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Abstract: First paragraph: The gospel, according to Andrew Walls, is the 'prisoner and liberator of culture'. Walls, perhaps the pre-eminent Methodist missiologist of the last half-century, is suggesting by this dictum that expressions of the Christian religion are both heavily conditioned by their circumstances and powerfully capable of transforming their settings. Believers are simultaneously subject to what Walls calls the 'indigenising' principle, the desire to live as Christians in their own societies, and the 'pilgrim' principle, the willingness to identify with members of the family of faith in other times and places. They therefore accept a great deal of the way of life around them, blending it into their religious practice, and yet are likely to break with part of the accustomed lifestyle because of allegiance to distinctive Christian principles. (Walls, 1996: 7-9). For historical purposes, however, this twofold model can usefully be adapted into a threefold pattern of how Methodism has interacted with culture. In the first place, the adherents of the movement have regularly been moulded by their context, a process corresponding with part of Walls's indigenising principle. Methodists have adapted to their surrounding culture, merging their attitudes with the common assumptions of their societies, as when, during the nineteenth century, they gradually dropped their objections to reading fiction. Secondly, they have frequently challenged the stance of their contemporaries, criticising rather than accommodating themselves to prevailing habits. This dimension of their practice, closely related to Walls's pilgrim principle, is well illustrated by the commitment of twentieth-century Methodists to the temperance movement. Thirdly, they have repeatedly proved a creative element in the societies they have inhabited, adapting existing forms of behaviour and establishing entirely novel ones. This aspect of the Methodist role, partly 'indigenising' because forging fresh bonds with the host culture but also partly 'pilgrim' because helping to Christianise it, can easily be overlooked, but it was historically important, not least in the evolution of the peoples receiving missionaries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Methodism was responsive to its setting and often willing to challenge custom, but it was also an innovative force in many lands.

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Methodism, also known as the Methodist movement, is a group of historically related denominations of Protestant Christianity which derive their inspiration from the life and teachings of John Wesley. George Whitefield and John's brother Charles Wesley were also significant early leaders in the movement. It originated as a revival movement within the 18th-century Church of England and became a separate denomination after Wesley's death. The movement spread throughout the British Empire, the United Methodism began as a movement in eighteenth-century England, part of the larger Protestant evangelical revival that endeavored to bring spiritual renewal to the nation and the Church of England and to increase the effectiveness of the church's ministry, especially to the poor. It is available to all people, freeing them to respond to God's offer of forgiveness and reconciliation. Whitefield's brand of Methodism was particularly popular in Wales and