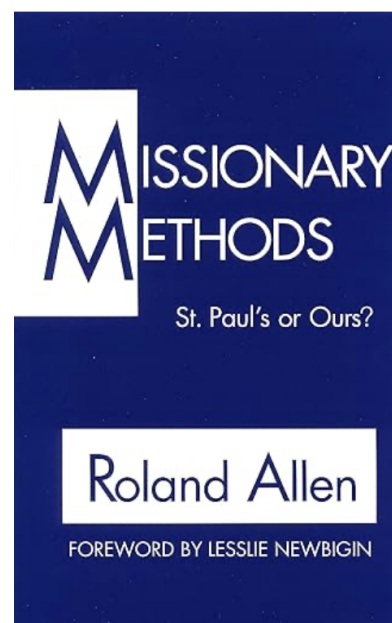


Allen, Roland. *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962.

Reviewed by Kyle Brosseau, IMB personnel, Europe

Missionary Methods was written by Anglican missionary Roland Allen in 1912. Serving as part of what was then called the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Allen lived and worked mostly in China but also conducted research in India and Africa. This diversity of experiences led him to the firm conviction that churches in mission contexts should be thoroughly indigenous and functioning autonomously as early as possible. This principle shows up prominently in what has certainly come to be Allen's most enduring work. In *Missionary Methods*, the author insists that there is a certain "universality" to the apostle Paul's strategy for spreading the gospel, suggesting boldly that his methods are still "suitable to the circumstances of our day." The central feature of Paul's missionary methods, Allen argues in this classic work, is their laser focus on the goal of indigenous, autonomous churches.

A major strength of *Missionary Methods* is how consistently it directs its various points of practical advice at the central goal of nurturing indigenous, autonomous churches in mission contexts. Allen writes of Paul's tendency to start his work in a given region from select urban centers. He explains that the apostle never brought financial aid to the peoples he aimed to evangelize. Perhaps most importantly, Allen emphasizes that Paul taught new converts



to rely on the Holy Spirit rather than on him for their growth and direction. With all of these points of advice, Allen makes clear that Paul's aim was to make sure the new believers in a given region came to constitute truly indigenous churches that operated on their own. Allen's consistency on this argument is one of the book's strengths.

At the same time, as Allen shows readers how emulating Paul's missionary methods might optimize our work today, he runs the risk of communicating to some that each and every thing Paul did should be mimicked precisely by missionaries in our time. This repetition is a potential weakness of *Missionary Methods*. Paul's strategies may have a certain universality about them, and they are surely suitable to our present circumstances in a lot of ways. However, individual mission contexts today may call for some tools and processes not explicitly preceded in Paul's work.

In keeping with his tendency to show how Paul strove to develop indigenous, autonomous churches in mission contexts, Allen emphasizes that the apostle always seemed to have an eye on his "retirement." This point has tremendous significance for missionaries today. The final component of what we at the International Mission Board see as the core missionary task is a phase of the work we refer to as *exit to partnership*. The idea is that cross-cultural missionaries should always be working toward healthily removing themselves from the contexts in which they serve. Allen points out that Paul rejoiced when new believers could grow in their faith without him. He reminds today's readers that outside missionaries were never intended to be permanent features of the churches they labor to plant. A key significance of Allen's *Missionary Methods*, then, is that it reminds missionaries to always be working toward exit.

Overall, Roland Allen's *Missionary Methods* is a classic work of missiology. It is an indisputable keystone in the longstanding legacy of reflection that we now have on the importance of indigeneity and church autonomy in mission contexts.

To fully understand Roland Allen, and to situate his thinking within its own historical context, it is best to also examine the work of Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn from several decades prior. Anderson and Venn had called for churches in mission contexts to be self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. That is, they celebrated indigeneity and church autonomy in the mission field, and they too encouraged cross-cultural workers to always be working toward their own exit. The seminal teachings of Anderson and Venn are reflected well in select issues of the *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* from the late 1970s to early 80s.