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The making of an evangelist

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I learned first hand. Missionaries have often spoken of the need, for protection in travel, and have asked for prayer along that line. There are Car Drivers, Cab Drivers, Bus Drivers, Aeroplane Pilots, causing the eyebrows to raise, along with the blood pressures.

Ú Ó“One time on a fairly narrow road, suitable only for a moderate pace because of the difficulty in negotiating bends, and avoiding passing cars. In spite of the limitations, we were doing 100 mph, when the driver dropped something and bent down to pick it up. The car quickly went off course and was headed straight towards a huge post. Time was limited, I couldn't say anything quickly enough to warn the driver. I did what I have not done before on any occasion. I grabbed the steering wheel and we just missed the post by the barest margin. It was with a great sigh of relief and thankfulness to God, as I tried to catch my breath again. Ú Ó“My prayer partners surely had their prayers for my safety, answered that day."

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Ú Ó”Then there was the time when a young Christian aboriginal school teacher, and I were driving in an area among wild buffaloes, and they almost surrounded our car. It was obvious they didn't appreciate our presence at all. Having winged a prayer to God, we took off, and gave them our dust. Sometimes it is essential to make a strategic retreat, and that in a hurry. It was a lonely part of Australia, and it was becoming more lonely in that part as we sped away.

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It is funny now, but didn't seem so at the time. Travelling in Western Australia, and, for some weeks having suffered a persistent stomach virus, I was journeying with my wife and others to a Crusade in the Wheat Fields. I was feeling acutely nauseous. So as we travelled, we came to a place called Ú Ó”New Norcia. I said to those travelling with me, I could do without New Norcia the old nausea is bad enough.

’The play must go on’ is an old saying in the theatre world. When one is an evangelist ñ the Crusade must go on. Sometime its difficult to accomplish. On this occasion of Crusading in Western Australia, I had to have a car waiting for me after every meeting, to take me back to bed to get enough physical strength for the next meeting. It went on for several weeks. Ú Ó”I was able to get through only because of the great grace and strength of Almighty God, given to His Servants in order that they might "walk and not faint".  (See Isaiah 40:28-31)

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Ú Ó”This time it was negotiating the Great Dividing Range, Australia in an old car. The driver had put his car 'out of gear' going down a long and steep descent. A sharp bend was approaching us at great speed. There was a small dividing concrete strip to separate the cars coming either way. We missed the left hand side in our hurry and went around
the outside, with a small space between us and a big drop down the mountain side. It was enough to cause us to think the Dividing Range was well named. Around the corner we headed for a bridge at the bottom of the steep descent. To make matters worse the car developed a zig zag patten, and the bridge was on an angle to our road. Ó “I was developing my prayer life at a rapid pace, fervently hoping we would not be ‘zigging’ when we should have been ‘zagging’ as we approached the bridge. Ó “We made it, thank God”, and we were slowed down by the uphill section on the other side of the bridge.

Ú Ó”In overseas, one learns to pray with added fervour, when in an assortment of vehicles. It was in India (New Delhi) and it was a Taxi Cab. The driver must have learned his driving on a Speedway Track. We came to a roundabout, I felt like putting my leg out like the speedway bike riders do, so as to get around the corner.

Ú Ó”It was in another part of India going to a night meeting in an oversized jeep type of vehicle, and travelling to a distant village along a very dark road. The jeep was packed with men, some of whom were oversized like the jeep itself. Suddenly we arrived at a bridge with the approaches washed away. It was a case of all on board abandon the jeep, except the driver, and push the jeep up a short, but fairly steep rise. (By the way when that road was mentioned one was tempted to ask what road?)

Ú Ó”Coming back from another meeting we had a rather hilarious trip. It happened like this. We were approximately 40 miles away from home’s, and we sat down for an evening meal, just about the time the bus was due to leave. Besides, we had to walk about a mile through a dark village to the bus station. The time was not Eastern Standard Time, we were working on, but sometimes, as is often the case in various parts of the world. Finally we got away about 45 minutes Ó “after the bus had left. Walking through the darkened village, and falling over an animal (a donkey, I think) and disturbing a large number of the animal kingdom, we finally made it to the bus depot. Our bus had gone, and it appeared we had no way of getting home.

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Ú Ó”But no! A miracle happened. A previous bus had broken down and would be ready for the road in a short time. It was a fairly ancient vehicle but it was our only hope for home. We sailed along, accompanied by many squeaks and noises. It seemed that everything made a noise except the horn. I was saying to myself as the bus swayed along “On the road” “Off the road” with many repeats of that little chorus. Ó “Finally by the Grace of God, and in answer to ‘prayer’ having gone up in the air, on our seats about as mush as we travelled forward, it seemed we finally reached our destination.

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In India, we travelled through what I was given to understand was called "The Robber Village" area. This village was on one side of the road, and a very colourful Gypsy Camp on the other side.

My interpreter I heard, had been pulled out of a bus by the robbers in one of these villages. They threatened to kill him by throwing him over a bridge, because he didn't have much money for them to take. His life was saved because one of the robbers recognised him and they let him go. This incident happened just a week or two before he became my interpreter.

One night in a certain part of India, I had been out to a meeting, and somehow was stranded too far away to return home. On enquiring around, I was put on to a kind of Bullock Cart, with a covered top. It was a very dark night, and there were a number of people (all Indians) who were seated in the back of the cart. To make life a little more interesting we took off through a cemetery, where there was not one light. Not knowing whether the people on board were honest or otherwise, and having had an experience in another country with a taxi driver who was dishonest, "I did some praying that all would be well•. It turned out well, but it could have gone radically wrong, as I found it could, by experiences in other countries.

"In the nation of Sriá-Lanka (formerly Ceylon) we travelled by train from Colombo to Kandy. Instead of having to battle for a seat as is often the case, I decided to sit in the part of the carriage marked "CLERGY AREA". I was somewhat amused when I found out that I had suddenly turned 'BUDDHIST', as 'CLERGY' especially meant 'BUDDHIST' MONKS! Although I didn't really qualify, as nobody else seemed to mind, I stayed put. I don't think this conferred in me any "Honorary Doctorate" or any such 'honour', but it did get me to Kandy. I was quite thankful about that.

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"At Kandy walking had a slightly dangerous meaning• and it wasn't because of the group called "The Tamil Tigers" so much. It was all because of monkeys. They had a pastime causing discomfort to passersby. They would pull a certain kind of tile from the roof of a house or school, and throw them at people, This made walking in Kandy definitely 'a health hazard', but certainly kept the tilers in business. A school, teaching children trades, could have plenty of 'on the job practice', especially in the Tiling class.

"We passed elephants• just by the railway track, they were in a stream. I am glad I didn't get out to see what "their• favourite form of attack was.

"Monkeys have a variety of approaches• to tourists. In another part of South East Asia (Singapore, I think) there was a monkey, who evidently
thought he was a Comedian. Sitting in a tree about 5a-6 feet from the ground, and just above a walking path, he waited for someone to come.

Ú “If a man came wearing a hat•, the monkey would lift it off, and the monkey gave a chatter (or his way of having a chuckle) to himself.

Ú “If it was a lady who came along•, he would bend down to pull her hair. I altered my course considerably in that part of the world, as I don’t usually were a hat, and would probably have suffered the fate of the ladies, by having my hair pulled.

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In Indonesia• when taking Crusade Meetings we usually went by a small bus in one area, and by BETJA (DUTCH) or BECHA (INDONESIAN) and pronounced BETCHA. These are like TRIa-ashaWS, only instead of having the men riding the bike in front of the passenger, the BECHA has the passenger in front. This seems like good thinking from the rider's point of view, because of traffic hazards.

In one place there was Ú “a Stop Sign•, easily 4 or 5 times as big as any I have ever seen. But it seemed, nobody took any notice of it and just went through. Traffic seemed to go all over the road in a kind of traffic dodgem, maybe to catch the shady side, on one trip, through nobody's fault really, we had about nine (9) near misses in a journey of about 2 miles.

Ú “Again my prayer life was developing rapidly•. I did admire our BETJA driver though. He gave of his services freely for the sake of our Lord Jesus, and it was his skill that avoided accidents.

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À “One Pastor took me for a sight seeing trip on the pillion of a motor bike•. He was a skilful rider, but we had to do weaving techniques through the traffic. It was something like being a knitting needle. In order to show one the sights as we travelled throughout a somewhat disorganised traffic system, he had to take one hand from the handle bars to point things out. This made for a very interesting afternoon, for myself, more used to a fairly orderly traffic system.

Ú “I would not like this recital of traffic hazards to give the wrong impression•, because these christian friends were kindness and courtesy itself. Often with limited resources they went out of their way to make my stay enjoyable. They have etched a place in my heart forever, because of their hospitality and brotherly attitudes.

Ú “I only mention these traffic hazards to show those who are itinerant evangelists, or who are answering the call to be such, what they may meet in the crowded cities of Asia, no matter how skilful their drivers maybe. Also, this is written to underline the need for prayer for the safety of christian workers, who live and work in crowded cities and villages of the world•.

Ú “In another area, one Indonesian Pastor• took me visiting his people of the village. Like many of the dirt roads among villages in many parts
of the world, riding over them on a motor bike was like riding over a series of speed bumps. They slowed us down and the Pastor and I went up in the air, as though we were on a bucking horse. The Pastor had to ride these roads regularly, and I realised how dangerous it could become for him especially after the heavy rains. "This Pastor and his church folk warmly welcomed us, and did all they could to make us feel at home. We often think of the Pastors and people we met, and thank God for their fervent love for the Lord Jesus, and their uncomplaining sacrifices for him.

"In one of the homes we visited, there was a lady. I understand, who had been a 'lady of the night' before she was wondrously, and soundly, converted to Christ. She gave up many possessions, to live in much poorer circumstances, in having a very small shop with a limited amount of stock. Her radiant Christian face, reflected the tremendous transforming power in the life of a human being, when Christ comes into a life.

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"In the U.S.A. my wife and I travelled with a godly and dedicated Pastor, but one whose driving was the 'interest point of many who had travelled with him. Like the Old Testament person Jehu who drove furiously, he too belonged to that school. He was a great Bible Student and Soul Winner, but I feel perhaps had picked the wrong place to Study the Bible, when he drove down the express way with it open on his steering wheel, causing his car to finish up in a ditch. We were glad we weren't on board that day.

"We were on board not long after, travelling down an expressway. My wife and I and Rev Charles Schultz the creator of the well known "Peanuts Cartoon' were seated in the back of the car, and the Pastor and another American Christian were seated in the front seat. "To say I was a little concerned would have been the understatement of the year, as we travelled at speed with the driver looking around into the back seat, to hear the discussion with Charles Schultz. I felt like saying to our driver, 'Don't you think it is advisable to look where you are going'? I was beaten to it by the American in the front seat alongside the driver, he said, something like this 'Say, bud, you keep your eyes on the road, I'll tell you what they are saying in the back seat'.

"Private aeroplanes can sometimes be a source of danger. One of the number we have travelled in, had little room for luggage so we had to manoeuvre to get it in. It was a very windy day, and the pilot said he was not keen on flying in wind like that. We took off and the cross wind gave us quite an attack of the wobbles'. The pilot then asked my wife and I and another Pastor to keep an eye open for other aeroplanes as we
would be flying into the heavy smoke cover of a forest fire, and there were about 29 other planes up there in the smoke. He said he didn't want to hit them, to which I added a fervent 'Amen'.

In the Holy Land, we were being driven up a hill on a narrow road, with a big drop of some hundreds of feet on either side, our driver decided to speed up to pass about 20 cars on the road all going the same way. There was no view as to what might be coming over the top of the hill, and no room to pass us if anyone did. An Australian friend travelling with us couldn't bear to look. He got down on his knees behind the front seat, and no doubt was having an earnest time of prayer to God. "I tell you, I didn't miss my additional prayer time that day, I was very busy at it in that car."

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We managed to pass the cars and get over the crest of the hill safely, and started our descent on the other side. It seemed our hired driver used the horn with great regularity, and the brakes of his car were inoperative, or he didn't know how to use them. Going down the hill it seemed, the 'in thing' was to press the accelerator down, pick up speed then keep the horn busy by almost non-stop blaring.

As we approached a village at the foot of the hill "there was movement at the station for the word had got around" that our car was arriving at the village at speed. (I write this with apologies to the man from Snowy River)

That afternoon we were to go to Bethlehem and the ministers' wives in our Australian party were glad to know that we would be going by bus, instead of these 'taxis'. Both men and women alike thought, in their ignorance, that these drivers couldn't do much harm in a bus. The road was winding, and the bus driver had some sort of charms, hanging up near him. Whatever they were, they weren't doing too much for him. He seemed to be a fatalist, and believed "what would be, would be".

We drove off along a dusty narrow, winding hilly road. I happened to be in an outer seat behind the driver. As we took the bends at speed, he would take the bus over to the outer edge of the road, in order to get around the corner. Everytime that happened, I had a very good "straight down view" of the bottom of the valley.

We got to Bethlehem safely. I believe because of the protective care of God.

When it came to the return journey, we had a 'rebellion' in our ranks, by the ladies of our party. They weren't going to travel on that bus, and only after a lot of persuasion did they decide to get on board. The nervous system of most of us had taken a severe beating, it seemed that day, a day which no one desired as a repeat performance, especially as accelerators and horns took precedence over brakes, and I think our Guardian Angels must have had a heavy programme all that day.
I know now, from experience what someone meant when he said "My heart was in my mouth so often, I had teeth marks on it".

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"CULTURAL DIFFERENCES"

Travelling in many countries faces one with the necessity to examine one's personal behaviour, as it relates to cultural differences. Some things taken for granted in our country causes serious offence in other countries. And some simple practices like drinking water, can be the cause of a grave illness or even death, in some countries.

To eat a vegetable salad in Australia is considered good for health, but in some countries it can be a health hazard. This is because of the water, which is untreated, and human body waste used as fertilizer. Even drinking some soft drinks can cause health problems, simply because they are made with untreated water. There are some drinks which are made with sterilized water, of course tea or coffee using boiled water is OK. Even cleaning one's teeth should be done by using boiled water in some places.

An Indian Christian friend told me that one has to be careful of cooked food, because sometimes it is not cooked thoroughly through, and can be a danger to health.

Some nations have good health systems, but others have no sanitation or toilet facilities, of course tourist hotels can be the exception to all this.

Words can have a different meaning in some countries, as can some practices and gestures. The common word 'outback' in Australia means the western areas of a country or state, but in the U.S.A. it means the toilet in the backyard. One has to be particularly careful of slang expressions and colloquialisms can have very different meanings overseas. Some words used overseas, which we would consider "swear words" are used as terms of endearment in other countries.

Actions such as a man sitting on a stage with legs crossed is considered obscene in some other areas. The friendly pat on the head of a child to us, can mean danger or even death in some areas of religion, because the head is considered Sacred.

Again in the matter of building restrictions one can come across cultural differences. In a former Mission House in India in which I stayed I noticed the electric wires which ran across the bedroom walls, had little or no insulation, and seemed to me could endanger human beings.
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One of our team who is an electrician had seen the need in various mission areas, where perhaps missionaries or helpers were unskilled as electricians, have to do the best they can. Our friend spends quite a bit of his time each year going to mission fields, to put the electrical wiring and fittings in order. As he and his wife are fine dedicated christians I am sure that they seek to do other "missionary work" while they are there.

As mentioned elsewhere, when handing food or any gifts to someone in India it is taboo to hand it with the left hand, which is reserved for all the dirty jobs. I am slightly ambidextrous and have had to sit on my left hand, so as not to offend when passing food or other things to friends in India. I know that out of their gracious hearts, some of the people overlook some things which we do, which are considered "out of line".

It is a good thing before going to some of the Eastern countries to find out from the Consul of that country, or from a missionary, what is considered right or wrong.

"In closing off this chapter which has been designed to help those who desire to serve Christ in overseas countries• where people see things in a way different from ourselves, there is one area too, which I feel is essential in the proclamation of gospel, and which also should be noted. This area concerns words used in our country which can mean something different. Two examples• are in the story of the Frenchman who had his head out the carriage window of a train, as another train approached on the other line. "Lookout", called out his Australian friend. The Frenchman put his head out further and found himself in danger. Later he said to the Australian áá "You people are silly. You say `LOOK OUT' when you mean `LOOK IN'".

`BORN AGAIN' in India needs explaining carefully, because among Hindus it means REááINCARNATION áá being born over and over in different forms.

It is important, as you can see, to understand the customs and local ideas, so as to communicate the Gospel more clearly.