Cross-Cultural Evangelism:
The Challenge Facing Adventism Today

By Patricia Jo Gustin

To be Adventist is to believe in evangelism. From their earliest beginnings, Adventists have concentrated on reaching out to others in various forms of evangelism. The bedrock of Adventism is three flying angels, sharing the everlasting gospel to “every nation, tribe, tongue and people” (Rev 14:6 NKJV). This commitment to evangelize the world has rested heavily on the literature ministry and the preaching ministry. For over 100 years the Adventist Church has invested much of its energy as well as a majority of its budgets, and human resources into these ministries. The commitment to go “into all the world to preach the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” (Matt 28:19, 20 KJV) has dominated Adventism.

Looking Back

Early Adventists followed a basic pattern in entering new territories around the world. Initially they relied heavily on evangelistic literature which they “scattered like the leaves of autumn” (White 1948:79). This introduced people to the new biblical truths Adventists had discovered. Later, evangelists gathered interested people to hear the message presented with vigor and assurance. In those early days of Adventist evangelism, this method was used first only in North America (1840s-1870s) but later in Europe, Australia, and southern Africa (beginning in the 1870s). Evangelistic endeavors focused almost exclusively on sharing the Adventist understanding of the Bible with other Protestant Christians through literature and preaching. Reaching out to Catholics and non-Christians (mostly animists) would not come for another twenty years (Knight 1995:67-68).

From the beginning, Adventists’ ability to be persuasive...
with others who shared a Christian heritage has been notable. They were especially successful with Protestants, but eventually also with Catholics. The planting of strong churches in many parts of the world during those years attests to that early evangelistic success. In Australia, various countries in Europe, South Africa, most of the countries of Central and South America, the Philippines, and in some of the other Pacific islands, Adventism took root and flourished as the result of preaching and literature-based evangelism.

Beginning in the 1890s work was begun with people from Catholic and animistic backgrounds, and eventually Adventist mission experienced considerable success among these two groups as well. However, even then the greatest success was primarily among those who had previously been converted to a Protestant denomination (Knight 1995:71). The “added truth” approach continued to succeed. Only later did seeking to reach those who had no previous Protestant or Christian understandings become a focus. Over time it became apparent that people from these other religious backgrounds must be approached differently, often including some kind of power encounter or confrontation and more indirect methods. This was eventually followed up with standard evangelistic literature and presentations, with baptism often delayed for two years or more. Early missionaries understood the importance of the need for a variety of methods and long-term discipling and nurturing of converts coming from non-Christian backgrounds.

For more than 150 years, Adventist evangelistic methodology has changed little. As time and technology moved on, evange-
reach. They have traditionally been formulated as, using a dialectical apologetic style, a Western, English, linear logic system, having as a presupposition foundational knowledge of Christianity (sometimes even an assumption of a previous conversion experience), and using a proof text presentation of Scripture.

Throughout the years, efforts to apply this otherwise successful approach to those from non-Christian backgrounds have proved unsuccessful. What worked so well with those from Christian backgrounds, however, has more often than not failed in working with non-Christians, especially with those from the major world religions—Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Judaism.

In spite of this failure, the Adventist Church has clung tenaciously to this traditional literature and preaching based evangelism model in its recent focus on reaching the most gospel-resistant parts of the world. Most cross-cultural evangelism today, even when translated into a local language, still uses standardized sermons, media materials, and literature that were originally developed to reach Western Protestant audiences, with some form of preaching/teaching as the main method. Many of the people Adventists seek to evangelize today, however, come from non-Christian backgrounds or cultures that have worldviews, logic systems, and needs vastly different from those that Western Adventists are familiar with. Anecdotal evidence abounds of high dropout rates, apostasy, and a syncretistic mingling of Christian and non-Christian practices and beliefs.

Syncretistic practices exist in many parts of the world. Some, in places where the church has been planted recently, but the problem also exists in places where the church has been established for a hundred years or more. Frighteningly, such practices exist at all levels of the church, even among longtime Adventists, including administrators and pastors in some cases. This challenge obviously raises the question of how such a thing can happen, and equally importantly, how it can be dealt with now and avoided in the future. It appears that aspects of the traditional cultures and religions have never been adequately addressed, thus lingering on, in some cases after years of apparent fidelity to Adventist doctrine and basic practices.

How Change Takes Place

The danger of oversimplifying a problem and offering simplistic answers is clear. When a similar pattern emerges repeatedly around the world, however, it is essential to search for commonalities. To understand some of the factors that explain what causes syncretism and similar problems, and how they can be minimized and dealt with,
it is essential to consider how change takes place.

The obvious purpose of evangelism is to bring change. Evangelism brings people to the change experience called “conversion.” What kinds of change are anticipated in the conversion experience? A change of beliefs? A change of lifestyle? A change of religion/denomination? The answer would undoubtedly be “all of the above.” Correct understanding of biblical truth has always been a high priority for a biblically-based church. In addition, there is an expectation of a change in behavior—walking in newness of life, giving up a destructive lifestyle. Change in these two areas would generally lead to a change of religion/denomination. An analysis of Adventist evangelistic messages around the world indicates that these are the primary foci. If, however, the results of this evangelism are not effective, the question must be asked: Is there more to the change of conversion than this, especially for those coming from non-Christian backgrounds?

Charles Kraft, noted missiologist, states that in conversion there must ultimately be three encounters—truth, power, and allegiance (1996:408-413). These three encounters can be summarized as follows:

Truth: Truth encounters confront human error and include knowledge and understanding about God as revealed in both Scripture and life. The vehicle of this encounter is primarily teaching. To bring lasting change, however, the encounter must be “personal and experiential, not merely a matter of words and head knowledge” (1999a:410). Ultimately, it must also interact with the other two encounters.

Allegiance(s): Allegiance encounters are concerned with relationships. They “involve the exercise of the will in commitment and obedience to the Lord, [and] are the most important of the encounters. For without commitment and obedience to Jesus, there is no spiritual life” (1989:408-413). To effectively help new converts change allegiance, their former allegiances must first be identified. Are they ancestors? Spirits? Materialism? Power? Drugs? After these have been identified, the long

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process of changing allegiance begins.

*Power:* Power encounters focus on freedom from the enemy’s captivity. To be effective these encounters must engage the real controlling powers in the individual’s life. Only as these powers are recognized and challenged on an ongoing basis can deep change result (Kraft 1989:408-413).

Working in Western contexts, Adventists have felt successful in truth encounters. But have the necessary adaptations been made to truly engage other belief systems in truth encounters? And what of the other two encounters—allegiance and power? How can these deeper needs be addressed? How can reaching all of these goals be prioritized and Adventist evangelism refocused to reach them?

As previously stated, over the years using the beliefs and behavior approach in evangelizing people who already hold Christian presuppositions has been successful. For such people, this “truth encounter” was, and continues to be, what is needed. The immediate and the long-term results have generally been positive. Among many converts, however, the results have been vastly different. Focusing on the *truth encounter* of beliefs and behaviors alone has not brought the lifelong, three-level change that is needed in true conversion. Kraft further states:

Throughout the world many Christians who have committed themselves to Jesus Christ, and who have embraced much Christian truth, have not given up their pre-Christian commitment to and practice of what we call spiritual power. . . . So they live with a “dual allegiance” and a syncretistic understanding of truth (1999a:409).

He summarizes the problem succinctly.

Many of us evangelicals grew up with a knowledge-truth brand of Christianity that pays little if any attention to power encounters. But we go out to witness and evangelize among people who have grown up in spirit-oriented societies and often find that solid lasting conversions to Christ are hard to achieve with our knowledge-truth approach alone (1999a:413).

**Change and Culture**

How does this deep, life-altering change that includes truth, allegiance, and power encounters take place? This question can be addressed by a brief review of the culture model that has been used as a reference point for cross-cultural missionaries. This model has been especially effective for those considering the issue of the radical change that is anticipated in evangelism/mission across cultures. Think of the layers of culture as the layers of an onion.

The outer layer of the “cultural onion” is summarized here as the *behavior* level. This is all of the tangible parts of life, that which
is observable of how people live. The various aspects of life viewed at this level differ greatly around the world, and much at this level is neutral. This level of culture primarily answers the questions of what, when, where, and how people do things and organize themselves.

Just below the surface of the more-or-less readily observable behavioral layer is the area of beliefs. These are the answers a culture gives to the why questions of life. It is how they explain at the conscious level what they accept as true.

Underneath these two layers—behaviors and beliefs—is the next layer that intertwines with the beliefs and behaviors. This is the area of cultural values that bind a people together and give validity and deeper reason for their beliefs and behaviors. For instance, a culture that holds the worth of the individual as an extremely high cultural value might express that value in the belief that “all persons are created equal” and the resultant behaviors would frequently be highly individualistic rather than communal. Because the values level is more deeply buried than behavior and belief, it is harder to access, identify, understand, and address.

Undergirding all of these is worldview, the very basic core of the cultural onion. According to missionary anthropologist Charles Kraft, “Worldview is the culturally structured set of assumptions (including values and commitments/allegiances) underlying a people’s perception of reality and their responses to those perceptions” (1999:385). These perceptions therefore determine what they think, feel, and do. The key points of this definition are that worldview (1) is assumptions about reality, (2) includes values and allegiances, and (3) determines (or controls) the rest of life.

According to Paul Hiebert, an additional significant characteristic of worldview is that it is largely unconscious (1985:45). Worldview assumptions are taken for granted without analysis or thought on a conscious level. A culture functions with them as “givens” for life and the universe. Some have likened worldview to eyeglasses through which one views the world. People do not usually “see” their eyeglasses, but rather see through them, without thinking about them; the glasses just bring the world into focus and clarify the things seen. This is the same way that worldview works.

Another illustration that helps to understand how worldview works and its unconscious power in life is to compare it to the way gravity operates in the physical realm. On a daily basis people never think about gravity. At an early age, trial and error permanently fix the reality of this invisible part of life into a person’s mind and muscles. Hundreds of times each day, people interact with this unconscious force and
make decisions based on their unconscious assumption that gravity exists. Similarly, people are not generally aware of their own worldview. It just is. Like gravity, it unconsciously affects all aspects of life without any awareness. And because worldview develops so early in life, and so unconsciously, people usually do not even know where those assumptions come from. Even though worldview is below the level of consciousness, it is the most powerful part of culture, subconsciously controlling values, beliefs, and behaviors hundreds of times a day. For the Christian, a prayer life (a behavior) is rooted in the belief that prayer is a way of connecting with God. This belief is based on the value of having a relationship with God. All of these are intrinsically rooted in the worldview assumption that there is a real, personal God who both controls the universe and desires a relationship with each person.

Like the rest of culture, many of the deepest cultural values and much of worldview are neutral. However, within each culture are behaviors, beliefs, values, and worldview assumptions that are in distinct contradiction to the gospel and allegiance to God. They must be challenged and “converted” for permanent change to take place. Changing the outer levels (behaviors and beliefs) alone is not adequate. Real, permanent change must take place at the levels of those deeply-held cultural values and worldview. If unaddressed, cultural values and worldview assumptions that are contrary to the gospel, will sooner or later manifest themselves in one of two main ways. First, converts will unintentionally reinterpret the teachings of Christianity through the lenses of the non-Christian parts of their worldview. Second, they will practice the types of behaviors addressed in the earlier presentations, either disguised as Christian, or openly non-Christian. This is called syncretism.

**Syncretism**

“Syncretism,” according to Kraft, “is the mixing of Christian assumptions with those worldview assumptions that are incompatible with Christianity so that the result is not biblical Christianity” (1999:390). In simple terms syncretism is...
a mingling of certain aspects of the old culture, especially values and worldview, with the new Christian behaviors, beliefs, values, and worldview in such a way that the old ways retain their original meaning and power. How does this blending take place? And most important, how is it avoided?

The first cause of syncretism is the superimposing of Christian behaviors and beliefs (the outer layers of culture) over an unchanged foundation of deep cultural values and worldview that are contrary to the gospel. This surface change over time creates what is referred to as “split-level Christians”—believers who appear to be Christians in behavior and beliefs, while still retaining the deep values and worldview assumptions about reality and life of a non-Christian worldview.Unchecked, these values and worldviews gradually work their way out into syncretistic beliefs and behaviors.

This manifests itself primarily in one of two ways. First, people may accept Christian beliefs and practices at the cognitive level, but at the same time hold on to some practices which they do secretly. This is especially true when Christianity fails to address the everyday challenges and crises of life in a way that is satisfactory. In times of crisis people will return to the previous behaviors and beliefs to find identity, security, and meaning.

Second, people accept and follow Christian beliefs and practices, but the assumptions undergirding their Christian belief and practice come from an unchallenged non-Christian worldview. These non-Christian elements are mingled with the new Christian teachings and beliefs, thus distorting the gospel. For instance, converts coming from cultures in which good deeds and acts of worship (i.e., ritual, giving of offerings) are a way of “making merit” to earn salvation and ultimate escape from the law of karma, may simply substitute Christian deeds and acts of worship, while at the worldview level their assumptions of how salvation is attained are unchanged.

To be effective and lasting, conversion (evangelism and nurture) must penetrate all four levels of culture. In reality, true conversion must begin at the worldview level and permeate the values, beliefs, and behaviors from the inside out. Failure to address the deepest cultural values and worldview issues in evangelism and nurture will inevitably open the door to syncretism and create split-level Christians.

Missionary anthropologists have concluded that there are several approaches to mission that inevitably lead to the types of syncretism mentioned above. The first is retaining parts of the old culture that are contrary to the gospel from all levels—behaviors, beliefs, values, and
worldview. These things become stumbling blocks, constantly drawing people back to their previous ways. This can be seen clearly in the cristo-paganism practiced in parts of South and Central America.

The second major cause of syncretism is indiscriminately “throwing out” everything from the old culture from every level—behaviors, beliefs, values, worldview. This makes the gospel so foreign and believers so separated from their culture that they lose their core identity and ways of dealing with life. This leaves a void that will ultimately be filled by things from the old way of life. Even when the “throwing out” is done more discriminately and only the elements deemed really harmful are thrown out, if functional substitutes for those discarded elements of culture are not provided, syncretism will develop. For instance, in many parts of the world initiation rites serve an important purpose of passing on knowledge, morals, and traditions from one generation to the next, as well as providing a clear marker for the beginning of adulthood. Some of the rituals included in such rites and the worldview assumptions underneath the rituals are not appropriate for Christians. In some cases it was therefore deemed necessary to eliminate the rite entirely, thus losing all the good such rites accomplished, as well as eliminating the elements that were harmful. This indiscriminate “throwing out” of significant elements from the original culture frequently left a huge void, which in many cases was filled by secretly practicing the forbidden rite or leaving people in the difficult situation of not having ways to deal with important aspects of life. In both of these causes of syncretism, the root is a failure to understand, recognize, and address the significance and strength of the deepest levels of culture.

The third cause of the troubling phenomena of dual allegiance and syncretism is modern Christianity’s (including Adventism’s) failure to understand and take seriously what missionary anthropologist Paul Hiebert has called “the excluded (neglected) middle” (1999:415). As people look at the world and the universe, they interpret and categorize the realities they see as follows:

1. At the “bottom” of this ex-
planation-of-the-universe model is the “scientific” world. Every culture has understandings and explanations of how the world functions. The Western scientific world has codified its explanation of physical and social realities in such fields of study as biology, chemistry, physics, geology, astronomy, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. The primal world also includes a large body of scientific knowledge. This knowledge is based on observation of the natural world and leads primal people to their own explanations of nature that cover such practical matters as how to predict weather, plant crops, tend animals, build houses, treat disease, organize families, and raise children.

2. For many people in the world (both “western” and primal) there is another layer of reality that includes supreme gods and powers. For Christians this level includes God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). For others it includes the highest gods, as well as ultimate powers such as karma, mana, and kismet.

3. In between these two layers is what Dr. Hiebert calls “the excluded (neglected) middle.” For most people in the world this is where the majority of life takes place. It is the way people deal with the uncertainties of life. It is how they connect with the forces or powers at the top. Prayer, visions and dreams, holy writings, ancestors, mediums, spirits, prophets, amulets, charms, idols, chants, blessings, curses, miracles, spells, healings, evil eye, demons, witchcraft, trances, ceremonies, and rituals fill this part of life. There is a strong expectation of the supernatural and evidence of supernatural power in daily life, thus the middle is extremely powerful.

This middle area, though “alive and well” in much of the world, is almost totally excluded or greatly neglected in Western thinking and education. In reality, it is not a significant force in a Western worldview, even for many who profess a biblical or Christian worldview. Western, scientific education has more or less excluded it from day-to-day reality. For instance, the issue of illness for many Westerners is a simple scientific matter—certain illnesses are caused by bacteria or viruses; others are caused by lifestyle, etc. A Westerner’s first impulse is to run to a medical doctor for treatment. Much of the world, however, understands the cause and cure of illnesses as first and foremost a spiritual or relationship issue to be approached with prayer, ritual, or the mending of relationships. The Western scientific worldview has made it difficult to recognize and deal with worldview assumptions that include a very powerful and active “middle.” Ironically, because of this neglect, Western missionaries have often been at the forefront of secularizing primal cultures (Newbigin
1999:418). Missionaries are frequently seen as very unspiritual people!

How does this affect evangelism? Through the years, much of the work of mission and evangelism has been done by people educated in the Western scientific worldview—the worldview that either hardly acknowledges the power of the supernatural at all, or at best minimizes its effect in everyday life. “The middle” has frequently been ignored or overlooked. At best it has been a victim of selective neglect. When missionaries/evangelists have encountered questionable practices and/or beliefs that reflected the presence of “the middle,” they have reacted in one of several ways: (1) neglecting to address them altogether, basically ignoring them, (2) minimizing their importance, even at times teaching that such things “aren’t real,” (3) simplifying the encounter into a “my God is bigger than your god” power struggle, hoping that this deeply spiritual/magical worldview will quietly go away after a few such power encounters, (4) dealing with them on the cognitive level with proof texts and “logical” explanations, and (5) practicing Christianity (Adventism) in ways that seem lifeless—failing to encourage the aspects of the middle that are affirmed by the Bible: miracles, prayer, healings, dreams, visions, prophets, rituals, ceremonies, the power of verbal blessings or curses, and the reality and power of evil spirits. Dr. Hiebert summarizes the challenge as follows:

Because the Western world no longer provides explanations for questions on the middle level, many Western missionaries have no answers within their Christian worldview. What is a Christian theology of ancestors, of animals and plants, of local spirits, and spirit possession, and of principalities, powers, and rulers of the darkness of this world . . . ? What does one say when new tribal converts want to know how the Christian God tells them where and when to hunt, whether they should marry this daughter to that young man, or where they can find the lost money? Given no answer, they return to the diviner who gives definite answers, for these are the problems that loom large in their everyday life (1999:419).

The tendency has been for missionaries to primarily address the nonbiblical manifestations of “the middle” at the
level of beliefs and behaviors, (1) with biblical admonition against certain practices, and (2) by forbidding them. However, the lack of understanding of the deep roots of these phenomena in “the middle” and the real significance and power they have in the culture have resulted in a very superficial and unsatisfying approach. In addition, failure to provide any functional substitutes that meet people’s everyday needs has further increased the problem. And as in the story of Jesus, when one spirit was cast out and nothing was put in its place, seven spirits entered to replace it, and the man’s state was worse in the end than it had been at the beginning (Matt 12:43-45).

At the heart of this challenge is the reality that while worldview change is essential, it is extremely difficult and takes a great deal of time. A few weeks or even months of Western-style Bible studies and evangelism will not bring lasting change at the values and worldview levels.

Today cross-cultural evangelism is at a crossroads. The greatest unmet challenge facing evangelism today is the roughly 2 to 3 billion inhabitants of the earth who for various reasons are seriously resistant to the gospel. This includes not only the adherents of the major world religions—Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and all of the traditional Chinese/Japanese/Korean religions—but also the secular/postmodern world as well. In addition, there are the thousands of animistic religions scattered around the world—many still among the unreached people groups. The reality is that none of these will ever be successfully reached at the deepest worldview level by the traditional message, methods, and materials. Continuing to use them will be detrimental in several ways. First, the true message will never really be heard. It will remain foreign and irrelevant to people from other religious systems and worldviews because it fails to address their deepest needs or answer their most serious questions about life. Second, many honest-hearted people will not be able to overcome their prejudices against Christianity which are perpetuated by
an uncontextualized message and approach. Third, traditional Adventist mission/evangelism will continue to create the likelihood that new converts will become split-level Christians. The time has come to ask some hard questions in order to analyze what is happening and why.

1. The first issue that must be addressed is how success in evangelism and mission is measured. In order to resist the tendency to focus on big baptismal numbers and overlook the influx of more split-level Adventists, what can be done in Adventist evangelism cross-culturally today? What challenges need to be recognized, taken into consideration, and re-evaluated?

2. Second, parts of the Adventist message must be re-examined. To be effective, the priority and sequence of topics and the focus of the evangelism events must be determined by the worldview of the people being reached. What are the needs and challenges to Christian faith as understood and practiced in that culture? Hesselgrave and Rommen warn:

Traditional missionaries have introduced Christianity and catechized new believers in piecemeal fashion—translating this or that New Testament Gospel, preaching on this or that Bible passage. . . . Even when they have attempted to be systematic they have usually dealt with topics that seem most important to them, but not necessarily to indigenes. . . . [T]he development of systematic theology as we know it in the West is inextricably bound up with problems posed by Western philosophy, not by problems posed by tribal, Hindu-Buddhistic, Chinese, or various other worldviews (1989:214-215).

Because of the diversity of culture at all levels, it is impossible to have a one-size-fits-all message for all people. The needs and misconceptions of one culture are not the same as another. The worldview issues that need to be addressed will vary from culture to culture. Only as the culture is understood at the worldview level can it be intelligently addressed and the deepest questions about life answered from Scripture.

3. Another challenge is the methods used. Public evangelism is probably the least effective method in most of the unreached portions of the world today. This is particularly true for the world religions and the secular world. Not only is it ineffective, but in many places it has the potential to create unnecessary prejudice and resistance. To reach people in these areas with the good news of the gospel, missionaries/evangelists must understand and accept the challenge of finding new ways of evangelizing the billions who need to hear the end-time message committed to the Adventist Church. In Gospel Workers this need is summarized:

The worker in foreign fields will come in contact with all classes of people and all varieties of minds,
and he will find that different methods of labor are required to meet the needs of the people. . . . The methods and means by which we reach certain ends are not always the same. The missionary must use reason and judgment (White 1948:468).

4. It is essential to evaluate the church’s ability to properly nurture, mentor, and disciple new believers before the evangelization process begins. Worldview change is a long process and can never be accomplished in a few weeks or even months. Tim Warner, former mission professor at Trinity International University, states that one of the main reasons churches do not retain converts is because the disciplers do not know how to deal with the emotional and spiritual baggage the new converts bring with them. Too often, discipleship is defined only in terms of right theology and right behavior (2005:417).

Nurture must first of all begin with people/leaders who understand the people, their beliefs, and other significant aspects of their culture at the deepest levels and can therefore guide and teach new believers as they grow in their understanding of what it means to live daily as a Christian at all levels in their culture. The initial conversion experience that addresses all three levels mentioned earlier—truth, power, and allegiance—must be ongoing. The nurture and discipling process is of utmost importance and will be successful only as a community of new believers is guided to bring their life questions and worldview issues to the Scrip-

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converts to help them grow on their own. Adventists have always understood the need for literature that can be scattered like the “leaves of autumn.” How ironic it is that as the church faces the greatest evangelistic challenge ever faced, turning toward the 10/40 window and the other unreached parts of the world, there is virtually no literature or media materials that have been written/prepared specifically for evangelism and nurture of converts coming from those cultures and the world religions. For growth to occur at those deepest levels of culture, there is a huge need for materials to be developed that will speak directly to the worldview issues and needs of each group.

Looking Ahead

As a church anticipating the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which will result in a mighty missionary movement to all the peoples on earth, there is an urgent need for Adventist Christians to prepare to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. Looking forward to the task of world evangelization, Adventists need to take several important steps.

1. Before any evangelism begins, a serious analysis of the local culture needs to be done at the deepest levels. Only then can the messages presented either in private or public be relevant to (a) affirm that which is good in the culture, (b) deal directly and wisely with that which is counter to the gospel at all levels, and (c) teach vital biblical truths in relevant, receptor-oriented ways.

2. Evangelistic and nurturing materials need to be tailor-made. These materials must deal with the values and worldview issues that are contrary to the gospel in *that* culture. Importing and translating materials from somewhere else (especially materials based on a Western Christian worldview and logic) will never be as effective to bring worldview change as materials written specifically for a particular people/culture. And in this process Adventists must also recognize and face the challenge of preparing evangelistic and nurturing materials appropriate for the more than 50 percent of the world’s peoples who are non-literate.

3. *Before* introducing and expecting changes in beliefs and behaviors, evangelists and missionaries must focus on change at the values and worldview level. Only if change comes from the inside and works its way out will the change be meaningful and lasting.

Conclusion

The time has come for a radical revision of the Adventist approach to cross-cultural evangelism/mission. The most important factor in church unity and growth is not a lock-step approach to beliefs and behaviors, important as those beliefs
and behaviors are. Unity will be best served when each member of the Adventist Church first of all encounters the gospel at the deepest levels of their culture in the threefold conversion experience of truth, allegiance, and power, and then learns to incorporate the beautiful truths of Adventism into their culture. A world membership unified in a primary allegiance to God and meaningful experience with God as revealed in Scripture will fulfill Jesus’ prayer, “That they may all be one” (John 17:21 NKJV).

How will the church, its leaders, its missionaries, and evangelists respond to the challenge of communicating across culture? If evangelistic focus continues to be on the outer layers of the cultural onion without adequate study and preparation to address the deepest values and worldview, the church will continue to create split-level Christians. Surface Christianity is the result of surface-level evangelism.

Works Cited


