

Fahey, Denis

by Patrick Maume

Fahey, Denis (1883–1954), catholic priest and anti-semite, was born in Kilmore, Golden, Co. Tipperary, on 2 July 1883, youngest of three sons of Timothy Fahey, farmer, and his wife, Brigit Fahey (née Clery). Timothy Fahey's farm was located in the parish of Knockavilla, whose pastor, Father Matt Ryan (qv), was a well-known agrarian and political activist. Jeremiah Kinane, bishop of Waterford (1933–42) and subsequently archbishop of Cashel (1942–59), was Fahey's first cousin; he sought his advice on dealing with communists in the 1930s and provided imprimaturs for several of Fahey's books.

Fahey was educated at primary schools in Knockavilla and Thomastown, before attending the college of the Holy Ghost Fathers (or Spiritans) at Rockwell, Co. Tipperary (1895–1900), where he had a good academic record and decided to join the congregation. Despite some opposition from his father, an anti-clerical Parnellite, who feared that Denis's ordination might endanger the continuation of the family line (one brother had died young), in 1900 Fahey entered the Spiritan novitiate at Grignon-Orly, near Paris. He returned to Ireland in 1901 to begin university studies at Blackrock College, but this (and the taking of his vows) was delayed because of health problems. It is not clear how far his illnesses were psychological; throughout his life he suffered from intense migraines, and an inability to tolerate noise contributed to his isolation. He taught for a time in St Mary's College, Rathmines, before studying for a BA (RUI) in civil and constitutional history and political economy at Blackrock College (1904–6).

On 2 February 1907, having returned to France for a period of preparation, he professed his vows at Grignon-Orly. After spending two years studying philosophy (possibly including a period at the order's English novitiate at Prior Park, Somerset), he went to Rome to study theology at the Pontifical French Seminary (run by the Spiritans) and the Gregorian University. Fahey, who may already have been exposed to continental extreme-right views during his first stay in France and by his contacts within the (French-dominated) Spiritan order, was profoundly disturbed by his exposure to anti-catholic (or perhaps merely non-catholic) texts during his RUI studies. At Rome his teachers included Father Henri Le Floch CSSp. and Cardinal Henri Billot, both subsequently disciplined by Pius XI for supporting the French ultra-right Action Française movement; they held that the ideal church–state relationship was a catholic monarchy founded on integralism (the principle that membership of church and state are synonymous), such as existed in the medieval world and in the French *ancien régime*. Communal reading in the seminary included texts presenting the medieval guilds as embodying the perfect catholic social system and attributing the French revolution and European conflicts between church and state to conspiracies by freemasons and other secret societies. Fahey was influenced by

the suppression of modernism: he responded to the modernist view that faith and reason could never be fully reconciled by denying the existence of laws of nature, which operated independently of direct acts of will – human, angelic, or divine. He thus adopted an approach utterly incompatible with post-Newtonian science, which predisposed him to see history entirely in terms of conscious decisions by good and evil forces.

Fahey was ordained to the priesthood on 24 September 1910 in the Basilica of St John Lateran. In 1911 he received a doctorate of philosophy from the Angelicum in Rome, and in 1912 a doctorate of divinity from the Gregorian University. On his return to Ireland he was appointed professor of philosophy and director of the senior scholasticate at the Spiritan novitiate at Kimmage Manor in Dublin. He spent the years 1916–19 in Switzerland; he was sent to the Bernese Oberland for health reasons and remained to minister to prisoners of war. On his return he resumed his teaching duties; in 1921 he was appointed professor of church history at Kimmage Manor and he retained all his teaching positions until his death. His pupils included John Charles McQuaid (qv). Fahey was a fluent speaker of French, German, and Italian; he attempted to learn Irish by ‘going among the poor people at Ring’ but decided that this enterprise must cede precedence to the exposure of ‘money manipulation’ (*Fiat*, no. 92 [n. d.; 1957]). His command of continental languages enabled him to establish contact with numerous far-right groups and to serve as an important conduit for the transmission of their propaganda (often in his own translations) to English-speakers.

Fahey's emotional life centred on the Fahey family farm, where he spent his annual holidays, swimming in the river and attending GAA matches. He was an enthusiastic supporter of organic farming, believing that chemical fertilisers were depleting the living fertility of the soil. He evangelised in favour of wholemeal bread, believing that white flour was created by money-making Jews and freemasons, who characteristically sacrificed nutrition to profit; he also favoured yogurt. He feared the displacement of family farms by commercial agriculture, and saw liberal economics, with its emphasis on increasing production, as reflecting a characteristically Jewish preference for quantity over quality. These ideas are delineated in his *Money manipulation and social order* (1944) and *The church and farming* (1953). In the 1940s he was quick to denounce agricultural labourers' unions as communist-inspired (*The rulers of Russia* (1938); *The rulers of Russia and the Russian farmers* (1948); *The tragedy of James Connolly* (1947)).

Fahey's world view is expressed in a series of books beginning with *Mental prayer according to the principles of St. Thomas Aquinas* (1927); his magnum opus was *The mystical body of Christ in the modern world* (1935). His works are schematic and highly repetitive, resting on vast compilations of quotations from varied (and often dubious) sources. Convinced that his works expounded God's will for the world, Fahey regarded any criticism of them as an attack on Christ. He believed himself to have established an intense personal relationship with God, which

superseded human relationships; although displaying benevolence towards relatives and disciples who thought of him as a sage and a seer, he was incapable of maintaining friendship on equal terms.

Fahey's central argument was that Jesus had wished to establish an earthly as well as a heavenly kingdom (which he summarised in six points), but that his purpose was frustrated by the Jews' refusal to accept that his message was intended for all peoples, rather than directed towards establishing worldwide Jewish dominion. By this refusal, Fahey claimed, the Jews repeated the revolt of Satan and his angels (whom he saw as directing 'Talmudic Judaism'). Meanwhile, God turned to the Gentile church to implement the 'Divine Plan for Order'; this was a slow process which reached its height in the thirteenth century but had since been undermined by forces directed by the 'Jewish Nation' (a phrase he adopted to emphasise that unbaptised Jews could not be citizens of any other nation) and its masonic protégés. The French revolution, with its admission of Jews to citizenship, represented a new stage in this assault; the Russian revolution, which he saw as led by Jews, marked the growth of a nascent Jewish-directed world government. This process could be reversed only by re-creating a catholic social order based on vocational guilds, through the establishment of catholic states that expressly subordinated themselves to the catholic church as the one true church and excluded non-catholics – particularly Jews – from citizenship. (Fahey saw Franco's Spain and Salazar's Portugal as the nearest modern approximations to such a state). In Fahey's eyes, the legislative documents issued by popes between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries to restrict the activities of Jews were expressions of divine wisdom deserving profound and reverent religious meditation. Fahey distinguished between his own religiously based hostility to Judaism and the racial anti-Semitism of the Nazis; Jews should not be exterminated but confined to ghettos and eventually deported to a Jewish state (which should not be in Palestine). Characteristically, Fahey believed Hitler to be a puppet of the Jewish conspiracy, who might even have been Jewish himself. After 1945 Fahey's disciples referred to Hitler as having 'disappeared from Berlin' rather than dying there; they insisted that Jews formed only a small proportion of Hitler's victims and that the numbers killed in the Holocaust had been greatly exaggerated.

Fahey's denunciations of the contemporary IRA as communist-inspired, his use of conspiracist works by British diehard Tories, and his denunciations of the republican tradition represented by Wolfe Tone (qv) and the IRB led some opponents to call him an imperialist. In fact he preached an integralist catholic nationalism, which he regarded as exemplified by Owen Roe O'Neill (qv); he feared moves toward European or world government as the submergence of divinely given nationalities in a Jewish-controlled world state, and denounced partition as unjust. (He believed it had been inspired by a desire to keep the Irish state from creating a catholic social order by luring it to sacrifice the rights of God to the so-called 'rights of man' in the hope of winning over Ulster protestants). Fahey appears to have been sympathetic to Fianna Fáil in the late 1920s, but his relationship with Éamon de Valera (qv)

cooled after the Fianna Fáil leader resisted Fahey's urgings to put a 'one true church' clause in the 1937 constitution. Fahey saw the recognition of Judaism as a legitimate religion in article 44 of the new constitution as a particularly disastrous mistake which would bring about Ireland's doom.

In 1942 Fahey founded a catholic study circle recruited from members of the Legion of Mary expelled for promoting Fahey's views as catholic doctrine. This became the nucleus of Maria Duce, which conducted a high-profile campaign to replace article 44 with a 'one true church' clause and propagated Fahey's views through its newsletter *Fiat*. Fahey acted as mentor rather than formal leader of the organisation, and his presence provided it with protection against ecclesiastical censure. Although Archbishop McQuaid shared some of Fahey's theological views and maintained a respectful relationship with him, he found the group an embarrassment. Maria Duce's antics led Fahey to face increasing difficulty in getting the imprimatur for his last books, and after his death Archbishop McQuaid ordered the organisation to change its name – it became Firinne (truth); until the early 1970s members held annual pilgrimages to Fahey's grave and hoped for his eventual canonisation. Fahey's later years were marked by depression and increased personal paranoia; he believed that Jews were plotting his assassination and wrote to friends about his willingness to suffer martyrdom. He died at Kimmage Manor on 21 January 1954 after suffering a stroke.

Even in his lifetime Fahey's influence stretched far beyond Ireland. His writings influenced, and were widely publicised by, the American 'radio priest' Charles Coughlin, and were translated into French by Canadian fascists; in Britain the far-right Conservative MP A. H. M. Ramsay (interned for pro-German activities during the second world war) cited Fahey as 'proof' of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy. In the years after the second world war Fahey and Maria Duce had extensive contact with American McCarthyites, who campaigned against Hollywood films as Jewish and communist propaganda and who emphasised the prominence of Jews in American left-wing politics as vindication of their anti-Semitism. His works were republished by Irish and American admirers and were still widely available in the early twenty-first century. Although Fahey was not representative of the Irish catholicism of his day, it remains startling that his views were tolerated, he was regarded as an amiable eccentric, and his writings were published with the permission of the ecclesiastical authorities while many other authors were banned. He saw himself as heir to Aquinas, but unconsciously echoed Joachim of Fiore's dream of a new age where the world would become a giant monastery.

Fahey's papers are held in the archive of the Irish Province of the Holy Ghost Fathers. His 'Apologia pro vita mea' was published in the Lefebvrist magazine *The Angelus* (January 2001). The NLI has a nearly complete file of *Fiat* (1947–62).

Mary Christine Athans, *The Coughlin–Fahey connection: Father Charles E. Coughlin, Father Denis Fahey, C.S.Sp., and religious anti-Semitism in the United States, 1938–1954* (1991); Richard Griffiths, *Patriotism perverted: Captain Ramsay, the Right Club, and British anti-Semitism, 1939–40* (1998); Enda Delaney, 'Political catholicism in postwar Ireland: Rev. Denis Fahey and Maria Duce, 1945–54', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, lii, no. 3 (2001), 487–511; http://sspx.ca/Angelus/2001_January/Fr_Denis_Fahey_Life_Work.htm, accessed 13 Sept. 2005

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