Obituary for Andrew Finlay Walls (21 April 1928–12 August 2021)

Andrew Finlay Walls was a Christian scholar, mentor, teacher, friend, and inspiration to many of us. In scholarship and in practice, Walls embodied World Christianity; the world of Christian scholarship has lost an innovative and outstanding mind. His life of service qualifies him as an ancestor in African traditional thought, and scholars in mission history and World Christianity will invoke his memory in the same way Africans acknowledge their *nananom*, ancestors. His sense of calling as a scholar, Methodist lay preacher, and public servant was palpable. It was impossible to encounter him without feeling that you were in the presence of a man of solid Christian and intellectual worth. At the same time, many of us will equally think of his storytelling, poetry, sense of humor, care, compassion, and humility.

Walls will be remembered as the doyen of the academic study of World Christianity. But, “[r]ather than foster[ing] his own career, Walls has endeavoured to empower others ... and he created a climate that fosters scholarly activity among a wide community.”¹ Beginning his career as a patristics scholar at Oxford, he embraced the opportunity to teach at Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone (1957–62), moving to the University of Nsukka, Nigeria (1962–66). As he so frequently recounted, this was a pivotal moment for him, as he recognized the parallels between contemporary African Christian thought and early Christian scholarship, a trajectory that shaped his remaining life and career. Returning home, he taught at the University of Aberdeen (1966–86), establishing the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World. In 1986, he moved the Centre to the University of Edinburgh (Centre for the Study of World Christianity); and in 2008 moved part of the library collection to Liverpool Hope University (Andrew F. Walls Centre for the Study of African and Asian Christianity).

He was the founder of the *Journal of Religion in Africa* (1967) and inspired the establishment of *Studies in World Christianity* (1995). The festschrift honoring his scholarship is befittingly titled *Understanding World Christianity: The Vision*

1 William R. Burrows, Mark R. Gornick, and Janice A. Maclean, eds. *Understanding World Christianity: The Vision and Work of Andrew F. Walls* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011) 1.

and Work of Andrew F. Walls. The editors' note was apposite: Walls invites us to consider what God is doing in the world as the gospel interacts with cultures and Christ as embodied in communities.²

Walls distinguished himself as a scholar with a genuine and credible global reach. His place in history as co-founder (with the late Lamin Sanneh) of the Yale-Edinburgh Group on World Christianity and the History of Mission (1992) means his influence on Christian scholarship will endure for generations. He was a past General Secretary of IAMS (1972–74); a past President of the British Association for the Study of Religions; a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland; and has received numerous awards and accolades. In the latter part of his life, he was Professor of the History of Mission at Liverpool Hope University; Professor Emeritus at the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission, and Culture, Ghana; Research Professor at Africa International University's Center for World Christianity, Kenya; Honorary Professor at the University of Edinburgh; and a guest professor at Princeton and Harvard; as well as a longtime collaborator with the Overseas Ministries Study Center.

Walls empowered others and created a climate that fostered scholarly activity among a wide community.³ He encouraged us to chronicle, document, and interpret the transformation of Christianity in its inexorable expansion. When his former student, colleague, and founder of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute, Kwame Bediako, passed away, Walls observed in a tribute there are many who achieve academic success, but few who change the prevailing intellectual climate and the way people think. We now say the same about Andrew Walls.

With his passing, we have lost a Christian scholar, visionary leader, and friend. May his legacy endure to the glory of God and the blessing of generations.

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² Burrows et al., *Understanding World Christianity*, 1.

³ Burrows et al., *Understanding World Christianity*, 1.