

## The Continuing Relevance of Roland Allen

I must begin egotistically with some words about myself, because I am neither a theologian nor a missiologist, so it may well be asked what business I have to talk about Roland Allen from a “professional” point of view. In fact, for that very reason this talk will consist largely of quotations from his own and other learned scholars’ writings. Nevertheless I was personally greatly influenced by “Granfer” (*as I’m afraid I shall often call him*) though mostly at second-hand, through his son - my father, John Allen. Between the ages of 8 and 13 I saw a lot of my grandfather, because while I was at boarding school near Nairobi I spent many half-terms and holidays at his home. But he was elderly and frail, so Grannie was very protective of him, and quick to stop our conversations, because she thought they were tiring for him. He did, however, for example, introduce me to poetry; and when as a 12-year-old I asked him whether I could read his books, he replied: *Oh, yes, you can read them by all means — but you won't understand them; I don't think anyone is going to understand them until I've been dead ten years . . .*

The principal way in which I was indirectly influenced by him was in a conscious determination after graduation here in Oxford to try to live as what *he* called a “non-professional missionary”. Having been “born, bred and buttered” in East Africa, I wanted to serve in what were then patronizingly called “under-developed countries”; but in those days there wasn’t any Voluntary Service Overseas nor any structured international aid, and such agencies as “the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief” – now OXFAM – were still primarily concerned with the relief of hardship in European and other countries which had suffered during the Second World War. So there were really only three ways for an Englishman without professional qualifications to work in the developing world – with a missionary society; or in commerce; or in the Colonial Service. I’d resolved not to go as a professional missionary, and I wasn’t attracted by money-making, so I became a wicked imperialist - a District Officer - in Uganda; and after independence, when I’d been “Africanized”, I continued a career almost entirely overseas as a municipal government consultant, working mostly in my native Africa, but also in countries as different as Albania, Bhutan, Bolivia, Sri Lanka, the Solomon Islands, the Dominican Republic and many more.

For the past 15 years I have been based in Old Marston, and early in that period I at long last began to have a closer look at my grandfather’s writings. This was because my father and his sister had been so upset by distorted published accounts of their father’s life and work that I decided to devote some spare time to trying to write a more balanced biography, and this was published in USA eight years’ ago. The book was very well received all over the world, so I suddenly found that I was being consulted by learned scholars as a “Roland Allen expert” – although in fact I’ve done little more than glance at most of his published work, and I’m far too ignorant to understand very much about most of the controversies in which he was engaged.

But that’s how I come to be here today – and that’s more than enough about *me*. However, just one more anecdote to illustrate how my father and I tended to react as a consequence of Roland’s influence: In about 1960 (when both of us had jobs in Uganda) the Minister of Health of the first elected government before independence opened a magnificent new state-of-the-art university teaching hospital at Mulago in Kampala. A few weeks later he fell ill, and he went for treatment to the old mission hospital at Mengo (which is also in Kampala). When people asked him why, he replied *Because in Mengo I get not only science, but love!* Lots of people in the Christian community recounted this rather smugly, but my father’s reaction – as his father’s would have been – was this: *That’s a horror story! No Christian love to be expected in the university hospital – just a crowd of unfeeling atheists and humanists and other non-believers, whilst all the Christians go and look after one another in their private ghetto!*

And this leads me at last to Roland Allen himself. Writing in 1903 in a journal called *The East & the West* about the causes of the Boxer Rising of 1900 he remarked that to the vast majority of Chinese "*all foreigners were Christians, and all Christians were to be judged by the actions of those whom they happened to meet, [including] the conduct of foreign merchants and engineers travelling in the interior, which was not always an excellent example of the practice of Christianity*". Roland was already beginning to feel concern about the potential impact of "non-professional missionaries" — of lay persons such as Western merchants and engineers

— all of whom were assumed by their host countries' populations to be Christians, simply because they were the fellow-nationals of the "professional" missionaries. As I expect you know, one Arabic word for a European is 'Nazrani' (a Nazarene); so in Arab countries Christianity is only too often judged by the behaviour of *all* Europeans. The same applies in many other parts of the world.

So what was Roland doing in China, and what did he learn there? As you'll see from the outline of his life, during the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century he was an Anglican missionary in Beijing (or "Peking" as it was called in those days). He was chaplain to the British Legation during the Boxers' siege of the European embassies and consulates in 1900; and his first published book was an account of that episode based on his diaries - **The Siege of the Peking Legations**.

I don't want to give you his life history because (a) you can read that in my book! and (b) we are concerned today with his *continuing* relevance more than half a century after his death. All the same, the ideas which made him influential emerged from his life experiences, and so I have to run through that life in some detail to explain how those ideas arose.

His principal job during those first years in Beijing was training a few local youths as catechists – and three of them, he thought, had the potential to become deacons. When first he took up this post at the clergy school, he remarked later, *I was quite innocent: I did not question the propriety of such a course for a moment. . . [but] During those five years I became more and more uneasy in my mind.* When speaking about his work in England after the siege, he began to give voice to his doubts. *Western teachers can never preach the whole Gospel to Eastern minds*, he said; moreover: *I saw that if the Church in North China was to have no clergy at all except such as could pass through my little theological school and then be financially supported, Churches could not multiply rapidly.* What's more, he warned: *If the Church bears the mark "Made in the West" too prominently stamped upon her, many will turn away from her who would not turn away from Christ . . . Constant guidance and supervision by Europeans may outwit its own purpose.* When other people worried that without such guidance the independent churches might stray from orthodoxy, Roland retorted: *Liberty which is not liberty to err is not liberty. There is no possibility of virtue without a possibility of vice. Orthodoxy based on ignorant acceptance of authority or upon fearful obedience to rules is not orthodoxy; it is not a 'doxy' at all . . . It is a house built upon sand... What is to ensure orthodoxy? Nothing: no power can ensure orthodoxy but the power of the Holy Spirit.*

These insights persuaded Roland that *The first work of the missionary should be to train his converts in real independence.* In order to fulfil this responsibility, he put forward three key principles:

- i) to teach the native converts to recognize their responsibility as members of the Church . . . never to do for the natives anything that they could do for themselves . . .*
- ii) to avoid the introduction of any foreign element unless it is absolutely essential... [otherwise] the books, the vestments, the ornaments, the design of the building, all come from a foreign land . . . the Church is the foreigners' Church.*
- iii) to be always retiring from the people, to prepare the way for final retirement . . . To become indispensable to the people is really to fail . . . [Rather the missionary should] patiently watch while the Holy Spirit transforms strange forms of life into Christian forms of life unlike our own.*

In 1903 Roland went back to China and with his Bishop's approval began to put some of his ideas into effect, basing them on the work of the Scottish Presbyterian missionary, Dr John Nevius, in Korea. Roland later described his experiments in the Epilogue of his book on *Missionary Methods* and explains how he *began by approaching his Bishop with a request that the usual grant given for the upkeep of his mission station might be withdrawn. He desired that his own salary and the salaries of his three native catechists*

might be paid them, but no more. Then e.g. at Han-Ko-Chuang the Christians wanted to found a small school. They asked me to do it. I refused. Then they tried to make a compromise by asking me to find the teacher. I refused again. I said that the school must be their school and that they must manage it, but that I would give a small subscription. In the event they did open a school, to which the Mission gave a grant of £1.1s. a year. After a very few months Roland was reporting *Personally I can see at present no reason why it should be necessary to keep a foreigner here more than a year or two longer, and even now I think the continued presence of a foreigner rather a disadvantage than otherwise.*

Sadly after only nine months back in China he was now invalided home for good, and became a country Vicar at Chalfont St. Peter. But this didn't last long because, having been doubtful about the Anglican Church's methods overseas, he now became so doubtful about its methods at home that in November 1907 he resigned. He did this because he found himself unable conscientiously to carry out his legal duty, as a priest in the established Church of England, to perform solemn religious ceremonies even for undeserving persons who *habitually neglect their religious duties, or openly deny the truth of the Creeds, or by the immorality of their lives openly defy the laws of God.* Roland could not accept that the Church should be used as no more than a convenient and fashionable social service. On one memorable occasion a wealthy bridegroom, who was a resident in the parish but a notorious unbeliever, pointed out to Roland that, even as incumbent parish priest, he could not lawfully prevent his wedding being celebrated in Chalfont St. Peter parish church provided that another priest could be found, who was willing to perform the ceremony. Roland responded cheerfully: *"Yes, that is perfectly true. And no more can you lawfully prevent me, as the incumbent parish priest, from tolling the funeral bell throughout the proceedings . . ."*

However, his resignation meant that he could no longer hold any post in the Church of England. For the next few years, doing a little deputation work for missionary societies, but living largely on his wife's inherited income, he and his family lived in quiet seclusion, whilst Roland read extensively, notably the works of Adolf von Harnack and Professor W.M. Ramsay; and above all, as he wrote later, *I began to study the methods of the Apostle St. Paul. From that day forward I began to see light.*

Then in 1910 the great World Missionary Conference was held in Edinburgh - a gathering which has been described as "the apotheosis of missionary triumphalism". The Conference epitomized all Roland's worst misgivings about the current attitudes of western missionaries. So, as a former colleague put it, *Allen turned back to the Christian Book of Instructions.*

At the end of 1910 Roland contrived to travel out to India for a couple of months. During this tour, he was able to talk to many people active in mission work in India, among them notably Vedanayakam Samuel Azariah, who later became Bishop of Dornakal, and Bishop Henry Whitehead of Madras. These discussions reinforced his growing convictions, and gave them a wider base than his experiences in China.

So in February 1912, with a preface by Bishop Whitehead, there appeared the book on which Roland's reputation during his lifetime was principally founded — **Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?**

In the words of Roland's daughter, my Aunt Priscilla: *Here we have straightaway the prophetic, "Hear the word of the Lord."* He was not recommending a revolution, he said, but a return to first principles. *The facts are these, he points out: St. Paul preached in a place for five or six months and then left behind him a Church, not indeed free from the need of guidance, but capable of growth and expansion.* What a contrast with contemporary practice as described by Bishop Whitehead in his preface! *We found Churches and keep them in leading strings for a hundred years, and even then are not within measurable distance of giving them independence.*

*Missionary Methods* caused something of a stir when it was published, and has continued to exercise influence to this day. It has been reprinted as recently as last year, not as an historical curiosity, but as a valid

textbook for contemporary missionaries and theologians. An American Episcopalian once remarked: *no serious Churchman can read this extraordinary book without some sense of emotional shock. Although Allen is ostensibly discussing China, India and other far off places, one keeps having the uncomfortable feeling that he has a curiously intimate knowledge of one's own diocese or parish, one's own Sunday School class or prayer group, even of one's own devotional life.*

In 1913 Roland published another book – **Missionary Principles** – which has also been reprinted in recent years. But he felt frustrated and disappointed because, although the merits of his arguments were acknowledged, even people he greatly admired seemed to be impervious to the need for change: *I could not understand how wise men could see what I saw and not change their whole manner of action.* Moreover, he got exasperated with clergy and laity who, as he saw it, had more zeal for missionary societies than for the mission of the Church. Such ‘missionary zeal’, he remarked could easily make people forget that *the Church in its entirety is a missionary body of which every member is a missionary. There is no ground for the existence of a body of professional missionaries in the New Testament.*

Now the First World War intervened, but Roland didn’t stop thinking and writing, and in 1917 he published a small book **Pentecost & the World** which Grannie said he himself considered his best single piece of writing: its subtitle is “*the revelation of the Holy Spirit in the ‘Acts of the Apostles’*” and it caused an American Baptist to write 40 years’ later “*Allen's observations in this booklet leave little doubt that he had a truer appreciation of what Luke really meant to say in his account of the outpouring of the Spirit than many learned exegetes who have spent their skill in analyzing it*”. It is reprinted in **The Ministry of the Spirit**.

Just before the War Roland met two non-Anglicans who shared his dismay about current missionary methods. One of them was Sidney Clark, a Congregationalist - an uneducated self-made businessman who had traveled in China and elsewhere and been shocked by what he observed: *If I conducted my business in the way the missionary societies conduct theirs, I would be bankrupt!* The other was Dr. Thomas Cochrane, a Scots Presbyterian who had gone out with his wife to eastern Mongolia in 1897, as a missionary doctor; and, after the Boxer Rising, had begun to build up the Peking Union Medical College.

Clark's weakness, remarked Sir Kenneth Grubb, was that *he was apt to assume that, if only the facts of a situation could be uncovered, men would rush to remedy the obvious ills.* So he was ready and willing to devote much of his money to helping Cochrane make an immensely detailed “*Survey of the Missionary Occupation of China*”. Roland’s experience agreed with Grubb's ensuing dry comment: *Unfortunately, men, even Christian men, do not so act.* Roland was sceptical about the value of surveys. Moreover he was profoundly concerned about such matters as the Ministry, the Liturgy, and the Sacraments, in which his future colleagues took much less interest than a relatively high church Anglican. Nevertheless, when they met in 1914, all three of them were united in their conviction that much of the Church's missionary effort was seriously misguided. What’s more, their abilities complemented one another's: Clark's business acumen made him an excellent manager for the project; Cochrane's charm and sensitivity made him the team's diplomat; and Roland with his trained analytic mind and wide learning was their philosopher and theologian.

So in 1917 they joined together in setting up the **World Dominion Movement**, in three small rooms of a top floor in London's East End (rented from the National Laymen's Missionary Movement, for which Cochrane was then working). *The great foundation of their work, notes Cochrane's biographer, was the basis which they liked to call the Three Supreme Loyalties:*

- (i) *To the Lord Jesus Christ and the centrality of His Cross.*
- (ii) *To the Bible as the final authority on Faith and Practice.*
- (iii) *To the Lord's command to world-wide witness”.*

At the end of the War Clark bought Roland a small house in Beaconsfield and gave him a stipend of £200 a year, plus traveling expenses. So for about ten years Roland devoted himself primarily to writing pamphlets and articles for their own journal, *World Dominion*, and letters, articles and other studies in theological journals, missionary society publications, and the national press.

He also wrote another influential book, **The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church, and the causes which hinder it**, with a preface by Bishop Azariah. In it Roland pursued still further his constant theme that Christ came to bring, not Law, but the Holy Spirit: *Every attempt to treat any of His sayings as legal enactments has always resulted in confusion, and error, and, what is far worse, in the letting loose of a flood of ill-will, hatred, pride, and self-righteous pharisaism which is the direct contradiction of His Spirit . . . The revelation of a higher code of morals is no Gospel.* Twentieth century tendencies to transform Christianity into no more than "a code of morals", Roland thought, had resulted (as one consequence) in a gross over-emphasis on non-spiritual requirements: *instead of establishing the Church and then assisting in its education, we insist that the education and civilization must come before the establishment of the Church . . . an elaborate internal machinery for the propagation of ideas seems to most of those to whom we go almost absurd. You do not want buildings and machinery to propagate ideas or a faith; you want ideas and a faith.*

That faith should lead us, Roland passionately believed, into handing over to people what F. D. Maurice called the 'Signs of the Kingdom' — the Creed, the Bible, the Ministry, and the Sacraments — and then leaving the Church's further growth to the Holy Spirit, without seeking constantly to train and to control. Roland commented: *"The wind bloweth where it listeth," said Christ, and spontaneous activity is a movement of the Spirit in the individual and in the Church, and we cannot control the Spirit.*

Anxieties about the possibility of irregularities and doctrinal error were brushed aside by him: *Am I not right in saying that in the early centuries of the Christian era the dangers to the Faith, the dangers to unity, arose not from the illiterate bishops, but from the highly educated? And would not the free ordination of natives and the establishment of real churches, obviously and unquestionably purely native, as a matter of fact tend to cut the ground from under the feet of the malcontents, whose argument is that we white men keep all authority in our own hands ?*

In 'Sponx', and in many of his articles and pamphlets published by the Survey Application Trust, Roland keeps stressing that the primary task of every missionary should be the propagation of the Gospel. He was by no means opposed to the involvement of Christians in social concerns, such as the provision of schools and hospitals: indeed this was, in his view, an important part of the mission of the laity. But for the missionary as evangelist, he believed, those tasks *must* be secondary.

As he thought about these matters, Roland began to observe that they led to further consequences. His daughter once remarked that *There are three themes in the life of Roland Allen which overlap like the tunes in a fugue.* He had been a missionary, and had found that lack of faith in the Spirit was damaging overseas missionary enterprise. He had been a parish priest, and had found that lack of faith in the Spirit was damaging the Church of England. He was still an ordained priest — and now he was beginning to question whether lack of faith in the Spirit was not damaging the Church's sacramental ministry itself. These thoughts led him on to the third theme in the fugue.

In his introduction to Sponx, Bishop Azariah identified some of the awkward questions which Roland was posing the Church. Among them we may note particularly in the present context: *"Is it not true that by employing a paid army of evangelists, the task of evangelization is shifted from the Church to a paid agency?"* And: *"In how many Churches is the Apostolic rule of weekly 'Breaking of Bread' being followed?"* and *"We accept a short training for a teacher, and demand a long training for a man who is to celebrate the Eucharist. Why do we do this?"* and *"Why do we not employ voluntary workers far more widely?"*

These questions and similar ones had been exercising Roland's mind for a long time. He was writing in the *Church Times* on the subject as early as 1919. In 1923 S.P.C.K. published the first of several longer treatises by Roland on the same theme — a booklet entitled **Voluntary Clergy**; and he noted examples of such clergy being ordained in southern Ohio and in New Jersey. And then, in the summer and autumn of 1924 he crossed the Atlantic, to investigate the failure of a scheme known as the Archbishops' Western Canada Fund [AWCF].

The objectives of AWCF, when it was launched in 1910, were to provide men and money from England for Anglican churches in western Canada during a ten-year period, after which time it was anticipated that the churches would be self-supporting and the fund could be closed. This hadn't happened. Roland sought to discover why. Many commentators had suggested that the failure of AWCF was simply an effect of the War; but Roland argued cogently that this was a misconception. The scheme had worked *only* where three conditions prevailed: a growing population in a definite place; a resident priest; and a congregation that became strong enough to maintain that priest. Otherwise AWCF hadn't worked — and in Roland's opinion it *could* not have worked — because it was in practice unrealistically dependent on an endless and growing supply of 'professional' priests, trained in theological colleges, and earning stipends. He pointed out that the closing report of the AWCF “ *tells us that 70 churches have been built and 168 sites purchased, also tells us that help has been given to 7 candidates in training for Holy Orders. 168: 70: 7: that is the proportion.*” This, he maintained, was a preposterous state of affairs. What then could be done?

So Roland terminated his brief official memorandum to the Archbishops with the following conclusion: *This is the lesson which, I would urge, is taught us by the history of the AWCF. We can either send out men who will act as parochial clergy and hold services for groups of people; or we can send out men to establish churches on a self-supporting basis from the very beginning . . . If we do the second the missionaries must be able to pass on, leaving churches (not necessarily buildings) established and settled behind them . . . [They] must be authorized to appeal, not so much for money, as for service, and to look for suitable men to be ordained in every place, who may minister to their fellows, free, gratis, and for nothing. In other words the stipendiary system must be subordinated to the spiritual needs of the church..*

The experience gained by him in this survey confirmed Roland's dedication to what his daughter identified as the "third theme in the fugue" of his life: that is to say, whether lack of faith in the Holy Spirit were not seriously damaging the *ministry* of the Church; not merely in Canada, but throughout the Anglican communion and beyond: *We put the maintenance of a paid clergy before the commands of Christ, and we get Church members who, when separated from their paid clerical nurses, are as helpless as babies.*

Roland's tour in Canada was followed by two more such overseas visits, paid for by the Survey Application Trust. In the course of each of these expeditions — to South Africa and Rhodesia in 1926 and to southern India and Assam in 1927/28 — Roland attempted in vain to "sell" to the local Anglican bishops, clergy and layfolk his ideas about the non-stipendiary ministry.

The problem, however, as Roland stressed, was not simply one for the overseas mission field — although in the gigantic dioceses of such places as Canada and tropical Africa, it appeared in starkest form. The problem was equally dramatic when rural parishes in England were reduced to *a mere fragment of a church in some larger area . . . Everything, the life of the Church, the Sacraments, everything is to be subordinated to money . . . Did not Christ say "Where two or three", and shall we put Him right and say "Yes, if they can afford to support a stipendiary cleric" ?* He was horrified by the distortion wrought by the Church's constant need for money to support the stipendiary system: *to build upon money is to build on a foundation that is not of the Gospel; it is to bind the Church to the chariot wheels of Mammon.*

He recognized, of course, that what he was proposing demanded enormous changes of attitude, both among clergy and laity: *We have to adjust our minds to a conception which is very unfamiliar ...*

- (1) *We have to think of qualifications as the writer of the **Epistle to Timothy** thought of them, and that is very strange to us.*
- (2) *We have to think of the ministry as given to the Church rather than to the individual ordinand, and that is strange to us. We give a Church to a priest, rather than a ministry to a Church . . .*
- (4) *We think almost entirely in terms of one man one parish: one priest-in-charge assisted possibly by others: we have to learn to think in terms of a college of priests in very small Churches . . . &c*

In a valiant final effort to bring home to the Establishment the importance of his thesis, Roland sent a copy of *Voluntary Clergy Overseas* to every Anglican bishop attending the 1930 Lambeth Conference, with an individually signed covering letter. Several of them responded warmly. His old ally, Bishop Henry Whitehead of Madras, for example, was moved to protest: *But why is it printed privately and not given the widest possible circulation? It ought to be broadcasted and read by all the bishops, archdeacons, parish priests, parish councillors, communicants and earnest churchmen and churchwomen throughout the Anglican Communion . . .*

Partly in consequence of Roland's work, an authoritative "Provisional Committee for Voluntary Clergy" was established under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Middleton. This commended Roland's proposals for full consideration by the Lambeth Conference. It ended forthrightly: *In conclusion, let us state that we do not bring forward this suggestion as a palliative for present evils, but as a change which is good in itself, and will do much to deepen Spiritual Life throughout the Church.* So the matter of 'voluntary clergy' did indeed get onto the Lambeth agenda. But the meagre outcome was a bitter disappointment for Roland - simply a statement that the Conference *sees no insuperable objection to the ordination, with provincial sanction and under proper safeguards, where the need is great, of such Auxiliary Priests.*

In fact, as subsequent history has shown, Roland had not vainly cast his bread upon the waters. His ideas about 'voluntary clergy' were taken up with enthusiasm by F. R. Barry, later to become Bishop of Southwell (who seems to have given currency to the more precise term 'non-stipendiary'). The Chinese Church altered its Canons as early as 1934, and less than ten years after Roland's death nearly half the Anglican clergy in the Hong Kong diocese were in secular employment. More recently similar developments have taken place in Tanzania and Singapore, Ecuador and Nicaragua, the USA and — as Roland would doubtless have been delighted to know — in some of Canada's provinces.

But most of this was hidden from Roland: and much time in his declining years were spent in profound depression — though his daughter remembered him saying *there was no need to be depressed because he was on the winning side*. Moreover, in one commentator's words: *Allen's primary value lies (as is being increasingly seen today) precisely in the area which, one feels, most irritated the Church leaders of his own day: the raising with ruthless persistence of precisely those theological issues which are most easily evaded because they call into question current practice.*

His last 15 years were spent in East Africa, sometimes helping out as a locum, but still warring with his Bishop, who actually forbade him to preach. As a hobby he took up the study of Swahili (in which his son John had become a noted expert) and several of his translations of Swahili poems were published during and after his lifetime. They are only relevant here, however, because they demonstrate a growing interest in Christian/Muslim relations. The wisdom and integrity of several Muslim scholars and poets had made a deep and lasting impression on John, who was later to comment: *It often seems that to find the Christian virtues it is necessary to go to the Muslims, and the reason is that the Muslim has never succeeded in dividing his life into two watertight compartments, secular and religious. . . Muslims and Christians hate each other more cordially than most groups of the human race . . . This is the hate of near neighbours, who are so close to each other that they fear that any concession may breach the wall between them and let in the enemy. I have tried all my life to breach that wall and let in a friend . . . I could not accept that people were totally wrong who believed a very great deal of what I believe myself and who often act on their beliefs better than I do myself. Nor could I treat them as enemies, when they were engaged on the same search for truth as myself . . .*

*Surely in this century, when the devil of materialism is so powerful, those who do believe in God should make a truce. Let us fight the devil first, and when we have defeated him, let us return to our own quarrel — if it still seems worth while.*

Those words perhaps have relevance today, but they were John Allen's, not Roland's. But Granfer was still thinking. He prepared sketches imagining the comments of the crowds around Jesus in response to two dozen of the parables. He brought together much of his later thought in a study entitled ***The Ministry of Expansion: the Priesthood of the Laity***. This is a carefully reasoned refutation of the *teaching which strangles us . . . commonly found in the writings of two great theologians, Bishop Gore and Dr. Moberly: Their theory of the Apostolic Succession*, claims Roland, *appears to me legal, formal, strained, and based upon extremely doubtful interpretations both of the language of the New Testament and of the passages from the early Church Fathers which they quote. They fail to convince me even within their limits.* The draft pamphlet appears complete and is of lively contemporary interest, and is today being considered for publication by several scholars around the world.

Besides these, in a notebook of 1944 Roland adumbrates further challenging suggestions, e.g.:

*The Gospels are not law books. Christians in establishing Christian Law, standards, codes, have gone back from Christ to Moses... pure principle has been too high for most of us.*

*It seems to me that by admitting the validity of lay Baptism any necessary and essential relation between [Holy] Orders and the administration of sacraments is denied, and any argument for the essential necessity of Orders for the valid administration of Holy Communion is rendered absurd.*

*Slowly I began to think of the Church of England, perhaps even 'Christianity' as known to us, as something temporary, a stage in the history of religion, and local. It was plainly incapable of any universality. Roman Catholicism made great claims to solve the difficulty by infallible utterances, but I soon saw that it was simply a form of ecclesiastical Nazism, and could no more endure than political Nazism could endure . . .*

But these ideas remained in that notebook, and most of the few people who noticed when he died far away in Kenya tended to dismiss him with a comment that it was sad that such a talented man should have achieved so little. So I was more than a little startled, when I was introduced to a Bishop in the early 1960s, to be swept into a warm episcopal embrace, accompanied by the remark: *I hear you are the Grandson of the Prophet!* This was Bishop Lesslie Newbigin of the Church of South India, who was then Director of the Division of World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches. In 1952, at the joint conference of the WCC and the International Missionary Council at Willingen in Germany, Dr. Newbigin began to urge people to seek out Granfer's books; commenting that once someone *has started reading Allen, he will be compelled to go on. He will find that this quiet voice has a strange relevance and immediacy for the problems of the church in our day.* From the time of the Willingen meeting onwards, Granfer's writings became more and more influential, to such an extent that in certain circles he'd have been horrified to find himself transformed almost into a cult figure.

A Jesuit, who had been introduced to Roland's writings by a Lutheran colleague, concluded: *I do not think he would have expected us, or wanted us, to come to the identical conclusions on every point that he himself reached over sixty years ago . . . But the main and general insights and questions of this remarkable man are as valid today as they were when they first stunned and disturbed the Church of his day.*

But what in all this can still have any relevance today? Let us look at his ideas one by one; and then I expect you to tell me!

*Missionary methods:* The full handover of missionary churches to indigenous Christians is in almost all parts of the world accepted practice. But even within those independent Churches the bad old habits linger on: only too often the new Churches' "establishments" are very reluctant to hand over self-government to minority groups within their jurisdiction, or to trust Christians not trained in their seminaries to preach the Gospel.

*Non-professional Missionaries:* In more and more places – not only in overtly anti-Christian countries like Iran or Saudi Arabia, but often just as much in such environments as state schools or management colleges or civil service departments in this and other European countries, the "professional" clergy and other church employees have no access. In these places the witness of lay Christians is all-important.

*Importance of the Sacraments:* In the Catechism of the Anglican **Book of Common Prayer** it is stated categorically that the Sacrament of "*the Supper of the Lord*" is "*generally necessary to salvation*". All over the world the Eucharist has become central to the life of the Church in a way that it never was in Roland's day. Nevertheless, by insistence on prolonged, very specialized academic training and qualifications for a full-time professional clergy, the Church (and the Catholic Church) still finds itself unable to extend to all its people the regular and frequent access to Sacraments that its own doctrines proclaim to be "necessary to salvation".

*Non-stipendiary clergy:* One solution to this is the ordination of non-stipendiary clergy ('voluntary clergy' as Roland called them), and this is now becoming common practice in many churches – from the Roman Catholics' "worker priests" to Anglican and Lutheran developments of many kinds. But this – and even the decision to ordain women – is still not enough to fill these churches' need for clergy. (Incidentally, I haven't come across any expression of views on women priests in Granfer's writings: but his paramount concern for ready and frequent access to the sacraments would, I guess, have made him ready to accept this. Whilst he advocated the *methods* of St. Paul, he never suggested that we should be bound by the *social* norms of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. He might even have been prepared to accept gay clergy, though I'm sure my father wouldn't!)

*Lay presidency at the Eucharist:* Even with NSMs, many adherents of these churches remain "unchurched", because they can seldom if ever have access to an ordained priest. A couple of years' ago the synod of the Anglican Province of New South Wales in Australia called for lay presidency at the Eucharist to be permitted in such circumstances, but the Archbishop of Canterbury's office ruled this out, basing arguments largely on the writings of Bishop Gore and Dr. Moberly – precisely the two theologians whose views Roland set out to refute in ***The Ministry of Expansion: the Priesthood of the Laity*** (which is still unpublished). Meanwhile the Lutheran church in Alaska and northern Canada has gone ahead with these ideas, so that some Anglican and Catholic churches have been handed over to them, since neither of those churches can themselves provide the sacraments under their existing rules.

*The Holy Spirit:* I don't think Roland could have been called a "charismatic", but his constant emphasis on the Spirit's *high and lofty significance* is endorsed by Lesslie Newbigin in his Foreword to my monograph in these remarks: *in the very discouraging mission fields of pagan Europe and North America...a strong dose of Roland Allen's missiology would have a wonderful effect in loosening up the stiff joints and muscles of the typical congregation, of whatever denomination, and would bring a liberating confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring his own witness into the life of the world.*

*Ecumenism:* In that Preface Lesslie Newbigin goes on to say he considers the second way in which my grandfather's ideas *are significant for the present moment* to be in the development of the ecumenical movement. He remarks that *the growing edges of the Church – the signs of vitality* are in *the increasing numbers of house churches, 'independent Christian fellowships', 'base communities' and so on.* These reflect Granfer's *central teaching about the role of the Holy Spirit*, but they *generally lack the other element of his teaching – the objectivity, given-ness and power of sacraments and the apostolic ministry linking them to the universal Church.* *Many in these movements seek to escape from the rigidities...but do not see, as Allen did,*

*that one can cherish the elements of order...and yet be free from the heavy structures.* So in this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, I'd like to conclude with these words of Roland's:

*"If the Holy Ghost is given, those to whom He is given are certainly accepted in Christ by God . . . Men may separate them, systems may part them from the enjoyment and strength of their unity; but, if they share the one Spirit, they are one."*

*"Men who hold a theory of the Church which excludes from communion those whom they admit to have the Spirit of Christ simply proclaim that their theory is in flat contradiction to the spiritual fact".*

Hubert Allen – 21. i. 2003