The challenge of contextualization has always been with the Christian mission. Every time God sent a prophet or communicated with people he always spoke through their cultural setting in cultural terms that a particular people knew and understood. Every time people from a culture different from the setting to which any of the biblical messages were addressed read the Word they were faced with the task of understanding the context of God’s message given to people with different ways of expression and understanding. Every time missionaries share the Good News with people who are not of their own cultural background they again face the challenge of presenting a clear picture of what God has said without mixing their own cultural trappings with God’s Good News.

I encourage you to read the ten articles on various aspects of contextualization carefully and prayerfully. The issue of contextualization is multi-faceted, challenging, and not without its critics. Yet Christian mission without contextualization is not an option. People deserve to hear a gospel presentation unencumbered by the cultural baggage of some other cultural group.

Three articles address approaches to Muslim evangelism. Carlos Martín expresses concern over a C-5 type of contextualization. Others see the issue differently. Perhaps a word of caution is in order. Mission to Muslims has good people on both sides of the question debating whether or not the extraction method or the C-5 approach is right, best, or appropriate. All of us, regardless of our position, would be well-served to read and re-read the account in the book of Acts that details the difficult process the Early Church went through as the Holy Spirit worked to convince the Jewish believers that God was interested in Gentiles also coming to a knowledge and relationship with him. All should watch carefully to see what the Spirit is doing, for if the Spirit is leading in the C-5 ministries none of us would want to be in opposition.

Join us in praying that God’s Spirit might guide each of us in our missionary task of providing each person with the opportunity to hear, in understandable terms, the Good News that Jesus Christ is Lord. We also welcome letters to the editor, for your reactions to the topics are important. Beginning with the next issue we intend to provide space for your interaction with the topics presented. Please respond with your comments to jams@andrews.edu

Bruce L. Bauer, editor