

## **'I Was a Stranger and You Didn't Take Me In'**

**Thought for the Day. BBC Radio Ulster: Friday 19th May 2006: John Dunlop, former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland**

Last Tuesday I was at the Annual Meeting of an organization called "Embrace" which concerns itself with immigrants living in Northern Ireland. One of their leaflets has the following words on the front of it "I was a stranger ..." which phrase is part of a longer phrase from one of the parables of Jesus "I was a stranger and you took me in ..." and in so far as that is a characteristic of a hospitable and generous life style, then we are citizens of the kingdom that Jesus was concerned about.

But if it is the case that our life style is selfish and excluding then the flip side of that same phrase reads "I was a stranger and you didn't take me in..." so you don't know what the kingdom is about, your friendship skills are awful and so ... "you're fired".

Immigration issues are all over the papers, parliament, radio and TV. The Prime Minister thought Charles Clarke wasn't up to the job and he was fired, and the people responsible for keeping tabs on illegal immigrants haven't a notion how many there are. I was told the other night by someone who knows more about this than I do, that at present there are people living and working in Northern Ireland drawn from 120 different nationalities ... that's what the man said, one hundred and twenty. I didn't know there were that many nationalities but here they are amongst us, many of them, strangers. I am told that more than 30 languages are now spoken in Newry.

Many of these strangers can't speak English; can't read the papers; don't listen to Radio Ulster; don't know that you have to be careful where you wear a Rangers or Celtic shirt; can't tell the doctor where the pain is; can't open a bank account, want to get their children into classes which teach English as another language only to find that with the cut backs the classes have been shut down.

How many are there? No-one knows. Many are here legally. In the last three years over 45,000 have registered for National Insurance. Most are younger men and women; enterprising, hard working, making a very significant contribution to this society; They do all kinds of jobs. Labourers, doctors, plumbers, nurses, plasterers, factory workers, soft ware engineers, academics. Without them, factories would shut; hospitals couldn't cope. Some do jobs none of us want to do. Without them we may not be able to build the Titanic Quarter.

Are these strangers happy amongst us? Some are and some are not. Some are afraid to go out. Some get shouted at. Some get attacked. Some slip out of the house at midnight to shop.

It would be a pity, if at the end of the day, Jesus said to us "See you people in Northern Ireland, you are an inhospitable crowd 'I was a stranger and you didn't take me in' and so, as far as the Kingdom of God is concerned ... your fired" Well now ... there's a thought.