

Roland Allen and the Spontaneous Expansion of the Church

Who is Roland Allen?

Roland Allen was an Anglican missionary who critiqued the traditional church as he wrote about planting churches among those who had not yet heard the gospel. Born in Bristol, England in 1868, Roland Allen was ordained to the priesthood in 1893. He served in North China on two occasions, first returning to the West due to political unrest, and later due to his own illness. Rebuffed by church leadership during his day, Allen challenged the traditional church to re-examine its missionary practices in light its failure to ignite fervent faith among indigenous congregations, and in light of the discrepancy between the practices of the first century Church and the twentieth century Church. Allen advocated planting churches that from their inception would be self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing. His strategy gives a large role to the life and fellowship of the Holy Spirit among believers, both lifelong believers and new converts.

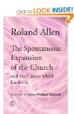
His books can still be purchased today. Here are two titles:

Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours? by Roland Allen



First published in 1912, the author compares 20th Century missionary methods with those of the early church.

The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes that Hinder It by Roland Allen



First published in 1927, the book is also found in its entirety online:
http://www.gospeltruth.net/allen/spon_expanofch.htm

Roland Allen Quotes:

This then is what I mean by spontaneous expansion. I mean the expansion which follows the unexhorted and unorganized activity of individual members of the Church explaining to others the Gospel which they have found for themselves; I mean the expansion which follows the irresistible attraction of the Christian Church for men who see its ordered life, and are drawn to it by desire to discover the secret of a life which they instinctively desire to share; I mean also the expansion of the Church by the addition of new Churches...

...the spontaneous expansion of the Church involved not merely the multiplication of Christians but the multiplication of churches.

Roland Allen Quotes (continued):

I know not how it may appear to others, but to me this unexhorted, unorganized, spontaneous expansion has a charm far beyond that of our modern highly organized missions. I delight to think that a Christian travelling on his business, or fleeing from persecution, could preach Christ, and a Church spring up as the result of his preaching, without his work being advertised through the streets of Antioch or Alexandria as the heading of an appeal to Christian men to subscribe funds to establish a school, or as the text of an exhortation to the Church of his native city to send a Mission, without which new converts deprived of guidance must inevitably lapse. I suspect, however, that I am not alone in this strange preference, and that many others read their Bibles and find there with relief a welcome escape from our material appeals for funds, and from our methods of moving heaven and earth to make a proselyte.

The spontaneous expansion of the Church reduced to its elements is a very simple thing. It asks for no elaborate organization, no large finances, no great number of paid missionaries.... The organization of a little church on the apostolic model is also extremely simple, and the most illiterate converts can use it, and the poorest are sufficiently wealthy to maintain it.

Only as it grows and spreads through large provinces and countries do any complex questions arise, and they arise only as a church composed of many little churches is able to produce leaders prepared to handle them by experience learned in the smaller things. There is no need at the beginning to talk of preparing leaders to face great national issues. By the time the issues have become great and complex the leaders of the little churches of today will have learned their lesson, as they cannot possibly be taught it beforehand.

(From *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes that Hinder It*)