

Henry Phillips, *Church and Culture in Seventeenth-Century France*, Cambridge 1997, Cambridge University Press, 334 pp., bibliography, index.

The history of the Catholic Church in modern France remains constantly one of the themes most avidly discussed by researchers. The reason for this tendency lies not only in the key role of French civilisation for European history, its variety, or the scale of changes to which it was subjected. A considerable part is played also by the state of the preservation and availability of the sources and diverse historiographic tradition. Tens of assorted studies and dissertations, representing differently detailed approaches, facilitate embarking upon synthetic topics. The work under examination is another attempt at such a broad synthesis.

At first glance, the title of the book appears to be excessively general, but actually it is a fitting reflection of the contents. We are not dealing with the history of the Church or the history of religious culture, but with a cohesive description of a widely comprehended culture of seventeenth-century France from the viewpoint of the Church as its hegemonous representative. It must be added that the titular seventeenth century is treated rather symbolically — as the peak epoch of the Counter-Reformation and French absolutism, and, at the same time, as a period preceding the Enlightenment. The image proposed by the author is almost static, and exemplifies a certain general model of culture and not a detailed description of its actual state in the course of the seventeenth century.

Only the first chapter, entitled *The Spaces of Belief* (pp. 9–42), deals with religious culture in the strict meaning of the term. Here, the author discusses the realisation of the Tridentine reform in relation to the clergy and assorted social groups. He considers its meritum to consist in the introduction into orthodoxy of the faith and practices of society as a whole, including its lowest strata. This task was to be served by a properly trained clergy, representing an appropriate moral level, and by the attachment to religion on the part of the elites, which provided models of conduct. In the opinion of the author, the price paid for success in the propagation of devotional practices and the implementation of Christian morality assumed the form of the alienation of the clergy from the community of the faithful, and the identification, by the latter, of the Church with the clergy. Paradoxically, therefore, the success of the post-Tridentine reform denoted in a longer range the turning away from religion of a considerable part of society.

The second chapter (*The Spaces of Representation*, pp. 44–75) describes mutual relations between the Counter-Reformation and art, and predominantly architecture, the plastic arts and literature. In its capacity as the greatest patron (alongside the monarchy), the Church enjoyed an opportunity for supervising themes and manner of depiction. Nonetheless, the artistic taste propagated by it was inseparably associated with the universal modes of the epoch, and thus control was restricted to issues of the meritum. In contrast to the plastic arts, literature was less dependent on patronage, and succumbed to surveillance to a smaller degree. In this case, a great role was played by a suitable intellectual moulding of the creative elites.

The Church monopoly on education is the topic of the consecutive chapter (*The Spaces of Education*, pp. 76–99). The author draws particular attention to parish schools, emphasising their wide social range and prime role for religious-moral upbringing. On the other hand, he stresses the fact that teaching, which aimed at understanding the foundations of the faith, stirred intellectual aspira-

tions and yielded a striving towards endowing the school curriculum with a lay nature.

The following three chapters are devoted to assorted aspects of intellectual culture. Chapter four (*The Spaces of Dissension*, pp. 100–134) considers the prime points of the ideological debates within the French Church, such as the attitude towards Jansenism or Gallicanism, the doctrinal distinctness of the highly influential Jesuit order, or the disputable status of tradition and the Fathers of the Church. The author intended to show the way in which Catholic orthodoxy inspired intellectual discussion.

The fifth and sixth chapters (*The Space of Ideas*, pp. 135–170 and *The Spaces of Discussion*, pp. 171–188) delve into the relations between the Church and science, which at that time had just grounded its rationalistic foundations. True, the thinkers (with few exceptions) perceived no divergence between religion and science (Descartes himself stressed their unity), but the Church remained distrustful towards scientific discoveries. Since Cartesian thought could not penetrate schools and universities controlled by the clergy, the dissemination of new ideas took place exclusively by means of secular channels, a process crowned by the establishment of Académie Royale des Sciences. In this way, hostility towards intellectual novelties became the reason why the Church lost surveillance over them, and permitted the emergence of an uncontrolled secular sphere of intellectual activity. Prior to the appearance of a circle of religious thinkers approving of, and profiting from Cartesian thought, there already occurred a significant weakening of ties between science and Christian thought.

Chapters seven and eight (*The Spaces of Hostility: Belief*, pp. 189–225 and *The Spaces of Hostility: Unbelief*, pp. 226–262) portray the situation of intellectual systems officially hostile towards the Catholic Church: Jansenism, Protestantism, libertinism, atheism and deism. The author maintains that in seventeenth-century France the characteristic feature of all those currents was intellectual involvement in a discussion with Catholic orthodoxy, the severance of ties with the latter, or a negation of the teachings of the Church. In this manner, such systems were culturally subjugated to the hegemony of the Catholic Church. In a search for secularised enclaves in French culture of the period, the author poses the essential question whether atheism existed at all. True, more than 130 books about atheism were published in France in 1660–1714 and an unknown number of titles was smuggled in from Amsterdam, but H. Phillips is inclined to support the view that this was a phenomenon secondary in relation to the concept itself. It was precisely the discussion on atheism conducted by the Church (which, essentially, remained entirely theoretical) that introduced this category into circulation, and led to the ultimate emergence of true atheists.

The closing chapter (*The Space of the Word*, pp. 262–296) focuses on Church, state and self-imposed censorship. The author sees one of the reasons for the gradual secularisation of French culture in the loss of control over the printed word on the part of the Church.

A distinct fault of the book is the fact that it ignores the role of the Church in political and legal culture. Only the summary (*Conclusion*, pp. 297–315) mentions relations between the state and the Church. The author places emphasis on the mutual permeation and supplementation of those structures, which meant that the system of the absolute monarchy took over part of Church prerogatives (e. g. in the domain of the law and the judicial system, the organisation of charity, the hospital system). This motif, however, remains insufficiently expanded.

The basic charge which could be made against the presented book is the overly strong subordination of the portrait of seventeenth-century French culture to our knowledge about the following centuries. Hence the quest for secularised spheres of culture and the mechanisms of their origin, crucial for the course of the narrative. Moreover, the author was forced to consider the question whether the seventeenth century paved the way for future de-christianization. In effect,

the model described by H. Phillips depicts the state of French culture on the eve of the Enlightenment breakthrough, and serves the explanation of this particular phenomenon. Similarly to every model, it operates with the assistance of simplification and generalisation, which one can try to undermine by resorting to individual facts, although the proper yardstick of its merit will be the range of strong impact upon other scholars.

The virtue of the book lies in a suggestive description of the dominating co-dependence between the Church and the culture of seventeenth-century France, despite the fact that not always was the author capable of avoiding a perception of the Church as a specific clerical organisation which remained outside society.

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