

ENTERTAINING ANGELS

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"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

I recently became a foreigner in my own country. This is how it happened. I was invited to go away with a group of twenty or so Chinese Christian students in order to speak to them about Jesus. We went to a small property about 100 kilometres from Sydney, and stayed for 2½ days. Naturally while we were there, we followed a number of Chinese ways. The two most significant were that Chinese language was spoken throughout, and that we ate Chinese food.

Now this meant that I was a foreigner. I cannot speak the Chinese language (Cantonese in this case), and, like most Australians, I think of Chinese food as being a delightful take-away, to be enjoyed every so often. We even had fried rice served up for breakfast!

Actually, I enjoyed the food. The most difficult thing was having to sit through lengthy meetings without understanding a word of what was said. The group was a lively one, and there were very many jokes; every so often people would laugh uproariously. All I could do was smile to show that I wasn't made of granite. It was easy to see how people could become lonely and homesick when they changed countries.

This experience is especially relevant to Australia. Since 1945, hundreds of thousands of migrants have settled amongst us. Many could speak English, but many could not. They have not come as tourists, they have come as settlers. How well have we received them?

On the whole, probably not very well. I can think of a Spanish friend of mine, for example,

whose father brought his family here some years ago. At first, his father tried to be friendly with English-speaking Australians, but all he received was mockery or apathy. It was not long before he gave up trying to learn English or become too Australian. Now if this was the fate of a European settler, how do our Asian migrants succeed? I have enough experience to know that they are often met with suspicion, ignorance, prejudice and disinterest.

These things ought not to be so. When I was with my Chinese friends I was struck by their thoughtfulness. Usually the person I sat beside gave me a quiet interpretation of what was being said; they took pains to see that I had a knife and fork to eat with, although they used only forks. They even produced a toaster so that I could start the day with something like my usual breakfast. In short, I was met with kindness on every side. They understood the great principle that the stranger and foreigner deserves more, not less of our courtesy and attention, and that it is a great test for any nation to see how well they welcome the outsider.

It is, however, especially significant for the Church. 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers' says the Bible, 'for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.' For those who belong to Christ, the old barriers of race and culture should no longer be of importance. Every congregation ought to afford the same loving welcome to the stranger, and should itself break down barriers to acceptance. I believe that this is already so in many Christian congregations; clearly there is also much need for more. How effective is your Church with the stranger in your midst? How well do you entertain the angels?

whose father brought his family here some years ago. At first, his father tried to be friendly with English people, but all he received was mockery or scorn. It was not long before he gave up trying to learn English or become an Australian. Now it was the last of a European matter, how do you know anyone succeeded? I have enough experience to know that they are often not with sympathy, tolerance, prejudice and discrimination.

These things ought not to be so. When I was with my Chinese friends I was struck by their thoughtfulness. Usually the person I was with would tell me that I had a long way to go to become an Australian.

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH
is broadcast every Sunday at
7.10 p.m. over Radio 2CH

Copies of these weekly broadcasts may
be obtained (\$5 per year posted) by
writing to The Christian Faith, c/-
2CH, York Street, Sydney N.S.W. 2000

31/8/80 35/80

It is, however, especially important for the Church to not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, says the Bible. For there are many who are strangers and need the love of the Church. The Church should be a place of love and acceptance. Every stranger who comes to the Church should be treated as a brother or sister. I believe that this is already so in many Christian communities, clearly there is also much need for more. How effective is your Church with the stranger in your midst? How well do you entertain the stranger?