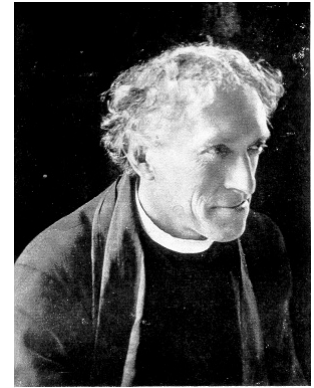


## Prayer of the Month • July 2017

O God, whose glory the heavens declare and whose handiwork the firmament sheweth, grant, we beseech thee, that all the workers of the world may be emancipated from the dominion of mammon and that all labour and craftsmanship may be established in justice and become a work, of ministry in thy Kingdom of grace; through Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord who, liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Conrad Noel, 1869–1942



This prayer, from the Red Mass of Conrad Noel's Catholic Crusade, is unusually about 'the workers of the world'. Maybe it is a phrase we would not use today, although perhaps we should. It is of an era, the inter-war years, but it has a strength of intention (that *all* workers should be emancipated), and a breadth of vision ('ministry in thy Kingdom'), that is heartening. We can still pray for justice for all workers.

Conrad Noel was born on 12 July 1869, at Kew. He was ordained in the Church of England in 1894, and from 1907 was the organising secretary of the Church Socialist League. He also founded the Catholic Crusade in 1918 to promulgate his views, and wrote several books, including 'The Battle of the Flags' (1922) and 'Jesus the Heretic' (1939). He was vicar at Thaxted in Essex from 1910 until his death in 1942, being appointed by the patron, the Countess of Warwick. She was an aristocratic socialist and feminist, an admirer and biographer of William Morris, who apparently rather hoped that Noel would simply use Thaxted as a base from which he could continue his speaking engagements around the country. Noel, however, took his responsibilities as Vicar seriously and settled down to make Thaxted parish church a centre for liturgical and social renewal which attracted attention from around the world. Noel renovated the church, taking out the dark Victorian pews, and in their place erecting chapels, altars and shrines which burst with delight and colour. None of this would, of course today get past the system of faculty jurisdictions or the Victorian Society. He became known as the 'Red Vicar' because of his socialism. He at first joined the Independent Labour Party, but in 1911 became a founding member of the British Socialist Party, and later founded the Order of the Church Militant. Within the church at Thaxted, Noel hung the red flag and the flag of Sinn Féin alongside the flag of St George. This led to the 'Battle of the Flags' with students from Cambridge leading attacks on the church to remove the flags; eventually a consistory court ruled against his displaying the flags and Noel obeyed the ruling. He was a friend of Gustav Holst, who lived in the village for some years, hence the name of the hymn tune Thaxted, adapted from Holst's Planet Suite. He died on 2 July 1942.

Colin Lunt