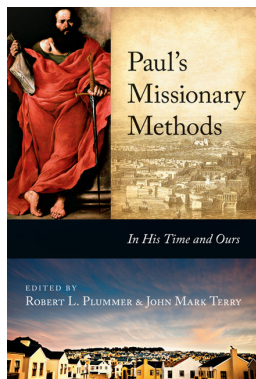


## BOOK EXCERPT



*Paul's Missionary  
Methods: In His Time  
and Ours*

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## Celebrating 100 Years of Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods*

"Can I read your writings, Grandfer?" the adolescent Hubert J. B. Allen asked his grandfather.

"Yes, you may read them. But you won't understand them," the older provocateur replied. "No one will understand them until after I've been dead for ten years."

So wrote the younger Allen in the only biography written about the legendary Anglican behind the creation known as *Missionary Methods*.

Allen died in 1947, and while it was not completely a decade after his death, it was a few years later before his work began to catch on among churches and missionaries across the globe. He was a misunderstood prophet. While the years of his missionary efforts in China and labors in both England and Nairobi were not many in number, Allen had a keen mind and a pen with an unlimited supply of ink. He was a man who knew both his times and the Scriptures and who wrote quite extensively about the missiological problems of his day. Even fifteen years after the publication of *Missionary Methods*, Allen was still convinced of both the challenges of his day and the necessity of the apostolic paradigm. Commenting on the apostle Paul, he wrote, "We must allow to his methods a certain character of universality, and now I venture to urge that, since the Apostle, no other has discovered or practiced methods for the propagation of the Gospel better than his or more suitable to the circumstances of our day. It would be difficult to find any better model than the Apostle in the work of establishing new churches. At any rate this much is certain, that the Apostle's methods succeeded exactly where ours have failed."

Priscilla M. Allen provided the best summary of her father's work: "There are three themes in the life of Roland Allen which overlap like the tunes in a fugue: he was a missionary and a critic of missionary methods; he was a parish priest and found that he could not square this with his conscience; and he became more and more conscious of the inadequacy of the professional, whether missionary or cleric." These themes greatly influenced his missiology and should be kept in mind when reading his works.

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Krista Carnet, broadcast publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or [kkcarnet@ivpress.com](mailto:kkcarnet@ivpress.com)

Alisse Wissman, academic print publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or [awissman@ivpress.com](mailto:awissman@ivpress.com)

Adrianna Wright, online publicity, at 800.843.4587 ext. 4096 or [awright@ivpress.com](mailto:awright@ivpress.com)

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### Edited by

Robert L. Plummer &  
John Mark Terry

### Contributors include:

-Michael F. Bird  
-Eckhard J. Schnabel  
-Robert L. Plummer  
-Benjamin L. Merkle  
-Christoph W. Stenschke  
-Don N. Howell Jr.  
-Craig Keener  
-David J. Hesselgrave  
-Michael Pocock  
-John Mark Terry  
-Ed Stetzer  
-Lizette Beard  
-M. David Sills  
-Chuck Lawless  
-J. D. Payne

Though Allen's book *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* would not be written until 1927, the missiology behind *Missionary Methods* was consistent with his later work. Allen desired to see the natural multiplicative expansion of the church occurring across the world as people naturally shared the gospel and planted churches.

### The Past Century

In the early 1960s, David M. Paton wrote in the foreword to *The Ministry of the Spirit: Selected Writings of Roland Allen*, "Roland Allen is perhaps now at last coming into his own, and is indeed acquiring an interested public of astonishing ecumenical width." In 1963, Charles Chaney wrote, "Since the end of World War II, Allen's thought has undergone a fresh and enthusiastic revival. His major books have been reprinted, and his theories have exerted more influence, received greater acceptance and experienced wider practical application than ever before. Today it is an oft repeated truism that Roland Allen's influence is more extensive than it ever was during his life."

Over the past century, many church leaders have read Allen's works. He ranks as one of the most influential missions theorists in the history of the church. His advocacy for the place of the Holy Spirit in the lives of new churches has appealed to many who, agreeing with Allen, maintain that indigenous churches have everything they need to be and exist as the church from the moment of their birth. His writings helped facilitate the need for indigenous churches to exist in non-Western lands free from Western control.

Possibly the greatest missiologist of the twentieth century and father of the Church Growth Movement, Donald A. McGavran, credited Allen as being one of the individuals who highly influenced his views. He believed so strongly in Allen's writings that he exhorted all missionaries serving among people movements to read his books. Another individual who found Allen's writings to be of much value was Lesslie Newbigin. Newbigin, among other noteworthy contributions, was influential in providing the theological and missiological foundation that resulted in the Missional Church Movement. Newbigin even penned the foreword to the 1962 American edition of *Missionary Methods*. Realizing the power of Allen's words, he offered a warning to the reader: "I have thought it right to enter these two words of caution, because the reader should be warned that he is embarking on a serious undertaking. Once he has started reading Allen, he will be

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compelled to go on. He will find that this quiet voice has a strange relevance and immediacy to the problems of the Church in our day. And I shall be surprised if he does not find before long that any of his accustomed ideas are being questioned by a voice more searching than the word of man.”

It is now commonplace for many popular authors, particularly those writing in the area of church planting, to make reference to Roland Allen. For example, Rick Warren credits Allen in his book *The Purpose Driven Church* when he writes, “The task of church leadership is to discover and remove growth-restricting diseases and barriers so that natural, normal growth can occur. Seventy years ago Roland Allen, in his classic text on missions, called this kind of growth ‘the *spontaneous* expansion of the church.’ It is the kind of growth reported in the book of Acts. Is your church spontaneously growing? If that kind of growth is not happening in a church we should ask, ‘Why not?’”

In his book *Organic Church*, Neil Cole draws attention to *Missionary Methods*. David Garrison, in *Church Planting Movements*, cites both *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* and *Missionary Methods*. Alan Hirsch quotes Allen in his book *The Forgotten Ways*. And there are several other popular American authors who are referencing Allen as well.

Anecdotally, I am finding more and more people in the United States interested in learning about Roland Allen. I often hear of how Allen has influenced people’s thinking and actions regarding missions in the twenty-first century.

Much can happen in one hundred years. Even though Allen sleeps, he still speaks—but this time people are listening.

—Adapted from chapter fourteen,  
“Roland Allen’s *Missionary Methods* at One Hundred” by J. D. Payne