

everyone to contribute; how church leaders could foster an environment in which discovering the big questions is encouraged. And who might form valuable conversation partners when so many have lost faith in political and civic institutions? The authors are not specific but the following could be considered: pressure groups committed to opposing the arms trade or preserving the environment who offer moral challenge; community organising groups who engage with local issues; (some) new organisations which are determined not to replicate hierarchical management structures and to allow those who work for them to use their imaginations and their creativity. What is there to be afraid of in engaging with such interlocutors? The reference to Gamaliel is indeed apt.

Yet fear seems to be the big problem. Catholic parishes do not need the permission of the Pope (or anyone else) to be 'as the light to the world' (though they need to reflect on what is involved in borrowing this phrase from the Jewish tradition and should examine more closely what it means therein). So if they are not acting in such a way – by adopting attitudes of suspicion and defensiveness towards 'the world', through fear of innovation or loss of control or breaking the rules or pathological evasion of personal responsibility – what is stopping them? There are no rules against practising hospitality to vulnerable strangers or of refusing to scapegoat the outsider – as the tradition and the present witness of many a Christian illustrates. If after 2000 years the Christian community had not gained some skills in listening to 'the other' and in non-dominating leadership, what a betrayal that would be of the practice of the one they follow.

The fact that the issues which these writers are concerned about are not confined to the Catholic Church (or to religious institutions) is itself instructive. Writing about the situation within the Anglican Communion, Canon Brian Mountford noted how much theological and social thinking the Church has to do. 'The Church must re-shape – maximise on good liturgy and preaching/teaching. Show interest in other faiths, other agendas, be faithful to the ethical challenge of Jesus. Be less hierarchical, less sacerdotal, less introspective, less self-obsessed; find a way of engaging with people's religious instinct and intuition without stifling it with agendas generated by professional clergy'. These conclusions sum up the argument of this book. There is (still) a chance to imagine something different.

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Fr. John Fahy: Radical Republican & Agrarian Activist (1893-1969).
Jim Madden. Dublin: The Columba Press. Pp. 272. Price: €19.99

John Fahy was born in Loughrea, Co. Galway. His life followed the typical trajectory of a would-be priest – secondary education at the diocesan college, Garbally College in Ballinasloe, and then seminary training in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. Not long after ordination in 1919, John

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Fahy began to earn a reputation as an ardent Sinn Féin supporter and agrarian activist. Through on archival research, Jim Madden traces Fahy's various clerical appointments in different parishes and the controversies associated with his political sentiments and actions. His account is enriched by fascinating correspondence between Fr. Fahy and his bishop, spanning the 1930s right up to the late 1950s, as well as newspaper reportage and articles from *Lia Fáil*, the publishing outlet of the organisation by the same name that Fr. Fahy founded in 1957, in response to the twin problems of emigration and unemployment. The letters between priest and prelate show how episcopal authority was exercised in Catholic Ireland – through control of clerical appointments and the writing of pastoral letters, for example – but also the limits of this power. Clergy hold appointments at the discretion of their bishop, but the relative autonomy they enjoy in their daily pastoral work means that they can be independent agents and Fr. Fahy was able to by-pass canon law stipulations to advance his political goals. In a hand-written letter appointing Fahy as curate to Abbey parish in 1959, Bishop Philbin was scarcely able to conceal his exasperation writing, 'I am bound to give formal instructions that in future you are not to take part in social or agrarian movements that have not ecclesiastical approval, and that you are to dissociate yourself from the persons connected with the *Lia Fáil* movement, both in Lusmagh and from outside that parish.'

Fr. Fahy was theologically conservative but socially liberal. He was never content to meet the spiritual needs of the faithful. He was also strongly committed to securing their social and economic well-being, supporting initiatives like rural electrification schemes. In the 1920s, he opposed land annuities – a tax on land, sent to Britain – and supported parishioners whose animals were seized for non-payment of the tax. He was imprisoned in 1929 for appropriating cattle seized by a local bailiff. An appreciation in 1970 in *The Fountain*, the student magazine in Garbally College, noted that, 'involvement was the watchword in every sphere of his career as student and priest'. When the Minister for Agriculture, Patrick Hogan, visited Loughrea in August 1923, he got a taste of this involvement as Fahy heckled him for his criticisms of a republican candidate in the general election. In Fr. Fahy, faith and life sought coherence.

Madden's study is well grounded in the archive but in places it would have benefited from a stronger editorial hand – for example, some of the archival pieces included lack titles and numbers and a few are difficult to read.

Rebel priests have not disappeared in today's church. Indeed, there may always be clergy like John Fahy who push the boundaries of proper priestly action – in the way they side with the faithful or articulate their political views about state activity – and whose public careers highlight the role of strong individual personalities in shaping larger institutional histories.