

Review Essay William R. Burrows, Mark R. Gornick, and Janice A. McLean, eds.
Understanding World Christianity: The Vision and Work of Andrew F. Walls. New York: Orbis Books, 240 pp., table of contents, index, list of contributions, bibliography, \$30.00, ISBN 978-1570759499

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This book is edited by three individuals with thorough backgrounds in theology and Christianity. William Burrows is a research professor of missiology in the Center for World Christianity at the New York Theology Seminary. The second editor, Mark Gornick, has previously studied the African Christian diaspora and is the president of the City Seminary of New York. Janice McLean is on the faculty of the City Seminary of New York. All three editors are well qualified to review these essays that contribute to a greater understanding of Christianity around the world.

The book mostly focuses on the expansion of Christianity in Africa, Asia, and the Global South. Professor Andrew Walls, who envisioned the works in this book, is a former missionary to Sierra Leone and Nigeria. He has taught at the University of Edinburgh, Princeton Theological Seminary, and throughout Ghana. As noted in the book, Walls has “fifty years of global ministry from the late 1950s to the present span across deep shifts in the study of World Christianity” (Burrows et al. 2011, 169). Walls also spent nine years in Africa. During the first five years of his stay, he taught history of the church to “Anglican ministerial candidates” at Fourah Bay College, Freetown, Sierra Leone (Burrows 2011).

Within this book, the reader gets a glimpse of Walls’ ideal vision of how Christianity moves around the world, touching continents such as Asia and Africa, leaving a cultural impression on those regions. The book is broken into five parts. The first section is an introduction to Walls as a mentor, Methodist preacher, and teacher in Africa. In the next section, the editors introduce “breaking boundaries and building new ways of scholarship.” Next, the book explains transmission in the Christian faith, following with a section on transformations in Christian history, then concluding with Africa’s place in Christian history, which is the main

focus of the book. For example, when speaking of Africa's role in the spread of Christianity, the editors state:

Within Africa itself, internal migrations, voluntary and involuntary, augmented the spread of Christianity. In West Africa, for instance, the Sierra Leone colony (which became home to tens of thousands of recaptured slaves under a British abolition scheme) became a major source of missionary migrants, as Christianized former slaves and their descendants returned to their homelands (or traveled further afield) with the Christian message. (p. 233)

Walls draws upon his knowledge of history, theology, biblical studies, and personal experience to describe and write about the ever expanding influence of the church. Walls' personal endeavors to learn and comprehend Christianity is strongly evident in these essays. "In a recent doctoral seminar on 'Slavery, Slave Trade, and Christianity,' Professor Walls worked through the dilemmas facing the Christian conscience when confronted by the practice of institutional slavery" (Burrows et al. 2011, 9). The majority of the essays within this book pay homage to Walls's abilities and knowledge on the subject of Christianity as other scholars attempt to explore Professor Walls's "legacy" in his documentation of Christianity.

The book slightly touches upon some historical components to Christianity in chapter four, as Wilbert R. Shenk speaks of the years following World War II, when the question of religion was debated by the Europeans. It was generally thought that the future of religion was forlorn, but not without good reason. "For a century the churches in Europe, measured in terms of active participation, had been steadily declining" (Burrows et al. 2011, 36). As to be expected, the author of this essay soon jumped back to the subject of Christianity in Africa and its "new forms and movements."

One of the most important areas of study for Walls is the incredible growth of Christianity in Africa. Within this region, attention has been given to Christian scholarship. "The tradition of Christian scholarship continued with the modern missionary movement in Africa"

(Burrows et al. 2011, 207). Furthermore, out of its main concern to convey the Gospel, the missionary movement was compelled into what Walls refers to as ground-breaking scholarship (Burrows et al. 2011). He argued that Africa has become a vital hub of the Christian religion and faith, and what occurs on the continent of Africa will determine the nature of present-day Christianity.

This book is appropriate for those seeking further knowledge of Christianity outside the parameters of the Western world. Perhaps it would be useful in a non-Western civilization course specializing in religion. It is also appropriate for practitioners and those yearning for a deeper understanding of Christianity. I would also recommend this book for an advanced reader as some of the essays are a bit “dry.” However, the book is broken up extremely well to maximize the reader’s interest and keep their attention. It is well written and well worded, suitable for any college level course and beyond. In addition, and most importantly, it is a thought provoking piece of work that truly conveys the amount of time and effort put into its completion.

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Bibliography

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