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The making of an evangelist

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From time to time in the days of air travel and fast transport, it is not uncommon for the services of an evangelist in one country to be requested for evangelism in another country.

It is a good thing to know some of the opportunities and 'difficulties' which one has to face in this extended kind of ministry. As we 'go walkabout' (for overseas readers, 'walkabout' is an Australian aboriginal expression for journeying round about) with the message of God, and visit various areas in overseas countries, we should seek to gain some idea of what we will be faced with, as far as customs and language differences are concerned. This chapter is written about some countries, and should help those not experienced in overseas ministry.

Differences of culture

In various places travelled to, it is essential to understand something about customs, food, accommodation, visas, general conduct of meetings and the need or otherwise for interpreters.

Some of the countries I have ministered in are used as illustrations or the variety of situations found in overseas countries.

United States

Many of the customs of Americans will be familiar with Australians having had a great deal to do with them in various war zones, and particularly in World War II when so many American servicemen were stationed in Australia.

However, some foods are quite different, and preparation and serving of food may be very new to an Australian. Under customs, some words used in America may raise in Australian's eyebrows. What in Australia are sear words or not very nice in mixed company, are used in everyday speech, and are not considered 'bad' words. Some expressions we use in Australia would raise eyebrows in America. Our term 'outback' used in Australia of the far west in America means the backyard toilet. the term 'knocked up' to an Australian means tired out or exhausted, in America means a single woman (often a loose woman) who is pregnant. My advice is to take some of the words Americans use in our stride and the usage may help you determine the legitimacy or otherwise.

In evangelistic services, the conducting of them will be different and appeals may be longer, and somewhat different. However, please do not think this is necessarily bad as we can learn from some of these differences.

In our conversation with one another, Australians tend to be blunt at times, saying what we really think. However, some Americans have said they like this because they know just where they stood with us.

In some countries because of a desire to show courtesy or not to hurt, things are said which to do necessarily reflect the real feelings of the speaker.
American people as a whole are very hospitable, generous and kind, and many are delightful to know. Like all countries, including our own, there are exceptions to the rule.

When you get your itinerary of meetings, contract your travel agent in Australia for a travel schedule in the USA which will suit you best. Sometimes airlines in the USA do not fly to all parts of the nation mainland, but are based on a certain city and fly in and out in directions like the fingers of a human hand. For example, American Airlines is based in Dallas, Texas and another airline goes from Atlanta, Georgia. After flying out to a given point they always return to their home base. You need a visa to enter USA as well as an Australian passport. Check with your travel agent for any alterations.

Malaysia

You are faced with a different sort of situation altogether. It is a Moslem country for a start. By that, I mean that the national religion is Moslem, which is strictly enforced if you try to give the Christian gospel to Malays. It is multi-cultural with Indians, Chinese, Eurasians and English speaking people. list these four groups, which can be evangelised by the Christians. The religion of these groups are Hindus, Buddhists and other Asian mixtures. Christians who have disobeyed that land regarding the Malays have either been put out of the country or even a mission has been closed down. A sensitive position like this needs handling with special care. In some other Moslem countries the laws are a little more relaxed. However, this has been my experience of things.

In many overseas countries, not only in Asia, but beyond, it is essential to be careful drinking the water. It should be sterilised or boiled. Coca Coal drinks are made of sterilised water, and can be trusted not to harm you. In India, I used a Coca Cola drink called Limca. In the Holy Land we were careful to drink bottled water (sterilised). Regarding food, in some countries salads can be dangerous to a westerner's health because of the water used to make the vegetables grow, and the human 'manure' to fertilise it. An Indian friend of mine said that westerners have to be careful even of cooked food in Asia, because sometimes it is not cooked thoroughly. In some parts too cleaning teeth has to be done with boiled water. Often it is advisable to stay in a better class hotel because of the water, sanitation and food problems.

Because of malaria in Asia and other parts of the world, it is essential to take anti-malaria tablets to combat the disease. You will need advice from a travel agent, a missionary you know who has been in the malaria areas, and the federal health authorities. You may also need to be immunised against cholera, typhoid and even small pox. If you go to Africa it could be other diseases against which you need immunisation.

Asia generally

I have given a number of areas which need looking at healthwise, under the heading of Malaysia. Obviously, while some of these apply to Malaysia, not all do.

under Asia generally, there are customs which apply to some countries which one can come across. Among certain Indian people who wear
turbans, the head is sacred, and to touch a boy child of these people on the head is looked on with great disfavour. Also, in some Asian countries, the way a man sits on the platform in a meeting (I think by crossing his legs) is almost considered obscene. In India, it is discourteous to offer people food with the left hand, which hand is usually kept for menial and dirty jobs.

These things are not written to confuse the reader but to make him or she aware that they need to find out by talking to missionaries or officials, behaviour which is likely to offend. After all, the Scripture tells us that we are to give none offence, neither to the Jew, nor Gentile, nor the church of God.

The place of a woman

In some countries, the place of a woman, can be quite different from our own, and other western areas. It is essential to observe the customs in this regard.

Many of the poorer Asian Christians are quite generous towards visiting Christians and would literally give their last food to show courtesy.

Let us, as evangelists always seek to love these folk as Christ loved them and gave Himself for them. Customs change and things may seem strange, but these are only peripheral. It is not things that matter, it is people who do. I have always found God to be completely colour blind when it comes to dealing with folk, and completely without any class distinction in His saving grace. It is the way the Master went, should not the servant tread it still.

Some hints about soul-winning will not go astray either. If you are preaching to Hindus remember that the term 'born again' means something quite different to that person, than what it means to us. If you should say, 'You must be born again', the Hindu would possibly agree with you but from a reincarnation angle.

In Japan, the people are of such a courteous nature, often they could answer you in the way they think you would like them to. 'Will you give your heart to Jesus?' has been known to receive a ready 'Yes' answer. They are trying to please you.

Among strict Buddhists, I have known of young people who became Christians, and as soon as they were baptised, they were put out of their homes for good. To be baptised in some countries is a very dangerous thing to do. As evangelists, we who call others to complete commitment, should make sure before we preach, that we have that same kind of commitment lest we be found guilty of hypocrisy.

In Indonesia

While the laws about holding public meetings are strict in certain instances, if a church invites us to come and evangelise, we are able to evangelise Moslems, animists and other groups. An Indonesian said 'The farther we get away from Mecca, Moslems are more tolerant of other religions'. This does seem to be so.

What about the language difficulties?
Very often it is essential to speak through an interpreter. I will deal with these problems specifically later on in the book.

Trouble spots of the world

Places I have visited in my ministry such as Northern Ireland, Beirut, the Robber Villages of India, bring their own special difficulties with possible danger to our person as we minister. It is nice to find out quite a bit about these places from embassies, and other official departments which deal with these precautions and to find out what are the 'dos' and the 'do nots'.

Missioning in England and New Zealand

It is necessary to find out a little about the nature of their 'reserve' and notice cultural differences even between Australians and these friends. Some of them consider Australians brash. Make sure you avoid the bull in a china shot approach and respect your audience as an invited guest. Accent can be a bit of a problem too.

This chapter is not intended to cause you to be afraid to venture out. The modern-day evangelist may well ask, 'Who is sufficient for these things?'. Good. Undoubtedly he would reply, 'Our sufficiency is of God'.

Seek God's face, dear brother, and remember that if God be for us who can be against us (Romans 8:51). Therefore, go in God's name, take the necessary precautions, and may God go with you as you seek to sin would out of darkness into the glorious light.