

Excerpts from the writings of Roland Allen on finances.

Missionary Methods: Chapter 6 Finance (excerpts) 2nd Ed. 1927

The primary importance of missionary finance lies in the fact that financial arrangements very seriously affect the relations between the missionary and those whom he approaches. 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, affect the minds of the people, and so promote, or hinder, the spread of the Gospel.

By modern writers this is often overlooked, and the finance of St. Paul's journeys is treated as an interesting detail of ancient history, not as though it had anything to do with his success as a preacher of the Gospel. St. Paul himself does not so treat it. It is strange how often he refers to it, what anxiety he shows that his position should not be misunderstood; but he speaks as if its importance lay wholly in the way in which it might affect those to whom he preached, never as though it made any personal difference to him.

There seem to have been three rules which guided his practice: (1) That he did not seek financial help for himself; (2) that he took no financial help to those to whom he preached; (3) that he did not administer local church funds.

1) He did not seek financial help. In his first contact with strangers and in his dealings with the Church he was careful to avoid any appearance of money making. Amongst the heathen there was a large class of teachers who wandered from town to town collecting money from those who attended their lectures. There was also a large class of people who wandered about as mystery-mongers, exhibiting their shows and collecting money from those who attended them. For these men philosophy and religion were a trade. St. Paul would not be accounted as one of them. He refused to receive anything from those who listened to him.

Similarly in the Church there was a class of people who made their living by preaching. St. Paul did not condemn these; on the contrary, he argued that it was legitimate that they should do so. Heathen religion, the Jewish law, Christ's directions, all alike insisted on the right of the minister to receive support. But he himself did not receive it, and he was careful to explain his reason. He saw that it would be a hindrance to his work. 'We bear all things,' he says, 'that we may cause no hindrance to the Gospel of Christ.'

He was anxious to show his fatherly care for his disciples by refusing to burden them with his maintenance. 'As a nurse cherisheth her children, we were well pleased to impart unto you not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were become very dear unto us.' 'For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: working night and day, that we might not burden any of you, we preached unto you the Gospel of God.' He was anxious to set them an example of quiet work, 'We did not behave ourselves disorderly among you: neither did we eat any man's bread for nought'. But above all he was anxious to avoid any appearance of covetousness, and 'What I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire an occasion.' So, too, in his last speech to the Ephesian elders he lays great stress on the fact that he had not made money by his preaching, but had supported himself by the labour of his own hands. 'I coveted no man's gold or apparel. Ye yourselves know that these hands ministered unto my necessities.'

Yet St. Paul did receive gifts from his converts. He speaks of the Philippians as having sent once and again unto his necessity, and he tells the Corinthians that he 'robbed other churches, taking wages of them, that he might minister to them'. He does not seem to have felt any unwillingness to receive help; he rather welcomed it. He was not an ascetic. He saw no particular virtue in suffering privations.

The account of his journeys always gives us the impression that he was poor, never that he was poverty-stricken. He said indeed that he knew how 'to be in want', 'to be filled, and to be hungry'.

But this does not imply more than that he was in occasional need. Later, he certainly must have had considerable resources, for he was able to maintain a long and expensive judicial process, to travel with ministers, to gain a respectful hearing from provincial governors, and to excite their cupidity. We have no means of knowing whence he obtained such large supplies; but if he received them from his converts there would be nothing here contrary to his earlier practice. He received money; but not from those to whom he was preaching. He refused to do anything from which it might appear that he came to receive, that his object was to make money.

(2) Secondly, St. Paul not only did not receive financial aid from his converts, he did not take financial support to his converts. That it could be so never seems to have suggested itself to his mind. Every province, every church, was financially independent. The Galatians are exhorted to support their teachers. Every church is instructed to maintain its poor. There is not a hint from beginning to end of the Acts and Epistles of any one church depending upon another, with the single exception of the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem. That collection had in the mind of St. Paul a very serious and important place, but it had nothing to do with church finance in the ordinary sense.

Its importance lay in its demonstration of the unity of the church, and in the influence which such a proof of brotherly charity might have in maintaining the unity of the church. But it had no more to do with church finance in the ordinary sense of the word than a collection made in India for Christians suffering from famine in China would have to do with ordinary Indian Church finance. That one church should depend upon another for the supply of its ordinary expenses as a church, or even for a part of them, would have seemed incredible in the Four Provinces...

[...by taking along Western equipment and money] the foundation of a new mission is primarily a financial operation. But it ought not properly to be a financial operation, and the moment it is allowed to appear as such, that moment very false and dangerous elements are introduced into our work.

It is sad to think what a large proportion of the time of many of our missionaries is spent over accounts. It is sad to sit and watch a stream of Christian visitors calling upon a missionary, and to observe that in nearly every case the cause which brings them is money. They are the financial agents of the mission.

The first glance at these missions financed from abroad naturally suggests that the religion which they represent is foreign. They are supported by foreign money, they are often foreign in appearance. Eastern people almost universally look upon Christianity as a foreign religion, and they do not want a foreign religion. This is one of the very chiefest and most insidious of our difficulties. We are not the preachers of a Western religion, and anything which tends to create or support that misunderstanding is a thing rather to be avoided than encouraged.

(3) Thirdly, St. Paul observed the rule that every church should administer its own funds. He certainly never administered any local funds himself. He did indeed bear the offering of the church in Antioch to Jerusalem in the time of the famine; he also, with others, carried the collection of the Four Provinces to Jerusalem. But in the first instance he was acting as the minister of a church on a business for which he had been specially appointed by the Church under the direction of those in authority. In the second, it is extraordinary what pains he took to make it clear that he was acting simply as the messenger of the churches, and even so he did not take the responsibility of administering their charity without associating with himself representatives of all the provinces which contributed to the fund, and taking every possible precaution to ensure that his action should not be misunderstood.

In both cases, moreover, he was carrying funds collected by the churches for charitable purposes in a distant place. He certainly did not receive and administer any funds within their own borders. The whole argument of 2 Corinthians 11:8-14, and 12:14-18, would have broken down if he had been in the habit of so doing...



The Spontaneous Expansion Of The Church And The Causes Which Hinder It - 1927

Chapter I Introduction [a preacher is best accepted] if his speech is voluntary and spontaneous. If he is a paid agent both speaker and hearer are affected by that fact. The speaker knows, and knows that the other knows, that he is employed by a mission to speak. He is not delivering his own message because he cannot help it. He is not speaking of Christ, because Christ alone impels him. Do men not ask our paid agents, 'How much are you paid for this work?' And must they not answer? And does not the answer destroy the effect... ?

Chapter III Modern Movements Towards Liberty We constantly hear men use these three terms, self-support, self-extension and self-government, as if they were distinct and separate things, and we find that men have aimed at one or another of them more or less by itself, as if it could be detached from its fellows. Now I believe that a moment's thought will reveal the fact that they cannot rightly be so treated.

Self-support is universally considered a mere matter of finance. No more striking example of the extraordinary materialism of our missionary outlook can be found than this, that we can only with definite and painful effort think of self-support in any other terms than that of money. The moment that we hear the word self-support we think at once of money and of money only. But any true self-support is more than financial. However wealthy a Church might be, it would not be self-supporting, unless it supplied its own clergy as well as its own Church buildings. However poor it might be, it would yet be self-supporting if it did produce its own clergy and carry on its own services, though its ministers might receive no salaries, and its services be held under a tree.

III (2) Self-support in a strictly financial sense is now one of the popular cries in the missionary world. For a long time men thought it impossible: they declared that the poverty of their converts was so profound that to expect them to provide the material for their common religious life was absurd, and many of our missionaries still say the same thing to-day. But that self-support from the very beginning is possible has been abundantly proved, not only in rare sporadic instances, but by the wider experience of those missionaries who set themselves to encourage the evangelization of the country by their converts from the very beginning...

In Uganda, when the rapid expansion of the Faith began, the leaders of the movement saw the necessity for ensuring that the new converts should supply what was necessary for their Church life, as they understood it, and they made it their boast that in Uganda all native buildings and all native teachers were supported by native funds. And what was proved to be possible in Uganda has been proved to be equally possible in all the other areas where converts have been encouraged to propagate the Faith from the very beginning... In Korea "the self-support method succeeds. Where this principle has been conscientiously followed--there the Churches are many and large.... Where churches are helped most, there they are weak, lifeless and helpless. This may be easily verified, go where you will throughout Korea."

This is what we should naturally expect. Nothing is so weakening as the habit of depending upon others for those things which we ought to supply for ourselves. Nothing more undermines the spirit which should express itself in spontaneous activity. How can a man propagate a religion which he cannot support, and which he cannot expect those whom he addresses to be able to support?

We must remember that the vast majority of our converts have been, and are being, educated in dependence, and that the vast majority of our missionaries have not advanced even to the point of believing in the desirability of spontaneous expansion from the very beginning. Even those who believe in its desirability are commonly under the impression that they are labouring with all their might to stimulate it, whilst they are practising those very things which hinder it.

Chapter IV (I) [when we control churches out of a fear of heresy, we see] First a terrible sterility. Our converts have not gone astray from the Fold; they have produced nothing. We have taught them to depend upon us, rather than upon Christ, and dependence upon man produces sterility, dependence upon Christ produces spiritual and intellectual fecundity.

(2) We have convinced the heathen as well as our converts that to become a Christian it is necessary to learn the lessons imparted by one of the trained teachers, or better still to receive the instruction of a foreign missionary himself. This obviously tends to restrict advance to the number of paid and trained teachers, and when there is any widespread movement the missionaries are unable to meet the demand. Then, instead of blaming their method, they lay the blame upon their supporters at home, as if they ought to supply teachers for every village in the world.

Chapter VII Missionary Organization – III We of to-day are enamoured of organization; we pride ourselves on our skill in designing and directing it; but when we are dealing with the propagation of the Gospel our love for it leads us into serious dangers. It leads us to give to material an undue importance; it leads us to attempt to organize spiritual forces.

(I) It leads us to give to material an undue importance. That our missionary organization is largely concerned with the collection and administration of material requires little argument. Every report, every magazine issued by any of the societies, reveals it. How anxious this makes our greatest and most spiritual leaders is shown by their constantly repeated warnings. Such men would not say again and again, we must not allow the material to take the first place in our thoughts, we must not permit the collection of money to distract our attention from the spiritual; unless they knew and felt how real the danger is.

The demand for the material is constant, pressing, immediate. It is impossible that men who rely upon voluntary contributions for the support of large and expensive undertakings should not feel the burden; it is almost impossible that this burden should not be often in their thoughts, and often first in their thoughts, It is impossible that their appeals should not emphasize this need and present it to supporters, as it presents itself to them, as the real pressing need of the moment. Say what they will, strive as they will, the need for material exercises a strong constraint, and thrusts itself continually into the foreground.

It is difficult to express the sense of overwhelming materialism which a prolonged and careful study of our missionary literature produces upon the mind of the reader. Careful examination reveals very few articles which do not contain, directly or indirectly expressed, an appeal for money. It is "money" "money" everywhere, all the time: everything depends upon money.

Listen, e.g., to the Bishop of Zanzibar confronted with a possible reduction of £4,500: "Of course no progress will be possible--no development, no preaching the Gospel in new parts of the diocese."

Abroad we see the same cause producing the same result. The collection of material is the pressing need. The collection of material is an art with which we are all familiar. Our methods of collecting funds and of administering them have been carried abroad. There, too, the collection of material is put into prominence and occupies a very large part, not only of our thoughts, but of the thoughts of our native agents and converts.

A Chinese writer put it in this form: "Evangelism in China costs twelve million American dollars annually. Towards this immense sum Chinese Christians can contribute one million dollars only. This shows that, if Chinese control of the Church means financial independence also, the Chinese Church faces an economic burden it cannot shoulder." The conclusion is clear: we have taught all our converts to feel helpless without money.

V. It is one of the most wonderful and amazing things in our modern religious thought that we have carried everywhere all over the world our stipendiary system as if it were an essential part of the Gospel which we preach.

VI. This system thus rooted in the material and the professional is something essentially "of" us: it springs from us, it expresses our spirit. Everybody knows that we established it because it was suited to us and our work. Here in the West it is at home; anywhere else it is foreign in the innermost sense of that word.

A professional class [of missionaries or paid ministers] does not easily encourage the spontaneous zeal of [ordinary local] men who are not members of their profession.

Organization and buildings ought to follow and spring out of the working of the ideas and the faith. Our organization seems to them to put the wrong things first. We collect money and pay men to preach and teach. Outside our circle nearly all men think that very strange. All knowledge, above all, religious knowledge, is a divine gift and to connect it with money is a sort of simony. A paid preacher is suspected as a preacher paid to teach what he is told to teach by those who pay him; not the inspired possessor of a divine gift.

An organization which collects money and pays salaries to missionaries of a Divine Faith seems to [many local] men a monstrous thing, wholly unspiritual. If those who direct it expect to propagate a faith by building preaching rooms and schools and hospitals, they show that they have no idea what spiritual forces are, or how they work. It is true that a certain number of our converts, by long association with us, learn to shake off these ideas, and that some non-Christians imitate us in this as in other Western practices; but the vast majority never understand our organization; it is to them foreign in the innermost sense of that word.

Mission Activities, Considered in Relation to the Manifestation of the Spirit, 1930

Another age may learn to look upon our use of [our various] activities much as we look upon the use of the sword by [church leaders of] an earlier age. Because... [the way we use] money takes so prominent a place, ours may someday be known as the age of financial Christianity... as we regard the sword, so a later age may regard money... The time is not yet full. We have yet to learn the consequences of our use of money.

The Case for Voluntary Clergy, 1940

...all advance depends on money, when we depend on paid workers for all advance. Teach men as one of their first lessons in the gospel that pastoral work and evangelistic work ought to be paid, and will they not believe that?