

# ***How to Evangelize International Students (1)***

By Victor Beshir

Many think of overseas as the only place for missions. I have met many youths who dream of going to Africa or Mexico to evangelize. This is a good zeal, but I have shocking news for you. Did you know that every year there are about 500,000 students from all over the world study in USA. These half million students are some of the brightest and most open-minded students in their countries. Although, they mainly come to enrich themselves academically, they also come with a deep thirst for other things as well. They are interested in how we live in the western societies and what we believe in. They like to see how we live in our homes and how we deal with our spouses and children.

While some think of going overseas, God permits us to have people from overseas come to our cities and towns, and they're eager to contact us, as we will see later. This reminds me about what happened on the Pentecost day, when people from almost every nation on earth were in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles. St. Peter used the opportunity and evangelized people from all over the world with his sermon. As a result, 3000 people believed in Our Lord and got baptized (Acts 2). God gives us a similar opportunity by bringing half a million students from all over the world to study in USA. Additional big number of international students also study in Canada, Australia, and Europe. So, before thinking about going overseas, think of evangelizing the international citizens who already in your backyard.

Mr. Zufikar Al Bhutto, a former prime minister of Pakistan, the largest Muslim country in the world, had sent his daughter, Benazir Bhutto, to study in USA. Before her leaving to USA, he told her: "You will see many things that surprise you in America and some that may shock you. But I know you have the ability to adapt. Never forget that the money it costs to send you comes from our people. You owe them a debt, a debt that you can repay by using your education to better the lives of our people."

These words reveal the motivation of the international students and they also show the pressure they may have which required a lot of help from western people. Nine years later this young woman became the first lady in

Pakistan after her father had been assassinated. Now think, for a moment, about the opportunity the people around Benazir Bhutto could have had while she was in the USA. They could have given her a better introduction to American life than the one she probably had by watching television and movies. Think of the Christian ethics she could have learned that may impact a whole nation. Above all, think about a Christian person or a couple who could introduce her to a better understanding of Christianity—even if, at the end, she chooses not to believe in Christianity. She may have had good influence on how the Christian minorities live in Pakistan.

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While we dream of missionary work overseas, God already sends us some of the best people from other countries. If we evangelize them, they may become the best evangelism workers in their own countries. They may do much better job than the missionary workers who spend years to learn the languages, social life, customs, and other things in order to evangelize—and even after those missionaries learn all that—they may not be welcomed because they still consider strangers. In other words, God sends the international leaders of tomorrow to us in order to attract them to love of Christ and give them the necessary tools to become evangelism workers too. It was reported in an April 13, 1992 Time Magazine article about international students that USA receives students from 193 countries.

What I am saying about USA also applies to Canada, Europe, and Australia. So, if you are not in USA, do not think that this evangelism opportunity is only available in the USA. I think the evangelism of international students is a great field for all of us in the western countries, as you will see later.

Indeed, some of these students accepted Christianity while they were studying in USA. Here are some examples. Mr. Weiming Cao of China wrote, "I was a visiting scholar, and this September my wife went back to China. I had to move out of the house where we lived, and Dr. Jim and Mrs. Nancy Katekeru provided a house to me. When I lived with them, they told me much information about Christianity that makes sense to me and I made a decision to receive Jesus as my Savior. After that I felt peaceful and happy."<sup>1</sup>

"Mr. Bakht Singh, a Sikh man came from Northern India to study engineering in Canada. He met a Christian couple who reached out to him in love and friendship. They gave him a Bible and encouraged him to meet

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<sup>1</sup> - Dr. Tom Phillips, *The World at Your Door, Reaching International Students in Your Home, Church, and School*, Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, USA, 1997, page

other Christians. Through their help in Bible study, Mr. Singh became a Christian and when he returned home he started evangelism activities that led to establish over 700 churches in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nepal.”<sup>2</sup>

I could go on telling you about more successful evangelism stories, but the message is the same one; God already sends us some people who are thirsty to find the truth. They are waiting in your backyard. If you open your heart, you may not only attract them to the love of Christ, but you may, with the grace of God, turn some of them to great evangelism workers.

Most of these international students come with eagerness to have friendships with Americans and to get help with the language and in going around. Once a friendship starts, they are mostly willing to learn more about our faith. Remember, youth years are the years when a person is forming his/her identity and thoughts; the person is mostly in a searching mode for the meaning of life, religion, thoughts, and life style. Therefore, this is a golden opportunity for us in the western world to evangelize without having to go to any other countries.

### ***Where to find the international students?***

The answer is obvious; they are in universities and higher education institutions. If you are a student, then you already have international students in your college and you probably meet them every day. However, if you are not a student, what should you do to get in touch with international students?

There are a few ways. One is to find Coptic Students in your church and work with them as a team to evangelize those international students. Another way is to visit the campus of a local university or a higher institution. Most of the American universities have chapels for worship, students clubs, and magazines having different announcements of coming events. Some chapels’ pastors are willing to help you to start a friendship with those students. Attending one of the student clubs or participating in one of their events can help in getting in touch with some international students. Sometimes just by walking in a campus, you will find international students who you may approach and talk to.

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<sup>2</sup> - Dr. Tom Phillips, *The World at Your Door, Reaching International Students in Your Home, Church, and School*, Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, USA, 1997, page 31,32

**[[Uncle Victor, this part, the note, should be at the very end of the article.]]**

## ***The Needs of International Students:***

The needs of international students make them look for help, friendship, and hospitality. Their needs would be a good starting point of a relationship that would easily get into evangelism. Here're some of their needs:

- 1- They feel strangers and need help.
- 2- They lack some essential skills needed to live in a western society which make them eager to establish relationship with citizens of the country to learn these skills.
- 3- They need to learn and practice the language.
- 4- They have a high level of intellectuality which creates many unanswered questions in their mind. They look for answers.
- 5- They are eager to have a first-hand experience of the western life.
- 6- Mostly they're after new ideas, thoughts, and meaning of life. So, they are open to new thoughts.
- 7- As stranger, their life is empty. Therefore, they are touched by hospitality and finding someone who cares about them.
- 8- They need faithful friendship and warm families to give them the feeling of acceptance and to fill the vacuum occurred when they left behind warmth of their families and friends at home.
- 9- They need someone who can talk on their level and answer their deep questions which are related to different issues and questions. Some of these questions are what I call the eternal questions, which ask about man existence, the cosmos, evil and good, God's existence, morality, and the meaning of life.

## ***How to evangelize international students?***

Let me first say that you will find that evangelizing international students is much easier than evangelizing Americans, Canadians, Europeans, or Australians. How to approach the international students?

### **1- Prayers**

Prayer is one important tool that is mostly missing. We are eager to go and talk, but slow to first spend time in prayers. See what our Lord did; first He spent the first forty days before starting His public service in fasting and prayers (Matt 4). Then after that, while His disciples left to sleep, He went to the mountain and spent the whole night in prayers (Mark 6:46). We need to pray to God to open the doors and guide us to the people that He wants us to meet. There is a big difference between our own attempt to assign people and talk to them and when God sends us to someone. God knows hearts of people and their needs and He is the only One who can match their needs with the right servant. God has

a plan for each person and we need to follow His guidance. Just try it before you start a service, if you pray long enough, you will see the hands of God in every step. He will arrange almost everything in an amazing way. Mostly, He will give you the right directions to follow. The person of prayers follows God and just watches for His eminent work.

## 2- **Be Ready to Serve**

The Lord gives us Himself as an example when He says, "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matt 20: 29) Also, before instituting the Eucharist, He washed His disciples' feet. To wash a person's feet, you need to be physically in a level that is lower than the person's position. So, the Lord lowered Himself before His disciples and washed their feet. To be a good servant of God, you need to learn how to wash feet of others, which means you need to be ready to lower yourself and serve the needs of others.

Evangelizing international students starts with serving their needs, whatever these needs are. You serve with love, as if you serve the Lord Himself, as He taught us "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." (Matt 25: 40) What a pleasure it is if we serve the Lord. Whenever you serve an international student think of Jesus as if He was a stranger in our world. Whatever you offer this stranger, the student, your offer is directly given to the Lord. What a pleasure it is to show hospitality to the Lord and to open our homes to help those people to overcome the lonely feelings of being in a strange land.

A young couple came from India and found a Christian family who offered them help in a time when one of them was sick and hospitalized. The father of the young wife sent a thank you letter to the Christian family saying, "I never met a Christian who acts as sister or as a brother before. I never thought a Hindu could be attached with love to a Christian until my daughter told me of how much she loves you and how much help you gave her." Service is the unspoken language of love. Service with love is the whispering language that is heard louder in the hearts of those who receive the service than any loudspeaker.

Some people think that to serve God is to teach in Sunday school or to preach to others. But before all of the teaching and preaching, serving others should come first. The lesson of kneeling down and washing the feet should be done first and should continue to accompany the service of teaching.

### **3- Offer Yourself as a Good Friend**

First, you offer your help whatever this help could be and as a result of your help the person opens his/her heart. Now, it is the time to offer your friendship. The first duty of friendship is to be available to your friends whenever they need you. The second duty is to spend time with your friends. But, before these two duties, you need to open your heart with a Christian love which will help you fulfill the duties of friendship with joy. Another aspect of friendship is sharing of a meal or thoughts. For youth, I would rather have this help and friendship come from a group of good Christian servants, not a single person. The group would better serve the needs. The group will also allow the international student to have choices of who to mingle with. If you are the only servant around, then I would rather have a male student evangelize a male international student or a female evangelizes a female international student. The reason for this is the culture the international students comes from; mostly she would be more comfortable and more open spiritually to deal with a female like her than to deal with a man.

### **4- Preach With Deeds**

Your first evangelism step should be without words. The step is to show real Christianity in action. Let the person see the good Christianity written not by words, but with great love, care, friendship, patience, sacrifice, humbleness, purity, joy, endurance, grace, tolerance, giving, respect to all, wisdom, speaking in clean and respectful language, and meekness.

You do not know how much you will shake this person when he/she sees you dealing with love and respect in your home, especially if he/she comes from a family or a country where the father is the dominant power and he has no respect to others in the family and considers women and children as a second class or as an object in the house. Put aside the propaganda you sometimes hear about other religions, because the reality is deadly. I lived in societies where the wife has no rights and the man can say one word, as "you're divorced," and she has to leave the house immediately, and the husband is allowed to marry more than one wife and she has to accept. For students coming from such background seeing Christian home full of love and respect is a heaven, and without doubt is on a greater level of humanity.

I visited a country where a person will not invite his own brother to visit him because of fear that the brother could be attracted to his wife and the wife could leave him to go with his brother. This was not one person or few; rather it was the feeling of a whole country. Can you think of the

shock you will give to a person coming from such a country when you gladly invite him/her to your home to discover the deep loyalty in your home and the great trust you have in other members of your household?

A friend of mine was working in an African country and met a French teacher who attracted many to the Christian faith. He started to wonder how the teacher could do that in a country where its majority of people, if not all, are fanatics. When he visited the teacher's home, he noticed that his home is open to many native people and he rarely eats alone; there are always native guests eating with him and his family. This shocked my friend. He asked himself, how the teacher can welcome such people to his home, and how he shares a meal with them. Until that time my friend did not fully understand the meaning of service of God. He thought the service is to teach and to love only clean, healthy, and high social class of people.

Many things could shock the international students and prepare the way for evangelism with words. The most important thing is whenever the student asks about an explanation, be ready to say this is what Christianity taught us and that Christ showed us the way of practical love. This would lead to what you ask for, and more importantly He gives us the grace to do it; and without His grace man is unable to aspire to this level.