

Views from the Pews: Christians and Patriotism

In 2018 my sister and I were privileged to attend the official centenary of the liberation of Le Quesnoy in France. It was a very patriotic experience, as we stood together to acknowledge our forebears' achievements on the other side of the world. Much was said about Kiwi courage, ingenuity, and military initiative. We rightly felt proud.

But patriotism is all too often misused by politicians – all too easily it can be changed into something called nationalism. How should Christians respond to invitations to feel patriotic?

Le Quesnoy was memorable too for the response of its people – both in 1918 and now – because its liberation was achieved without loss of civilian life, a tremendous military achievement. Their gratitude takes modern form in the town's 'twinning' with Cambridge, where St Andrew's Church contains a memorial window. The townspeople's hospitality was unlimited.

How to process all this?

Perhaps, Christians should respond with two questions;

Firstly, 'What has God given my country?'

But secondly (and essentially), 'How can those gifts be employed in the service of others?'

While we were in Level 4, the RNZAF was flying mercy missions into the Pacific after the cyclone caused such havoc. That required skill and courage. We can all take pride in that. Let us support that work with our prayers and our money.

Pray too that our pride is kept in check – excess pride, accompanied by feelings of superiority and arrogance, can lead us down darker paths.

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