

# *New Foreword*

BY MICHAEL NAZIR-ALI

There are two things which struck me immediately as I re-read Roland Allen's classic *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?*. The first impression is about how different things are now. Many of the churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America to which Allen refers are growing exponentially. They make their own decisions, find their own clergy and are largely financially independent, even if there is still funding from the West and elsewhere for special 'projects'. Not only are they self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating, they are increasingly engaged in cross-cultural mission even, perhaps especially, to the West itself. All of this would have gratified but also amazed Roland Allen.

Taking our cue from mission in the West, the other striking thing about Allen's manifesto is his remarkable relevance for the churches of Britain today. His emphasis on bringing people to faith, planting churches and maintaining an effective local ministry, ordained and lay, rings true today for us in our missionary situation. His belief that a local church should be trusted with providing its own ministry, whilst continuing also to be related to the wider church through itinerant, apostolic figures, is also of importance today. It is crucial that fresh expressions of the church, as they emerge, should have the balance right between autonomy and interdependence, between great strategic centres and authentically local assemblies, between genuinely 'native' leaders and cosmopolitan 'encouragers'.

It is now recognised that Allen did not stand alone but alongside the great missionary thinkers of the 19th century such as Henry Venn, Secretary of CMS 1841-72, and Rufus Anderson, Secretary of the American board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Both Venn and Anderson are known to have vigorously promoted some of the ideas later adopted by Allen.

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By then, however, they were out of fashion, even in the CMS, and Allen's exposition of them certainly gave them a new lease of life in a rapidly changing situation. What is also remarkable about Allen is that he came from an Anglican Catholic background and many of his ideas related to the recovery of a primitive catholicity for the local and wider church. He wanted an ecclesiology of the Spirit but also one of order.

Like many others, then and now, he draws attention to the Graeco-Roman background to St Paul's mission but he is not so insistent on the oriental background to much contemporary religion nor, as J B Lightfoot has pointed out, on the importance of the orient for those ethical ideals, even in the Graeco-Roman world, which were to prove such a fruitful preparation for the Gospel. He does not discuss the spread of Syriac Christianity, whether in the Roman or the Persian empires, and its relevance for expressions of church today. In his discussion on healing, and of miracles in the church generally, his approach is open but modern: miracles may recur in the Church's mission but, meanwhile, their absence does not require us to abandon other aspects of St Paul's approach. All of this sounds and is very pre-Pentecostal. How could Allen have known the amazing changes to Christian demography which would come about because of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements? The incredible growth of the independent churches in Africa, the vitality of the churches, of all kinds, in China and revival in Latin America are all now the subject of much sociological and theological research. Surely, this would have affected many of Allen's ideas!

As in any great body of writing, there are tantalising glimpses of issues and themes which could be further developed. Among them are how the local church relates to its universal, the importance of the provincial idea in St Paul's thought and practice and how Apostolic Teaching is transmitted, received and passed on from age to age, place to place and culture to culture.

Roland Allen's work remains 'classic' because he is still able to raise sharp and necessary questions for us in our own missionary context, however different that is from his.

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TO THE 1960 EDITION

Roland Allen was a missionary in North China working with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Later, he worked for a number of years in collaboration with the founders of World Dominion and the Survey Application Trust, and finally retired to Africa, where he died in Kenya in 1947.

The demand for his books still continues and makes it necessary to issue a new edition of *Missionary Methods*.

When Allen's careful analysis first appeared forty-eight years ago it made a startling impression. Many thoughtful missionaries and mission-secretaries throughout the world were forced to look at their own work afresh and ask themselves several awkward questions, such as: Is our progress commensurate with all the money and effort expended? Is that progress, if any, as rapid as the work of church-planting by the great Apostle? Are we actually planting new churches or merely perpetuating a mission? Are the new causes truly indigenous and self-supporting, and, if not, why not? At what stage in church-building does a missionary become dispensable?

The book divides into five parts. The first consists of a careful examination of how the Apostle came to visit the various centres and what conditions were like in the social and religious world of about AD 50. It is obvious that the author studied those conditions with great care and he quotes where necessary from the works of dependable authorities. The conclusion is that Paul enjoyed no peculiar advantages in proclaiming the Gospel.

The second part comes to grips with the main problem by showing how St. Paul presented the Christian Gospel, the significance of the miracles he performed, his financial policy of self-support for himself and self-support for the new churches, too, and how missionary methods of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries contrast with his alarmingly.

Part three stresses the short time devoted by St. Paul to training

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converts before they were baptized, and the contrast between the rapid manner of appointing responsible church leaders in his day with the slowness of the present, together with our unconscious 'suppression' and 'silencing' of natural leaders and prophets.

The part of the book naturally disturbs missionary readers and provokes thought.

Part four deals with problems of authority and discipline in the churches, contrasting the Apostle's principles and actions with modern procedures which have failed to challenge the conscience of the local church. After all, it is what his own church thinks that ultimately influences an offender to mend his ways. This part ends with a stirring chapter on building the unity of the Church by spiritual means and by Christian fellowship rather than by the importation of Western systems artificially imposed upon the young Church.

Part five deals with conclusions. Roland Allen writes with such clarity and with such emphasis upon the Apostle's successful principles that the interest of the reader in the main theme is sustained to the end.

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in this book and in other writings of Allen. No doubt this is due to the fact that, in many parts of the world, churches and missions are being forced by circumstance to face the arguments which Allen so ably deployed nearly half-a-century ago. He himself used to say that fifty years would pass before his views would win wide assent and influence policy and practice.

The modern reader may well find his style repetitive, and sometimes even tedious. But who can blame Allen? In spite of many previous editions, it is still only the few who have heeded his teaching. It is in order that this book may continue to be studied, and attract many new readers, the World Dominion Press has republished it in its present form.

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