

the TREASURY

MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF WALES

From North America's 1st Protestant Prayer to the 46th President of the USA

Two of the articles this month feature past and present highlights in the story of the United States of America. In recent years two of our ministers, Revd Adrian Pratt and Revd Richard Evans have settled there. Current events have revealed a nation in deep need of healing.

Reflections on the Election

by Revd Adrian Pratt

Four years ago, Donald Trump was elected president. The church I was then serving had a tradition of sharing joys and concerns before we went to a time of prayer. A lady in the choir shared what a joy it was to be with many of her sisters marching in Washington DC the previous day to protest the election of a president who had used derogatory language about women.

No sooner had she sat down than a gentleman at the back stood up and declared, in a rather loud voice, "And now that God has put a new president in place we must get down on our knees and support him." I did not ask for any more joys and concerns! At the point the atmosphere, to put it mildly, had become a little tense.

Such was a prefiguring of the tone that has existed, not just in churches, but in families, in gatherings and in meeting places of many kinds. Without a doubt the years of Donald Trump's presidency have been the most divisive four years I have witnessed since relocating, in 1996, to the U.S. I would personally describe him

as the presidential equivalent of Marmite. People love him or hate him. None appear indifferent.

The recent election has resulted in a situation where former vice-president Joe Biden is the president elect and Donald Trump is refusing to concede defeat. Since long before the election President Trump had been raising concerns about the integrity of the voting system. (Although only in those states he was projected to lose.) At the time of writing he tweeted in capital letters "I WON THE ELECTION."

As of today, he had received 73,126,487 votes, while Joe Biden had received 78,764,266. In the U.S

system the final determination is determined through the electoral college. Trump had a tally of 232 while Biden had 290. The magic number to be the next president is 270. Yet still the president is urging his supporters to protest and claim that widespread voter fraud took place.



The four years of his Presidency have been peppered with derogatory comments and tweets, a describing of everything that did not fit in his agenda as being fake news and a coming and going of people in his orbit that has been unlike anything seen before. His supporters applaud such actions, praising him for his business-like skills and his ability to "Drain the swamp," that the political elite had created. They are prepared to turn a blind eye to his more excessive outbursts claiming that is just the way he is.

The role of evangelical religion has been a decisive one in his ability to gain support. A Baptist ministerial colleague in West Virginia (a Trump stronghold) had been sending me in the run up to this current election video clips of pastors 'prophesying' that Trump was ordained by God to be the next President and that God would use him to bring great blessings on the nation.

But that was not the key issue. The real decisive issue was his views on abortion. To simplify the issue (as my West Virginia colleague was happy to do) Republicans are against abortion. Therefore, they are the righteous party. Democrats are baby killers and a vote for them is a vote for evil. The irony is that prior to running for office Donald Trump appears to have taken a pro-choice rather than a pro-life position.

There have been so many

other issues to talk about. Immigration. Climate change. Gun control. The economy. Racial issues that have highlighted the tension between the police and the black community. But in conversations with those who identify as representing the religious right, it comes back to abortion. The reality is that there are a whole variety of views among both Republicans and Democrats on sanctity of life issues. But such nuances do not fit the current political narrative.

In 2020 Coronavirus (or 'China Virus' as the president chose to call it) arrived on the scene. The current administration has not handled the crisis well. Denial. False predictions. A questioning of scientific assertions. A politicising of the issue that has resulted in many not wearing a mask as an act of declaring their freedom. The death toll continues to rise. Newly released news of a possible vaccination offers a ray of hope, but it is early days.

As of November 2020 a new President, Joe Biden has been elected. His task is going to be monumental. There are millions of people still supporting Donald Trump's claim that the election was rigged. Tens of thousands of them marched this past weekend in Washington DC and clearly voiced their views. This is more than just an objection. It is a part of their spiritual belief

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system and a vital part of their understanding of what makes America great.

The years ahead are going to be ones that define the nation's role, not only as a people, but also on the international stage. At stake are issues such as climate change, human rights, and global poverty. It's going to be quite a ride!

None of the above should diminish the significance of the election of Kamala Harris. She will be the United States' first female vice president and the highest-ranking female elected official in U.S. history. Harris will also be the first Asian-American and the first African-American Vice President. At a time of deep division, one hopes that her voice will be heard, and perspective welcomed. I am currently living in a nation in deep need of healing and I hope the voices of those who for too long have been marginalised will be a huge contribution that process.

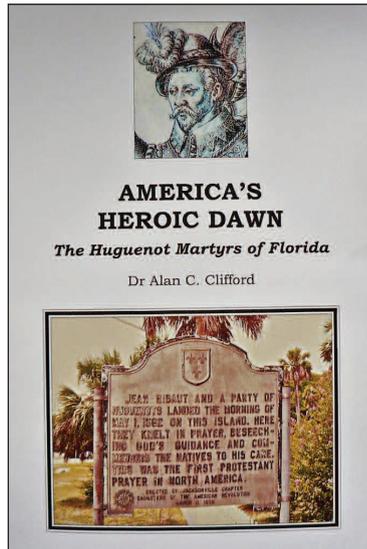
The political progress of any nation tends to swing from left to right and back again. I personally still believe that God holds the whole world in God's hands. That does not mean I will not speak out on issues that Scripture holds dear. The Kingdom manifesto of Jesus was delivered at the start of His ministry (Luke 4:18-19). *'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'*

Identifying how the political task can engender such a radical transformation of society remains an issue for discussion and often seems far removed from current political rhetoric. In an age demanding instant answers it is way too easy to lose sight of the bigger picture. I am thankful we are called to place our hope in Jesus Christ, not any political leader or party. I will continue to support in prayer the work of those God called to the political arena and encourage all people of faith to do the same.

Adrian Pratt is minister of Bridgehampton Presbyterian Church, NY. His article was written on 16th November 2020.

America's heroic dawn

The Huguenot Martyrs of Florida



by Dr Alan C. Clifford

A largely-forgotten history reminds us that the first attempted Christian settlement in North America was by Huguenots seeking a haven from persecution in France. This follows the era of Christopher Columbus whose first adventures to the New World date from 1492, soon followed by the Cabots from England a few years later. Not to forget the English Jamestown settlement of 1607, the Huguenot adventure occurred sixty years before the Pilgrim Fathers founded the Plymouth plantation in 1620.

This was the era of Iberian domination, when Spain was the world's 'super power'. With the blessing of the Pope, Spain and Portugal laid claim to the New World. Their brutal Central and South American conquests brought justifiable opprobrium upon the cruel fascism of King Philip II and his ilk. Predictably, war was inevitable as less-compliant European nations resisted this evil and expanding tyranny. The Protestant Reformation fuelled the animosity as anti-Catholic sailors from Normandy found courage to challenge Spanish arrogance. One form of resistance was to attack the Spanish treasure ships bringing gold and silver from Mexico, Peru and elsewhere. Outraged by the cruel horrors of the Spanish Inquisition, hot-headed French pirates thought nothing

of enriching themselves at Spain's expense. They were the scourge of the Spanish Main. The Spaniards called these high-seas raiders *corsarios luteranos*, i.e. 'Lutheran pirates'. However, among these 'Protestant adventurers' were more noble souls with more honourable aspirations, properly called 'Calvinists'.

Closely acquainted with John Calvin, the Huguenot leader Admiral Gaspar Coligny sent Jean Ribault of Dieppe—an eminent sailor of strong Protestant convictions—on an expedition of discovery in 1562. This high-principled man was no pirate, as one historian implies. So, after a voyage of eight



weeks, the explorers found a river estuary off the coast of Florida. Landing on 1 May, Ribault and his sailors gave thanks to God for safe passage, commending also the native Timucuan people to God's mercy.

We fell to the ground a little way from [the native people], to call upon the name of God, to beseech him to continue still His goodness towards us, and bring to the knowledge of our Saviour Christ this poor people.

This was the first Protestant prayer in North America.

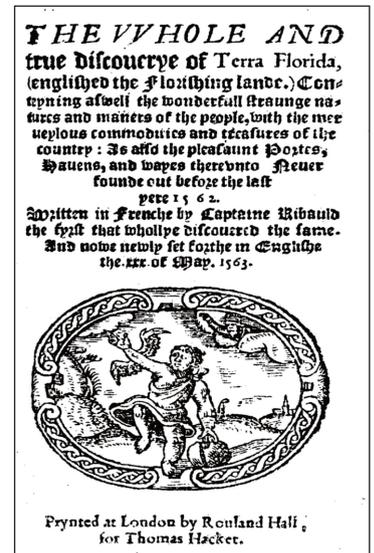
It reflects the missionary dimension of Calvin's usual end-of-sermon prayer, that God might 'grant His grace, not only to us, but also to all people and nations of the earth, bringing back all poor ignorant souls from the miserable bondage of error and darkness, to the right way of salvation'. Ribault and his Huguenot brethren knew – as Calvin expressed it – that 'The advent of Christ was 'the time of Reformation' [Heb. 9: 10-11] – doubtless for the 1st and

16th centuries – and that, 'the figures of the [Old] Testament' receiving 'their fulfilment in Him, ... the whole world became an enlarged Mount Zion upon the advent of Christ'.

Naming the river 'the River of May' (now the St John's – formerly Spanish San Juan – near modern Jacksonville), Ribault claimed the territory for France by setting up a monument in the name of the French King Charles IX. After further peaceful contacts with the native people, the Huguenot explorers sailed further up the coast to modern South Carolina where another monument was set up. Leaving a settlement at Charlesfort, Ribault returned to France to report on his discoveries and organise another expedition.

However, finding France in the throes of the tragic religious wars, he took refuge in England. Queen Elizabeth warmly welcomed him at first. After suspecting that this French patriot might be a threat to our security, she briefly imprisoned him.

While in the Tower, Ribault wrote his account (to his Huguenot master, Gaspar Coligny). This was 1563. It was



translated and published in English the same year. A noteworthy fact, this was a year before Shakespeare was born! The anonymous translator's English – doubtless influenced by Tyndale and the Geneva Bible (1560) – is very clear and vivid.

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forgotten as the reader feels gripped by the narrative, replete with colourful accounts of the local flora and fauna, and the native Americans.

In April 1564, Ribault's second-in-command René Laudonnière sailed for Florida on a second enterprise. Their arrival in June began with worship:

I commanded a trumpet to be sounded, that being assembled we might give God thanks for our happy and favourable arrival. There we sang a psalm of thanksgiving unto God, beseeching him that it would please him of his grace to continue his accustomed goodness towards his poor servants, and aid us in all our enterprises, that all might turn to his glory and the advancement of our king.

These enterprises enraged Catholic King Philip II who, sanctioned by the Pope, claimed America for Spain. Regarding the French as interlopers, the fact that they were Protestants made them more intolerable. So, in 1565, not before a Cuban expedition under Captain Hernando de Manrique de Rojas destroyed Charlesfort (in May 1564), the Pope commissioned devout Catholic Admiral Pedro Menéndez de Avilés of Asturias to rid Florida of the Huguenot menace.

Menéndez' orders were to 'leave not a man alive. Inflict on the heretics an exemplary punishment which all of their kind will remember forever'. His hatred was also fired by the fact that the Huguenots were determined to free the inhabitants of Cuba who had been enslaved by the Spaniards.

Despite kind help from the natives, internal problems and a delay of supplies from France – then in the grip of the first religious war – meant that Fort Caroline was not looking a viable settlement. As desperation was setting in, ships under the command of Sir John Hawkins appeared in August, 1565.

Though offered a passage back to Europe, the French decided to accept a ship and supplies from the Protestant English (in exchange for most of their cannon). Plans to abandon Fort Caroline ended when

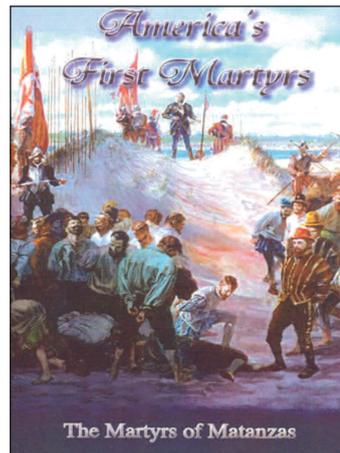
Ribault's second expedition brought supplies and reinforcements from France. Then, hard on the heels of Ribault's fleet, Menéndez and his heresy hunters arrived off the Florida coast. Establishing a base at San Agustín (named after the Feast Day of St Augustine), he sailed north to oppose the French. After an inconclusive stand-off in the St John's estuary, Menéndez returned to his base. Ribault and 500 of his men then sailed to attack San Agustín. However, lashed by a hurricane, shipwreck south of St Augustine rendered Ribault's counter-offensive futile.

A fortnight later, since there were few defenders, the Spaniards then attacked Fort Caroline over land. 'At dawn on 20 September 1565, Menéndez and his men struck at the fort, inside which were women and children, all the sick, including René Laudonnière, and a handful of armed guards. Above 143 massacred bodies Menéndez placed a notice: **'I do this, not as to Frenchmen, but as to Lutherans'**. Besides taking supplies and ammunition, Protestant Bibles, books and Reformed symbols were destroyed. Laudonnière and a few others escaped to tell the tale. Sailing in his ship the *Greyhound*, Laudonnière landed in Wales, receiving succour from people in Swansea before continuing back to France. He later wrote an account of Ribault's voyages, and his martyrdom – an event we now relate.

Tragically, with his vessels beached, Ribault and his men were eventually caught in the cruel grip of Menéndez. A first group of survivors of his sunk and grounded ships tried to make their way overland to Fort Caroline, not knowing what had happened there. Scouts from St Augustine observed them. Soon Menéndez led 50 soldiers south to Anastasia Island. Surrounding the worn and bedraggled Huguenots, he offered to spare their lives if they would surrender. 'Battered by the sea and hungry, they agreed...' After ordering their hands tied behind their backs, the Spaniard ferried his prisoners across the swamps to a place of execution. Soon, 111 Huguenots lay dead in the sand. A second group headed by Ribault appeared a few days later. They too were slain at the

same location. It was later named 'Matanzas' (Spanish for 'slaughters'). In all, nearly 250 died.

What is truly remarkable is the way all these French Protestants, without exception, maintained their profession of the Reformed Faith. Over four



thousand miles from home, in an unfamiliar foreign land, they did not capitulate in the face of death. What a testimony to God's all-sufficient sustaining Grace! A Spaniard named Solís de Meras was an eyewitness of the massacre:

[Menéndez], [took] Jean Ribault behind the sand hills, among the bushes,...he asked if they were Catholics or Lutherans, or if any of them desired to make confession. Jean Ribault replied "that all who were there were of the new religion," and he began to repeat the psalm, 'Domine! Memento mei'; and having finished, he said, "that from dust they came and to dust they must return, and that in twenty years, more or less, he must render his final account; and that [Menéndez] might do with them as he chose."

We must note what Jean Ribault recited (or possibly chanted). Charles Bennett remarks that 'the psalm that Ribault recited before the dagger was thrust into his body was the 132nd Psalm which begins, "Lord, remember David"; but Ribault began it, according to an eyewitness, with "Lord, remember me." The psalm is highly significant. As David – anxious to build the Temple later built by Solomon – was concerned to find a resting place for the Ark of the Covenant and the pure worship of God, so Coligny, Ribault and others desired to find a place in the New World to worship God

in spirit and truth, far from the superstitious and persecuting religion of Rome. Sadly, pursuing them across the Atlantic, their enemies gave them no peace, even in distant Florida.

Thus on that fateful September day in 1565, Ribault and around 250 others were America's first martyrs.

Trusting to the certain purposes of their Sovereign God, they knew – despite their fears – that their struggles and sufferings for Christ would never be in vain, a truth gloriously stated by John Calvin in his commentary on Psalm 132:

The greater that fear which seizes upon us when exposed to aggression from enemies, the more are we sensibly awakened to take hold of divine help. The passage teaches us that the Church and people of God will never enjoy such peace on earth as altogether to escape being assaulted by the variety of enemies which Satan stirs up for their destruction. It is enough to have it declared, upon divine authority, that their attempts shall be unsuccessful, and that they will retire eventually with ignominy and disgrace.

And so it proved to be, as expressed by American poet James Russell Lowell (1819-91), opponent of slavery and other injustices:

Careless seems the great avenger,
History's pages but record,
One death-grapple in the darkness
'Twixt old systems and the Word;
Truth for ever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne -
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow,
Keeping watch above His own.

Roche remarks that Menéndez 'then set sail for Spain to make his report to Philip II. Behind him, at the St Augustine supply depot, a strong force of Spaniards stayed on. They kept up the settlement at Fort Caroline also, renaming it San Mateo. Slowly, St Augustine grew to become the first Spanish settlement in what is now the United States of

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America... **but it was not the first European settlement, though reference works insist that it was**.

The 'Matanzas' slaughter created widespread outrage in France, and not only among Protestant people who (in view of Romans 12: 19, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay' says the Lord') dare not contemplate revenge. Remarkably, it was a patriotic French Catholic named Dominique de Gourgues who led an expedition of retribution in 1567. It was an issue of simple justice. He attacked the Spanish-held Fort Caroline – then renamed Fort San Mateo – in April 1568. He and his men were helped by the native Americans who had earlier become friendly towards the Huguenots. They too had suffered at the hands of the Spaniards who had robbed them and stolen their women. Unlike the Spanish conquerors, the French had not come to the New World *only* for gold and silver. The former were known as the 'bad white tribe', the Huguenots as the 'good white tribe'. The native Timucuan had clearly learned the Reformed Christian Faith, lustily singing psalms and songs taught them by their Huguenot friends.

When De Gourgues' attack came, the half-drunk Spaniards were surprised during their siesta. Putting them to the sword, De Gourgues placed a notice over their corpses: '**Not as to Spaniards, but as to Traitors, Robbers and Murderers**'. On his return to La Rochelle, the Huguenot community expressed gratitude to the instrument of Divine justice. The Spanish government then demanded that De Gourgues be hanged. Ever the wily politician, the Queen Mother Catherine de Medicis – while agreeing that France would no longer permit expeditions to territories claimed by Spain – did not oblige them by pursuing the French hero.

After another mission of conquest to America in 1572 (the year of the French St Bartholomew Massacre, 24 August), Menéndez was recalled by Philip II to prepare for the 'Invincible Armada'. He died at Santander in 1574. More justice was meted out when Sir Francis Drake bombarded St Augustine in 1586. Spain felt Drake's wrath again in the defeat of the Armada in 1588.

So, the French Huguenot mission to the New World failed through relentless Roman Catholic persecution. They were thus prevented from setting up colonies of their own, as they might have done. As in Europe (let the horrors of the French St Bartholomew Massacre of 1572 never be forgotten), so in Florida, **the Reformed people of France were called to absorb the hate-inspired energy of their enemies**. This enabled the English and others to plant permanent settlements in North America years later. Following the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685), Huguenot settlements eventually found a place in the Carolinas, Virginia and elsewhere. Among thousands of other Americans, George Washington had Huguenot ancestry. In view of a tragic later history, had Providence determined otherwise, the early Huguenot policy towards slavery might have bequeathed a happier legacy than became the case in the USA.

While not unknown to earlier historians, this important history was resurrected and thoroughly documented by Florida historian and Democratic congressman, Charles E. Bennett (1910-2003). **A man of strong Christian conviction, he was clearly inspired by the faith and fortitude of the Florida Huguenots. His enthusiasm led to the creation of the present replica of Fort Caroline.**

In 1954 Charles Bennett sponsored a bill that added the words 'In God We Trust' to all US currency. Due to his influence, a code of ethics for Government personnel—nicknamed 'The Ten Commandments'—was adopted in 1958. He sought to glorify God in all things. Charles Bennett published several books on Huguenot history.

As faithful Christians in the USA begin to face opposition from hostile elements, and while apostate American Calvinists are embracing Roman Catholicism, public-spirited Protestant Christians like Sara Ballenger are finding inspiration from the events researched by Charles Bennett. Sara's booklet on the Matanzas massacre (excellent despite its brevity) is now into a second edition (2010). The significance of all this for our own testimony is surely obvious.

In somewhat secular mode,

EDITORIAL

Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them



Following the death of the Revd Keith Hawkins earlier this month we were reminded of a meeting of the Association in the East in the early 1980's when the question of suitable provision of care for elderly Christians was raised by a young minister of the time. Adding his support to the concern that had been raised, Keith spoke of his own experience in Prestatyn some years earlier that had resulted in the establishment of two Homes under the auspices of Abbeyfield. Their motto, 'Making Time for Older People' is as pertinent now as then, especially as the number of elderly people increases significantly in Wales and the rest of the UK.

Covid-19 has created immense difficulties for those who run Care Homes. Occupants who have made

these places their home have found themselves effectively imprisoned for most of 2020, denied any form of meaningful visits from those who love them.

The *Spectator* columnist, Matthew Parris speaks for so many in observing that 'It is shameful how we have treated our elderly'.

The fifth commandment about honouring father and mother is a life-long obligation, and it has been heart-warming to see and hear about grown-up children and grand-children making determined efforts to visit elderly relatives. Often-times this has only been through the partially open window of a care home, or in a specially created visiting pod.

As with churches and chapels, a more positive attitude is required from those who issue guidelines. After nine months, Care Home residents and their families are justified in expecting improved arrangements for meeting one another. Often overlooked, this venerable section of society deserve better, even in Covid-19 times.

Roche concludes that 'As individuals, sacrificed in fire, tortured on the rack, exiled, the Huguenots lost—theirs was the 'predestined' fate of vanguards. But those who survived nurtured among us the ideal of personal freedom with responsibility;...whenever, with each generation, we fight to keep alive the rights our forefathers won for us in blood ..., we fight once again the battle of the Huguenots. Our triumphs are theirs.

More 'Christianly', W. Carlos Martyn wrote:

The object of the Huguenots was the demolition of idols, the purification of the sanctuary, the reinauguration of primitive Christianity; to bring man to God through the divine Redeemer, the 'one Mediator', by the abolition of an impious, mediatorial priest-caste, and the promulgation of the golden truth which Luther reaffirmed, and which Calvin echoed, 'justification by faith' in Christ, the invocation of His sole intercession at the heavenly bar.

While Sara Ballenger warns us that the current reality is nothing to be complacent about, that the beneficiaries of Huguenot heroism are betraying their noble heritage, Martyn's Victorian conclusion still points us in the right direction (despite 150 years of subsequent decline):

Standing in the sunlight of the nineteenth century, the age of unfettered lips, of myriad churches, of open Bibles, whose great heart throbs with that love of God which is 'perfect liberty', who shall say that the Huguenots have not grandly performed their work? Let each of us reverently thank God for the light of their example; let us determine to be worthy of the past, and the apostles of a sublimer future.

All in all, the testimony of the Florida Huguenots should never be forgotten. Indeed, with thanksgiving to God, we remember these faithful servants of Christ, of whom 'the world was not worthy' (Hebrews 11: 38)

A Personal Memory of the Revd Adrian Pugh Williams B.A., B.D., M.Th.



by Revd Roger Ellis Humphreys (Tregaron)

Adrian Pugh Williams was born on 13th November 1945 at Llai Hall Farm, Wrexham, to Dorothy May and Ellis Wynne Williams. The family later moved to Abergele where Mr Williams served as headmaster at Ysgol Dinorben. Thus, Adrian received his primary and secondary education in that town, going thereafter to the University College of North Wales, Bangor, to study Welsh, History and Languages. This was followed by four years at the United Theological College, Aberystwyth, preparing to serve as a minister in the Presbyterian Church of Wales. He was amongst the first to be awarded an M.Th. degree by the University of Wales.

He was ordained in September 1972 at Maengwyn chapel, Machynlleth. It was at Aberystwyth that we came to know one another. I pay tribute, therefore, to one who was a friend and colleague from college days to the end of our working lives in the PCW (1972 - 2020). I therefore give thanks for a steady and warmhearted friend over all the years.

He met Nan in 1965 in the Student Sunday School Class at Twrgwyn chapel, Bangor. They were married on 1st August 1970 at Capel Mawr, Denbigh with the Revd Cynwil Williams, Revd Isaac Jones, Revd W.H. Williams (Adrian's uncle) and Revd Richard Lloyd (Nan's great uncle) officiating. Their children Menai and Hedd were born in 1974 and 1976. Our families supported each other along the way, and Adrian delighted in the life of his own family all his days.

He entered his first pastorate at Llandrillo, near Corwen in 1972, which comprised Hermon, Llandrillo, and Bethel, Cynwyd, before the addition of Saron, Llandderfel, later on. He moved to serve the pastorate at Blaenau Ffestiniog in 1977 where he remained until 2004, his longest period of

service in one place. There he worked with the churches at Peniel (Ffestiniog), Bethesda (Manod), and Tabernacl and Maenofferen in the town. After the closure of Tabernacl and Maenofferen, Bowydd and the English chapel in the centre of town were added. After Peniel chapel closed, Gorffwysfa, Penrhyndeudraeth, and Croesor became part of his pastorate.

In 2004, he decided to aim for the sea at Aberystwyth and spend time in the company of St. David's, Bath Street, until Adrian retired at the close of 2012. He continued to go about preaching until the end, and in 2020 with its Lockdown periods, he mastered the art of holding services through the medium of Zoom. Although his health was by then weakened, he would not refuse the call to go out in the name of His Lord!

He was longtime Clerk to Presbytery of Gorllewin Meirionnydd, and served as Secretary to the Ecumenical Panel of the Presbyterian Church of Wales for many years, travelling widely to Norway, Harare and Buenos Aires to meetings of the World Council of Churches. He made three visits to India: once to open a library in memory of the late husband of Mrs Margaret Jones (St David's), namely the Revd Basil Jones, who had done mission work in Mizoram. And afterwards to Shillong to preach in the church where his uncle, the Revd W. H. Williams did mission work in Aizawl. He served on the working party of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, the Free Church Federal Council, Enfys, Cytun: Churches together in Wales, Waunfawr Cytun Committee, and he was secretary of Aberystwyth Christian Aid for several years – amongst other responsibilities! Through his A-level examination, Adrian became qualified in German, and he liked to speak that language. He would listen to the Sunday morning church service in German and other relevant

programmes, thanks to the satellite dish on the side of the house. He was a man of wide horizons!

History interested him and he was in his element sharing his knowledge with others, not least his own children. A current project of his was to research the effect of the coming of the train from Ruabon to Barmouth on the social and religious life of the time. And yet, he also studied the works of R. S. Thomas, Gwenallt, John Spong and others, quoting widely from them over the years.

He faced up to one of the challenges of a minister's life – namely the need to keep fit and healthy – by riding his bicycle. He enjoyed going on Saturday afternoons from Festiniog down to Harlech – even though he had to face the return journey up those hills! The advantage of the bike, however, was that he could stop to talk to anyone that he knew. The people of 'Stiniog and Aber later on, came to know him and his bike very well!

And there is a central tenet of Adrian's ministry – his service to people. Adrian was Chaplain at the Memorial Hospital in

Festiniog for years – visiting every Monday afternoon to talk to the patients and their families and to play hymns from memory on the dayroom piano.

So we come full circle back to our days at Aberystwyth Theological College. Adrian and I were the organists for our regular services at the Prys Memorial chapel there. We both believed that our talents were suited to promoting and sustaining the life of our chapels and their people. We had fun exercising our gifts in this practical way time after time, throughout Wales. In the chapel next door to the manse at Y Manod, Adrian (with myself too at times) would sit at the pipe organ feeling the lovely sound lifting our spirits and renewing us for our calling. Worship, service, and commitment – enjoying it, despite the religious climate of the time.

One of our children shall have the last word: "That laugh is gone!"

Adrian Pugh Williams, born 13th November 1945, died 22nd October 2020.

emails to the Editor

From Revd Jonathan Kirk, Haverfordwest

I would like to offer a different view on the government asking churches to close for lockdown periods than the one presented by the ministers who petitioned the Welsh government to complain on the matter (ref: November *Treasury*). The government of Wales, as I am sure everyone would agree, are faced with a very difficult task in attempting to control the spread of COVID-19 in order to prevent the hospitals of our country becoming overwhelmed. And yet more than that, to control a virus which if gets 'out of control' could cause many many more deaths. In light of this extreme situation which we have not had to face before- not for a long long time anyway- it seems very reasonable to me that the government might ask us, as churches, to not meet together, physically, for certain periods.

I am concerned by what seems a 'conflict-mindset' amongst those who have

petitioned the government. The issue is presented as a matter of restricting the freedom of the church and hence the government is threatened with the law if they do not respond to the letter/petition by a certain date. I find that, simply, over the top, especially as physical gatherings were only stopping for three Sundays! I am also concerned that the reasons for the ministers' petition are being overegged. Can people live without a physical Sunday service? or live without a physical prayer- meeting/ home-group, etc? Can people live without a physical visit from the minister? From reading the complaints of the ministers (as reported on *walesonline*), you would think that the government is asking the churches to stop worshipping or operating altogether; that they are banning Church! This is simply not true. As a police officer, who was called to a church in Cardiff that was deliberately holding a physical service during lockdown, said to the unhappy 'pastor': "the government are not asking you not to worship, but are asking you not to gather indoors". And that is the point. It is only the physical gathering of the church that the government asks us to stop for limited times.

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NOT THE SUNDAY SERMON

by Dr Mike Ward

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained strangers unawares. (Hebrews 13: 2)

In the book of Ruth, we read how Ruth, a Moabite widow, follows her Israelite mother-in-law Naomi to Bethlehem and adopts her religion. A foreign girl, Ruth had arrived in the harvest fields near Bethlehem and made it her harvest. Gossip travels fast. Ruth stood out. Tongues began to wag. *Who is she and, more to the point, what*

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I do believe that 'Church' - or proper 'Church' in normal times is very much a physical experience, but these are not normal times and worship, home groups and pastoral work however inadequate can continue via the internet and telephone. Also, food banks and social help can also go on in slightly 'improper' forms. I am wondering whether there is a problem here of the ego. Can God really not do without our physical gathering? I am pretty sure that God can get on with his work without my churches or my ministry!

To offer some theology; we worship a God of sacrifice and self-denial. We follow a Saviour of sacrifice and self-denial for the sake of the world. We are Jesus followers. We walk the way of the Cross, the way of denying ourselves for the good of others; for the good of the world. We love our neighbours and therefore show we love God. Many people, quite understandably, are becoming lockdown fatigued. I feel especially for those on their own. Yet, for the sake of the hospital workers, for the sake of the vulnerable and the weak, we sacrifice our physical gathering when asked to by the government. By so doing, I feel, that I am following Jesus in giving myself for others and obeying God's call to love my neighbour, and also God's call to be a good Christian citizen, obeying those set over me as they seek to do good for our society (Romans 13).

Yours in Christ

is she doing here? But we read too of the kindness of Boaz who ordered this foreign girl to be protected - no small consideration - from the kind of abuse that any stranger might easily suffer in a close-knit community. Then or now.

It could all have been so very different. What if Boaz had *not* protected her? What if he had turned a blind eye to the racist comments aimed at this Moabite? The book of Ruth is in the Bible precisely because it was *not* the normal reaction to an incomer arriving in any community. Strangers and their different way of doing things were a threat to God's fledgling people still finding their feet. That is why Boaz' hospitality and later his love for Ruth stands out. Any other Israelite would have thrown out Ruth from the fields or worse. But not Boaz.

Perhaps somewhere in the recess of his memory he recalled the story of how Israel came into existence. Abraham sitting outside his tents near the sacred trees of Mamre seeing three men coming towards him. He invites them to wash and shelter under the trees whilst his wife makes bread and Abraham himself kills one of the best calves. You may recall one of the guests was the Lord who said, "I'll come back about this time next year, and when I do, Sarah will already have a son."

There is no hint that Abraham was aware of the special significance of his visitors or had any expectation of repayment or reciprocation. But the story has come to be a foundational motivation for Christian hospitality, connected as it is with the presence of God, Abraham welcomed strangers and in doing so entertained angels unawares. Sarah would be rewarded with a child. From Abraham's simple act of hospitality the nation of Israel was born. How quickly the story would be forgotten. *But Boaz remembered* and told his workers in the fields to look after Ruth, the foreign girl. But what if Abraham had turned away those visitors? *What then?*

One my favourite Bible passages is the account of Paul's shipwreck in *Acts*. It is one of those "what happened next" surprises. *The natives showed us unusual kindness.* Momentous happenings are

described in *Acts* - but no greater event can be found in Luke's account than islanders simply lighting a fire and bringing food to Paul and his Roman guards on Malta. Did they know who this exhausted prisoner was? No, they did not. They did not know his testimony would change the world? It could all have been so very different. No, the islanders might say, let them look after themselves. The shipwreck was their fault anyway. Instead: *unusual kindness.*

You may remember the murder of the young black student Anthony Walker in Liverpool in July 2005. Anthony Walker was a popular boy studying for his A levels, a church youth leader, a talented basketball player and an aspiring lawyer. His future was bright. Until one July night he was walking his friends to a bus stop outside his home when he was chased by three young white men and attacked in McGoldrick Park with an ice axe. Walker died from his brain injuries at the Walton Centre the next morning. It was a racist attack without motive. What might that future have held if the 18-year-old had not been the victim of that vicious racist attack? *What might his life had been like and which other lives might have been better with him alive in them?*

Jimmy McGovern, with the cooperation of Anthony's family, attempted to answer that in his BBC drama *Anthony* broadcast during lockdown. We first see Anthony attending an awards ceremony, aged 25, and handing the prize he wins to his friend, a former alcoholic. Anthony, in this drama, had taken him in off the streets and helped to rehabilitate the mate who had been his best man and, in various nightclub confrontations with other racists, his protector. He steps in during Anthony's first date with Katherine, the woman Anthony will propose to at 21, marry at 22 and have a beloved baby with at 23. *But in real life none of this ever happened.* It is a story of what might have been. A biography in reverse from an imagined moment at the age of 25, back to the night of Anthony's death. It could all have been so very different.

I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above, entire and whole and perfect - really? Entire and whole and perfect? There are those who still look to

us as that kind of country, a country that welcomes strangers and entertains angels unawares. People like the parents of Alan Kurdi. In the early hours of 2 September 2015 Alan Kurdi, aged 5, boarded a tiny inflatable dinghy along with his parents and brother on the shore of Bodrum in Turkey. The boat was designed for 8 people. 16 people boarded. There were no life jackets. The family had paid roughly £3000 for this supposedly safe passage to a new life, to a country entire and whole and perfect, so unlike the war-torn country of their birth, Syria. *And there's another country I've heard of long ago, most dear to them that love her...*

Now imagine if Alan Kurdi had not made that trip. Imagine a UK government that accepts immigrants and gives hospitality to strangers, not refusing them entry through our borders. Imagine that little 5-year old growing up in our country, going to school, making friends, going to university... But this was a journey that ended in another shipwreck and there was to be no fire or warmth for the wee boy, only the arms of a Turkish policeman gently scooping up the lifeless body from the shore, a photograph that was broadcast all over the world. Alan was still wearing the brand-new shoes his father had given him as a present for the journey. He had been so excited. (A story sadly repeated just this week in the English Channel with three more innocent children drowning trying to cross with their parents to a new life.)

It could all be so different. And we might say it is up to the politicians and not up to us. Boaz could have said that too. It was not *his* job to welcome the Moabite girl into his fields. *But he did.* It was not necessary for Abraham to welcome strangers into his tent. *But he did.* It was not necessary for the islanders to light a fire and provide food for Paul and his shipwrecked companions and guards. *But they did.*

But think of what might be... think of what might have been if Anthony Walker had lived, if little Alan Kurdi had grown up in a country that accepted him and welcomed him and shared his hopes and ambitions and dreams... Who will we welcome this week? Who will we turn away? And look closely. Is it strangers or angels in disguise?