

Interaction with Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Eerdmans, 1962).

Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*, originally written in 1912, is a classic read for mission minded Christians. His basic thesis is that many cross-cultural workers do not follow the example of the Apostle Paul, who greatly depended on the Holy Spirit to accomplish in the new believers what missionaries and methods cannot do. In short, he states, "we cannot trust our converts to Him" (vii). The author makes a number of key points that are still beneficial for the contemporary reader.

First, Allen argues that Paul's evangelistic method centered on urban areas (16–17). This is especially relevant to our time, when urbanization is rapid throughout the world. He remarks that cities were places where people of different ethnic groups could share in a common culture, language, and legal system. Paul therefore could more easily establish common ground with a large number of people, who would be ready to form local congregations.

Second, when talking about finances, Allen urges missionaries to consider how others perceive them. What values are they projecting? With respect to money, missionaries have been accused of greed, mismanagement, and even capitalism in the name of Christian missions. Allen rightly notes that how one dresses and defends our presence in a foreign place can have a great affect on whether we are trusted by locals. Yet, in principle, this point is broader as he implies when he says, "If we do not preach, we cannot convert, but no preaching in itself can convert" (54). Therefore, missionaries should reflect on their methodologies and manner of life to find out that subtle messages are being communicated in the local context, even if they are unintended by the missionary.

Third, cross-cultural preaching requires a firm knowledge of Biblical doctrines as well as local religious beliefs. Though respectful, Allen says that Paul was unwavering in stressing the

cross and the need for repentance and faith (66–67). Paul clearly communicated what was expected of Christ’s followers, even if this meant rejection or persecution (70). Yet, undue provocation is avoided because Paul identifies common ground between Christianity and other religions as starting points for evangelistic dialogue.

Fourth, missionary practice languishes when the Holy Spirit is ignored. When presenting the gospel, power of the Holy Spirit “requires that the speaker should expect a response” (74). The Spirit changes entire lives. In addition, the Spirit manifests himself within the Church (76). Therefore, one’s conversion leads *into* a local church body; thus, the Holy Spirit never calls out individuals *merely* for their own sake, but rather for the benefit of God’s people. Allen says the same Spirit that filled the Apostles, and leads us today, and just as well guide new converts (144). In addition, instead of “making clear-cut legal demands which must be obeyed in the letter,” Paul instead “suggests principles and trust the Spirit which dwells in the church to apply them” (121). In summary, Allen exhorts the reader to move beyond mere orthodoxy to Spirit-dependent orthopraxis.

Fifth, theological education must be coupled with practical ministry, though neither is sufficient without the other (159–160). Allen warns against an intellectual assent to faith. Leadership is marked by humble obedience; teaching comes from one is trying to put into practice. However, this does not subjugate theological training. In fact, Paul seems to make sure that new churches had a firm grasp of the gospel, with an emphasis on Jesus’ death, resurrection, and the Old Testament (90). Rather than concentrating on methodology or formal structures of worship, “St Paul ensured that his converts should really master the most important things” (90). Consistent follow-up would build on this foundation until converts would themselves seek to become missionaries (93).

Sixth, Paul shows no partiality to social classes (see chapter 3). He sought out Jews and Gentiles. He preached to the intellectual elite, government rulers, and the wealthy. At the same time, he conversed with slaves, the superstitious, and the poor. Since, Allen says, faith does not consist in how much knowledge one has, but rather in the power of the Spirit, teaching and preaching should be easily understood and applicable for any type of person (151–152). When unity is based on the Lord through the Spirit, not ethnic groups, organizations, or outward ritual, one can expect to see fruit that is permanent (128, 131, 151).

The timeless value of Roland Allen's book lies in its ability to unsettle old habits and presuppositions found within missionary circles. Over time, methods are fossilized. Perhaps pragmatism and denominational culture functionally replace the Bible and the Spirit. Allen calls missionaries to exercise the same sort of faith they demand of potential converts. This necessarily involves risk (91). *Missionary Methods* asks the reader to reconsider his expectations about what missionary strategies can and cannot accomplish, that is, the limits of human methodology. He reminds us that preaching the gospel cross-culturally is full of uncertainty, therefore, principles, not patent formulas must guide the labor. Accordingly, when working with new Christians, Allen warns against the use of law, "unreasoning obedience", and quick answers from the missionary teachers. In their place, the missionary exhorts native believers to follow his example in seeking the Spirit's wisdom with respect to some circumstance or passage of Scripture (117–118). The desire for a tidy ministry undermines love.

A few qualifications should be added to this endorsement. First, the reader must understand that Allen was an Anglican clergy, therefore, at times, he injects discussion about sacraments (159), a Prayer Book, and The Creed (90) that unfortunately disrupt an otherwise focused meditation on Paul. In addition, the reader is unsure what Allen necessarily implies in his

comments about miracles (chapter 5). Allen says miracles showed the nature of Christianity, opening doors for Paul to preach the gospel. When Allen says that we today have the same Spirit that worked miracles and exorcisms for Paul, it is unclear whether he expects the modern church to do the same sort of works in the present time. Regardless of his intentions, Allen's writing compels the reader to reevaluate whether the Spirit has any *practical* role in our strategic thinking and missiological practice.

Upon reviewing *Missionary Methods*, a few questions warrant asking:

1. In light of p. 118, what missionary practices and assumptions have become almost unquestionable though little to no Scriptural defense can be found? How might Allen's admonition to depend on the Spirit temper traditional thinking and approaches?
2. Without appealing to "law", what clear expectations should we lay on new believers?
3. Besides simply saying "the gospel", what are the most essential doctrines that should be taught that would still allow for missionaries to move on from a given location?
4. Can one reject, on Scriptural grounds, Allen's expectation on miracles? Why or why not? Might an over emphasis on law, traditionalism, and pragmatic control dictate more of our pneumatology than does the Bible? Explain.
5. What tangible signs would a missionary expect to see in a local believer showing his or her readiness to assume positions of leadership?
6. In light of the homogeneity found in many churches during weekend worship services—whether in socio-economic status, views on secondary doctrines, or political beliefs—how strongly can one assess whether our unity is truly in the gospel and not these other things? What steps can be done to facilitate Spirit-inspired, Christ-centered unity?