



Understanding Cultural Dynamics

—when my way isn't the only way!

Beyond the Bottom Line

March 24-26, 2019

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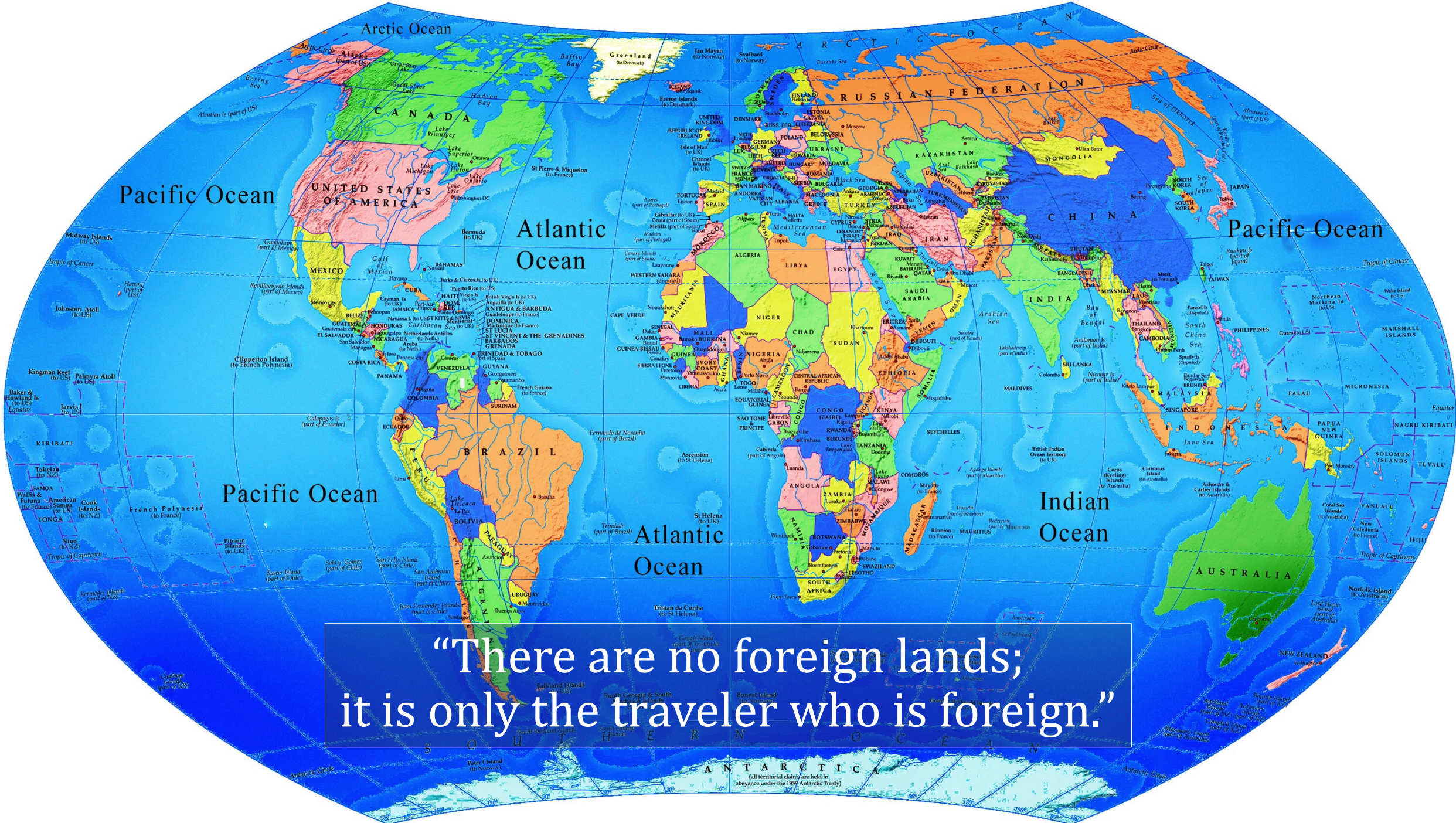
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Seminar objectives:

1. To understand the unseen elements of culture
2. To recognize my cultural biases
3. To know how to relate effectively with persons from other cultures
4. To demonstrate cultural awareness and understanding in my work responsibilities.
5. To value unity and diversity in the Church.

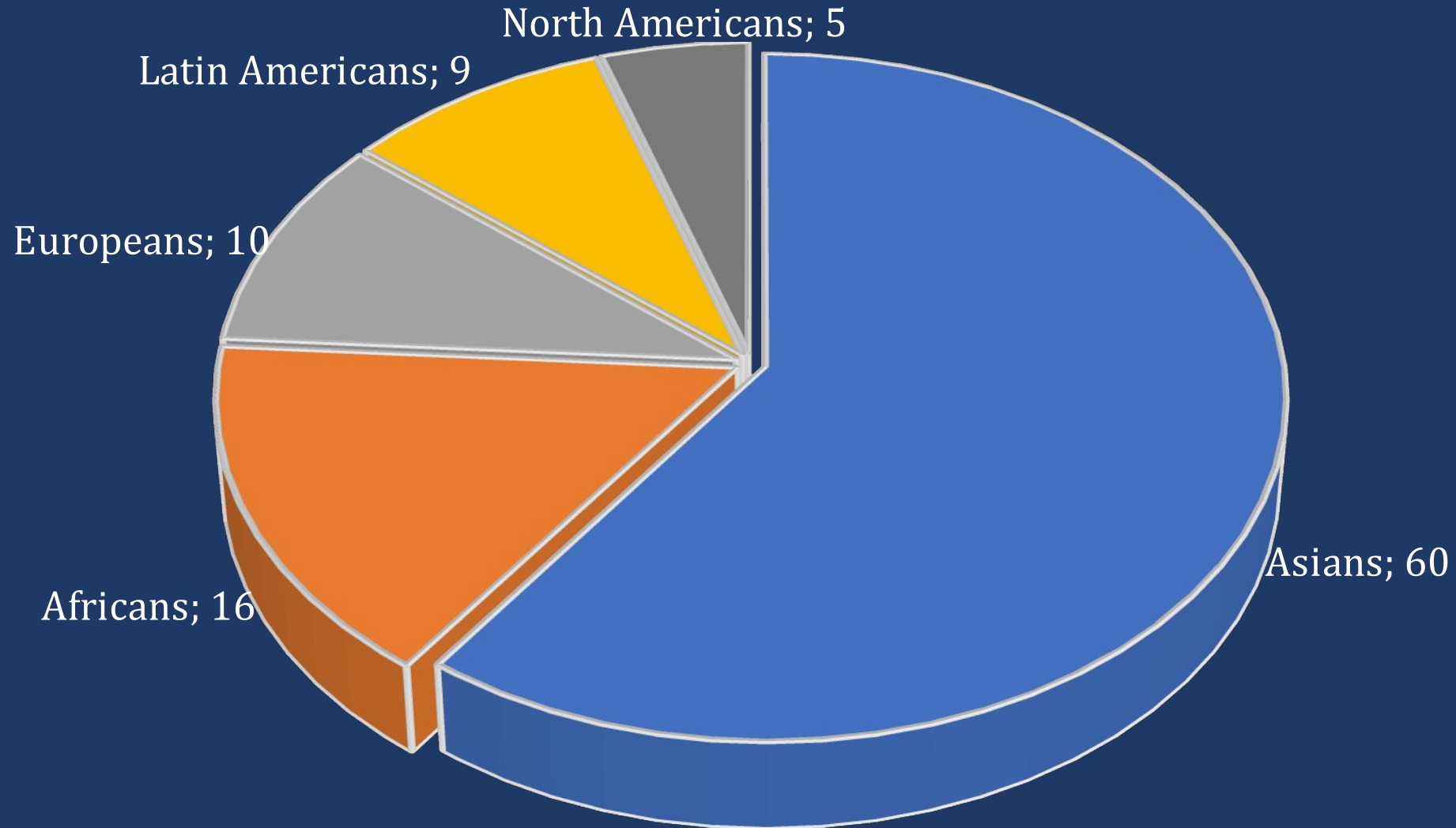
SDA Church employees may be called upon to work in, or with colleagues from, cultural environments that differ markedly from their own. It is therefore increasingly important to understand how cultural sensitivity functions in the workplace environment and in the global family.



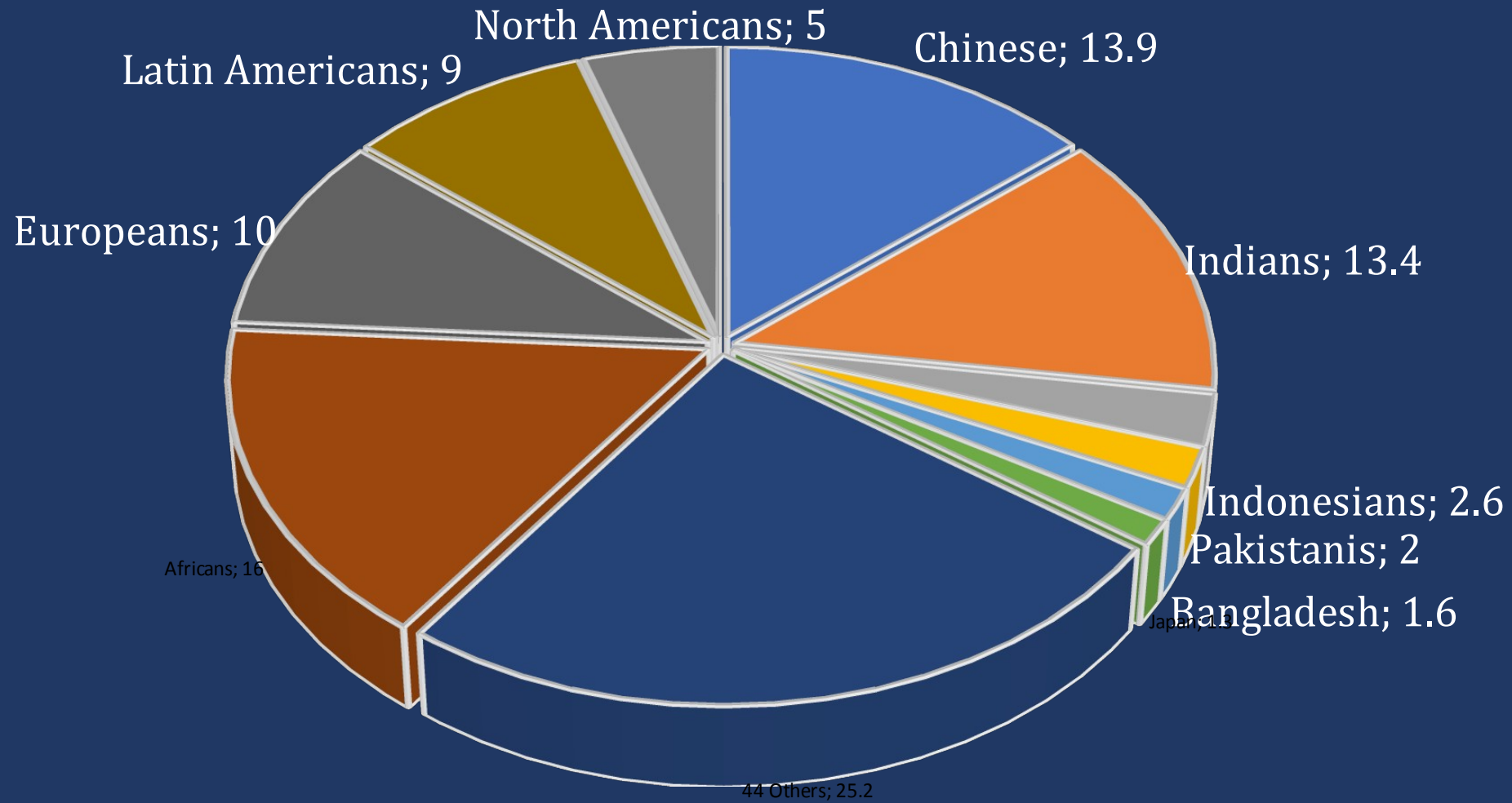
“There are no foreign lands;
it is only the traveler who is foreign.”

ANTARCTICA
(all territorial claims are held in
abeyance under the 1959 Antarctic Treaty)

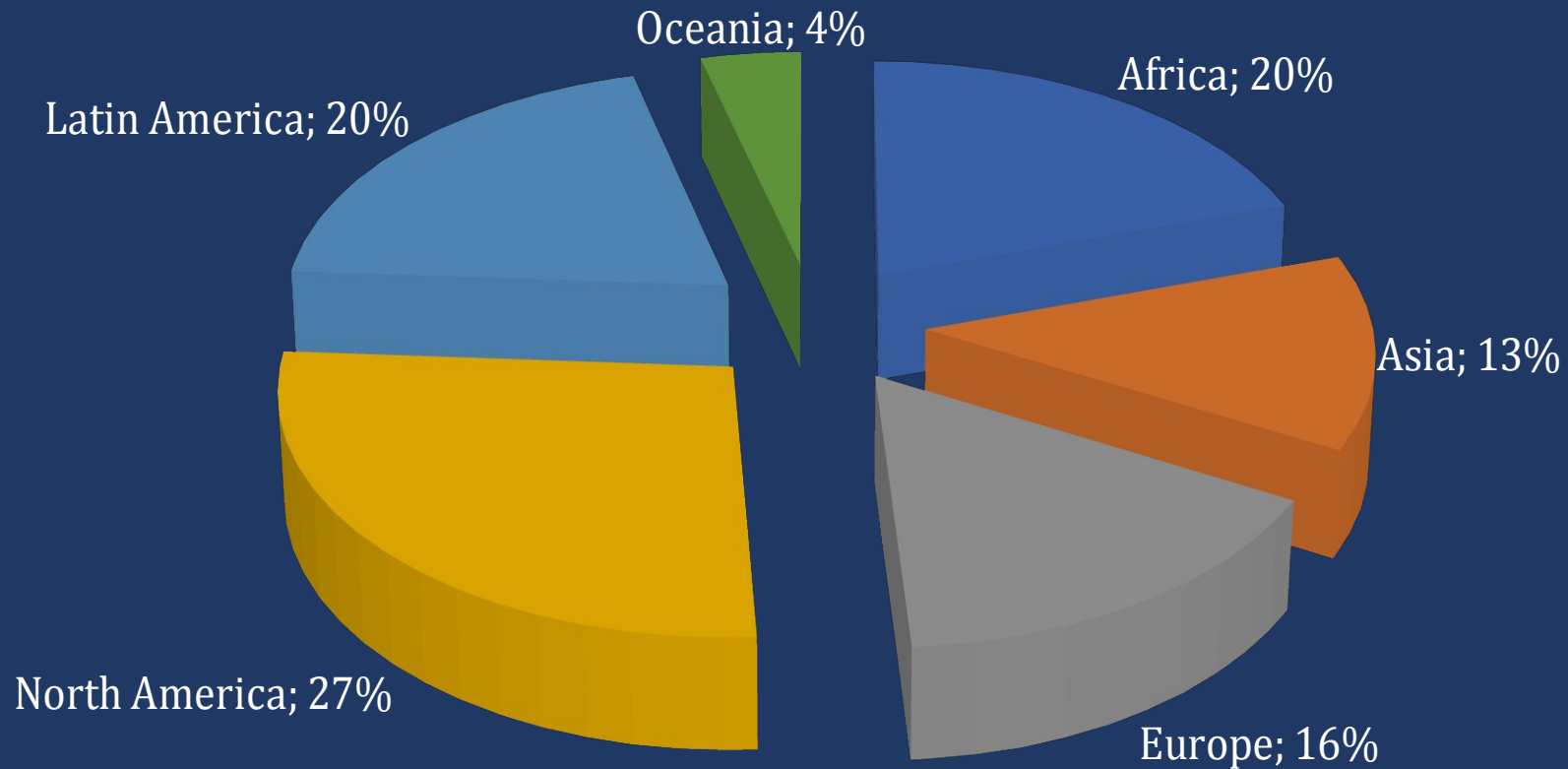
The world in a village of 100 people:



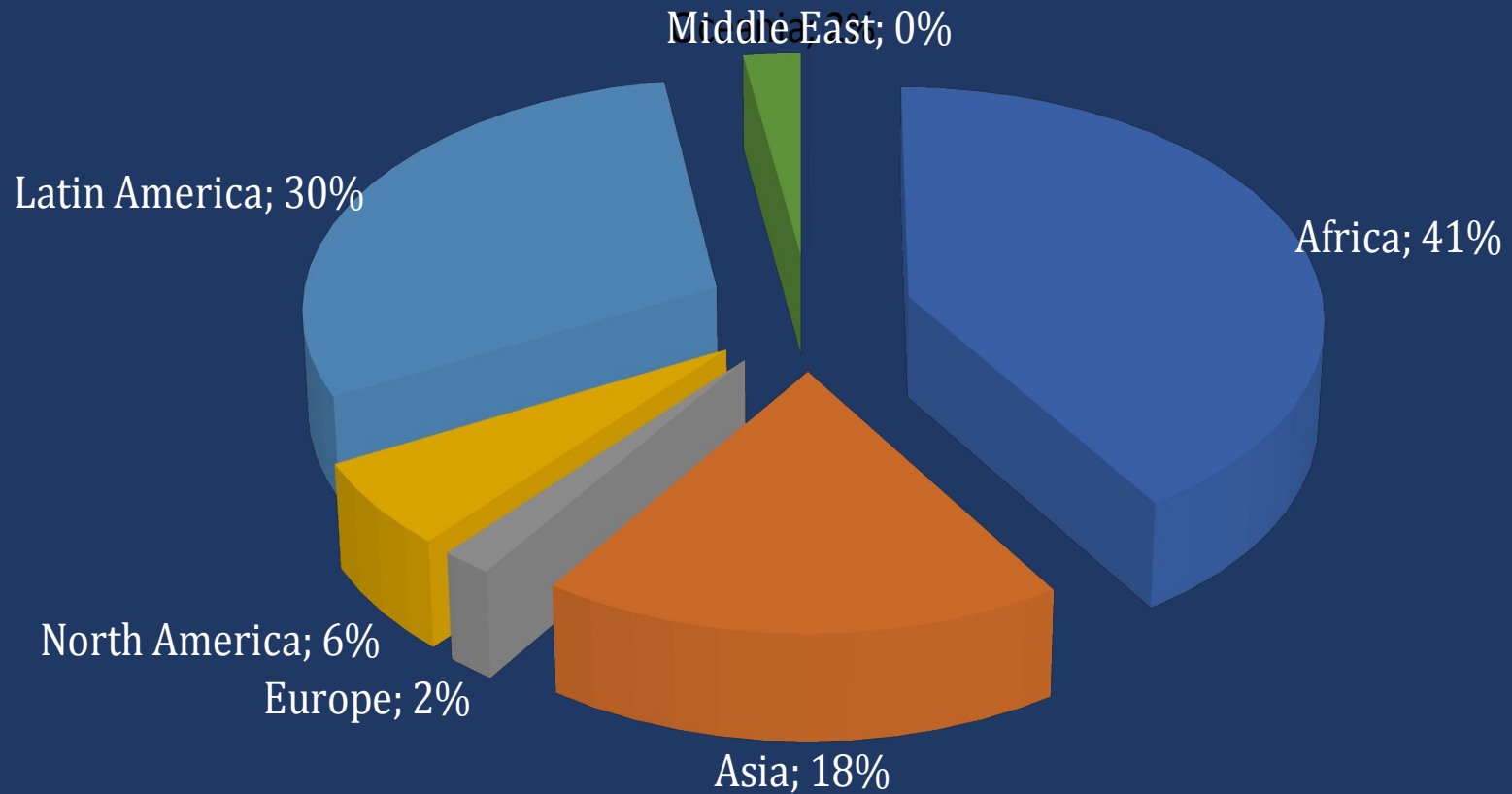
The world in a village of 100 people:



SDA world membership distribution—1960

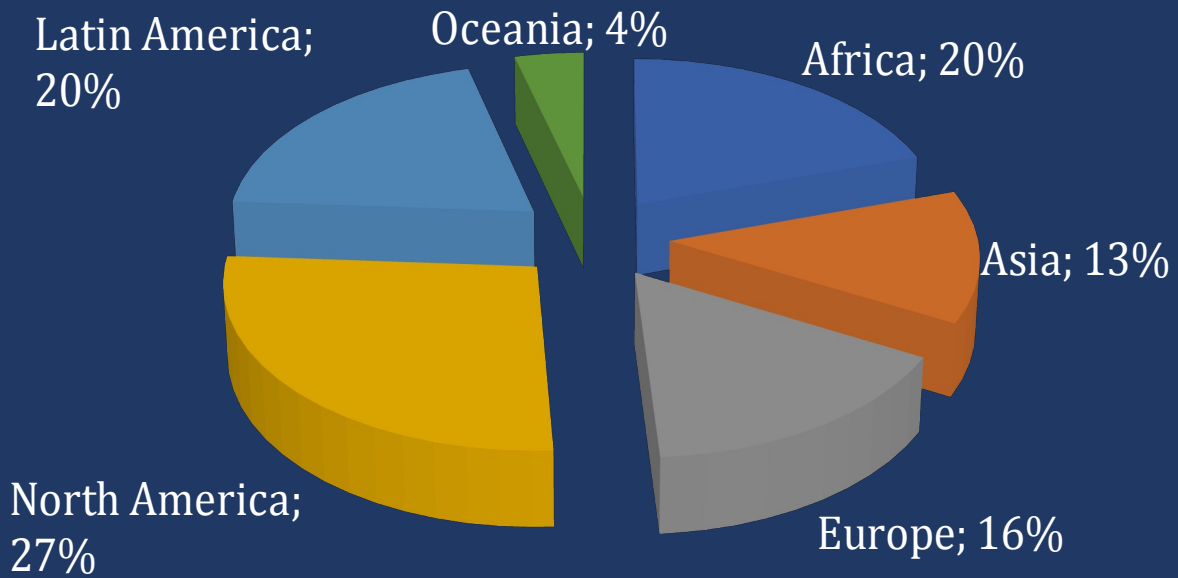


SDA world membership distribution—2017

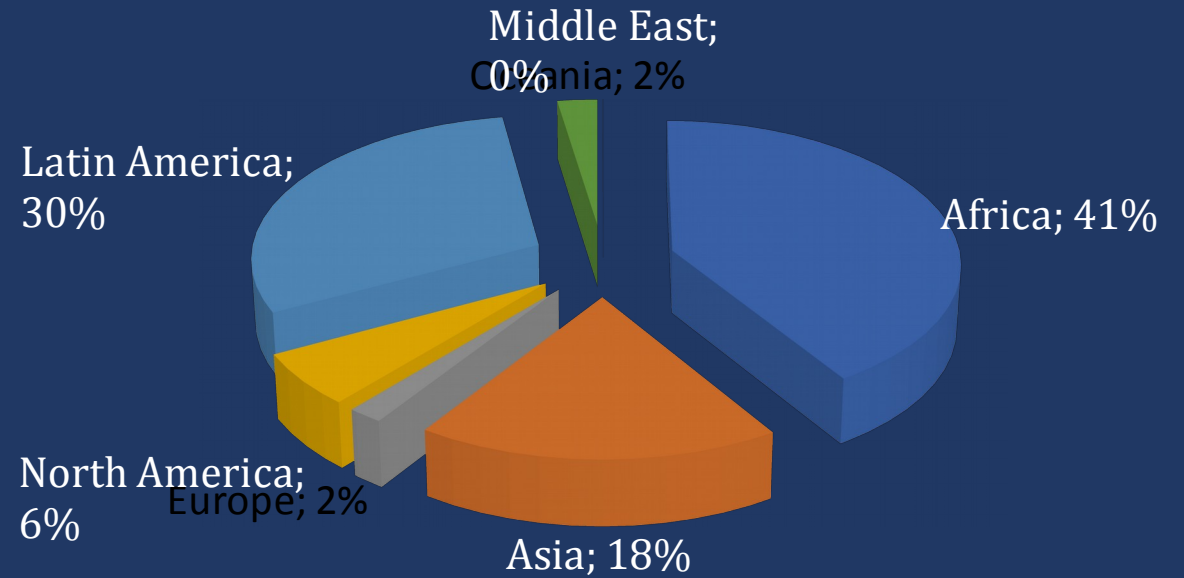


SDA world membership distribution

1960



2017



We live in a multi-cultural world. The extent and impact of communication technology results in relatively few people living in a mono-cultural setting. However, a person's culture of origin can have long-lasting influence on behavior even in a multi-cultural environment.

10 Culture clusters in the world

1. **Nordic** (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden...)
2. **Anglo** (Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, UK, USA...)
3. **Germanic** (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Netherland, G-Switzerland...)
4. **Eastern Europe** (Bulgaria, Czech Rep., Hungary, Poland, Russia...)
5. **Latin Europe** (France, Italy, L-Switzerland, Portugal, Spain...)
6. **Latin America** (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico...)
7. **Confucian Asia** (China, Japan, Singapore, S Korea, Taiwan...)
8. **South Asia** (India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand...)
9. **Sub-Saharan Africa** (Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Zambia, Zimbabwe...)
10. **Arab** (Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, UAE,,,))

Cultural differences may not always be complex and confusing. But the possibility for misunderstanding is greater due to unfamiliarity with individuals and the beliefs and attitudes that motivate their behaviors.

Study of cultures necessarily involves making generalized statements—summaries of likelihood rather than certainty.

Generalizations can be helpful in moving us toward understanding but should never be taken as absolutes.

What is culture?

Culture is the sum of shared **assumptions, values, and beliefs** held by a large group of people that result in characteristic **behaviors**.

Notice the invisible parts—assumptions, values and beliefs.

Notice the visible parts—behaviors.

What may be the underlying belief?

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1. Inviting the janitor to eat with you. | 1. Equality |
| 2. Asking the boss's opinion when you are the expert. | 2. Deference to authority |
| 3. Disagreeing openly at a meeting. | 3. Being direct |
| 4. Accepting without question that something cannot be changed. | 4. Fatalism |
| 5. Agreeing in a meeting to a suggestion you think is wrong. | 5. Saving face |

Culture-based behavior is not accidental or arbitrary—it has a foundation. There is a cause and effect relationship that operates in culture.

Ethnocentrism:

Seeing the world through the lens of my own culture, evaluating other people by my cultural values, beliefs and behaviors.

Much of our behavior has no inherent meaning. Over the course of time a culture decides or comes to accept what a specific behavior means. When people assign similar meaning to a specific behavior communication can take place either with the use of language (sounds with agreed-upon meaning) or gestures.

In cross-cultural situations an important principle to remember is to suspend judgment or the assigning of meaning to a given behavior until you can discover what the behavior means in the other person's culture.

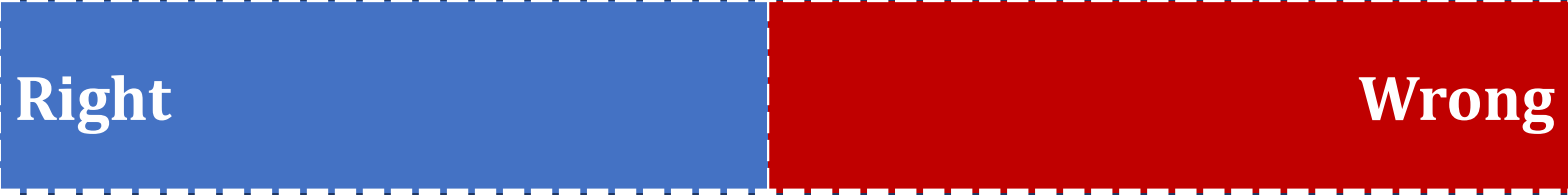
Not all behavior is cultural. Cultural behavior occupies a space in between universal and personal behavior.



Is it universal, cultural, or personal?

1. Sleeping with an open bedroom window.
2. Running from a wild animal.
3. Men opening doors for women.
4. Eating regularly.
5. Speaking Spanish.
6. Feeling regret at causing an accident.
7. Wearing a suit and tie to worship.
8. Dislike of wearing a suit and tie to worship.
9. Needing sleep.
10. Needing sleep right now.

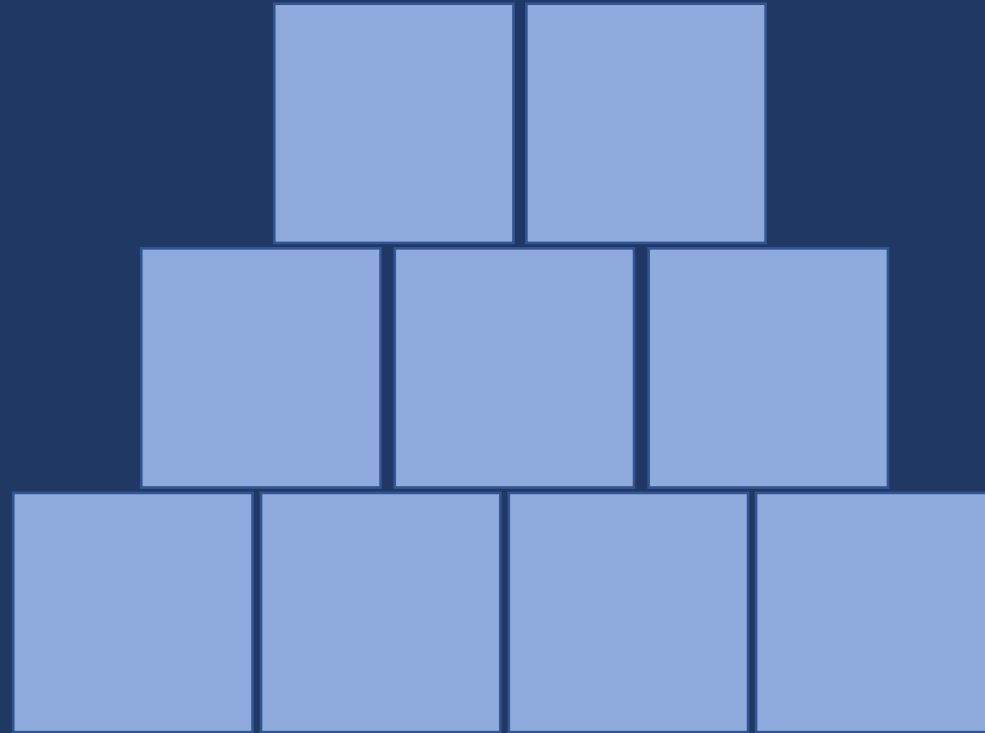
Some culture differences are just that—
differences. We should not assign a value
judgment (i.e. right or wrong) to them. Indeed, it
may be appropriate to assess a value judgment on
some cultural behavior. But we must not rush to
judgment as soon as we notice a difference.



“We stand in awe of the ocean,
The thunderstorm,
The sunset,
The mountains;
But we pass by a human being
Without notice
Even though
The person
Is God’s most
Magnificent
Creation.”

—Augustine

The
building
blocks
of
culture



Six basic ingredients of culture:

1. Concept of cosmos (worldview of religion)
2. Concept of self
3. Concept of responsibility
4. Concept of time
5. Concept of authority/control
6. Concept of communication

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Concept of the cosmos (religion):

1. Theism (monotheism, polytheism, atheism)
2. The character of God/gods (loving/angry)
3. Origins (creation/naturalism)
4. Meaning/purpose in life
5. Good and evil (influence of spirits)
6. Death and the future (restored earth, heaven, bliss, reincarnation, nothingness)

Particularly in the West, there is a tendency for culture to move away from Christianity—from any religious expression for that matter. Religion is increasingly consigned to the arena of private life with little or no opportunity for a voice in the public square. This situation is not true in several other culture clusters around the world. In fact, in some areas of the world religion is playing an increasing role in public life.

How should we view the global Church in a world of many cultures and differing worldviews that inform various aspects of those cultures?

Is Seventh-day Adventism cross-cultural, counter-cultural, trans-cultural or a sub-culture within cultures?

Six basic ingredients of culture:

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Concept of self (individualist/collectivist)

Individualist:

- Smallest unit of survival is the individual.
- Needs of the individual are satisfied before those of the group.
- Independence and self-reliance are stressed and greatly valued
- Personal freedom is highly desired.
- More psychological and emotional distance from others.

Concept of self (individualist/collectivist)

Collectivist:

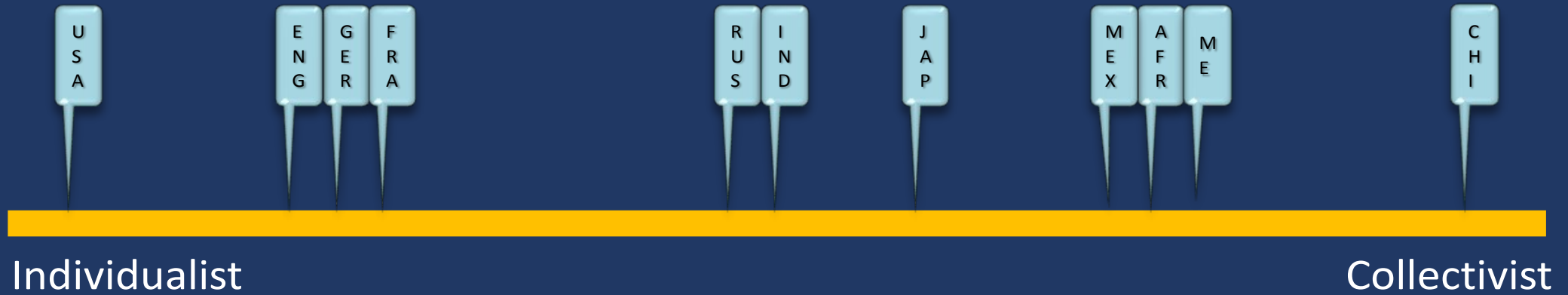
- A group, usually family, is the smallest unit of survival.
- One's identity largely determined by his membership and role in a group.
- By considering the needs and feelings of others, one protects oneself.
- Harmony and interdependence valued.
- Group decisions more important than individual decisions.

No culture is exclusively individualist or collectivist. All cultures will exhibit some blend of the two concepts. However, cultures do tend more towards one or the other end of the spectrum.

Individualist or collectivist culture?

1. Companies give employee-of-the-year awards.
2. Harmony and saving face highly valued.
3. Friendships are many and casual.
4. There is less of a need for signed contracts in business.
5. A mother asks her four-year-old what he or she wants to wear today.
6. Self-help books are popular.
7. Consensus decision making is the norm.

How cultures view themselves on the concept of self: (approximations only)



Legend:

AFR = Africa
CHI = China
ENG = England

FRA = France
GER = Germany
IND = India

JAP = Japan
ME = Middle East
MEX = Mexico

RUS = Russia
USA = United States

Six basic ingredients of culture:

1. Concept of cosmos (worldview of religion)
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Concept of responsibility: (universalism vs. particularism)

Universalism:

- The idea that right is right regardless of circumstances.
- Same rules apply to everyone.
- Fairness: everyone alike in similar situations—no preferential treatment for family.
- Matters are to be analyzed and judged objectively, deal with the “facts”.

Concept of responsibility: (universalism vs. particularism)

Particularism:

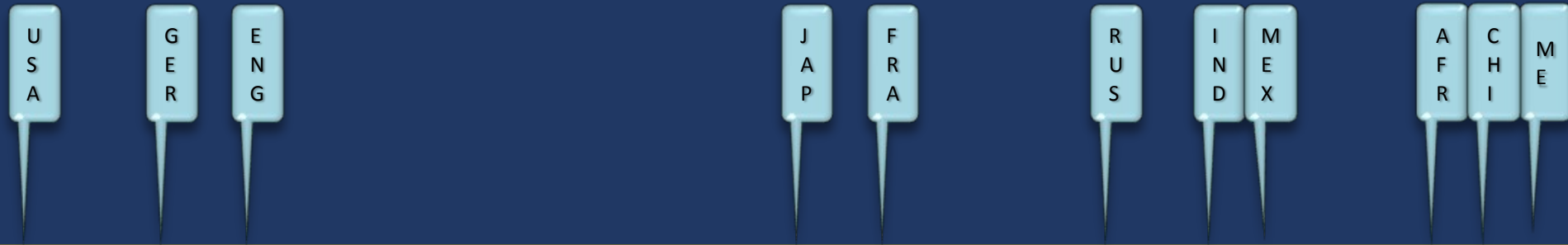
- What is right in one situation may not be right in another, evaluate circumstances.
- Treat family and friends the best you can.
- To be fair is to treat everyone as unique.
- Exceptions will be made for some.
- Personal feelings should not be ignored.
- Special requests can be made of in-group members because they are assured special treatment when the time comes.

No culture is purely universalist or particularist. But various cultures will exhibit behaviors that tend towards one or the other of the two views concerning responsibility, what is right and what is fair. Not all individuals in any culture will necessarily align themselves with the majority view within that culture.

Universalist or particularist culture?

1. An agreement is valid whatever happens afterward.
2. Friends stick together no matter what.
3. Objective reasoning takes precedence over subjective feelings.
4. Justice is blind and impartial.
5. Every situation is different; you cannot apply rules rigidly.
6. If circumstances change, a promise may not need to be kept.

How cultures view themselves on the concept of responsibility: (approximations only)



Universalist

Particularist

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Six basic ingredients of culture:

1. Concept of cosmos (worldview of religion)
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Concept of time: (monochronic vs.
polychronic)

Time goes “bye”!

“Danish punctuality would result in hypertension in Greece”

— Max Messmer, *Staffing Europe*

Concept of time: (monochronic vs. polychronic)

Monochronic:

- Time is measurable and quantifiable—a limited amount of it.
- Efficiency and urgency are highly valued.
- The needs of people must be adjusted to the time (schedule, deadline, etc.).
- Interruptions are annoying because they waste time.
- Doing one thing at a time is better than trying to multi-task.

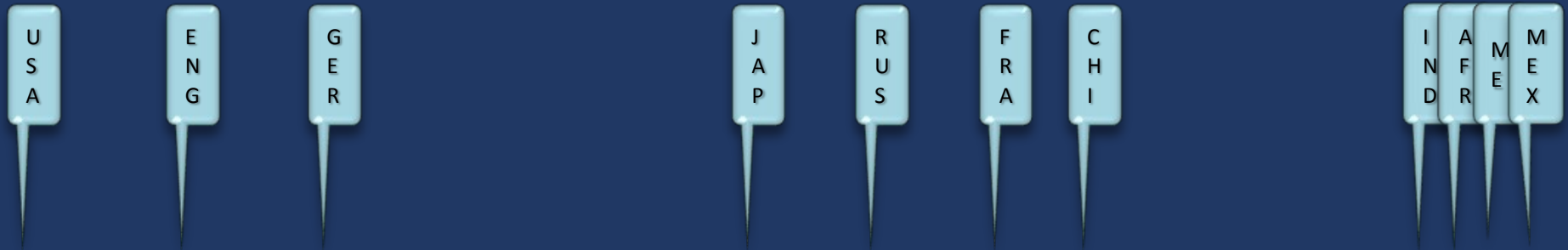
Concept of time: (monochronic vs. polychronic)

Polychronic:

- Time is elastic and limitless. There is always more time.
- The event is more important than the time.
- Schedules and deadlines can be changed since time must be adjusted to people's needs.
- It is not necessary to finish one thing before starting another. Multi-tasking OK.

No culture is purely monochronic or polychronic. But various cultures will exhibit behaviors that tend towards one or the other of the two views concerning time. Not all individuals in any culture will necessarily align themselves with the majority view within that culture.

How cultures view themselves on the concept of time: (approximations only)



Monochronic

Polychronic

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Concept of authority/control: (internal vs. external)

Which statement do you agree with most?

1. What happens to me is my own doing.
2. Sometimes I feel I don't have control in my life's direction.

- Percentage of Americans choosing first statement = 89%
- Percentage of Chinese choosing first statement = 35%

Concept of authority/control: (internal vs. external)

Internal:

- Control over life is largely internal.
- Very few things have to be accepted as they are or cannot be changed at all.
- You can accomplish most anything you want to do.
- Success is up to you—you are responsible for what happens to you.

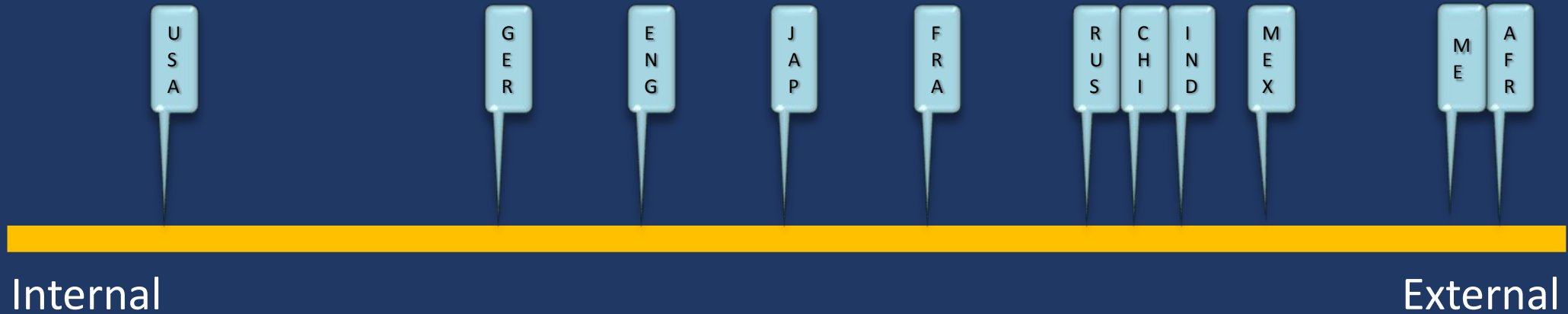
Concept of authority/control: (internal vs. external)

External:

- Control over life is largely outside the individual.
- Some things in life are simply predetermined.
- There are limits beyond which one cannot go.
- Success is then a combination of good fortune and your effort.

No culture is purely internal or external in its concept of control. But various cultures will exhibit behaviors that tend towards one or the other of the two views. Not all individuals in any culture will necessarily align themselves with the majority view within that culture.

How cultures view themselves on the concept of control: (approximations only)



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These differences might be described as a **time-oriented** bias versus a **relationship-oriented** bias.

Does one or the other bias influence a person's valuation of the Great Commandment (Matt 22:36-40) above or beneath the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20)?

Is it realistic to think that one culture may emphasize the Commission (time-oriented) while another may emphasize the Commandment (relation-oriented)?

Six basic ingredients of culture:

1. Concept of cosmos (worldview of religion)
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Concept of communication: (direct vs. indirect)

The dimension of communication on which cultures differ the most and the one affecting more aspects of the communication dynamic is the matter of directness.

Concept of communication: (direct vs. indirect)

Directness:

- Seen more often in individualist cultures.
- People lead more independent lives, there is less instinctive understanding of others.
- Tendency to be more explicit in speech, say exactly what is meant rather than suggest or imply.
- The words said are important; what is left unsaid is rather inconsequential. “No” can be said directly.

Concept of communication: (direct vs. indirect)

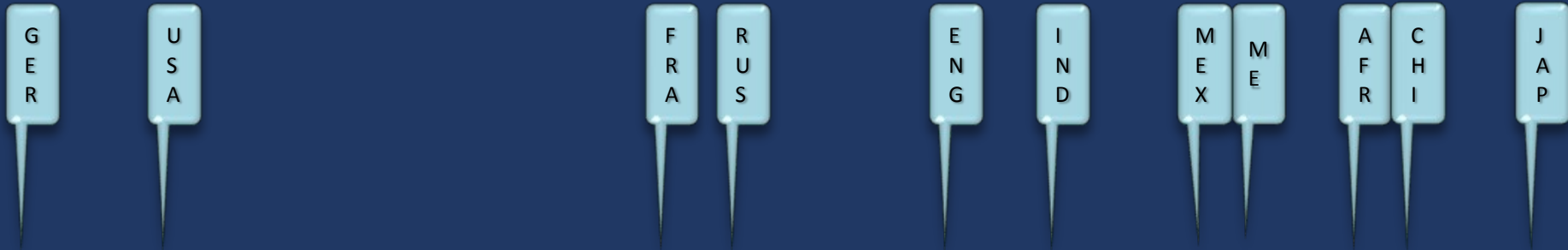
Indirectness:

- More typical of collectivist cultures.
- Prefer inference, suggestion or implication rather than direct speech.
- Harmony and saving face are important.
- Confrontation is avoided.
- Emphasis on relationships brings intuitive understanding and thus less need for specificity and directness.
- Very careful in how “No” is said.

Other factors in cross cultural communication:

- **Body language** (we must hear with our eyes)
- **Space** (personal space)
- **Power distance** (i.e. boss and subordinate)

How cultures view themselves on communication: (approximations only)



Direct

Indirect

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The Bible and culture:

In the move from the Old Testament covenant people to the New Testament covenant people there is a shift from a single nation (Children of Israel) to an international group—the Church, with representatives from all nations. The people of God come from every nation, tribe, tongue and people. (Revelation 5:9 and 7:9)

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

—Revelation 7:9,10 NKJV

The OT-NT transition to awareness of an international covenant people introduced many new and complex questions concerning the life of faith: How does one relate to government? How do believers relate to socially expected customs when those customs had religious overtones (i.e. circumcision, food offered to idols)? What should be the religious posture with respect to economic structures in society? And how does a believer deal with persecution?

Some insights from a study of culture:

1. Every culture reveals something of God's image and likeness in humanity while also giving evidence of how this image and likeness has been distorted and corroded by rebellion.

Some insights from a study of culture:

2. The mission of God addresses all of human existence and thus is cultural, cross-cultural and trans-cultural. The Gospel confronts all cultures for redemptive rather than destructive purposes.

Some insights from a study of culture:

3. The Bible encourages good citizenship while insisting that the worshippers of God have a primary allegiance to the King of Kings. (See 1 Peter 2:13-17) Christians are to submit to the authority of the state except in those situations where doing so places one in disobedience to God, the supreme authority.

Some insights from a study of culture:

4. The Kingdom of God is not to be equated with any political, social or economic order—with any culture.

Some insights from a study of culture:

5. If differences are culturally based and not a violation of the clear teaching of scripture, we can/should learn how to accept, honor, and respect fellow believers whose behavior may differ from ours on the basis of cultural background.

Some insights from a study of culture:

6. The Gospel message is meant for the whole world and every culture. In its mission to reach every culture, the Church will need to engage increasingly with questions of unity and diversity. Relevancy to cultural and geographic specifics will lead to increasing diversity of practice—but this need not threaten the underlying unity of a mission-focused Church.



A World

What does it mean
in practice?

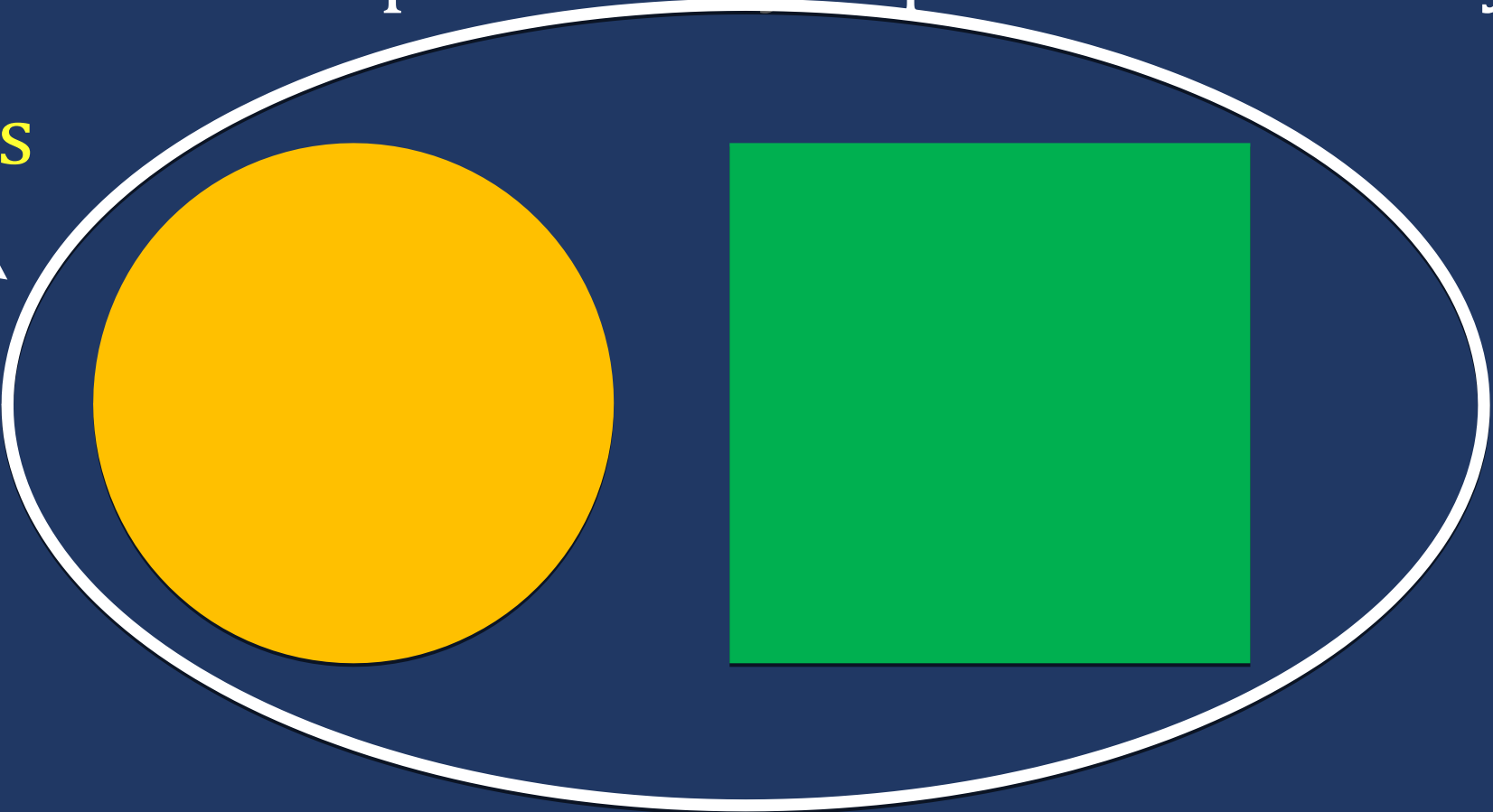
Diversity—a term used frequently in reference to race, gender, color, food, physical characteristics, age, behaviors, size, talents/skills, traditions, viewpoints, culture, beliefs (including theological beliefs), and political affiliations, etc.

Diversity means difference—but more than just difference. A circle and a square represent difference but not diversity.



Only when a circle and square are collectively classified as shapes do they represent diversity.

Shapes



Definition of diversity

1. The condition of having or being composed of differing elements
2. The inclusion of different types of people in a group or organization.
3. Occurs within a concept of things belonging to a group or collection.

Definition of unity:

1. Oneness or sameness
2. The quality or state of not being multiple
3. The combination or arrangement of parts so as to constitute a whole or to result in a singleness of effect.

We must not be satisfied to think of unity only as sameness nor should we think of diversity only as difference. Diversity exists only within a larger frame of reference that constitutes a unity of some kind—an identity or a larger purpose. Similarly, unity is much more than sameness. It is also that harmonization of difference or the mutual contribution of different parts to a singleness of effect or identity.

Diversity, unity, and culture—conclusions:

1. Diversity in and of itself is not wrong or undesirable. Diversity is seen in creation and in the development of civilization..

Diversity, unity, and culture—conclusions:

2. Because the gospel is universal, its presentation and communication must be contextualized to the cultures it encounters.

John's description of Christ as the "Word" (John 1:1) is viewed as an accommodation to the Greek concept of "logos" in Stoic philosophy. Paul's use of "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28) was an ingenious accommodation to Greek poets.

▪

Diversity, unity, and culture—conclusions:

3. Because the Church is universal, it must become increasingly diverse as it expands and embraces new cultures. Cultural diversity cannot and must not be avoided by a Church if that Church is going to be faithful to the true nature of the Church.

Diversity, unity, and culture—conclusions:

4. The Church is God's agency for the demonstration of redeemed diversities that result in a restored and renewed unity.

Diversity, unity, and culture—conclusions:

5. The Bible message recognizes many cultures. The gospel does not destroy culture, it redeems and beautifies culture. The gospel challenges all culture. A follower of Jesus lives within his/her culture but also trans-culturally (outside his culture) because of the ethical and moral values of the gospel.

Diversity, unity, and culture—conclusions:

6. The SDA Church will exhibit cultural diversity because the claims of the gospel must be lived in each person's local situation.

Diversity, unity, and culture—conclusions:

7. We must not use culture as a way of imposing our values on others, nor should we insist on the right to practice cultural behavior in a way that offends others.

Diversity, unity, and culture—conclusions:

8. Appeals for unity that overlook the rightful place of biblically-informed diversity will lead to further disunity. The basis for unity among God's people is their worship of God. No human organization, rules or procedure can create the kind of oneness that comes from the worship of God.

Christ's love for us and our love for Christ and His people creates a unity that embraces diversity.



Culture and my work:

1. How does cultural awareness inform my relationships and communication with colleagues?
2. What cultural biases do I bring to the workplace?
3. What are defining marks of SDA culture?
4. Does or should SDA culture override other cultural considerations?

Resources:

- Carson, D A; *Christ and Culture Revisited*, W B Erdmans Publishing Company, 2008, Kindle Edition
- Elmer, Duane; *Cross-Cultural Connections*, Inter-Varsity Press, Kindle Edition
- Livermore, David, *Leading With Cultural Intelligence*, AMACOM, Kindle Edition
- Storti, Craig (2011-03-04); *Figuring Foreigners Out: A Practical Guide* (pp. 25-26). Quercus. Kindle Edition.

