

It's not hard to recognize when someone's conscience has been defiled. I certainly saw it on Mustapha's face when we were living in a rural mountain town in North Africa. The Lord had been good to introduce us to this young follower of Christ during our first year there. I will never forget the look in his eyes that evening in our home. I had taken the liberty of inviting some Muslim men from our neighborhood to celebrate the birth of one of our children in their customary fashion—with a feast. At one point, in response to what seemed a comfortable and jovial experience eating roast lamb together, they broke into a spontaneous recitation of the Fatihah, their traditional Quranic blessing for a child. There was nothing but good will and acceptance in that room, and it was quite a bonding moment for me. But Mustapha's eyes said quite the opposite: a moral line had been crossed. His conscience had been deeply disturbed. That evening was my startling introduction to the ethical complexity of faith in a radically different socio-religious world.

Sally Dye describes this complexity as an encounter with another's "moralnet" (p. 15). Now that's not your typical label for an unreached people or region, but it's true to what greets us when we cross any cultural or religious frontier, either one across the world or among the diaspora at our doorstep. I didn't have a clue as to how Mustapha's conscience was guiding him through his traditional moralnet. All the benefits of cultural analysis and Bible study can fail to tune us into the moral maze these young believers face. Without Dye's grasp of the cultural and religious norms that comprise a moralnet, or a guiding set of propositions as outlined in Robert Priest's earlier research (p. 44), I could not fully appreciate Mustapha's struggle.

Our proper reflex is to turn to Scripture for principles to guide us in these new and distinct moral climates. The article by Wayne Dye, Sally's husband, offers a method of biblical interpretation that steers us through the straits between biblical absolutes and cultural variation, and keeps us from running aground on the sandbars of either biblical absolutism or ethical relativism (p. 5). Anyone looking for core Scriptural principles that can be maintained and developed in various cultures—and that can assist believers in these various contexts to adapt and express biblical absolutes—will find in Wayne's framework for biblical interpretation a timely tool.

One Pauline portion of Scripture, 1 Corinthians 8–10, is invariably used to address questions of culture and conscience—specifically, how new believers negotiate the

*Editorial continued on p. 4*

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idolatrous rituals resident within their community. It's here that Paul deals with the predicament of new believers amidst a pagan moralnet. Wayne and Sally both refer to this key text, but Kevin Higgins' exegetical study discloses how Paul handles the religious sensibilities of a new context (p. 27). Corinth is a long way from Jerusalem, and its spiritual and moral climate required an apostolic sensitivity distinct from what was required in a Jewish setting on the other side of the Mediterranean. It's here that love and liberty guide Paul in navigating individual consciences that are variously weak, clear, wounded, offended or emboldened. You'll want to read how Higgins adds new insight from Kenneth Bailey's commentary on 1 Corinthians to Paul's shaping of a "local theology" in this socio-religious context.

What's unsettling to many is the way a new believer's conscience is influenced by the non-Christian religious core of a culture (e.g., Islam's historical shaping of cultures). This can fall under the specter of syncretism and the blending of two religious worlds. It's challenging enough to sort out culture and conscience

(e.g., polygamy), but everything gets ratcheted-up in discerning how a trans-cultural religion influences conscience (e.g., ancestor worship). Again, in light of the Corinthian experience, Paul's penchant was not to make unilateral, dogmatic or collective statements about the "paganism" of Corinth, but rather to help believers honor and care for others with distinct and different religious sensibilities (e.g., consciences).

On this matter of religious sensibility, we thought we could use some perspective from Scott Sunquist's new book, *Understanding Christian Mission* (Baker Academic, 2013, see ad p. 2), and we're grateful to this publisher for permission to include an excerpt from this masterful all-in-one textbook on modern mission. Framed as a Trinitarian theological approach to the subject of mission, Sunquist shares his "eureka" of placing the interface with other cultures (contextualization) and religions (theology of religions) under the mission of the Holy Spirit. He asserts the superintending role of this third person of the Trinity in all the "points of contact" with other religions; but, as you can see from Richard's book review

(p. 48), social and cultural factors can also influence the church's selection of terminology at these same points of contact on any religious frontier.

### Looking "Back to the Future"

Seizing upon the 40th anniversary of the International Congress on World Evangelization held in Lausanne, Switzerland, this year's ISFM in Atlanta (September 23-25, 2014) will look back to the future with the theme "Recasting Evangelization: The Significance of Lausanne '74 for Today and Beyond" (see ad on back cover or [ijfm.org/isfm/annual.htm](http://ijfm.org/isfm/annual.htm) for details). As we celebrate the watershed event that was Lausanne '74, the focus will be on "Today and Beyond." We've got a great line-up of speakers and an affordable "all-inclusive" package—don't miss it!

In Him,



Brad Gill  
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

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The **IJFM** is published in the name of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, a fellowship of younger leaders committed to the purposes of the twin consultations of Edinburgh 1980: The World Consultation on Frontier Missions and the International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions. As an expression of the ongoing concerns of Edinburgh 1980, the **IJFM** seeks to:

- ☞ promote intergenerational dialogue between senior and junior mission leaders;
- ☞ cultivate an international fraternity of thought in the development of frontier missiology;
- ☞ highlight the need to maintain, renew, and create mission agencies as vehicles for frontier missions;
- ☞ encourage multidimensional and interdisciplinary studies;
- ☞ foster spiritual devotion as well as intellectual growth; and
- ☞ advocate "A Church for Every People."

Mission frontiers, like other frontiers, represent boundaries or barriers beyond which we must go yet beyond which we may not be able to see clearly and boundaries which may even be disputed or denied. Their study involves the discovery and evaluation of the unknown or even the reevaluation of the known. But unlike other frontiers, mission frontiers is a subject specifically concerned to explore and exposit areas and ideas and insights related to the glorification of God in all the nations (peoples) of the world, "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." (Acts 26:18)

Subscribers and other readers of the **IJFM** (due to ongoing promotion) come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Mission professors, field missionaries, young adult mission mobilizers, college librarians, mission executives, and mission researchers all look to the **IJFM** for the latest thinking in frontier missiology.