the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Council. Their purpose is not simply to commemorate a historical event but to contribute to the renewal of today’s Church. There is a crisis in the Church both of structures and of faith, which they strive to present as an opportunity for renewal rather than despair. So how have they managed?

Their analysis of the structural crisis within the Catholic Church is familiar enough. Although the Second Vatican Council outlined a renewed, biblically inspired, vision of church as the People of God, among whom hierarchy can only be justified in service to the people (for baptism is prior to ordination) and where due rights are afforded to local churches, this vision, which required a re-balance of power between the periphery and the centre, has manifestly not been realised. A note of exasperated sadness at the lost opportunities pervades these reflections. It is a painful, pastorally-inspired, cri de coeur in the face of the increasing insularity and increasing centralisation of the Church. ‘It is difficult for many who appreciate the values of transparency and democracy in civil and political life to hang on to their Christian faith when it is embedded in an operatively monarchical polity which instinctively shies away from open communication and shared decision making’ (p68). The structural crisis is a real obstacle to personal faith, an anti-sign of the kingdom of God, because it demands standards from ‘the world’ which it does not grant to its own members. The Church frequently behaves like a centralised, controlling, modern state - while claiming not to be such.

Central to Gerry O’Hanlon’s chapter is the idea that the dichotomy between structural and personal change is a false one. ‘The logic of an incarnational God is precisely that relationships, structures, institutions, cultures and laws are intrinsic to this mystery, intrinsic to what is personal, to what is “spiritual” (p66). The personal is never solitary: we are all part of particular cultures. We are, each of us, multicultural.

Theology, however, cannot bring about change on its own, and so the authors call for a spirituality of change combined with a strategic plan of action, based on their analysis of the crisis. They explore the image of the ‘conversation’ as a means to a more participative culture. Conversations need to take place with both ‘internal’ and ‘external’ partners, so that learning and change can take place. ‘Conversation’ and ‘conversion’ come from the same Latin root: conversation is a serious activity. At its best, conversation invites the participants to change their (perhaps ingrained) ways of thinking. What could such conversations be about and how could they be conducted? A model could be found in the Quaker method of conversation which allows views to be articulated and heard without the need to engage in adversarial debate. It cannot be real conversation when one party claims to know all the answers. It is more important to ask the right questions, open questions which generate hope, imagination, engagement, energy, creative action and learning from others (words which run as a refrain through the text) than to provide answers. Which questions are more likely to generate new possibilities rather than focus on past problems and obstacles? There is a process to experience here, but broadly speaking, conversations could explore what a good parish could be like; how a parish could be created which enables 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 sacramental, 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.

Glasgow

PAUL FITZPATRICK


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
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 criticism 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.

*NUI Maynooth*  
BRIAN CONWAY

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**NEW BOOKS**


This book, by the distinguished historian, Fr. Anthony Gaughan, profiles the 1,870 men who served as priests in the Dublin Archdiocese between 1900 and 2011 (2010 according to the Introduction). The list includes those who left the priesthood with the exception of those who were laicised on account of sexual misconduct with minors. They do not appear. Each entry has the person’s date and place of birth, education, date of ordination and ordaining prelate, appointments, special studies and date of death. The book will serve historians well and provides a brief monument to all who served the Archdiocese in whatever capacity.

Of particular interest is the well and concisely written introduction which gives a description of the education of the priests and their typical career paths culminating in their being appointed a Parish Priest which was, until quite recently, at an age which suggested that the appointment was the reward for a well-spent life.

From 1972 Religious Orders were invited to take responsibility for new parishes and to take care of some existing ones. However, the decline in religious vocations has resulted in a number of parishes being handed back to the diocese. But as the diocesan clergy has itself suffered a vertiginous decline in vocations, the Archdiocese has to contemplate radical re-organisation. Going hand in hand with the decline of vocations has been a sharp increase in the number of men leaving the ministry and seeking laicisation. The actual statistics are not given but with some labour one could work them out for oneself from the profiles. There are no statistics or any mention of the number laicised on account of sexual misconduct.

This is an invaluable historical source and I am sure that some of the statistical gaps will be made good in due time.

Fr Gaughan is to be congratulated on his meticulous, painstaking and detailed work.

Dublin  
NOEL BARBER, SJ


Books with articles submitted by various authors are often difficult to review because the content varies greatly from one author to the next. Having worked for many years in the field of spiritual direction I found some of the articles a little too simplistic. To compare spiritual direction to a dance lesson, I’m not too sure would be helpful to somebody enquiring or seeking direction for the first time. Again a walk in the Tasmanian mountains and finding an underground stream doesn’t really say much for direction. I’ve lived and worked in a very strong Muslim region of Africa for ten years and I must say that I never encountered anything that