The issue raised by Dr. Martín’s article is an important one for missions. Often such topics are ignored and Martín’s willingness to raise the question of contextual mission methodology is welcomed.

Dr. Martín is also to be commended for his endorsement of proper methods of contextualization/accommodation. Strange as it may seem in the light of a heavily diverse world and an international church and mission program, some still wonder about the validity of contextualization. They fail to realize that all actually practice some accommodation whether they admit it or not. Martín’s work should help in laying that issue to rest.

On the other hand, the paper makes statements and advocates some positions which are problematic and need to be questioned. I mention these under three broad headings.

First, Martin incorrectly ties the doctrine of inspiration to the C-4 vs. C-5 contextualization issue. Martín’s paper connects a high view of biblical authority with proper contextualization and a low view of Scripture with lack of critical contextualization that leads to syncretism. While in some cases this can be true, in many others it is simply not correct. Holding a high view of Scripture does not necessarily lead to right doctrine. Many conservative evangelical Christians who believe the Bible is inerrant espouse theistic evolution (syncretism with modern science), immortality of the soul (syncretism with Greek philosophy), and Sunday sacredness (early syncretism with animistic beliefs). In the case of Martín’s paper, he pits himself and Phil Parshall (whom he in part bases his argument on) against John Travis and Jerald Whitehouse. If you were to interview all four,
my conviction is that they would all basically agree on the doctrine of inspiration. Their differences on C-4 vs. C-5 stem from other issues. Considering those who disagree on a contextualization issue as being errant in their doctrinal position on inspiration is usually not helpful and in this case seems unfair.

Second, Martín makes sweeping generalizations on several issues which are not supported. One such issue is the topic of inspiration referred to above, but there are others as well. Martín labels the C-5 approach as an “erosion of Christianity” and “an open form of syncretism.” Martín suggests two things: first, some elements of C-5 are going too far and need to be changed; and second, some wording in the GC statement needs to be tightened up. This in reality is much more modest than his broad statements imply.

Third, key specifics in Martín’s arguments are unsubstantiated. Is it in fact true that C-5 Muslim background believers maintain that Islam is a true religion, that Mohammed is a true prophet, and the Quran is equal to the Bible? Along with Whitehouse, I fail to see evidence that this is indeed the case.

There is, however, evidence that suggests this is not the case with all C-5 believers. There is an Andrews University dissertation written by one who spent weeks in field research among C-5 people and conducted many surveys and interviews (Lepke, 2001). There is no evidence in Martín’s paper that this dissertation was consulted. Doing so may have lessened some of Martín’s concerns.

Martín’s paper connects a high view of biblical authority with proper contextualization and a low view of Scripture with lack of critical contextualization that leads to syncretism. Holding a high view of Scripture does not necessarily lead to right doctrine.
In the light of all of this, it seems that the more helpful approach for Martín would have been to approach the Mission Issues Committee with his questions rather than circulate a paper or article.

While respectful of Martín’s concerns, I wish to affirm two things: first, I affirm the Global Mission Issues Committee and its work. While what it has done is not perfect and is subject to change, its statements have forwarded the global mission of the Adventist Church in a remarkable way. Its endeavors have been based on broad input from GC leadership, Division presidents, Biblical Research Institute’s (BRI) members, field missionaries, and missiologists. This committee is one of the most vital for the mission of the church. Its work must continue. Second, I affirm the decision to use a modified C-5 approach with careful monitoring. Not all Muslim evangelism should use the C-5 approach. I suspect that even those who utilize it now would believe it should not be followed universally. When used, it should be modified to fit Seventh-day Adventist core beliefs and should be carefully monitored. In spite of its imperfections, this method has been the means God has used to bring thousands of Muslims to a belief in the second coming of Jesus, the seventh-day Sabbath, and the core beliefs of the three angels messages. Monitoring gives safeguard against falsehood and disunity.

My greatest fear is that some may take the pretext of Martín’s paper and use it to condemn or question all creative approaches to Muslim evangelism and the entire work of the Global Mission Issues Committee. I know this is certainly not Martín’s intent, as he is not only a missiologist but an evangelist with a heart for Muslim mission; but I hope overly zealous, hasty readers do not respond in this way. My prayer is that we may dialogue openly on these issues and find ways we may not yet know about, to help prepare not only thousands but millions of Muslims to be ready to meet Jesus.

Works Cited