

contemporary metaphor for exploration of “new frontiers” may have proved less cumbersome.

Overall, the work provides an introductory text that is both accessible and nuanced. The narrative voice throughout makes even the theoretical section seem lively and engaging. Although non-Christian readers may need assistance with decoding of Christian theological presuppositions, it is evident that the author makes this contribution from the stance of an authentic, lived spirituality steeped in Ignatian spirituality.

CHRISTINE LUNA MUNGER

Episcopal House of Prayer, Saint John's University

Discernment: Theology and Practice, Communal and Personal. By Ladislav Orsy, SJ. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2020. 77 pages. \$14.95 (paper). doi: 10.1017/hor.2021.94

Ladislav Orsy opens this slim volume by observing that “The practice of discernment in the Spirit has always been present in the communities of God’s people” (6). Taking inspiration from the apostles at the Council of Jerusalem, St. Paul in his counsel to the Church at Corinth, and, above all, St. Ignatius and the first Jesuits, Orsy sets out to formulate guidelines for communal discernment “based on sound theology” (18) and the possibilities and limits of human nature attuned to the movements of grace. The book unfolds as a series of thirty-one propositions, framed by five questions: “What are the theological foundations of communal discernment?”; “What are the legitimate expectations from communal discernment?”; “What is it that the community should not expect?”; “What is the relationship between authority and discernment?”; “What practical guidelines follow from our theological reflections?” Each of the successive propositions are titled in such a way so as to invite intellectual consideration and, for this reader, a kind of *lectio divina*. For example: “9: God’s Light and Humanity’s Weakness”; “15: One Step Forward in the Service of the Lord”; “24: The Habit of Prayer Is Necessary”; “26: The Paradox of Peaceful Mistakes”; “28: The Right Use of Authority.”

Orsy describes group discernment as *a way of asking, seeking, and knocking* (Matt 7:8) in which “each person must be given the respect that is due to an intelligent and free child of God” (6, 18). Yet because human beings “find their fulfillment in community” (20), the common will and flourishing of the whole must also be taken carefully into account. Although adapting a classic model such as Ignatius’s “Rules for the Discernment of Spirits” into communal situations is a “complex” and often messy process (17), for Orsy,

wholeness in discernment is the key. It comes through a climate of prayerful listening, “nothing else than putting ourselves into a state of readiness to surrender to truth” (2). Integrity in decision-making—which is *not* to say perfection or infallibility (49–52)—arises through the shared pursuit of truth and the gradual emergence of wisdom rising from the incarnational dynamics of life in community (40–41). Grace builds from nature (55). It is the grace of loving community “to carry one another’s burden” (54). Although expectations “should be modest,” the results “may surprise us” (30).

When communal discernment is led by legitimate authority, such authority, suggests Orsy, can no longer take its model from the parent-child relationship (62–63). Presuming good intention and openness to the Spirit, the most suitable model for religious leadership today is that of a “trusted friend,” endowed with power “to serve his or her people.” A Christian community is not a group of children to be “directed by a father or mother.” Leaders earn trust when they utilize power to unite the community “in faith, hope and love and thereby make their work more effective” (63).

Taking Wisdom 6:12 as his epigraph, Orsy aims to offer “a twenty-first-century contribution to Christian ‘wisdom literature’” (6). Although initially I was impatient with the author’s propositional approach—some contemporary, concrete examples of communal discernment in practice would have grounded the author’s generally abstract prose—with patient rereading I recognized Orsy’s principles at play in my own experiences of communal and institutional decision-making. As in a mosaic, the points that contribute to the whole play against one another in dynamic tension, emerging finally as a picture, a *wisdom*, truer to reality than if taken linearly, as if figures in a mathematical series. The picture that Orsy describes of the Spirit coming alive from within the imperfect human community is profoundly truthful *and* consoling.

“The gifts of the Spirit do not depend on our abstract reflections ... While theologians are working their way toward a conceptual understanding, communities that are one in mind and heart should go on praying to find out how they should take the next step in service of the Lord” (5). This is a book of considerable theological depth and practical wisdom for any person, parish, or Christian institution involved in discerning how to take the next loving step in service of the whole body that is the church and the universal human community.

CHRISTOPHER PRAMUK

Regis University