

**THE CHURCH: LEARNING AND TEACHING BY Ladislav Orsy, SJ.** *Dominican Publications, Dublin and Fowler Wright Books, Leominster, 1987. 172 pages. £12.95.*

Orsy is strong on *interplay*, meaning he likes to position his analysis in the space—institutional, conceptual, supernatural—where different persons and factors play their parts in the progress of the christian community towards the whole truth. This interplay is really a sacred play. His essay selects topics such as magisterium, assent, dissent and academic freedom, and examines them within the basic theme of the Word of God given to the Church. The fundamental interplay is between those who possess the Word (that is, the whole Church) and those within the community who have a special power to proclaim it and authenticate it (that is, the episcopate).

He is a readable, well-informed and moderate guide to the many sides of this theme, one particularly prominent in the United States context from which he writes. He is a master of the informative aside. To quote only a handful: he knows of no thorough study from a theological point of view of the power of the Roman Curia; too often all Vatican documents are (falsely) attributed much the same authority; at Vatican II the title 'Vicar of Christ' was also used of diocesan bishops; too much attention has been given to the sacrament of order and not enough to that of baptism.

Readers of Orsy should never neglect his footnotes. In one of them he recalls the guidelines Congar gave in *Vraie et Fausse Réforme dans l'Eglise* (in the expanded 1969 edition) for what '*la contestation*' should not be in the Church, and Orsy suggests they can be adapted to point to the limits of dissent. In the Church, then, *contestation* cannot be (i) destructive of charity, (ii) a calling into question of those hierarchical pastoral structures for which the foundations were laid by the Lord, (iii) the denial or calling in question in a hasty, thoughtless or irresponsible fashion of those points of doctrine for which one should rather sacrifice one's life, (iv) rejection of those who think otherwise as bad persons, irretrievably lost and (v) one cannot admit expressions of *contestation* in a liturgical celebration, e.g. in the homily. Perhaps Orsy makes the last point stricter than Congar intended, in translating '*il ne semble pas*' by 'one cannot admit'.

Many good things are said well and Orsy is never dull. But one topic unaccountably neglected, given his theme, is the vigilance pastors are to exercise lest harm be done to the faithful through writings or other media. Even without entering into the details of canons 822–832, Orsy could have considered the duty and right Pope and bishops have to demand that writings to be published by *any* of the faithful which touch on faith or morals be submitted to their judgement. It is lopsided just to quote canon 218, as a fundamental right of the faithful to freedom of inquiry, and moreover to give it an extension it cannot really bear. The general reader will, however, be helped by the suggestions for correctly understanding the term '*obsequium*', which has become a key word to describe, or prescribe, the response of the faithful to the pronouncements of the teaching authority. The word and its derivatives occur in Vatican II documents and in the 1983 Code of Canon Law. Orsy suggests that the attempts to translate *obsequium* by one precise term are misguided; it refers first to a general 'attitude', not to any specific form of it. The external manifestation of a disposition can take many forms, depending on the person to whom *obsequium* must be rendered or on the point of doctrine that is proposed as entitled to *obsequium*. Accordingly, the duty to offer *obsequium* may bind to respect or to submission or any other attitude between the two. This seems a promising way forward.

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