

Foreword

BY BRIAN STANLEY

Roland Allen wrote his books at a time when the church in the western world took the legitimacy of the missionary imperative for granted and when many European and American Christians supposed that there need be little argument about the best way to discharge it. Allen saw his task as being one of pointing his fellow western Christians towards a more secure theological basis for the missionary enterprise and of disturbing their complacent assumptions about how to go about it. Today, when there is fundamental questioning within the church about the meaning and validity of traditional understandings of Christian mission, Allen's writings have acquired a new resonance. *Missionary Principles*, first published in 1913, is not as widely known today as Allen's earlier *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?* (1912) or his later *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes which Hinder it* (1927), but in many ways it is the most foundational and resolutely theological of his works.

The central axiom of this book is the insistence that Christian mission derives its very existence from the being of the triune God whose Holy Spirit of love and compassion reaches out to all humanity. Allen thus anticipates the emphasis of modern theologies of mission on the *missio Dei*. Mission is grounded not in human sentiment or endeavour, nor even in a response of formal obedience to the command of Christ, but in the essence of the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit appears on almost every page of this book: it was the Spirit who impelled the Son into the world; it is the presence of the Spirit that defines both Christian identity and ecclesial purpose: 'if the Holy Spirit is given', urges Allen with characteristic pithiness, 'a missionary Spirit is given'. Allen thus foreshadows also the prominence which (in marked contrast to his own day) is now given to the Holy Spirit in Christian theology and in the churches of the majority world, so many of which are pentecostal in emphasis. For Allen, the uniqueness of Christianity lay in the fact that its founder claimed to bestow neither doctrine nor wisdom but the gift of his own Spirit. Christian mission, therefore, is not about the dissemination of a 'religion' or a system of philosophy or ethics, but about the humble impartation of the Spirit of Christ. For that reason, the mission of the church cannot be restricted by the exclusion of any portion of humanity from its scope, for that would be to limit Christ: 'If Christ does not save the whole world He can save none.'

Allen reminds us that the goal of mission is nothing less than the revelation of Christ by the Spirit to all humanity, to the glory of the Father. This revelation must always have a material embodiment in the church as a sacramental community – as a Catholic Anglican Allen would have had no time for those modern theologies of

mission that seek to find ways of following Christ that do not necessitate incorporation in the body of Christ. Nevertheless, the focus of mission should not be on the number of our converts, the size of our mission budgets, the superiority of our ecclesiastical organization, or even on the growth of Christianity as a 'religion', but simply on the revelation of Christ.

The western church in Allen's day conceived of mission as essentially a one-way traffic from west to east. In *Missionary Principles* Allen does not challenge that misconception as openly as he does in his other writings which deal with the theme of the indigenous church. But he does here launch an attack on parochialism by insisting that 'A Gospel for England [alone] is no Gospel, a Christ for the white man [alone] is no Christ'. That is an emphasis which the church in Britain, in Europe, and indeed world-wide needs to hear afresh. Accusations of proselytism and imperialism – however justified they may appear to be by the record of the past – cannot be allowed to restrict the mission of the church to the spiritual renewal of those segments of humanity which are viewed as traditionally Christian. Nor can they be permitted to evacuate the gospel of its essential Christological content. Roland Allen's prophetic voice remains a distinctly uncomfortable one which needs to be heard as much today as it did in 1913.

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