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# *Political Catholicism in Post-War Ireland: The Revd Denis Fahey and Maria Duce, 1945–54*

by ENDA DELANEY

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*In the mid-1940s a Catholic lay organisation, Maria Duce, emerged in Ireland which vigorously promulgated the idiosyncratic writings of Revd Denis Fahey, a Holy Ghost priest. Amongst other activities, Maria Duce campaigned in the late 1940s for an amendment of the Irish constitution of 1937 by which the Roman Catholic Church would be recognised as the ‘one true Church’ rather than the ‘special position’ enshrined in article 44 of the constitution. The origins and development of Maria Duce are charted in some detail and particular attention is paid to Fahey’s role in the group. The campaign to amend article 44, which ultimately led to the demise of the organisation in 1954, is examined, as is the lack of widespread support for the activities of Maria Duce in post-war Ireland.*

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**T**raditional concern with the careers of high-ranking ecclesiastical figures has resulted in a relative neglect of lay movements in modern Irish religious historiography. The role of the laity in the Catholic Church in independent Ireland has not yet received much attention from historians, although an unpublished account of the Catholic laity in Dublin in the interwar period has provided a model approach for similar local studies.<sup>1</sup> The aims of this article are twofold: first, to examine the career and writings of Denis Fahey, a Holy Ghost priest, and second, to shed light on the Catholic lay organisation, *Maria Duce* (‘under Mary’s leadership’), which developed in the early 1940s and of which he was the founding figure and mentor. The Holy Ghost Fathers (now the Congregation of the Holy Spirit) were a religious congregation founded in France in 1703 whose members first came to Ireland in the late 1940s. *IER* = *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*; *IHS* = *Irish Historical Studies*; NAI = National Archives of Ireland, Dublin

I should like to thank Fr Leo Layden CSSp., Dr Patrick Maume, Jim McAllister and Dr C. J. Woods for their very useful comments and advice on earlier drafts of this article.

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Hartigan, ‘The Catholic laity of Dublin, 1920–1940’, unpubl. PhD diss. Maynooth 1992. For a preliminary survey of a number of organisations see Eamonn Dunne, ‘Action and reaction: Catholic lay organisations in Dublin in the 1920s and 1930s’, *Archivium Hibernicum* xlviii (1994), 107–18.

1850s, and which was heavily involved in education, missions and social work, both in Ireland and elsewhere. Fahey and *Maria Duce* are one of many aspects of the history of Irish religion in the twentieth century that have hitherto remained unexplored. The major work on the Roman Catholic Church in independent Ireland, J. H. Whyte's *Church and State in modern Ireland*, treats *Maria Duce* briefly,<sup>2</sup> and, moreover, was written before the relevant archival material was made available to researchers.<sup>3</sup> Dermot Keogh has examined the organisation as an example of a right-wing pressure group or a 'case-study of intolerance' but, as shall be demonstrated here, it is more appropriate to view it within the broader context of Catholic lay activism in the interwar years, although admittedly *Maria Duce* represented an extreme variant of Catholic action.<sup>4</sup> There is a general consensus amongst historians that this organisation epitomised the radical right wing of Irish Catholicism in the post-war period yet no sustained analysis or examination of it has emerged.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the relationship between the organisation and the Catholic archbishop of Dublin from 1940 until 1971, John Charles McQuaid, is a subject clouded in ambivalence: drawing on previously unused material this article will clarify the policy pursued by McQuaid in relation to *Maria Duce*.<sup>6</sup>

## I

Fahey's role in the foundation and development of *Maria Duce* is of crucial significance. Born into middling farming stock in 1883 at Kilmore, Golden, County Tipperary, and educated at nearby Rockwell College, run by the Holy Ghost Fathers, Fahey entered the Holy Ghost Congregation at the age of seventeen.<sup>7</sup> He was sent for his noviciate to Grignon-Orly, south of Paris, travelling to France in 1900 during a period of uncertainty in Church-State relations there. The background to

<sup>2</sup> J. H. Whyte, *Church and State in modern Ireland*, 1st edn, Dublin 1971; 2nd edn, Dublin 1980.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 2nd edn, 163–5.

<sup>4</sup> Dermot Keogh, 'The role of the Catholic Church in the republic of Ireland, 1922–1995', in *Building trust in Ireland: studies commissioned by the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation*, Belfast 1996, 135–42. See also Dermot Keogh and Finin O'Driscoll, 'Ireland', in Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway (eds), *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918–1965*, Oxford 1996, 295–9.

<sup>5</sup> Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth-century Ireland: nation and state*, Dublin 1994, 219, and 'Ireland and "emergency" culture, between civil war and normalcy, 1922–1961', *Ireland: A Journal of History and Society* i (1995), 6; John A. Murphy, *Ireland in the twentieth century*, Dublin 1975, 91; J. H. Whyte, 'Church, State and society, 1950–70', in J. J. Lee (ed.), *Ireland, 1945–70*, Dublin 1979, 81.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Dermot Keogh, *The Vatican, the bishops and Irish politics, 1919–39*, Cambridge 1986, 278 n. 44, and John Feeney, *John Charles McQuaid: the man and the mask*, Cork 1974, 35.

<sup>7</sup> The biographical matter is taken from Matthew Hoehn (ed.), *Catholic authors: contemporary biographical sketches*, Newark 1952, 164–5.

this tension lay in the Dreyfus affair of 1896 which split French opinion and had far-reaching effects on the Third Republic. When Fahey arrived in Paris, Waldeck-Rousseau, the head of the government elected in 1899, had already instituted a campaign against the religious orders.<sup>8</sup> The Holy Ghost Fathers, whose mother-house was in Paris, would have been particularly threatened in this anticlerical climate, and it is clearly evident that although Fahey's sojourn in France was brief it was to have an important influence on his subsequent view of the relationship between Church and State.<sup>9</sup>

Although he completed his noviciate in 1901, Fahey did not profess his vows, as a serious illness had forced him to return prematurely from Paris.<sup>10</sup> The years 1901–4 appear to have been spent at St Mary's College, Rathmines, a Holy Ghost secondary school in the suburbs of Dublin where Fahey was involved in the supervision of students, but by 1904 he had returned to his studies and was preparing for a BA degree of the Royal University of Ireland, which had been established in 1879 as a purely examining body.<sup>11</sup> In 1906 Fahey received a first-class honours degree from the Royal University with 'the highest honours in civil and constitutional history, political economy, and general jurisprudence', and he achieved first place in his class in this particular subject combination.<sup>12</sup> From 1906 to 1908 he studied philosophy in the houses of the Holy Ghost Congregation in England and France and during that period, in February 1907, made his religious profession. In 1908 he was sent to Rome where he studied theology at the Gregorian University. He was ordained priest in September 1910 and received a doctorate in philosophy from the Angelicum in 1911: his studies culminated in 1912 with a doctorate in theology from the Gregorian University. It should be noted that Fahey was in Rome during the campaign against Modernism which had resulted from Pope Pius x's encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907).<sup>13</sup> When he

<sup>8</sup> For the impact of these developments on the Holy Ghost Congregation in France see Henry J. Koren, *To the ends of the earth: a general history of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost*, Pittsburgh 1983, 352ff.

<sup>9</sup> For an assessment of the influence of his time in France on Fahey's writings and thoughts see Mary Christine Athans, *The Coughlin-Fahey connection: Father Charles E. Coughlin, Father Denis Fahey, C.S.Sp., and religious antisemitism in the United States, 1938-54*, New York 1991, 15-23; Enda Delaney, 'Fr Denis Fahey CSSp., and *Maria Duce*, 1945-54', unpubl. MA diss. Maynooth 1993, 47-50.

<sup>10</sup> Hoehn, *Catholic authors*, 164.

<sup>11</sup> Fergal McGrath SJ, 'The university question', in P. J. Corish (ed.), *A history of Irish Catholicism*, Dublin 1971, v, fasc. 6, 110. For a detailed discussion of the Royal University see T. J. Morrissey, *Towards a national university: William Delany SJ (1835-1924)*, Dublin 1983, 42ff.

<sup>12</sup> Hoehn, *Catholic authors*, 164; Royal University of Ireland, *Calendar for the year 1907*, Dublin 1907, 529.

<sup>13</sup> For general information on Catholic modernism see A. R. Vidler, *The Church in an age of revolution*, rev. edn, Harmondsworth 1974, 179-89.

returned from Rome in 1912 he was appointed professor of philosophy at the Senior Scholasticate of the Irish Province of the Holy Ghost Fathers at Kimmage manor in the suburbs of Dublin, where, in addition, he was later appointed professor of church history. This was an important position, since the scholastics of the order usually attended lectures at Kimmage before they travelled to the missions or became involved in education in Ireland.

Fahey has earned his place in twentieth-century Irish ecclesiastical history largely owing to his polemical work. His writings throughout the period between 1923 and 1954 are numerous and can be found scattered in various journals and periodicals.<sup>14</sup> In the 1920s he was a frequent contributor to the well-respected clerical journal, the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*. The subject matter of these articles was mostly philosophical in nature.<sup>15</sup> His books, of which nine may be classified as major works, dealt with topics which brought Fahey from the strictly academic sphere into the public arena. They varied considerably in length: his major work, *The mystical body of Christ and the reorganisation of society* (1945) was 590 pages in total; his short work, *The kingship of Christ and organised naturalism* (1943), a mere 143 pages, is, however, the most concise statement of his thinking. In order to grasp the essence of his thought, his writings should be read in conjunction with his 'Apologia pro vita mea' (1948), an unpublished document he circulated to friends, which provides the most valuable insight into the formation of his ideas.<sup>16</sup>

It would be well-nigh impossible to briefly summarise this corpus of work, and thus only the most salient elements of his philosophy are outlined here.<sup>17</sup> Put concisely, the so-called divine programme for order

<sup>14</sup> For example, Fahey contributed a number of articles to the *Catholic Bulletin* in the 1920s: 'The mission of St Thomas Aquinas', *Catholic Bulletin* xv (1925), 491–506; 'Characteristics of St Thomas's teaching', *ibid.* 596–608; 'Secret societies and the kingship of Christ', *ibid.* xviii (1928), 25–32, 159–64, 260–6, 381–6, 492–5, 606–12, 712–21, 822–32, 928–41, 1030–41, 1143–54, 1272–80.

<sup>15</sup> *Idem*, 'Nationality and the supernatural', *IER* 5th ser. xxi (1923), 261–74; 'The introduction of scholastic philosophy into Irish secondary education', *ibid.* 177–93; 'The value of scholastic philosophy', *ibid.* 480–99; 'Latin and the supernatural', *ibid.* xxiii (1924), 189–205; 'The metaphysics of Suarez', *ibid.* 389–415, 485–500; 'The twenty-four theses of St Thomas, pt I', *ibid.* 614–27; 'The twenty-four theses of St Thomas, pt II', *ibid.* xxiv (1924), 35–55; 'St Thomas: official metaphysician of the Catholic church', *ibid.* xxv (1925), 273–90; 'Our real life, part I–IV', *ibid.* xxvii (1926), 490–502, 611–29; 'Our real life, part V', *ibid.* xxix (1927), 600–16; 'Our real life, part VI–VIII', *ibid.* xxx (1927), 41–58.

<sup>16</sup> This document is in the possession of the Holy Ghost Fathers; it can be dated to 1948 from a letter from Archbishop McQuaid, 2 Dec. 1948, thanking Fahey for a copy of the 'Apologia': Denis Fahey papers, Holy Ghost provincialate archives, Temple Park, Dublin.

<sup>17</sup> For a more detailed examination of Fahey's writings see Athans, *Coughlin–Fahey connection*, 71–111. I am much indebted to this work for a theological assessment of Fahey's writings.

which Fahey refers to constantly throughout his writings was the centrepiece of his thought. According to Fahey, this programme had been proclaimed by Christ when he came to earth but was rejected by his own nation, the Jews.<sup>18</sup> The link between the programme for order and Fahey's interpretation of history was, he argued, crucial as the history of the world was 'the account of the acceptance or rejection of our Lord's programme for order'.<sup>19</sup> The kernel of his hypothesis was as follows. In the thirteenth century western Europe almost achieved the 'concrete realisation' of this programme.<sup>20</sup> The medieval gild system ensured that there was no separation between the Christian and citizen either in social life or education. For Fahey, the guilds were an application of the 'doctrine of human solidarity in Christ to economic affairs'.<sup>21</sup> While the acknowledgement of the programme in the thirteenth century was defective, it was still 'real'. Since then, he asserted, 'steady decay' had occurred. The partial embracing of the programme from the thirteenth century until the sixteenth century was for Fahey a highlight in the history of the world:

Society had been organised in the thirteenth century and even down to the sixteenth, under the banner of Christ the king. Thus, in spite of deficiencies and imperfections, man's divinisation, through the life that comes from the sacred humanity of Jesus, was socially favoured.<sup>22</sup>

In the sixteenth century, however, the Protestant Reformation, which had been fostered by the 'cult of pagan antiquity of the Renaissance', led to the breakdown of the organisation of the world in accordance with the divine programme for order.<sup>23</sup> The French Revolution of 1789 was yet another stage, according to Fahey, in the process of decay which stemmed from the Protestant Reformation. It aimed at the 'violent overthrow of the ordered grasp of life still prevailing in Catholic countries'.<sup>24</sup> For Fahey the French Revolution represented not merely a conflict between the Catholic Church and the principles of the revolution but also an opposition between naturalism and the supernatural life of grace.<sup>25</sup> The final bench-mark in this process of decay was the Russian Revolution of 1917. Fahey believed that communism was a revolt against God which had been initiated by Satan.<sup>26</sup> He had no difficulty in gleaning condemnations of communism from the various papal encyclicals which constituted the basis of the divine programme. One, *Divini Redemptoris* (1937), was devoted solely to this subject. Some Catholic theologians

<sup>18</sup> Denis Fahey, *The mystical body of Christ and the reorganisation of society*, Cork 1945, 150-1.

<sup>19</sup> 'Apologia', p. 4 of ms, p. 3 of copy.

<sup>20</sup> Denis Fahey, *The mystical body of Christ in the modern world*, 2nd edn, Dublin 1938, 10.

<sup>21</sup> Idem, *The kingship of Christ and organised naturalism*, Cork 1943, 99.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 100.

<sup>23</sup> Idem, *Modern world*, 10.

<sup>24</sup> Idem, *The kingship of Christ according to the principles of St Thomas Aquinas*, Dublin 1931, 41.

<sup>25</sup> Idem, *Reorganisation of society*, 288.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 144.

and historians would have agreed that these events were bench-marks in the rejection of the programme for order: however, what was striking about Fahey's analysis was his conviction that all of them were linked.

In the modern world, according to Fahey, there existed various threats to the mystical body of Christ, i.e. the Roman Catholic Church, and these were the organised forces of naturalism. A distinction is made by Fahey between what he termed the invisible organised force and the visible forces. The invisible force was that of Satan and 'his fellow demons'.<sup>27</sup> The visible forces were identified as the Jews and the Freemasons.<sup>28</sup> The two later groupings were parts of a movement of organised naturalism in direct confrontation with the supernatural life of Christ. It is the exposition and development of these teachings, some of which were antisemitic in character, which perhaps not surprisingly made Fahey such a figure of controversy in post-war Ireland.

The danger of Freemasonry was a constant theme in Irish Catholic writings in the interwar period. Several periodicals, most notably the *Catholic Bulletin*, were vociferous in their condemnation of it.<sup>29</sup> Pre-occupation with this subject can be explained in the context of the political situation in the Irish Free State. Anti-Freemason propaganda was used largely to attack the *Cumann na nGaedheal* government which was in power between 1922 and 1932, and which, some *Fianna Fáil* propagandists argued, 'depended for its support on the Freemasons'.<sup>30</sup> It is likely that Freemasons would have supported the *Cumann na nGaedheal*, since this political party 'appealed to the propertied elements in the country', yet it should be noted that in the Irish Free State 'Freemasons' was a code-word used in political rhetoric for 'Protestants'.<sup>31</sup> Fahey published a twelve-part article in the *Catholic Bulletin* in 1928 on the dangers that secret societies posed to the kingship of Christ.<sup>32</sup> Another Holy Ghost priest, John Charles McQuaid, then dean of studies at Blackrock College and subsequently archbishop of Dublin from 1940, read proofs of this article for Fahey and made some suggestions for minor changes.<sup>33</sup> The article was later incorporated in Fahey's first book, *The kingship of Christ according to the principles of St Thomas Aquinas* (1931). In his discussion of Freemasonry, Fahey failed to make a

<sup>27</sup> Idem, *Organised naturalism*, 39.      <sup>28</sup> Idem, *Reorganisation of society*, 148–229.

<sup>29</sup> Terence Browne, *Ireland: a social and cultural history, 1922–1985*, London 1985, 71; Margaret O'Callaghan, 'Language, nationality and cultural identity in the Irish Free State, 1922–7: the *Irish Statesman* and the *Catholic Bulletin* reappraised', *IHS* xxiv (1984), 237; Whyte, *Church and State in modern Ireland*, 41–2. The interest in Freemasonry was also a feature of the nationalist discourse in pre-independence Ireland: Tom Garvin, 'Priests and patriots: Irish separatism and fear of the modern, 1890–1914', *IHS* xxv (1986), 78.

<sup>30</sup> Whyte, *Church and State in modern Ireland*, 42.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> See above n. 14.

<sup>33</sup> DDA/AB3/A/II.20, McQuaid papers, Dublin diocesan archives, Drumcondra.

distinction between the various types of Freemasons: the Protestant-type Freemasons in Ireland had little in common with the atheist-type Freemasons in France, either in ideology or organisation, although presumably Fahey believed that all types of Freemasons were anti-Catholic. Fahey's understanding of Freemasonry was based largely on the writings of the Revd Edward Cahill sj. Fahey frequently referred his readers to Cahill's work, *Freemasonry and the anti-Christian movement* (1929), which he thought was 'an excellent discussion of the subject' and clearly this admiration was mutual, with Cahill acknowledging the help of Fahey.<sup>34</sup> Fahey was in regular contact with Cahill, dispatching students from Kimmage manor to Milltown Park, the nearby Jesuit seminary, with books and documents.<sup>35</sup>

## II

Although the majority of Fahey's published works are on the alleged Judeo-masonic conspiracy, he did have other related interests. In 1944 he produced a short book on monetary reform, *Money, manipulation and social order*. His basic contention was that some governments were controlled by 'those skilled in the manipulation of money or exchange-medium'.<sup>36</sup> Fahey cited St Thomas Aquinas's statement that 'money is meant to be the servant of politics and economics', yet he observed that the opposite had occurred in modern society leading to a disorder which is embodied in the functioning of the gold standard system.<sup>37</sup> According to Fahey, the system whereby a monetary basis is established on the strength of gold reserves results in a fundamental disorder:

Instead of the right order, according to which the manipulation of money is intended to facilitate production, distribution and exchange, in view of strengthening family life, men are now sacrificed for production, while production and consumption, in their turn, are sacrificed for interest on debt. Instead of being an instrument of economics and politics, money is the end.<sup>38</sup>

The only way he believed that this problem could be corrected was by the abolition of the gold standard system and the transfer of credit-creation from privately-owned businesses to public institutions. This did not involve state ownership of the banks, to which Fahey was opposed. The banks would be compelled to balance their loans with holdings of the

<sup>34</sup> Fahey, *Principles*, 143; E. J. Cahill, *Freemasonry and the anti-Christian movement*, 2nd edn, Dublin 1931, p. xi.

<sup>35</sup> Athans, *Coughlin-Fahey connection*, 37. It is rather puzzling that no correspondence between these two priests has survived, since it is evident that they were in close collaboration in the 1930s.

<sup>36</sup> Denis Fahey, *Money, manipulation and social order*, Dublin 1944, 13. This book was incorporated as pt v of his *Reorganisation of society*.

<sup>37</sup> Idem, *Money, manipulation and social order*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 40.



national currency. This concept was first proposed by Frederick Soddy, the English chemist who was awarded the Nobel prize for chemistry in 1921<sup>39</sup> and who wrote frequently on the topic of economic and monetary reform. In *Money, manipulation and social order*, Fahey relied heavily on Soddy's work. He corresponded regularly with him between 1945 and 1950 on monetary reform matters and Soddy even offered to refute some of the criticisms made in a review of *Money, manipulation and social order* in an Irish newspaper in February 1945, an offer which Fahey accepted.<sup>40</sup> Fahey also recommended that readers consult the minority report of the Irish Banking Commission (1938) submitted by P. J. O'Loughlen for some important remarks on national monetary reform.<sup>41</sup> This report was drafted by his friend and collaborator, Edward Cahill sj, in association with Bulmer Hobson, an influential Irish nationalist figure.<sup>42</sup>

One of Fahey's more startling theories related to the role of the Jews in the Russian Revolution of 1917.<sup>43</sup> According to Fahey the revolution was plotted by agents of the Jewish nation, and Bolshevism in Russia was the 'most recent development in the age-long struggle waged by the Jewish nation' against the Catholic Church. For Fahey, the efforts of the communists to spread their sphere of influence was aimed at the destruction of the Catholic Church.<sup>44</sup> He saw communism as an instrument in the hands of the Jews which they used to prepare for the coming of the 'natural messias' and the 'establishment of their future messianic kingdom'.<sup>45</sup> He argued that if the Irish Republican Army (IRA), a communist organisation, were to seize control the result would be that the people of Ireland would be 'trampled under foot in another world-empire ruled from Moscow or Jerusalem'.<sup>46</sup> The socialist tendencies of a section of the IRA in the mid-1930s were, for Fahey, an indication that they were communist fellow-travellers. Fahey also wrote a short pamphlet on James Connolly, the Irish socialist leader, executed in 1916 for his part in the Easter Rising. Most of the pamphlet is devoted to an outline of Fahey's own views. However, the 'tragedy' of James Connolly,

<sup>39</sup> 'Soddy, Frederick', *DNB 1951-60*, Oxford 1971, 904-5. For a fuller account of Soddy's life and career see Linda Merricks, *The world made new: Frederick Soddy, science, politics, and environment*, Oxford 1996.

<sup>40</sup> *Irish Independent*, 13 Feb. 1945; Frederick Soddy to Fahey, 22 Feb. 1945, Fahey papers. There is extended correspondence from Soddy to Fahey in the period between 1945 and 1950.

<sup>41</sup> Fahey, *Money, manipulation and social order*, 70.

<sup>42</sup> J. A. Gaughan, *Alfred O'Rahilly, II: Public figure*, Dublin 1989, 310-14; T. J. Morrissey, *A man called Hughes*, Dublin 1991, 307-8; Ronan Fanning, *The Irish department of finance, 1922-58*, Dublin 1978, 359-62.

<sup>43</sup> Of course, this theory was not peculiar to Fahey and was widespread among European antisemites. For further information see Norman Cohn, *Warrant for genocide: the myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, 3rd edn, Chico 1981.

<sup>44</sup> Denis Fahey, *The rulers of Russia*, 3rd edn, Dublin 1939, 48.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* 25.

<sup>46</sup> *Idem*, *Modern world*, 97; *Rulers of Russia*, 60-2.

according to Fahey, was his 'simultaneous acceptance of contradictory doctrines'.<sup>47</sup> Connolly and the workers he represented were 'only pawns in a gigantic game' controlled by communist leaders and Connolly would, if he were alive, advise workers against supporting the false doctrine of communism.<sup>48</sup>

I think I have written enough to show how that if James Connolly, God rest his soul, could now speak to Irishmen and Irishwomen, he would say 'Do not be led astray by Marx as I was. In a hard and busy life I was not able to see clearly whither I was being led... In that faith [Catholicism] I died and in that faith I now want the Resurrection denied by Marx.'<sup>49</sup>

While the published works of Fahey are numerous, the content varied only on a few occasions. *The mystical body of Christ and the reorganisation of society*, was the most detailed statement of his thoughts, yet his first book, *The kingship of Christ according to the principles of Thomas Aquinas*, contains many of the basic tenets of his arguments. In fact, Fahey frequently reproduced sections of works in his other books thereby displaying a sense of confidence in his thoughts or perhaps equally a reluctance to reassess his previous conclusions.<sup>50</sup> Very rarely were his arguments changed, only slightly modified to suit the particular subject matter under discussion. The sales of Fahey's books and pamphlets were considerable. *The mystical body of Christ in the modern world* (1935), was issued in three editions and reprinted six times. In the United States, owing mainly to the recommendations of the antisemitic radio priest Charles E. Coughlin, his works were disseminated widely.<sup>51</sup> In one letter Coughlin states that 350,000 copies of his pamphlet, *The rulers of Russia* (1939), were distributed, albeit free of charge.<sup>52</sup> Correspondence from his distributor in the United States indicates extensive circulation of his works.<sup>53</sup> Browne & Nolan, the Dublin publisher that distributed a number of Fahey's books, wrote to him in 1952 advising that *Money, manipulation and social order* was 'completely sold out' and requesting a decision on whether or not to reprint it.<sup>54</sup> The Catholic Truth Society of

<sup>47</sup> Idem, *The tragedy of James Connolly*, Cork 1947, 11.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 45. For the varying interpretations of Connolly's Catholicism see Patrick Maume, 'Lily Connolly's conversion: new evidence on James Connolly's last days', *History Ireland* ii (1994), 30-1.

<sup>50</sup> For example, the introduction to his translation of Kurth, *The workingmen's guild in the Middle Ages*, Cork 1943, is identical to ch. ii of *Organised naturalism*.

<sup>51</sup> For further discussion of this subject see Athans, *Coughlin-Fahey connection*, 157-237 and 'A new perspective on Father Charles E. Coughlin', *Church History* lvi (1987), 224-35. Athans meticulously explains how Coughlin used Fahey's writings as a justification for the antisemitic sentiments characteristic of his radio broadcasts in the 1930s.

<sup>52</sup> Charles E. Coughlin to Fahey, 20 Mar. 1940, Fahey papers.

<sup>53</sup> There is extended correspondence between W. J. O'Connor (distributor in the United States) and Fahey in the period between 1946 and 1953.

<sup>54</sup> S. Hughes (Browne & Nolan Ltd) to Fahey, 30 Oct. 1952, Fahey papers.

England and its counterpart in Scotland were in touch with him, ordering numerous copies of various titles.<sup>55</sup> In Canada his works were translated into French for distribution in Quebec by Adrien Arcand, who was the leader of the Canadian fascist organisation, the Blue Shirts, which developed in the 1930s.<sup>56</sup> People from places as far away as China wrote to Fahey trying to procure his books.<sup>57</sup>

There was no overt attempt by Fahey's religious superiors to place constraints on his writing endeavours, and he had good relations with some members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Ireland. It must be remembered that Fahey was an important figure in a religious congregation which was very much at the forefront of education in Ireland. Michael Browne, the bishop of Galway, thanked him for a copy of the book, *The kingship of Christ and organised naturalism*, and complimented him on his 'deep knowledge of the subject and very cogent presentation'.<sup>58</sup> Ironically, when in 1942 the members of *Maria Duce* acted on Fahey's behalf to try to secure the *imprimatur* of Archbishop McQuaid of Dublin for this work, the diocesan censor, the Revd M. R. Dempsey, thought that the *imprimatur* could not be granted as this would create 'grave pastoral problems'.<sup>59</sup> According to Dempsey, the appearance of the *imprimatur* on the book would have been an authoritative admission that it was 'in every respect in harmony with Catholic doctrine' which he did not think was the case.<sup>60</sup> When this work was published in 1943 it was with the *imprimatur* of Daniel Cohalan of Cork who, along with Jeremiah Kinane, had provided the *imprimatur* for some of Fahey's other works. Kinane, bishop of Waterford and later archbishop of Cashel, wrote the prefatory letter to Fahey's, *The mystical body of Christ and the modern world*. Kinane was a first cousin of Fahey's and turned to him for advice when he believed communist ideals were infiltrating the city of Waterford in 1935.<sup>61</sup> The point worth noting here is not that these ecclesiastical figures fully endorsed Fahey's thoughts – since clearly most did not – but that his views were clearly regarded as legitimate and therefore worthy of respect and serious consideration. However, Fahey encountered some difficulty in obtaining an *imprimatur* for his last volume, *The kingship of Christ and the conversion of the Jewish nation* (1953). Members of the hierarchy were reluctant to grant it approval and the book was eventually published with the *imprimatur* of the bishop of Ferns, James Staunton, although it is

<sup>55</sup> T. W. C. Curd (Catholic Truth Society of England and Wales) to Fahey, 4 Jan. 1940; J. McKeown (Catholic Truth Society of Scotland) to Fahey, 4 Jan. 1944, *ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Correspondence from Adrien Arcand to Fahey, 1949–51, *ibid.*; Cohn, *Warrant for genocide*, 232. I owe this point to Dr Patrick Maume.

<sup>57</sup> J. F. Beal (Catholic missionary in China) to Fahey, 23 Oct. 1940, Fahey papers.

<sup>58</sup> Dr Michael Browne to Fahey, 1 Feb. 1944, *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> M. R. Dempsey (censor) to A. Murphy, 7 Apr. 1942, *ibid.* <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Dr Jeremiah Kinane to Fahey, 28 June 1935, *ibid.*; *Irish Independent*, 7 Jan. 1935.

unclear from the available evidence whether he actually gave it his approval. Fahey's *confrères* have recounted how Staunton was reprimanded for this action by Archbishop McQuaid who stated in no uncertain terms that he did not want the book sold in the archdiocese of Dublin.<sup>62</sup> In many ways reluctance on the part of the members of the Catholic hierarchy to provide an *imprimatur* in the 1950s indicates the changing circumstances wherein Fahey's thoughts was regarded with a certain degree of disdain largely due to the Holocaust, but also because of the popular dissemination of his teachings by the *Maria Duce* organisation in the 1940s and early 1950s.

### III

*Maria Duce* developed from a study circle which Fahey had been leading since 1942, although its exact origins are unclear. One possible reason for Fahey becoming involved in the formation of a study circle at this time was the death of his friend and collaborator, Edward Cahill, in 1941.<sup>63</sup> Cahill, Fahey and other like-minded individuals had provided the impetus for the establishment of the group, *An Ríoghacht* (the League of the Kingship of Christ), in 1926 to promote the study of Catholic social principles. After the death of Cahill the leadership of *An Ríoghacht* moved away from exposing the alleged menace of Freemasonry towards a concentration on the education of workers in Catholic social thinking. Fahey filled the void with his own study circle which provided him with a platform to expound his idiosyncratic ideas. At these meetings Fahey lectured to members on the subjects that were the central focus of his work. Any assessment of the group must first concentrate on the number of its members. It is extremely difficult to put an exact figure on the membership since only one list is extant. According to one former member,<sup>64</sup> it never exceeded a hundred but its public meetings are thought to have attracted double that number. During its active period, members of *Maria Duce* endeavoured to ensure that details of the actual composition of the group remained secret, and the success of this policy is evinced by the fruitless efforts of Special Branch detectives during 1946 to obtain the names of members.<sup>65</sup> (The state security apparatus had been instructed by the department of industry and commerce to inquire how *Maria Duce* was obtaining newsprint for its publication, *Fiat*, when it was rationed for specified purposes at this time.)<sup>66</sup> Not only is there a dearth of documentary evidence about the

<sup>62</sup> Athans, *Coughlin–Fahey connection*, 71.

<sup>63</sup> *Irish Provincial News*, iv, no. 4 (Oct. 1941), 278.

<sup>64</sup> This former member wishes to remain anonymous.

<sup>65</sup> Garda report, 3C/67/46, 21 July 1946, department of justice, S.18/46, NAI.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

organisation but in addition few former members display any desire to speak about their involvement, rendering a comprehensive oral history project impracticable. Despite numerous requests for information, only one former member consented to offer any information, and then with the stipulation that he would not be named in any unpublished or published work.

Analysis of the socio-economic status of members is impossible owing to the fragmented nature of the small amount of evidence available in Fahey's papers on the membership of *Maria Duce*. An impressionistic assessment, based on an examination of the addresses of the members, would be that the membership was predominantly middle-class, with members living in areas in prosperous suburbs of Dublin such as Rathgar, Sandymount and Clontarf. The occupations of the members varied from barristers to small businessmen and women, although the evidence available suggests that members of the civil service were well-represented, as was also the case with a number of other Catholic lay organisations in this period such as *An Ríoghacht* and the Legion of Mary (founded in 1921 by a civil servant, Frank Duff).<sup>67</sup> In geographical terms *Maria Duce* was primarily a Dublin organisation. Branches did exist outside Dublin, as evidenced by the membership of Sean South, an IRA member from Limerick who was killed in an attack on Brookeborough RUC barracks in Northern Ireland in January 1957. According to Mainchín Seoighe, who wrote a hagiographical work about him, South was attracted to Fahey's ideas and in 1949 founded a branch in Limerick city.<sup>68</sup> South is more the exception than the norm in that members of *Maria Duce* did not frequently exhibit any support for violent republicanism and, as indicated above, Fahey believed the IRA to be a communist organisation.

Members were recruited primarily by personal contact and no requests for prospective members were ever publicly issued, which indicates a certain degree of selectivity in the group's approach to recruitment. Why people joined the *Maria Duce* organisation is a matter worthy of consideration. Again it must be said that definite evidence is hard to come by. Irish historians in recent years have highlighted the importance of the social outlets provided by political organisations such as the Fenians in the nineteenth century and the quasi-fascist Blueshirts of the 1930s.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> One former member of *An Ríoghacht* recalled to Fr Thomas Morrissey that a number of civil servants were present at meetings of the organisation: Morrissey, *A man called Hughes*, 317. For a general, although not very objective, assessment of the *An Ríoghacht* organisation see John Waldron, 'An Ríoghacht: a retrospect', *Irish Monthly* lxxviii, (1950), 274–80; on the Legion of Mary see Desmond Fennell, *The changing face of Catholic Ireland*, London 1968, 63–72.

<sup>68</sup> Mainchín Seoighe, *Maraíodh Sean Sabhat aréir*, Dublin 1964, 50.

<sup>69</sup> R. V. Comerford, 'Patriotism as pastime: the appeal of fenianism in the mid-1860s', *IHS* xxii (1981), 239–50; Mike Cronin, *The Blueshirts and Irish politics*, Dublin 1997.

Clearly membership of an organisation such as *Maria Duce* did have a social function. That many observers referred to the relative youth of the members may also be revealing.<sup>70</sup> It seems likely that advancement, either in social or career terms, may have played a part in the minds of members; perhaps in civil service circles membership of a Catholic organisation be it the Knights of St Columbanus, the Legion of Mary, *An Ríoghacht* or even *Maria Duce* may have been regarded as an advantage. However, it must be noted that the letters containing frequent protestations of eagerness to ensure the ‘social rights of Christ the King’, as *Maria Duce* members referred to its various campaigns, do display a genuine commitment to the wide dissemination of Fahey’s thoughts, although the fact they were corresponding with their ideological mentor obviously influenced these statements.

The teachings of Fahey constituted the philosophy of *Maria Duce*. In their letters to newspapers members displayed a good understanding of these sometimes difficult concepts.<sup>71</sup> An important function of the lectures delivered by Fahey and others was to ensure that members were familiar with the theological and philosophical basis of the organisation. At a time when only a small minority of citizens completed second-level education, this method of instruction was favoured and respected Catholic scholars encouraged the clergy to nurture the development of this means of education.<sup>72</sup> Fahey’s thoughts were distilled into a convenient and easily understood six-point plan, the ‘Catholic plan for social order’, to aid comprehension. This set out the aims and objectives of the organisation. While religious toleration should be acted upon ‘in accordance with the teachings of the church’, it was to be remembered that the Roman Catholic Church was the ‘one true church’.<sup>73</sup> The group called on all nations and states to acknowledge this fact. Other points contained in the six-point plan related to the ‘unity and indissolubility of Christian marriage’, the education of children in line with Catholic teaching and the need for monetary reform, reflecting Fahey’s earlier writings on the subject.<sup>74</sup>

The structure of the organisation was to a large extent similar to that of *An Ríoghacht*, with a clear distinction being made between associate and full members. The only commitment of associate members to the organisation was to recite prayers and pray for the success of the group, but they had no active involvement. The one membership list that is available provides an indication of the way in which the group was structured. The executive council of *Maria Duce* consisted of a president,

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, the comments of Gabriel Fallon in *The Standard*, 31 Oct. 1952.

<sup>71</sup> See the letter from John Ryan, secretary of *Maria Duce*, on article 44 in the *Irish Times*, 7 Mar. 1950.

<sup>72</sup> Peter McKevitt, ‘The study circle’, *Christus Rex* i (1947), 34.

<sup>73</sup> *Maria Duce* information leaflet, n.d. [1949], Fahey papers.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

two vice-presidents, a general secretary, a treasurer and a director of organisation. It also included a number of members representing the various branches (each branch was named after an individual saint).<sup>75</sup> While the organisational apparatus was clearly designed to accommodate a large membership, this was perhaps more a matter of aspiration than reality. Public meetings for members were held on a monthly basis, but members also attended Fahey's Sunday morning lectures in Cavendish Row in central Dublin. All public meetings began with Fahey or some other clerical figure reciting the Rosary and ended with prayers and the *Maria Duce* hymn.<sup>76</sup> However, Fahey's role was essentially that of a mentor and he rarely became involved in the day-to-day activities of the organisation. The crucial difference between *Maria Duce* and the various other Catholic study circles that were operating in Dublin at this time, such as the Guilds of Regnum Christi founded in 1933, was that its members vigorously and dogmatically expressed Fahey's extremely idiosyncratic genre of social thought; they were to bring his ideas out of academia and philosophical hypothesis and into the public arena, most notably in launching the campaign to amend article 44 of the Irish constitution of 1937, a campaign for which *Maria Duce* will be remembered in Irish history. This article recognised the 'special' position of the Roman Catholic Church as the guardian of the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens of the Irish Free State. It also recognised the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Jewish Congregations, the Religious Society of Friends as well as the Methodist Church.<sup>77</sup> In his writings Fahey had stated that the 'special' position placed Catholicism merely on the same level as all other religions. Writing in 1945 he argued that the 'special position' of the Catholic Church in the 1937 constitution recognised 'what is evident to anybody who can count, namely, that the majority of Irishmen in Ireland profess the Catholic faith'.<sup>78</sup> Fahey believed that 'the Irish state seems to attribute rights to erroneous systems', that it placed all religions on the same level and that consequently truth was not recognised as distinct from error.<sup>79</sup> In the 'Catholic plan for social order', the second point stated

<sup>75</sup> Membership list of the association of *Maria Duce*, n.d. [1948], *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Programme of a meeting of *Maria Duce*, 26 Oct. 1952, *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, article 44. The clauses which recognised the 'special position' of the Roman Catholic Church and the other religious denominations by name in the Irish constitution of 1937 (1.2° and 1.3°) were subsequently deleted by an amendment passed in December 1972.

<sup>78</sup> Fahey, *Reorganisation of society*, 354. For a critical assessment of the validity of this interpretation of papal teaching on Church–State relations see Enda McDonagh's comments in 'News and views', *The Furrow* xi (1960), 769–71. These comments are in response to a letter from K. M. Burke, general secretary of *Fúinne* (an organisation, composed of former *Maria Duce* members, which developed in 1955).

<sup>79</sup> Fahey, *Reorganisation of society*, 354.

that the 'state must recognise the Catholic church as divinely appointed to teach man what favours or hinders his supernatural destiny'.<sup>80</sup> Fahey and his followers objected to article 44 on the grounds that the 'true religion' was placed on the same level as the 'man-made religions'.

It is interesting that when John Charles McQuaid, later archbishop of Dublin, was advising the then *taoiseach* (prime minister), Eamon de Valera, during the drafting of the constitution in 1937, he sought the aid of his *confrère*, Fahey. The detailed advice proffered by McQuaid has been highlighted by a number of scholars, yet Fahey's indirect input has only been mentioned in passing by one historian.<sup>81</sup> Throughout his political career de Valera maintained a good relationship with members of the Holy Ghost Fathers as Farragher's account of this long-standing association amply demonstrates.<sup>82</sup> According to Farragher, Fahey gave de Valera 'the benefit of his expertise', but de Valera did not accept this advice, 'leading to rather strained relations thereafter'.<sup>83</sup> This fragment of information is important in studying the campaign that *Maria Duce* mounted in 1949 to amend article 44. Fahey told members that the only reason that de Valera did not include the phrase 'one true church' rather than 'special position' was that elements in the cabinet would not accept such a proposal in deference to the aspiration to unify Ireland and in anticipation of the effect that such a clause would have on the Unionist population of Northern Ireland.<sup>84</sup> Initially the campaign took the form of the circulation of petition forms by members demanding that 'article 44 be so amended as to conform to the social rights of Christ the king as outlined in the authentic teaching of the papal encyclicals'.<sup>85</sup> Petitioners were directed to forward the completed forms to the department of the *taoiseach*, much to the irritation of the civil servants in this department since each form had to be filed. The first inter-party or coalition government (1948–51) was somewhat dismissive of the group. Between 1949 and 1951 hundreds of petitions were sent to the government offices by members calling for an amendment.<sup>86</sup> An examination of the geographical distribution of the petitioners is

<sup>80</sup> Association of *Maria Duce*, membership card, Fahey papers.

<sup>81</sup> Dermot Keogh, 'The constitutional revolution: an analysis of the making of the constitution', *Administration* xxxv (1987), 4–84, and, 'Church, State and society', in Brian Farrell (ed.), *De Valera's constitution and ours*, Dublin 1988, 103–22; Seán Faughnan, 'The Jesuits and the drafting of the Irish constitution of 1937', *IHS* xxvi (1988), 99–102; Seán P. Farragher, *Dev and his alma mater*, Dublin 1984, 173.

<sup>82</sup> Farragher, *Dev and his alma mater*, *ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 92. Farragher does not provide a source for this statement, but it is presumably based on the recollections of members of the Holy Ghost Congregation.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with a former member of *Maria Duce*, 8 Sept. 1992, who wishes to remain anonymous; recordings and transcripts of the interview are held by both parties.

<sup>85</sup> Petition from *Maria Duce* re article 44 [1949], NAI, DT S 9756 A.

<sup>86</sup> All the petition forms are stored, *ibid.*



revealing in that certain suburbs of Dublin were well-represented, most notably Sandymount and Rathgar. The only substantive conclusion that can be drawn from this information is that active members of *Maria Duce* requested their neighbours and friends to sign the petition. In December 1949 John A. Costello, then *taoiseach*, received a petition with over 800 signatures demanding that article 44 be amended and *Maria Duce* also requested an interview with him to discuss the matter.<sup>87</sup> It had previously sought an interview in October 1949, but Costello had refused to consider the question until the organisation told him whether its proposal for an amendment ‘of the article has the approval of the ecclesiastical authorities, in particular, of His Grace the archbishop of Dublin’.<sup>88</sup> In January 1950 Costello’s reply sought the same information except that the word ‘express’ was inserted before approval.<sup>89</sup> This placed *Maria Duce* in an invidious position. While the fragmentary evidence available indicates that McQuaid may have preferred the inclusion of a ‘one true church’ formula in the constitution, it is also evident that he would never openly support a campaign to amend article 44.<sup>90</sup> The group’s response to the *taoiseach*’s request is interesting, as it suggested that Costello should seek the advice of McQuaid on the ‘orthodoxy of our position in relation to article 44 of the constitution of Ireland’.<sup>91</sup> Costello declined to act on this suggestion and instructed his private secretary that no further action was necessary on this matter.

The campaign’s one and only success (a dubious one) was a resolution passed by Westmeath county council on 2 January 1950. This called on the government of Ireland to amend article 44 of the 1937 constitution in order to place the ‘one true church’ on a plane above the ‘man-made religions of the world’.<sup>92</sup> The meeting of the council at which the resolution was passed was badly attended, in fact only six councillors were present, and one councillor, seizing the opportunity, proposed this resolution, which is obviously based on the petition forms distributed by *Maria Duce*. It is doubtful whether he was a member of the organisation, although, judging from his contribution to the meeting, he was familiar with Fahey’s ideas. There was uproar at the next meeting and the motion was eventually rescinded, but this came too late as the original resolution was circulated to all county and city councils.<sup>93</sup> During February 1950 *Maria Duce* attempted to seize this opportunity to publicise

<sup>87</sup> List of people who signed *Maria Duce* protest against article 44, 22 Dec. 1949, *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Seamus Mac Uge (private secretary to the *taoiseach*) to John Ryan (secretary of *Maria Duce*), 7 Dec. 1949, *ibid.* <sup>89</sup> Mac Uge to Ryan, 3 Jan. 1950, *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Keogh, ‘The constitutional revolution’, 21, 28; Faughnan, ‘The Jesuits and the Irish constitution’, 100–1; Feeney, *John Charles McQuaid*, 35.

<sup>91</sup> Ryan to Mac Uge, 7 Jan. 1950, NAI, DT S 9756 A.

<sup>92</sup> *Midland Herald*, 16 Feb. 1950.

<sup>93</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 18 Feb. 1950.

its campaign to amend article 44 by distributing a memorandum to all members of the Catholic hierarchy, public bodies, *Dáil* deputies and senators. It was later sent out with the organisation's newsletter, *Fiat*, a four-page newspaper-type publication which was issued first in 1945 and subsequently at irregular intervals.<sup>94</sup> For *Maria Duce* it was appropriate that such a resolution was passed during the holy year:

We noted with much pleasure the resolution of the Westmeath Co. Council, which seeks an amendment of article 44 of the constitution of Ireland in a manner respectful of the social rights of Christ the king. It was fitting that the resolution was adopted in this Holy Year... article 44 of the constitution of Ireland, in its present form, is an insult to Christ the king, for it places the Catholic Church, the mystical body of Christ, on the same level as man-made religions.<sup>95</sup>

Despite the pressure that the group was applying on the various members of public bodies no real response was evoked. Most county councils marked the resolution 'read' but did not express any support for its contents.<sup>96</sup> The controversy surrounding the Westmeath resolution was to become embroiled in the continuing debate on the 'liberal ethic', that raged with varying intensity in the letters page of the *Irish Times* from January until March 1950 and involved well-known liberal figures such as Owen Sheehy Skeffington, Brian Inglis and members of *Maria Duce*.<sup>97</sup>

The private papers of one senior politician and the leader of the opposition at this time, Eamon de Valera, show that he was keeping a close eye on the events and the subsequent controversy surrounding the constitution.<sup>98</sup> A response was elicited from de Valera when a letter signed by the wife of a member was sent to him on the subject which was 'troubling the minds of an increasing number of Catholics in this city'.<sup>99</sup> De Valera replied that although the phrase 'special position' was not 'in the happiest terms' he was satisfied that as a practical political proposition 'the provisions in regard to religion are as good as in our circumstances we could have secured'.<sup>100</sup> The member who had drafted the original letter was uncertain whether it could be used in the public arena since

<sup>94</sup> Key Publishing Society, *Fiat – its history and aims*, Dublin [1950].

<sup>95</sup> *Maria Duce*, *Memorandum re article 44*, Dublin [1950].

<sup>96</sup> *Westmeath Independent*, 18 Feb. 1950; *Irish Press*, 29 Mar. 1950.

<sup>97</sup> The voluminous correspondence was subsequently published in a pamphlet, *The liberal ethic*, Dublin 1950, by the *Irish Times*. For the views of some of the participants the following works are helpful: Brian Inglis, *West Briton*, London 1963, 157–9; Andrée Sheehy Skeffington, *Skeff: a life of Owen Sheehy Skeffington, 1909–1970*, Dublin 1993, 141–62.

<sup>98</sup> De Valera kept press cuttings of the various letters to the newspapers relating to article 44 of the 1937 constitution: De Valera papers, 1087, Franciscan house of studies, Killiney, Co. Dublin (these papers have recently been moved to the archives department, University College Dublin).

<sup>99</sup> Mary Collins to de Valera, 20 June 1949, *ibid.* 1089/1.

<sup>100</sup> De Valera to Mary Collins, 4 July 1949, *ibid.*

it was marked 'strictly confidential' and such action could be a breach of confidence. Neither the letter nor its contents were ever made known to the general public and so it must have been concluded that the letter was indeed written in confidence.<sup>101</sup>

One can detect a subtle difference in the responses of the three major political parties in independent Ireland in their dealings with and attitudes towards *Maria Duce*. De Valera, leader of *Fianna Fáil*, the largest political party, closely scrutinised the group's activities in order to ensure that no sustained opposition emerged to the religious article of the constitution. He preferred to let colleagues such as Sean Brady, the member of parliament for South Dublin, debate the issues with the members of *Maria Duce* in the letters pages of various newspapers. It should be remembered that de Valera, consummate politician and diplomat that he was, would have been wary of becoming directly involved in a controversy with Fahey for two reasons. First, as noted above, throughout his political career he enjoyed a very good relationship with the Holy Ghost Congregation.<sup>102</sup> Second, de Valera had known Fahey while both were at Blackrock College and would therefore perhaps have been wary of offending him. In January 1954, when Fahey was *in extremis*, de Valera paid a visit to him, although Fahey was so ill that no visitors were permitted and he died that night. He later recounted details of his visit to Joseph Walshe, the Irish ambassador to the Holy See, and in a pithy manner summed up Fahey's stance on matters relating to religion; according to de Valera, in Fahey's view, 'there was no dividing between right and wrong but the breadthless mathematical line'.<sup>103</sup> That Fahey is not mentioned in relation to *Maria Duce* in the semi-official biography of de Valera by Lord Longford and T. P. O'Neill, may indicate that he had no wish to cause any further embarrassment to the Holy Ghost Fathers.<sup>104</sup> John A. Costello, the leader of the second largest political party, *Fine Gael*, on the other hand, paid little heed to *Maria Duce* and treated the organisation in a dismissive manner. His refusal to meet the leaders unless they could provide evidence that McQuaid approved of their proposal effectively circumvented their request. Finally, the response from the Labour party was to pass a motion at its annual conference in August 1950 to 'reaffirm its belief in the principle of freedom of conscience, and regret the failure of its public representatives to offer

<sup>101</sup> Vincent Collins to Fahey, 13 July 1949, Fahey papers.

<sup>102</sup> Farragher, *Dev and his alma mater*.

<sup>103</sup> Copy of a letter from de Valera to J. P. Walshe, 20 Feb. 1954, de Valera papers, 1529.

<sup>104</sup> *Maria Duce* is not named in the text but coded references to a 'Catholic minority whose religious susceptibilities were hurt by the fact that recognition should be given to any religion but their own' and 'a vociferous and embarrassing group' clearly refer to this organisation: Frank Pakenham, earl of Longford and T. P. O'Neill, *Eamon de Valera*, Dublin 1970, 300.

effective opposition to recent attacks on article 44 of the constitution and to organisations promoting the attacks'.<sup>105</sup> At the end of 1950 the campaign fizzled out, but it was its activities relating to article 44 of the Irish constitution of 1937 which had earned *Maria Duce* its notoriety. John A. Murphy referred to the group as 'those Catholic zealots represented by the lunatic fringe styling itself *Maria Duce*' in his survey of twentieth-century Irish history.<sup>106</sup>

#### IV

The relationship of the group with the ecclesiastical authorities has yet to be clarified and is particularly interesting since its demise in 1954 is intimately linked to the actions of John Charles McQuaid. The policy which McQuaid adopted in relation to *Maria Duce* in its early years was one of non-intervention. His reaction is, of course, of vital importance as the development of the group relied on the approval of the ecclesiastical authorities. If members were to be recruited, it was crucial that the group should be perceived to be acting in accordance with the wishes of the bishop of the diocese. *Maria Duce* had received an assurance from McQuaid in 1948 that he 'would not interfere in the policy of the group'.<sup>107</sup> However, a meeting between McQuaid and the leaders of *Maria Duce* in 1949 displays a more sympathetic attitude on the part of the archbishop. A report of the meeting, possibly drafted by Thomas Agar, president of *Maria Duce*, was sent to Fahey; this document is valuable in that it adds weight to the assertion that initially McQuaid looked on the organisation benevolently. According to the author, McQuaid told them that '*Maria Duce* was doing splendid work, that it was a great power for good, but that we [*Maria Duce*] were not doing enough good work!!!'.<sup>108</sup> McQuaid also recommended that the Oxford Social Study course should be studied by members at their meetings.<sup>109</sup> Notwithstanding these words of encouragement, albeit expressed in private, a notable shift is evident in McQuaid's attitude from 1950 onwards. After the 'success' of the campaign to amend article 44 in Westmeath county council, the group increasingly came to the fore in the public eye and as it developed a higher public profile so McQuaid became less inclined to display an association with it.

In February 1951 Thomas Agar wrote to Fahey enclosing a letter from McQuaid's secretary, the Revd Christopher Mangan. Mangan informed

<sup>105</sup> Sheehy Skeffington, *Skeff*, 255 n. 5.

<sup>106</sup> Murphy, *Ireland in the twentieth century*, 91.

<sup>107</sup> Christopher Mangan (secretary to McQuaid) to Thomas Agar, 5 Aug. 1948, Fahey papers.

<sup>108</sup> [Agar] to Fahey, 25 Nov. 1949, *ibid*. The tone and style of the letter indicates that Agar was the author.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*.

Agar that McQuaid had decided to withdraw from *Maria Duce's* 'Catholic plan for social order',<sup>110</sup> the *imprimatur* which had been granted in March 1949.<sup>111</sup> Agar believed that the reason for this was a *Maria Duce* information leaflet which referred to the group as a Catholic action organisation.<sup>112</sup> Mangan's words were unequivocal on *Maria Duce's* position and status *vis-à-vis* the ecclesiastical authorities in the archdiocese of Dublin:

His Grace would also appreciate it if you will kindly refrain from styling, in your literature, your organisation as a Catholic action body, since an essential requirement of a body being Catholic action is that it be approved by the bishop of the diocese: this approval has not been given by the archbishop to your organisation.<sup>113</sup>

In its literature, *Maria Duce* regularly referred to the organisation as a Catholic action group or as a branch of Catholic action. The removal of the *imprimatur* explains the motivation behind a letter that Fahey later sent to McQuaid, in May 1952, concerning official approval for *Maria Duce*. McQuaid advised Fahey that it was not technically correct for *Maria Duce* to approach him for approval and suggested vaguely that in the first instance the request should be addressed to Rome; it would be referred back to him in due course.<sup>114</sup>

The second incident denoting a change in attitude concerns a statement prepared by the members of *Maria Duce* objecting to the presence, in Ireland, of Paul Blanshard, the polemical anti-Catholic writer. Blanshard was in Ireland in 1952 doing research for his book, *The Irish and Catholic power* (1954). During his stay he attended a number of *Maria Duce* public meetings and requested an interview with Fahey.<sup>115</sup> Members of *Maria Duce* refused the request and delivered a statement to Blanshard in which they informed him that he ought 'to be expelled from the country'.<sup>116</sup> His frequent attacks on the Roman Catholic Church led *Maria Duce* to conclude that for Blanshard 'the Kremlin is preferable to the Vatican, error is preferable to truth'.<sup>117</sup> Blanshard's account of the confrontation is of interest since it provides some valuable observations on the members of *Maria Duce*:

the committee [of *Maria Duce*] accepted a cordial invitation for coffee and sandwiches, we debated the matter quite fruitfully for three hours and I remained in the country. I found the *Maria Duce* leaders earnest, sincere, frustrated,

<sup>110</sup> Mangan to Agar, 14 Feb. 1951, *ibid.* The leaflet is attached to Agar's letter.

<sup>111</sup> Association of *Maria Duce*, membership card, *ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Agar to Fahey, 16 Feb. 1951, *ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Mangan to Agar, 14 Feb. 1951, *ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> McQuaid to Fahey, 16 May 1952, *ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Paul Blanshard, *The Irish and Catholic power*, London 1954, 198.

<sup>116</sup> Copy of a statement handed by the members of *Maria Duce* to Paul Blanshard, 29 Nov. 1952, Fahey papers.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

provincial, and profoundly uncultured – resembling the least literate super-fundamentalist leaders in the southern states of the United States.

A copy of *Maria Duce's* statement was sent to McQuaid, perhaps in an effort to obtain his approbation. However, McQuaid's response was not of a commendatory nature and he expressed his disapproval 'with the terms of the statement' in a letter to a member of the committee.<sup>118</sup> He thought that any 'answer made to him [Blanshard] ought to be dignified and restrained'.<sup>119</sup> McQuaid possibly foresaw the result that such an action would have on Blanshard, in merely reinforcing his *a priori* assumption that Ireland was 'not a place where men can express frank and unorthodox opinions on church and state without penalty'.<sup>120</sup> More importantly for *Maria Duce* and Fahey, the letter from McQuaid contained a 'sting' in the last paragraph, as McQuaid expressed his 'emphatic disagreement' with the use of the name of the mother of God in the activities of *Maria Duce*.<sup>121</sup> The leaders of the organisation asked Fahey to see them as this was 'a terrible blow to them'.<sup>122</sup> However, although McQuaid had stated his 'emphatic disagreement' he did not specifically request the organisation to change its name. It is reasonable to suggest that the advice Fahey gave members was to take no action as throughout 1952 and 1953 no change is evident.

A number of factors serve to explain McQuaid's change of attitude towards *Maria Duce* in 1952. First, *Maria Duce* had been the subject of increasing criticism in the influential Irish Catholic weekly newspaper, the *Standard*, during October and November 1952.<sup>123</sup> It is indeed possible that highly-respected Catholic intellectual figures associated with the *Standard*, such as Gabriel Fallon, Peadar O'Curry and others, were bringing pressure to bear on McQuaid to act against the group. Second, correspondence between Fahey and McQuaid ceased after May 1952. Without doubt McQuaid was concerned not to offend his old professor, although by 1952 he was forced to censure *Maria Duce* for its activities. However, since McQuaid had expressed his approval of the philosophy that underpinned *Maria Duce* in his commendation of Fahey's first work, *The kingship of Christ according to the principles of St Thomas Aquinas*, his position was rendered somewhat difficult. In fact, McQuaid's last letter to Fahey indicates that he sympathised with his motives, although not necessarily with his published writings: 'you certainly have done what lay in you to prevent evil coming into the country. I only hope I too will be able to do my part'.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>118</sup> Fr Liam Martin (secretary to McQuaid) to Joseph Duggan, 8 Dec. 1952, *ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>120</sup> Blanshard, *The Irish and Catholic power*, 23.

<sup>121</sup> Agar to Fahey, 10 Dec. 1952; Martin to Duggan, 8 Dec. 1952, Fahey papers.

<sup>122</sup> Agar to Fahey, 10 Dec. 1952, *ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> See especially the editorial by Peadar O'Curry in *The Standard*, 24 Oct. 1952.

<sup>124</sup> McQuaid to Fahey, 16 May 1952, Fahey papers.

The proposed publication in *Fiat* of a lecture given by Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani provided yet another source of conflict. Ottaviani was the pro-secretary of the supreme congregation of the Holy Office in the Vatican, and his lecture, on the duties of the Catholic state in regard to religion, had been given before the Lateran Ateneo in the Vatican in March 1953. He dealt more specifically with the policy a Catholic state should pursue in relation to non-Catholic denominations. Ottaviani's views on this matter merit quotation:

Those who feel themselves in secure position of truth and justice do not come to compromises. They demand full respect for their rights. But, on the other hand, how could those who are not certain of the possession of the truth demand that they alone have rights without including those who claim respect for their rights on the basis of other principles?<sup>125</sup>

This was very useful material for the campaign to amend article 44. Fahey wrote to Cardinal Ottaviani seeking approval of a translation he had prepared of his 'luminous, timely, and courageous lecture'.<sup>126</sup> No reply is extant but it must be assumed that approval was given since the translation was published as a small pamphlet following Fahey's death in 1954.<sup>127</sup> Fahey addressed the members of *Maria Duce* on the subject of the lecture, but despite his efforts to ensure a wider dissemination of Ottaviani's thoughts, steps were taken by McQuaid to ensure that the lecture was not published in *Fiat*. It is unclear how McQuaid learned of the plan to publish there, but nevertheless when it came to his knowledge, he acted swiftly. In December 1953 Agar received a telephone call from Martin, who asked whether they intended to publish Ottaviani's address. When Agar replied in the affirmative he was told that 'His Grace asked me to inform you that he does not wish it to appear.'<sup>128</sup> Even though final proofs were at that stage printed, Agar complied. The address was never published in full in *Fiat* although copies of the periodical issued in the early 1960s carried a summary of the lecture and an offer to supply complete translations.<sup>129</sup>

It is of interest that the *Fianna Fáil* government of the day were also aware of the problems which could result from Ottaviani's lecture. For de Valera, Ottaviani's statement seemed to confirm the 'views of the *Maria*

<sup>125</sup> Joseph Walshe to F. H. Boland (secretary of the department of external affairs), 11 Dec. 1953, NAI, DT S9756 B. This file contains a translation of Ottaviani's lecture which together with Walshe's report was passed on to the *taoiseach*.

<sup>126</sup> Fahey to Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, 6 Sept. 1953, Fahey papers.

<sup>127</sup> Alfredo Ottaviani, *The duties of the Catholic state in regard to religion*, trans. Denis Fahey, Dublin 1954. Keogh is incorrect when he states that the lecture was never published: *Ireland and the Vatican: the politics and diplomacy of Church-State relations*, Cork 1995, 341.

<sup>128</sup> Report of a telephone conversation between Fr Liam Martin and Thomas Agar, 4 Dec. 1953, Fahey papers. <sup>129</sup> For example *Fiat*, no. 48, Dublin n.d. [1960].

*Duce* group, about whom a high authority had expressed the view that they were in pursuit of the right thing but in the wrong way'.<sup>130</sup> Joseph Walshe, the Irish ambassador to the Holy See, assured the government that the pope had 'spoken against the Ottaviani thesis' in a speech made to the Congress of Italian Catholic Jurists in December 1953.<sup>131</sup> According to Walshe, the papal declaration removed the right to give decisions on the issue of Church-State relations from all ecclesiastics and was a clear indication to Cardinal Ottaviani that he should not have made his pronouncement. De Valera was relieved that Ottaviani's statement had been undermined by the pontiff and that his article on religion in the 1937 constitution was still broadly in line with Catholic thinking, although he told Walshe he was not fully convinced that it 'explicitly controverted the Ottaviani view'.<sup>132</sup> In an attempt to assuage his doubts, Walshe wrote a further letter to de Valera, stating that, on the basis of the advice and counsel he had received from senior clerics at the Vatican, it was clear that the pope's statement was a 'complete reversal' of the Ottaviani view.<sup>133</sup> This was not the only statement to come from the Holy See on this matter: Thomas Agar was told by Mangan that the order not to publish the lecture had come from the Vatican.<sup>134</sup> No doubt this information was communicated to Agar to impress upon him the seriousness of the issue.

## V

Denis Fahey died on 21 January 1954, two months after the Ottaviani episode. McQuaid immediately asked the director of the Dublin Institute of Catholic Sociology, the Revd Thomas Fehily, to report on *Maria Duce*. Fehily found that the organisation had more than 200 members, 1,000 associate members and branches in Cork, Limerick, Belfast and Dublin.<sup>135</sup> This information, presumably derived from interviews with the leaders of *Maria Duce*, should be treated with caution, as the group, perhaps sensing that suppression was imminent, was likely to endeavour to exaggerate the importance and size of its membership. For example, Thomas Agar stated

<sup>130</sup> Copy of a letter from de Valera to Walshe, 12 Jan. 1954, de Valera papers, 1529. Professor Keogh speculates that this 'high authority' was 'possibly archbishop McQuaid': *Ireland and the Vatican*, 340. However, while such speculation is plausible, it would seem highly injudicious of McQuaid, noted for his caution and reserve in speech, to suggest to de Valera that *Maria Duce* was in fact correct in its interpretation of papal teaching, and that in effect his article on religion was not in consonance with orthodox Catholic teaching. <sup>131</sup> Joseph Walshe to F. H. Boland, 11 Dec. 1953, NAI, DT S9756 B.

<sup>132</sup> De Valera to Walshe, 12 Jan. 1954, de Valera papers, 1529.

<sup>133</sup> Walshe to de Valera, 19 Jan. 1954, *ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Agar to Fahey, 4 Dec. 1953, Fahey papers.

<sup>135</sup> J. A. Gaughan, *Alfred O'Rahilly*, III/ii: *Catholic apologist*, Dublin 1993, 200. This has been confirmed with Mgr Fehily. His general recollection on Fahey and *Maria Duce* is quite vague but he did report on the organisation: Fehily to author, 23 Apr. 1993.



in a letter to McQuaid in November 1954 that *Maria Duce* had more than 5,000 members, which is clearly a gross exaggeration of the membership base of the organisation and one which was undoubtedly designed to subvert the possibility of censure by the ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>136</sup> However, without Fahey, the ideological impetus for the group evaporated, along with his crucial ecclesiastical connections, and in January 1955 McQuaid persuaded the group to change its name to one less associated with sacred persons.<sup>137</sup> It was only after Fahey's death that McQuaid moved directly to suppress *Maria Duce*; the reasons for this can be found in his relationship with Fahey. McQuaid found it difficult to publicly condemn the group when Fahey was still alive and was in particular difficulties since he had recommended Fahey's writings in the early 1930s. McQuaid never expressed any objections to the philosophy of the organisation, which was largely in consonance with his own thinking. The Thomistic outlook, a central feature of Fahey's teachings, for example, was popularised by McQuaid throughout the 1950s and there was no doubt in McQuaid's mind as to the relevance of scholastic Catholicism.<sup>138</sup> His opposition was not to the principles for which *Maria Duce* stood, but rather to the methods its members used to achieve their objectives, in particular by the organisation's energetic efforts to secure an amendment of article 44. Thus, the efforts of the group to achieve the first point of the six-point plan, the acknowledgement of the Catholic Church as the 'one true church', ultimately led to its downfall. Paradoxically, the fragmentary evidence available indicates that McQuaid personally would probably have preferred such a formula but realised that as a political proposition it was impracticable.

What is the place of *Maria Duce* in the history of Irish Catholicism in the twentieth century? Clearly *Maria Duce* demonstrated that a small organisation could institute a vociferous campaign seeking an amendment of the Irish constitution of 1937. Drawing its philosophical *raison d'être* from the idiosyncratic writings of Denis Fahey, the group developed the narrow focus which became the centrepiece of its activities. The extreme nature of these activities placed *Maria Duce* firmly on the margins of Irish Catholicism in the 1940s and 1950s. The reason it excited little interest among the populace at large was not because it was a radical right-wing group, but simply because the majority of the population did not view it as an organisation whose objectives were realistic, and therefore worthy of support. If *Maria Duce* had endeavoured to seek the implementation of the other points contained in its six-point plan, such as

<sup>136</sup> According to Agar 'Our membership at present is over 5000': copy of a letter from Agar to McQuaid, 24 Nov. 1954, cited in Athans, *Coughlin-Fahey connection*, 66 n. 73. This letter could not be located for the purpose of the present study.

<sup>137</sup> Gaughan, *Alfred O'Rahilly*, III/ii, 200.

<sup>138</sup> Feeney, *John Charles McQuaid*, 30.

the wide diffusion of property or monetary reform, without doubt it would have attracted more members and commanded broader support. Other lay Catholic organisations which sought to achieve more practical objectives, such as the Knights of St Columbanus, the Legion of Mary and *An Ríoghacht*, had a far greater number of members within their ranks.

Quite apart from the fact that *Maria Duce* did not pursue with any vigour the other points in the ‘Catholic plan for social order’, the lack of appeal of both the organisation and Fahey’s ideas in general is explained by reference to two related factors. In the first instance, by concentrating on matters of principle such as the amendment of article 44, it operated on a level which seemed far removed from the practical concerns of most Irish Catholics in the immediate post-war period. Constitutional issues rarely excited widespread interest among the populace at large, at least until the contentious divorce and abortion debates of the 1980s and 1990s. For many the subtle, yet important, distinction which *Maria Duce* made between full recognition of the Roman Catholic Church as the ‘one true church’ and the ‘special position’ granted by the relevant article in the 1937 constitution appeared of little consequence. In the wider context of a poorly performing Irish economy and rising emigration, debates surrounding the finer points of the Irish constitution paled into insignificance. Second, there is the question of the relevance of Fahey’s ideas for twentieth-century Ireland. Notwithstanding Fahey’s exhortations to defend the position of the Roman Catholic Church, the threats he identified as resulting from an alleged Judeo-masonic conspiracy did not seem to be in evidence in post-war Ireland, and were especially distasteful in the post-Holocaust era. In fact, the 1950s were probably the high-water mark for Irish Catholicism, with abundant visible evidence of popular devotion, in particular Marianism.<sup>139</sup> The principal significance of *Maria Duce* lies in the fact that it originated within the broader Catholic social movement which developed in Ireland in the 1930s and 1940s, but set out to achieve objectives which ensured that it represented the extremities of Irish Catholicism in the post-war era.

<sup>139</sup> See, for example, James S. Donnelly, Jr, ‘The peak of Marianism in Ireland, 1930–60’, in Stewart J. Brown and David W. Miller (eds), *Piety and power in Ireland, 1760–1960: essays in honour of Emmet Larkin*, Belfast 2000, 252–83.