Worldview: Vital for Mission and Ministry in the 21st Century

By Paulo De Oliveira

As mission and ministry move into the twenty-first century it is becoming clear that the challenges and revolutions in technology, transportation, communication, and the philosophic postmodern condition is forever changing the landscape of the world’s societies. The question that remains to be answered is whether Seventh-day Adventist ministry and mission has the ability to adjust quickly enough in the face of such challenges to take full advantage of the opportunities that come with them. Until now, the Adventist paradigm for ministry and mission has often overlooked, or at least displayed, an inability to face such changes.

The purpose of this article is to raise awareness and encourage dialogue among Adventist scholars and missionaries about the importance of the worldview concept in doing ministry and mission in the twenty-first century. The Adventist emphasis on cognitive knowledge and behavioral change instead of working for deep changes in worldview assumptions and allegiance is not very effective when working with postmoderns. Adventists need to understand and practice the art of communicating to produce transformation at the worldview level. Movement forward toward this new paradigm of ministry and mission will be rooted in divine revelation through biblical studies but also will include work to understand the human context through human studies (figure 1).

The church is in some places already reacting to this new emerging reality. Some excellent suggestions have been offered that are beginning to bear fruit here and there. For example, the development of missional churches has changed some congregations’ self-understanding as...
to their very purpose for existence (Webber 2001:20 and Stetzer 2006:161-169. For a similar readjustment of focus among Seventh-day Adventists towards [or back] to missions see Knight 1995 and Oliver 1989).

This article suggests a paradigm shift for Adventist ministry that will encourage the church to deal with worldview level communication and transformation instead of emphasizing cognitive knowledge and behavioral change. Hopefully this article will contribute to the ongoing dialogue for this emerging framework for Adventist ministry and mission around the globe. I begin with a brief history of the worldview concept in order to show readers its importance in many academic disciplines.

A Brief History of the Worldview Concept

Worldview as a concept is found in several areas of study. The origin of the English word “worldview” is from the German word Weltanschauung, a word that was coined by Emmanuel Kant in 1790 (Kant 1987:111-112). Ever since it has been the object of research in both the secular and Christian world.

Philosophy was the earliest discipline to reflect upon worldview. Antony Flew, defining Weltanschauung, affirms that the “term is applied to a philosophy affecting the practical (as opposed to purely theoretical) attitudes and beliefs of its adherents” (Flew 1979: s.v. “Weltanschauung”). Although coined by Kant, who apparently used the term only once (Naugle 2002:59), the real metamorphosis of the term took place later with Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling who shaped the concept into a more accurate definition as “a self-realized, productive as well as conscious way of apprehending and interpreting the universe of beings” (Heidegger 1982:4).

![Figure 1. Missional Ministry.](https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jams/vol5/iss1/3)
When the term moved from philosophy to the natural sciences the inquiry shifted from abstract ideas and thoughts to questions on epistemology. The first to focus in this way was the Jewish-Hungarian scientist Michael Polanyi followed by Thomas Kuhn and his paradigm revolution (see Kuhn 1996). Thomas Kuhn recognized that the objective world that is thought to be out there by science is actually partially shaped by the scientific mind conducting scientific research. In the same fashion, Ruth Benedict stated some fifteen years before Kuhn that worldview or “custom,” as she called it, “did not challenge the attention of social theorists because it was the very stuff of their own thinking: it was the lens without which they could not see at all” (Benedict 1934:9).

The social sciences deal with things related to human patterns of behavior such as the human psyche (psychology), society (sociology), and culture (anthropology). Worldview has been the concern for psychologists in areas such as identity development, trauma, marriage, and the like. For example, Sigmund Freud denied that psychoanalysis could provide a complete worldview, for he assumed that psychoanalysis should accept the scientific one (Freud 1980:158) while Carl G. Jung proposed five relationships between psychotherapy and worldview (Jung 1966:76-78). As for sociology, people such as Peter Berger, Talcott Parson, Thomas Luckmann, Karl Mannheim, and others have provided some useful information about the topic, even though other terms are utilized to refer to what we are here calling worldview. Terms such as ideology, social frameworks, background assumptions, paradigms, etc., are linguistic differentiations of a similar subject.

Despite many contributions for worldview studies from these areas of inquiry, the field of cultural anthropology has provided the framework most helpful for the current dialogue concerning worldview in missiology. From anthropology worldview migrated into mission studies as well as into other branches of theology. The term has now become a “buzz” word and is widely used and sometimes misused for a lack of understanding. Hopefully, the following discussion will correct some of the misunderstandings.

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Toward a More Accurate View of Culture

One of the ways to begin the quest to understand worldview is to understand culture. However, any attempt to study culture will face many obstacles to find conclusive agreement on terms and concepts for until 1990 “there exists no single textbook that brings together examples of leading work” in the field of culture studies (Alexander 1990:vii).

To have an accurate understanding of culture is very important for missionaries. Thus, Van Rheenen was led to propose a “Theology of Culture” (Van Rheenen 1997:33) because “ultimately, missions seek to bring every aspect of culture under the rule of God” (1997:38). It is true that a poor conceptualization of culture has led to cross-cultural confusion and ethnocentrism in the past. And as the world increasingly becomes culturally diverse, successful missions in the twenty-first century will be largely defined by the missionary understanding of culture.

Popular View of Culture

The word “culture” has often been used to indicate an attitude or behavior of the rich and elite (Hiebert 1981:367), and often refers to certain personal aspects such as cordial behavior toward others (“a gentleman”), preference for classical music, knowing and practicing rules of etiquette. In Brazil, for instance, one would refer to a person with such attributes as culto, or a person who has “culture.” For those that do not display such characteristics, one would refer to them as sem cultura, or a person who has no “culture” at all. In this sense, we equate culture to the behavior of the rich and educated and marginalize the poor and oppressed. A missionary with such a poor understanding of culture may develop an attitude of superiority toward non-Western or non-Westernized cultures, viewing them as inferior. Some even assume that missions is a movement from the superior to the inferior, from the sophisticated to the wild, and from the Christian to the pagan. A balanced view of culture by missionaries and an understanding of worldview depends on understanding the concepts of cultural dimensions.

Cultural Dimensions

Hiebert presents three dimensions of culture: ideas, feelings, and values (Hiebert 1985:30). The Cognitive Dimension is the shared knowledge of a society providing the “conceptual content” for culture, informing people about what is real and what is not (1985:30-32). Different cultures will use different ways to preserve cultural knowledge such as books, stories, proverbs, rituals, etc. Adventist missionaries need to be aware of this dimension for contextualizing the gospel message. In one culture the gospel may be communicated through lectures, but in another one it may be necessary to use dramatization and music. A second dimension is the Affective Dimension that deals with...
cultural feelings and has to do with people’s “notion of beauty, tastes in food and dress, likes and dislikes, and ways of enjoying themselves or experiencing sorrow” (1985:32-33). This dimension plays a major part in church life. This is the dimension people use for their preferences in areas of music or worship styles. Taste and preference is firmly linked to our cultural context in history more than to logical reasoning.

The last dimension is the *Evaluative Dimension* that provides evaluative service to the other dimensions of culture in terms of true or false, judging emotional expressions, and reviewing values to determine right and wrong (1985:33-34).

**Defining Culture**

As a basis for understanding worldview, culture must be accurately understood as “the more or less integrated systems of ideas, feelings, and values and their associated patterns of behavior and products shared by a group of people who organize what they think, feel, and do” (Hiebert 1985:30). This definition implies some of the ground rules for making the case for studying worldview as it relates to Adventist missions: (1) all cultures are valid ways of living for the members of the given culture; (2) cultures must not be compared in terms of better or worse, but in terms of diversity in ways of living; (3) all cultures must be appreciated; (4) cultures are not neutral, they all have good and evil that must be checked against the standard of Scripture; (5) as we approach different cultures we must understand that God has been active in that culture before the arrival of the missionary; (6) culture is the context where missions happen; (7) culture is the place for a theology in progress; (8) cultures are not to be replaced or rejected but embraced and shaped according to Scriptures; (9) all cultures can contribute to a dialogue on biblical hermeneutics; and (10) no culture should be viewed as the Christian default culture or as superior over other cultures (figure 2).

**Understanding Worldview**

Worldview is the silent force that explains, gives meaning, and evaluates in order to produce behavior. . . . Human beings are captives to their worldview.
to their worldview. It is, however, a very complex and abstract concept in human studies and is difficult to grasp. Worldview is not something that one can sit down and write a list about one’s own worldview assumptions and premises. They are neither clearly perceived nor rapidly recognized.

Worldview, as the deepest level of culture, has several characteristics and functions. Before one can understand worldview and know how to analyze it, it is important to understand its nature, characteristics, functions, and how worldview impacts people as they process a cultural event as it passes through the cognitive, affective, and evaluative filters. This process is very important to understand since behavior is the outward visible manifestation of worldview assumptions and is also the process missionaries use in discovering, analyzing, and hopefully changing worldviews.

**Nature of Worldview**

Worldviews are invisible, abstract concepts about the world located in a hidden dimension of culture that are made visible through external manifestations such as behavior and speech. Differentiation must be made between *worldview assumptions* and *worldview*. Assumptions are single propositions about the world that are to be understood as “statements about a perceived truth, based on the logic of a particular culture” (Bradshaw 2002:18). Worldview is the totality of one’s worldview assumptions. Both dimensions are important in discovering cultural propositions and producing changes. Missionaries have the goal to produce worldview level change. To be able to recognize and analyze world-

![Figure 2. Levels of Culture.](source: Class notes, Applied Missiology for Pastors, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, Fall 2004; and Hiebert 1997:84.)
view assumptions, evaluate them (in the light of Scripture), and produce changes toward a biblically shaped worldview, one needs to understand both the inside and outside aspects of worldview.

**Inside Outlook**

To look at worldview from the inside outlook is to recognize or to read worldview assumptions. Three levels of assumptions help to perceive worldview “functioning internally as parts of worldviews” (Kraft 2008:252) and as the major internal mechanisms of worldview. By discovering worldview themes missionaries can understand behavior and analyze a given culture by comparing the theme to Scripture in order to define what needs to be dealt with in that culture to transform it towards a biblically shaped worldview.

The first level of worldview assumptions consists of *themes*. This concept was developed to indicate “a postulate or position, declared or implied, and usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity, which is tacitly approved or openly promoted in a society” (Opler 1968:198). As an example, a hypothesis of a North American worldview theme is given by Kraft that postulates that “money and/or material possessions are the measure of success” (Kraft 2008:254). A worldview theme will have subsequent assumptions related to the theme. These sub propositions are called *subthemes*, and a third level of worldview assumptions are *paradigms*. Figure 3 can help us to perceive how worldview assumptions work to prescribe values, beliefs, and behavior.

Readers should be advised that worldviews are not stable and neat ideas. Themes, subthemes, and paradigms are didactic ways to make worldview understandable. Other categories can be detected.

**Outside Outlook**

The above categories help us to look from the inside outlook of a worldview. Single worldview assumptions and premises all together will form what Hiebert calls cultural integration (Hiebert 1985:42). The collection of these assumptions and premises about reality forms a worldview which is the outside outlook of a worldview (see figure 4). Therefore, when one talks about an American worldview, one is making reference to
the constellation of assumptions of the individuals inside the United States’ culture.

**Characteristics of Worldview**

There are five main characteristics of worldview that are as important as its nature (see Kraft 1996:55-58). First, worldview assumptions are not “reasoned out, but assumed to be true without prior proof.” Second, worldview assumptions provide people with interpretative cultural lenses and maps that shape the way they perceive the world around them and interpret it. Third, people will organize their lives in terms of worldview assumptions as integrated wholes, which will seldom be questioned unless something occurs that cannot be easily harmonized. Fourth, worldview differences are the most difficult situations to deal with when different cultures come in contact with each other. Because worldview assumptions are not reasoned out, it seldom occurs to the members of a culture that there are people who have different assumptions. People assume that their reality is universal, and that everyone lives their lives in the same way they do. This characteristic is responsible for many cultural clashes and much stress. Lastly, people and worldview function together. Worldviews are tools humans use to make sense of the world and derive meaning for their existence. To talk about cultural structure (worldview, beliefs, and values) is to talk about a person who does things.

Worldview serves people in different ways. Didactically, the various ways are called functions of worldview.

**Functions of Worldview**

There are many worldview functions, but four of them people use on a daily basis. The

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<th>Levels</th>
<th>Worldview</th>
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<td>1. Theme</td>
<td>• Money and/or possessions are the measure of success</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Subtheme</td>
<td>• Time is money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Paradigm</td>
<td>• The value of a person can be calculated in terms of net monetary worth</td>
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Figure 3. American Worldview Theme, Subtheme, and Paradigm. Source: Kraft 2008:254.
first is explanation. This function supplies people with cognitive material to create a system of explanations that supports a people’s belief system. Different worldview assumptions lead to different conclusions about the same matter because data is explained differently. This function provides emotional stability and comfort. A second function is validation/evaluation. This is the function people use to evaluate experiences. It is important to understand that, in doing mission, the most important reality is not the missionary’s but the people’s view of reality since they are constantly evaluating and prescribing meaning in order to make sense of what is happening. A third function is integration. Worldview integrates culture as a whole. “It organizes our ideas, feelings, and values into a single overall design” (Hiebert 1985:48). It creates images which are more or less accurate pictures of the world, “images that mirror the world” (Kearney 1984:5). These very images, although not totally accurate, are used to guide action. A fourth worldview function is to monitor change. Worldview is composed of dynamic assumptions that are constantly confronted and challenged by new information and experiences coming from one’s own culture or from other cultures. These new assumptions may be contrary to an existing assumption or just slightly different. In both circumstances, when a worldview is challenged, instability is created at the worldview level, producing discomfort. This tension will disrupt the worldview task of integrating culture. Thus, because of the internal contradiction, related worldview assumptions will be used to produce an explanation that evaluates and validates one or the other assumptions.

Figure 4. Constellation of Assumptions and Premises Equal Worldview. Source: By the author.
with the intention of reducing the tension and discomfort. The final product of this process may be a gradual change in worldview. Many people, however, may never be aware of the worldview transformation that took place.

The discussion so far has provided the reader with fundamental information to understand the working of worldview within a culture as it prescribes meaning and determines personal behavior. Cultural behavior or products will always be a reaction to a reality perceived, namely, an external stimulus. The reality perceived will be filtered through worldview lenses that will shape what is being seen. This perception process is fundamental to understanding human behavior, which is the material missionaries will use to hypothesize in worldview analysis. This process is repeated thousands of times every day as people react to external stimulus. The action is the visible manifestation of a person’s worldview. Thus, by learning to recognize and biblically shape a person’s worldview missionaries may permanently change behavior toward Christian behavior.

The basic information so far will be harmonized in one model, hopefully enabling readers to see worldview at work as it shapes reality and prescribes behavior.

**Worldview at Work**

As presented above, cultures may be divided into three dimensions, namely, cognitive, affective, and evaluative. In figure 5, these dimensions are placed in a three-dimensional image with the worldview as the foundation of culture. In short, external events are experienced by a person simultaneously through the two dimensions of cognition (beliefs) and affection (feelings). Cognition checks if what has been experienced is in accordance with the established assumptions; affection will react based on the feelings perceived by the experience. If the perceived experience agrees with the established worldview assumptions, the feeling dimension will experience certainty; but if the perceived experience disagrees with the worldview set, instability and discomfort will be the reaction. These two dimensions communicate their information to the third level of culture (evaluative) which will evaluate if what is experienced is valued and at what level of
priority or value. Based on the communicated information, the person will make a decision that will generate a behavior or a cultural product.

The intention here is to paint a picture of the filtering process. When a person acts, the result of the person using worldview to interpret, assign meaning, and then prescribe adequate responses is seen. The adequate response is manifested in a behavior or cultural product that reflects the process and the worldview level. Therefore, worldview is the basis for behavior (act or speech).

Beyond prescribing behavior, worldview assumptions are the very propositions about reality that define our relationship with others. These propositions, mostly shared through ontological narratives, are taught through a process of interaction between the Self and the Others, forming a more or less coherent view of the world. Despite cultural differences, the worldview of any given culture defines reality and has the responsibility to explain and evaluate events by the established worldview prescribed by a particular culture to the individual. Therefore, behavior, in all its formats, is the external manifestation of the deeper worldview assumptions and premises.

As the deepest assumptions about reality, worldview should be the focus of any mission. Mastering the message or tools of mission is not enough to produce deep changes in allegiance. A classic example is Paul and Barnabas' visit to Lystra (Acts 14:8-20). The message and the miracles were interpreted according to the local cultural worldview. The result was catastrophic for the gospel and for the mission of Paul and Barnabas in that city. There is

![Diagram of the Dimensions of Culture at Work](Image)

*Figure 5. The Dimensions of Culture at Work. Source: Hiebert 2008:26.*
no subsequent story of the same nature, which may indicate that they learned that people will interpret events according to their own worldview.

The discussion so far makes the point that in doing ministry and mission the perceived reality of the people is what counts in trying to communicate and produce Christian transformation cross-culturally.

**Worldview Analysis**

It is my firm belief that the final purpose of Adventist mission is to create a biblically shaped worldview in any given cultural context. In order to accomplish this purpose missionaries need to more than understand worldview concepts; they also must be able to analyze and biblically shape cultures. In terms of mission, awareness of one’s own worldview and others’ worldview is as essential as having biblical or theological knowledge. There is a reality that “outsiders consistently misinterpret the phenomena of cultures exotic to them in terms of the implicit categories of their own culture” (Handler 2004:490) and it is my belief that the same is true for missionaries. The difference is that for the latter the consequences may be rejection, distortion, or inappropriate understanding of the gospel message as well as other problems such as equating cultural aspects with biblical revelation and the like.

A word of caution is due in dealing with worldview analysis. To study another culture’s assumptions is to expose one’s own culture. It is like holding up a mirror that enables people to see their own assumptions, prejudices, and flaws. When dealing with worldview analysis the first worldview to be analyzed is one’s own. This process may be painful but necessary in order to check the missionaries’ own culture. Worldview analysis is a search for cultural meaning (Geertz 1973:5) and not rigid cultural laws. These meanings of one’s own worldview provide a system that will be reflected in one’s values and behavior (Kwast 1981:364) as one enters in direct contact with the people one wants to biblically shape. It is wise to keep in mind the following advice:

We must begin where we are, with ourselves. “Know thyself” is a useful reminder. . . . Work spent articulating one’s worldview, one’s assumptions about how the world works, why it is as it is, and what
might improve it is work worth doing. It . . . should make us more effective (Myers 1999:59).

The rational for the quest of worldview analysis, which is the prerequisite for any attempt to influence others at the worldview level, is that there are common worldview elements throughout different cultures. Although a worldview is private in the sense that it exists within a person, it is manifested in the public arena since common assumptions are also shared within a culture. Therefore, missionaries searching for worldview assumptions in a given culture will mostly observe, question, search, listen, and learn from individuals within a social group.

**Worldview Universals**

Anthropologists Robert Redfield and later on Michael Kearney developed a model indicating the process of categorization or classification that an individual goes through by looking at the universe from a certain point of view. The model of *Worldview Universals* follows the rational that there are basic categories of assumptions that every people group needs to deal with. This model provides us with a way of perceiving shared commonalities that would help in the process of comparing cultures. For example, spiritual powers have very little to do with daily events in the mind of many Americans. In contrast, for South Americans, the awareness of the influence of spiritual powers such as demons is a constant.

This model follows a similar path of how doctors work. A doctor works in terms of a set of core assumptions so that even though he is confronted with different patients those common elements will guide in the diagnosis. The analysis is based on blood pressure, pulse, respiration, etc. The doctor will pay attention to these vital signs and will reach different conclusions for different patients. In the area of worldview universals this principle also seems to be true. It is this set of commonalities common to all cultures that makes analysis and comparison possible.

The worldview universals are *Classification, Self, Other, Causality, Time*, and *Space*. Here missionaries will observe cultural products such as books, popular proverbs, stories, music, speech, etc., in order to create hypothesis of worldview assumptions.

1. **Classification.** As people grow older they are given information about the world. This information needs to be classified to give order to the world. In a practical way, all cultures name reality (objects, social categories, people, animals, supernatural entities, etc.) dividing them into categories. Any attempt to analyze a worldview will largely deal with the “major categories of reality recognized by a people and the criteria by which they group the contents of these categories together” (Kearney 1984:78).
2. **Self.** The second universal is the most necessary and basic concept of life, therefore, the “first requirement of a worldview,” is namely, the Self (1984:68). This universal reflects the human quest to discover the true nature of human beings. For example, Kearney relates to the Spanish use of the “reflexive-verb constructions such as ‘my tooth hurts me,’ or ‘my body does not wish to heal itself’” (1984:69) as a manifestation of a worldview of the Self. This implies that the Self is within the body but somehow with a separate existence. This concept may be explained by the popular Catholic teaching that man is composed of body (matter) and spirit. Generating hypothesis about the Self is a primary step forward in assessing worldview assumptions.

3. **Other.** The notion or perception of Other is the third element in a list of worldview universals, and denotes everything that is not the Self. The idea of Other is a complement of the Self (1984:71) since the Self attains its identity in relationship with the Other. This relationship is understood to be positive, negative, or neutral and is used to define what kind of relationship people will have. For instance, people learn how to relate to co-workers in an ethical way that may give the appearance that the workers know each other very well when, in fact, there is a “professional relationship” with clear boundaries for those involved in that relationship that often keep them from personally knowing their co-workers. Also, we learn to love family members and to keep a safe distance from strangers. In essence, we learn how to classify Other in groups because our worldview prescribes how to treat each type (Kraft 2001:110).

4. **Causality.** Causality follows Self and Other as the fourth worldview universal because it is dependant on the previous two. Self and Other are the “back bone of a worldview” (Kearney 1984:88). Causality is related to what is commonly known as cause and effect. It seeks to understand the power or powers behind events and seeks answers for such questions as “What causes things? What forces are at work in the universe?” (Kraft 2008:193). It is important to remind the reader that worldview
assumptions provide purpose for life, explain the past (events), provide meaning for the present (moment), and offer guidance for the future.

5. *Time*. The fifth worldview universal is the notion of Time. Things are located in time; people live in a temporal context (Kearney 1984:90). The notion of time, however, will vary depending on the culture. In the West people see time as daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, seasons, etc. Time is considered to be divided into past, present, and future. Other cultures, however, may see time in different ways. As a consequence, daily lives of a people through elements such as “settlement patterns, house construction, architecture in general, the arrangement of furniture, folk dances, and so forth” (1984:92). From a missiological point of view, worldview assumptions about space have far-reaching consequences in the way we construct buildings and infuse theological meaning to secular/material and sacred/spiritual places. Then there is the space notion of heaven, the location of angels in relation to humans, and so on. The notion of space needs serious attention in cross-cultural mission because they will behave and believe differently according to their view of time. It is especially important for Adventism to understand the notion of time because the seventh day, as the biblical Sabbath, is a biblical teaching related to the notion of time.

6. *Space*. The last worldview universal is the notion of Space. Time and space mirror the virtual inseparability of Self and Other as presented above and are largely related or co-related. The definition of space is broader than just geographic measurement. The notion of space is revealed in the space plays a defining role in the integrated worldview system.

One should not think that if the worldview universals described here are discovered for a particular culture then the missionary has mastered a people’s worldview. The worldview universals presented here are just an initial point for worldview analysis helping to touch the surface. There are other models for worldview analysis that can also be used by missionaries (see Sire 2004; Sire 1997; Myers 1991; Jayakaran 1999).
Creating Hypothesis

The next step in worldview analysis is to begin mapping the worldview themes, sub-themes, and paradigms, as described above, as well as identifying the role they play as themes and counter-themes. Due to their relationship, themes act as determiners of beliefs, values, and behavior but also as a restraint against other themes. When a theme is functioning as restrainer it is defined as a counter-theme (Opler 1968:202). This understanding of limiting forces is believed by Opler to be the key to understand how equilibrium or integration is achieved in a culture (1968:201). The goal of the themes and counter-themes at the worldview level is to reduce the possibility that one theme might become so powerful as to disturb cultural harmony.

The creation of hypothesis will largely depend on the observation and creativity of the observer. Testing worldview hypothesis, on the other hand, will also depend on the application of tools of verification to define whether the hypothesis is true, false, or in need of adjustment. There are two main ways for checking hypothesis. First, ask questions. After formulating your hypothesis about a given behavior, ask insiders questions about the formulation (Jones 1972:80). Second, since worldview assumptions are integrated and influence or overlap each other, look for other behaviors that may shed light to confirm or challenge the hypothesis (1972:80).

Although one should always be ready to question the answers, honest answers will often be found if the observer has developed significant relationships with the insiders who will be serving as the cultural informants. In the final analysis, worldview themes are integrated and may be tested either by comparison or counting the expression of themes throughout the culture. Keep in mind, however, that worldview assumptions are internally inconsistent and contradictory at times (Kearney 1984:135). Through the exercise of creating worldview hypothesis in analyzing a culture, missionaries are preparing the way for worldview transformation, for the goal is to help people move toward a biblically shaped worldview.

The question of hypothesis must be addressed to avoid imposition by one’s own distorted ideas. Through hypothesis a tentative conclusion based on personal observations and logical rational concerning phenomena is suggested. The hypothesis may be right or wrong, so to find out its true nature one must test it. In doing so, missionaries may be prevented from being determinist in their worldview analysis where they would create a “reality” that is not there. If that happens, chances are the decisions and strategies following that particular hypothesis may be very wrong or at least distorted. In this sense, generating hypothesis is always tentative.
Worldview Transformation: Toward a Biblically Shaped Worldview

One of my strongest held positions in this article is my firm belief that the goal of missiology is to produce permanent change at the deepest levels of allegiance to Christ and his revealed will in Scripture. There is a danger of being satisfied with superficial change. As Jayakaran warns, “communities that claim to be Christian, but have not had their worldviews transformed, are likely to forge deities to address their vulnerabilities or try to twist God to fulfill a utilitarian role” (Jayakaran 1999:33). The danger that I have seen in my own experience is that too often assumptions at the worldview level are not altered. As a result, a person may follow the “churchy” new behavior or belief for a period of time, but sooner or later the untouched worldview assumptions reassert their pull on the life and the person reverts back to the old ways of living. Shenk warns, “Superficial cultural changes leave undisturbed the issues of allegiance and Christian identity” (Shenk 2002:99).

This article suggests that worldview transformation occurs by creating instability at the worldview level, providing new explanations, and, as a result, a new cultural integration occurs that will incorporate the new worldview assumptions with the rest of a person’s assumptions, shaping the new worldview and restoring stability. In addition, it is suggested that a new experience is the most powerful way to produce worldview change. Therefore, Adventist mission must find a balance between explanation and the use of experience as agents of worldview transformation.

No culture needs to undergo total transformation in order to become Christian. Worldview themes that are contrary to biblical truths are those that need to change. The goal is to create a biblically shaped worldview instead of superimposing one’s own culture and its worldview on the people one is witnessing to.

Too often among Seventh-day Adventists there appears to exist a perception that Western Christianity (Adventism) is the “right” way of doing church, and rarely are efforts made to encourage local cultural ways of expression that are relevant and biblical. Instead, the Western church model, music, strategies, clothing, administration, etc., are assumed to be part of a biblical worldview.
of the gospel message with the result that the church is perceived as foreign. Local cultural elements are often reflected as non-Christian or as not compatible with the Adventist lifestyle even if they do not go against biblical principles. The solution is to allow Scripture to be the judge of all cultures. Worldview assumptions must be checked under the light of Scripture to define which worldview themes need to be changed and which ones may remain.

Christians from all cultures are called to develop a biblically oriented life that does not just impact their belief system, but is deeply rooted in their worldview assumptions. Again, the goal of any mission effort, therefore, is to allow the biblical message to transform any culture by moving toward a biblically shaped worldview. In this sense, a Mongolian Seventh-day Adventist will be as Adventist as an American one. This idea frees the church in various cultural settings to be united in Christ, but still maintain its cultural identity and peculiarities.

Conclusion

Paul Hiebert, one of the main missiologists to bring worldview concepts to mission studies, affirmed that in the new paradigm of post-postmodernism, worldview is the key issue (Hiebert 2008). Christian workers need to evaluate their own lenses before they can examine (and hopefully transform) the lenses of those they minister to. Christian witnesses need to assess their own assumptions and premises and do the hard work of bringing them under the scrutiny of Scripture, for “we will live either the examined or the unexamined life” (Sire 1997:18). Worldview concepts help us see and understand our own lenses that shape the way we view the world, but those same concepts allow us to understand the assumptions of the people we want to minister to.

Understanding worldview is a critical issue in contemporary missions, social development, cross-cultural communication, ministry, and several other areas because people use their core worldview assumptions to make sense of their world as well as to guide and prescribe behavior in daily life. There is a growing need for understanding different worldviews and being sensitive to the assumptions people make about reality when presenting the gospel message. In an era of pluralism and the postmodern condition, managing worldview level transformation can be the great differential toward a truly converted church for the twenty-first century.

To have an awareness of the impact of people’s worldview in their perception of reality is overdue. The fact that there are assumptions and premises that shape people’s perception of everything they say and do leads to questions about current strategies, methodologies, curriculums, and church models that Adventists are currently using. In an enlightening reflec-
tion on his long-term missionary experience, Clifton Maberly provides an account of applied theories, practices, and results of doing mission informed by social sciences that challenges current strategies and methodologies. He recognizes that doing missions based on people’s perception of reality is not business as usual and there is a “need for much more missiological training among local leaders of the church” (Maberly 2005:265). One leading missiologist says that “mission calls us to radical reexamination” (Van Engen 1991:80). Worldview studies call Adventist ministry and mission to a radical reexamination of the impact of a people’s worldview as the church seeks to accomplish its mission.

Works Cited


