

Editorial

Contextualization is a word that some love and some hate. There is also a lot of misunderstanding about what contextualization does or does not do. For those of us in the Department of World Mission at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University the term describes the process of presenting the eternal and unchanging teachings and principles of God's Word in understandable ways within each cultural setting. There is no watering down of truth, no adapting the presentation of God's Word to make it more acceptable in difficult cultural settings. Paul Hiebert calls this process Critical Contextualization, meaning a careful process—see a more complete description of this later in my article about contextualization in Cambodia.

This issue of the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* focuses on case studies of various attempts to communicate God's message in understandable ways in a variety of cultural settings. One of the challenges facing the Seventh-day Adventist Church is that since it was founded and grew out of a North American environment most church practices, ceremonies, art, architecture, methods for presenting the gospel, appropriate dress, and many other areas of Adventist life are dominated by the American way of doing things.

For North American Adventists and believers in most Western countries this approach to church life causes few problems; however, in much of the rest of the world and especially among people in the world religions of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, the Western flavor of Adventism is a barrier and causes the gospel to be labeled as foreign. We know that the good news is for all and that Jesus Christ is the Savior of all people of the earth, yet too often Adventist mission has been packaged in Western garb that keeps people from hearing about God's love. People should never reject the gospel because it was presented in ways that are comfortable and acceptable in some other part of the world.

Contextualization is a difficult process. This is especially true in the areas of music and art. Most of us have the habit of thinking that "good" music and art are what we like and "bad" music and art are what is different, strange, or unknown. Look at the Thai art in this issue and begin to realize how vastly different the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan can be presented in various settings. Yet, when a Thai person looks at those pictures they are able to understand what is taking place in the battle between good and evil.

Bruce L. Bauer, editor