

**The Spontaneous Expansion of The Church  
And the Causes which Hinder It**

by

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**Forward by Bishop Lesslie Newbigin**

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**Foreword**

The mission of the Church is the work of the Spirit. Part of the essential things that Roland Allen was concerned about – the re-submission in each generation of the traditions of men to the Word and Spirit of God. There is a summons to everyone who will hear to submit inherited patterns of Church life to the searching scrutiny of the Spirit.

“We were not interested in the ministry and the sacraments in the way that he was; he (Allen) joined us in a deep concern for the place and pre-eminence of the Holy Spirit in all the work of the Church everywhere, and in the practical activities that this conviction involved.” In Allen’s thought – so far as I understand it – the central place given to the work of the Spirit in no way implies a lessening of the importance of the ordered life of the Church.

**Foreword**

**Kenneth G. Grubb**

Allen begs us not to confuse faith in Christ with intellectual and moral advance or even Christian social doctrine. Our real mission has all the time been to proclaim the Gospel of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Allen is exceedingly pessimistic about the probability of the work of these missions resulting in what he would recognize as self-propagating, self-supporting and self-governing churches.

**Chapter 1**

**Introduction to 1927 Edition**

## I

Many years ago my experience in China taught me that if our object was to establish in that country a church which might spread over the six provinces which then formed the diocese of North China, that object could only be attained if the first Christians who were converted by our labours understood clearly that they could by themselves, without any further assistance from us, not only convert their neighbours, but establish churches. That meant that the very first groups of converts must be so fully equipped with all spiritual authority that they could multiply themselves without any *necessary* reference to us: our removal should not at all mutilate the completeness of the church, or deprive it of anything necessary for its unlimited expansion.

The restraint of ordination to a few natives specially trained by us, and dependent for their own maintenance and the maintenance of their families upon salaries provided either by us or by the small native Christian community, and the absolute denial of any native episcopate at the beginning, seemed to me to render any wide expansion of the church impossible, and to suggest at the very beginning that there was something essentially foreign about the church which demanded the direction of a foreign governor.

We cannot establish a foreign church governed and directed by foreigners, and then at some moment say: 'Let us make it indigenous or native by process of devolution.' If the church is to be indigenous it must spring up in the soil from the very first seeds planted. If we establish missions rather than churches, two evil consequences, which we now see in greater or less degree everywhere, sterility and antagonism, inevitably arise.

If the first groups of native Christians are not fully organized churches which can multiply themselves, but must wait upon a foreign bishop to move, they are in bondage.

The equipment of small native congregations of Christians with full power and authority as local churches would remove most, if not all, of the present causes of trouble. Without further words we should have proved to all men that we do not preach Christ in order to extend

our dominion as our enemies assert. We desire to be helpers, not lords over other men's souls.

## II

There is another difficulty which besets anyone who would write of missionary methods in general terms: it is not easy for him to find any expressions which are universally true, or any rules which have no exception. The result is that the moment he makes any statement some individual arises to cry out that that statement is not true, because in his experience it is not true in his district; and thus an impression is produced that the statement in question is a gross exaggeration and that the author is a careless manufacturer of hasty generalizations.

## III

I ought perhaps to say one word on the plan of this book. I begin by trying to set forth the nature of the force which issues in spontaneous expansion and the dangers of checking it. Then I point to some hesitating attempts in modern days to recognize and give place to it. Then I set out the difficulties which hinder us from giving place to it, the terrible fears which beset us, fears for our doctrine, our moral standards, our ideas of civilized Christianity, our organization. In doing this I argue that such fears are real and natural but wicked, that the standards which we so highly prize are not our Gospel, and that the attempt to maintain them by our control is a false method.

Spontaneous expansion must be free; it cannot be under our control; and consequently it is utterly vain to say, as I constantly hear men say, that we desire to see spontaneous expansion, and yet must maintain our control. If we want to see spontaneous expansion we must establish native churches free from our control.

## Chapter 2 The Nature and Character of Spontaneous Expression

### I

St. Paul does not repeatedly exhort his churches to subscribe money for the propagation of the Faith, he is far more concerned to explain to them what the Faith is, and how they ought to practice it and to keep it. The same is true of St. Peter and St. John, and of all the apostolic writers. They do not seem to feel any necessity to repeat the great Commission, and to urge that it is the duty of their converts to make disciples of all the nations. What we read in the New Testament is no anxious appeal to Christians to spread the Gospel, but a note here and there which suggests how the Gospel was being spread abroad: ‘the churches were established in the Faith, and increased in number daily.’

This was not a peculiar note of the apostolic age, a sign of the amazing inspiration and power of apostolic preaching and example: for centuries the Christian Church continued to expand by its own inherent grace, and threw up an unceasing supply of missionaries without any direct exhortation.

**Nor was the result of the preaching of these unknown missionaries the creation of a multitude of detached groups of believers in cities and villages all over the Empire. All these groups were fully equipped churches.**

This then is what I mean by spontaneous expansion. I mean the expansion which follows the unexhorted and unorganized activity of individual members of the Church explaining to others the Gospel which they have found for themselves; I mean the expansion which follows the irresistible attraction of the Christian Church for men who see its ordered life, and are drawn to it by desire to discover the secret of a life which they instinctively desire to share; I mean also the expansion of the Church by the addition of new churches.

I know not how it may appear to others, but to me **this unexhorted, unorganized, spontaneous expansion has a charm far beyond that of our modern highly organized missions.** I delight to think that a Christian traveling on his business, or fleeing from

persecution, could preach Christ, and a church spring up as the result of his preaching, without his work being advertised through the streets of Antioch or Alexandria as the heading of an appeal to Christian men to subscribe funds to establish a school, or as the text of an exhortation to the church of his native city to send a mission, without which new converts deprived of guidance must inevitably lapse.

But men say that such relief can only be for dreamers, that the age of that simple expansion has gone by, that we must live in our own age, and that in our age such spontaneous expansion is not to be expected; that an elaborate and highly organized society must employ elaborate and highly organized methods, and that it is vain now to sigh for a simplicity which while it existed had many faults and infirmities, and, however attractive, can never be ours. I must, of course, admit that, if that saying is true, if it is really better that paid missionaries should be sent out by an elaborately organized office, and be supported by a department, and directed by a headquarters staff, if it is really true that our elaborate machinery is a great improvement on ancient practice, and that to carry the knowledge of Christ throughout the world it is in fact far more efficient than the simpler methods of the apostolic age, then indeed I must acknowledge that to sigh after an inefficient simplicity is vain, and worse than vain. But if we, toiling under the burden of our organizations, sigh for that spontaneous freedom of expanding life, it is because we see in it something divine, something in its very nature profoundly efficient, something which we would gladly recover, something which the elaboration of our modern machinery obscures and deadens and kills.

## II

If we seek for the cause which produces rapid expansion when a new faith seizes hold of men who feel able and free to propagate it spontaneously of their own initiative, we find its roots in a certain natural instinct. This instinct is admirably expressed in a saying of Archytas of Tarentum quoted by Cicero:

If a man ascended to Heaven and saw the beautiful nature of the world and of the stars his feeling of wonder, in itself most delightful, would lose its sweetness if he had not someone to whom he could tell it.

This is the instinctive force which drives men even at the risk of life itself to impart to others a new-found joy: that is why it is proverbially difficult to keep a secret. It is not surprising then that when Christians are scattered and feel solitary this craving for fellowship should demand an outlet, especially when the hope of the Gospel and the experience of its power is something new and wonderful. But in Christians there is more than this natural instinct. The Spirit of Christ is a Spirit who longs for, and strives after, the salvation of the souls of men, and that Spirit dwells in them. That Spirit converts the natural instinct into a longing for the conversion of others which is indeed divine in its source and character.

### III

Spontaneous expansion begins with the individual effort of the individual Christian to assist his fellow, when common experience, common difficulties, common toil have first brought the two together. It is this equality and community of experience which makes the one deliver his message in terms which the other can understand, and makes the hearer approach the subject with sympathy and confidence – with sympathy because the common experience makes approach easy and natural, with confidence, because the one is accustomed to understand what the other says and expects to understand him now.

He speaks from his heart.

But this only 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 of which we have been thinking?

### IV

We instinctively thought first of heresies, schisms, part railings and disputings, the wild licence of individual interpretation. If that is true, it is but an illustration of our modern attitude towards spontaneous expansion. It raises at once the question whether it is in its very nature

desirable; and the instinctive thought in our minds has condemned it beforehand as an irrational method of religious progress.

We fear it because we feel that it is something that we cannot control. And that is true. Spontaneous activity is a movement of the Spirit in the individual and in the Church, and we cannot control the Spirit.

Given spontaneous zeal we can direct it by instruction. Aquila could teach Apollos the way of God more perfectly. But teaching is not control. Teaching can be refused; control cannot be refused, if it is control; teaching leads to enlargement, control to restriction. To attempt to control spontaneous zeal is therefore to attempt to restrict it; and he who restricts a thing is glad of a little but does not welcome much. Thus, many of our missionaries welcome spontaneous zeal, provided there is not too much of it for their restrictions, just as an engineer laying out the course of a river is glad of some water to fill his channels, but does not want a flood which may sweep away his embankments. Such missionaries pray for the wind of the Spirit but not for a rushing mighty wind. I am writing because I believe in a rushing mighty wind, and desire its presence at all costs to our restrictions.

By spontaneous expansion I mean something which we cannot control. The great things of God are beyond our control. Therein lies a vast hope. Spontaneous expansion could fill the continents with the knowledge of Christ: our control cannot reach as far as that.

There is always something terrifying in the feeling that we are letting loose a force which we cannot control; and when we think of spontaneous expansion in this way, instinctively we begin to be afraid. Whether we consider our doctrine, or our civilization, or our morals, or our organization, in relation to a spontaneous expansion of the Church, we are seized with terror, terror lest spontaneous expansion should lead to disorder. We are quite ready to talk of self-supporting, self-extending and self-governing churches in the abstract as ideals; but the moment that we think of ourselves as establishing self-supporting, self-governing churches in the Biblical sense we are met by this fear, a terrible, deadly fear. Suppose they really were self-supporting and depended no longer on our support, where would we be? Suppose self-extension were really self-extension, and we could not control it, what

would happen? Suppose they were really self-governing, how would they govern? We instinctively think of something which we cannot control as tending to disorder.

## V

If the natural instinct is not opposed to order, still less is the Divine Spirit opposed to order.

But perhaps it may be said that what we fear is not the free expression of this natural instinct, still less of this divine grace; what we fear is the expression of human self-will and self-assertion. These are real sources of disorder; and unhappily men are not moved solely by the pure zeal of the Gospel.

We cannot, then, root up the tares without rooting up the wheat with them. The same action which represses an exhibition of self-will represses also an exhibition of godly zeal.

If new converts once receive the impression that they should express the natural instinct to impart a new-found joy, the divine desire for the salvation of others, only under direction, they are in bonds, cramped and shackled. The zeal dies away, and the Church is robbed of the inspiration which comes from the sense that men are being converted and the Church enlarged no one knows quite how or by whom. Zeal for the conversion of their neighbours is not in their hearts or in their thoughts. But it is the suppression of that first zeal which was never expressed which is the real cause of their trouble.

## VII

Restraint forces godly zeal into opposition to order: sooner or later it must break forth and, if it breaks forth in opposition to order, self-will and self-assertion appear as its allies and flaunt themselves in the guise of the deliverers of godly zeal. It is dangerous to restrain what cannot be permanently crushed. We are in far greater danger of serious disorder when, in fear of the expression of self-will, we restrain a God-given instinct, than when we accept the risks involved in giving it free play.

## VIII



It is said that when God announced to the Angels His purpose to create man in His own image Lucifer, who was not yet fallen from heaven, cried: 'Surely He will not give them power to disobey Him.' And the Son answered him: 'Power to fall is power to rise,' Lucifer knew neither power to rise, nor power to fall, but that word 'power to fall' sunk deep into his heart, and he began to desire to know that power, and he plotted from that day forward the fall of man. He fell himself, and he taught man to know his power and to use his power to fall. When in the fullness of time he saw the redemption wrought by Christ, he began dimly to understand that power to fall is power to rise; but he understood it crookedly. Hence, as Christ's disciples began to multiply, and his own kingdom to be minished, his mind turned instinctively again to this power to fall. If he could check, or hinder, the power to fall, he might also, he thought, check the power to rise. He began by trying to induce the apostles to bind all the Gentile converts within the hedge of the Mosaic law, and he was foiled by the boldness of the faith of the great Apostle of the Gentiles. But ever since he has sought to attain his end, striving to induce the servants of Christ to deprive new converts of the power to fall, by hedging them round with laws of one kind or another, in the hope that so he might deprive them of the power to rise: and men, knowing the terrors of falling, and dreading the power to fall for new converts, are only too ready to listen to him; for he play upon their fears.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Modern Movements Towards Liberty**

If we attempt to satisfy a demand for new missionaries and new stations which increases with every new station which we establish; and if the stations which we at present hold are, as they notoriously are, inadequately staffed; and if we find it difficult, as we undoubtedly do find it difficult, to secure sufficient men and money to maintain our present stations, schools and hospitals; and if we attempt, as we must attempt, to carry the Gospel to the whole world; is it not apparent that the size of the work and the method do not agree? Yet in practice we are still acting as if we could go on multiplying mission stations indefinitely.

Even if the supply of men and funds from Western sources was unlimited and we could cover the whole globe with an army of millions of foreign missionaries and establish stations thickly all over the world, the method would speedily reveal its weakness, as it is already beginning to reveal it. The mere fact that Christianity was propagated by such an army, established in foreign stations all over the world, would inevitably alienate the native populations, who would see in it the growth of the domination of a foreign people. They would see themselves robbed of their religious independence, and would more and more fear the loss of their social independence.

## I

Christ trained His leaders by taking them with Him as He went about teaching and healing, doing the work which they, as missionaries, would do; we train in institutions. He trained a very few with whom He was in the closest personal relation; we train many who simply pass through our schools with a view to an examination and an appointment. Christ trained His leaders in the midst of their own people, so that the intimacy of their relation to their own people was not marred and they could move freely among them as one of themselves; we train our leaders in a hothouse, and their intimacy with their own people is so marred that they can never thereafter live as one of them, or share their thought. I have heard of students in theological colleges so ignorant of the religion of their own people that they had to be given lectures on it by their foreign teachers. Thus, whether we consider the length of time devoted to the training, or the number of the leaders trained, or the character of the training, or its manner, or its method, we perceive at once that the training of leaders of which we speak is something utterly different from that which we set up as the example, and to which we appeal as the authority for our practice.

If the end which we have in view is the evangelization of the country, and it is to do that work that we establish the church and train its leaders, then our training should be training in evangelization. But in the theory which I am now examining there is a distinction between the training and the evangelization. The church is to be founded, educated, equipped, established in the doctrine and ethics and organization first; then it is to expand. The insertion of this term between the first

evangelization by foreigners and the second evangelization by the native church, introduces a grave danger. In putting the advancement of the church first, we teach the converts and the leaders whom we train, so soon as they arrive at consciousness of the direction in which they are being led, to look upon their own progress as of the first importance, to concentrate upon themselves. But that is not training for the evangelization of the country. Great advance in this direction is compatible with a complete absence of any zeal for the conversion of others; and, indeed, is at times definitely opposed to expansion. For instance, I was told the other day that there was a considerable feeling amongst the younger and more highly trained Christian students in India against the admission into the church of large numbers of illiterate converts from the outcastes, on the ground that such admission tended to lower the prestige of the Christian Church in India which had, through many years, built up a reputation as a highly educated community.

We need not be surprised at this, for we are quite familiar with the unhappy fact that it is possible for Christian churches to be highly organized and equipped and yet to fail utterly to understand the necessity for carrying the Gospel to the people around them. History is full of examples and warning. Some utterly perished, some survived, persecuted and tormented, and some degenerated in faith and morals. 'He that saveth his life shall lose it.' That danger hangs close on the heels of a practice which puts the elevation of a young church in the foreground and treats the work of evangelization and expansion as something which must follow.

## II

In the New Testament I find such churches: the church at Antioch, the church of the Thessalonians, the church which is at Corinth, the church in somebody's house. I read of the churches of Galatia, the churches of Asia, the churches of Judea. These 'churches' were local groups of Christians fully equipped with ministers and sacraments and were exactly what Bishop Tucker desired the churches of our foundation to be, self-supporting, self-governing and self-extending. The churches of St. Paul established new self-supporting,

self-governing and self-extending churches like themselves in the nearest towns or villages, not by fissure but by spiritual procreation.

The Pauline churches were mere collections of Christians in towns and villages without local presbyters and local observance of the Lord's Supper as their regular common service.

I believe that we ought to return to the apostolic practice and found churches in every place where we make converts, churches equipped with all the divine grace and authority of Christian churches.

### III

When converts are taught from the very beginning that they receive to hand on, and when they practice this with the inevitable consequence that there is a great advance made, and when this is reported at home, it often results in our being stirred to send them men and money to establish institutions for their intellectual advancement and to supply them with 'better trained' teachers. Now this action, which is designed to encourage them and to help them, seems often to hinder them. They learn to receive, they learn to rely on paid and trained men. The more teachers they have, the less they feel the need for exerting themselves to teach others. That is perhaps quite natural, but it is disastrous.

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?

Now here it will be at once observed that the little group had organized itself and could maintain itself.

Its members met for mutual comfort and support; they combined to provide themselves with such things as were necessary: they were directing all their own organized religious life, until the day that they invited the visit of that foreign trained pastor. Here was self-government from the very beginning. If only that self-government had not been destroyed by the foreign missionary, but had been regularized by the bishop, if their leaders had been ordained, there is no reason in

the nature of the case why they should not have continued as they had begun.

We ought never to send a mission agent to do what men on the spot are already doing spontaneously. If they cry to us for help, as they often do, we should give them help, but help which would support their position and assist their zeal, not supersede them and kill their zeal; help that should strengthen them as leaders, not make them subordinates. To supersede them is disastrous.

They see and learn the lesson that the spontaneous zeal of native Christians is deficient in some way. It obviously does not satisfy the white man and his paid native pastors: they do not trust it: they do not encourage it. It is better to get a paid teacher however young and poorly equipped than to have the most zealous unpaid volunteer, for the moment that the white man finds out what is going on he will certainly insist on sending one of his paid teachers.

The Muslim, for instance, does not nurse his converts nor send them paid teachers. Converts to Islam seek teaching for themselves that they may lead their fellows: they travel sometimes from Nigeria to Cairo to learn. Christian converts are taught to cry feebly for teachers to be sent to them.

The moment that any door of opportunity opens before them, they look behind for support.

Until we learn that not only self-support in a financial sense, but self-support in a spiritual sense, a sense that implies self-government, must begin from the very beginning, we cannot hope to see that wide propagation of the Gospel which alone could penetrate a continent like Africa, or reach the vast populations of India and China, or cover those wide, sparsely-populated areas where communications are difficult, or find an entrance into those countries or districts where the Government is definitely opposed to Christian propaganda. Could we once persuade ourselves that self-extension, self-support and self-government go hand in hand, and are all equally the rights of converts from the very beginning, we might see such an expansion of Christianity throughout the world as now we little dream of.

It is high time that we should definitely face the question whether we will not in the future return to the biblical apostolic practice and by establishing apostolic churches open the doors for that expansion and make it the foundation of our missionary policy; for we are at a turning point in our missionary history, and what is to be the future course of that history will depend upon the attitude which we take up on this question.

## **Chapter 4** **Fear for the Doctrine**

One of the most serious difficulties in the way of any spontaneous expansion and of the establishment of apostolic churches arises from our fear for our doctrine. I once heard a missionary from Africa say that if we allowed our converts to teach as the Muslims allow their converts to teach, the doctrine might spread like wildfire. 'But,' he added, 'we could not possibly permit that.'

Their ability to express it as he thinks that it ought to be expressed.

### **I**

We often hear it said that we must maintain at all costs our standard of doctrine. We cannot possibly allow untrained and uncontrolled natives to propagate Christianity.

The attitude which 'cannot allow', and 'cannot permit', is obviously the attitude of a governor: it is an imperial attitude. *We* must maintain, we say, *we* cannot permit. We, then, are the guardians of the standard, and we must maintain it not only for ourselves but for all who learn to believe on Christ through our preaching.

The standard to be so maintained must be a fixed standard; but if we were asked where this standard of doctrine is to be found, what should we say? Should we say, In the Catholic Creeds? That is not what we really mean when we talk about maintaining our standard of

doctrine. If we are members of the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society we mean a certain doctrine of inspiration: if we are members of the Anglo-Catholic party we mean what they mean when they speak of Full Catholic Teaching. It is not the Apostle's Creed that we think of when we speak of maintaining our standard of doctrine, but of some interpretation of it, or of some addition to it. And where that standard is to be found we do not know, for we are not all agreed as to the terms of it.

## II

On what do we rely for the maintenance of this standard? When we talk of maintaining it we are obviously not relying on its own inherent truth: it is we who are proposing to maintain it, and we are depending clearly upon some power which we possess to maintain it. There is clearly a great difference between 'contending earnestly for the Faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints,' and this maintaining of a standard by authority. When we contend earnestly for a Faith, the emphasis is upon the inherent truth of that for which we contend: when we maintain a standard, the emphasis rests upon the exercise of authority.

On what then do we rely for the exercise of this authority? Without doubt we rely upon our prestige; and in no small degree upon our wealth, and our ability to give to the converts all those material advantages which only money can supply, salaries and buildings and education and hospitals and such-like. This is a fact with which every student of missions at home and every man of experience in the mission field is familiar.

When we say we must maintain our standard, we certainly mean that it is *our* standard and not *their* standard. It does not seem to me that any maintenance of doctrine which does not spring voluntarily from internal convictions can properly be called a maintenance of doctrine at all.

From amongst teachers (that we have trained) we select the men who repeat best and teach best from our point of view, and to these we give further teaching and then ordain them with great confidence that they will teach nothing but what they have learned from us.

What has been the result of this method of maintaining our standard?

1. First a terrible sterility. Our converts have not gone astray from the fold; but 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.
3. The Doctrine has been maintained by external authority, but it has hampered the thought of the people, and as the Christians advance and grow in understanding they begin to feel this dimly and to resent it.

### III

The great heresies in the early Church arose not from the rapid expansion resulting from the work of these unknown teachers; but in those churches which were longest established, and where the Christians were not so busily engaged in converting the heathen round them. The church held the tradition handed down by the apostles, and expected the new converts to grow up into it, to maintain it and to propagate it.

The Church of those ages was afraid of the human speculation of learned men: we are afraid of the ignorance of illiterate men.

### IV

Doctrine, accepted either as an intellectual satisfaction, or as an authoritative pronouncement, divorced from experience, has no power in itself.

Experience of the power of Christ to deliver from sin and from fear of the punishment due to sin, did then, and does now, induce zeal; and the preaching of that power of Christ is Gospel; but the other by itself is mere doctrine, and, like all doctrine, in itself lifeless.

In the light, then, of the history of the early Church, and of our own experience of sporadic cases of spontaneous teaching, I venture to



suggest that the method by which the early Church maintained its standard of doctrine is superior to ours, and that we should be wise to rely upon the free expression by any convert, however illiterate, of his spiritual experience, and to teach our doctrine as the complement of that experience.

As far as the missionaries are concerned they are thinking entirely in terms of a theory and method of missions which limits teaching to a comparatively small body of missionaries and their trained native helpers, and of doctrine almost entirely in terms of intellectual education.

This witness of experience brings a spiritual enlightenment, and spiritual enlightenment quickens the intellectual faculties, and prepares the mind for intellectual teaching: it also brings a great readiness to receive instruction. Consequently where there is spontaneous expansion there arise not only a multitude of witnesses to Christ's power; but also a host of teachers, not only ready to impart teaching, but to receive it.

## V

What Christ asks of His disciples is not so much exposition of doctrine about Him as witness to His power. Now witness to His power can be given by the most illiterate if he has had experience of it. Christ did not require any long training in doctrine when He said to the Demoniac of Gadara: 'Go and tell how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and how He had mercy on thee.'

Does anyone seriously think that the doctrine would really suffer in the long run, if India or China, or Africa, were flooded from end to end with the teaching of men who knew enough to say: 'I called upon the Lord and He heard me,' 'I appealed to Christ and He saved me from my fear?'

The temptation to the trained mind is to dwell on the process by which deliverance came and to forget that the deliverance really preceded the process. What distinguishes us Christians from other men is that we know the first cause; other men know secondary causes. But when we dwell upon the secondary causes we are likely to obscure rather than to reveal the first cause.

‘I sought the Lord and He heard me,’ are arguments for faith in Christ which may be rejected but, cannot be controverted. When men come into the presence of a real deliverance, they marvel; and, if they have a consciousness of need of deliverance for themselves, they covet it.

Yet we commonly insist that to propagate the doctrine we must have men who can answer the arguments of opponents. No doubt it is well to have men who can do this, but it is far more important to have men who can witness to Christ simply and truly, for true and simple witness is by far the more powerful weapon. A clever argument may silence opponents, but witness converts them: they see in deliverance something which all their wit does not supply.

## VI

Christianity, the doctrine, is a system of thought and practice: preaching Christ, the Gospel, is a revelation of a Person.

Is it possible to reveal Christ to those who have never heard His name without setting forth the facts of His Life, His teaching, His works, His character, His Godhead, His atonement, His priesthood, His kingship; the moral, intellectual, and emotional attitude due to Him; the duties to other men which arise from belief in Him; the effects of belief in Him which have been, and must be, revealed in the lives of individuals and nations; or some of these things, or others like them; and is not all this what we understand by Christianity?

To make converts to a doctrine is to make proselytes. The Christian convert is a convert not to a system of doctrine but to Christ. It is in Christ that he trusts, not in any system of doctrine or of morals.

We are all constantly in danger of allowing the acceptance of our orthodoxy to become the aim and object of our work.

I said at the beginning that the motive which urges us to restrain untrained teachers is fear. When we are dealing with the Gospel fear is a very bad master.

## Chapter 5 The Christian Standard of Morals

## I

Unless we are prepared to accept the Jewish law in its entirety, there is no code of morals laid down in precise commands for Christians in the Bible as a whole, still less in the New Testament.

We treat sins of the flesh as matters for the enforcement of law, sins of temper and spirit we do not. Yet in the Gospels, Christ is not represented as observing this distinction. He denounces sins of pride and self-assertion with a severity no less condign than sins of the body; but we do not refuse to admit men who give way habitually to a hot temper, or indulge a supercilious, insolent, haughty and contemptuous manner towards those whom they consider their inferiors. Why? Is it because these sins are in truth less dangerous and immoral than sins of the flesh?

## III

It is not surprising that great numbers of natives, both converts and heathen, should look upon the imposition of our rules as the imposition of a yoke of western civilization rather than as a law of Christ. The result is that they are driven into opposition, not only to western civilization, not only to missionaries, but to the truer and higher conception of morality. For instance, in Africa they are driven by our insistence upon monogamy as a formal universal Christian law either into a defense of polygamy or into a rejection of Christianity, or into both. As polygamists they must oppose the teaching of the Christian missionaries.

That this unhappy choice is set before them is due to the imposition of law. Polygamists might have been on the right side rather than on the wrong. If their wives had not been made the objects of the missionary attack; if, when they learned to believe in Christ, they had been accepted as Christians; the ideal would have been before them not as something inimical, to be hated and dreaded, and resisted, not as a monstrous and tyrannical imposition but as an ideal at which they might safely and wisely look.

## IV

We present the way of salvation as the way of obedience to these divine laws.

That standard which we so often call the Christian standard of morals, simply does not exist in the New Testament. The only Christian standard is: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thy self.' That and none other is the Christian standard of morals.

Every attempt to treat any of His saying 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. He came to men not to direct their conduct by external admonitions, but to inspire and to raise them by the presence and power of His Spirit given to them. He began by showing it in His own Person and giving to men a Spirit Who should guide and enlighten them until they became like Him.

Spiritual pride is a far more deadly sin than concubinage; selfishness is a far more deadly sin than polygamy; hatred is a far more deadly sin than the destruction of twins.

Our hope now, and for the future, lies not in the attainment of a standard which shall make us fit for His grace; but in the assurance that acceptance of His grace will raise us.

Christ came to save, not men who had attained to a certain standard of morality, certainly not men who were already prepared to advance to our local, temporary, external standard of morality, but men as He found them.

Obviously we are putting the external before the internal.

## VI

We have begun by imposing a system of external rules, and we cannot easily go back. To have baptized men who confessed Christ without insisting that they must first accept our laws, to have established churches in native villages under their own elders without breaking up their social order, would no more have been a lowering of our standard of morality than the establishment of a kindergarten class in a school is a lowering of the standard of education in the school.

## VII

As long as we continue to teach and enforce our law as law, as long as we make acceptance of it a condition precedent to admission into the Church, so long we can expect no spontaneous growth.

So long as we hold to his doctrine it is impossible for us to establish churches on the apostolic model.

We have laid down the law and passed over the love of God; we have set our hearers on the wrong path; we have raised up a most serious barrier to the spontaneous expansion of the Church.

### Chapter 6 Civilization and Enlightenment

#### I

The real problem is not whether we should encourage or discourage any particular custom, but whether we should be the judges of what is fitting; not whether we should retain or revive this or that native custom, but whether we should touch these things directly at all.

#### II

Social reform is not necessarily Christian, and schemes for the amelioration of the conditions of life certainly do not necessarily lead men to Christ, even if they are set on foot by Christian men with the most serious Christian intention.

#### III

Putting intellectual, moral and social advance first in time, we inevitably tended to accept the position that reform of conditions was a necessary antecedent to the living of a Christian life.

That is a very serious position to adopt. It subordinates Christ to conditions. Historically, it is not true. Men in those conditions have become Christians, and very good Christians too, before the conditions of their life were changed, not only in India, but elsewhere.

A Christian life is a life lived in Christ: it does not depend upon conditions.

#### IV

St. Paul rejected any statement of the Divine Reality which might lead men to accept a doctrine instead of surrendering themselves to the control of a divine power. He manifested the Spirit, he demonstrated the power, and he led men as they experienced these to welcome and accept the Cross in which they were revealed.

Is there no danger that the presentation of the Gospel of Christ by means of a Science which is unquestionably the wisdom of the wise may produce exactly that effect which the Apostle sought to avoid?

Does it not conceal the foolishness of the Cross? The triumph of the Cross is the triumph of the Cross because it is not the triumph of anything else, and it cannot be the triumph of the Cross if it is the triumph of anything else. If our preaching and teaching of Western science is, as it manifestly is, a triumph for Western science, if we constantly hear our missionaries talk of the spread of Christian civilization and Christian enlightenment among peoples who are not Christian; is there not a danger that the Science, the wisdom of men, is taking the place of the wisdom of God? Does not the teaching of the wisdom of men deprive the Gospel of the Cross of that foolishness which is its glory? The salvation of men, body, soul and spirit is not seen as the revelation of God's wisdom through the foolishness of preaching, but as the revelation of the wisdom of men who devised such wonderful and uplifting schemes.

We use the appeal of Science most vigorously in our preaching to the educated, for they are likely to understand and receive that appeal. For the most part they do accept this wisdom of men. The wisdom of men appeals to them and satisfies them, so far as any wisdom of men can satisfy a human soul.

We proclaim that the introduction and establishment of these arts and sciences are the steps preliminary to the acceptance of the gospel, and that we carry on our institutional work for that purpose. Society must be permeated with Christian ideas, and then men will accept Christ; the ignorant must be taught scientifically in our modern

educational way and then they will be able to accept Christ; social abuses must be reformed and then men will be able to accept Christ; social ethics must be inculcated and then men will be able to accept Christ.

We must confess that we have gone astray, and have obscured the true foundation, the Cross of Christ which is itself the condemnation of our civilization. Our Western enlightenment, our Christian social doctrines, our Christian science, are no foundation upon which to build faith in Christ.

Christian education does not often for us mean the education which enables a man to speak ‘the wisdom of God in a mystery’. We see among our converts sometimes men who can do that, men who can understand and express depths of love in the Cross which we ourselves cannot all fathom. This is a philosophy which penetrates far deeper than the intellect. It embraces the affections, emotions, will and thought, in one whole at one instant, in one word. It is a spiritual apprehension, and is moved by the Holy Spirit given to men. We are sometimes amazed at it; but we do not therefore call the man who can use such expression an educated man. We call him educated or uneducated on quite other grounds. It is his knowledge of the wisdom of the world, which entitles him to be called educated by us.

Immersed in educational, medical or social work which we are doing truly for Christ’s sake, we call the work Christian; which it is for us because we do it in Christ.

Social reform is, as we have seen, easily divorced from all religion: enlightenment and civilization are quite compatible with extreme selfishness. It is Christ alone who inspires men with the desire to bring men to Christ.

If we instinctively seize upon everything which does not seem in harmony with our ideas of civilization to declare that it is ‘not Christian’; how can we possibly encourage the spontaneous expansion of the Church?

## **Chapter 7**

### **Missionary Organization**

For missionary work we have two organizations; one which is ancient and one which is modern; one simple, the other very cumbrous: the simple necessary organization is the organization of the Church, the cumbrous modern organization is the organization of missionary societies.

The Church was first established and organized with a world-wide mission for a world-wide work. It was a living organism composed of living souls deriving their life from Christ, who was its Head. It was an organism which grew by its own spontaneous activity, the expression of that life which it had in union with Christ, the Saviour. Its organization was the organization fitted for such an organism; it was the organization of a missionary body. Consequently there was no special organization for missions in the Early Church; the church organization sufficed. It was simple and complete. There was abundant room in it for the expression of the spontaneous individual activity of its members; for every member was potentially a missionary; and the Church, as an organized body, expected that activity and knew how to act when its members did their duty. With the activity of its members, it grew simply by multiplying its bishops.

The new modern missionary organization is an addition. With us the Church had largely ceased to be self-expanding: its members had, for the most part, forgotten its missionary character; its organization had degenerated and become stiff and rigid. Naturally, it expressed itself in the form characteristic of a Western people in this age. It took the form of elaborate organization; it created a new organization within the Church.

When we ascribe these results to our modern organization and say, as we often do say, that we have attained these results by our organization, we forget that results as great were attained in the past without our modern organization. The results are due, not to our organization, but to that undying spirit of love for the souls of men which Christ inspires. The modern organization is only the form in which we have expressed that spirit; and a time may come when organization, which seems to us to be absolutely necessary, may cease to be necessary, or may take such different shape as to be hardly



recognizable; for it has within it elements of weakness which betray its temporary character.

## II

Missionary organization in these societies is necessarily elaborate. It involves the creation of offices and departments, with directors, clerks, accountants, divided and subdivided. Now elaborate organization exercises a strange fascination over the minds of men; and this is as true of our missionary organization as of any other organization. It tends to become an end in itself. Men incline more and more to rely upon it: they learn to ascribe to it virtues which do not belong to it.

There is a horrible tendency for an organization to grow in importance till it overshadows the end of its existence, and begins to exist for itself. Many men have established organizations in order to achieve by them a definite object, and have been caught in the toils of the organization which they have created. Business men, for instance, have created organizations that by them they might become rich, and then, having grown rich even in their own estimation, have gone on labouring simply to keep the organization in existence.

Our love of organization leads us to rely upon it. When once an organization has been built up men think that all that is needed is to keep it going and to enlarge it. The direction becomes mechanical, and as the direction becomes mechanical the organization ceases to produce the results expected. This is the cause of much failure in the educational world. Men evolve a method of teaching, and they begin to think that the method can be worked mechanically; and instantly it loses its power. Give us, they say, so much more money and so many more men and the propagation of the Gospel will advance in proportion. That men speak as if it were certain only shows that they are beginning to rely upon the organization to do the work.

Not only does our love of organization lead us to expect from it spiritual results, it also leads us to ascribe to it results which do not belong to it.

As the organizations grow they assume an undue importance in the minds of their directors and supporters. More and more men begin

to rely upon them, more and more they allow them to take that place which is Christ's alone.

### III

We of today 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.

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. 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.

All our missions have been bound up with the administration of property, the building and equipment of large stations, schools, hospitals, industrial institutions, and the like, all financed largely from home.

For spiritual work spiritual organization is necessary; but can we create a spiritual organization of spiritual forces? Only a divine intelligence can do that. But we attempt to do the work of that divine intelligence; by fixing our stations and immobilizing our men. Consequently, we see spiritual movements taking place not far from us, and we ourselves outside them, or, if not outside them altogether, utterly incapable of taking our proper part in them. What we can do is to organize our own powers, and that we do within the limits of our

intelligence. To be God's agents in spiritual movements we must follow, not lead.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Ecclesiastical Organization**

In the beginning the Church was a missionary society: it added to its numbers mainly by the life and speech of its members attracting to it those who were outside. Where they went churches were organized, where they settled, men who had never heard of the Church saw the Church, and, being attracted by the life, or by the speech, of its members, learned its secret, joined it, and were welcomed into it.

#### **IV**

Now here we at once observe that the training is intellectual training; that the 'best elements of the race' are said to be young scholars of higher intelligence than their fellows; that the object of the training is to create a force which the foreign missionary can use; and finally that all the early training of the race in native government of their family or tribe is set wholly on one side as of no account. The training given is essentially education in the narrow, modern, western sense of the word, a literary and intellectual training.

The apostolic practice was not peculiar to St. Paul and St. Barnabas, for it was followed over very wide areas long after the death of the apostles. There were great numbers of small churches in the apostolic and sub-apostolic age in Asia Minor, Armenia, North Africa, and elsewhere which were certainly not 'bits broken off of the local synagogue', and the names of their first bishops are certainly not Jewish names.

It is strange, that a Christian bishop should ascribe the stability and growth of Christian churches more to the power of training in the faith, the morals and the devotional life of Judaism than to the power of the Holy Ghost and of the grace of Jesus Christ.

For generations after the death of the Apostle there were no paid clergy in the Church.

## **Chapter 9**

### **The Way of Spontaneous Expansion**

The Church expanded simply by organizing these little groups as they were converted, handing on to them the organization which she had received from her first founders. It was itself a unity composed of a multitude of little churches any one of which could propagate itself, and consequently the reception of any new group of Christians was a very simple matter. By a simple act the new group was brought into the unity of the church, and equipped, as its predecessors had been equipped, not only with all the spiritual power and authority necessary for its own life as an organized unity, but also with all the authority needed to repeat the same process whenever one of its members might convert men in any new village or town. Thus the results of the spontaneous labour of any individual Christian were naturally and easily consolidated and established within the unity of the Church.

## I

The Bishop of Lagos, for instance, has told us that in Southern Nigeria the greatest progress of recent years has been due not so much to the direct work of the European missionaries, or of paid African teachers, as to the spontaneous work of untrained and unpaid native Christians.

I believe the time is ripe for this advance.

## II

The Bible is read by those best able to read it and expound it; but no man's mouth should be close, and the most illiterate will sometimes be found able to make a comment of the most profound spiritual significance because it is rooted in his experience.

A writer is quoted in the *International Review of Missions* for October 1920, as saying:

A village panchayat may be an assembly of illiterate men, but it is not an assembly of ignorant men, by any means. Nor are they men uneducated in matters of government.

Illiterate members often bring to the church a profound spiritual knowledge, and a sense of the practical application of Christian truth to daily life, which is hidden from the accomplished student. This then is what I mean by the delivery of the Gospel to the church. The Bible is

delivered to the whole Church as the message of God to the whole Church.

### III

To leave new-born churches to learn by experience is apostolic, to abandon them is not apostolic: to watch over them is apostolic, to be always nursing them is not apostolic: to guide their education is apostolic, to provide it for them is not apostolic. The missionary and the bishop must watch over their education.

From the point of view of spontaneous expansion, we have no need to think of secular education, as we call it, at all, nor to make any provision for it. It is quite certain that men who learned to read religiously for a strictly religious purpose would certainly in some cases begin to desire and to win for themselves and their children further education in what we call secular subjects. The whole church would grow together in enlightenment, as each member brought in a new contribution, and each generation made some advance.

To us progress might seem slow; but all true educationalists know well the importance of slow growth for solid progress, even in the education of the individual; and when we are dealing with the education of a community we are thinking in terms not of years but of generations, and we must learn not to despise slow growth.

This then is what I mean by watching over the education of the church. To some minds this may seem inadequate, and they may think that we should make better progress by exercising direct control and forcing the pace. To watch and to assist spontaneous progress is certainly not to abandon converts to their own devices.

### VI

The spontaneous expansion of the Church reduced to its elements is a very simple thing. It asks for no elaborate organization, no large finances, no great numbers of paid missionaries. In its beginning it may be the work of one man, and that a man neither learned in the things of this world, nor rich in the wealth of this world, the organization of a little church on the apostolic model is also extremely simple, and the most illiterate converts can use it, and the poorest are sufficiently wealthy to maintain it. Only as it grows and spreads through large

provinces and countries do any complex questions arise, and they arise only as a church composed of many little churches is able to produce leaders prepared to handle them by experience learned in the smaller things. There is no need at the beginning to talk of preparing leaders to face great national issues. By the time the issues have become great and complex the leaders of the little churches of today will have learned their lesson, as they cannot possibly be taught it beforehand.

No one, then, who feels within himself the call of Christ to embark on such a path as this need say, I am too ignorant, I am too inexperienced, I have too little influence, or I have not sufficient resources. The first apostles of Christ were in the eyes of the world 'unlearned and ignorant' men: it was not until the Church had endured persecution and had grown largely in numbers that Christ called a learned man to be His apostle.

What is necessary is faith. What is needed is the kind of faith which, uniting a man to Christ, sets him on fire. Such a man can believe that others finding Christ will be set on fire also. Such a man can see that there is no need of money to fill a continent with the knowledge of Christ. Such a man can see that all that is required to consolidate and establish that expansion is the simple application of the simple organization of the church. It is to men who know that faith, who see that vision, that I appeal. Let them judge what I have written.