

# Foreword

by *Hubert J.B. Allen*

It is remarkable that fresh books examining my grandfather and his ideas are still being considered worthy of publication seventy years after his death. Dr Rutt's magisterial study is an important and wide-ranging contribution, so I am happy to have been invited to express some introductory thoughts. For more than that, however, I must simply refer to the brief biography which I composed over twenty years' ago, largely to edify his descendants<sup>1</sup>.

I need, however, to emphasize that I myself and the only other three persons known to me who can remember him in his lifetime, were, in those War-time days, mere schoolchildren. My contemporary accurately described Roland as '*a fine-looking man who was both kind and also rather stern and austere*'.<sup>2</sup> I only recall one example of the impatience some people attributed to him, at a time when he flung a book on the floor, expostulating: '*Calls himself a scholar – and his book doesn't even have an Index!*'

But in those declining years in Nairobi, his health was not good, so his wife Beatrice became formidably protective. Consequently, just as one of us three grandchildren had begun some truly fascinating conversation with him – not, of course, at our age discussing his controversial adult ideas about missionary methods, the established Church, or the Apostolic succession, but rather such topics as poetry, or cathedral architecture, or maps, or public speaking – then only too often Grannie would intervene and tell us to '*run along now, and stop tiring your grandfather*'. Nobody ever argued with Grannie, so all of

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1. Roland Allen, *Pioneer, Priest & Prophet*, Eerdmans/Forward Movement, 1995.
  2. This third living witness is Valerie, the daughter of Mr Hermann Fliess, a German Jew, who early in the war acted as spokesman for all his fellow Germans in Kenya's internment camp at Kabete. Roland and Beatrice removed her and her brother from a feckless landlady, and took care of her until the end of the war.

us – including our equally disappointed ‘Granfer’ – would dutifully disperse: he probably to working on classical Swahili poetry at his desk, we children to read on the verandah or to play in the *banda* – the circle of eucalyptus poles supporting a thatched roof, which served as a simple gazebo, protecting us from the tropical rain or sun. My two sisters remember Granfer using that *banda* to teach them how to project their voices, so that a whisper could be heard right across it, notwithstanding the lack of walls.

In 1945, after spending almost the whole of World War II in East Africa, we three children set out for England with our parents by train, bus and river steamer down the Nile to Cairo. On the final morning, Granfer, knowing that it was extremely unlikely that we should ever all be together again, celebrated full Holy Communion for the whole family, assuring my doubtful mother: ‘*Of course, Nell shall receive both the Bread and the Wine!*’ – although she was only seven years’ old, and none of us three were yet confirmed.

In spite of my emphasizing this background, Dr Rutt is not alone in attributing to me a very much more profound knowledge and understanding of my grandfather’s life, ideas and literary legacy than I, in fact, possess. It is true that in my own declining years I sought to provide – especially for his direct descendants – an outline of his eventful life-story, together with an ignorant layman’s understanding of some reasons for his continuing notoriety. But I have spent very much less time than many scholars studying his published works – and indeed some of his books I have never read at all. On the other hand, I have been privileged to live close to Oxford University’s Bodleian Library, where I have been able to read much of his private correspondence and a few of his unpublished (or incomplete) writings, which the librarians have carefully preserved.

Furthermore, our children and grandchildren are able to share the family’s pride in such memorabilia as the little brass gong, which Granfer made use of instead of a church bell to summon people to prayer in Peking (*Beijing*) during the summer of 1900, when the Boxer movement was besieging the greatly hated foreign Legations. From that same episode, we also possess a small brass tray, on which he was carrying refreshments to a patient in the makeshift hospital, when a sniper’s bullet knocked a chip off its rim, instead of hitting his heart. His medals, unmounted on their ribbons and never worn, we found in an old tobacco tin long after his death. He had great admiration for courage, so he respected any award for brave deeds; but he had no patience with medals ‘*simply for being there*’, like his China Medal or his

1914 War Medal.<sup>1</sup> Such medals, he considered, if awarded at all, should have been awarded to *everyone* – to all people in any way adversely affected by the war (even – or perhaps especially – to non-combatants and conscientious objectors).

Most of what I learned about my grandfather's character, and idiosyncracies, was derived at second hand, from my father and other older friends and relatives; and in this book and its anticipated companion volume Dr Rutt alludes to nearly all the incidents and episodes, by which I sought in my monograph to illustrate such aspects of my 'Granfer'. So I think it only remains for me to express admiration and gratitude for such a very learned and painstaking tribute to the Rev. Roland Allen.

Hubert J.B. Allen

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1. This was awarded for his wartime chaplaincy in the hospital ship 'Rohilla', from which he succeeded in swimming ashore when she was wrecked off the coast of Yorkshire on her way to Belgium in October 1914.

# Foreword

by *Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali*

## Roland Allen has Still Much to Teach us

Most people have diverse experiences in life and are formed by different influences. The media likes to group us and stereotype us as ‘conservative’ or ‘radical’, ‘evangelical’ or ‘catholic’, etc. In fact, we are often the result of myriad influences during the course of our lives. Roland Allen was no different. His mother’s Evangelical faith was formative for him and remained with him for the rest of his life. His interest in evangelism and mission stemmed from it, as did his reverence for biblical authority. At Oxford, he encountered some of the finest minds of the burgeoning Anglo-Catholic movement. His concern for a proper ecclesiology and his emphasis on the sacramental life arose from such exposure.

It is, of course, well known that Allen’s interpretive approach to Church, mission and faith was based on his reading of St Paul’s missionary methods as set out in the Acts of the Apostles and in Paul’s Letters to churches and individuals. Thus, he is not only Pauline but Lucan in the way he reads history as a history of mission. From the *Didachē*, he acquired a view of how the primitive church would organise itself, taught new converts and administered the sacraments, as well as his ideas about local and ‘trans-local’ ministries. His beliefs about the local church, the role of the laity, the relation between the Priesthood of all Believers and the Ministerial Priesthood all derive from what might be called ‘primitive catholicity’. Although Allen is well aware of the dangers of ‘African’, ‘Asian’ or ‘American’ Christianity, he does not face issues arising from claims to radical autonomy. He is content with the Quadrilateral of Bible, Creeds, Sacraments and Ministry as the marks of catholicity but does not ask how such catholicity is to be maintained as a legitimate diversity in unity. What is the place of a proper teaching authority in the Church? How are decisions that affect everyone, to be made together and what are the proper instruments to do this? Perhaps such questions had to wait for a later age to be asked, if not answered.

Allen believed passionately in church-planting strategies which did not perpetuate mission structures. Following the educationalists of his day, he held that a good church-planter should first assess the social and spiritual situation, then, in the light of this, to share the good news of the Gospel with the people, to disciple converts, to train the leadership of the new church and then to move on. He rejects the possibility of church and mission continuing indefinitely to exist side by side but fulfilling different roles, rather, the church is to be the vehicle of its own missionary mandate. In his belief that such a church should be self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating, he is thinking of every aspect of a church's life, not merely economic independence, but structures of governance, training of clergy and other leaders, organising for mission etc. Once again, however, as a man of his times, he does not discuss, in detail, the partnership and interdependence which these churches would also need.

The social and cultural context should alert the missionaries to the necessity of what today we would call inculturation or contextualisation. The Chinese love for order and propriety or the spiritual longings of East African Sufism should be reflected in the kind of Christian faith that emerges among a people. Equally, Christianity is also a world view and this would assist the people to develop a world view and a proper anthropology which aids all round development of all that is God-given in their culture. Allen was, like William Reed Huntington, wary of religious systems, whether administrative, hierarchical or even liturgical from becoming dominant over the fundamental principles of mission and church. He believed that a local church should possess everything it needs for its common life. His passion about the necessity of sacramental life in a church led him to the somewhat odd conclusion that, in the absence of a priest, lay leaders should be allowed to preside at celebrations of sacraments. It may have been that rigid ideas in his day about what constituted 'proper training' for ordained ministry, which led him to this startling conclusion. There is, however, no necessary conflict between the requirement that a duly ordained person should preside at celebrations of the sacraments and the belief that a local church should have all the ordinary ministry it needs for its common life. What is necessary is a process of discerning gifts and callings in the local church so that the wider Church can recognize them and so that, those whom Allen labels, 'trans-local' ministers, can then ordain, authorize and commission such people for appropriate ministries in their local church and beyond. Anything can happen in an emergency and this is never 'nothing' but it cannot be made a basis of church order. In the process of inculturation, a proper balance has to be maintained between what is

*Apostolic* and, therefore, required of every local church so that it may truly be in fellowship with the Church down the ages and across the world, and what is *cultural* in the way it orders its worship, discipleship and decision-making.

Allen did see the local church as having a mission beyond its own community. He was affected by the practice in China of a newly planted church in a village setting out to evangelize the next village, a practice which still continues. Such a view of mission could, of course, be extended across regional, cultural, linguistic and national boundaries, though there would need to be careful co-ordination and co-operation amongst the churches to avoid duplication, optimize resources, develop centres of training and so on.

Allen knew that the *Pax Britannica* had provided an opportunity for mission in many parts of the world but he knew also from personal experience, during the Boxer Rebellion, the ugly fruit colonialism can produce on every side. Indeed, much of Christian mission has been about withstanding the temporal rulers, colonial or communist, nationalist or fundamentalist, whether in his day or in ours.

The fact that books have continued to be written about Roland Allen since his death and that they are still being written alerts us to his significance for mission-minded thinking for today's Church – and tomorrow's. Steven Richard Rutt has put us all in his debt by bringing Allen's thought and practice, once again, to our attention.

*Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali*  
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