



ORGANISED CHRISTIANS

A contextual sounding on the
meaning of community organising
and the faithful motivation to
organise amongst Christians in
East London today

Arabella Milbank

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This research was conducted as part of the [Contending Modernities](#) research initiative based at the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies.

[Contending Modernities](#) is a global research and education initiative focused on collaboration among secular and religious universities, institutions, and leaders.

contendingmodernities.nd.edu

foreword

This paper is one of a series of pieces of work from the Contextual Theology Centre which have been generated by the University of Notre Dame's *Contending Modernities* project. These explore how people of diverse faiths and cultures – in areas with large migrant communities – discern and promote a common good.

Because it allows diverse citizens to bring their *whole* identity into the public square, community organising seems to offer a way in which they can work together peaceably, faithfully and effectively. Arabella Milbank's paper tests this against reality, asking a diverse range of east London Christians to speak of the motivation for their common action. We are very grateful for her inspiring account of their theology and spirituality.

Angus Ritchie
Director
Feast of Christ the King, 2012

acknowledgments

The research for this report was conducted as part of the Contending Modernities Project <http://kroc.nd.edu/research/religion-conflict-peacebuilding/contending-modernities> an initiative of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. This project as a whole seeks to ‘develop a rich and nuanced understanding of how religious and secular institutions and individuals interact, for good and ill’ to which this report seeks to make some contribution.

Particular thanks to Canon Dr Angus Ritchie, the Director of the Contextual Theology Centre through whom my own original Jellicoe internship, a parish placement and experience of community organising, was made possible and under whose direction this research was carried out.

My gratitude is also owed to all those individuals whose views are represented anonymously in this report, for their generosity with time and hospitality and their nuanced reflection on the theory and practise of being faithful citizens. These include the Jellicoe summer and year-round interns, staff at the Contextual Theology Centre at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine, and clergy and laypeople from St John at Hackney, St Peter’s Bethnal Green, St Stephen and St Nicholas Manor Park, St Mary’s Cable St in Tower Hamlets and the Stepney Salvation Army.

introduction

Navigation is really learned only by those who sail, and this is a fundamental principle of the church. 'He that doeth the will shall know the doctrine'

Stanley Evans, 1965¹

In the chapel at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine which is the worshipping centre of the Contextual Theology Centre, a palimpsest of ecclesiastical art and statuary reminds the prayerful visitor of the continuity of praise and offering which is, has been and always will be the life of the Church. Before the altar, on the floor, is a reminder of the dockside location, and says something of what it is to 'do' theology in the context of the divine reality in the form of a compass rose with the words of St Augustine inscribed in its perimeter:

We do not come to God by navigation but by love

This report is an attempt to attest to the real *theoria* and knowledge of God that can come from commitment to doing his work. It is thus a call to all that flows from the *praxis* of that central activity, the theology that is itself a 'warfare of the heart' and never a purely abstract science.

theology is a central activity of the church, because it derives from the Word of God [...] not offering comfort, but God's powerful claim upon the whole of our life [...] to call people to responsibility, to the service of God in the world and so to a humanity that is in analogy to God's reality.²

place

The soundings in this case have been taken in the three boroughs of Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets that form part of Inner East London and cover much of the traditional East End. Fr Kenneth Leech called this area in the '90s 'a site of continuity and upheaval which is a kind of microcosm of change in British, European and global society today'.³ Inner East London boasts the greatest ethnic and cultural diversity in the

¹ Quoted in Kenneth Leech, *The Sky is Red* (London : Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003), p.331.

² Haddon Wilmer. 'Karl Barth' in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, eds. Wiley-Blackwell, 2003.

³ *ibid*, p.2.

country. However the three vie for first, second and third most deprived boroughs of London's thirty-two, and have the highest number of poverty indicators in the country. To mention just a few statistics, over half of the children living in Tower Hamlets and Hackney are living in poverty. This deprivation is despite the recent projects of development around the Olympic Park and the Westfield Shopping Centre, the Docklands Development of the 90s and Hackney's trendy profile, many of which changes have failed to effect the resident populations in any deep-rooted way. The boroughs also saw the highest budget cuts in London in 2010-11, at the cap rate of 8.9%. My bearings are based on conversations with clergy, young interns and congregation members from a spread of Church of England, Roman Catholic and free churches over this area. These churches are united by their shared membership in TELCO, the East London Communities Organisation which is a chapter of London Citizens and Citizens UK, the alliance which is attempting to grow the strength and amplify the voice of British civil society using a technique of community organising developed through deprived communities and catholic churches in Chicago in the 1930s. Their views and voices fly in the face of statistics to speak with love and hope about their communities, viewing this area as truly the testing and development ground for new social visions. One priest goes so far as to say that 'the East End is a gift to the church' because it is *simply impossible* to become inward looking and denominational.

method

With this in mind, I conducted this research as a series of personal conversations around what it means, in layman's terms and as it came, for those of the Christian faith to organise as part of Citizens UK. This included a number of interlocutors who, as students mainly based at the University of Oxford had done the month-long community placements known as Jellicoe Internships, so named after Basil Jellicoe, undergraduate at Magdalen College, Oxford, and later slum-priest. With them particularly it was possible to explore the range of religious and political motivations that had led them into this work, as well as to get a certain freshness and on occasion scepticism of response. I continued my investigations by returning to the parishes that had been the sites of their experiences, and engaging with the priests whose lives were now dedicated to these communities and the spiritual and material anxieties of the people within them. I then interviewed laypeople, ordinary members of the faith communities, involved to some degree in community organising which gave an even better idea of how this technique works, in people's minds and hearts, from the grassroots up.

structure

I have taken as my structure the series of organising 'principles' and key tenets as they were first outlined to me as a Jellicoe intern and including some maxims of organising as they appear in Austen Ivereigh's *Faithful Citizens*, an essential handbook for the Christian organiser.⁴ To these I have in each case framed a response using the articulations, which came to me through my series of long conversations, making free use of anonymous quotation so the voices I heard, can truly speak. In a series of places I have broken up the discursive with the narrative, particularising and personalising to bring this account to life.

⁴ Austen Ivereigh, *Faithful Citizens* (London : Darton, Longman and Todd, 2010), Appendix 2, pp.165-6.

a diverse alliance

Much of community organising is based on the techniques developed in Chicago and elsewhere in the US, with the co-operation of many churches and especially of the Catholic Church, by the Jewish-born atheist and ‘provocateur’ Saul Alinsky. Behind Alinsky’s philosophy of activism for change and behind the practice of organising in the United Kingdom today was the desire to engage the *entire* community in all its variety. For Alinsky and the Industrial Areas Foundation this meant uniting existing foci of localised membership and activity: local businesses, community groups, churches, and unions. In his day and in the urban contexts in which he worked in Back of the Yards and Woodlawn, Chicago and Oakland, San Francisco this tended to mean the churches and the labour unions. In London today the emphasis continues to be on faith-based membership, adjusted to the massive cultural and religious diversity of 21st century London.

...of diverse institutions

The constitutive members are frequently themselves highly diverse, weaving this commitment into the foundations of organising. The focus here on Church of England and Catholic parish churches requires us to add that this is, if anything, particularly true in their case. The established Church of England’s territorial parochial structure and status as the established church as well as its presence in the Commonwealth and in Africa, and the same commitment to the ‘cure of souls’ and the worldwide existence of the Catholic Church in multiple nations and cultures, make both possible sites of convergence. Whilst in practice the pastoral focus has to limit itself somewhat to those who pass within its doors, and partly gathered congregations are rather more common in urban contexts, this commitment nonetheless engages the pastor with the fate and interests of the broader community and has real material effect on the diverse make-up of her congregation.

The faith communities in this report are extraordinary mirrors of the diversity of inner East London. This means, for example, high numbers of Nigerian and Afro-Caribbean members in Hackney. Meanwhile the direct missioning aims of the Salvation Army Church included in this report also impact on its diverse take-up, and render it particularly effective with Chinese students and new immigrants to whom Christianity is

still very culturally alien. Its historical commitment, begun with its founder William Booth as a church for the working classes, to the deprived also gives it penetration. The churches examined in this report are also mirrors of the reality of the high levels of poverty and deprivation in the three boroughs sampled from. They exist for, and thus reflect, the geographical area in which they are set, connecting to every socioeconomic stratum through the worshipping congregation itself, through the celebration of baptism, marriage and the funerary rites, and in the church's deep concern in and provision for the destitute and the deprived, whatever the extent or nature of their religious affiliation. This diversity is entirely founded in a Christian understanding of the importance of commitment to the whole of humanity as God's creation, and to the incarnational embrace of geographic and cultural situation.

independent of ideology

A further key principle of Citizens UK as an alliance which to some minds paradoxically fits it for purpose with church communities is its vaunted independence. This means a suspicion of all political or ideological affiliation. Saul Alinsky, despite his reliance on churches for organising force and deep friendship with the then Catholic Bishop of Chicago, James Shiel, and with the French Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, unwaveringly included religion within his definition of the dogmatic:

I could never accept any rigid dogma or ideology, whether it's Christianity or Marxism [...] if you think you've got an inside track to absolute truth, you become doctrinaire, humourless and intellectually constipated

This is of course a personal philosophy, but it is also given in the context of guidelines for the independent, flexible and chameleon organiser who should

never have an ideology more specific than the founding fathers' 'for the general welfare'⁵

Despite Alinsky's assertion, even the most agnostic of the organisers interviewed was prepared to assert the foundational and essential importance of faith to organising. Even if he could also express this in more Alinsky-like pragmatic terms,

the fact that there is this belief gives the church an emotional pull a secular organisation could not have

he could also assert the conviction that

the authentic unconditioned turn to prayer of the catholic young people persuaded me their belief truly informed their action.

Jellicoe intern, committed atheist

⁵ Saul Alinsky, '[Playboy Interview, March 1972](#)', reprinted in *The Progress Report*, an online publication of the Benjamin Banneker Center for Economic Justice and Progress, 2003. Part 12. Retrieved October 5, 2012.

As Maurice Glasman, the culturally Jewish organiser who has now founded the Blue Labour movement, said

I am just working with what is, in that sense. I could say I want the world to be different than it is, I would like everybody to be a secular humanist. And then I would say, well, maybe not.⁶

The ideological independence of Citizens UK is refreshing for Christians because it is the Christian assertion that their *credo* is precisely not an ideology. It is an assertion of a reality based in experience of and relation to the divine, through prayer and worship, out of which grows faith. In fact the resistance of secular ideologies from communism to capitalism can be traced throughout the history of Catholic Social Thought.

The independence and flexibility of community organising corresponds to the knowledge of Christians committed to the New Testament revelation that belief is not expressed in adherence to fixed principles or laws which can be played out in society in unshifting and determined ways—it is rather a relationship to wisdom, love and justice which builds up an ethos more like an architectural tradition than an ideology.

In the course of this research, testimony of this reality was provided by the doubts many of those interviewed had experienced in their engagement with ordinary representational politics. It was a given that Christians, more, not less than others exercise their rational faculties to assent to the policies and to affiliate themselves with the directions specific political parties represent. Such affiliations can form part of their faithful citizenship. However the evidence of those I spoke to, many of them under 30, erred towards ‘disillusionment’ and ‘dissatisfaction’ with party politics as they had experienced it. Those who had considered involvement in the Christian lobbies such as CARE and Christian Concern had also been disillusioned. Community organising emerged as the answer to a vital gap

It was the small ‘p’ politics I had been looking for all my adult life

Church of England priest, evangelical background

The assertion that community organising attracts Christians precisely by its anti-ideological and politically independent stance was hence borne out. Faithful politics often seems to transcend such categories, and hence finds itself either spread-eagled

⁶ Transcript of exchange between Maurice Glasman and John Milbank, Jellicoe Seminar, 2011.

with conservative sympathies for example towards responsibilities over rights dialogue and elements of the Big Society discourse in a predominantly left-leaning set of views—or universally dissatisfied, tired of the what seems like cross-party resignation to the necessity of an economy based crony capitalism, for example.

This was often as much form as content. A number of student interns had begun their political ‘careers’ in the common room, the student union or even the Christian union and were used to practising a politics based on best solutions to address common concerns rather than that of ideological affiliation. When confronted with ‘getting the party vote out’ and ensuing experience of shadowing MPs and of politics as done through Westminster they had swiftly been turned away and left without an obvious path forward.

A number of adults had dived straight into the mainstream political conscious they wished to do so faithfully. The various Christian lobbies offended their sense of what faith in the public sphere meant. They found themselves caught between hard-line and soft approaches, the ghettoization and the completely concessionary

I didn’t want to be ‘making a Christian difference’ and define myself around my faith understood as an ‘interest group’

Jellicoe intern, evangelical background

This disillusionment was not universal, and at least one interlocutor felt that there could certainly be a Christian call to attempt to work at the highest structural level. Evidently it is important that those of faith not limit themselves to one kind of civil society politics.

However neither is the independence of Citizens UK a closed story. It has shown itself willing to work alongside party political campaigns, offering organising training to both the Conservative and the Labour Party and setting up Movement for Change during the Miliband’s leadership contest. It has also made the ‘big call’ away from being largely a pressure group to co-operate with LOCOG and Olympic Jobs contraction—acting, in a sense, as a public service by taking on the role of an employment bureau. Independence means co-operation where possible, not an artificial distance. This resonated with Christians too.

...but committed to creed

Whilst a notional ideological independence is essential to the whole, there is no dilution of creedal commitment and the possibility of its expression from bottom to top. This is part of what makes the whole alliance seem

Human. It has soul!

congregation member, Church of England parish

As one layperson involved in organising put it.

It is important to call into question Saul Alinsky's own neutrality—he expresses a commitment to his Jewish identity and traces back key understandings of morality to rabbinic instruction. This is the paradox: community organising is committed to the assimilation of creed into practise and motivation but against the assertion of any one ideological position at the level of programme. It retains consensus on action whilst equally retaining difference of dogma.

As the evolution of community organising in this country especially demonstrates, it now involves what are for the United Kingdom surprisingly explicit evidences of faithful motivation at the key occasions that are public assemblies. This gladdens many Christians—and not just because they see their own religion expressed.

not driving a wedge...

The very visible diversity of East London holds out, in temptingly real outline, the possibility of co-operation and peace between peoples and religions. What my conversations made very clear is that this close co-existence and neighbourhood truly does provide extraordinary possibilities for friendship and concord. They made it equally clear that this lies cheek-by-jowl with the unavoidable reality of the potential for tension and hatred.

The evidence was anecdotal and the tension sporadic, but nonetheless shocking. One church had been broken into by local Muslim youths, anti-Christian slogans scrawled on its walls. For another clerical family a threatened march past the East London Mosque by the far right English Defence League was the catalyst to reveal some of the less palatable realities of some Islamic understanding of Christianity. Their children found themselves ostracized within their mostly Bengali school, called 'Muslim-killers,' and associated with demonic practises. In an example on the other side, at one Catholic school a few parents had questioned the appropriateness of the religious studies content of their children's curriculum, which included a visit to a mosque. This incomprehension that may imperceptibly develop into fear and into hatred creates a familiar cocktail. However it is also one that suggests projected 'secular' solutions of toleration and religious freedom may be of little use.

Our relations are not constituted by dull-edged tolerance but by love—be it expressed in judgment or in kindness. This is the stuff of common experience: the sometimes-volatile chemistry that binds the most ordinary family together. Christians engaged in their inner east London communities do not simply assent to the right to toleration for their Islamic neighbours, they *feel* the desire for 'good relations'. To strip back to the current secular discourse of the right to religious freedom would be to engage in a negative and defensive enterprise, fencing off religious communities.

This raises what may in the long-term be a much more distinct danger: that of a blind and uncomphrending coexistence held in a temporarily secured but unsatisfactory stasis by the rule of law. Behind the secular attempt, for some, seems to lie a hope that cultural and religious identity, the stuff of heritage and character that makes us human, will somehow just 'go away' in the march of rational progress. Needless to say the

perspective of those I spoke to was quite the opposite. Whilst ‘it was growing harder to tell the Christian story,’ and one clerical family who had arrived in inner London from a rural context were shocked to discover that even the older urban generation had little or no experience of church, they felt that the evidence of growing conviction over falling attendance suggested we were entering a post-secularist phase. Moreover, there was a sense that the need was becoming more evident as the narrative was lost, and hence answering the need could become part of the prerequisite and basis for telling that narrative. Speaking from a combination of conviction and experience, many gloried in the potential of community organising to allow them to *be* the church without driving certain wedges of pre-existent prejudice through dissociated catechism or evangelism.

...but striving for the common welfare

From the secular perspective religious conviction often bears the blame for driving urban tension and violence, and this lies behind many arguments against ideological and ‘extremist’ religion. It is worth remembering that the most recently experienced violence in this area, the riots of August 2011, one outbreak of which began in the churchyard of a church included in this report, have not been—in the final analysis—convincingly defined and explained away even by a basis in racial tension. The evidence seems to conclude they were a consequence of young people’s deprivation, alienation, and lack of hope. Indeed one of the main counter-motivations cited in the major study done of the outbreaks was the morality and perspective derived from religious conviction. Religious establishments were also key in the community response.⁷

It is vital to be conscious that faith also powers the pursuit of charity and justice. It is essential to acknowledge that many of the problems of contemporary society seem to be located in a sense of loss which is only partly rooted in authentic material deprivation. Hence the high rates of mental health issues and the difficulty escaping the cycle of violence. The measurable indices—real lack of opportunities and employment, for example—are enmeshed with a less locatable lack of hope related to feeling useless or extraneous in a society increasingly ordered around material standards of flourishing. Christians of all denominations and believers of all faiths have a particular ability to engage with such ideas, and, as this report will stress elsewhere, with the humanity of those they encounter as more than the sum of their purchasing power, the price of their labour, or the political value of their vote.

⁷ Gareth Morrell, Sara Scott, Di McNeish and Stephen Webster *The August Riots in England : Understanding the Involvement of Young People*, prepared for the Cabinet Office by NatGen, the National Centre for Social Research, October 2011.

Nor are relations between Christian denominations perfect. However in the case of ecumenism and interfaith relations I heard again and again the confident message that community organising had incalculable and unprecedented potential to transcend such divisions, representing

[...] the best of modern ecumenism. Rather than me looking at you and working out how or why you are different let's go for a walk and, side by side, see what we have in common—that things concern and please us both in the humanity in this place to which we are both passionately committed

Church of England vicar, Anglican Catholic tradition

Particularly from those laypeople who had long been woven into the fabric of an East End existence came extensive testimony to the possibility of working together in ways that might surprise—for example as the one white Christian woman on an all-Bengali male housing board. It might not always be the direct means for an ecumenism which aids doctrinal or theological understanding between peoples, but it created a solid stuff of relationality which results in the co-existence within the vastly more stressed Christian creed of neighbourly love.

This emphasis of putting aside other questions for the common good has some history of presenting problems for Christians, especially those with an evangelical background, in terms of the necessary compromise with missioning aims. In my experience this did equally in a very few cases apply to those at the other end of the low church-high church spectrum. It was evidently a matter of particular concern for those who were specifically thinking about community organising as a tool for the priest and hence within their priestly vocation.

One future ordinand had some doubts about the ordering of ends, or 'putting the carrot before the stick'. That is to say, he felt the reducing of material need risks becoming an end in itself where those engaged in faithful organising forget, or might find themselves forgetting that 'we are come to baptize the nations'. As a practising priest put it:

I must never forget my duty to extend the invitation into Christ's body explicitly and directly

Vicar, Church of England parish church, evangelical background

Catechism and teaching has to come first in intention, although building the fabric of civil society can certainly be a way of showing the love of God through one's actions. Basil Jellicoe, the Magdalen-educated slum priest and housing reformer after whom the internship is named, got this balance right—he cites the religious images built into the slum housing he envisioned, a literal embedding of divine beauty, presence and worship at the heart of communities one is trying to spiritually and materially aid.

It was belief that the more protestant emphasis on Church as defined through encountering Christ less specifically through sacrament, in fact enables them to comprehend this in missioning activity. This was partly borne out in my conversations with those from evangelical backgrounds, who tended to stress 'relationality' and even where they had become more centred on the Eucharist as the most holy and centric reality and making present of Christ they embraced the full range of possibilities for this in liturgy and action.

The consensus was to find a distinct place for this action in Christian life and mission, whatever the Christian background and at varying degrees of balance and utility.

relationality

Empathy [...] calls us to task, the conservative and the liberal, the powerful and the powerless, the oppressed and the oppressor. We are all shaken out of our complacency. We are all forced beyond our limited vision.

Barack Obama, on community organising⁸

In your concord and harmonious love, Jesus Christ is sung

Epistle to the Ephesians, St Ignatius of Antioch

Community organising as practised by Citizens UK eschews official *credo* or philosophy. It exists as an alliance and defined by its membership and any programme is, ideally, rooted in grassroots collaboration. The technique, in its evolution from the Chicago-based community activism of Saul Alinsky, does however have a series of governing principles. Of course no technique can properly claim to be a neuter instrument, and nor, from the perspective of the old-fashioned attester to normative truth, should it aspire to be called so. The alliance's very eschewal of the ideologically political negotiating space, and the alternative of the lobby groups of particular interest groups, is part of a set of assumptions about the need to balance modern 'social democracy,' with its reliance on majoritarian representational politics and the forces of the market, with a voice perhaps less utilitarian, perhaps more human-shaped. This voice, in the Citizens alliance, best emerges from the associational bodies through which we relate and find meaning in our lives together, from churches, synagogues and mosques to schools and scout groups, residents associations and unions. Its actions emerge from their values, and its shape permits and invites their involvement in a way no political organisation could.

For the Christian organiser the most salient and crucial of these governing principles is that of 'relationality'. This was affirmed again and again by the Christian organisers whose voices form this report.

⁸ Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* (Edinburgh; New York, Canongate, 2006), p. 69.

Within organising, relationality—the formation and growth of relationships—is both the technique and the aim. All efforts to engage its participants began at the level of personal and intimate conversation, within what is known as the one-to-one or 1-2-1, a meeting understood as primarily about increasing mutual understanding and relationship and only secondarily as directed towards a particular goal.

The significance of [...] the community organising approach is that it's just about the meeting of two people in any given time and it can grow and become all sorts of different things, but it starts out just as a one-to-one and treats that as significant in itself

Jellicoe intern, Anglican worshipping in the catholic and charismatic traditions

Hence the call to love that is at the centre of the Christian life can be placed at the centre of community organising without compromise. Many spoke, directly or indirectly, of the 'golden commandment' or 'new commandment' of John 13:34 and Mark 12: 29-31 'that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another'. This call to love pulls all other calls to individual and corporate morality into perspective around it.

Relationality is also about causing this love to redound in larger communion, within and between communities.

Community organising is all about relationships, rebuilding communities, strengthening the ties between communities in a multicultural pluralistic society

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in the Anglican conservative evangelical tradition

The resulting growth of relationship is what is referred to as 'reweaving the fabric of civil society'. It thus relies on an understanding that this has atrophied under the pressures of modern atomisation imposed on our common lives as the populace considered as amorphous aggregations of customer or voter units not known as essentially loveable humans whose good and whose flourishing is to be desired.

For the Christian, however it is expressed in historical terms, the breakdown of relationship is also a matter of theological truth. The fall is a fall out of communion, with God, and—as part of that—with each other. Adam and Eve's exile is followed within a

generation by Cain's murder of Abel, and this larger division's impact can be traced through the violent chronicles of the Old Testament and into contemporary history. Christ's entry into the world as the new Adam, however, is a full revelation of God's love making newly possible, through love for the man Christ who is also God, our relation with God *and with each other*, newly transparent as women and men formed in God's image. Christians engaged in community organising can find within the one-to-one a way to meet their fellow man and so to encounter Christ.

It's a very social thing for me, my religion [...] society is the way it is because it is godly—meeting and talking and getting to know people as they are is itself godly

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in the Anglican charismatic and catholic traditions

This seems to not only be a matter of best fit, but also to positively nourish the Christian life. For a number of young Christians engaged in parish-based community organising their official five-day training

revealed [...] the beauty of human relationships and the importance of nourishing them

Jellicoe intern, roots in the Anglican evangelical tradition

and their experience

the times when I felt least sceptical about community organising and most optimistic about humanity were definitely the times I was doing it

Jellicoe intern, committed atheist

When Christ ascends to his father, *koinoia* and *kat'holous* of which Early Church writers speak is an attempt to be a continuation in the world of the union with God and between men that he exemplified.

It was a common factor for the clergy I spoke to attest to the naturalness of building *koinoia* within their parish boundaries as part, if not the essence of their priestly vocation. 'To bring to God is to bring into relation,' as one priest pointed out:

the Trinity is the perfect community, in which all awareness of fellowship must be founded

Parish priest, incumbent of church in the Anglo-catholic tradition

So, as long as the right end is in sight,

[to] bring into relation, as a Christian, is to bring further towards the life of God

Parish priest, evangelical background, vicar of a mixed traditions parish

Jacques Maritain, the Catholic philosopher and longstanding friend to Saul Alinsky, was convinced that his technique was also capable of converting those he engaged towards moral awakening, as it drew them out of self-interest and towards solidarity through the realisation that their supposed concerns were common and were best addressed, in the short and long-term, by entering into fellowship.⁹

The interns, clergy and laypeople came from a variety of complexions of Christianity, from high, low and Free Church backgrounds. Whilst most had something to say about the possible tension of church and mission aims and the secular aims of organising when a church community involves itself in this kind of grassroots politics, those who self-identified as evangelical had of course had more reason to give the question serious thought. However the conclusions tended to be similarly centred on the suitability of showing forth, embodying and demonstrating, to 'reach out to people and show them Christ:

My faith is crucial to why I do what I do—so establishing a true relationship and connection as you do through the relational techniques of community organising will draw others into the life of Christ

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in a charismatic free church

To the extent that many saw what they did for social justice through the techniques of community organising not as some kind of activity secondary to mission, or a subsidiary

⁹ Bernard Doering, ed. *The philosopher and the provocateur : the correspondence of Jacques Maritain and Saul Alinsky*. Notre Dame ; London : University of Notre Dame Press, 1994. p. 20.

part of mission but precisely as that way in which they were sent to carry our Christ's work in the world.

It's not the arguments that convince, it's the lives

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in a charismatic free church

The priestly response included caveats as to the necessity of balancing the needs of the parish with these aims, as well as the importance of holding out an explicit invitation into the life of the Church.

However it seems to be a possible means by which Church communities that were in themselves divided can be deepened into communion. One 'plant' or 'church grafting' of the powerful Holy Trinity Brompton, home of the Alpha Course, currently runs two Sunday services that, whilst they are growing together, are divided along the more traditionalist elderly congregation and the slightly more charismatic and contemporary approach of the incomers. Whilst there is an overall spirit of mutual generosity, and both are growing together in a process of liturgical re-education, community organising is certainly 'one of the things which brings the two congregations together'. Another priest in very different circumstances sees his organising training as being precisely that which helps him to cope and see a way through the disparate material and spiritual needs which overwhelmed him on first arrival.

Interestingly the comfort with organising as part of pastoral responsibility often depended—for those priests formed through evangelical backgrounds—on having come towards a more traditionally Anglican ecclesiology which tended to be less exclusive or bounded. For one vicar of a church in the borough of Tower Hamlets, this was best expressed in idea proper to the established church of the 'cure of souls'. For the Church of England, whose parishes are also national administrative units, all those within the parish boundaries are subject to their vicar's care, as created beings capable of full relation to their God and to whom the sacraments of the Church, with certain legal limits and those of instruction and preparation, are open. As well as administering services and sacraments and to the pastoral needs—material and spiritual—of their congregation they understood themselves to have a responsibility of bringing together the community at large. Free churches had often modulated towards this understanding for their area, understanding the importance of embedding within and serving pre-existent community by embodying its fulfilment.

Those who speak in this report were many of them already involved in what an encyclical of the current pope has called that ‘most important human responsibility to which the Church is duty bound to offer her own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically.’¹⁰ It is a model of Jellicoe internship as demonstrated by this report to have involvement and interest in both student or party politics and faith affiliation.

The possibility of a primarily relational means of agitating for change at all political levels has also been key in encouraging the re-entry into politics of those made apathetic by the misfit of their instinct towards justice and Christian involvement in the public sphere and the possible political modes. Many student interns included in their discussion of motivations a ‘disillusionment’ with party politics. Some mentioned their diffidence when it came to the possibilities for Christians who wished to engage in social justice—the political, lobbying and third-sector options were often theologically unsatisfactory, forcing a ‘business-minded’ or ‘programmatic’ approach. There was a great deal of thought-conversion on these issues even where it was expressed as emerging politically or ecclesially, as the need to inhabit, enact and extend the life of Christ and the Church beyond its own sphere or the dissatisfaction with the narrow vision of humanity and the good within the public and political sphere. Within scripture, liturgy and the life of the church were images of justice and communion imperfect because aching to be realised; within the public sphere there was much action but little true communion, and potentially narrow understandings of human flourishing.

As a technique within the church community it has been an aid beyond that offered by any other kind of training, forming a more reconciled community to embody reconciliation within its wider context. The principle of relationality pulls faith communities out beyond their boundaries in a way many had desired and worked for, but also gives the community itself, rather than individual Christians in their disparate vocations, a place in the public sphere. It is good for the church in enabling it to stand *itself* as a neighbour alongside its secular neighbours and those of other faiths, embodying the community and joint purpose for the common good within the Citizens UK chapter.

All those I spoke to involved in organising expressed some anxiety about sustaining and building the relationality of Citizens, against the temptation which comes with power to rely on more top-down directives and a pre-established unity of community, rather than continuing to build and maintain relationships within the alliance members and

¹⁰ ‘Deus Caritas Est’, Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI, 25th December 2005, Part II.

chapters. Organisers of faith like the Christian ones with which I spoke may perhaps be key in securing this basis in relationality which is already so strongly part of their convictions and understanding, ensuring that 'what comes first is the relationship, not the project'.

the Olympic jobs drive and the Salvation Army

This story gives a particularly powerful example of the close connection between Christian action and the relational power of a faith community combating the usual reign of the 'powers that be' and in the process of answering material need and humanizing a bureaucratic process.

Sylvia was living under London Bridge, having dropped through the cracks in the system due to family break-up and arrangements for a job in the US falling through. Her passport had expired, making it very difficult for her to find employment through the normal channels. She had few friends or connections. Her prospects of finding employment or a place in her community were bleak and arduous.

However in 2011 TELCO, the East London chapter of Citizens UK, with its knowledge of the concentration in these boroughs of deprivation through unemployment and its rooted community presence, decided to make a new foray into response. With many jobs soon to be available as part of the Olympics and Paralympics, a decision was taken to co-operate with LOCOG and its contractors. It would run selection events through its many members from which a screened number would be sent on for interviews. Without the personal note a member of the Salvation Army was able to attach to her application to explain her ambivalent status, Sylvia would have fallen at the first bureaucratic hurdle. Having her personal good in heart, he had the motivation to provide the full account of her authentic skills and employability. And, following that, he, and others from the church, was able to extend an invitation to draw her deeper into her local community, into society and into faith. She is now known as a leading member and activist for TELCO, but also a worshipping member of Stepney Salvation Army.

Through the power of relationality but in co-operation with the usual reign the powers-that-be, it was possible for a woman to gain in dignity and self-determination, but also find her place within the community, in a church fellowship and under the lordship of Christ.

building power

Melchior: And the riddle that torments the world is this: shall Power and Love live together at last, when the promised Kingdom comes?

Mary: 'I am quite humbly born, yet the Power of God came upon me. My baby was born and filled my life with Love. The child in my arms is the answer to the riddle'

Dorothy L. Sayers, The Man Born to be King

By contrast to the hope and understanding the 'relationality' principle conjures in Christians involved in the community organising of Citizens UK, 'building power' generates a notably more cautious if not suspicious response. Surely seeking power is the opposite of asserting the lordship of Christ? Was his life not an inversion of such desires for material wealth or temporal dominion, upsetting expectations of a conquering Messiah for the people of Israel? 'My kingdom is not of this earth'. It is one of the aspects of the realism of organising that particularly those who are entering the alliance purely through their church affiliation and not with a pre-existent background in the political do in fact find most difficult. Even though, when dissected, it refers to 'people power' and the strength that comes from a community founded in strong relationships it can be difficult for Christians who know Christianity in its current form to deal with the points at which organising understands this power in a highly secular way: to have sway and to coerce, to act in the world as one of the forces which Paul describes to the church at Ephesus:

we wrestle [...] against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.
(Ephesians 6:12)

All Christians assert in their most fundamental prayer that 'thine is the power, the kingdom and the glory'. The mediation of this power in the world, through the body of Christ that is Christians divided into their churches, is less clear. However we know that it has been given us to dwell with us, even if we must be careful not to think of it in

secular terms. One intern spoke of the reception of power at Pentecost as the reality of the continuation of the incarnation in the witnesses to Christ.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1: 8)

The Church as a whole wishes its influence to come from the power of its truth, not the power of exerting an influence defined in numerical terms: by number of potential voters or consumers or by the loudness of a given voice. Much of the fear here is associated with the old adage that ‘power corrupts’ and the inherent danger of associating the church and the church’s action for the good of its people and the world too strongly with a single institution which may come to be more interested in multiplying its own strength and interests.

the morality of power

Saul Alinsky’s first book *Reveille for Radicals* was originally to be entitled *The Morality of Power*. Alinsky’s publisher, angling for controversy and sales, would have preferred the *Poor Man’s Machiavelli*. However Alinsky should not be dismissed as having the instrumentalist understanding of the relationship between charity and power this implies. Certainly Alinsky is sometimes guilty of implying a pragmatic understanding of power as a finite quantity to be transferred from ‘haves’ to ‘have-nots’: an understanding whose stress on opposition and confrontation makes mixed sense to Christians.

However his primary understanding of true power is of free association and self-determination, being freed *into* relationality and a vision that goes beyond self-interest. This power is also the power to overcome ‘man’s largest conflict’ between the morals held and the morals practised. It is truly ‘ability to act’.

ability to act

The Christian desires the furthering of God’s power over all our lives, which is also—paradoxically—our liberation into true self-determination where the self is understood as at the service of God and others. The majority of British citizens have plenty of ‘ability to act’: the *power* to flourish and to cause the flourishing life of others through contributions to the common life in our professions and activities. This kind of ‘power’

is, however, still denied to many. There is a paralysis in deprivation, as a Hackney vicar attested, but

the Church can give the poor, dispossessed and hopeless a voice and a presence

Vicar, parish priest in the broad church Anglican tradition

Alinsky's ideas of power are very concerned with enabling larger and eventually altruistic vision for all, permitting

the most oppressed and exploited elements in the country to take control of their own communities and their own destinies¹¹

Nor does he, ultimately, envision a pitting of underclass against overclass or 'haves' against 'have-nots' in an endless cycle. The kind of organising practised in Britain today has already evolved beyond 'fighting the establishment' towards a much more cross-class and reconciliatory vision which Alinsky himself predicted and desired:

the only hope for genuine minority progress is to seek allies within the majority and to organize that majority itself as part of a national movement for change¹²

It was no accident that this was the name given to the attempt to reinvigorate and re-embed the Labour Party within the experience of ordinary people by means of using organisers and organising techniques in the Movement for Change which began as part of David Miliband's leadership campaign and continues today with the backing support of both brothers and so the current leader, Ed Miliband.¹³

Many of those I spoke to had encountered power in its most negative form at first hand, invested in local mayors and councillors and which many spoke of as 'tyranny' or 'petty

¹¹ Saul Alinsky, '[Playboy Interview, March 1972](#)', reprinted in *The Progress Report*, an online publication of the Benjamin Banneker Center for Economic Justice and Progress, 2003. Part 7. Retrieved October 6, 2012.

¹² Saul Alinsky, '[Playboy Interview, March 1972](#)', reprinted in *The Progress Report*, an online publication of the Benjamin Banneker Center for Economic Justice and Progress, 2003. Part Two. Retrieved October 5, 2012.

¹³ For an account of the birth of Movement for Change see Rowenna Davis, *Tangled up in Blue: Blue Labour and the Struggle for Labour's Soul*, London: Ruskin Publishing Ltd, 2011. Chapter Five, pp. 105-153.

dictatorship'. One priest used the words of the US organiser Jonathan Lange to compare the two dangers:

*Power without love is tyranny and love without power is just sentimental.
Many Christians are guilty of the latter.*

Priest, Roman Catholic Parish Church

relational power

The importance of power to community organising is tied almost entirely to the idea that 'power precedes programme'. This embeds the notion of power within the notion of the primacy of relationality, and indeed with bonds of love. It is pragmatic, democratic, and by being 'people, rather than issues-based' is part of the series of factors which attract Christians to a politics which moves outside of party politics and even principles or ideologies towards an ability to respond, in the moment and for the growth of the kingdom, to the needs of the whole person as they understand it within their communities.

As many reported, church congregations often include those whose human flourishing and recognition as persons is best recognised and fostered by the Church and the body of Christians who can see them with some of the light given the attempt to know and love them as God does: body and soul. Where these interests and perspective are brought to light through the alliance, so largely constituted of faith-based communities or schools with religious ethos, part of the power is *in* the unity. It is also in the emotional pull. A Citizen's Assembly may sometimes seem a piece of theatre, but its testimonies and witness statements are almost unanswerable in statistical and numerical terms, asserting a power more rooted in human response and less in the abstracted forces rooted in desire and will to wealth and sway.

Where power is rooted in a social morality and in relational bonds of neighbour love, for many Christians, it is *all about* mediating the justice and love of God for the common good. Christ did not just embody and incarnate these values but recruited disciples and acted on them.

lessons

There are two main fears that emerge and remain in Christian's accounts of power in what they have experienced of doing community organising. The first is that church and faith-based communities become caught up in the pressure exerted by Citizens UK to provide a strong membership base over and against their own desire to grow their community, which may not be by increasing their numbers, a secular assessment of power. Here views oscillated with different churchmanships being happier with the idea of the importance of material growth. Overall it was felt it could sometimes provide a helpful corrective to think in terms of strength both qualitatively—as dedication to faith, to their God and their belief, and to purpose (its enactment through this means, which those of faith consider essential to the importance of their convicted membership of the alliance)—and quantitatively: it would be dualistic and erring towards spiritualization of faith to argue that God does not value growth of brotherly love and growth of the body of Christ in material terms. The second fear around the principle of 'building power' is one shared by those whose more secular perspective causes them to value all that is popular, democratic and properly grassroots motivated in community organising. It is particularly powerfully important for organising Christians that the alliance keep its basis in relationship and not move beyond this to top-down ideologies which cannot be traced back to the consensus on the common good achieved through the good substance of committed individuals and their relationships. This risks a degenerative slide of the organisation into one governed more by self-interest and building power on power, rather than one committed to maintaining its fabric even at the expense of delaying change. Lay voices of involved members of the various congregations were particularly anxious on this front: 'there are flaws in the democratic process'. Chosen leaders sometimes found space to doubt their own legitimacy and certainly that to question whether particularly the last agenda to which politicians were made accountable had been truly based in a democratic programme and not extrapolated from past experience and rushed out to meet a deadline. It was not, in fact, that there was any clash with what these churches and faith communities might find it in themselves to support. It was rather the insight of those of faith that God's power works through its gift and distribution; we do his work by discovering and conforming to his will, less of which work can be done if the will of others, however good, is presented pre-packaged for our assent and ratification.

use of tension

Anglicans in particular imagine that the mighty would be put down from their thrones so gently that they would not feel the bump when they hit the ground.

Conrad Noel

The phrases associated with the vital contribution of tension and confrontation to the dynamic of community organising sound more like an introduction to the principles of physics than a mode of agitating for new progressive measures in society and government. Here are a few of the ‘tenets,’ as quoted by Austen Ivereigh in his *Faithful Citizens*:

‘the action is in the reaction’

‘change means movement; movement means friction; friction means heat; heat means controversy and conflict’¹⁴

personalise and polarise

It was, famously, the emphasis on confrontation and reputation as a troublemaker and stirrer that led a church leader to say ‘no-one can follow both Saul Alinsky and Jesus Christ’. None of the interns seemed to be under the apprehension that Christ was not there to ‘turn the world upside down’ as much as the tables of the Temple he famously overturned.

Conflict is consistent with the gospel [but] how do you go about doing that straighttalking in love?

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in the evangelical tradition

Part of the manner in which organising is understood to work is by generating anger against and fear and discomfort within those who are seen to be enemies to the Citizen’s

¹⁴ Austen Ivereigh, *Faithful Citizens* (London : Darton, Longman and Todd, 2010), Appendix 2, pp.165-6.

programme. It is, by preference, individuals who are targeted, hence the tenet 'personalise and polarise'. This is the potentially dark side of the 'relational' approach. It is particularly in evidence at the key events for visibility and participation that are the London Citizens Assemblies. At the most recent all-chapter Mayoral Accountability Assembly in 2012, just prior to the re-election of Boris Johnson, it was the candidates who were both guests to be thanked for their support and targets to be held 'accountable' for their fulfilment of promises to the citizenry, represented through the member institutions: schools, mosques, synagogues, scout troupes, churches, residents associations. Although on this occasion the judgment was mostly positive, the atmosphere is deliberately one of judgment and confrontation. Boris—familiar by now with their strategies—clearly knew how to play the crowd, speaking of himself as 'quaking in front of the assembly, Hercules in front of Eurystheus receiving his labours'.

There was widespread anxiety that this opposition never meant holding up figures as objects of hate. One recent campaign targeted Jamie Oliver for the failure of his restaurants to pay cleaners living wages:

Citizens should not vilify individuals...or it should be careful to distinguish human beings from their professional roles

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in the evangelical tradition

However, as we have established,

community organising is a way of doing politics that is more than simply doing politics; it is a way of helping people be more fully human

Priest, Church of England Parish Church

What can sometimes seem, as one student organiser said 'dehumanizing' in its tendency to erect straw men in fact gives individuals used to acting as the mouthpiece of their organisations the chance to step out from behind their cardboard cut-outs and act as moral beings, with empathy and love. It is here that the catchphrase 'no permanent enemies...no permanent friends' comes into its own. On the individual level this often involves a deliberate targeting of a CEO's self-image, the attempt being to set up a tension between potential glory and actual falling-short. This is quite compatible with the Christian acknowledgement of our wedded fallen and potentially glorious nature. Whilst the initial approach, as with the exposure of HSBC's poor treatment of its

cleaners using the example of the man responsible for cleaning the CEO's own office, is one of vilification the end envisioned and realised was one of humanisation: on his own initiative he met personally with the cleaner and changed both the policy and his personal outlook.

This also works on the corporate level. It is another tenet that, where possible, institutions and corporations be held accountable to their own ethos or codes of ethics. The campaign to persuade the John Lewis Partnership to bring its cleaners into its lauded mutual structure or at least to pay them a living wage adjusts the famous John Lewis slogan and takes it as its own: Never knowingly underpaid. Here the tension worked on is similarly between action and inaction, or value and fulfilment.

self-interest

Sometimes community organising, in the relationship to the institutions it is trying to reform, can appear to be a conflict rather than a consensus organisation. Instead of attempting to bring into alignment the best desires of those officials and powers and leaders and the common good to use instrumentally their worst instincts and self-interest. Conversely, it can seem to inveigle its way to realisation and consensus to agendas by placing officials in positions where they fear exposure and public outrage without themselves being converted to the good of the cause in question.

This dark assessment of how to create change for the good is also evident in aspects of the discourse around recruitment. Organisers, and the student interns spoken to, are encouraged to use the one-to-one to identify an individual's 'self-interest' or the particular concerns that drive them. The question 'what makes you angry?' is also often used.

It was frequently difficult for Christian organisers to view this positively or to integrate it with their beliefs

It accepts man's fallen state—and uses it! I have a problem with that.

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in the Free Church charismatic tradition

However it was the experience of Christian organisers that altruism is just as foundational as selfish appetite in engaging citizens,

There were some times when I was quite amazed—when I set out to find someone's self-interest actually it was completely irrelevant [...] they weren't really motivated by naked self-interest at all; there was something deeper that was driving them

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in the Anglican Catholic tradition

An intern reported witnessing one organiser stymied in his appeal to material self-interest by the instinctive altruism he found instead. The suggestion that the negotiation of a living-wage contract for lower-paid workers might also bring the cleaner in question more favourable terms met with a passionate response

I just want a better future: for myself, for my family, for my workers who work so hard

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in the Anglican Catholic tradition

It is also clear from Alinsky's own writing that his intent was to use self-interest to move beyond itself. It is also part of his basis in the personal, the particular and the experiential. His use of this was in part a reaction against the appeal to abstracted principles, including those of Christian morality. This does not exclude founding political engagement in neighbour love, but it does exclude founding political engagement in an explicit appeal to the abstract principle of altruism. It is a seeming 'relativity' that in fact founds itself in the normative principle of the primacy of the situated, incarnated, and particular. This corresponds to the replacement of the law by the narrative and by the embodied in the New Testament.

The thesis that all creation of change has to be oppositional is part of the ideas behind the dialectical materialism of Marxism and the justification of revolution. Marxism and associated revolutionary movements have been quite thoroughly condemned by the Catholic Church and other leading Christian authorities. However Alinsky was no revolutionary; he operated using totally non-violent tactics and heavily critiqued all ideological movements, believing in the people's vision of their own future over and above anyone else's vision. His *pragmatism* and relativity with its space for the enactment of the convictions of individuals and those hold collectively in communities and institutions is what fits community organising as an important tool for the church as an agent of social justice today.

lessons

As the adoption of the phrase Movement for Change and the mixed membership suggests the driving philosophy of English and of contemporary organising is already modified Alinsky—his own insight and eventual aim that the alliance grow and become cross-class and international, creating and then dissolving tension as it goes. This is also evident in the decision of the Olympics Jobs Drive to co-operate with the public sector to deliver jobs. The membership of churches and Christian communities contributes to this hopeful direction towards unity and consensus.

The insight of faith critique over vilifying and thus dehumanizing individual targets is also an important criticism for Citizens UK to take on board. At the same time, the ‘dark side’ of Alinsky’s vision of humanity and the necessity of tension corresponds to the self-understanding of Christians that they inhabit a fallen world and are themselves fallen. It is not Christian to be optimistic, it is Christian to be hopeful: particularly in engagement with the public sphere there is a value to desiring the world as it should be yet taking the world as it is.

the father Christmas sign

Fr Sean cares for two parish churches: his main church of St Stephen's and a much smaller church in a slightly more prosperous area nearby to the main church and vicarage. In 2011 it was looking worryingly as if St Nicholas might have to close, and the parish was anxious and unhappy. This was, in Newham terms, a historic building: a Victorian church. However it was off the main road, hidden from view rather than making its beauty and retreat known. There was a strong and swelling feeling that there should be a sign provided, to encourage visitors. The Council, when approached, simply said no: it would enhance street clutter.

At this stage the joint congregation began to get angry. Perhaps this was not exclusively due to the resonance of this particular issue: the refusal came from a council that, unlike the local church community, generated little love or loyalty. Fifteen or twenty people turned up to a spontaneous, barely advertised meeting. Together they came up with a slogan: 'we don't want a miracle; we just want a sign'. It was June, but they felt the council's absurd behaviour required an absurd response, this church was under the patronage of St Nicholas: so why not a midsummer Father Christmas? A group of primary school children singing carols accompanied Father Christmas to the front of the council building.

The response was near immediate, but still indicative of the underlying failure of the council to relate to the people it was meant to act on behalf of. A minor official scuttled out to grant permission for the sign. At a later celebration no one from the council was willing to turn up, just as no one at the council had been willing to talk to the concerned.

The campaign had been successful, and its people felt they had realised their cause—small as it might be. At the same time it was not really about the sign, and the people understood that. It was about standing up to an impenetrable, arrogant and tyrannical local authority, generating just the right amount of non-violent tension and holding a mirror up to bureaucratic idiocy.

‘the world as it should be’ and the Kingdom of God

The proclamation that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, the vision of a transformed society—the Kingdom of God—and the commitment to work with the incarnate, crucified and risen Christ to achieve it, through the power of the Spirit and nourished by word and Eucharist—is the gospel. There is no other.

Kenneth Leech, The Sky is Red

When organisers use the phrase ‘the world as it should be’ and its converse, ‘the world as it is’ they do so to awake a productive tension that encourages a visionary perspective, a projection of a notional future, past or metahistorical reality against which we hold the measure of our experience and current structures. This vision is part of what enabling citizen participation in politics should open up, according to Saul Alinsky it is one of the ends of organising itself, illuminating existence either seen in terms of the ‘brilliantly lit, highly exciting avenue of hope, drama, conflict with at the end of the street the most brilliant ending known to man—the future of mankind’ or as ‘a world in which man’s practises will catch up with his ethical teachings and where he will live the full consistent life of practising what he preaches’. ¹⁵ Alinsky was an atheist, and espoused an imminent embrace of the life’s variety and potential. However he also combined a distrust of material utopian visions as viewed by revolutionaries on the far left, realisable by total upset, with a belief in man’s instinct for, and destiny within, a better life whose lineaments each generation had been to indistinctly taste, see and struggle towards, and for which a series of radical movements including Christianity itself had ‘carried the torch’.

This humanism and hope for the material and the temporal allied to a scepticism about man’s abilities to more than partially and gradually, if not patchily and only through grand vision to realise it grows a series of techniques which are fertile ground for

¹⁵ Saul Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals* (New York : Vintage Books, 1969), p.66; p.73.

Christian participation. Without speculating over whether Alinsky, in some partial and secularised sense, knew the reign of God we can attest to this much.

Those who work for the kingdom through social transformation in East London are part of a long tradition, through which the most recently celebrated Kenneth Leech, could trace his lineage through Stanley Evans and John Groser and in which descent at least two of the priests I interviewed would place themselves today. In 1956, Evans, then a parish priest in Dalton, Hackney described

*the fundamental division within the Christian world as one which did not run along denominational lines but rather divided those Christians in all traditions who believed that the Kingdom of God involved a hope for the transformation of this world and its structures and those who did not.*¹⁶

One distinct feature of the theology of all those I spoke to, whether traditionally evangelical and thus more reluctant to place the relation of the current to the future reign as more than one of analogy: emphasising the personal salvation of each soul over corporate salvation, or catholic and thus more willing to consider it as a participation, they had thought of their action in terms of witness to the Kingdom.

the Kingdom

For some it was the emphasis on the small-scale and the relational that made community organising

The coming of the kingdom is exercised in practical things that are meaningful to people then; it's not about building an entire system [...] there's a necessary messiness

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in the Anglican catholic and charismatic evangelical traditions

In Christ and in encounter with Christ the kingdom was made actual. If community organising can be a vehicle for this encounter then it can be engaged in bringing the kingdom.

¹⁶ Kenneth Leech, 'The Rebel Church in the Back Streets—Where Are We Now?', 1996 in Andrew Bradstock and Christopher Rowlands, eds. *Radical Christian Writings : A Reader* (Oxford : Wiley Blackwell, 2002) p. 330.

It is in the nature of the analogous relationship of the existent 'two cities' of man and God, church and 'state' or 'secular' to the coming kingdom that it emphasise distance as well as proximity, and some mentioned the risk

I am theologically opposed to the idea that if only we can do social justice properly we can bring about God's kingdom [...] the dangerous thing is to have this picture of the kingdom being rolled out

And tended to think of kingdom realisation in this 'spotty' way

It is being constantly realized in partial shadowy states

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in the Anglican evangelical tradition

However others emphasised the change that came upon the world when the potentiality of creation was made transparent in Christ, a change that effects all that is, and continues to do so where he is witnessed to:

There is a good that comes as the kingdom of God is extended in this place whether or not people put their lives under the rule or reign of the king of this kingdom

Priest, evangelical background, vicar of a mixed traditions parish

This places an emphasis on the reign of God over all things, and also acknowledges the coming of Christ as a historical event. The gospel good news is a historical event to which all have some kind of access and which has common impact.

Those with more catholic understandings of the importance of the Church and mediation through tradition and structure could turn to that set of ideas. However a more strictly Protestant background could also produce the assertion that

The relationship of civil society to God's kingdom is creating an environment in which God's kingdom can be extended

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in the Anglican evangelical tradition

It is evidently important to acknowledge that God's kingdom will be finally realised in the *descent* of a new heaven and a new earth, in which the former things will pass away, as Paul says. However this knowledge of distance is also what has made it all too easy for the Church to turn its back on the imperfections of a fallen world, particularly on a structural level. In what revelation we have of what is to come we hear that

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever. (Apoc 11: 15)

As Christ himself says,

Heaven and earth shall pass away

However there is some space for 'faith in the structures' in the sense Stanley Evans puts it, for as Christ concludes,

my words shall not pass away. (Matt 24:35)

It is through our actions in the current *regnum* that we are formed to be citizens of the coming kingdom. This explicitly *excludes* absenting ourselves from the duty to be citizens faithful to God and faithful to each other and to the institutions and nations we are part of.

In other words, we are engaged in creating 'conditions', or are at work in a drama of greater import than we have hitherto been able to imagine. It is wrong to pretend that in our daily lives we are, as it were, play-acting, rather than as if the play of existence were the training ground for our eternal souls.

The Word of God has opened up a particular road, and to be faithful means going forward along that road

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in the Anglican catholic tradition

If we see the church, as Augustine did, as the City of God set within the City of Man, we must not just think the static relation and prophetic critique. Not only is it clear, from Christian organisers concern for the structural and their concurrence on many elements of what constitutes a better system—especially, for example, a shared scepticism about capitalism in its current form—Christian critique and engagement builds up its own developing counter-narrative and counter-possibility, a new social ethic at least for its

time.

The notion of building Christ's kingdom in the life of the church community and the civil community was found to be to some extent helpful by all those I spoke to when thinking about their organising work. The civil community is the wider 'ring' or context within which people and institutions may be more or less oriented towards Christ. However it is also the space of circumstance, encounter, action and potential through and in which are developed full material and spiritual well-being. The Church Militant is meant for and in some sense 'needs' the world as leaven requires dough, to use the terms of one of Jesus' parables of the kingdom. Whatever remains at the last, to understand the building of Kingdom in terms of the Church alone is not to fully realise the Christian vocation. Of course the world also desperately needs the Church--in a final sense to enable the introduction of its members into the love and the life of Christ. But this, as in first-century Palestine, now in 21st century East London is something which is not just worked towards but embodied in the passion for and the wisdom in the work of love and justice that Christian members of the Citizens Alliance provide.

The potential of community organising is that it is both visionary and grounded. As one priest expressed this paradox,

*It values the world as it is and seeks, through it, the world as it should be.
That I think resonates very strongly with Christian theology*

Priest, evangelical background, vicar of a mixed traditions parish

making change happen: action

A liberal is a person who leaves the room when an argument becomes a fight.

Saul Alinsky

Saul Alinsky, the main developer of the techniques which define citizen's organising, speaks of a radical—for him, the opposite of a liberal—as someone driven by a passionate, active love for all humanity, someone who loves with the 'heart and not the head'. Community organising, from the bottom up, is committed to action and to change, to transforming the circumstances of people's lives, and to demonstrating that such transfiguration is possible to the end that it may spread. 'Action is to organisation as oxygen is to the body' as another organising maxim runs. In one borough this really did mean small scale: the new crossing for the school, the new sign for the church, but achieved by the voice and participation of citizens. What community organising has shown, again and again, is precisely that it 'works': it is a very successful movement that has had an impact on the lives of Londoners and on the politics of London and of the United Kingdom. Its organisers have been engaged in training members of all major political parties. For many I spoke to, the motivation to organise was based in the call to action they discovered in the gospel. However it was also based in the ability and the impulse to 'make change happen' in the material circumstances of themselves, their communities that Citizens campaigns represent: the London Living Wage, the Citisafe campaign, and its support of their own micro-actions. Many I spoke to responded with the practical justification that organising 'works.' But how do we defend a Christian activism and a kind of Christian pragmatism?

from word and worship to the world

No one I spoke to would deny that the church is called to worship and to praise God, and to celebrate his sacraments in the work of our salvation through Christ. However this very celebration of Christ in word and sacrament, for many, pushed beyond itself into the urgent call to be active witnesses to his incarnation in, as well as his judgment and redemption of the world.

At the heart of the gospel as I knew it was this call to action.

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in the Anglican catholic and charismatic traditions

The encounter with the living Word of God in the Bible demanded more than further reading. As one student explained

I didn't just want to allow it to be something in texts

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in a charismatic free church

On Sundays as a child his father would take him out of church and around the neighbourhood, and his mother wax eloquent about the state of the world today. It was the unfulfilled nature of these instincts and words, when held against the word heard and preached, which pushed him towards first politics and then community organising.

Despite the 'frustration with the disjuncture between 'being' Christian and actually doing something' this was *not* an impulse that arose from dissatisfaction with liturgy and theology as contemplation, reflection and relationship to God, but as its fulfilment

The deeper I got into my faith the more I felt like it ought to be a practical thing

Jellicoe intern, worshipping across Anglican catholic and charismatic traditions

Scriptural texts could literally be pointers beyond themselves. One intern began to explore the options for action for social justice after reading the Book of Amos. The 'quite startling' voice of the Hebrew prophet critiqued the Old Testament age of law and adherence to sacrifice and worship without attention to justice and righteousness for the poor and the oppressed.¹⁷

This text reflects other prophetic texts in the Bible and the words of Christ himself about the nearness of the Kingdom in bringing the proximity of judgment near: a prospect that stirs to repentance, response and transformation.

I wanted to do something

¹⁷ See especially Amos 5 : 21-24

This is an interesting text to have inspired in a time when much of the passion for social justice is driven by pointing to Christ's display of love without acknowledging how much an instinct for transformative and often world-upsetting justice was included within this. Fr Kenneth Leech spoke of this as

A major problem with Anglican social witness [...] it has tended to exalt incarnation and sanctification at the expense of redemption and judgment. A 'neat incarnationalism' [has tended] to bless and hallow communities, movements, and individuals in a fairly uncritical way. Charles Gore even spoke of the need for the sanctification of each new social order.¹⁸

Awareness of the eschaton, for this intern and others, does not mean abandon to grace and to the complete distinction of the divine order, 'it's not all up to God'. Hence the prophetic 'lifting of the veil' that reveals the imperfection of the contemporary order and the necessity, and justice, for restitution and transformation fits with

the energy and the ability to create change

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in the Anglican conservative evangelical tradition

Of course there is no guarantee that this is God's work, and to some extent this must rest on the faith that it is recognised by so many Christians as good. One intern with an Anglo-Catholic background quoted the invocation second collect at Evening Prayer

O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed

The commitment of all these young Christians to social action is a proof that 'holiness is the habit that issues in social justice'.

¹⁸ Kenneth Leech, *The Sky is Red : Discerning the Signs of the Times* (London : Dartman, Longman and Todd, 2003), p. 160.

sacred and secular

The church is faced with the false polarities of ghetto and surrender, of the heroic sect surrounded by impenetrable walls or the shapeless pseudo-community of the unclear and the vague

Kenneth Leech

The temptation to inaction, as some interlocutors who had been involved in other forms of Christian involvement in the public sphere, was twofold. Either the church responded to the fact that

the very shape of the public and political sphere can prove a stumbling block

Priest, evangelical background, Church of England vicar of a mixed traditions parish

By refusing participation on unsatisfactory terms, and retreating to the truism that the church be the church, hence risking Alasdair MacIntyre's warning that

When the sacred and the secular are separated, then ritual becomes an end not to the hallowing of the world, but in itself [for] the task of religion is to help see the secular as the sacred, the world as under God. Likewise if our religion is fundamentally irrelevant to our politics, then we are recognising the political as a realm outside the reign of God.¹⁹

Or the church becomes merely a critical and negative voice, an opposition to liberalization since the 1960s that has never attempted to be part of, in itself, a coherent new social ethic

Christians should organize to hold out an offer rather than a take-away

Jellicoe intern, worshipping in the Anglican conservative evangelical tradition

The current Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams has spoken out against

¹⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marxism: an Interpretation* SCM Press, 1953

the disappearance of the churches as a genuinely public voice, and the failure of the churches to be serious about social crisis—all this is a deeper sickness than can be addressed by mild and largely middle-class reformism. The need is for protest, holiness, and the kind of working community life that will remind people that, by God's grace, it doesn't have to be like this ²⁰

The genius of organising is that it is both unafraid of radical change and eager to deal with the 'world as it is'. It suits both those I interviewed who, through belief in the potential sanctity of the culturally emerging order, wish to work within it and those who hold out more of a radical belief in its temporal transfiguration. This Augustinian worldly pessimism coupled with the belief that Christians are called to 'seek the welfare of the city' in the earthly Babylon, in the process of their own, and for social, sanctification.²¹

One priest, despite his deep-rooting in a particular tradition, spoke of being 'post-denominational' and embracing a focus away from some of the over attention to the 'frills' of religion. In the context of extreme need, the focus is on action and on thought as the immediate response to action, when it is urgent and necessary, as an 'urban theology that can allow people to take their place within the gospel story'. This is a space for the emergence of a slightly tougher account of the place of action, change, conflict and radical social transformation than some Anglican traditions of separatist holiness have allowed.

He also spoke of the temptation to embrace the consumer culture that has spread even to 'styles' of theology and church and set themselves up as one successful option amongst many, thus drawing in a gathered congregation and having a flourishing, if niche, life whilst leaving their immediate community to its woes. However, for this catholic, such a body would be a mockery: having a 'high' understanding of the sacrament and the offering of Christ's real presence at the heart of the community without bringing that height of holiness properly into the common life of the particular body of humankind that made up his parish.

As well as the threat to sacramental theology which many contemporary high Anglicans find in modern churchmanship, there is the threat high Anglicanism becomes to itself if it retreats into a mockery of holiness unexpressed in holy action.

²⁰ Rowan Williams, 'Foreword to the New Edition' in Kenneth Leech, *The Sky is Red* (London : Dartman, Longman and Todd, 2007), pp. vii-viii.

²¹ See especially Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibility of Contemporary Witness* (Oxford : Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

An evangelical parish that draws strict boundaries around what it understands as the Church—the community of the saved—and what it understands as mission runs the same risk. One evangelical pastor I spoke to had also—partly by force of circumstance—embraced a trans-denominational position. As parish priest he was ‘all things to all people where he found need’. The church was a force for righteousness in the neighbourhood, however that might be expressible.

lessons

What can sometimes seem like pragmatism in community organising is understood by its practitioners as fitting with the broad gospel call to individuals and the Church to enact the kingdom, not to fence it off into the liturgical and worshipping life of the Church, or to bound it by one’s own narrow and prefixed understanding of what constitutes the holy. ‘The holy is that which shakes the foundations of the world’ and the church and churchgoers are pushed into action precisely by encounter with the God in word and sacrament who reaches down to our world. This is both the incarnation that shows us the goodness of our nature and our world, and the incarnation that demonstrates by the contrast of his love, justice and righteousness the distance at which we stand from God’s purposes for us. Community organising relies and feeds on the engagement of our fear and the embodiment of our hope, a movement that is central to the dogma of the Church, to the incarnation of Christ in the world and the sense that runs through the Gospels of the stirring proximity of the Kingdom.

summary conclusion

This project's own ship's orders were to take new bearings towards an implicit theology of community organising. It has sought to identify the articles of faith on which the Christian practitioners of this kind of engagement for social transformation concur in basing their practise. That I do feel I have identified great consensus across diverse traditions, in godly thought developed from godly action, is testimony to the growth in unity that accompanies the practise of Christian organising. I also believe that growth in unity is itself testimony to the unity of truth. As the introduction to this report outlines, my soundings were taken amongst traditions and within heritages that might be expected to have great doctrinal difference. I myself identify as an Anglo-catholic, and I sometimes sailed into quite uncharted waters in terms of encountering non-sacramental and non-liturgical traditions. However my given task was to discover how these different theological backgrounds lead into the common work of social justice. It is surely fitting for the themes of this report that it was precisely in this context of seeking common ground that I came to understand a whole range of traditions, from the charismatic evangelical to the Salvation Army, more deeply than any other previous, less engaged encounter had so far led me to.

And is there an implicit theology of community organising? I believe the convergence of thought I found and engaged with shows that there is. It is characterised by a generous ecclesiology, a commitment to the importance of the material foreshadowing of the kingdom, and radical love and hope for humanity that goes beyond but encompasses a strong recognition of our fallen nature.

The practise of community organising engages much of that which is proper to God's nature and expressed in his human creation, and works to build up that divine character in those who organise. Rooted in love and relation, organising was understood by all those I spoke to as most fitting for faithful engagement in its placing of people before programme. This is what I explore in the section entitled 'Relationality'; at its best, and indeed in its origins in the philosophy of Saul Alinsky, organising understands its purpose as the fruit of the loving engagement of human persons. This defines the Christian life and that of the ecclesial assembly. We are called to live according to the union perfected in Christ, with God and with each other. This is the first task and golden commandment given in the New Testament. Organising as Christians practise it is founded in these true relations, true because of their basis in the absolute identity of all mankind in Christ that is a fundamental of Christian doctrine.

That this emphasis was common across denominations is unsurprising, perhaps: of course Love is a fundamental of the Christian faith! What was less expected was the extent to which those at both 'ends', low and high, of the tradition could view their engagement as fully faithful mission. A number of the churches in this report practise and train members in direct 'street' evangelism, and engaged members are often also active in the church's Citizens UK work. Whilst the majority of those I spoke to felt less called to this form of mission, they did not place extremely rigid boundaries between more direct apologetics and their work. At the level of the one-to-one, it was considered that mission was accomplished in making Christ present by embodying as much as possible his love and justice, and by looking towards its more corporate expression in social action. Across traditions this was something that had received thought: the end of mission is the salvation of souls, and this might be regarded as better achieved through the invitation into the sacramental life of the church on the one hand, and towards personal acknowledgement of the life and death of Christ for us on the other. However there was a nuanced understanding across the board of the interrelation of spiritual and material welfare, and the importance of building good institutions and good societies that transcended such considerations. 'Politics is the highest form of charity' as the last pope once said, and hence the care for the real and the notional neighbour that is exhibited when we seek to transform our structures without losing sight of the need to transform ourselves and seek the transformation of each other is an integral and a vital part of the call of the Church and the Christian.

Luke Bretherton's *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, which devotes a great deal of space to community organising, delves back into Augustine to frame the contribution to the City of Man by the City of God in quite dark terms. We are called, he attests, to 'seek the welfare of the city' as part of our Christian calling. However whilst this seeking is essential to our individual perfection Bretherton tends to downplay corporate virtue. He emphasises the distinction between the temporal and the eschatological, rather than looking to articulate the prolepsis and participation of the coming kingdom in the conditions of the church and state in the now. Whilst his conclusions and articulations are relatively subtle, the overall argument echoes a long tradition, more emphatic in Protestant than Catholic theology, of understanding the relationship of our material and temporal welfare to our spiritual and heavenly destiny as tenuous at best, and which in a related fashion emphasises individual rather than social or corporate salvation. He has to wrestle a justification for Christian involvement in politics and in organising out of

this concern for the temporal order, Babylon to an exiled people, and the spiritual building-up and benefit of these good works for the Christian who hopes to be saved.²²

Amongst those I spoke to the understanding of the relationship of the kingdom to their action was a little less pessimistic. It seemed to be the case that simply to be active in social justice gave Christians a more material hope for the shape of human society and institutions as they contribute to creating the conditions for flourishing human lives. Even those from the most conservative evangelical of backgrounds were happy to speak of working to establish the conditions for Christ's kingdom to be extended, and many simply spoke of building the kingdom in their work. Overall the full range of those I spoke to also express a surprisingly universally generous ecclesiology. In several cases this was partially a result of working in areas where the local church's function as a social institution for a range of variously confessing souls required a reassessment of previously strict boundaries, and of the importance of personal conversion experience to membership of the Body of Christ.

Once again this was a natural result of their role as more enactors than thinkers: seeing the good where they found it, it was thus their role to foster that good and bring it towards fruition, with the hope that good runs necessarily back to its source, however unbeknownst, and this will also reveal its destined end. This did not mean I encountered relentless Christian optimism and positivism. There was also a consciousness of the fall and of sin, particularly in the case of those whose exposure had been primarily to the evangelical tradition. This was a large part of what rendered them live to injustice and to wrong in the world and in themselves—a consciousness of the fallenness of all things. This is identifiably part of the implicit theology of faithful organising, which requires the more piercing eye of judgment.

On the other side we might accuse the non-evangelical wing of the church of running the risk of falling into a sentimental incarnationalism. A parody of Augustine and Aquinas' political theologies might say that the former views the state as a product of the Fall, whilst the latter understands it as part of the created order. This version of the Augustinian view has the potential to decline into a too strict delineation of the borders of Church, a predestinarian soteriology and a total aloofness from the political sphere or—potentially—an insistence on theocratic rule. This version of the Thomist view runs another risk—that of understanding Christ's incarnation as announcing and enacting the sanctification of all things, which we must continue in a mode of love and affirmation

²² Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: the Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

with much less space for the justice and judgment which are equally part of the perfect but fierce love of God. It is part of the implicit theology of those engaged in this Christian work of community organising that such an attitude has been modulated. The tension and conflict which community organising involves, and which is treated in more detail in Section VI of this report, as well as the necessity of holding tightly to the vision of what should be in the face of what is, dealt with in Section VII, requires the Christian organiser to be unflinching in judgment, and unafraid to campaign for extensive change and transformation. Citizens UK does not limit its goals. It refuses a collaborative and reformist outlook which is afraid to name wrong where it finds it. However, in a way that for Christians recognises the duty to find the possibilities for redemption in the existing order, it also refuses revolutionary goals or isolationism: it works within organic community and even co-operates where opportunity arises with the government and with political parties in the name of the common good.

Christian organisers are motivated to social action as a response to the knowledge and love of God. The originary impulse came very frequently straight from the salvation narrative and its impact on the believer brought up in a tradition of its exploration and elaboration—be that in a charismatic evangelical or a high-church context. That Word, activated by its proclamation and celebration in the bodies of their churches, drove them out into the high-rise and underpass, the cleaner's cupboard and council flat. Whilst catalysts ranged from particular Bible passages to a general disillusionment with party politics, all of those I spoke to came to organising from churches that were themselves strong emblems of the communion that is the life of Christ. They were united in the impulse to hold up the mirror of this love and knowledge to the life of the secular order, but also in the desire to enrich the ecclesial community by perfecting its ideals through enactment in the world.

Many of the Christian anxieties about organising correspond precisely to the importance of a continuing Christian presence in organising. It is the membership of pastorally sustaining institutions like parish churches which ensures that what the neutral terminology of the alliance calls 'maintenance organising' and which is essentially the constant weaving and re-weaving of community takes place. Many Christians are particularly anxious that individuals not be instrumentalised towards alliance ends, and that the process be one of full consultation and as perfectly democratic as possible. As TELCO, London Citizens and the whole Citizens UK alliance grow in power, there seems to be the real danger of a loss of density of grassroots engagement and weakening of the consultation process on the Citizens programme. The involvement of Christians who are often engaged precisely *because* this is not just an innovative new agenda but a new

form of politics may thus be essential. Their membership and pressure must ensure that organising remains true to its primary aim of ‘building civil society’ or—as we might better express it—the strengthening of relational bonds towards the ability to have collaborative impact, over and above that of an implementation of a set of derived and extrapolated policies which form an agenda to which the vast majority of members feel alienated from and which—because not consulted on—has also not in its development been the agent of common action.

It is passionate drive and commitment that pushes organising forwards as people engage to make change happen. This is particularly to be found in people of faith, as organising demonstrates. Paradoxically this is perhaps because they are motivated less by narrowly-defined ‘self-interest’ than the philosophy and practise of organising might seem to attempt to engage but because their action springs from by the immediate motivation of seeking their own good and that of others and the final motivation of the unimaginable good in which earthly goods end. The profundity and vision of such motivations lies behind organising. The flexibility and diverse commitments of churches to causes both local and tiny and enormous might also teach Citizens UK much as it looks to a future where the precise nature of its role is uncertain: how far will it collaborate and remain distant from party politics. In a sense this is also the constant dilemma of aloofness and engagement faced by the Church. It manages a dual identity—tied in to the national establishment and rooted in the lives of ordinary people—which is also an oscillation between the intensely local and grassroots and the national stage that Citizens faces.

Christians organise within their churches because they feel the impact of Christ’s presence needs to resonate at every level. Churches do not, however, stop at that. They make the most fundamental impact of all in their worship and bringing souls into the communion of God’s being. As individual Christians, their members also engage in party politics, vote and run for office, take part in every sphere of public life. However neither is community organising is not just ‘suitable’ for use. It truly has the potential—if practised faithfully—to model forth into and to shape the secular order to be more fitting for God’s people to live and work in, and hence to bring more people into the love and knowledge of God. At the heart of what churches are, however, the ‘implicit theology’ I have identified drives much more of their social action than just that triggered by their membership of the alliance. It is their work, ongoing in and out of the alliance—battles for the immigration status of their most perilously positioned parishioners, funerals for the child victims of gang violence—in which the campaigns of the alliance are based. It is their formation of young people with the passion for love and

justice to enact these ends that provides much of the manpower of organising. Beyond this, it is all the *other* work they do, in homeless shelters, debt counselling—in one parish’s response to the riots and another’s connection to the Near Neighbours Hub—that proves their commitment to a project larger than one organisation or even a national alliance can encompass. Christians do not just organise, they love and worship their God and respond to him in every aspect of their lives and the lives of their communities: this is why they are vital for the future of community organising.