

Comparative Book Review

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Introduction to Book Review

Roland begins sharing his experiences and how he came to his present position. "Roland Allen served as an Anglican missionary to China and Kenya in the first half of the twentieth century. He is a prolific writer on missions. He is best known for *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* Although his writings did not gain significant influence in his life, they have gained a profound influence on subsequent generations. Allen's missions philosophy is particularly evident in popular contemporary strategies such as Donald McGavran's church growth movement as well as Church Planting (CPMs) and Disciple Making Movements (DMMs)" Allen, 2018. He states the danger which he sees the remedy, and the difficulty in writing its plan and purpose, Allen, 2018". J.D.Payne. This book has brought out the core of Allen's missiology. He covers ten themes that were the focus of Roland Allen's writings. The reason Payne self-published this book was to expedite its release to make its rounds in the mission community during this centennial remembrance of Roland Allen.

"Book 1" Summary

The Spontaneous Expansion of and the Causes which Hinder It

By Roland Allen

The title immediately raises the question, what is meant by spontaneous expansion? Allen states, "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 learned 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 the 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." Allen, 2018. Payne unfolds two recurring themes in Allen's ecclesiology, "the importance of the Eucharist and the indigenous concept of the church. He saw the local church as being indigenous; he wrote what he understood of an indigenous church. Allen wrote, 'I understand a Church which possesses an inherent in itself everything which is essential to the existence of a Church and is able to multiply itself without any necessary reference to any external authority", Allen, 2018. Jesus was the greatest missionary, and Allen observed the manner in which Jesus taught his disciples. "Allen observed that Christ taught the apostles by word and deed. According to Allen, Christ's training was not theoretical or in the confines of an institution separated from the missionary task. He trained them in the work, not outside it; in the world, not in a hothouse." Allen, 2018. Allen argues regarding the Apostolic Approach by stating that there are four things that are necessary. "Allen states, "Four things, then we see St. Paul deemed necessary for the establishment of his churches, and only four. A tradition or elementary Creed, the Sacraments of Baptism and the Holy Communion, Orders, and the Holy Scriptures. He trained his converts in the simplest and most practical form. He delivered these to them. He exercised them as a body in understanding and practice of them, and he left them to work them out for themselves as a body whilst he himself went on with his own special work". Allen, 2018. Allen placed evangelism as a priority. He stated, "Of the reasons for supporting evangelistic missions, I need not speak at length. I believe that they are in themselves supreme, and that without them, no educational or medical missions would ever have come into existence ... Christ, the beginning, the end: the need for Christ; the hope in Christ; the desire for His glory; the conviction of His sovereignty; the impulse of His Spirit- these

are some of the reasons for evangelistic missions, and, however we may express them, they are, as I said, in their nature supreme". Allen, 2018.

Payne summarizes Allen's writing by stating, "Allen's views called for a radical paradigm shift, not a step-by-step process for church growth. This shift reverted to a biblical simplicity of an apostolic pattern, and church organization." Allen, 2018. "The Roland Allen Equation for the Spontaneous Expansion of the Church, in essence, consist of three components. Allen's views concerning indigenous churches and the Holy Spirit must be realized and accepted. And, missionary faith that is opposed to devolution must be present when the concept of indigenous churches is united with the proper understanding of the Holy Spirit and missionary faith is present, the result is the spontaneous expansion of the Church." Allen, 2018.

The strengths of the author's ideas in all his writings, "Allen's overriding concern was to show that missionary method, far from being a secondary or indifferent matter, is a matter of supreme importance. To him, it is the expansion which follows the unexhorted and unorganized activity of individual members of the church explaining to others the Gospel. He proposes that Christianity can expand spontaneously within individual communities if only organized religions can be restricted from entering", Allen, 2018.

The potential weaknesses in the author's ideas are that some of what he taught seems counterintuitive at the time, including the ideas that missionaries should be self-sustaining, like Paul, who made tents, should adapt their methods to local customs, and train locals to take to take over the mission work. "His primary thesis is that because our traditional missionary methods have sprung into existence as the almost inevitable consequences of our attitude and

training and that in employing them, we have unconsciously, and often unwillingly, created an atmosphere in which spontaneous expansion is almost impossible," Allen, 2018.

"Book 2" Summary

The Hole in Our Gospel, by Richard Stearns

What does God expect from us?

Introduction

The author, Richard Stearns, was the CEO of two companies before becoming the longest-serving president (1998-2018) of World Vision US, which is a Christian humanitarian aid organization.

The Hole in Our Gospel, with the subtitle "What does God expect of us, takes a global look at the Christian church and the enormous discrepancies between the US and other parts of the world" Stearns, 2019. Stearns explains his story of coming to Christ, leaving worldly success to run a global nonprofit Christian organization that serves the poor. "Stearns argues for a larger gospel that calls Christians to a greater generosity rather than a life of luxury and ease" Stearns, 2019. However, at the beginning of his life, he was an atheist. Stearns paints a picture of how the Gospel transformed his entire life and the transformative power of the gospel in his life has changed the lives of so many people". (Stearns, 2019).

The question arises, what is the Hole? He explains the Hole by quoting Ezekiel 16:49, which states, "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom; she and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned: They did not help the poor and the needy ."This Scripture is so

apropos for today's society. The most important and primary ingredient is "our faith through love," Galatians 5:6. The whole gospel tells the story of salvation through faith, to build with God for his kingdom, Ephesians 2:8-10. Matthew 25:37-40 tells us how we are to care for each other, "The King will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did it for me."

God is asking us for everything! "Jesus had a lot to say about it. He did give us deep insight into the character of God and our relationship with him as well, but he also spoke at length about His expectations. God expects our values to be aligned with Him and not with the world. He is asking for more than church attendance, more than prayer too, more than belief, and even more than self-denial. God asks us for everything. He requires a total life commitment from those who ask to be his followers. He calls us to be His partners in changing the world, just as he asked the twelve (12) to change their world two thousand years ago," (Stearns,2019).

We are seeing people concerned about themselves only and not about the less fortunate. 2 Timothy 4:3 states, "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. This is the gospel with holes in it – a gospel that gives us tickets to heaven and asks us nothing in return, a gospel that relieves us of responsibility towards others, towards injustice, towards the poor, perhaps towards God Himself – a gospel with ourselves and our own comfort and fulfillment at the center." (Stearns, 2019). "Jesus' gospel is the whole gospel of salvation and grace, through faith, to build with God, for His kingdom. There are over 2,000 verses concerning justice and poverty that tangibly loving our less fortunate neighbors here on earth is seen in heaven as loving God." (Stearns

2019). The "Bible calls to action concerning the poor is no minor matter. Jesus explicitly and repeatedly links these issues, in His parables, actions, and commandments, to building His Father's Kingdom." (Stearns, 2019). The Bible states in Matthew 25:40, "The king will reply, "Truly I tell you whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me ."This is the command that God set forth for us/Christians/believers/followers of Christ.

Stearns addresses the least of these. "The world's poorest people, misery and death are the norm, and the number is staggering. Stearns presented examples of the least. Stearns argues, "imagine a jetliner full of American travelers crashes, killing all aboard, not once, but three times in the space of a month; there would be a terrible outcry, investigations, a mobilization of tremendous resources to prevent further tragedy. Yet, the equivalent of 100 plane loads of children crash every day, killing all, that's 26,500 children, first suffering, and then dying each day of the year, from preventable causes due to their extreme poverty." (Stearns, 2019). Mr. Stearns, there is no social justice for those 26,500 children dying daily because they do not look like those American travelers on the jetliner.

Stearns further argues that the church is absent without leave "AWOL" from Humanitarian Crises of all time, and no one gave permission. "The Church in America must confront the uncomfortable challenge of being endowed with an abundance of blessings in an extremely poor world." (Stearns, 2019). Stearns concludes, "Most of our brothers and sisters in Christ in the developing world live in grinding poverty. And in the midst of this stands the Church of Jesus Christ in America, with resources, knowledge, and tools unequalled in the history of Christendom.... Will historians write about a people who stood by and watched... of Christians who lived in luxury and self-indulgence while millions died for lack of food and water.

The heart and soul of the Church of Jesus Christ, the very integrity of our faith, and our relevance in the world hang in the balance." (Stearns, 2019).

The strength of the author's ideas is several. The hole in our gospel tells the story of Richard Stearns's whole life transformed by the gospel and the ways the transformation power of the gospel in his life has gone in to change the lives of so many. The purpose of the book was to find the hole in our gospel. The weakness is a lack of finances and other resources to enhance his goal for the least of these.

The authors are responding to the Great Commission Jesus gave in Matthew 28:19-20. They are spreading the gospel and caring for God's people, and planting churches. Missions are at the heart of their work. They differ, with Roland Allen already being a Christian and Richard Stearns having to become one.

The ideas of these authors impacted me, indeed. Should I become a pastor or leader of a church, I would partner with neighboring churches to plan a program for missions, both domestic and foreign/global.

Reference

Allen, R. (2006). *The spontaneous expansion of the Church: And the causes which hinder it*. Lutterworth Press.

Stearns, R. (2019). *The Hole in our gospel*. Thomas Nelson Incorporated.