

# the TREASURY

MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF WALES



## 'Our generation [became] history instead of growing up'

DUFF COOPER

21 January 1918



Soldier reading a letter sitting on a bench near Flint Castle  
Lest we Forget 1914 - 1918

## EDITORIAL



### The Firebreak Closure of Churches

At the same time that 64,000 people have petitioned the Welsh Government about their decision not to allow supermarkets to sell 'non-essential' items during lockdown, a group of church leaders from across Wales are questioning the Government's decision to forcibly close churches for worship for three Sundays. They rightly contend that churches have been highly responsible during the pandemic, and the lengths to which the Presbyterian Church of Wales has gone in this regard is testimony to that. They invite the Government to engage with the churches and provide the evidence that proves that it is necessary to close places of worship. While not all members of Christ's Body will feel this to be an attack on the Church's freedom, it is understandable that for others this recent closure is another hindrance to their mission, ministry and vital social endeavours in their communities. In a fast moving exchange of correspondence that can be viewed on the website of Christian Concern ([christianconcern.com](http://christianconcern.com)), the Government is requested to respond by the afternoon of 26th October. Should the ban continue the Christian Legal Centre is set to support the group in seeking a judicial review.

### Remembrance Sunday

It is regrettable that the third of these Sundays should include Remembrance Day, which falls one day before the Firebreak lockdown is due to end. While the First Minister did say that an exception would be made for officially organised small scale Remembrance Sunday events, churches who would normally include an Act of Remembrance in

their morning service are left questioning whether they can open to observe the two minutes silence, and if they are included amongst those 'officially organised events'? An answer may be to revert to a socially distanced observance on Armistice Day itself, 11th/11th at 11am.

### After Dunkirk: 1940

On this eightieth anniversary, we are especially reminded of Dunkirk. The Irish poet, Robert Irwin (1933-2018) writes in recollection, as we do remembering the experience of one mother who lived alongside Nazareth CM Church, Cwmcarn whose three sons were all killed during the course of World War 2. His penultimate lines capture that mother's thrice repeated experience of

**'reading the tense message, face transfigured.'**

Irwin's description of the telegraph boy's knock epitomises the experience in many homes,

**'so many telegrams then: so many homes where lives could never again be the same.'**

Twenty-two years earlier in Flintshire another mother, who perhaps died of a broken heart a decade later, must have grieved to hear of her only son's death in a military hospital just twelve days before the end of World War 1. Her boy's brief life and career, like that of thousands of others, summed up in a brief epitaph,

**'From school to war'.**

Were it not for 'the peace that passes all understanding' all our hearts would break. Our sorrow would be inconsolable!





# 'A Heritage from the Lord'

(Ps. 127: 3)

**Dr Chris Wright reflects biblically on current events**

Those of us with children or grandchildren who were caught up in the GCSE and A Level results fiasco this summer will have suffered with them all the stress of the waiting, and then the grief and disappointment for some when the grades were finally awarded, and then the howls of unfairness and confusion that followed. What a mess!

## A damaged generation

Children have been very badly affected during this pandemic, some through the exacerbation of inequality and poverty, some through inescapable cruel abuse, and all through the disruption of their education; a whole generation suffering through no fault of their own – or anybody's, as far as the pandemic itself is concerned. So if ever there was a generation of kids to be kind to, to show some generosity to, especially at a time of maximum childhood stress (awaiting exam results that determine their immediate future), this was it. But instead they were subjected, (culpably, I think we have to say, through somebody's fault), to the damaging impact of uncertainty, anxiety, chaotic swings of expectation, disappointment for many, and complete loss of hope for some. Of course, there are those who will sail on unscathed to future success. But many of this generation of our children have suffered mental stress and social harm that will haunt their long-term future.

And the suffering of Britain's children this one summer seems but a pin-prick in comparison to the mountain of misery endured by children the world over – think of Yemen, Syria, and the Rohingya, and the millions of little lives enslaved and trafficked into the sex-trade and sweatshops. According to UNICEF, 385 million children

live in extreme poverty, many of them enduring brutalizing violence in conflict zones. And in our own country, "the number of children living in poverty has been steadily increasing in recent years. There are around four million children in the UK growing up in poverty. And those poverty rates have risen for every type of working family – lone-parent or couple families, families with full and part-time employment and families with different numbers of adults in work. This is the first time in two decades this has happened," according to the government's own Children's Commissioner's website. And this means "poor outcomes, poor health, poor prospects, social problems that end up costing billions to deal with." Last Christmas Day (of all times), 210,000 children in Britain woke up homeless, either in cramped "temporary accommodation," or "sofa surfing."

It's more than heart-breaking. Does the scandal and shame and indictment of such childhood deprivation not make you angry? If it does, then you share a tiny fraction of the grief and anger that, according to the Bible, the suffering of children brings to God's own heart. But let's look first at the positive side of the Bible's perspective on children.

## Every generation claimed by God

When God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, one of the first things he required was that every firstborn son in their families was to be consecrated to God and redeemed by sacrifice (Exodus 13:1-2, 14-16). Of course it was a way of remembering that God had delivered their firstborn from death during the last terrible plague on Egypt. But it was also a way of claiming every new generation as belonging to God.

Children matter to God because God's plan and purpose is trans-generational through the centuries.

And then every new generation of children was to be nurtured and diligently taught by their parents (Deut. 6:4-10; 20-25; Ps. 78:1-4). Children participated in the ceremonies and festivals that confirmed their sense of identity and history and God's blessing for the future (Deut. 16; 31:11-13).

Vulnerable children (the fatherless) were to be systemically protected under the law, along with widows, the homeless and landless, such as foreigners and Levites (Exodus 22:22-23; Deut. 24:19-22). Daughters were not to be sold into prostitution, or children



Dr Chris Wright

punished for their parents' crimes (Lev. 19:29; Deut. 24:16). Children were God's precious gift, as multiple stories illustrated and as the Psalmists celebrated with delightful metaphors of arrows and olive shoots (Psalms 127:3-5; 128:3-6). And even under God's judgment in exile, the Israelites were to have children and grandchildren who would inherit God's future restoration (Jer. 29:4-6).

God the Son was therefore only reflecting the loving priorities of God the Father when Jesus welcomed little children in spite of the disciples' objections (Matthew 19:13-15), and placed a child right in the midst of them as a vivid visual aid of the values of God's kingdom.

*At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them.*

*And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."*

*Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me (Matthew 18:1-5).*

## The suffering of children

And whoever hurts one such child hurts me, Jesus might have added. Indeed, he more or less did say that, when he went on to severely condemn those who cause harm to, or despise, "one of these little ones" (Matthew 18:6). His expression "little ones" has moved on to mean not just actual children, but ordinary believers however insignificant they may seem. But the whole tone of the passage and its astonishing beginning show that Jesus included children in that category. Harm children, and you have Jesus, their angels, and the Father in heaven to answer to (Matthew 18:10).

The book of Lamentations is an outpouring of agony at the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the brutal Babylonians in 587BC. And the writer, who was an eyewitness, cannot get the children and their appalling suffering out of his mind, just as it's hard for us to forget television images of crying infants, bleeding in bombed cities or starving in war-torn countries. Children fainting and dying in the arms of their mothers is the repeated image that haunts Lamentations, stirring human and divine pain and anger (Lam. 2:11-12, 19-20; 4:2-4, 10).

But it's not just war that makes children suffer. Micah (like other prophets) expresses the wrath of God at those whose political power, economic policies, and arrogant greed push people into poverty and eviction. And he particularly focuses on the impact of such socially caused homelessness on children – an observation with sharp moral resonance today. What would Micah say (what does God think) about the evils of child poverty in Britain today?

*Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds!*

*continued on next page*



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At morning's light they carry it out  
because it is in their power to do it.  
They covet fields and seize them,  
and houses, and take them.  
They defraud people of their homes,  
they rob them of their inheritance.

You drive the women of my people  
from their pleasant homes.  
You take away my blessing  
from their children forever.  
(Micah 2:1-2, 8)

### Children playing in the streets

But we must end on a note of hope. The Bible lifts our eyes up to the new creation when Christ returns. There are so many ways the Bible describes what that will be like (since it is beyond our imagining), but one I particularly love is the way Zechariah evokes the peace of the new Jerusalem – a place for the elderly to enjoy their people-watching, while children play in safety.

*This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there." (Zech. 8: 4-5).*

I love that! That is God's idea of a good future for our world. And it matches, of course, Isaiah's more familiar vision of the Messianic reign of peace in all creation, when "a little child will lead them" (Isaiah 11:6-9).

*This article first appeared in 'Transform' the quarterly magazine of Langham Partnership - a Christian charity whose mission is to strengthen the ministry of the Word of God through nurturing national movements for Biblical preaching, and fostering the distribution of evangelical literature, enhancing evangelical theological education, especially in countries where churches are under resourced. Revd Dr Chris Wright is International Ministries Director and author of over thirty books. Learn more about the work of Langham Partnership by visiting [www.langham.org](http://www.langham.org)*

# Celebrate a love that builds hope this Advent

## Christian Aid's Christmas Appeal



It's rare for us to live through a phenomenon which affects us in Wales at the same time as people right across the world. Not often in our lives have we experienced a threat that is shared by our global neighbours in countries as wide-ranging as Ethiopia, Lebanon and Nicaragua.

Covid-19 and measures to curb its spread have held much of the world in its thrall throughout 2020 destroying lives, instilling fear, devastating livelihoods and forcing vulnerable people into more desperate poverty.

As we approach Christmas though, we are reminded of a person who turned the world upside down for good, whose life in a time of oppression and fear introduced a hope that transformed the globe as it spread across it.

Looking to Emmanuel, God with us, this Christmas, we are reminded that God walks with us through deeply difficult times and works through us in all circumstances to show love to this world. A love that never fails. A love that unites. A love that builds hope.

### Ethiopia

Inspired by Jesus, Christian Aid supporters walk alongside those for whom coronavirus is yet another threat on top of existing ones, including the climate crisis, conflict and in 2020 the impact of locust swarms.

Your gifts and actions help people like Mekonnen Sofar in Ethiopia's South Omo region, who digs a metre deep in dry river beds to try to find a water source to keep his livestock alive as the climate crisis pushes his family into hunger and threatens his whole way of life.

Friends, fellow herdsmen and children have died through digging so deep that the dry bed collapses above them.

Christian Aid is working with families like Mekonnen's to provide community water



**Mekonnen Sofar digs in a dry river bed to find water for his livestock**

Photo credits Christian Aid/Elizabeth Dzziel

sources and explore alternative means of raising income such as through making soap from aloe vera and planting drought resistant crops.



**Low rainfall leaves herdsman Mekonnen Sofar struggling to find water for his cattle in Ethiopia**

### Traditions change, love remains

The new restrictions placed on how we meet and interact have caused us to rethink what it is to be community, but our supporters know that we are bound together by much more than a virus and have shown a deep determination

to continue to reach out to others.

This Christmas churches are being invited to join in a **moment of solidarity and hope on Advent Sunday, 29 November** by using the carol 'When out of poverty is born' in their worship and taking a collection for Christian Aid.

The hymn, which is freely available to use from [caid.org.uk/christmasresource](http://caid.org.uk/christmasresource) celebrates Mary's faith in the Magnificat and begins with the words 'When out of poverty is born a dream that will not die'. This Christmas we can celebrate the incredible truth that we are bound together globally by a love that builds resilience in the face of disease, drought and darkness, that builds up hope for all our neighbours.

**To find out more about Christian Aid's Christmas Appeal, including how to act for climate justice, visit [caid.org.uk/hope](http://caid.org.uk/hope)**

This Advent, £15 could train one woman to make aloe vera soap, £80 could provide two goats to help a family build a better future and £290 could pay for the materials and tools to build a pond, providing life-saving, reliable water for a whole community.



# Looking back to Dresden

by Revd Jonathan Hodgins

There are many harrowing moments in the book *Dresden: The Fire and the Darkness* by Sinclair McKay but one that stands out is the image of a woman whose baby was sucked from her hands into a tornado of fire. It isn't an image that one can really imagine, and yet at the same time, it is incredibly vivid and impossible to forget.

McKay's book examines the Allied attack on Dresden that took place on February 1945. He describes how dozens of planes flew from the south of England to the east of Germany and, just after 10pm began to drop thousands of tonnes of bombs onto what turned out to be an unprotected city.

The bombing began with bombs 'the size of four men huddled together' smashing through the roofs of homes, shops and churches. The explosion created devastation, but also allowed the accompanying incendiary devices to fall onto flammable items beneath.

The third part of the attack included 'weapons that deployed burning corrosion: bombs with jellied petroleum and magnesium unleashed on bricks and mortar, these would create fires that could not be extinguished; this was also true of human flesh. Anyone touched by the searing substances would find no escape, not even by jumping in rivers or canals.'

The attack was brutal and the accompanying atmospheric conditions enabled a terrible conflagration to become a catastrophe. Those who hid beneath ground in cellars (the Nazi *Gauleiters* having decided it was too expensive to build proper air raid shelters) were suffocated as the oxygen was sucked from them. Those who

dived into water were boiled alive by the intense heat, and those who were above ground were incinerated or hideously mutilated; one Nazi soldier on his bicycle was hit so hard by flying glass that his arms and legs were sliced off even as his body was carried along on his bicycle. All of those images are awful but none seems as dreadful as thinking of that poor baby.

And yet in 1945 there was some ambivalence about this. McKay tells of a well-educated and intelligent wife of a senior officer who was asked if it was right that the Allies should be killing large numbers of German women and babies. She told him; "Oh yes. It's a good thing to kill the babies especially. I am not thinking of this war but of the next one, twenty years from now. The next time the Germans start a war and we have to fight them, these babies will be the soldiers".

Perhaps in 1945 people didn't necessarily know the exact manner of death of German babies in Nazi Germany. We have a huge amount of documentary evidence, but with the development of make up and special effects, there is a greater idea in the popular imagination of what Dresden must have been like. Even so, declaring the killing of German babies in the crib a good thing, is quite a statement to make.

And yet it makes a kind of sense. After all, in the seventy years leading up to 1945 the German nation had spent only thirty-one of them at peace. They fought France three times,

Britain twice and even after the Nazi's, were still running a totalitarian state in East Germany until 1990. It isn't difficult to make an argument to say that the Germans are a militaristic and war loving people. The novelist Thomas Mann wrote in his novel *Dr Faustus* "We have experienced the destruction of our noble cities from the air, a destruction that would cry to heaven if we who suffer were not ourselves laden with guilt. As it is the cry is smothered in our throats: like King Claudius's prayer, it can 'never to heaven go' ". Holocaust survivor, Victor Klemperer had concerns too. Returning to Dresden after the war he listened to the *Kreuzchor*, the choir of the *Kirche* demolished in the bombing raid. Klemperer, was beguiled by the black and white uniforms of the *Kreuzchor*, as well as its stylised traditions, but he fleetingly thought of the boys as automatons. How can we so quickly judge Bomber Harris for bombing Dresden, or that woman for considering that the destruction of babies might be for the greater good of peace in the world?

But McKay has a footnote. Klemperer thought those boys automatons. In their uniforms they perhaps reminded him of the Hitler Youth or the *Volkssturm* or even the *Freie Deutsche Jugend*. But as McKay notes "this was far from the case: some of them – Including Peter Schreier – would likely go on to have the most brilliant musical careers. Schreier joined the choir full-

Frauenkirche, Dresden (rebuilt from its bombed ruins, 1994)  
Photo credit: Iain Hodgins



time months after the bombing; he was ten years old. Even among many other young talents, his voice stood out and in the late 1940's his solos were recorded. After his voice broke, Schreier embarked upon a dazzling operatic career. In other words we can't know what a child will become, or what will develop from a nation. And the destruction of children because of where they come from, or what they might become, should be appalling to any civilised society.

And yet, today, in India, it is expected that five-million sex selective abortions could take place over the next ten years. In Malawi the government is currently debating legalising abortion up to birth. Meanwhile Iceland is lauded around the world for 'eradicating' Down's Syndrome, while Amazon sells t-shirts with the slogan "Let's Make Down's Syndrome Extinct". Not that we need to worry about people not being aware of abortion services in this country; more than 100,000 abortions were conducted in England and Wales between January and June this year - a new record.

Like the bombing of Dresden there are many who say with great force that the end justifies the means. When people say that aborting girls in India is better than letting them be born into poverty, they are making a perfectly valid and rational point. Likewise when they say that women in Malawi should have the right to decide, even up to the moment of birth. Undoubtedly Down's Syndrome can be an unexpected burden on families, and the emotional strain of Brexit and Covid, recession and family breakdown can cause stress and anxiety to British women.

But in the end our nation legislates, advocates and pays for doctors and nurses to tear babies from their mothers, and has done so for more than fifty years. Seventy-five years ago Britain spearheaded Allied air forces into a bombing raid that incinerated children. It is hard to argue that it was a moral stain on our nation. Since 1967 Britain has aborted a baby every three minutes. This too is a moral stain, but when will we speak out?

Revd Jonathan Hodgins is Associate Editor of 'the Treasury'.

# NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES



## PENRHYN BAY

We are trying to make church life as normal as possible during these difficult days, and so we held our Harvest Thanksgiving Service last month when the church was filled to lockdown-restrictions capacity, with an overflow of persons in the Schoolroom. Saturday morning had been spent decorating the sanctuary with gifts of non-perishable foods, fruit and flowers. Some were delivered to

us personally and others were left on the church doorstep. Because of the temporary seating plan we were not able to display these items at the front as usual, so we had tables laden with gifts down the centre of the church. Two days after the Service we delivered the food to 'Hope Restored' which is a work for the homeless in Llandudno that is run by Brenda Fogg, BEM, a member of our church. Gifts of flowers and fruit

were also delivered to our house-bound members.

The Sunday Morning Harvest Service was conducted by Mr. Peter Owen, now of Oldham, who was born in Penrhyn Bay and was brought up in our fellowship. Peter is a Lay-Preacher who is kept busy taking Services on Sundays in the Oldham area but comes 'home' about three or four times a year to minister to us.

Back in 1964 he was the first

baby that Revd John Dowber baptised in Penrhyn Bay when he began his ministry there. It is gratifying to see Peter serving the Lord through all these years.

We are now busy filling Shoe-Boxes to go to Eastern Europe so that children there can receive gifts of love as Christmas draws near. Cash and gifts of toys, hats, gloves and scarfs are being given to us so that we can bring happiness into young lives.



## Platinum Anniversary at Penrhyn Bay

Peter and Maureen Lowe, who are members at Penrhyn Bay, recently celebrated their Platinum Wedding Anniversary. They were married seventy years ago at County Road Methodist Church, Liverpool on 23rd September 1950. They both still sing in the Church Choir at Penrhyn Bay.

## WALES' NINTH RECOVERY SUNDAY

Sunday, 25th October, 2020, was another milestone in the history of the battle against addiction to alcohol, drugs and other harmful behaviours in Wales.

Once again this year, a Sunday was designated as Recovery Sunday to encourage churches not only to think about those suffering from various dependencies or addictions, to learn more about their situation, their needs and the help available through such centres as the Living Room, CAIS and Adferiad Recovery, but also to encourage churches

to do something practical to help. This could involve a financial contribution towards the work. Others may take note of what is said in Hebrews 13: 3, *Regard prisoners as if you were in prison with them.* The author of the letter to the Hebrews no doubt refers to a literal, physical prison, but on Recovery Sunday we remembered that addiction to alcohol, drugs, food, sex/pornography and gambling is a prison for so many people today.

Elin Maher was responsible for preparing the service and in

it she meditated on the word FABRIC – in the field of clothing and materials around us, in what makes us as people and how we can be used in the world.

This service, in English or Welsh is available to be downloaded from [www.cynnal.wales](http://www.cynnal.wales)

On this ninth Recovery Sunday in Wales we invited Christians to unite in prayer for those who are dependent and trapped in addiction, to ask God to help us to help them, but it is not too late to set aside a time in a church service to do

that, if the designated date passed by unnoticed.

*Wynford Ellis Owen is Specialist Counselling Consultant at CYNNAL. The Churches' Counselling Service is available throughout Wales for all Clergy, Ministers of Religion, Christian workers and their families:*

[www.cynnal.wales](http://www.cynnal.wales)  
[wynfordellisowen@cais.org.uk](mailto:wynfordellisowen@cais.org.uk)

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Editor: Revd IAIN B HODGINS, 1a CHESTNUT GROVE, HAWARDEN CH5 3HD

e-mail: [iaain.hodgins@ebcpcw.cymru](mailto:iaain.hodgins@ebcpcw.cymru)

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Enquiries about orders and subscriptions should be addressed to

GWASG Y BWTHYN (PANTYCELYN), Tŷ CADNANT, ZONE 2, LŴN HEN FELIN, CIBYN, CAERNARFON LL55 2BD

Tel: 01286 672018 • [gwasgybwrthyn@btconnect.com](mailto:gwasgybwrthyn@btconnect.com)

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