

Introduction

'I have regularly been surprised and deeply heartened by the widespread sense that the Church of England, for all the problems that beset it, is poised for serious growth and renewal'. So wrote Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 2004. He was presenting a report which set out bold and radical proposals for the mission of the church. The report was called '*Mission-Shaped Church*' – a title which, I guess, would have pleased Roland Allen. In his forthright manner he might also have expressed dismay that it has taken over 80 years for his perception of the missionary nature of the church to begin to reach the central institutions of the church.

It is true that Roland Allen's mission was focussed in the unevangelised areas of the world. To English Christians at the beginning of the twentieth century, mission was something which happened somewhere else. Since then, in faith terms, Europe has become the dark continent, shrouded in the mists of vain secularism and proud to be identified as post Christian. Numerical growth and strength is found in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

It is also true that the years since Allen was ministering and writing have seen one of his great visions –the witness and ministry of lay people– become more of a reality. Certainly in Africa it is the new Christians who have created spontaneous expansion, even if the growth of lay participation in the west has been more in terms of administration and laicised clerical roles such as Readers and Pastoral Assistants. Nevertheless the phenomenon of rapid growth is not entirely absent from Europe and North America where the charismatic movement and Pentecostalist churches have led the way in trusting laity with witness and leadership.

The mission agencies have gradually learned, sometimes at great cost to their own identity and institution, that local christians are the best leaders and growth takes place in proportion to the

risks which are ready to be taken with the leadership of tender new churches. It is this, following the vision of Roland Allen, which is now being translated into the desperate mission setting of the affluent west. It could be argued that Allen prescribed in too much detail and, writing as a former chairman of the Ministry Division of the Archbishops' Council, I would hesitate to adopt the extreme *laisse faire* position with regard to the training of leaders, whether ordained or lay. On the other hand there is an attractiveness about the abandonment of faith and the trusting in the Holy Spirit which is at the heart of Allen's questioning of some of the methods of institutionalised Christianity. He is keen that education and training should *follow* the establishment of a local church and not the other way round.

One of the imperatives of being in a minority, as western Christians now are, is that the perception of church has to change. It is not first an institution but a community of the baptised. Belonging to it is just as important as going to it. It is not an optional hobby but a seasoning of all that we are and do. It not only meets our needs but is the stimulus for our witness and the vehicle of our mission. Leaders of the church are accountable to it and the local church to the apostolic church throughout the world. That I believe is what is at the centre of Roland Allen's call. He had, after all, a high doctrine of the church and its Bishops but he saw it as God's gift to the world and not a self preservation society.

That is why the republication of this book is so timely. *Mission-Shaped Church* has brought us back to some of Allen's dynamic –recognising that there are many ways in which the reality of the mission church can exist and that it will expand spontaneously when Christians are freed to take on the responsibilities of their baptism in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Michael Turnbull
Former Bishop of Durham

Foreword to 1960 Edition

It is only gradually that Roland Allen's *Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* has established its reputation among those who are concerned with the mission of the Church. This is odd since it is in many ways both, a more mature work than *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?*, and also more relevant to the particular tasks with which churches and missions have to wrestle today. Nevertheless, the fact that a new edition is called for at the present juncture is, perhaps, a recognition that the book contains much that needs to be said and read just now.

It is over thirty years since it was first written. Yet to read it in 1960 is to appreciate anew the touch of the prophetic with which Allen again and again enlivens his analysis and treatment. Some of the things he says seem commonplace today, but they were hardly talked about in any serious way at the time when he first set himself to produce this book. Many examples could be quoted. He bids us beware, for example, of the growth of nationalism, pointing out that it may make the position of any foreigner difficult. He points the same lesson when he deals with the organization of the Church itself and asks how long the Christians of the land will tolerate the foreign missionary as the guardian of their spiritualities. Allen saw all these things as conditions which ought to be met and faced before they became acute; now that they are obvious all can see them, but largely out of our control. Allen had a theory of missions and of the development of the Church which enabled him to face this kind of probable future without misgivings. One wonders –indeed it would be fascinating to know– what he would have to say about such a major transformation as the Communist regime in China.

It is because he combined both insight and foresight, and not only perceived tendencies but was able to lay his finger on their meaning, that his work retains a lasting validity, and can be studied and re-studied with profit. Indeed *The Spontaneous Expansion* is a work which *ought* to be studied more than once since it is a

challenge to all our complacencies and all our easy assumptions. Nor is this quality of fresh penetrative criticism, constructive withal, in any material way diminished because in many respects events have overtaken him. And not all of his misgivings have been fulfilled: no less than any of us was he free from the possibility of being mistaken.

It is instructive to turn to Chapter 6 on 'Civilization and Enlightenment', remembering that he wrote it in the twenties, when the West had no misgivings about the sacred trust of universal progress committed peculiarly to its hands. In this chapter, Allen begs us not to confuse faith in Christ with intellectual and moral advance or even Christian social doctrine. We are, no doubt, less likely to fall into that confusion than were the men of that day. We have been chastened by a second world war, by the rise and spread of Communism, by the vivid realization that we have created instruments of power and horror which we may hardly be able to control; and humbled to find that our popular institutions in Europe, or America, by no means infallibly supply a conviction and purpose sufficient of themselves to endow our civilization with a sense of vision and mission. Thus chastened, we discover that our real mission has all the time been to proclaim the Gospel of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. Allen was saying this and pleading with us to see it, but it was hidden from our eyes. Few, reading this chapter today, would find much to quarrel with in it; and, indeed, it is better to be wise after the event than not to be wise at all.

Therefore, it is not difficult to see why there should be a renewed interest in Allen's writings. For churches and missions are being forced by circumstances 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 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 may attract many new readers, that the World Dominion Press has caused it to be reprinted in a completely new form.

At the same time, it is important to remember that Allen, no less than any other author, must be read with discrimination and judgement, and in some passages with reservations. They are not skilful framers of policies who shallow any man's views wholesale and give them what might be termed an almost mechanical interpretation, in a word where issues –spiritual, political, moral and economic- are intertwined with the utmost delicacy and complexity.

It is when Allen deals with the missionary organizations of the West, as they are, that I find him most difficult to follow. He admits that we have to grapple with the modern mission board or society in its vast range of activity and complex arrangements, as the main agent, hitherto, of 'missionary work'. He is exceedingly pessimistic about the probability of the work of these missions resulting in what he would recognize as self-propagating, self-supporting and self-governing churches. He shows us how to start again from the beginning, but he is not always so clear about how to start from halfway down the course, which is just where most of us have to start from. And I think that here his glances into the future are somewhat misleading, for it seems to me fairly evident that the work of missions, with all their faults, is leading, and has led, to the existence of churches having the marks of true churches of Christ and keen to expand by evangelism.

By common and willing consent, the era of missionary domination in the Church has gone and it is no longer possible for the missionary to dominate the Church; it has always been undesirable. It is, indeed, true that the leadership of the churches is often in the hands of men who are only too obviously influenced deeply by the standards and outlooks of the West and are thus not always representative of the indigenous potentialities of their own countries. But when all is said, and much can be said in this discussion, the missions of the West have perhaps flair and, may one say, with more of the guidance of God the Holy Spirit, than Allen might be ready to admit?

For it is always to be recalled, and emphatically at this stage of history, that there is nothing particularly sacrosanct about what is national or indigenous as such. There are natural and

very cogent reasons, many of them of a simple and practical rather than a theological order, why the Church should be deeply rooted in the life, culture and modes of expression of a nation; why it should govern itself, subject to the order of the New Testament, after its own instinct and light. But the true nature of the Church is supranational and ecumenical. Its very existence is a rebuke to the overweening pretensions of exaggerated nationalism, whether in East or West. It should be the glory, rather than the reluctance, of a church to enter into relations of mutual aid with other churches, without reference to nationality as a finally determining factor. It is the function of the missionary society or board once again to be a pioneer and to find out just what this means in personal service, prayer, the supply of means, the exchange of views, and the ordering and value of technical services; or the teaching of, and training in, the faith. But the significance of Allen's present volume lies partly in this, that those who have thoroughly grasped his equal emphasis on each of the *Church*, will most sensitively fulfil the pioneer task of the Church.

The reader should not be put off because Allen uses the term 'native', or refers somewhat indiscriminately to non-Christian cultures and religions as 'heathen'. Few in his time questioned the propriety of such terms. Similarly, the 'mission field' was the correct description of the scope of the mission of his day. That there have been great changes in the relationship between churches and missions is unquestioned, and is, indeed, a response to the truth of Allen's thesis. That there is still a cogent contemporary need to take seriously his thought, and, in doing so, not to be deterred by the defects of his sometimes peculiar style and punctuation, seems to be equally certain.

Kenneth G. Grubb
December 1960