

Catholic Social Teaching—our best-kept secret?

What is it? Where did it come from? What can it be used for?



Caritas Anchor House and the Newham Deanery will be running a **short course for parishes** on Catholic social teaching (CST) over the coming months.

We will be exploring:

- Meaning and origins of CST
- Principles of CST
- Applying CST and social action

For more information please contact Chris Driscoll at
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The Cardinal Manning
Catholic Social Teaching Conference 2014



*The 125th anniversary of the
Great London Dock Strike*

Thursday 19th June 2014

Brick Lane Music Hall,
Silvertown, London



Final words from Monsignor John Armitage

As a priest, when you stick your head above the parapet, you are often accused of being political. But for me none of the political parties are radical enough. The word ‘radical’ means going back to the roots, and the roots are where we call come from. There is a saying by one of the great saints of the Church, St Augustine, in which he describes our faith as ‘ever ancient, and ever new’. But this also applies to life. When something is ancient there is a wisdom to be found, and where something is new there is a vision. But if you go through life just talking about wisdom, then all you are talking about is history. Similarly, talking about vision is groundless without wisdom. One is empty without the other. ‘True and real ‘radical’ life, which is in the life of Jesus Christ, is where you bring together the ancient and the new and you get a real vibrancy – and that’s what I believe we see in Catholic social teaching’.



We have brought together one great academic and one great practitioner to help us see what is truly radical, to exercise wisdom and vision. That is epitomised and embodied in Cardinal Manning who in the East End of London was able to steer through a very difficult time in our country’s history, and left us with a legacy that we still celebrate today that is alive and vibrant and informing people in a way that he would never have dreamt of in his time. So we honour him and honour all those people who have in their own way and their own lives embodied that: through the work of Caritas, through the work of the SVP, through the work of schools and parishes, through the work of our charities, through the work of just being a good neighbour, through the work of our politicians, for those who are trying to find new ways to try to engage people in politics. It’s part of bringing these two things—the ancient and the new—together. Tonight we thank God that this alive and active and vibrant in our Catholic community.

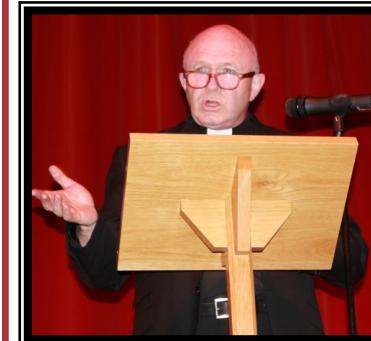
The role of faith-based charities—do you think that there should be greater recognition for the role of faith-based charities in successfully improving outcomes in people's lives?

Maurice Glasman

The political class are completely estranged from love. They see things in terms of processes, procedures, outcomes, aims and objectives, and effectively eliminate the role of relationship in real change and transformation . Then they'll do a weird calculation where they find that working with Christian charities is cheaper !

In terms of where my Party is at, there are glimmers of hope, but they still think that they know better than us. They still think that we're in the grip of some mystical, traditionalist, patriarchal, sexist, oppressive tradition. The response is loving. The only way that there is any genuine change is through the obligations of love and that is inseparable from relationships and from the tradition that nurtures love. The renewal and entry of the Church into the lives of people who are estranged from the goodness which is a palpable reality, makes us all stronger.

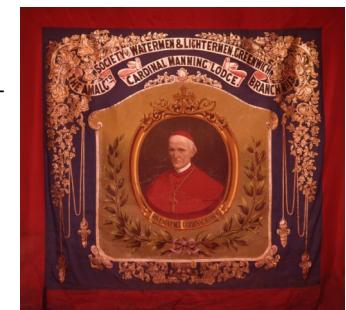
All of you be confident in the love and truth of your inheritance because that is the way to genuinely transform lives for the good. And you're going to be on the winning side as long as you are like Cardinal Manning – stubborn, organised and faithful.



Introduction from Monsignor John Armitage, Vicar General of the Diocese of Brentwood

What are the roots of our Catholic action? I want to suggest that so much of what we do has its roots in that simple request of the Lord: to love each other. And from that so much has come, so much inspiration. At this conference we will reflect on a particular part of that story's history that took place here, within this community.

This is the banner of the Cardinal Manning Lodge which was set up by the Society of Watermen and Lightermen in Greenwich in recognition for the Cardinal's great work during the Great Dock Strike. Great local organisers like Ben Tillet, John Burns and Tom Mann, were encouraged by the Beckton gasworkers and the match-girls' strike that took place in the Bryant & May factory in Bow, to organise among themselves. Alongside the fabulous wealth of the London docks was terrible poverty. Ten years after the strike the American author Jack London would write about the east end and called his book, 'The People of the Abyss'.



The strike was called in 1889 and within a short period the London docks were paralysed. Cardinal Manning would write this:

"We have been for years blinded or dazed by the phrases of 'free contract', 'the independence of adult labour'... The meaning of all this is : 'Let working men maintain their independence of one another, and of all associations, and of all unions, and of all united action... The more perfectly they are isolated, the more independent of all defenders, the more dependent they are on capitalists. Starving men may be locked out of the docks with impunity. The hunger of their wives, the cries of their children, their own want of food, will compel them to come in from the strike. It is evident that between a capitalist and a working man there can be no true freedom of contract. The capitalist is invulnerable in his wealth. The working man without bread has no choice but either to agree or to hunger in his hungry home. For this cause 'freedom of contract' has been the gospel of the employers, and they have resented hotly the intervention peacemakers. They have claimed that no one can come between them and their men; that their relation to them is a private, almost a domestic affair. They forget that when thousands of women and children suffer while they are refusing to grant a

penny more in wages, or an hour less in work, there is a wide field of misery caused by their refusal to negotiate in this strike. It is not a private affair; it is a public evil...Recently, for a month the streets of London were choked day by day with processions of tens of thousands. Disorder and horseplay, which at any moment may turn to collisions with the people or the police, were imminent;by simply the refusal of an additional penny an hour....The commercial wealth of London and the merchandise of the world, the banks and wharves of the Thames might have been pillaged...all because this was a matter for us and our men"

These words of Cardinal Manning – powerful words – they're not the sort of words you'd expect from a Cardinal, a Victorian Cardinal. But he recognised the situation and the suffering of the people whom he led as a bishop. Years later, the same communities came together as The East London Community Organisation, TELCO, to start to work for the Living Wage. It was exactly the same principle as the fight for the 'dockers' tanner'. Their inspiration came from what had happened there, and it was because of this inspiration that Pope Leo XIII was inspired to write the first modern social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*.

That first encyclical was the beginning of modern Catholic social teaching and it is why we're here tonight. It's why we hear about Caritas Anchor House, it's why we hear about the Catholic Children's Society, it's why we hear about CAFOD. It is why we as a Christian community alongside other faith communities and secular groups work together for a common good. Tonight we celebrate the role of our community in strengthening and inspiring the Church at large to talk about this great gift of Catholic social teaching not just to the Church but to the whole world.



Mgr John Armitage with speakers Kevin Flanagan and Maurice Glasman

Politics and young people—how do you engage students and young people in politics?

Students and young people are right to feel a lack of engagement in politics. This goes more widely. For most adults or young people, they can see the truth that the party system is kind of silly in a way and in bearing witness to what I see each day: you've got one party that can't see anything wrong with the State and another party that can't see anything wrong with the market and so it goes on...

The problem with engaging young people is they are often asked to get involved in something that pre-exists them – the Living Wage or something else – it's not amenable. The way ahead with this is to acknowledge that they are right and then given them the truth – you can't do it on your own. Identify your leaders and they engage on what they care about and then it grows from the Catholic side – not the party political side.

Aristotle, who also can claim some influence on Catholic social teaching said that politics is about the ability to protect the people and the places you love. It's about allowing young people to name the problems. You begin from where you are and what your inheritance is. Schools need to be even truer to themselves and ask what are the real issues.

We did this in a Hackney school where the main issues anticipated were about drugs or violence, but instead it was about violent dogs attacking children on the way to school. The students led a campaign and got police protection and the dogs put on a leash. Students know things that they're not saying, and great politics is where they are allowed to name it and organise around it. If you view politics as simply honouring obligations to the people around you, there will be some really interesting outcomes...

Kevin Flanagan

The YCW method of See, Judge, Act is a process of gentle discernment, and can help young people take responsibility and reflect on the reality of their own lives in the light of the gospel. Cardijn would say that without the action the seeing and judging has little purpose. As a young man in the YCW one of the first actions I did was to knock on doors in a block of flats to interview people and ask what life was like to live in the flats. I was very quickly politicised and began to understand the world a bit more. The YCW brought the world to my door, and so their impact movements, campaigns and models are well worth looking at.

The one thing 'See, Judge, Act' gave me was a method of analysis which I still apply today. A review of life. It's a powerful weapon when you actually understand it. It's not just understanding politics, it's understanding the mechanisms, the ability and the leadership that one needs to develop to engage effectively.

Questions from the audience

Housing—what are your thoughts on the housing crisis and the issue of ‘affordable housing’?

Maurice Glasman

When it comes to property, you will note, that people are unbelievably individualistic. They think the solution lies in getting on the property ladder, getting a mortgage. But that's not the way. We have to make hard political choices over this. There's a huge amount of land that has been sold off by councils in order to keep other services going.



This idea of ‘community land trusts’ is actually rooted in Catholic social thought in that people have got to organise themselves so that the councils can transfer land to people so they can build their own homes. It has worked very well with a sister organisation of London Citizens in America called Nehemiah Homes in east Brooklyn which was a great alliance between the Catholic Church and the Puerto-Rican / Pentecostal Church.

We all want a home in the world. The current system works completely for the developers: the State sells off the land quite cheaply to developers and then gives the planning permission to build on the land they've just sold which makes it 3 times more expensive. In terms of affordable housing and of rented housing, there's little alternative to what we talked about tonight which is not to exclusively pursue an individual end but to get together with others who want a home and then locate a brownfield site where they are selling off land, oppose the sell-off to the developers and insist on the transfer to local people.

Kevin Flanagan

The new form of trade unionism, the new ‘community unionism’ is trying to find ways in which we can ensure that people can access reasonably priced finance. But also could I see a day when trades unions are helping to build houses for the working poor. I’m appalled that the bedroom tax in some instances could be the new land clearance whereby those properties that people can’t afford to live in anymore are then being exploited by others. There is a role for the government to step in and declare that it’s not in the interests of the common good

Guests and other speakers



St Angela’s and St Bonaventure’s Sixth Form Choir



Keith Fennett, Director of Caritas Anchor House



**Guy Insull, Appeals Director
Caritas Anchor House**

The Global Noticeboard



Engage on the Global Noticeboard

The Global Noticeboard is an online platform matching people in need with people who are able to give help - think Facebook, but with a purpose. We are currently planning to roll GNB out across 90 primary and secondary schools across the Diocese, as well as to a selection of parishes and Catholic charities.

This is a wonderful opportunity for all of us to help make a difference to the lives of people in need. Find out more by contacting Chris Driscoll at c.driscoll@caritasanchorhouse.org.uk or call 020 7476 6062.



The old....



...is the new

Putting Catholic social teaching into practice for over 50 years

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of our everyday experience.

Don't think that Catholic social teaching is ahead of us. It's always catching up with us. Because through our lives, through our experience, through our daily work, insofar as you try to live out that simple message that the dignity of the human person is supreme because God loves them...you write Catholic social teaching. You create it and make it real.



That's why I'm delighted to work with CSAN, Caritas Anchor House and the other Catholic agencies, because together there is tremendous witness. I always say that the trade union movement is probably the UK's largest voluntary movement ever. Thousands upon thousands are committed to serve people and many have been motivated and influenced by Catholic and Christian faith traditions. Cardijn used to say the YCW are born when one young worker discovers another next to them and loves them. That is when Catholic social teaching comes alive, the principle of solidarity is realised and dignity is rejoiced in relationship.

We must make sure the Church has open ears to listen to the voice of the poor. We must make sure that it has the structures for the poor to shape the Church. Baptism gives us this responsibility, not an instruction from high, it is what the Lord intended for us, our purpose and our task. I agree with Pope Francis when he says if we are going to do anything, let's do it with joy, because we sometimes live as though we have already lost! He was also right – if we worry too much about the weeds we'll never sow any wheat. So go out and sow, understand a little bit about Catholic social teaching but don't study it too long. The best thing is – go and do it.



procurement contracts, at least. The answer was that it's a matter of choice for people. Isn't that interesting in the light of what we'd heard about dock managers justifying conditions in the dock strike? It's a matter of choice.

Those things that offend the dignity of the human person cannot be right. How can we in the modern world still issue a contract that doesn't guarantee the number of hours of work and at times only minimum pay? Is that better? We might not put them in pens anymore, but many workers are still trying to secure the basic conditions to enable them to live a decent life. This doesn't meet the standards of the test of the common good, so whom does it serve? Catholic social thinking asks: what is the primary objective of the economy? *To serve the person*: the person is for work, not the work for the person. Everything has to be oriented towards the needs and the dignity of the human person and as so often we start from the economic end and work towards the person. Start with the dignity of people and build systems that honour this dignity.

Would Manning be happy today that we are going to see a massive growth in the poverty of those who retire? Would he be happy in seeing our pension schemes destroyed? Would

he be happy to see larger and larger proportions of people's wages being eaten up in child care costs. We need to be asking these very questions. I'm convinced that if we don't ask them, who is? It starts with relationships and building community, or to use another word – solidarity.

However, this is not a class war. It would be a denial of the gospel and our very message if we turn it into 'them or us'. For as soon as we turn it into that, we are denying the dignity of the other person. Some of my work has been on the Union Learning Projects in the north-west and Irish region to try and establish effective partnerships between employers and trade unions, and build access to basic and IT skills. The truth of the matter is that if we're excluded from technology these days, if you're excluded from basic literacy and numeracy, you are excluded from the economic order. I've never found a better way to 'do mission' than in the Union Learning Project and I'm pleased that one region of the union is working in solidarity with us. I need to remind people in church structures that that is mission. That's the vocation that you and I were called to do. We're called to be priests, prophets and kings. We're called to read the 'signs of the times', to read them in the light of Catholic social thinking, to read and interpret them in the reality



Dock managers in 1889



Lord Maurice Glasman—lessons

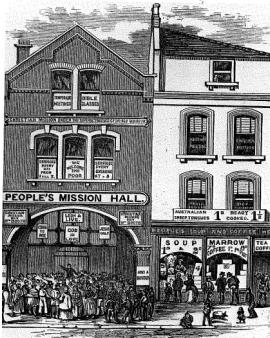
from the Great Dock Strike

One of the things of Catholic social thinking that has inspired 'Blue Labour' is that, if you read the encyclicals, the old is the new. It is to rediscover the ancient truths, to re-interrogate them and to make them living and new. I think that this building (the Brick Lane Music Hall) is a reminder of how we forget our traditions and inheritance which makes us who we are, and in doing so we lose the beauty, the magic, the continuity of our inheritance and forget where we are from and what we are doing. This building is a physical manifestation of Catholic social thought in that there is great beauty and truth to be found in renewing those traditions and not simply discarding them.



I'm from a Jewish background and what I would like to begin with in the story of the Great Dock Strike is the solidarity between the Catholics and Jews. During the strike there were two roles that essentially the Jewish immigrants played. The first was that the tailors went on a solidarity strike with the dockers in Brick Lane and there were soup kitchens put on for the strikers. If you have ever eaten Jewish food you might wonder if this was a mercy or a punishment! But they were hungry enough to eat the salt beef which they still do on Brick Lane. There was also the rise of the 'Blackshirts' in east London, and the Cable Street riots is an important moment. My uncle Sid who is 96 and still alive was there at Cable Street said that the decisive moment was when the Irish dockers came with planks of wood and burst through the police lines and really dealt with the Blackshirts on the street. That was another act of incredible solidarity and inspiration. So there is a *history* in east London and it's a history from which emerged a very special kind of solidarity; a solidarity that was between groups, and, this is essential to Catholic social teaching on the common good, between estranged groups. In other countries in Europe there was little solidarity between Catholics and Jews but in England and east London, there was, and that was a very special thing that I think was born and grew from the dock strike. I absolutely honour that and it continues to inspire me today.

To move further into this idea of what was going on in that strike is to learn that there was a huge estrangement between Catholic immigrant workers and Protestant English workers, and this was an incredibly difficult division to bridge. It is also worth mentioning the Salvation Army which produced 9,000 loaves of bread to feed the strikers and opened up soup kitchens. If you read the press at the time, when they had the dockers' marches there was Cardinal Manning and Catholic priests, but you also had the Salvation Army band, and the



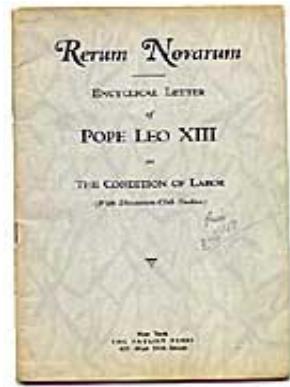
press were disgusted as it was the first time since the reformation, they said, that there was joint action between Catholics and Protestants. This is a very important aspect of the common good.

To understand the distinctive contribution of Catholic social teaching around the time of the strike was to understand what was thought about capitalism. What Catholic social teaching said, and people at the time said it was nonsense, ridiculous, archaic, nostalgic—and just wrong—was that there was a possibility of leading a life, a good life, that was neither liberal nor Marxist, neither exclusively individualist or collectivist, but built upon the reconciliation of interests which at first required the recognition of conflict and tension. The ‘new thing’ in *Rerum Novarum* (which means ‘these new things’), was something that wasn’t so new to English people, and was the idea that in capitalism a human being could be treated as a commodity. The human being didn’t have a soul, wasn’t connected to others. If you couldn’t get a local job or feed yourself you had to leave your family. It’s a story that in east London we’ve lived with ever since. The Catholic Church said that the human being had a soul, that the human being is relational – the meaning of life is found in relationship with others – and that capitalism can be a very destructive force.

But second, and equally important, was that this idea of the human being in capitalism was just to be exploited for their labour and let go. This said the Church was no way to treat an animal let alone a human being. There was then a very strong criticism of capitalism but this did not lead to a call for what was called ‘the terrible errors of Marxism’. Marxism says that capitalism is a wicked system so we need to abolish it and then bring in a dictatorship of the proletariat or a working class tyranny. The Catholic Church argued for a reconciliation of interests.

In 1945 Labour came into power and introduced the welfare state and a programme of nationalisation, but strangely it didn’t really change the conditions of the poor. Then under Margaret Thatcher the Conservatives emphasised the market and less state intervention and it just made things worse.

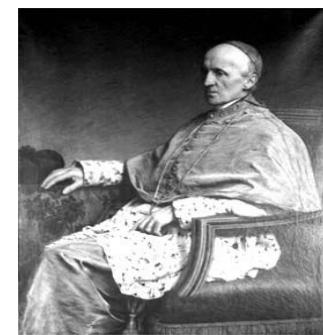
So the old is the new – what was born in England in the dockers’ strike in 1889 will be the future – the past is the future. It is Catholic social thought now that can’t be stopped



intimacies of the darkest recesses of our lives, is down to you. If the YCW ever taught me anything it was that *I am responsible* for the vocation in the world, for living out, or at least attempting to live out, to give some hope, joy and love.

What does it demand of us to be a ‘Church for the poor’?

First and foremost it demands a relationship with the poor. It demands that we build new structures in our Church and in our communities so that the poor of our communities are part of the shaping of the Church. If we miss that, we all miss it, because we are the church together, and not apart. It’s not a task for ‘them up there’, it’s a task for all of us. I believe that passionately because I believe that if we don’t move together not just as a Catholic community but a shared faith community, with all the faiths, then actually we deny the heritage on which our world should be based.



So the heart of Catholic social thinking is based upon the infinite value of every single human being. Is it any wonder therefore, that Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum*, which no doubt in my mind has Manning’s fingerprints all over it. Manning was the one who fought it out in North America when one of the US Catholic unions (the Knights of Labor) was close to being proscribed, an action that would have alienated the Catholic bishops in America from the working people. It was Manning who Leo XIII trusted to intervene to stop that happening.

When we talk about building Catholic social thinking, what is this ‘common good’ that we are called to serve? Joe Kirwan (Principal of Plater Trust College), who I had the great privilege of studying under, saying one of the best definitions of the Common Good he had was that it is ‘a search for, and maintenance of, all those necessary conditions to enable people to become more fully human’. All those necessary conditions, whether that be health and safety at work, decent housing, decent pay, a good work environment, work itself, education, training, access to the fruits of the Earth equally. All those things that will enable us to flourish; to be who we’re meant to be. Creative, artistic, poetic, joyful beings in the world, giving hope.

I had the opportunity at the GMB conference recently to put a question to a potential Minister of State for Employment if there is a change of government next year. I asked him a question about whether a new government would ban zero-hours contracts in public

In the introduction we started with the match workers dispute. It was of course women who were involved in that, and we often forget the struggle of women at that time. Women played a major part, but it's only much later that we actually see women's unions being formed.



Manning had seen and lived the struggle, he had opened his doors, his heart and his mind to it, informed by a love of the gospel. As in the case of Joseph Cardijn, he saw young workers going into the workshops, factories and mills near his home. After coming back from the seminary Cardijn couldn't understand why the young workers were so powerless, so downtrodden. What happened to the energy, the joy, the love, the freedom, the excitement? Why now had work turned them into brutish beings? This is what also motivated Cardijn to say this is not right. This is wrong. How can I have this privileged life? And of course he himself had come from a working family and seen this struggle, and is why he committed his vocation to the role of the workers. Manning's life was also committed in this way.



We also forget that Manning in 1872 stood on the platform with the agricultural workers when they were establishing the Agricultural Labourers Union. That's 17 years prior to the dock strike. So it wasn't just that (the dock strike). This is a continuum. It is somebody reflecting gently of the core message of the gospel, the fundamental message in Catholic social thinking: the unique value of every single human being in the eyes of God. The hands, the face, the eyes of Christ in, with and through us.

So I'm not surprised that he's 80 years energetic and delivering out this message! In the same way Cardijn would get on the rostrum and say 'I am 80 years young!' because if you actually believe the heart of the gospel message, if we actually begin to understand Catholic social thinking – the unique value of every single person – I cannot see how we can fail to be radical. I cannot see how we can fail to challenge injustice. I cannot see how the Church can ignore the cries of the poor on its doorstep because if it does it fails to live out the very task the Lord has called it to do: to give witness and reality to God's love for the world in and through your lives and through your work.

Catholic social teaching is *not* a set of documents just for the higher echelons, for the Cardinals, for the bishops, for the priests – it is primarily for you and for me. For the reality of whether Catholic social teaching comes alive in our communities, in our homes, in the

and offers the possibility of a good life and a reconciliation of interests that is both pro-business, because you need to be 'busy', you need to do things, and pro-worker in that you can't have that without the dignity of labour and respect for work.

Now I think to a lot of us this sounds almost like common sense, but still in the world this is considered some kind of strange heresy and over the last 100 years it's been considered as



completely misguided. So we've got to honour the strike in terms of giving us the inheritance, a tradition that is unique to England, unique to our place, that is in fact going to be a tremendous blessing to the world. I remember when I was invited to the Vatican I had a conversation with Pope Francis and he said to me, 'England?

Who would have thought England would be the place'. And I said well it's not the first time, and I mentioned Cardinal Manning and he said 'That's right'. The Germans also claim it through Archbishop Von Ketteler who was also a very important part of it, so it was a combination of those two.

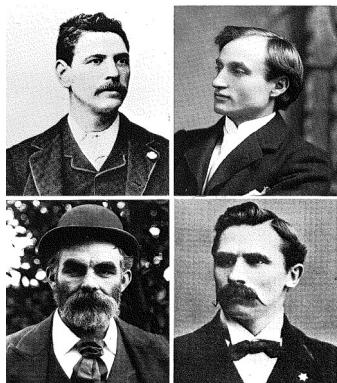
So let's just look at the lessons of the strike. The dockers said that they were being exploited, but as individuals they couldn't do anything about it. I always say to MPs, 'Why are you in politics?' and they say to make a difference, and I say, 'what you're not in politics to earn a living, to have a better job, get the respect of people?' and they say 'No, no...I have no interest in that...'. I never work with those people, and I don't trust them! They are talking about an individual contribution but the real change comes when you establish relationships with others, when you are organised, when there *is* something in it for *you* too, that your life, the lives of your family and people around you is better. Between collectivism and altruism it's all a dead end, but in reconciling mutual interests – the common good – that's the way ahead.

What I love about Catholic social thought is that it understands sin. The encyclicals talk about a 'structure of sin' in the modern world of capitalism and the state which encourages faithlessness, promiscuity, greed, avarice, lust. I'm completely with this – that we've got to have *virtue* and a sense of vocation in the world and that's fundamentally a relational issue. It's about moderation too, which is a crucial thing in the Great Dock Strike. One story that is very rarely told is that when they had the processions they had 3 banners - the first being the 'dockers' tanner', the demands of the strike that there should be a penny rise in the hourly rate in normal time and tuppence rise in overtime. For those who grew up after decimalisation, a tanner was sixpence which is 2½p in today's money so they were asking for a 2½ pence rise which makes the Living Wage look quite generous!

The second was something like this one (the Cardinal Manning Lodge banner) and the third was the ‘temperance movement’, as Cardinal Manning was a tremendous temperance reformer. There was a strong notion about living a good life with others and temperance was a part of that.

So what are the lessons of the strike? The first involves organising and the one of the key things about organising is a stress not on transforming the world, not on ends, not outcomes but ‘incomes’, relationships, talking to people. The method of organising is in one-to-one conversations, to get to know people, to trust others. That was a really important part of the story of the strike in that only with others can you have power, can you begin to act in the world. You cannot do it on your own. This is a massive Catholic insight: the social nature of the person. One of the great things about the Church, which is shared with Judaism, is that you can’t take Mass on the internet – you have to turn up, have real physical presence, be there with people in communion and in association.

During the strike there was a trust between people based on their experience and based on their conversation, that’s how they overcame their divisions. The division between Catholic and Protestant was more easily overcome than the division between the north and south London dock side communities! They managed to do it not by passing resolutions and without talking to people but by getting people together to vote in public assemblies – a real physical presence. It wasn’t done by an anonymous postal ballot.



Another thing about their organisation which is vital is that you didn’t need to have a PPE degree from Oxford to be a trade union or labour leader. There is no evidence that Ben Tiller or John Burns or Tom Mann went to school let alone to University. They were working class leaders, they had talent and ability and they developed this idea of bringing people together to work out what they wanted. It was the most moderate request in the world that dockers should be paid a penny more an hour. It was winnable – this is a big thing with organising. The dock owners came across as being simply mean, that they were refusing to recognise the demands of the dockers who themselves had enormous public support.



We sometimes miss the point that in his formation Cardinal Manning was in a rural parish and knew what it was like for the landless to be without land; he knew what it was like to be powerless, because he experienced it in his ordinary everyday ministry in the parishes that he served. In Ireland in the 1840s he saw graphically the impact of people losing land, and at the time of the famine, when many fled to England and overseas, he would later become a key campaigner on the ‘Irish question’, so this experience obviously made a deep impression and impact.

So here we are at a pivotal time for the whole trade union movement, a pivotal time in our social and economic history. One of the stories told about Will Thorne is that when going to visit one of the workers in the backstreets around here, he saw the worker’s wife sitting half-naked on a bench with breast cancer. He saw her sores and her agony, and it moved him deeply to see the abject poverty that these people were living in, 12 or 13 people living in a house or a room in order just to survive. This was the heart of a situation in which men went daily to the docks to work and were put in pens to try and get a ‘tally’ (a ‘brass tally’ would be given

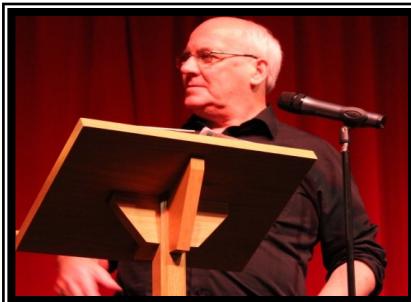


to and exchanged by the dockers for work) or some means to be called for 4 or even 1 hour’s work. The pens were there to keep them in and to protect the foreman who had to allocate the daily work. This was the economic order at its most brutal, at its most brutal: people *fighting* to get work.



We have to steep ourselves in the reality and agony of that: day in, day out, going back to try and get enough to try and live a simple pitance of a life, with children, with wives and with families to support. That’s the truth of it. This was the reality that Cardinal Manning’s parish and neighbouring parishes saw. This is what made it powerful. How could we say that we love our neighbour and that in them we see the image of God, and that at the same time we see them impoverished, denied the very existence of even a penny to live on? To grovel for work, day in, day out? How could we see people treated that way and believe in a loving God? That’s what powered Manning’s heart and it’s the power of the gospel that roots us in Catholic social teaching.

Kevin Flanagan (St Antony's Centre for Church and Industry) - The heart of Catholic social teaching

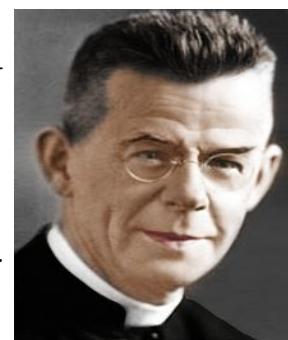


The heart of Catholic social thinking is the old and the new. But in a sense we miss part of the point if we think that everything Cardinal Manning did and the dockers' strike was the starting point. What we say is it is the starting point of modern Catholic social thinking.

For the last 34 years I have been trying to establish the Centre for Church and Industry (in Manchester) trying to link the reality of the Church's social thinking and the world of work. As a student I went to Plater College, originally called the Catholic Workers' College, which was probably one of the best things I ever did, because it gave me an opportunity to study Catholic social teaching, and, very gently at least, it managed to enthuse me. My own roots lie in the YCW (Young Christian Workers) movement to whom I was introduced to as a young man. In fact when Joseph Cardijn (right) founded the YCW in the 1930s it was known in Belgium as the 'Youth Union' and later became known as the 'Young Christian Workers'. Cardijn would thump the rostrum at mass rallies and say 'You are not slaves, you are not beasts of burden, you are sons and daughters of God!' and the crowd would cheer.

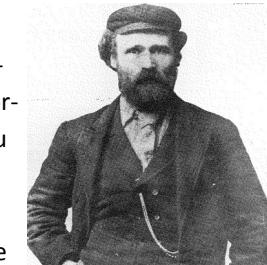
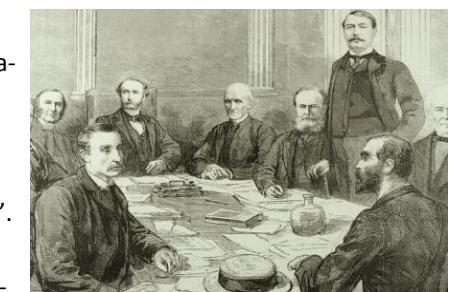
It was my involvement with the YCW that led me to seriously consider Plater College as an option for study and it was that that led me into trade unionism in my teenage years inside the brewing industry, not because I knew everything about trade unionism, but what it did do was inspire me in the heart of what the gospel stands for: What is the greatest commandment? Love God, and love your brother and sister as yourself. That's the root of Catholic social thinking.

I've spent 40 years officially inside the trade union movement and I have the great privilege of being the National President of the Commercial Services section of the GMB (I was formally in APEX Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff) before it joined the GMB and in fact one of the first events I went to when APEX joined was in Beckton to celebrate 100 years of Will Thorne's establishment of the gasworkers' union. It was a celebration of what the foundations of the GMB and the great gasworkers dispute (in 1889) which actually won an 8 hour day.



The people of this area came together during the strike to elect their own leaders. It wasn't led by technicians or technocrats, it was led by the people themselves. You can't change the world at all unless you are prepared to open yourselves to others, to be in relationship with others, and then from being faithful to your tradition, open up to the goodness in other traditions to build an association and a greater bond. And this, extraordinarily, was how my party, the Labour Party was born, but if you tell the story in Labour, no-one even remembers it. They say we were founded to create equality and justice and diversity and accessibility and inclusivity. This really wasn't the language of the dock strike. Their language was 'brotherhood', 'solidarity', 'vocation'.

The second lesson moves us more to the Cardinal Manning side of things. Manning was on what was called the 'Mansion House Committee' which involved the Lord Mayor and a representative of the docks and this was supposed to be some kind of impartial committee. Cardinal Manning let it be known that he had huge sympathy with the dockers and as the strike went on, the Lord Mayor and Anglican Bishop of London got bored and went on holiday. It was Manning who stayed. So another lesson is 'don't walk out'. Saul Alinsky who is the founder of community organising said the definition of a liberal is someone who leaves the room before the argument begins. People these days can't deal with conflict, can't deal with tension, they tend to walk out and get offended, but Cardinal Manning just stayed on the job. So when the public support for the dockers came in, Manning was the man on the spot and he could broker a deal. So durability, patience and faithfulness are an important part of that story.



Another huge part of the story which people forget was that Cardinal Manning was 81 years old: he was an old man. I'm in the House of Lords which is the only place other than the Bishops' Conference where older people are still respected and have some power! It's amazing that you have people at the age of 80 on committees and absolutely active because we neglect the old at our peril, they are a source of our inspiration. I sometimes joke that Tony Blair said that 'we're at our best when we're at our boldest' which I rephrased to 'we're at our best when we're at our oldest'! We've got to honour the old. A lifetime of wisdom went into Manning's role and technically speaking these days it would be illegal for him to be in place because he was so far past retirement age.

So now I want to move forward to ask what was distinctive about the approach that Cardinal Manning took in relation to Catholic social thought, which is one of the enduring legacies of the strike, the other being the labour movement itself. Alone in Europe, the labour movement in this country was not divided along religious lines nor between religious and secular, but was a broad based, quite deeply conservative movement that was attached to family, place and the representation of labour interests, which would have been impossible without Catholic social thought. And it is impossible today unless we remember and honour that particular tradition.



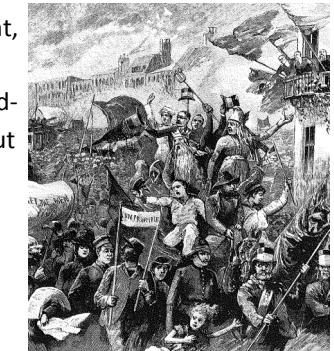
There was then this critique of capitalism, this sense that it was as Pope Leo XIII referred to a condition akin to slavery, because if the system is based on maximisation of return on investment then it's obligatory for the capitalist to get the most amount of money as quickly as possible on their investment. The problem is if what you're investing in requires human labour and natural resources what you're doing is turning human beings and nature into a commodity. Now, what Catholic social thought says is that to resist the domination of one interest, resist the domination of capital, the answer is not just to turn to and ask the State to do the resistance but you must build relationships and institutions, and particularly around this concept of the dignity of labour: that the human being is simply not a commodity and they are not to be used in that way.

This led to a very interesting thing. What the Church said was – and this was why it was accused of being nostalgic – was that we should really actively build vocation and skilled work, amounting to an honouring of work which was considered absolutely wrong by the liberals, who said that work was based on individual contract. But neither did the Church call for collectivism, instead it called for the development of incentives to virtue so that people, through relationships, come together to form associations and honour work.

Workers should be represented in the governance of firms – that was a big thing with Catholic social thought. People thought it was a crazy idea but the that you should have local banks that should loan within regions and not outside regions. Everybody laughed at that until, you remember, 2008 when it turned out that we had no regional banks left as everything was in the City of London and they'd blown it all in an 8 year binge and we had to bail them out. That was the biggest transfer of wealth from poor to rich – September 28th 2008 – since the Norman conquest.

have a say, not a dominant say, but a say in the governance of politics and the governance of the economy. In terms of the beauty of what took place in the Great Dock Strike, bringing everybody together who was in the same circumstances and keeping it peaceful – that was an incredible achievement.

Leaders were developed from within this peaceful movement, from within the communities they served – that's another huge lesson we need to remember. It was based on an incredibly disciplined moderation: a penny: a winnable demand. But as a consequence organised labour was recognised and for the first time since the Reformation the Catholic Church was recognised as a constitutive of the nation, and people were given hope that through associations their lives and those of the people around them could be improved.



And finally, is that these events helped to generate an entirely new thought – *rerum novarum*, these new things. The Church found its vocation, found it's voice, as a force for solidarity, a force for justice and a force for work.

So these are things that, in a way, East London has given to the world. I suggest that firstly we remember that for ourselves, that we don't give it all away and keep a bit of it for ourselves because we need it now. The rich are still dominant. The rich and the educated are still humiliating the poor and the workers, and we are still in desperate need of a common good. We have to build this common good between immigrants and locals, between faithful and secular, in order to assert the fundamental truth of Catholic social thought: that human beings are not a commodity and that by working together you preserve the dignity of the person.

