

Founding the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World

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The Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World (known since 2009 as the Centre for the Study of World Christianity), from its successive homes in the universities of Aberdeen and Edinburgh, has exercised an influence in the shaping and bibliographic resourcing of the new academic field of ‘world Christianity’ that is arguably without parallel. That extraordinary and enduring influence derives in large measure from the single-minded vision, and dogged persistence in the face of many institutional obstacles, of Andrew Finlay Walls, O.B.E.¹ His own experience as a theological educator in Sierra Leone and Nigeria from 1957 to 1966 had left him in no doubt that the immediate future of Christianity lay in the southern hemisphere. But he had also become increasingly aware that this new and exciting chapter in Christian history could not be adequately written in the years to come unless some serious and urgent initiatives were taken to document and interpret the rapid growth and rich diversification of southern Christianity. The Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World developed from Andrew’s awareness of this compelling need.

In 1970 Andrew was promoted from his post as Senior Lecturer in Church History in the Faculty of Divinity in the University of Aberdeen to become head of a new Department of Religious Studies (reconstituted from an existing Department of Biblical Studies) in the university. Funding was provided by a bequest for the provision of a lectureship or chair in comparative religion from a local schoolmaster, William Riddoch, who had died in 1942.² The fledgling department was to be independent of the Faculty of Divinity and was dedicated particularly to the study of religion in ‘primal societies’ (a contested term which Andrew has always resolutely defended as carrying no implications of primitivism) and non-western expressions of Christianity. Influenced by the pioneering example set in the University of Ibadan by another Methodist missionary and scholar of African religion, Geoffrey Parrinder, Andrew’s broad vision was of a department dedicated to ‘the study of religion, in its own

¹ He was awarded the Order of the British Empire in 1986 for his public service, especially to the arts in Scotland.

² James L. Cox and Steven J. Sutcliffe, ‘Religious studies in Scotland: a persistent tension with divinity’, *Religion* 36 (2006), 1-28 (reference at pp. 5-6).

terms and in its social, phenomenological and historical aspects'.³ Andrew soon attracted a number of highly distinguished academics to join him on the teaching staff.⁴ They included: from 1973 to 1981, Harold W. Turner, a New Zealand colleague of Andrew's from both Freetown and Nsukka days, and a pioneering scholar of African new religious movements; from 1976 to 1982, Adrian Hastings, the Catholic historian and interpreter of African Christianity; and from 1978 to 1981, Lamin Sanneh, a Gambian convert from Islam to Christianity who later went on to hold chairs at Harvard and Yale. With such a gifted team, a steady stream of postgraduate students from Africa and elsewhere soon made their way north to Aberdeen. Andrew's own PhD students in the Aberdeen years included such subsequently celebrated names as Kwame Bediako, Jonathan Bonk, James L. Cox, Edward Fasholé-Luke, David Shank, and Godwin Tasié.

The setting up of the Centre within the Department at Aberdeen was a logical next step from Andrew's existing energetic activities as academic supervisor, journal editor, and bibliographer in the fields of mission studies and African religions. He was the founding editor of two new journals that had first appeared in 1967 – *The Bulletin of the Scottish Institute of Missionary Studies* and *The Journal of Religion in Africa (JRA)*. The former publication continued, a little irregularly, in two series, the first running from the inception of the Scottish Institute of Missionary Studies in 1967 until 1976, and the second from the creation of the Centre in 1982 until 1994. For a period the *Bulletin* was accompanied by a bibliographical supplement (on microfiche) of Current Literature on Christian Mission and on Christianity in the Non-Western World. The *JRA* remained under Andrew's editorial guidance until Adrian Hastings took over in 1985: it continues to flourish to this day as the premier academic journal in its field.

While at Aberdeen, Andrew also assumed additional responsibilities in the sphere of the bibliography of world Christianity. The first volume of the *JRA* contained nearly fifty pages compiled by Andrew as the first instalment of the Bibliography of the Society for African Church History.⁵ The intention that this should appear annually was not fulfilled, though a similar but more comprehensive objective was fulfilled from January 1972, when

³ James L. Cox, 'From Africa to Africa: the significance of approaches to the study of African religions at Aberdeen and Edinburgh universities from 1970 to 1998', in Frieder Ludwig and Afe Adogame (eds.), *European Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004), 255-64 (quotation at p. 255).

⁴ See the comments of Adrian Hastings, 'African Christian studies, 1967-1999: reflections of an editor', in Ludwig and Adogame (eds.), *European Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa*, 265-74 (reference at p. 269).

⁵ 'Bibliography of the Society for African Church History', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 1 (1967-8): 46-94.

Andrew took over as compiler of the bibliography on mission studies that had been published in each quarterly issue of *The International Review of Mission (IRM)* since its foundation in 1912 as *The International Review of Missions*.

The establishment in 1982 of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World thus marked the natural culmination of Andrew's academic work in Aberdeen. The Centre had relatively modest beginnings as a base for the collection of documentation on Christianity in the non-western world. Integral to this goal was Andrew's work as compiler of the *IRM* bibliography, a role which from October 1995 was shared with Margaret Acton, the librarian of the Centre, and which he continued to exercise until the bibliography ceased publication (it is hoped only temporarily) in 2009. Andrew's passion for bibliography over such a wide field is a function of his commitment to the catholicity of the church, and also indicative of the generosity of his spirit: as bibliographer and teacher he has anonymously shaped a far wider range of publications than he himself has authored.

In light of the fact that a regular flow of income from university sources was never a realistic prospect, the Centre adopted as its central principle of operation the international exchange of periodical literature and bibliographic information. In return for complimentary copies of *The Bulletin of the Scottish Institute of Missionary Studies*, or as an integral part of the bibliographical function of *The International Review of Mission*, church bodies, mission agencies and study centres throughout the globe would send their periodicals, newsletters, and other publications to the Centre. On this basis the Centre developed within its first five years a remarkable library of some 700 current periodical titles, in addition to a further 1,300 non-current titles. A collection of some 6,500 to 7,000 books also accrued from a variety of sources, mainly as donations or review copies, or as items sent for the *IRM* bibliography, whose categories of classification, deriving originally from the eight study commissions at Edinburgh 1910, provided the basis of classification for the Centre library. The Butler collection on non-western Christian art added an important visual dimension to the Centre's holdings.

The future development of the Centre from the mid-1980s onwards was dictated by the convergence of two entirely unrelated forces: Andrew's precarious health, and the cold winds of rigidly utilitarian approaches to higher education then blowing from the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher (winds that have sadly continued to blow under successive administrations of different political complexion). In 1985 Andrew suffered a second and severe heart attack which necessitated his retirement from his salaried post as head of the Department of Religious Studies. At the same time the department

suffered drastic financial cutbacks. For the academic year 1985-6 Andrew endeavoured to develop the Centre in Aberdeen as a quasi-autonomous base for his activities, but it became clear that a new home for the Centre had to be found.

Happily the University of Edinburgh was able to extend its hospitality, first in 1986 to Andrew himself, and then, in September 1987, to his Centre, which was, over a period of some months, re-located in New College as part of the University of Edinburgh's Faculty (later School) of Divinity. This was a highly appropriate venue. New College was the institution which in 1867 had appointed the former India pioneer missionary, Alexander Duff, to a chair of 'Evangelistic Theology' – the first academic chair in the study of missions anywhere in the world. Although that chair ceased to exist as a permanent post in 1892, the coming of the Centre to Edinburgh in 1987 can be interpreted as a late second flowering of Duff's vision of making New College into an institute of missionary studies.⁶ Furthermore, it was in the same complex of buildings on the Mound that the celebrated World Missionary Conference had taken place in June 1910, giving birth, *inter alia*, to the *International Review of Missions* and its bibliography for which Andrew was now responsible. Shortly before the move to Edinburgh, work began on compiling an electronic database containing the cumulative bibliography of the *IRM* from 1912 with the aid of a substantial grant from the World Council of Churches; this rapidly grew to over 65,000 records. The WCC grant made possible the employment of a Research Fellow, Dr A. Christopher Smith, who accompanied Andrew from Aberdeen and was able to contribute significantly to the Centre's MTh teaching programme. Dr Andrew C. Ross, Senior Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History in the Faculty of Divinity, was also appointed Deputy Director of the Centre.

The flow of doctoral students from the non-western world was now progressively diverted from Aberdeen to Edinburgh to work under Andrew as Honorary Professor, and continued to accelerate. His global reputation was signalled by the award of an honorary doctorate in divinity from the University of Aberdeen in 1988. Undergraduate teaching also reaped the benefit of the Centre's expertise, with 'primal religions' appearing for the first time on the Edinburgh curriculum. Initially the University of Edinburgh was able to supply little more than space for the Centre's collections, and even that proved hard to find. However, Andrew's success in attracting to the University both overseas postgraduate students and project funding soon made it possible for funded staff to be appointed to work alongside Andrew and Doreen, who for long worked as Honorary Publications Secretary of

⁶ See Duncan Forrester, 'New wine in old bottles', in David F. Wright and Gary D. Badcock (eds.), *Disruption to Diversity: Edinburgh Divinity 1846-1996* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 259-76 (reference at p. 271).

the Centre (in addition to being an invariably welcoming host to the Centre's students). In 1988 Margaret Acton was appointed by the University of Edinburgh as the first (and, so far, the only) full-time librarian of the Centre, and remained in post until 2007, when the post was axed for financial reasons. The Centre's expertise in the teaching of African Christianity was bolstered by two appointments. In 1993 Dr Jack Thompson, a former Irish Presbyterian missionary to Malawi, moved from the Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham to become Lecturer in Mission Studies, on secondment from the Overseas Board of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. He would later, from 2005 to 2008, serve as Director of the Centre. In 1991 the University funded the post of Associate Director, and appointed Dr John Parratt, an expert in African theology, who had been Professor of Theology and Religious Studies in the University of Botswana, and also had teaching experience in Malawi, India, and Papua New Guinea. In 1999 Dr Parratt was appointed to a chair at the University of Birmingham.

The most notable externally funded project secured by the Centre was the African Christianity Project (ACP), established in 1992, and funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts of Philadelphia through two successive grants of \$500,000 and \$425,000.⁷ It was throughout under Andrew's overall direction in tandem with his former Aberdeen doctoral student, Dr James L. Cox, who joined the Centre from the University of Zimbabwe in 1993 and served as Co-ordinator of the Project to its conclusion in 1998. The ACP involved the Centre in collaboration with an eventual total of eight institutions on the African continent in the promotion of research, publication, and the compilation and exchange of bibliographical information, on African Christianity.⁸ The Project gained its own librarian based in the Centre, Elizabeth Leitch, in 1993. As the Project proceeded, the emphasis progressively shifted from an Edinburgh-based programme to one in which the institutions on the African continent increasingly took the lead. Of particular significance from 1987 onwards was the partnership with the recently established Akrofi-Kristaller Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology at Akropong in Ghana. This was directed by another of Andrew's former doctoral students, Kwame Bediako (1945-2008), an outstanding African theologian. Dr Bediako became a Visiting Lecturer in African Theology at the Centre in Edinburgh, teaching for a term each year, whilst Andrew made frequent visits to teach at the Centre in

⁷ For a summary of the activities and achievements of the ACP see James L. Cox, 'Setting the context: the African Christianity Project and the emergence of a self-reflexive institutional identity' in James L. Cox and Gerrie ter Haar (eds.) *Uniquely African? African Christian Identity from Cultural and Historical Perspectives* (Trenton, NJ and Asmara: Africa World Press, 2003), 1-7; see also Cox, 'From Africa to Africa', 261-3.

⁸ The eight institutions were the Universities of Malawi, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Sierra Leone, Namibia, Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique, the University of Ghana, Legon, and the Akrofi-Kristaller Centre in Ghana.

Ghana. Dr Bediako's visiting lectureship was funded initially by the Duff Missionary Lectureship,⁹ and then by the African Christianity Project.

The move to Edinburgh was followed in December 1990 by the signature of a formal agreement with the University of Edinburgh which clarified the status of the collections, as belonging, in the most part, to the University. These developments greatly stimulated the stream of library and archival accessions to the Centre. Shortly after the move from Aberdeen, the Church of Scotland deposited its mission reference library on permanent loan in the Centre. This included a unique collection of pamphlets on India compiled by Alexander Duff, which has subsequently been microfilmed by Adam Matthew Publications. From Providence Seminary in Manitoba came the Ida Grace McRuer collection of North American evangelical mission periodicals and newsletters. Other deposited collections included works on Hindu literature from Dr Eric Lott and on nineteenth-century China from Dr George Hood. In addition, the Centre built up a unique range of contemporary pamphlets and ephemera ('grey material') from Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. A very significant body of manuscript and other archival material also began to find its home in the Centre. A rich collection of documentation on Christianity in the Himalayan region was deposited in 1990, comprising the archives of the United Mission to Nepal, the International Nepal Fellowship, and The Nepal Church History Project; this has now been transferred to Yale Divinity School Library. Other extremely important missionary collections were acquired which remain in the Centre to this day. Those of the Regions Beyond Missionary Union (RBMU), incorporating the archives of the Livingstone Inland Mission and the Congo Balolo Mission were deposited in 1991. They were followed by the archives of the Sudan United Mission (SUM) and Latin Link (formerly the Evangelical Union of South America). Most of the RBMU and SUM archive is now available on microfilm from Adam Matthew Publications. There are in addition a considerable number of private missionary papers from all parts of the world, though China is particularly well represented.

In addition to the close partnership with the Akrofi-Kristaller Centre in Ghana, under Andrew's leadership the Centre also forged strong links with Yale University Divinity School, where Lamin Sanneh was in 1989 appointed D. Willis James Professor of Missions and World Christianity, and Professor of History, and whose archival and library holdings in non-western Christianity were unrivalled. These links were formalized through the inception

⁹ The Duff Missionary Lectureship Trust was established in 1879 by William Pirie Duff, son of Alexander Duff, in memory of his father, to provide for a quadrennial course of public lectures on some aspect of foreign missions, to be delivered in Edinburgh or Glasgow.

in March 1992 of the Yale-Edinburgh Group on the History of Missions and World Christianity, formed at a conference held at Yale. Beginning as a small informal gathering of invited friends of Professors Walls and Sanneh, the Yale-Edinburgh conference has, without losing its informal character, grown over the years into probably the most significant annual academic event in its field, alternating between the venues of Edinburgh and New Haven. The Overseas Ministries Study Center, a near neighbour of Yale Divinity School, has provided valued financial support.

A further significant development was the inception in April 1995 of a new academic journal, *Studies in World Christianity: the Edinburgh Review of Theology and Religion*, published by Edinburgh University Press. By the time of Andrew's 'second retirement' from Edinburgh in 1996, the study of world Christianity in the university had attained a degree of permanence sufficient to enable the university to establish a funded chair in World Christianity, to which Professor David A. Kerr, a specialist in Christian-Muslim relations, was appointed. Andrew remained as Honorary Curator of the Centre's Collections and as an Honorary Professor of the University of Edinburgh, although from 1998 new responsibilities as Guest Professor of Ecumenics and Mission at Princeton Theological Seminary had to be accommodated within his diary. In late 1997 the library, postgraduate reading room, and offices for Centre staff were moved to premises owned by the Free Church of Scotland in Bank Street, adjacent to New College. It was entirely fitting that, on the suggestion of the then Dean of the Faculty of Divinity, Professor Duncan Forrester, the library in its new home in what became known as Thomas Chalmers House was given the official title of 'The Andrew F. Walls Library'. The bulk of the Centre's accommodation remained in Thomas Chalmers House until 2007, when the Centre, with its library and archival collections, moved back into New College.

Although the original vision behind the creation of the Centre focused primarily on the collection of bibliographical resources for the study of non-western Christianity, it is possible that its most substantial and enduring achievement will prove to have been its promotion of high-quality postgraduate research within the field. The faculty lists of universities and theological colleges throughout the non-western world bear eloquent testimony to the uniquely influential role that the Centre has played in the provision of postgraduate education in the fields of non-western Christian history, contextual theology, and African and Asian religious studies. Over the years an immense number of research students flocked from all quarters of the globe, but above all from Africa, to Aberdeen and later to Edinburgh, to work under the supervision of Andrew and his colleagues on topics in

the history of missions and non-western Christianity. By 1997 about one-third of the postgraduate student body of the Faculty of Divinity was affiliated to the Centre – a remarkable testimony to Andrew’s work and world-wide reputation. Although his globe-trotting lifestyle made him sometimes physically elusive, his postgraduate students found they could count on his devoted attention in their supervisions and his intense loyalty ever afterwards. As few students from the developing world had the necessary education to commence PhD studies immediately, a one-year MTh degree course in Christianity in the Non-Western World was offered during the Aberdeen years, and the Edinburgh version was approved in 1987, and has flourished ever since. Many went on from the MTh to study at MLitt or PhD level.

By the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Centre could count some 129 MTh and 65 PhD theses in its archives. Their authors have gone on to become some of the best-known names in the fields of world Christianity and mission studies – in addition to the examples from the Aberdeen years cited earlier in this article, the following names and their current spheres of service could be mentioned by way of illustration: Siga Arles (Principal of Serampore College in West Bengal), Jehu Hanciles (Professor of Mission History and Globalisation, Fuller Theological Seminary), Jooseop Kim (Secretary, Council for World Mission and Evangelism, World Council of Churches, and editor of the *International Review of Mission*), Esther Mombo (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, St Paul’s University, Limuru, Kenya), Cyril Okorochoa (Anglican bishop of Owerri diocese in Nigeria), Diane Stinton (Dean of Students and Associate Professor of Mission Studies, Regent College, Vancouver), and Timothy Tennent (president of Asbury Theological Seminary). Many others, though not necessarily so well known internationally, are exercising key roles in national church leadership or theological education in their own countries. The geographical range of the topics covered is truly impressive, encompassing not simply the more ‘obvious’ countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, India, China, or Korea, but also less well-worked territory, such as Namibia, the Malay peninsula, Burma, or Peru.

If there has been one disappointment in Andrew’s hopes for the Centre which he founded in Edinburgh, it is that a large and complex university has proved unable in straightened economic times to provide the resources for the professional archival and library care of the Centre’s special collections that their importance merits. In 2008 a new Andrew Walls Centre for the Study of World Christianity was opened at Liverpool Hope University, whose Vice-Chancellor, Gerald J. Pillay, had been one of Andrew’s doctoral students in Aberdeen. Some of the Edinburgh Centre’s runs of English periodicals, and the Butler

collection of non-western Christian art, have been transferred to the Liverpool Centre. However, despite rumours to the contrary, the great majority of the printed book, pamphlet and archival holdings of the Centre remain intact in Edinburgh and available to researchers. The University of Edinburgh demonstrated its continuing commitment to the work which Andrew began by renewing the post of Director of the Centre on Jack Thompson's retirement in 2008 and appointing Brian Stanley, not simply as Director but also as the third Professor of World Christianity. Andrew Walls has left his mark on the lives of two British universities, and, in his eighties, is now devoting his energies to a third. All students of world Christianity will be in his debt for decades to come.