

**Discussion Questions on**  
***The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture***  
**by Andrew Walls<sup>1</sup>**

QUESTIONS

1. The table below shows the characters of each of the groups surveyed by the alien professor of comparative religion. If you were to add an entry for RCRC, what would it look like?

**Jewish Christians, A. D. 37:** “lawful and joyful observance.”

**Greek Christians, 4<sup>th</sup> cent.:** “concern with metaphysics and theology, and intense intellectual scrutiny, an attempt to find precise significance for precise terms.”

**Irish Christians, 7<sup>th</sup> cent.:** “desire for holiness and their heroic austerity in quest of it.”

**British Christians, 19<sup>th</sup> cent.:** “activism and the involvement of their religion in all processes of life and society.”

**Nigerian Christians, 20<sup>th</sup> cent.:** “concern with power, as revealed in preaching, healing and personal vision.”

2. Among the commonalities between the various Christian groups surveyed, Walls lists: (a) the centrality of Jesus; (b) the scriptures; (c) communion; (d) the historical spread of the Gospel; (e) the inheritance of the history of Israel; and (f) the “continuity of consciousness”—we all think of ourselves as Christians (p. 6).

What do you think of his list? How do you find these core characteristics of Christian communities through the ages reflected in our church’s vision:

As a growing, multigenerational community of Christ, we are called to faithful obedience and holy living; we offer our hearts and lives to do God's work in our world. We dedicate ourselves to worship God joyfully, proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, and transform lives and culture by the power of the Holy Spirit. We want to become like Jesus Christ in all we think, say, and do.

3. Walls quotes Gilbert Murray as saying that the differences between modern Christians pale in comparison to the differences between Christian communities over the ages (p. 6). Do you agree? Does this shed any light on the sectarian battles currently underway within and between denominations in the U. S.?

To be more specific, what issues divide American Christians, and should they?

4. Walls ends by saying:

When a comfortable bourgeois congregation meets in some Western suburbia, they, almost alone of all the comfortable bourgeois of the suburbs, are regularly exposed to the reading of a non-bourgeois book questioning fundamental assumptions of their society. But since none of us can read the Scriptures without cultural blinkers of some sort, the great advantage, the crowning excitement which our own era of Church history has over all others, is the possibility that we

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, p. 3.

may be able to read them together. Never before has the Church looked so much like the great multitude whom no man can number out of every nation and tribe and people and tongue. (p. 15)

What can we learn from the various communities in Christian history regarding *our* balance between the indigenizing and pilgrim principles?

5. Walls implicitly appears to place each of the communities he surveys on equal footing, without examining the possibility that some of them are truer to the Gospel than others. Could it be that some (or all) variation between these communities is due to their level of fidelity to the true Gospel?

6. In discussing the spread of the Gospel to a new culture, Walls writes (p. 14),

...what was God doing in the Greek world all those centuries while he was revealing himself in judgment and mercy to Israel? Not all the Greek past was graven images and temple prostitution. What of those who testified for righteousness—and even died for it? Had God nothing to do with their righteousness? What of those who taught things that are true—that are according to reason, *logos*, opposed to the Great Lies taught and practiced by others?

Where do you see God's truth revealed in the secular American culture? How do we make use of that, as Paul did when he quoted the philosophers Epimenides and Aratus in Acts 17:28-29?

7. In his book *Streams of Living Water*, Richard Foster describes six faith traditions and their emphases:

*the contemplative tradition:* the prayer-filled life

*the holiness tradition:* the virtuous life

*the charismatic tradition:* the Spirit-empowered life

*the social justice tradition:* the compassionate life

*the evangelical tradition:* the Word-centered life

*the incarnational tradition:* the sacramental life

Walls' indigenizing principle suggests that there will be as many flavors as there are cultures penetrated by the Gospel. Does this imply that the more the Gospel spreads, the more faith traditions will be added to the list above? Or is there a finite "basis set" of emphases which can be played out independent of the number of cultures the Gospel is brought to?