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Andrew Walls: A Quintessential and Dedicated Scholar of African Church History

By Harvey Kwiyani and Deji Ayegboyin[41]

Introduction

On Friday, 26 August 2021, a small group of about seventy people gathered at the Aberdeen Methodist Church to pay their last respects and celebrate the remarkable life of Andrew Walls, known to many as the beloved "Prof."[42] COVID-19 restrictions made it necessary to limit the number of attendants. If the tributes that poured in online are any reflection of how people valued and loved Andrew Walls, his would have been one of the most attended funerals, bringing together people from all continents as a testament to the many years of his ministry in the academic discipline of World Christianity. It was a surreal moment of utmost humility, deeply characteristic of Prof Walls' life. One speaker after another told memorable stories of how Andrew Walls had touched their lives in one way or another. Stories from around the world poured forth, appreciating his long life and the many good deeds upon which that life was grounded. Those in attendance who had enjoyed an academic relationship with Andrew Walls spoke of his generously intentional preferential option for marginalized histories of Christianity in the world, and how he worked tirelessly to name and highlight those histories. In doing so, he strived to correct the ways

[41] Harvey Kwiyani, PhD, is a research fellow at the Andrew Walls Centre for the Study of African and Asian Christianity and Deji Ayegboyin, PhD, is a senior fellow (since 2013) at the Andrew Walls Centre for the Study of African and Asian Christianity, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool, United Kingdom as well as Former Head, Religious Studies Department, University of Ibadan (Nigeria) and DACB Senior Advisory Council member

[42] Andrew Walls was born on April 28, 1928 and died on August 12, 2021. At the time of his death, he still held the position of Professor of the History of Missions at Liverpool Hope University in Liverpool, UK. This essay does not rehash his biography in the interest of dedicating its focus to the significance of his work in the shaping of contemporary history of Christianity in Africa. For a biographic account of Andrew Walls' life, please see Daniel Jeyaraj's tribute on behalf of Liverpool Hope University at https://www.hope.ac.uk/news/allnews/remembering-acclaimed-historian-professor-andrew-walls-.html.

in which the history of Christianity has been distorted so that it appears to be the history of European Christianity.

To a great extent, it was Africa that enjoyed Andrew Walls' attention the most. His close working relationships with such African scholars like Lamin Sanneh, Kwame Bediako, and Jehu Hanciles allowed him to always be at the cutting edge of African Christian scholarship. Many African church leaders studied under him either at Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Liverpool Hope, Princeton, or the Akrofi-Christaller Institute. It is Andrew Walls' work in the history of Christianity in Africa that this essay seeks to celebrate.[43]

Unmasking False Histories of Africa

The history of Christian missions has, for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, excessively emphasized the narrative of Western missionaries and their marvelous deeds in other parts of the world.[44] One would be forgiven for believing that mission has always been a domain exclusively reserved for Westerners, both the actual missionaries and their historians. By and large, events outside the Western world are represented as incidental occurrences in the master narrative. Indigenous agents in mission only appear tangentially as supporting actors in the story of white Western missionaries. Fortunately, since the 1980s, some scholars have increasingly responded to the distortions in such an approach.[45]

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[43] Harvey Kwiyani worked with Andrew Walls at Liverpool Hope University where he was Professor of the History of mission until his death. Deji Ayegboyin worked for a while closely with Andrew Walls in West Africa, especially in Ghana and Nigeria where he is based.

[44] Harvey Kwiyani, ed., *Africa Bears Witness: Mission Theology and Praxis in the 21st Century* (Nairobi: ATNP, 2021), 6. In addition, Allan Anderson, for example, observes that historians and hagiographers of Pentecostalism have often reflected biases interpreting history from predominantly white, usually North American perspectives, neglecting the vital and often more significant work of Asian, African, American and Latin American Pentecostal pioneers. See Allan H. Anderson, "Writing the Pentecostal History of Africa, Asia and Latin America," *Journal of Beliefs and Values: Studies in Religion and Education* 25, no. 2 (2004): 140.

[45] Peter Brown focuses on the shift in European Christian identity from an East-West Mediterranean axis to a South-North axis. See Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, AD 200-1000* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012). See also John Wayland Coakley and Andrea Sterk, *Readings in World Christian History: Earliest*

Evidently, it is ineffectual if one understands the roots, trends, and future development of Christian missions without a proper grasp of its background. History in this sense will encompass the scientific approach to history, historiography, and objectivity in the analysis of the facts being studied. In his book *The Growth of African Civilization*, Basil Davidson referred to some writers as imperialist historians who engaged in what he called "bad history" because "they allow their prejudice and personal feelings to get the better of them." [46] He expressed grief that some Eurocentric writers were so prejudiced that they alleged that African culture and civilization were so backward, sterile, fruitless, and disobliging for any intellectual stimulation that it was safe to conclude that Africa had no history of her own.[47] There is a great deal of falsehood in such telling of African history.

Indeed, Africans have a long history of their own which is a legitimate part of global history. Andrew Walls often lamented that the particularity of European and American histories has resulted in the denigration of the place of African Christianity in mission history. He complained that Church History, even when taught on African soil, and even when taught by African scholars, often meant the history of Christianity in the Western tradition.[48] Walls challenged Africans to stand up and insist that, in the age of globalization, Africa be studied on its own terms to reflect its unique historical and social circumstances.

Christianity to 1453, vol. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), ix. Another good example of this shift is Emma Wild-Wood's book on Apostle Kivebulaya. See Emma Wild-Wood, *The Mission of Apolo Kivebulaya: Religious Encounter and Social Change in the Great Lakes c. 1865-1935* (Suffolk: James Currey, 2020).

[46] Basil Davidson, *The Growth of African Civilisation: A History of West Africa 1000-1800* (London: Longmans, 1966), 1. This book was written with F. K. Buah.

[47] Kwame Bediako argues that Anthropology and Missiology are not really universal sciences since they reflect Western ethnocentrisms and tend to set other cultures, viewed as exotic, over against the West. See Kwame Bediako, "Mission Issues in Africa Today," *ATF Bulletin* 5 (October) (1997). Mbiti also pointed out that "one of the dominating attitudes in this early period was the assumption that African beliefs, cultural characteristics and even 'foods,' were all borrowed from the outside world. German scholars pushed this assumption to the extreme, and have not all abandoned it completely to this day…" See John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1971), 6.

[48] Brian Stanley, "Profile of Andrew Walls," *Epworth Review* 28, no. 4 (2001): 18.

Andrew Walls: A Foremost Historian of African Christianity

Andrew Walls is eminently qualified to raise objections on the earlier mindset on the study of missions in Africa and to give appropriate directives on what unbiased scholarship should look like. He founded and served as the pioneer editor for several periodicals that promoted research on non-Western Christianity.[49] These include *Sierra Leone Bulletin of the Society for African Church History*, *Journal of Religion in Africa,* and *Annual Survey of Literature on Christianity in the non-Western World*. Walls was a pioneer and academic statesman in the study of missions and world Christianity.

His interests in African Christianity spanned a period of sixty-four years, starting in 1957 when, after finishing his studies at Exeter College in Oxford and working at Tyndale House in Cambridge for five years, he moved to Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone to "teach those in training for the ministry (…) church history."[50] He went to Sierra Leone believing that church history was full of lessons to be imparted to the younger churches from the accumulated wisdom of the older ones.[51] His transformation of mind took place when, as he says, he was "happily pontificating on the patchwork quilt of diverse fragments that constitutes second-century Christian literature" only to realize that he was "actually living in a second-century church."[52] He quickly noticed that his students responded to learning about the Early Church as if they were actually living at the time of the Early Church. Of course, his students in Sierra Leone, just like in the wider continent of Africa, were living in the second century of their Christianity.

Many years later, Walls would say that realizing that African Christians responded warmly to Early Church history led him to further appreciate the geographical spread of the Early Church, that it was not restricted to the Latin-speaking western parts of the Roman Empire like Rome and Carthage only. It also spread to the Greek-speaking eastern parts of the Empire in the East, to Constantinople and Antioch, down to Egypt, Nubia and Ethiopia, as far as

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49 Lamin Sanneh, "Andrew Finlay Walls," in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 714.

50 Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), xiii.

51 Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, xiii.

52 Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, xiii.

Arabia, India and Persia. In addition, he discovered that Africa needed new theological curricula because those imported from Europe had limited relevance among African Christians. This meant, for Walls himself, that he had to learn the Christian story anew, paying attention to this new second-century church in Africa and what it had to say to the old traditions of Western Christianity. While in Sierra Leone, he was elected the founding secretary of the Society for African Church History.[53]

In 1962, he moved and taught in Nigeria, where he became the head of the new Department of Religion at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He left Nigeria and returned to Scotland weeks before the 1966 war. Brain Stanley recalls that at Nsukka, Andrew Walls "developed African curricula and methods of teaching religion appropriate for a newly independent country in Africa which combined strong Muslim and Christian traditions both of which were undergirded by the continuing vitality of assumptions of African traditional or primal religion."[54]

Throughout his time in Nigeria, he promoted the study of Christianity in its non-Western forms. With this background, he initiated the establishment of the Centres for the Study of Christianity in the non-Western World (CSCNWW) first at Aberdeen in 1982 and later at Edinburgh since 1987.[55] Stanley observed that departments such as that established by Walls at Nsukka pioneered a model for the study of religion in primal societies that was followed by universities in Europe and North America.[56]

Over the ensuing years, Walls observed that the "labors of the missionary movement and the cross-cultural process in Christian history have borne fruit and catalyzed a shift in the center of gravity of Christianity that has immense implications for the theology of the future."[57] As such, Andrew Walls has, in his three major works, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History,*[58] *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*,[59] and *Crossing Cultural Frontiers:*

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[53] Stanley, "Profile of Andrew Walls," 20.

[54] Stanley, "Profile of Andrew Walls," 20.

[55] Sanneh, "Andrew Finlay Walls," 714.

[56] Stanley, "Profile of Andrew Walls," 20.

[57] Stanley, "Profile of Andrew Walls," 9.

[58] Walls, *The Missionary Movement*.

[59] Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

Studies in the History of World Christianity[60] made a theological commentary on the shifting of Christianity and anticipated the emergence of World Christianity while seeking to begin to retell the history of Christianity in ways that honor the non-Western trajectories that have been lost along the way. They also begin to argue for a change in the ways we understand mission to include the scholarly voices of non-Westerners. Indeed, in a 1991 article, he lamented the "the untroubled rule of palefaces over the academic [or theological] world."[61] In the decades of his work, Walls repeatedly sought to bring our attention to the new fact that the Christian heartlands are no longer in Western Europe and North America but are instead in South America, Africa, and Eastern Asia. He was of the opinion that the future of the Christian faith, its shape in the twenty-first and twenty-second centuries, is being decided by events which are now, or will be in the near future, taking place in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, stating that, "new agendas for theology will appear in Africa."[62]

He continued to visit Africa numerous times over the fifty-five years following his 1966 return to Aberdeen, while drawing students from around the world to study with him in Scotland. Indeed, Walls has been involved in various roles in the development of many African scholars, most of whom have passed through the corridors of the Aberdeen University and the University of Edinburgh. In an article about Walls, rightly entitled "Historian Ahead of His Time," *Christianity Today* suggests that for most North American Christians, Walls could be the most important person they do not know.[63]

Andrew Walls' Significance in African Church History

Andrew Walls' work in the study of African church history or African Christian thought stands out. The fact that he has three books to his name (plus one more

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[60] Andrew F. Walls, *Crossing Cultural Frontiers: Studies in the History of World Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017).

[61] Andrew F. Walls, "Structural Problems in Mission Studies," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 15, no. 4 (1991): 152.

[62] Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process*, 85-86.

[63] Tim Stafford, "Historian Ahead of His Time: Andrew Walls May Be the Most Important Person You Don't Know," *Christianity Today* (2007). http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/february/34.87.html, accessed September 20, 2021.

co-edited with Cathy Ross[64]) does not do justice to his legacy which is revealed to some extent in Williams Burrows' edited volume, *Understanding World Christianity: The Vision and Work of Andrew F. Walls.*[65] To really appreciate his impact, readers need to look beyond the book catalogues and search for his name in journal search engines and in video repositories. Indeed, some of his most significant contribution is on YouTube and video repositories of the many institutions where he spoke over the decades.

Speaking from an African perspective, Walls' work can be understood along three key issues. The first important issue he wrestled with has to do with the relevance of history in mission. He lamented that not the whole spectrum of Christian history has received adequate attention.[66] In his work among African Christians, Andrew Walls was a church historian focused on mission. According to him, the missiology and church history of any region share common ground. If this has not seemed to be an obvious area to explore, it is because some writers equate Christian history exclusively with Western history. As long as this misconception persists, church history and mission will wrangle at arms' length instead of seriously engaging with each other. His work brought them together in a very exemplary manner. His church history is mission history and his mission history is also church history. Walls always maintained that it is important to have a broad outlook on history before we can say that we are studying the history of the universal Christian Church; but we must also understand that local histories are important.

In seminars and conversations, Walls often expressed his discomfort with the restricted and parochial outlook in Church History, including Mission History, citing his own experience in Scotland where students being prepared to become church ministers followed a three-year syllabus in missions that focused on three areas: (1) the Early Church, (2) the Reformation, and (3) the history of the church *in Scotland*. They were not expected to know what happened to other churches in various parts of the world. Although a chance was given for African church history as an optional (elective) course, some were concerned that the syllabus of that class distorted history because it kept the students from learning

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[64] Andrew F. Walls and Cathy Ross, eds., *Mission in the Twenty-first Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).

[65] William R. Burrows, Mark R. Gornik, and Janice A. McLean, *Understanding World Christianity: The Vision and Work of Andrew F. Walls* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

[66] Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 1.

about the church in other contexts. Walls affirmed that nothing large or lasting in missiology could be fully understood without learning about the advent of Christianity in Africa. He argued that the special place for Africa in the history of redemption is hinted at in the New Testament, in Acts 8, for instance. Walls claimed that the encounter of the Ethiopian eunuch with Philip is a reminder that Africa, the lands beyond the Nile, would have a Christian history too, one that was not yet charted and one that was distinct from the story of Asia and Europe, which is the concern of the Acts of Apostles.[67]

He recalled also that in the history of the Early Church, among other things:

> Africans provided much of the intellectual task force of early Christianity who developed the groundwork of Christian theology. Most of the seminal theologians of the early centuries belonged to the African continent. Africa was also the source of Christian innovations, of new, radical, and sometimes controversial movements.[68]

The second critical issue in the assessment of Walls' understanding of the importance of history in missiology is that the development of mission is not static, but rather dynamic. He is deeply suspicious of those who perceive history as immutable, preferring to define historical authenticity strictly by reference to the past. Walls insisted that since mission history is concerned with the spread of the church, the study of history must take into account where the history of mission is proceeding. John Parratt quoted Walls as saying as early as 1976 that: within the last three centuries the position of Christianity had changed from being a kind of "tribal religion of the Caucasian peoples" to becoming a truly world religion. Today the greatest areas of Christian strength are no longer in the West; and in Europe in particular Christianity is in marked recession, losing in adhesion, respect and influence. Its main strength lies rather in Latin America, Western Africa, the Rift Valley, and the Pacific, where it has most adherents and where its impact upon society is most widespread.[69] The realization that Christianity is dynamic made Walls appreciate that as much as it was good to teach and follow the curriculum that was primarily made in and for Europe, there

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[67] Andrew F Walls, "Africa in Christian History: Retrospect and Prospect," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 1, no. 1 (1998): 20.

[68] Walls, "Africa in Christian History," 2.

[69] John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 1.

was a need to recognize the value of the history of Christianity of West Africa where he was working even though there was no written literature on African Christian history.

Third, Walls declared that there were obvious glaring gaps in our knowledge of people, places, and activities of nationals in most of the earliest contacts that were documented in personal memoirs, diaries, and journals because they were published from the missionaries' viewpoints.[70] He also expressed the fact that because there was no follow-up on the new developments in Africa, the histories of some places which had once been prominent would be forgotten. Indeed, some places were neglected because they might have been inaccessible to the missionaries, but that does not mean that those places did not exist or were not important. Walls contended that it is only when the history of Africa is studied as a whole that it would become evident what Africans have done for their own development and the development of mission. Allan Anderson underscored this point when he explained how and why the roles of thousands of national workers in early Pentecostalism were overlooked or marginalized. Traditional ways of telling history emphasized perspectives that came "from above." They gave exaggerated importance to the roles of the missionaries and were often full of historiographical imperialism and ethnocentrism. Indeed, a great deal of missionary biographies from Africa sounds like hagiography. The reason, according to Allan Anderson, is clear:

> Missionary paternalism, even if it was "benevolent paternalism" was widely practiced… white missionaries kept control of churches and their national founders, and especially of their finances they raised in Western Europe and North America. Most wrote home as if they were mainly (if not solely) responsible for the progress of the work there.[71]

As a result of this marginalization of the roles of nationals, Walls embarked on modest research with the local Christian community. Due to the mentality people had about Christian history, many thought that Walls was deluded in his research approach and methodology on the history of Christian mission in West Africa. It was thought then that a Church History needed Greek and Latin to back it up. But then, as Walls stated, "it was soon clear, however, that work on the African material was not only 'real' Church History, but it was

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[70] Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 56.

[71] Anderson, "Writing the Pentecostal History," 146.

going to be as demanding and laborious, and (…) there were fewer guidelines, fewer precedents, hardly any instruments of the study."[72] Consequently, Walls became one of the advocates of a "new history"[73] which is a deliberate reaction against traditional history and its paradigms.

Fourth, Walls emphasized that some deep injuries have been done to mission in Africa because of the neglect of history and the significance of primal religion. Primal religion, in a way, is the context into which Christianity was born. Context in this sense implies understanding and insight into the realities of our particular situation as part and parcel of the wider total reality of Christian scholarship, history, and witness.[74] Undeniably, in Africa and other Majority World societies, primal religion served as the background into which Christianity was born. Unfortunately, many missionaries and scholars refused to study the forms of African traditional religions appropriately and sympathetically. Missionaries frequently referred to the nationals in their newsletters, diaries, and journals as "heathen," "primitive," and "savage." They described African religions as paganism, heathenism, idolatry, fetishism, animism, and other derogatory terms.[75] The bizarre picture that illustrates the position of Africa is articulated by James Coleman:

> Tropical Africa was of special interest to Christian missionaries. The heathen was the missionary target, and of all peoples in the non-European world the African was believed to be the most heathen. In early missionary literature Africa was characterized "as one universal den of desolation, misery, and crime, and certainly, of all the divisions of the globe it has always had an unfortunate preeminence in degradation, wretchedness and woe." The reports of many early traders, explorers, and pioneer missionaries contained vivid and

[72] Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, xiv.

[73] Anderson explains that the "new history" is concerned with the whole of human activity, "history from below" rather than "history from above," history taken from the perspective of the powerless rather than from that of the rich and powerful. (See Anderson, "Writing the Pentecostal History," 149).

[74] Bediako adds that the relevance of contextuality has within it the potential of inter contextuality. In other words, studies of context need to be seen as studies of part of total story. See Bediako, "Mission Issues in Africa Today."

[75] Idowu pointed out that in studying African Traditional religion, even African students entered upon their studies with an academic temper dictated by the attitudes and terminologies of foreign writers. See E. Bọlaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (London: SCM Press, 1973), 108-34.

> frequently exaggerated accounts of primitive savagery and barbarism. In 1873 a returned missionary said: "The Chinaman meets you with the stolid morality of his Confucianism; the Hindoo with astute logic for his Pantheism … When I carry my torch into the caves of Africa, I meet only filthy birds of darkness … Thus, whereas the non-Christian East was portrayed as having traditions of ancient civilizations, Africa was believed to have nothing but moral darkness ….[76]

Walls confessed that he fell into the same trap, which some earlier church historians had fallen into. He tried hard to avoid the importance of African religion and society in the transformation of mission.[77] However, it soon dawned on him that just as the religious background of the Roman Empire was essential for Patristic Studies and the process of interactions between the Christian faith and primal religions of Europe were helpful for a better grasp of how Western Christians came to appropriate the Gospel, so was it necessary to understand in a better light the encounters of religions and Christianity in Africa.[78] Walls found out that, in his case, the work involved addressing the forms of African religion and society. This realization led him to think seriously about the process of interactions between the Christian faith and the primal religions of Europe. He wondered about the process by which his own ancestors and those of the Western Christians came to appropriate the Gospel and other religions of Europe, and how parallel they were to the primal religions today. More importantly, he realized that it is possible to understand those old texts better in the light of the encounters of religions presently visible in Africa.[79]

In order to arrive at an appropriate methodology of relating the background of a place to its history and to remove the possible biases that are informed by scholar's background, Walls attracted to the University of Edinburgh project funding notably from the Pew Charitable Trust of Philadelphia for a project on African Christianity.[80] He then brought together a mixed group of Western and African students to study World Christianity. This brought to him an exciting revelation, seeing how African Christians responded

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[76] James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), 91.

[77] Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, xvi.

[78] Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, xv.

[79] Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, xvi.

[80] Stanley, "Profile of Andrew Walls," 23.

to the documents in a way that reflected the origins of Western European Christianity, and the insights they brought to those documents. One cannot but appreciate Walls' picture of a big, crowded theatre with a huge stage and a stream of actors passing across it, but no one sees the whole of it. He pointed out that everyone in the theatre sees the same play and hears the same words, but they have different views of the conjunction of words and action. Those on one side get a sharply focused view of certain scenes, which those placed elsewhere do not have to the same degree. Even when the scene changes, and the position is reversed, and the main action is on another part of the stage, still viewers will not be able to view the whole stage at once. In this illustration, he mentioned a very important point when he avers, "Those who get up at the interval and compare notes with friends sitting elsewhere in the auditorium will perhaps understand the action best of all."[81] Walls' conclusion from all this shows that global missiology would not be understood properly until attention is paid to knowing or writing appropriately the Majority World church history and theology.[82]

African Church History After Andrew Walls

Failure to include the Majority World in church history for many years has fractured the discipline. This view is underscored and strengthened by historians of the African church like Ogbu-Kalu,[83] Lamin Sanneh,[84] Kwame Bediako,[85] John Pobee,[86] Elizabeth Isichei,[87] Mercy Oduyoye,[88] and many others. Sanneh insisted, like Walls, that "to detach the African factor in mission is to misunderstand the history of Christianity in its African transformation."[89] A careful study of the African Independent Churches and indigenous Pentecostal

[81] Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, 44.

[82] Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, xv.

[83] Ogbu Kalu, *African Christianity: An African story* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007).

[84] Lamin O. Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1983).

[85] Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995).

[86] John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979).

[87] Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

[88] Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*.

[89] Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, xii.

movements that were not started by Western missionaries needs to be done time and again. Avoiding doing so may still lead to a biased African Church History, for such churches have contributed so much to the growth of Christianity in Africa. For a fruitful study of these churches, it is necessary to consult and involve the leaders of these very churches, other than writing from hearsay, because these very leaders hold the very truth and the history of their churches

Second, Sanneh acknowledged the fact that there are some aspects of traditional history that have to be built upon as foundations to writing the church history of the Global South. For this, Third World (sic) scholars must express some gratitude.[90] However, as Lamin Sanneh pointed out, "We need a shift in our categories of data compilation and analysis to take adequate account of the new African Christian material. In faithfulness to that material there must be a genuine plural tradition of academic scholarship to reflect on the data and to reconstruct it as a faithful component of the African world to which it belongs and from which it speaks to us."[91] In fact, a profound study of the writings of Ogbu Kalu, Lamin Sanneh, and John Pobee shows that they recognized that the foundational history of West Africa is important. However, they maintained that the historical records colored with erroneous conceptions must be deleted. Walls agreed that there are some local crucial issues, which traditional Church History overlooks. For example, it refuses to put on record some evils that were committed by the European colonizers of [Africa and Latin America] against the church.[92]

In reaction to this, historians like Ogbu Kalu and Elizabeth Isichei, among others, have pointed out that there are many perspectives to having authentic Church History of Africa, which will not be stained by traditional Western historians. It is, however, important to note that in evaluating the colonial history of Africa, scholars of African missiology must not fall into the double-edged trap of either glorifying the missionaries and not looking at their lives and ministries critically or blaming everything on them. Yes, there existed missionaries who were critical of colonialism but there also many who were supportive of colonialism.[93] The history of European colonialism and missionary

[90] Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, xii.

[91] Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, xii.

[92] Walls, *The Missionary Movement*, xiv

[93] For instance, see Harvey Kwiyani's discussion of Joseph Booth and William Colenso in Harvey C. Kwiyani, "Mission After George Floyd: On White Supremacy, Colonialism, and World Christianity," *ANVIL* 36, no. 3 (2020).

work in Africa must be told courageously. Church history needs the truth—if it is not true, it is not history. Of course, all history is mixture of good and bad; there is no need to whitewash it. There is a lot to learn from the past if one is not biased and it could help us to write a better African history.

Concerning the re-writing of traditional history, Walls explained that there are some disciplines, some backgrounds, and some foundations that must be understood and taken into consideration before events can be appropriately reported. Walls also reported how he trained his postgraduate students to break away from the traditional forms of writing history. Similarly, Walls felt that there were some areas in the Majority World history that could not be appropriately explored because traditional historians held those areas were not important. Evidence abounds now from African historians showing that the history of the church in all nooks and crannies of Africa is vital. Historians like Jean Comby are struck by the fact that there were immense territories in which there were either no missionaries or very few on the field. Such regions are literally glossed over by historians in spite of the fact that the history of such places should have helped to understand why Christianity failed there and succeeded elsewhere.[94]

Andrew Walls addressed the fact that a study of African traditional background and society is crucial to the Church in Africa.[95] Most African scholars rightly emphasized the importance of African religious heritage to a comprehensive understanding of the African people and their history. It is certainly true that the real encounter between Christianity and traditional religion took place in the heart of African Christians. African scholars, therefore, agreed that a careful study of traditional religion helps to bring to light certain aspects of African life that relate to the phenomenon of the rich and diverse religious life that has flourished among Africans for centuries. Those things include finding out about relationships between divinities and ordinary life; how common objects like water, stone or wood could be transformed into a ritual symbol. Is there a way this transformation has become a mediation and intercession in African Christianity? And is there a way the recognition of the plural world of the divinities contributes to the African understanding of the universal doctrines of the Holy Scriptures? The understanding of these and many other questions can help to determine the way the Church was assimilated in communities and societies. The same could also be used to determine how the Church was

[94] Jean Comby, *How to Understand the History of Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 103.

[95] Walls, "Africa in Christian History," 2.

assimilated in other Global South countries. This, in the end, would help scholars of the Global South Church History to avoid bias.

Conclusion

Evidently, one of the striking matters arising in the works of Andrew Walls is that it has become clear that from the end of the second millennium to the present, the Christian faith has become a predominantly non-Western religion. According to Walls, the things by which people recognize and judge Christianity for good or for ill will increasingly be determined in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The characteristic doctrines, liturgy, ethical codes, and social applications of the faith will increasingly be prominent in the Majority World.

Current developments within African Christianity indicate that these were not wild claims, for not only is Christianity growing rapidly, but "in African hands, the faith has also been experiencing much transformation with an impact that is being felt across the Western World."[96] If it is true that the non-Western World would provide a model for reshaping religion and the Christian faith now and in the future, then we must take the history of their mission seriously just as European missionaries once believed in their divine task of evangelizing what they called the Dark Continent. African Church leaders today are convinced of their mission to bring the Gospel back to those who originally provided it. As Sanneh posited, "the recognition of the African factor is by now overdue and is of inestimable value in the rediscovery of the real origins of African Christianity."[97]

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[96] Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, xiii.

[97] Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, xiii.

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