



# SIMPOSIO di CATECHETICA

## La dimensione educativa della catechesi

Università Pontificia Salesiana, Aula Vecchi, 8-9 novembre 2024

### 3. Il futuro della catechesi: Per una fede viva in una Chiesa sinodale

*Thomas Groome\**

#### *The Future of Catechesis: For Living Faith in a Synodal Church*

Dr. Thomas Groome is Professor of Theology and Religious Education at Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry. He grew up in Ireland, the youngest of ten children. He received the equivalent of a BA in Theology from St. Patrick's Seminary, Carlow, Ireland, his MA in Religious Education from Fordham University, NY, and his Doctorate in Religious Education from Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary, NY. He was a cofounder and has served for over 40 years as Director of Boston College's PhD in Theology and Education. He is the author of nine books, and co-editor of five collections of essays. His most recent book, *What Makes Education Catholic: Spiritual Foundations* received a First Place Award in Faith Formation from the Catholic Media Association. His books have been translated into many languages and are used widely throughout the world in graduate level courses in religious education, catechesis, Catholic education, and practical theology. Groome has lectured widely throughout the US and Canada, and in some 25 different countries.

Professore di Teologia ed Educazione Religiosa presso la Scuola di Teologia Pastorale del Boston College, è cresciuto in Irlanda, il più giovane di dieci figli. Ha conseguito l'equipollenza di laurea in Teologia presso il St. Patrick's Seminary, Carlow, Irlanda, il Master in Educazione Religiosa presso la Fordham University, NY, e il dottorato in Educazione Religiosa presso la Columbia University e l'Union Theological Seminary, NY. È stato anche cofondatore e ha servito per oltre 40 anni come direttore del dottorato di ricerca in teologia e educazione del Boston College. È autore di nove libri e co-editore di cinque raccolte di saggi. Il suo libro più recente, *What Makes Education Catholic: Spiritual Foundations* ha ricevuto il primo premio per la formazione alla fede dalla Catholic Media Association. I suoi libri sono stati tradotti in molte lingue e sono ampiamente utilizzati in tutto il mondo nei corsi di laurea in pedagogia religiosa, catechetica, educazione cattolica e teologia pratica. Ha tenuto conferenze negli Stati Uniti e in Canada e in

---

\* Professore di Teologia ed Educazione Religiosa presso la Scuola di Teologia Pastorale del Boston College, è cresciuto in Irlanda, il più giovane di dieci figli. Ha conseguito l'equipollenza di laurea in Teologia presso il St. Patrick's Seminary, Carlow, Irlanda, il Master in Educazione Religiosa presso la Fordham University, New York (NY), e il dottorato in Educazione Religiosa presso la Columbia University e l'Union Theological Seminary, NY. È stato anche cofondatore e ha svolto il suo servizio per oltre 40 anni come direttore del dottorato di ricerca in teologia ed educazione nel Boston College. È autore di nove libri e co-editore di cinque raccolte di saggi. Il suo libro più recente, *What Makes Education Catholic. Spiritual Foundations* ha ricevuto il primo premio per la formazione alla fede dalla Catholic Media Association. I suoi volumi sono stati tradotti in molte lingue e sono ampiamente utilizzati in tutto il mondo nei corsi di laurea in pedagogia religiosa, catechetica, educazione cattolica e teologia pratica. Ha tenuto conferenze negli Stati Uniti e in Canada e in venticinque altre nazioni. Tra le tante pubblicazioni si segnalano: *Christian Religious Education. Sharing our Story and Vision*, Harper, San Francisco 1980; *Sharing Faith. A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, Harper, San Francisco 1991; *Educating for Life. A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent*, Crossroads, New York 2000; *What Makes Us Catholic. Eight Gifts for Life*, Harper, San Francisco 2002; *Will There Be Faith*, Harper One, San Francisco 2011; *Faith for the Heart. A "Catholic" Spirituality*, Paulist, Mahwah (NJ) 2019; *What Makes Education Catholic. Spiritual Foundations*, Orbis Books, New York 2021.

venticinque altre nazioni. Tra le tante pubblicazioni si segnalano: *Christian Religious Education. Sharing our Story and Vision*, Harper, San Francisco 1980; *Sharing Faith. A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry*, Harper, San Francisco 1991; *Educating for Life. A Spiritual Vision for Every Teacher and Parent*, Crossroads, New York 2000; *What Makes Us Catholic. Eight Gifts for Life*, San Francisco, Harper 2002; *Will There Be Faith*, San Francisco, Harper One 2011; *Faith for the Heart. A "Catholic" Spirituality*, Paulist, Mahwah (NJ) 2019; *What Makes Education Catholic. Spiritual Foundations*, Orbis Books, New York 2021.

### *Becoming a Synodal Community*

The practice of synodality was favored by the first Christian community (see Acts 15: 4-29) and has been engaged intermittently since then – more so within the Eastern than Western communions of Catholic faith. Now it seems that the Holy Spirit is insisting that synodality be the Church's defining *modus operandi* from here forward. It calls us to bond and function as a participatory Christian community that moves along together (*syn – hodos*). Such synodality requires that all the baptized be active participants in the life of the Church and agents of its mission to the world.

Often Pope Francis has likened this renewed synodal path to turning the Church as a pyramid upside down; he means to realize it first and foremost as the whole Christian people of God with its leadership serving rather than ruling over this Body of Christ. Here Francis is echoing Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* and the sequence of its chapters, focusing first on "the Mystery of the Church" (Ch 1) and then on "The people of God" (Ch 2), before outlining the function of "The Hierarchical Structure of the Church" (Ch 3). Of course, the Church will always need a leadership structure that serves its "holy order" (*hier-arche*, the opposite to *an-arche*), yet the leaders no longer *define* the Church. It is first and foremost the whole Christian people of God, with all, according to their gifts and opportunities, to be active partners in the Church's mission and ministry to the world.

Though this proposal might sound tame enough at first blush, in fact synodality calls for a whole new (or renewed) way of being Church. To begin with, its defining characteristic is that all the baptized are called to actively participate in its life and mission. Over and over, the documents that have emerged since Pope Francis first called the Church to deepen its practice of synodality (beginning with the Synod on Synodality, Oct 2021), the word *participation* and the people as active *participants* have been the dominant theme (used some 50 times in the *Document for the Continental Stage*, Oct 2022). Participation by all the baptized is to be realized within the communion of the Church. We can note varied characteristics of the participation needed.

First, it demands that all members be invited and welcomed to invest their gifts in service to the Church's mission – the realization of God's Reign that centered the ministry of Jesus, ever working together and being co-responsible to effect God's saving will for the world. Such participation calls every baptized person to share their spiritual wisdom within their Christian community and to be open to receive the wisdom of others. Such participation requires that all Christians be active agents of their faith rather than passive recipients.

This synodal way of moving along together requires that all members contribute according to their abilities and receive according to their needs. It requires mutual exchange in

which all members are invited to share their own deep truth, with their word being heard and welcomed in the community discourse and discernment. A synodal church moves along together with collaboration, conversation, and collective discernment – all of which requires deep sharing and listening, with all the baptized being fully heard and heeded. As the *Instrumentum Laboris* (2023) notes, synodality requires “readiness to enter into a dynamic of constructive, respectful, and prayerful speaking, listening, and dialogue” (#18).

This being said, the central proposal of this essay is that the most effective way to prepare people to work together as a synodal Church is by an appropriate catechesis – beginning in kindergarten and reaching throughout the life cycle – that reflects the core values and dynamics of synodality. This calls for a pedagogy in which participants share with, listen to, and learn from each other, where conversation is the dominant mode of participation for all. Or, conversely, a purely didactic pedagogy of “teaching as telling” is unlikely to encourage a synodal Church.

### *Need to Catechize for Living Faith Toward Synodality*

To state the obvious, our catechetical praxis greatly depends, as it should, on our understanding of Christian faith – that for which we are to educate. To illustrate this point, I draw upon an example from catechetical history. The *Catechism of Trent*, also known as the Roman Catechism, was published in 1566. Embracing the understanding of faith reflected in the decrees of that Council, Trent’s Catechism defined faith as “that by which we yield our unhesitating assent to whatever the authority of our Holy Mother the Church teaches us to have been revealed by God” (*Catechism of Council of Trent*, 1913 edition, 14). This emphasis on faith as belief/assent and solely by Church authority was understandable in the historical context; the Reformation had questioned many of the Church’s traditional teachings. However, understanding faith primarily as *belief* encouraged a catechesis that soon became a simple question/answer summary of the Church’s beliefs that was to be memorized by rote. Such a pedagogy became the dominant mode of catechesis from Trent down to Vatican II – and its spirit prevails in many parts of the Church today.

Including but reaching beyond *belief*, Vatican II proposed a holistic understanding of faith that is to engage the whole person, *head, heart* and *hands*, shaping our beliefs indeed and then our spirituality and daily praxis of faith as well, now to be lived out in synodality. This holistic understanding is epitomized in the Council’s *Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum*, par 5), where, citing St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, the Council summarized that the purpose of all Christian catechesis is “to bring about the obedience of faith” (16:26). In other words, ultimately and immediately, Christian faith is to be *lived* and realized in the daily of life, engaging, like its greatest commandment, all of our mind, heart, and strength – our very soul (Mk 12:30-31).

Let me outline briefly how such holistic faith is to be realized - and thus catechized – in the daily of life and then to imagine how the call to synodality lends a fresh impetus to catechizing for such faith. In sum, I propose that Christians are called to a *living* faith, which means a faith that is *alive, lived, and lifegiving* – for the person and for the life of the world. Then, when situated within the horizon of synodality, catechesis for *living* faith calls for

pedagogies that are *communal* in their context, *conversational* in their dynamic, and that encourage faith by *conviction*.

*Alive* faith is to be ever fresh and vibrant, constantly renewing and deepening, like a “gradual journey” (Pope Francis) that ever reaches into new horizons of faithfulness and holiness of life. *Alive* faith continues to grow and develop across the life-cycle until we finally rest in God. In his conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well, Jesus promised her that his Gospel would always be like “a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (John 4:14). Christians must return often to the fresh waters of Jesus’ Gospel and do so in synodality with other Christians in order to journey on in an *alive* and vibrant faith.

*Lived* faith. From the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus repeatedly prioritized *lived* faith as the measure of discipleship. For example, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father” (Matthew 7:21). So, not the *confessing* but the *doing* is what realizes Christian faith. Jesus repeated often, in one way or another, “blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:28). In an amazing moment when his mother and family came looking for him, fearing for his well-being, Jesus declared that his family now are “those who hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8:21). For Jesus, faith must get done. And surely the most likely way to get it “done” is by walking with others of like faith and commitment – in synodality.

*Life-giving* faith. Throughout his public ministry, it is amply clear that Jesus lived and taught a life-giving faith, a faith that would be salvific and liberating for oneself, for others, and “for the life of the world” (Jn 6:51). Such life-giving faith was best symbolized in his teaching and praxis for the reign of God – the most utopian symbol imaginable. Life giving faith after the way of Jesus must promote “life in abundance” for all (John 10:10). This demands commitment to social justice, to oppose every form of prejudice and discrimination, and to care for our “common home” (Pope Francis). On the ground, life-giving faith demands compassion for the poor, the marginalized, the excluded, the victimized, the hungry, the displaced - toward all instances of human suffering. Again, such life-giving faith can only be sustained by accompaniment with others of like commitment.

*Community*: It is clear from the documents that have emerged since the start of the Church’s four-year program that synodality calls to a deeply communal and bonded faith. In sum, “all the baptized are to form Christian communities who live the closeness of the day-to-day around the Word of God and the Eucharist” (*Synthesis* 18:e). One of the rich fruits – already – from the retrieved emphasis on synodality is “our awareness of our identity as the faithful People of God, within which each is the bearer of a dignity derived from Baptism” and all are called to “co-responsibility” for the shared mission of the Church (1:a). This deepened emphasis on the communal nature of Christian faith calls for catechesis by a participatory pedagogy that nurtures community.

*Conversation*. To pose an approach to catechesis within a paradigm of conversation is to swim against the still high-tide of “teaching as telling.” In many ways, traditional catechesis – at least from Trent to Vatican II - was the epitome of what Paulo Freire would call “banking education,” depositing information in passive receptacles and measuring success by how

accurately students can repeat back what they heard. A synodal church calls for a pedagogy whose defining paradigm is *conversation*, in which participants are invited to speak their own word and to hear with open hearts the word of others – even if at times with disagreement.

A synodal catechesis needs to be “a ministry of listening and accompaniment” (Synthesis 16:n), which implies prompting people to speak and share their own word. Then we must encourage “authentic listening in order to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Church” (Synthesis 2d) and to each member personally. Each of us ever has a “word of God” to share; a synodal catechesis must encourage people to share their faith and open them to hear the faith of others. This is how to catechize for a synodal Church.

*Conviction:* Formation in Christian faith will always require primary socialization into such identity. As the Proceedings or Synthesis summarizes, “the first formation takes place in the family” (Synthesis 14:c) and, we can add, followed by enculturation into a Christian community. Yet, ultimately and for maturity of faith development, synodality calls for and encourages a personally chosen faith. To be convicted in Christian faith is all the more needed in our “secular age.” Nothing less than an owned faith – rather than a passively inherited one – will thrive in our postmodern world and encourage our practice of synodality.

For the remainder of this essay, let us imagine more precisely the kind of catechesis needed to nurture *living* faith in a *synodal* church. To state the obvious, and ever counting on the grace of God, it is the methodology employed in catechesis that shapes the learning outcome. So how are we craft the pedagogy toward the learning outcome of *living* faith in a *synodal* Church? I will first outline the catechetical *commitments* needed for such pedagogy and then, next section, the catechetical *practices* to implement it.

### *Catechetical Commitments to Educate for Living Faith in a Synodal Church*

So what might be the distinguishing commitments of a catechesis that educates people to integrate their lives and their faith into a *living* faith and encourages a *synodal* Church, with all receiving from and contributing to its mission and moving along together.

Let me preface here that I have been working toward such a catechetical approach for more than forty years, and now with renewed impetus from the horizon of the Church as a synodal community. I have written widely about it as a “shared Christian praxis approach” and more friendly as “bringing life to Faith and Faith to life.” (see my *Will There be Faith*, esp chs. 8 and 9). It has been implemented in a great variety of cultural contexts, and across the life-span. I have been informed in its foundations and practices by many scholars of pedagogy from across the ages, including Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, Julian of Norwich, Angela de Merici and Maria Montessori, and by more contemporary scholars like John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Nel Noddings. And now I have been encouraged in this approach by the Church’s renewed commitment to synodality; it will require a catechesis that enables people, in communion and conversation with each other, to bring their lives to their Faith and their Faith to their lives.

However, I have also come to recognize that the distinguishing commitments of a *living* faith and *synodal* pedagogy are amazingly evident in the teaching praxis of the historical Jesus.

Ironically, while the books about *what* Jesus taught could well fill a library, there has been precious little attention to his actual pedagogy – to *how* he taught. Nor did Jesus have a lock-step pedagogy that he used laboriously on every occasion. Yet we can detect a general style of teaching that marked his public ministry. As I outline some eight characteristics of a *living* faith and *synodal* pedagogy, I will note, after each one, how its commitments are echoed in the teaching praxis of Jesus.

1) *Create a Welcoming Community*: The revived notion of synodality calls for a catechetical community that welcomes and encourages all to be active participants in its life and pedagogy, with all teaching and learning together, contributing and receiving according to their personal style of engagement. All must be made to feel included, respected, and that their contributions are welcome and taken seriously. That we develop the practice of such an inclusive pedagogy, promoting the participation of all, is essential, going forward, for becoming a synodal Church – and this from kindergarten onward!

We surely have a model of such hospitality and inclusion in the pedagogical praxis of Jesus. The most radical symbol of his inclusive pedagogy was his table fellowship, with all welcome, even hated tax collectors and public sinners. Then note his outreach to lepers, to the poor, to women, to people considered unclean, even to Roman officials - and the list goes on; all were welcome to hear his Gospel and receive his healing ministry. That such communal catechesis must begin early, note Jesus' amazing outreach to children, and his frequent cant of "let the children come to me . . . for the reign of God belongs to such as these." (Mark 10:14). And Jesus welcomed children in a culture where they were considered of the lowest social status.

2) *Conversation as Primary Mode of Discourse*: Though there is surely place for "presentation" within a synodal pedagogy, the defining paradigm must be one of *conversation* among participants, with all the give and take that good conversation entails. Everyone must feel welcome to join the dialogue and to actively participate according to their learning style. Note that the original document that launched the renewed move toward synodality (*Episcopalis Communis*) stated that the core intent is "to give voice to the whole people of God" (EC 6). It will surely help people to engage in conversation if they have been so catechized. Suggesting as much, the *Synthesis Report* from the General Assembly Synod of October 2023 states the intent of synodality as "to enter into a dynamic of constructive, respectful, and prayerful speaking, listening, and dialogue" (Foreword 18) – a paradigm of conversation. Pedagogically, then, a synodal catechesis must encourage conversation within and between participants, with the texts and symbols of Christian faith, and with the cultural world in which they live. A catechetical key to prompting participants to share their insights and wisdom will be to pose *questions* that elicit as much, and then to ensure that all are heard and taken seriously.

Though we typically image Jesus the Teacher as didactic – simply holding forth - his dominant style was one of conversation, often beginning with a good parable from people's everyday lives (in the Synoptics) or an engaging metaphor (in John). Both are ways to prompt people to think for themselves, with first a kind of inner conversation that would then flow out into the community. Note, too, that Jesus posed direct or indirect questions over 300 times throughout the Gospels (see Copenhaver, *Jesus is the Question*). Among the most significant, surely, was his "who do *you* say that I am?" (Mt 16:15), put to disciples on the road to Caesarea

Philippi, deeply engaging their emerging life-in-living-faith. Note again, a favored location of Jesus' faith conversations was at the table.

3. *Engage Participants' Lives and Interests*: Following on from hospitality and conversation, a pedagogy for *living* faith toward a *synodal* church needs a curriculum that engages people's everyday lives, their interests and concerns, their hopes and dreams, raising up life-centered themes that dispose them to become active participants by engaging their interests. Paulo Freire encouraged such pedagogy as turning people toward their own *realidad* – their situated reality in the world – in order to engage them with a “generative theme,” something relevant to their lives. For effective catechesis, it is imperative to stimulate and then engage the felt interests of participants; as John Dewey was fond of saying, people learn little for their lives unless they are interested. A synodal pedagogy needs to craft the curriculum to be interesting to people's lives and for their *living* faith in the world.

Jesus was an amazing example of a pedagogue who got people interested and precisely by turning them toward their own *realidad* - life in the world. Again, the parables and metaphors are a prime example. Can't you imagine him, some early morning, being down by the lakeshore with the people who were sorting their fish – the little ones to go back in, the dead ones to the birds, and the good ones to the basket for market. Jesus, having observed a while, says, “You know what the reign of God is like? People sorting fish.” Then, with their interest aroused, he went on to teach them about who will belong – that it is not inevitable, there will be a sorting, etc.. And he did the same with the women baking bread, the vineyard keeper hiring workers, the farmer sowing seeds, etc., ever encouraging people to look to their daily lives for spiritual wisdom.

4) *Participants to Share their own Word, To Name their Own Reality*: From the beginning and throughout, the pedagogy must invite and welcome people to share their own truth from their daily lives and social situations; in prompting as much, good reflective questions are key. Inviting people to speak their own word, to name their own reality as persons, is the first step, claimed Freire, toward an emancipatory way of knowing. It is the antithesis of “banking” education – depositing information in passive receptacles. And though a verbal way of sharing one's word may be most typical, participants can do so through any mode of self-expression – art, symbols, writing, etc.

Again, Jesus constantly invited people to recognize their own reality and especially, as noted above, by the parables and metaphors he employed – things they could look through to see themselves and their lives in the world. He wanted people to recognize what they were doing and what was being done around them – the present praxis of their historical situation. Note, too, how often Jesus posed a question to people who approached him, inviting them to first name their own reality and desire. So, he asked the blind Bartimaeus, *What* do you want me to do for you?” - though Jesus surely knew well what he would request. And Bartimaeus expressed his own longing: “Master, I want to see” (Mark 10:51). It is suggestive, too, that Jesus made people free to name their own reality, even if chastising him, as Martha did - for not being there for her brother Lazarus: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (John 11:21). And his initial engaging of the Samaritan woman with his request, “give me a drink” (John 4:7) –

his own felt need - was the beginning of catechizing her to become his first evangelist – in John’s Gospel.

\*\*\*

5) *Critical Reflection on their Lives in the World.* If a synodal catechesis is to teach people to be agents of their faith, then they must be encouraged to think for themselves – albeit not by themselves but in community with other Christians and with their shared tradition of faith. *Critical* here does not mean negative; from the Greek *krinein* it means more to discern than to criticize. So being *critical* means to name the issues, to weigh evidence, to consider context, etc. Critical reflection not only asks people what they think but why they think they think that – becoming aware of how their life praxis is greatly shaped by their socio-cultural context. Note, too, that such critical reflection calls for engagement of the whole mind – reason, memory and imagination. In our postmodern world, we typically give reason primacy, often forgetting what we already know from *memory* or failing to *imagine* new possibilities. And while critical discernment encourages people to put their whole mind to work (reason, memory and imagination), Montessori also encouraged teachers to turn students to “the life-force within” – to engage their souls.

Jesus was a critical (discerning) thinker writ large. He constantly invited people to question their taken for granted world and to imagine new possibilities for their *living* faith. So much of his pedagogy is epitomized in his repeated “You have heard it said but I say” (Mt 5: 17-48). Indeed, his whole teaching of the Reign of God – and its vision of fullness of life for all – invited participants to deepen their critical reflection on their present reality, personal and political, and to imagine life-giving alternatives.

Or note the critical thinking needed to embrace his recrafting of the greatest commandment of love. He was the first Hebrew prophet to bring together Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 – uniting love of God and neighbor as oneself into a three-fold love command (see Mk 12: 28-34) – even of enemies (Mt 5:43). And his parables often called people to critical reflection; so, the Samaritan is the neighbor, the prodigal is welcomed home, Lazarus goes home to God and the rich man to hell; the list goes on. Why, that Samaritan woman likely caused Jesus to do his own critical reflection: “how can you a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?” (Jn 4:9). To say that Jesus encouraged critical thinking is an understatement; he demanded it of himself and his disciples.

6) *Persuasive Access to Christian Story and Vision.* The responsibility of all catechesis is that it lend persuasive access to Christian faith that we are to incarnate in daily life. To encourage people’s personal engagement with the tradition, it can help to cast it as a grand overarching *narrative* - albeit with lots of dogmas and doctrines, symbols and sacraments etc. within it - that continues to unfold as we live into its vision for our lives. The *Directory for Catechesis* (2023) overall favors “narrative language for catechizing,” precisely because it engages the “affective, cognitive, and volitional” of people’s lives (DFC par 207-8). So, I propose Story here as a metaphor of the whole corpus of Christian faith as represented by Scripture and Tradition. The Vision, then, entails all that the Story means for and asks of people’s lives toward *living* faith in a *synodal* church. Our catechetical accessing of the Christian Story/Vision should be persuasive, proposing to participants how it has been life-giving across the ages and can still be so for our time.



The heart of Jesus' public ministry and from the beginning (Mk1:15) was his proclamation of the Reign of God in the Synoptics and the analogous "light of life" in John; such was the summation of his whole Story/Vision. It was persuasive for people because God's reign represented hope for the best of everything for everyone, or life in abundance for all (Jn 10:10), and this as what God desires for humankind. Then, every aspect or symbol of Jesus' great Story carried a Vision that invited people to embrace and do God's will of fullness of life for all now - "on earth as it is in heaven."

7) *Invite participants to personally appropriate Christian Story/Vision.* While personal appropriation should be encouraged throughout such catechesis, it is well to have an intentional moment when participants are explicitly invited to discern and make their own the faith being taught. This echoes Bernard Lonergan's emphasis on *judgment* as essential for authentic cognition. In brief and drawing upon the long history of Catholic epistemology (especially from Aquinas), Lonergan outlined authentic cognition as a fourfold dynamic; it begins with *attention* to data, moves to *understanding*, to then reach on to *judgment* and *decision*. While this *appropriation* moment echoes Lonergan's third dynamic of *judgment*, pedagogically it amounts to participants discerning and making their own what is being taught, and coming to see for themselves the gift that Christian faith can be to their lives.

This *appropriating* movement can be as simple as asking participants, according to the Story/Vision presented, "so what is emerging for you now?" or "what are you coming to see for yourself," or "what make sense to you," or "what do you agree with, disagree with, or add to the conversation." For younger children, questions can be as simple as, "so what did you hear" and "what stood out for you" or "what did you like from this story" or "how might you take it to heart, put it to work," etc. The undergirding pedagogy is to invite participants to integrate what they know from reflecting on their own lives-in-the-world with what is presented as Christian faith, encouraging them to integrate the two sources into their own personally embraced and *living* faith.

We can readily recognize Jesus encouraging such personal appropriation of what he was teaching. Rather than having people accept his teaching by authority, he ever desired them to come to see and hear for themselves the Story/Vision he was teaching. This is why he could bless those who had the ears to hear and the eyes to see (see Mt 13:16-17) the truth he was teaching and to embrace it as their own. And that he left people free to follow their own discernment – even, at times, to reject his teaching – is also clear. When a rich young man declined Jesus' invitation to join his company, because "he had many possessions" Jesus let him "go" (Mt 19:16-22). And when many found his teaching too difficult and left his company, Jesus offered the same option to his inner circle of disciples (see John 6:66-68).

8). *Invite to personal decision:* Corresponding to Lonergan's fourth and final move in the dynamics of cognition (i.e., *decision*) and in order to be formative toward *living* faith in a *synodal* Church, every catechetical event should invite participants to *decide* how to put their faith to work in their daily lives. The decisions can be: *cognitive* – what they believe and embrace with personal conviction; *affective* - how they feel or might pray about it; or *behavioral* – how they might respond by works of faith. And decisions may well be a combination of all

three. While we cannot grade people, if grading be needed (e.g. in a school setting), on their personal outcomes and convictions, we can well evaluate their *understanding* of what has been taught, the discernment with which they *appropriate* the content, and the *responsibility* they take for their decisions – whatever they may be.

We already noted above how Jesus constantly encouraged peoples to come to see for themselves and to make the faith their own – all to lead on into the discipleship of *living* faith. Note, too, that when he called people to “come follow me” – his central invite to discipleship – the Greek verb there for “come,” *deute*, is more of an invitation than a command. Jesus consistently called people to a *living* faith, yet this was by invitation.

And a final note on Jesus’ pedagogy! Rather than making those pedagogical movements sound unduly laborious – as I likely did above – sometimes Jesus enacted the spirit of such a pedagogy within just one Gospel verse. For example, “Look at the birds of the air (engaging people’s everyday lives); they do not reap or sow, or gather into barns (discerning reflection); yet your heavenly Father feeds them (faith instruction). Are you not more valuable than many sparrows?” (invite to see for themselves and decide) (see Mt 6:26)

#### *Pedagogical Movements of a Life to Faith to Life Approach.*

Now we must ask, how can such catechetical commitments be enacted consistently as an engaging pedagogy? How are we to translate such dynamics into a catechesis and one likely to educate toward a *living* faith while encouraging a *synodal* Church. Echoing the commitments outlined above, I briefly offer here the pedagogical *movements* that can enact them. Note again, this whole approach to catechesis is deeply grounded in conversation, with all participating according to their learning style; this is precisely what lends it the potential to encourage a *synodal* Church.

In an actual catechesis, the *life to Faith to life* approach (aka Shared Christian praxis) can be implemented around a *focusing activity* and *five pedagogical movements*. Though the movements can occur, reoccur, combine, overlap, and vary in sequence (as with movements in a symphony), for the sake of clarity I lay them out sequentially below. You will readily note how they implement the commitments outlined prior. After summarizing each movement, I will offer one brief example, suggested by my praxis in a parish catechetical program with twelve-year-old students and on the generative theme of “Jesus is our Friend.”

*Focusing Activity: Establish the Catechetical Curriculum around a Life/Faith Theme.* Here the intent is twofold: a) to engage people as active participants in the pedagogy, and b) to focus on what for them might be a generative theme of life or of life-in-faith, something of real interest and likely to engage because it is significant to their lives in the world.

\* Turning to my example and limited to a fifty-five minute class, we focused the theme and engaged our students by displaying a large poster of a very friendly-looking Jesus surrounded by children, and simply said, “Today we want you to learn about the best friend you will ever have; someone who will always be your friend, no matter what. His name is Jesus.” At least we had their attention and personal interest.

*Movement One (M1): Expressing the Generative Theme in Present Praxis.* Here the educator encourages participants to express themselves around the generative theme as experienced in their present lives and contexts. They can name what they themselves do or see others doing, their own feelings or thoughts or interpretations, their perceptions of what is going on around them in their socio-cultural context apropos the theme of the occasion.

\* With the children, after the poster, we asked, “But first, what does it really mean to be a friend?” We invited them to choose someone they consider to be a good friend and then, taking paper and markers, to draw or represent their good friend. We invited them to share their drawings and to tell the story of their good friend if they wished; many did.

*Movement Two (M2): Reflecting Critically on the Theme of Life/Faith.* The intent here is to encourage participants to reflect critically – with discernment - on the praxis they expressed in M1. As noted, critical reflection can engage reason, memory, imagination, or a combination of them, and can be both personal and socio-cultural. The key here is to encourage in-depth reflection that is shared in conversation as a teaching/learning community. The depth of reflection will depend on the developmental readiness of participants. However, I’ve learned not to underrate the potential of younger children for critical reflection provided it engages “concrete” themes of interest to their lives.

\* Here we invited the children to more in-depth reflection with such questions as “What does it mean to be a good friend?” “How do we know when someone is a real friend?” “Why do we need friends in life?” “What are the joys of having a good friend? The demands?” “What makes for a best friend?” And so on. As a transition to Movement 3, we asked, “Have you ever thought of Jesus as a friend?” And added, “What kind of friend would you imagine Jesus might be *for you*?” Again, there was much volunteer sharing.

*Movement Three (M3): Accessing Christian Story and Vision:* Here the pedagogical task is to teach persuasively the Christian Story/Vision around the generative theme of the occasion and this toward encouraging the participants in *living* faith toward a *synodal* Church. They should have ready access to the truths, values, and spiritual wisdom of Christian faith around the theme – its Story - and how such faith is relevant to their lives and to be lived now, the Christian Vision.

\* We gathered the children in a circle and told the story of Jesus’ special outreach and welcome for children. As found repeatedly in all three Synoptic Gospels, we painted a word picture and invited the children to imagine the scene: of parents trying to push their children through a huge crowd to get a blessing from Jesus, the disciples holding them back, but Jesus objecting with “let the children come to me.” Jesus then explained that theirs is the very reign of God, and encouraged the adults to become more childlike if they are to belong. As a sign of his loving care for them, Jesus embraced and blest the children. We reflected further on the kind of friend Jesus could be for them now, and what it asks of them to be a friend of Jesus (the Vision).

*Movement Four (M4): Appropriating Christian Faith to Life:* M4 begins the move back to life, focusing precisely now on what students can learn *from* or learn *into* of Christian faith. The

reflective pedagogy of M4 is to encourage participants to discern for themselves what the focused aspect of Christian Story/Vision might mean for their everyday lives and according to their own perspectives.

\* With the children we engaged in conversation around questions that encouraged their own appropriation and “to see” for themselves. We asked, “So what do *you* think? Can Jesus really be your friend? What does that tell you about Jesus? About yourself? What are some of the challenges in being a friend to Jesus? How can you show that you are Jesus’ friend?”

*Movement Five (M5): Making Decisions For Living Christian Faith:* Here participants are invited to discern and make decisions about the accessed truths, values, and spiritual wisdom of Christian faith, being encouraged to discern its meaning and embrace it as their own. Decisions can be cognitive, affective, or behavioral, shaping what people believe, how they might relate with God or others, or the values they want to embrace and live by. The hoped for learning outcome is that participants commit to *living* Christian faith toward a *synodal* church.

\* With the children we invited them to make a decision and to write it in their notebooks of “One thing I will try to do this week to show that I’m a friend of Jesus.” We welcomed them, as comfortable, to share their decisions. Many did.

In conclusion, I note briefly that *this life to Faith to life* approach has been well endorsed by the *Catechetical Directories* that have been issued by the Church since the Second Vatican Council. It would seem that the Church has been moving resolutely toward a participatory catechesis that encourages the integration of life and faith into *living* faith and now toward a synodal Church.

Here I highlight some instances from the *General Directory for Catechesis* of 1998 though the other two Directories (of 1971 and 2020) favor a similar pedagogy. Far beyond the Q&A catechism prior to Vatican II, the 1998 Directory calls for catechesis that integrates “life” and “faith” and that this is how “God’s pedagogy” works (#133); the same is true of “the pedagogy of Jesus” (#138). It calls for catechesis that re-presents “the Christian message in a meaningful way...(to) refer clearly to the fundamental experiences of people’s lives” (#133). “Faith formation must be closely related to praxis; one must start with praxis to be able to arrive at praxis” (#245). Following on, the *Directory* calls for catechesis that reflects “a correct correlation and interaction between profound human experiences and the revealed message” (#153). Catechesis is to “bridge the gap between faith and life” (#205), “to correlate faith and life” toward *living* faith (#207).

It would seem that a *life to Faith to life* approach to catechesis outlined here is now the horizon for the whole Church and that such a participatory and conversational pedagogy is the most likely, by God’s grace, to educate for a *living* faith toward a *synodal* Church.