

The Exotic at Our Doorstep

Few books on mission strategy have carried as much influence over the last 100 years as Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* His argument for Paul's indigenous principles has become almost standard fare in missiology today, but a century ago it was radical, disturbing and anything but celebrated. This past September, the International Society for Frontier Missiology (ISFM) 2012—in addition to its own regular gathering—joined with the Evangelical Missiological Society at the annual Missio Nexus meetings to recognize the centenary of this historic publication. Allen's prescient missiology framed those ISFM sessions, and addresses from both events are published herein.

Buried in his book on missionary method was Allen's assessment of mission efforts to date, an assessment that carries relevance even after a century.¹ After examining the principles of Paul, Allen takes a chapter to survey the churches emerging across the pre-World War I mission fields. He found "three disquieting symptoms."

"Everywhere Christianity was still an exotic." The churches across those frontier settings seemed foreign in their context. Allen was sensitive to what we now call contextualization, and he considered these alien forms of church a distinct impediment to effective church movements. The ISFM embraced this specific concern of Allen's in its theme for 2012, *"Still an Exotic?: Reassessing Contextualization after a Century."*

Two of the ISFM papers presented at Missio Nexus explore contextualization in the Hindu world. Darren Duerksen's study of nascent Jesus Movements among Hindu and Sikh communities describes how "church" identity is being formed through negotiating another socio-religious context (pp. 161-67). H. L. Richard carefully probes the matter of syncretism in his historical study of the movement that surrounded K. Subba Rao, piercing through the odd deviations from orthodox Christianity (pp. 177-82). Given the polarity of opinion among those present regarding "insider movements," the phenomenological/descriptive approach taken in both papers proved beneficial in encouraging productive interaction.

"Everywhere our missions are dependent." Allen is known particularly for his stance on the deficits of dependency in these earlier frontier mission situations. He beheld it everywhere, and saw little promise of changing the foreign source of men and money. Paul De Neui, whose SEANET association published on this very issue in 2011 (see ad on p. 188), reexamines Allen's principles in Buddhist South East Asia after a century (pp. 183-88).

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"Everywhere we see the same types."

The uniformity of a common church template across such diverse cultural and religious fields was disconcerting to Allen. There didn't seem to be any "discovery of new aspects of the gospel" nor any "unfolding of new forms of Christian life." Doesn't the diversity of contexts warrant variety? Richard Jameson offers a comparative study from his three decades of ministry among Muslims in the Middle East and Southeast Asia (pp. 169-76), and he makes a convincing case that many assumptions of "sameness" in Muslim contexts are totally inappropriate.

The missiological maturation from Allen's "indigenous" perceptions to our present grasp of "contextualization" has included a fresh reassessment of the role of the missionary. At ISFM 2012, Scott Moreau summarized the findings in his new book on the different models of contextualization deployed across evangelical missions today (reviewed on pp. 196-98). Participants also heard of the developing role of the "alongsider," a term for those ministering strategically alongside a Jesus movement in another socio-religious world.² This prompted us to supplement these ISFM articles with Richard Hibbert's

historical piece on the role of missionaries in three movements in China just before Roland Allen's own involvement in that region (pp. 189-95).

But 100 years has changed the global equation and the exotic is closer to home. The crisis of new nation states, religious enmity, economic globalization and war has spawned a global diaspora of peoples transplanted into new settings of kingdom opportunity. Domestic households, university campuses, urban neighborhoods and corporate office parks present new multicultural and interreligious arrangements. The single factor of distance has changed everything, and it affects how the global church sends, goes and receives. The new tag "diaspora missiology" is simply short hand for our attempts to understand this global disruption and to find new ways to reach peoples stretched across the globe.

Do Roland Allen's "disquieting symptoms" still apply given this diaspora at our doorstep? Do we still expect sameness when those in this diaspora turn to Christ? Should they simply assimilate to our alien style of church? Are we free of the old dependencies as new mission emerges from younger churches among the diaspora? These are

some of the strategic questions behind the ISFM 2013 theme, "Global Peoples: Gates, Bridges and Connections Across the Frontiers." (Dallas/Plano, TX, September 18-19, www.ijfm.org/isfm/annual.htm or see ad p. 204). We'll take another look at the apostolic challenge, at the new perspectives offered in mission anthropology, and at the emerging approaches to training across this diaspora. We'll also consider how disciple-making movements might skip across a people group that encircles the globe.³

I look forward to seeing you in Dallas,



Brad Gill
Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

¹ In Chapter 12 of Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* 1962. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. First published 1912, London: R. Scott.

² John Jay Travis presented "Nine 'Alongsider' Roles in Jesus Movements," forthcoming.

³ Len Bartlotti's article in *IJFM* 27:3, Fall 2010 (pp. 135-137) lays out the engagement points across a global ethnoscapes.

The **IJFM** is published in the name of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, a fellowship of younger leaders committed to the purposes of the twin consultations of Edinburgh 1980: *The World Consultation on Frontier Missions* and *The International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions*. As an expression of the ongoing concerns of Edinburgh 1980, the **IJFM** seeks to:

- ☞ promote intergenerational dialogue between senior and junior mission leaders;
- ☞ cultivate an international fraternity of thought in the development of frontier missiology;
- ☞ highlight the need to maintain, renew, and create mission agencies as vehicles for frontier missions;
- ☞ encourage multidimensional and interdisciplinary studies;
- ☞ foster spiritual devotion as well as intellectual growth; and
- ☞ advocate "A Church for Every People."

Mission frontiers, like other frontiers, represent boundaries or barriers beyond which we must go yet beyond which we may not be able to see clearly and boundaries which may even be disputed or denied. Their study involves the discovery and evaluation of the unknown or even the reevaluation of the known. But unlike other frontiers, mission frontiers is a subject specifically concerned to explore and exposit areas and ideas and insights related to the glorification of God in all the nations (peoples) of the world, "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." (Acts 26:18)

Subscribers and other readers of the **IJFM** (due to ongoing promotion) come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Mission professors, field missionaries, young adult mission mobilizers, college librarians, mission executives, and mission researchers all look to the **IJFM** for the latest thinking in frontier missiology.