

ISFM 2012: Still an Exotic?

Money and Mission in the Buddhist World: A Review of 100 Years Since Roland Allen

by Paul H. De Neui

Editor's note: This is the revised version of a paper presented at the 2012 gathering of the International Society for Frontier Missiology in Chicago, Illinois.

We are celebrating the 100th anniversary of the publication of Roland Allen's famous book *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* In chapter 6 Allen lists three rules about finance, which he draws from the missional writing and practice of the Apostle Paul: 1) Paul did not seek financial help for himself; 2) he took no financial help to those to whom he preached; and 3) he did not administer church funds. I appreciate the opportunity to reflect upon these rules from my own experience of mission within Buddhist contexts. It is time to ask the hard questions: How far have we come? What have we learned? What has God done in us and, sometimes, in spite of us? Where will we go next, particularly in regard to the use of one of our most treasured resources—our money?

Before we review Allen's work, I want to mention three factors not present in his day that impact the way mission is done in ours. First, we no longer live in a world where Western Christianity (formerly known as "Christendom") rules the world. Other new groups, Christian and otherwise, now actively proselytize globally. The days of Western hegemony of the Christian faith are over. The growth of the church in the global south or the majority world is well documented¹ and indeed praiseworthy. Secondly, Allen ignores the global presence of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox work in mission. This may perhaps be attributed to the agreement at the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh to leave blank on the global map of mission outposts at the time all of Latin America in deference to the Anglican (and Roman Catholic) understanding that these areas were, in fact, "reached." Finally, there is a significant change in the directional flow of funding for missions today, particularly to Buddhist contexts. More money now comes from within Asia itself, as indigenous groups promote philanthropic giving based upon Eastern values (such as following the dharma or building up good karma). These values existed in Allen's day but he did not mention them in his book. With

Paul and his wife Gretchen served as Evangelical Covenant Church missionaries to Thailand from 1987 to 2005, working with national leaders in a variety of contextualized holistic ministries. He has also served as a contributor and editor of several volumes with SEANET, an association of practitioners in mission across the Buddhist world. Paul is Professor of Missiology and Intercultural Studies at North Park Theological Seminary, where he is also Director of the Center for World Christian Studies.

these important differences in mind, let's evaluate our contemporary mission practice according to Allen's three rules.

Rule 1: Paul Did Not Seek Financial Help for Himself

Allen spends two full pages reviewing the practices of Paul concerning this first rule. He concludes with this summary from his own time as a missionary (1895-1903):

In this our modern practice is precisely the same. Our missionaries all receive their supplies from home, and cannot possibly be thought to seek financial support from their converts. If they ever seem to be preaching for the sake of their living, that can only be because their attitude towards the preaching give some cause or occasion for the charge. (p. 51)

Where do we stand today? Can such things still be said of today's missionaries throughout the Buddhist world? While the vast majority of missionaries do not come to Buddhist cultures in search of financial gain, several constructs of mission (and even secular work) have clouded the issue for local people. Such practices include:

- Accepting paid positions to teach English.
- Setting up a business to cover personal salary and calling it mission.
- Entrepreneurial work that brings in funds that help oneself and others.
- Administering community development work where the foreigner handles the funds instead of a local person.
- Competition for funding with other groups and at times by individuals working within the same group.

Well-intentioned Christians, who want to break away from negative missionary stereotypes of the past such as living in lavish compounds, use strategies such as those listed above (and

others) in the Buddhist world and elsewhere without recognizing the local impact. Allen's words below remain a good warning for us today:

It is of comparatively small importance how the missionary is maintained: it is of comparatively small importance how the finances of the Church are organized: what is of supreme importance is how these arrangements, whatever they may be [missionary lifestyle, church buildings, accounting systems, etc.], affect the minds of the people, and so promote, or hinder, the spread of the gospel. (p. 49)

What do those whom God has called us to serve think about what we're doing? I am not suggesting that we



live by the judgments of others; this is more of a communication issue. Jayakumar Christian said, "Our lives are always giving witness to something. The question becomes, what is our life giving witness to?" (1999) What is being stated nonverbally by our presence in the places where God calls us to serve? Because evangelical missionaries do not wear the clerical collar or habit of Roman Catholicism (or the white shirt and tie of the Mormon tradition), we are not easily identifiable. Indeed, we look in many respects like every other tourist, a fact that does not lend credibility to the task. Others groups are clear; perhaps we can learn something from them.

Rule 2: Paul Did Not Take Financial Support to His Converts

Let me move on to the second rule that Roland Allen suggested: Paul did not receive financial aid *from* his converts, neither did he take financial support to them. The one instance of assistance to the suffering church of Jerusalem does not count as on-going financial support. Regarding this practice, Allen lamented that in his day, "we are now as far removed in action as we are in time." (p. 52) He complained that the construction of physical buildings and mission compounds assumes that "the work is firmly planted, that it cannot be easily driven away... We must have the material establishment before we build the spiritual house." (p. 52) Other issues related to Allen's second rule include, in his own (italicized) words:

1. *Securing properties raises difficulties in the way of preaching.* Restricting the sharing of the gospel to one location or type of edifice seriously hinders communication. However, the attitude "if we build it, they will come," has not proven true as the numerous empty church buildings of Asia can attest.
2. *Properties burden missionaries with concerns of maintenance.* How many ministries are bogged down because of their buildings? We have all seen it. When any this happens, central mission vision is lost.
3. *Large establishments misrepresent our primary purpose in coming.* Allen spends an entire three pages on this topic, which still challenges us today.
4. *By supplying everything we pauperize converts.* No opportunity is provided for growth through giving. In the most recent book in our SEANET² series, entitled *Complexities of Money and Missions in Asia*³, Mary Lederleitner wrote a chapter encouraging the use of

appreciative inquiry to address this particular issue.

5. *There is a false assumption that financial bonds will create unity and allegiance.* This may only last until a better patron comes along. In my own chapter on patron/client relationships, I try to help Western missionaries understand that the patron/client system exists in Asia and can be useful. We as Western missionaries talk about “raising our own support,” when in reality we rely on a network of patrons ourselves. Let us be clear and not two-faced.
6. *Establishing compounds ties our missionaries to one place.* This needs little comment.
7. *Extensive compounds make it difficult for national leaders to attain equal status.*
8. *Sooner or later these holdings will become a source of fresh difficulties.*

What can we learn from others in regard to these critiques? There are other groups involved in mission from their own religious traditions that in some ways outstrip what the small group of evangelicals is attempting. Look, for example, at the strategy of Mormon missiology. They arrive on their mission field fluent in the local language. They live exemplary lives. They target only the interested and do not waste time with the uninterested. They keep membership requirements high. They establish local outposts quickly and purchase property in the name of local leaders. Finally, they only stay for short periods of time and then move on, creating a sense of ownership and indigenous leadership from the beginning.

What can we learn from Roman Catholic missionaries? Central to Catholic (and Orthodox) missiology is the need to establish a Eucharistic community, for it is from the table of the Lord that we gather in order to be sent to the world. Protestants (especially evangelicals) need to regain an understanding of the missional significance of the

They only stay for short periods of time and then move on, creating a sense of ownership and indigenous leadership from the beginning.

communion service as it connects with mission. Establishing a visible central place that is known by all allows neighbors to understand the spiritual function of the community. As an integral part of establishing a worshipping community, Roman Catholic missiology was once strategic in its intentional accommodation of local rituals. Further, the use of the liturgical calendar quickly established a cyclical tradition that draws in predictable seasonal events and unifies the global community of believers. Finally, Catholic missionaries are committed to a local place for as long as that community will have them.

How have we done as Protestants? Early on, money for construction projects flowed into Asia, and to some extent this continues. This focus on major building projects had died down until fairly recently when new money began pouring in, this time from the well-financed Protestant Korean missionary movement. Evangelicals need to be known as caring people and must continue to be present with aid and relief when disaster strikes. But investment in church facilities is much less than it was in the past. House church movements are growing in many parts of Asia—particularly China, Japan, Bangladesh and Burma. There is even a movement known as “Vulnerable Mission” that does not engage in aid work at all, but only gospel sharing.

Christians in the Buddhist world are confused about the decline in interest in building new structures for mission in Asia. “Why are you no longer building schools and hospitals?” we are asked. Those structures are still needed, but a new model of partnership is developing that will require more of national people and true synergy of resources together. We will return to this concept of partnership.

Rule 3: Paul Did Not Administer Local Church Funds

Rule number three from Allen’s study is that “he did not administer local church funds.” (p. 49) Unlike the situation in Paul’s time, Allen admits that this was rarely the case in his own day. Foreigners administered funds collected by local people, something Allen was strongly against:

They [locals] may not administer it at all to our satisfaction, but I fail to see what our satisfaction has to do with the matter. It is not our business. By making it our business we merely deprive our converts of one of the very best educational experiences, and break down one of the most powerful agencies for creating a sense of mutual responsibility. We also load ourselves with a vast burden which we are ill able, and often ill fitted, to bear. (p. 60)

How far have we come concerning this third rule? We recognize the need for locals to administer funds, particularly since Western evangelical churches are sending fewer missionaries long term to learn new languages and cultures. We agree with the theory of self-support and self-governance—but are we willing to do it? Can we actually release our money into the care of national leaders? Perhaps we need to step back and examine our motivations here. What do we, as partners in this mission, actually need? Certainly some of our funding sources require regular expense reports and annual audits. But we need to recognize how such requests can be interpreted in the minds of our non-Western brothers and sisters. In relationship-oriented cultures, the demand for receipts, reports and audits suggests a lack of trust. It is time to redefine accountability in light of mutually beneficial global partnerships.

To allow local leadership to administer funds means letting go so others can take charge in the way they best see fit. Naturally, the greater the responsibility (and higher the budget), the more difficult this task becomes. Allen identified two major fears preventing this “letting go” from happening in his own day, namely independence and congregationalism. He said, “we think it quite impossible that a native church should be able to exist without the paternal care of an English overseer.” (p. 60) Certainly in that pre-World War I worldview, much of Christendom truly believed that Western Christianity would be the civilizing—and thereby saving—force of future societies. I believe that WWI (when Christian societies began killing one another) marked the beginning of the end of Christendom, and the start of the cracks in modernity that we now recognize so clearly. As a result, post-colonial and postmodern worldviews continue to divide us. Rather than reminisce, let us look forward to learning together as a global community that is committed to one another relationally.

Money and Mission Today

So where are we in relation to mission today, and, in particular, the way in which we use our finances in mission? What are we afraid of?

For the most part, Christ followers of all Western branches and their churches operate out of a sanctified version of the “Prime Directive,” a theme out of *Star Trek*, the popular American science-fiction television series created in the 1960s. Reacting to the manner in which the United States was imposing its political agendas on other places in the world, particularly during the Vietnam era, the American screenwriters of this series inserted into the script a way to silently protest invasive US practices abroad and at the same time provide interesting new twists to their episodes. As the starship Enterprise encountered new worlds out in the galaxies, there arose

the ethical and intercultural dilemma of its crew simply appearing out of nowhere in societies that had no previous awareness that other worlds even existed. Behind the Prime Directive was the view that, because encounters of any kind would result in negative outcomes, social evolution should be allowed to continue without threat to natural processes. In its shortest form, the Prime Directive demands,

No identification of self or mission.
No interference with social development of said planet. No references to space or the fact that there are other worlds or civilizations.⁴

Although the rumor is unsubstantiated, some claim that the idea for the Prime Directive came from *Star Trek*



creator Gene Roddenberry’s (supposed?) belief that Christian missionaries were interfering with other cultures.⁵ Whatever the case, many Christians do believe such things about missionaries, and this affects the way they think, live and support—or don’t support—global missions. We are afraid that the presence of a Christian witness in a society where the gospel has not been previously understood will interfere with the social (or some other) development of that particular culture. Like the dedicated crew of the starship Enterprise, we as Christians live our lives vowing never to say anything about space, our mission in space, the Creator of space, or the fact that there are other greater and more

eternal worlds beyond the temporal here and now.

The cultural tendency currently prevalent in our churches represents a 180-degree shift from the situation Roland Allen faced a century ago. Instead of the hopeful future of yesterday’s Christian missions (albeit at times achieved through conquest), today’s Western Christians are generally remorseful. I see this as mostly white guilt about mission and all of the negative things we think Christian missions have imposed upon non-Western cultures throughout history—things we never want to repeat. In fact, many (perhaps most?) Christians believe we need to make amends for these past wrongs. And certainly doing nothing is better than continuing to make problematic inroads abroad. U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq has contributed to the negative feelings that many Americans have about interventions overseas. Even well-known emerging church leader Brian McLaren (who claims to be missional⁶) states, “Wouldn’t it be ironic if, in the name of Christ, we try to conserve and preserve the very same native cultures in the twenty-first century that we tried to wipe out in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?” (2001:77)

So how does this impact our use of money in mission? Believing that local leaders know their context best, we have withdrawn our relational commitment to understanding the complexities of distant cultures and have relied upon a few “partners” who may have started out as mere acquaintances or friends. Instead of sending people, we rely upon gifted national believers who are usually trained in our Western contexts, speak our language, and have “sacrificed” to return home and serve the Lord in what we considered a “less privileged” context. We can send our financial gifts and donations to these individuals and feel good about it. After all, we are “partnering” (or at least

doing something) in global missions; we are not the ones doing it overseas (which would be messy at best and paternalistic at worst); and, although we would never actually say this, we're happy that it doesn't impact or inconvenience our lifestyle where we live.

Is this the best we can do? Is "paying someone else to do the work" how we now define the contextualization of the gospel in the twenty-first century? I would like to offer a few final suggestions.

The newest edition of Jonathan Bonk's *Missions and Money*⁷ includes a chapter by Christopher Wright entitled, "The Role of the Righteous Rich." In it Wright describes the role of certain Christ-centered individuals found in the Bible whom God blessed in tangible ways *for mission*. He argues that the fulfillment of that individual's blessing came through their partnership in God's wider mission. Americans especially are among the wealthiest people on earth. What then is our role as the righteous rich? We certainly have the opportunity to partner, but it takes much more than money for partnership to work well.

Take, for example, expectations surrounding the giving of gifts. Such expectations are culturally defined. In general Americans have a need to be thanked whereas other cultures in the world do not have this issue. In some Buddhist contexts it is embarrassing to try to thank someone for a gift, and rarely is the gift ever opened in front of the giver. Gratitude is a godly value but perhaps it can be redefined in ways that are better understood interculturally.

What about the resources that come from within the Buddhist world itself (or your context)? Recently, I received a document from an Indian brother now living in the UK who is encouraging philanthropic giving among Asians of many faiths.⁸ Modeling giving enables others to experience the blessings of God in ways that build the

Americans especially are among the wealthiest people on earth. What then is our role as the righteous rich?

church and, in the process, change all who partner in that mission.

One divine corrective that we in the Western church ignore to our peril is the two-way transformational nature of God's mission. Mission certainly changes the missionary, but it also must impact the sending church. How many of our churches are ready for that kind of investment? How many of us are willing to hear from our sisters and brothers in other parts of the world, and to let them teach us about obedience and faithfulness? Is it surprising that the church in Africa and China—where Jesus is literally life for people—is growing faster than elsewhere in the world? We righteous rich are blessed to give, pray, partner and go. But in God's economy it is not by might, nor by power (or well-funded projects), but by God's Spirit that mission moves. When we invest in our partnerships, let us follow Paul's models, which can inform and correct us. How about introducing a book study of Roland Allen, along with the writings of Paul, in our churches this next year? There is much we have yet to learn. We need to be touched at the deepest level of our deepest cultural values, namely our money. And it is here that our global partnerships can help us view ourselves, and our resources, differently.

Let me conclude with the words of a Buddhist abbot of a large temple in one of the largest slum communities in Bangkok. This is another lesson that we can learn from our Roman Catholic partners in mission. When the abbot heard that a particular evangelical mission agency was planning to send American missionaries, he was pleased. "Send us Protestants," he pleaded. "But don't send us Catholics. They stay!" **UJFM**

Endnotes

¹ See, for example, Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

² SEANET (South, East, Southeast, and North Asia Network) is a network dedicated to facilitating mission in the Buddhist world, beginning in South East Asia and beyond. As far as we know this is the only network focused on mission in the often-neglected Buddhist cultures of the world. SEANET has been meeting annually for the last fourteen years and for the last eleven we have had a missiology forum. Thanks to assistance from students at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago where I now serve, we have been able to publish the edited papers from these conferences into topical volumes. The theme of the 2011 SEANET conference was "Money and Missions in the Buddhist World." In 2012 the edited papers were published by William Carey Library Publishers in a volume entitled *Complexities of Money and Missions in the Asia*.

³ This volume, along with all the SEANET volumes, is available online through William Carey Library (www.missionbooks.org); also see ad p. 188, this issue).

⁴ Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Directive).

⁵ *Ibid.*, stated without substantiation.

⁶ *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished CHRISTIAN* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 2004.

⁷ Jonathan J. Bonk, *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Missionary Problem... Revisited* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 2007.

⁸ UBS-INSEAD Study on Family Philanthropy in Asia. No date.

References

Allen, Roland

- 1962 *Missionary Methods St Paul's or Ours?* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. (American edition. First published 1912, London: R. Scott).

Bonk, Jonathan J.

- 2007 *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Missionary Problem...Revisited.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Christian, Jayakumar

- 1999 *God of the Empty-Handed: Poverty, Power and the Kingdom of God.* Monrovia, CA: MARC.

De Neui, Paul H., ed.

- 2012 *Complexities of Money and Missions in Asia.* Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library Publishers.

Dvorksy, Steve

- 2007 "Star Trek's 'Prime Directive' is Stupid. 13 Jan 2007. http://www.sentientdevelopments.com/2007/01/star-treks-prime-directive-is-stupid_13.html

McLaren, Brian D.

- 2001 *A New Kind of Christian.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Prime Directive

<http://www.70disco.com/startrek/prime-dir.htm>

Roddenberry, Gene

- 1968 "Bread and Circuses." Star Trek. Broadcast March 15, 1968. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bread_and_Circuses_%28Star_Trek:_The_Original_Series%29



New Releases

WILLIAM CAREY LIBRARY



COMPLEXITIES OF MONEY AND MISSIONS IN ASIA

SEANET 9

What happens when an expatriate missionary is thrust into a context where the standard of living is so divergent that perceived or actual wealth suddenly becomes the strongest draw of attraction? What actual message is communicated through the wordless witness of the Western Christian missionary lifestyle? Is attention to so-called good news now so financially focused that other foundational issues become overshadowed? This issue becomes even more complicated when the missionary arrives clueless about personal privilege, ignorant of the envy of others, and carries the mistaken attitude that others think similarly. SEANET proudly presents *Complexities of Money and Missions in Asia* for all who are asking such questions. From seven different indigenous and expatriate perspectives this volume deals with the perceptions of money specifically from those seeking to serve obediently in the Buddhist contexts of Asia.

ISBN: 978-0-87808-038-0

Paul De Neui, Editor

WCL | Pages 176 | Paperback 2012

List Price: \$15.99

Our Price: \$12.79

3 or more: \$8.79

MISSIONBOOKS.ORG • 1-800-MISSION