1 As I detail the grid, I suggest that you write cue-words in the boxes, so you won't continue to stare at something meaningless.

2 This exercise is to help you experience visually (1) the difficulty in making sense out of ancient literature (Bible, Apostolic Fathers, Ecumenical Creeds..) & (2) the importance of taking the ancient wordings more seriously than words in any other situations.

3 In the 9am discussion group before worship in church today, a physician who's used to reading her patients' body-language reported that she heard the first Presidential debate on radio, then later caught TV clips that filled in the body-language for her. "On the radio, when words weren't flowing, nothing was going on; but when I saw the clips, I saw that a lot was going on in the silences!" Listening to the car radio, she was in Situation 3C (3 is "hearing," C is "radio"). When later she watched the clips, she was in Situation 2B-3B (2 is "seeing," B is "television"). If she wanted to isolate body-language for study, she would be in Situation 2B (television with the aud off). And if somebody at home had vid-recorded the debate, she've been in Situation 3B¹-2B¹--unless of course she offered the aud to study the body-language, in which case her Situation would have been 2B¹. (Yes, B¹ & C¹ are recordings.)

4 But suppose she missed both the radio & the TV of the debate, & only read the full text next day in (say) the NEW YORK TIMES. Would she not then be in Situation 4D, entirely deprived of all except the print in front of her eyes? No; for while she may never have been in the presence (A1) of either candidate, she does have vid-&-aud memory of both in settings other than the debate....And if, being neither blind nor deaf, she ever had been in the presence of either or both & saw/heard him/them speak, the communication Situation would be **max** (A1-A2-A3), the extreme from the **min** (D4, as in this Thinksheet's title). In the maximum Situation, so much is going on in addition to words; in the minimum Situation, nothing outward.

5 Now that I've detailed the whole Communication Grid, you may have noticed that the A-C communicators are each in some sense physically **alive**, & the D communicators (authors/redactors) are all physically **dead** (whatever may be said of spiritually alive, supremely as Spirit illumines text). Also, A through D moves us along a descending, deprivatory scale (visually represented by my grid)--so that by the time we arrive at D, we have the least to go on in our effort to make sense of the text.

6 Because there's so little to go on in Situation 4D, readers need help toward imaginatively-intelligently recovering the living context of the text, i.e. the situation (author, primary audience, life-world) out of which the text emerged. They need to proceed from their life through the text to the life that produced the text, & then from that life return to their life. (For this process, see "How life and literature should be related," 163-170 of my FLOW OF FLESH, REACH OF SPIRIT [Eerd./95].) One conclusion I draw from this is that only the well trained (technically, or by drill) should be permitted to read ancient textual material aloud in church. The widespread

1	X			
2	X	X		
3	X	X	X	
4				X
	A	B B'	C C'	D

current practice pf permitting the untrained to read has the effect of teaching the worshipers that the Bible isn't very interesting, thus discouraging them from private Bible reading. To put it ironically: I would permit the laity to preach, but not to do the scripture readings. (Some laity, do you say, read aloud better than some clergy--either because they are more gifted in speech, or because they are more spiritual, or both? Shameful! The seminaries should provide all three forms of training: in spirituality, in technical Scripture study, & in public reading of Scripture. All three were emphasized in my experience as seminary student before WWII.)....Yes, there are reasons other than communication for having laity sometimes do The Readings. But this Thinksheet is only about communication--here, conveying the meaning-message-feel of ancient texts by public reading....As a pastor, I trained some members for public reading, always training for each time--so they'd understand the passage, hit the pace most appropriate for it (most laity reading far too fast), make the best use of their voice with adequate volume (most laity read too softly even for most PA systems), & enunciate clearly (most laity read aloud with consonants even worse-formed than vowels). (Yesyesyes, some clergy are lousy readers; but that's another subject.)

7 Daily, Loree & I read ancient texts to each other. Just now, it's Papias, of the 3rd audio-generation from Jesus: he remembered the "living voices" of those taught by the apostles who were taught by Jesus. He "carefully remembered" (2.3) those voices & what they said. "For I did not think that the contents of books would profit me as much as what came from the living and surviving voice" (2.4). Where is Papias (his book pub. ca.AD140CE) on my Communication Grid? Obviously at 4D (the written tradition); yet more than any other ancient author he states preference for the oral tradition, for remembering the actual sounds of the elders before him, believing that he could hear at least some echoes from the Voice of the Logos-Word, the Lord Jesus (so we might slip him partway into 3C, as a nontechnological anticipator of radio & audio-recording).

8 So it's understandable that Papias is the (unofficial) patron saint of us who daily see-hear the Bible's sounds (Semitic & Hellenic), by which we are saved. Yes, we are saved by sound ("faith comes from what is heard," Ro.10.17 NRSV)--indirectly, by translation sounds. Those are wrong who claim that without remainder, sounds can be transposed into ideas, which in turn can be hewn to construct ideological altars (contrast "You must build the altar of the LORD your God of unhewn [Heb., "whole"] stones"--Deut.27.6 NRSV; cp. Josh.8.31).

If you believe this, as I do, does that make you an audiolater, a worshiper of sounds? It's a temptation, as the history of magical incantations shows, the magician imagining to have power by *using* words imagined to have inherent potency--in double contrast to the Christian belief in God's salvific power through our *hearing* of certain words which have no spiritual energy except by the touch of the divine Spirit. In both Testaments, the special case here is "the Name" (YHWH [Ex.3], Jesus [Phil.2.9-11], the Trinity [Mt.28.19]--including the Semitic sense of the person's inhabiting his/her name). In Christian hymnody, "At the Name of Jesus" (Pilgrim Hymnal 197; not in The New Century Hymnal, because too difficult to demasculinize) is an outstanding example (based on Phil.2): "At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow....'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord, who from the beginning was the mighty Word....Humbled for a season to receive a name....Faithfully he bore it...brought it back victorious....Bore it up triumphant...To the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast...Filled it with the glory of that perfect rest."

9 Everybody who had anything to do with writing the Bible is more dead than the 7 of my forebears whose voices I can "access" (remember): dozens of other ancestors I can hear *about* but can't hear, can't have firsthand audio-knowledge of: they are entirely in 4D except for the few whom I can access technologically by (2B¹) photo- or (3C¹) audio-recording. But I'm more interested in my spiritual ancestors than in my biological--supremely, in those the Bible helps me to access; & I try to pass on their word, for me the supreme medium of God's Word, *without ideological distortion* (such as "inclusive language" for the Deity). Today I read this in a manuscript of a dying Hospice patient: "Let us, before we die, harvest our heritage and prepare the feast for those who follow."