

author's unselfconscious appropriation of the Byzantine Tradition, which he has fused admirably with his profound grasp of the Bible and the great Cistercian and other medieval mystical theologians. He has clearly soaked himself in the *Philokalia* and the Desert Fathers (but why refer to the latter as 'priors'?—they were spiritual fathers, often anchorites, not coenobitic superiors). Louf's concern is clearly with the wholeness of the Christian spiritual tradition. His exposition of the Philokalian teaching on the *heart* as the centre of the praying person, into which the intellect must 'descend', and in particular his account of the Orthodox Jesus prayer, comes across as something not only based on scholarly *ressourcement* but as a vital element in the writer's own experience which may be commended without hesitation to other Western Christians

in search of God.

This book is above all Christocentric. It 'focuses much on the person of Jesus, seeing in His prayer the way to the Father'. Chapter 3 in particular meditates at length on the praying Christ as portrayed in the Gospel. Here perhaps the erudition is not so well digested: there is too much straight exegesis, too many references in the text, and do transliterations of Greek and Hebrew words help the general reader very much? Basically, however, we have here a spiritual work of unusual quality, which takes into account not only the problems of beginners, but the role of prayer in its full ecclesial and cosmic dimensions: prayer in the heart 'already penetrates to the heart of the world', and participates in Christ's ongoing work of salvation.

NICHOLAS GENDLE

CIVIL LIBERTIES IN BRITAIN, by Barry Cox. *Penguin Special*, 1975. 336 pp. 90p.

Barry Cox has provided a very well-researched and clearly-written account of the civil rights movement over the last fifty years. It is essentially the history of the National Council for Civil Liberties which was established, as its formal statement of aims declares, to 'assist in the maintenance of hard-won rights'. That was in 1934, and the Council's work has, of course, continued ever since.

The first part of the book deals with advances and setbacks in what Cox calls the basic freedoms, i.e., those of association, assembly, expression and movement. The second examines how justice is dealt by the police and the courts. The third discusses the position of minority groups, and the fourth the question of privacy. A review cannot do justice to the wealth of detailed information presented by the book, so I shall confine myself to one of the important general issues raised by it.

'Civil liberty', said Smythe, former general secretary of the NCCL, 'is not about the way you treat your friends, but about the way you treat your enemies': echoes of Jesus from a latter-day liberal. But in Jesus's case the question of one's relationship to the enemy reached a resolution in his death: a death which was either a final defeat at the enemy's hands or a transformation of the whole issue, depending on your point of view. For the NCCL

on the other hand, there is no such clear-cut end in sight. Whether the enemy is perceived as fascism or racism, or as power groups perverting the course of justice in their own interests, or as a status quo which penalises certain groups, the work of the NCCL can in no sense be interpreted as building up to a climax of total defeat or total victory. This message comes across clearly throughout the book.

Defeat is, of course, almost the daily bread of civil liberties groups. And, as Cox points out, a history of such organisations is inevitably in large part about acts of repression, since it is these which call rights into question in the first place. But defeat is seen by him not as a final outcome, but as part of a process of advance and setback; a process which he delineates as the classic civil liberty situation, and makes a central theme of the book. When rights are more widely and aggressively asserted, he argues, as they have been since the 1930s, authority is forced to respond. But the nature of that response is conditioned by the flexibility of the British system, expressed in the lack of a written constitution. This means that authority can act repressively simply by extending what powers it already has, but it also allows pressure from below to have a real impact. Hence there is unlikely to be a simple outcome to any

issue, and most campaigns result in a mixture of progress and defeat.

Total defeat is also made unlikely precisely because the self-appointed task of the NCCL is to ensure that such rights are upheld which already have a tradition of acceptance. Such a task involves constant watchfulness to ensure that rights are not eroded unnoticed. But it also means that when acts of repression occur, support can generally be found from establishment and semi-establishment figures in politics, law and journalism as well as from the more vocal liberal element in the population. As Cox points out in the opening pages of the book, the British consciousness of civil rights runs very deep. And he maintains that the more widespread and forceful articulation of this consciousness over the last fifty years has resulted in an overall growth of civil liberties despite important and serious setbacks in the areas of freedom of movement (the immigration laws) and the right to privacy. It would take a radical alteration in people's attitudes and values for total defeat to become a reality.

Total transformation, on the other hand, is equally unexpected and unlooked-for, since the NCCL and similar groups are concerned with the defence, correction and extension of the situation as they find it. To adopt a more radical stance would, in fact, invalidate the *raison d'être* of the civil rights movement, a point made by Cox when he discusses the NCCL activists

in the 1930s who believed repression to 'be inevitable in a class system and curable only by revolution'. 'Such an attitude', he goes on, 'precluded any genuine attempt to exploit the vulnerability of authority'. The strategy for civil liberty must be the exercise of rights in fairly small doses by fairly small groups: anything more would, Cox claims, make civil liberty as we know it inoperable, and the NCCL would, of course, be out of business as a result. In fact, the possibility of widespread activism leading to the total collapse of the present system is not discussed seriously in the book; presumably because it is not viewed as having any likelihood of realisation. What is to be taken seriously is, in the words of the conclusion, 'that those who wish to be active can be and are'.

The NCCL emerges from this book as an impressive body with a wide range of activity and concern and a laudable history of championing individual and minority group justice. It is particularly impressive in its record of taking up the cases of the poor and the unknown. But the nature of the involvement with the status quo which is required for the success of civil rights work of necessity imposes limitations: civil rights groups cannot make total victory their focus because total victory means the end of civil rights. Those who do want to place total victory, total transformation at the centre can and should value the work of the NCCL; but their identification must be with other traditions.

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