

Cardinal Manning's 1892 Essay on Honour

Epigraphs

“Honour inspires a certain indignation against all paltering with truth....It has so strong an affinity with truth, that it would rather speak out even untimely truths than be silent....To mean what you say and to say what you mean, wins even enemies at last. Honour never falters; and even enemies are disarmed before it.” (Henry Edward Cardinal Manning, *Pastime Papers* (1892), Chapter One)

“The profound thing which Cardinal Manning said to me [“when I was but twenty years old”—*i.e.*, in 1890, and it was less than two years before Manning himself was to die at 83 years of age in January of 1892] was this: '**All human conflict is ultimately theological.**'” (Hilaire Belloc, *The Cruise of the Nona* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925), pages 51-52)

“In one of those great halls which the winter darkens and which are proper to the North [up in Norway, “down from the Dovrefield”], there sat a group of men **kindly and full of the winter night** and of their food and drink, upon which for many hours they had regaled together, and not only full of song, but satiated with it, so long and so loudly had they sung....I say they were tired of song **and filled with many good things, but chiefly with companionship. They had landed recently from the sea** [these Vikings]....Cold came with it [the open gate] for a moment, and the night air; light, and, as though blown before that draught [of “night air”], there **drifted** into the hall **a tall man** [“the missionary”], very young, who bowed with a gesture they did not know....The Faith went [thus] over the world as very light seed goes upon the wind, and no one knows **the drift** on which it blew; it came to one place [among the hospitable and receptive Norsemen] and to another, and to each in a different way. **It came, not to many men, but always to one heart**, till all men had hold of it [as was the case with that Old Norse Seaman-Pilot “who had often run down into the vineyard lands [of the Franks]....and...he [himself] had very bright but very pale gray eyes **that were full of humility.**” (Hilaire Belloc, “The Missioner,” is to be found in Belloc's own 1909 Essay Collection, *On Everything* (London: Methuen & Co., 1909), pp. 261-263, and 269—my emphasis added. The entire vivid essay itself is to be found on pages 261-269 of *On Everything*, and it is also a very beautiful one, indeed—in my view, it is one of Belloc's best and most intimate and evocative essays, written in his late thirties when he was still full of adventure and missionary journeys himself.)

While attempting to retrieve a memorable 1909 Hilaire Belloc essay (“The Missioner”) for a College student — to be then conveniently found in a 1926 Anthology entitled *Representative Catholic Essays* — I unexpectedly saw and read for the first time an earlier 1892 essay on “Honor” by Henry Edward Cardinal Manning, who was one of Belloc's own beloved mentors and heroes.¹ Cardinal Manning's fresh and acute insights about “what honour does” and about “what honour is” are still worthy of our own grateful and deepening consideration now almost a century and a quarter later. He will also gradually and cumulatively teach us the fuller English sense of “on my honour” as well as “what honour does not do.”

Cardinal Manning, moreover, was writing just before the onset of Britain's own consequential, imperial Boer Wars in Africa, and we may analogously thus learn, for our greater good, some fitting things to do and not to do morally amidst our own Imperial Wars and Revolutions today. Chesterton and Belloc themselves, who were “Little Englanders” and thus opposed to the hubris and injustice of the Boer Wars, might well have warned us “Big Americaners” today not to become so centrifugally overextended and so hollowed out. And they would likely have helped us also to live out manfully, and so to increase, our Honour in Foreign Policy, as well as our Honour in Military Policy.

After considering how “some men, even after death, vindicate to themselves what was denied them in life, and live with an everlasting recognition in the memory of mankind,” (1) Cardinal Manning says: “In this sense, honour means veneration, love, gratitude, recognition of personal and public utility and service and the like.” (1-2) More importantly, however, our learned and still classically educated Cardinal says:

It is remarkable that though honour has many senses, it has not among them in other languages [such as Greek] the special sense common in our own [English language]. Among the Romans, it [honour] signified the veneration of which we have spoken. There were many degrees of it, personal, civic, and religious.

1 *Representative Catholic Essays*, edited by George Carver and Ellen M. Geyer (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), 221 pages. Hilaire Belloc's 1909 essay “The Missioner”—about the spreading of the Faith to Norway—comes from his own authorial collection of essays, *On Everything* (1909), and is the first essay in the later 1926 Catholic Anthology, on pages 11-19. Cardinal Manning's essay, “Honor” (spelled “Honour,” in Britain) is to be found on pages 176-184 of that Anthology; and it comes just after G.K. Chesterton's own 1922 chapter, “The Story of the Vow,” from his longer book, *The Superstition of Divorce* (1922). Chesterton's especially brilliant and profound chapter is presented on pages 162-175 of the 1926 Catholic Anthology. The Anthology is worth reading in its entirety, but it is not easy to find in libraries today. Therefore, I shall use the pagination of Cardinal Manning's original 1892 book, *Pastime Papers* (London: Burns & Oates, 1892), pages 1-12. References to that same text, which is now also available reprinted, will be placed above in parentheses in the main body of the current appreciative essay. *Pastime Papers* was first published shortly after Cardinal Manning's death in January of 1892, at 83 years of age—his having been born in 1908.

Divine honours lifted men to the gods...**But that sense is not the sense we are seeking**....Now, neither the Latins or Greeks would have understood an Englishman when he said, “**Upon my honour.**” (2-3—my emphasis added)

Manning then proceeds to go a little deeper into this special English usage, for as to honour,

It is among us **the adjuration** [solemn oath] **of a man by himself**. And this is **no empty form**. A priest swears, or affirms *in verbo sacerdotis*, because his priesthood is, or ought to be, **the highest obligation, containing all that is sacred in his office and in his person**. A knight pledged himself **on the faith of a true knight, because to him falsehood was a moral death**. When a man, then, says, “**Upon my honour,**” he pledges himself **by all that he is or has of truth, integrity, or dignity—that is, by his whole price, or worth before God and man**. Here we come to the sense we are seeking. This honour is **not** the price that the world sets upon a man, **but the price he sets upon himself**. (3—my bold emphasis added)

Lest this view be, or appear to be, too subjective, Cardinal Manning raises an objection, and then forthrightly attempts to answer it:

But it may be said that men set a very false price on themselves, and dream that they are what they are not. **The subjective consciousness is often self-loving with a peacock's tail. And none treat others more haughtily than those who have least worth in them**. Nevertheless, the rule is true. Just as there is a vicious self-love, and a rational self-love, so there is a vainglorious self-consciousness, and a just consciousness of self. The first is inflated, unreal, and selfish; the last is humble, real, and true. (4—my emphasis added)

After saying that “Of vainglorious self-consciousness we need not speak,” (4) he gives us some warnings and some more differentiated understanding of honour and its contrasting counterfeits:

If a man seeks for honours as the end of his actions, **he becomes double**. **Even the good he does is not done because it is good**, but because it will bring him popularity and praise. This self-consciousness and reflection upon self is not to be found only in empty and unreal characters. Even greater men may be beset by it. But it is neither their motive nor their end; it is **the cloud of dust that follows the wheels that are in motion**. Self-consciousness will envelop **minds that are actively good and true**. **It is their temptation and their torment**: if indulged, it becomes their vice; if resisted, it is their **discipline of humility**. For humility does not consist in an ignorance of truth. (4-5—my emphasis added)

By then becoming more specifically illustrative about a boy or man who cannot help but recognize certain true facts, Cardinal Manning will draw us on to consider some splendid qualities and inescapable responsibilities of true honour, in light of one's knowledge of reality:

If a man is above the average height of men, he cannot help knowing it. If he is stronger than others, he learned it in boyhood, when youths measure strength. If he be skilful in games and sports, he cannot fail to know it. If he comes out first in contest[s] of strength and skill, **in body or mind, or in moral action**, how can he be unconscious of it? **Every day he is learning by an accumulating experience what is his lot and share in the gifts of Nature, or in acquisitions of his own mental and moral life.** He cannot be ignorant of it **if he would.** If his own inward perceptions were so dull, his eyes and ears would learn it by the words and dealings of those around him. **All this creates in a man a sense of duty and responsibility.** (5—my emphasis added)

Manning will now make some distinctions to support his understanding of our different kinds of fittingness and obligation in our different stages of life:

What was fitting in his [“a man's”] youth is no longer fitting in his manhood, in his maturity, in his old age [Manning himself was then in his early 80s]. What is fitting for others is not, therefore, fitting for him. **Every lot has its own measures. This which to one man would be proportionate, to another would be too much or too little.** Our state is made up of a multitude of conditions or elements, some within and some without; the essential are within, the accidental are without. **The whole sum of what a man is by nature, habit, acquisition, mentally and morally—all these make up the standard by which what is proportionate in each man may be measured.** (5-6—my emphasis added)

Once again, while on his polite incremental way to help us to understand and to live the Cardinal Virtues, Manning will give us some concrete examples about fittingly proportionate standards:

What in one man would be **generous**, in another would be **narrow-hearted**; what in one would be **a fair advantage**, in another would be **exacting**. A poor man may do many things which in a rich man would be **out of all moral fitness**. A man of low estate enjoys a liberty **where another in higher estate must live in bondage. This does not mean that one must die of dignity, or the other let himself down with laxities of speech and manners; but there is a fitness and proportion attaching to every estate and to every man**; and it is an instinct of common sense **to perceive it, and to make it the measure of our dealings with others and with ourselves. This is what we mean by honour; and we feel at once the meaning of the words honourable and dishonourable:** “Honour is as honour does.” (6—my emphasis added)

Cardinal Manning then specifically and politely says that he now thus even further wants “to draw out somewhat in particular **what this honour means and does.**” (7—my emphasis added) His

chivalrous insights, presented under six sections, constitute a fine compendium of what is honourable and what is not. For, his contrasts will also clarify our minds. For example:

Honour makes a man scrupulously exact in **keeping engagements and promises, explicit and implicit**. It is large, generous, and prompt **going beyond** the strict obligation of law and conscience. To be sordid or mean, tricky or sharp, would be more painful than any loss. Some men will fulfil what can be legally enforced, but nothing beyond. They may have incurred “debts of honour”; but if they are not claimed, they will not offer them; if they are forgotten, they will not pay them. **If they have only raised the hope and expectation of poor people by vague hints of help, they feel no obligation to fulfil them**. In making bargains, they [the Dishonourable] take advantage of every circumstance known to them, unknown to the other....Some men, when they find too late that they have made an unwise promise to their own disadvantage, will try to slip out of it. Honour will keep it [that “unwise promise”], though it be to a man's hindrance. (7-8—my emphasis added)

After alluding to the honorable Regulus of Rome, who, to his own perilous disadvantage, kept his promise and fulfilled his parole by returning to the Carthaginians in the First Punic War (circa 255 B.C.), Manning gives us another aspect of honour:

Honour makes men **faithful in keeping secrets**, and therefore [sic] unwilling to receive them, for secrets are like red-hot ploughshares [cutting blades]. Only saints can walk safely between them. To keep secrets **under the cross-fire of questions and curiosities which harass the world** is not easy. (8—my emphasis added)

As to the very important third aspect of chivalrous honour, Manning adds the following:

Honour makes men magnanimous in forgiving and forgetting offenses and ingratiitudes. It has a **long memory for what is good and noble**, and a short memory for what is evil and base. Petty spites, resentments, retaliations, mean revenges, secret animosities, jealousies, and malice in word or deed, are **cast out of an honourable mind** as if by exorcism. **Men of honour** deal with an especial generosity with those who have unworthily treated them. They treat them **not as they deserve, but as they could least expect**. It is **honour's *lex talionis*** to return good for evil; kindness for ill-will. The world will call it want [a lack] of knowledge of men; **but honour is wiser than the world, and as strong as it is wise**. (8-9—my bold emphasis added)

The fourth category under which we are to consider the actions of honour is respectfulness, and this further shows Cardinal Manning's heart for the poor and the manifoldly deprived:

Honour makes men **to be respectful to everybody, but especially to those**

below them in station, education, or social advantage—such as the poor, or servants, or dependents in any kind or degree. It has **no adulation for the great, and no loftiness for the lowly**; but a **sympathy with all that is honest and true**....It treats all men as kings' sons, **recognising** in them, **through all the weeds of worldly inequality**, the nature of man and his dignity; **for “a man is worth what he is worth before God, and nothing more.”** And even **the unworthy they will treat with a courtesy** which more than the keenest words makes them conscious of their little worth. Honour **acts** honourably as light shines, **by its own nature** [cf. “*operari sequitur esse*”]; and is the same to all, **not** because of what **they** are, **but because of what it [honour] is in itself.** (9—my emphasis added)

Under the fifth aspect, Cardinal Manning considers the “*bonum commune*,” the “common good,” or larger “public good”:

Honour carries men over all [merely] private ends and private interests, **when the public good comes in.** It was said of a great heathen [by Lucan, the Roman Poet] that he was “*indocilis privata loqui*” [“incapable of telling secrets”]: which may [also] be rendered, that **he could not be got to talk of anything but public affairs.** (9—my bold emphasis added)

The final aspect to be considered — the sixth sub-heading — has to do with honourable indignation, and its just reasons in the presence of equivocation or prevarication or any unworthy trifling:

Lastly: honour inspires a certain **indignation against all paltering with truth.** It is **impatient** with equivocations, ambiguities, amphibologies [negligent, or even sometimes intended, **grammatical** ambiguities], or white lies. **It has so strong an affinity with truth, that it would rather speak out even untimely truths than be silent. Truth will always take care of itself.** It may make confusion, and turn things upside down, like a shell [artillery round] falling into a square [a military formation]: but **in the long run, the most veracious man is the most useful, and most at peace with those whom his veracity has offended. To mean what you say, and to say what you mean, wins even enemies at last. Honour never palter**s; and even enemies are **disarmed** before it [*i.e.*, in its presence]. (10—my emphasis added)

Showing his integrity once again, Cardinal Manning anticipates and faces some objections to his presentation thus far:

Now all of this [sense of honour and show of indignation] **may be full of pride**; because, like Pharisaiism, the best things **might be full of self; and self, unless mastered, is full of evil.** But honour may **only** be **consciousness** of what is high, and right, and true, **prompting always to what is higher, nobler,**

and truer both in word and deed; and that **not** for vain-glory, nor for self-interest, but for its own sake. **There must be no pride in conscious rectitude**: in the *nil conscire sibi, nulla pallescere culpa* of an upright man [quoting the Roman poet Horace: “to be conscious of no guilt, and to turn pale at no charge of personal culpability”]. (10—my bold emphasis added)

As he approaches the end of his reflections upon honour, Cardinal Manning makes an important transition to consider the perfections of virtue, both in the natural order and in the supernatural order. He is even willing to take a certain risk, as he attempts to define honour adequately:

Thus far we have spoken of **what honour does**; but we have not ventured to define **what honour is**. We will, however, **run the risk**, and it may be **the gauntlet** of the wise who abound in the world.

It would seem, then, that honour is the perfection of the virtues of the natural order, as charity is the perfection of the virtues of the supernatural order. And we must believe that the superstructure will not stand firm unless the foundation be four-square beneath. [Grace presupposes and builds upon Nature, purifying it and elevating it and perfecting it, as our Catholic Faith also teaches us.] Christian talk, and pious emotions, and imaginative visions of perfection and devotion, if they do not rest upon these solid foundations, easily ascend in a balloon and and float away. The virtues of the natural order are: first, prudence, which knows and measures the proportions and fitness of states and actions; secondly, justice, which gives to every one his right, and even goes beyond it: for justice is not only the doing things justly, but the doing them as a just man would do them, that is **in motive, and measure, and manner**; the justice of the just man is not merely liberal [with a largesse of spirit], but equitable and generous.² (11—my emphasis added)

Cardinal Manning, slightly altering the more traditional hierarchical sequence of the Four Cardinal Virtues, now concludes his exposition, first with Temperance and then Fortitude, in that intentional and purposive order, as we shall see:

After this [*i.e.*, the virtue of justice] comes **temperance**, which **chastens, restrains and subdues** passions, affections, and desires of what is pleasant , soft and sweet to self in all its forms, **so as to make us unselfish**. And finally comes **fortitude**, which **denies itself and suffers, and willingly sacrifices its own and itself for truth, justice, generosity, and the public weal**. These four rise into what the old world called *virtue* which was equivalent to **courage or fortitude in a heroic degree**, crowning temperance, justice, and prudence **with a sovereign strength of mastery. In the supernatural order, this would be charity, the bond of perfection, and the fullness of fortitude in self-oblation**

² There appear to be some typographical errors in this original 1892 text, three on page 11 and one on page 12: “balloon” instead of “balloon”; “produce” instead of “prudence”; and “beuitable” instead of “equitable”; and “unselfish” instead of “unselfish.” I have made the proper emendations already in the quoted passages above.

and in martyrdom. (11-12—my bold emphasis added; italics in the original)

Would that I had earlier been given this essay on “Honour” to read and to savor, especially when, now so many years ago, I was first taught as a new cadet (1960-1964) the still distinctively resonant West Point Motto: “**Duty, Honor, Country.**” It would have been a good formative preparation for me then (and thereafter) as a future American military officer and commando.

Cardinal Manning's lucid and inspiring insights about honor would have also fortified our fuller living out of the West Point **Honor Code** itself, and given us even a greater gratitude for the whole culture and atmosphere of our own self-policing **West Point Honor System** and its permeating and deeply formative discipline.

Therefore, may it be so — or soon come to be so — that Cardinal Manning's 1892 essay on “Honour” would still be gratefully and formatively read at West Point today by the cadets. And henceforth also permeate their lives.

(This Essay is Dedicated to the Memory of my Beloved Friend, Anthony S. Fraser of Scotland, himself a Man of Honour and the loyal Catholic Editor of APROPOS who died almost two years ago now, on 28 August 2014, the Feast of Saint Augustine of Hippo.)

--FINIS--

© 2016 Robert D. Hickson