



Aspects of Synodality in Recent Catechetical Documents: The *Directory for Catechesis* and *Antiquum Ministerium*

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Abstract: This article seeks to draw out the implications of synodality as journeying together in some aspects of the *Directory for Catechesis* (2020) and of *Antiquum Ministerium* (2021). These notions of synodality cannot be fished out of these documents in an immediate way. The method which will be adopted is a bibliographical one where several texts will be analysed. The first part will seek to give a working definition of synodality. For a balanced view, this will be supplemented by some difficulties in synodality today. This will be followed by a very brief outline of how catechesis changed as a result of the Second Vatican Council. The *Directory for Catechesis* and *Antiquum Ministerium* will then be presented in terms of contents within them which point at or call for synodality. Finally, specific aspects of the contents of these two documents will be studied in view of their practical implications to catechesis in the contemporary secularised world, namely synodality within the structures of the Church entrusted with catechesis; accompaniment; listening and speaking, and discernment.

Keywords: catechesis, synodality, *Directory for Catechesis*, *Antiquum Ministerium*, discernment, listening and speaking

This paper seeks to draw out some aspects of synodality which can be traced in the *Directory for Catechesis* (2020) and in the *Motu Proprio Antiquum Ministerium*. These notions of synodality cannot be fished out of these documents in an immediate way, but they are to be seen as a corollary to the synodal process as journeying together which Pope Francis is seeking to instil in the Church. Still, these aspects of synodality cannot be considered as a coincidental insertion in these latest documents of the Church, but they must be specifically pointed out as part of the journeying together of the Church and of its pastoral operators in their venture together towards the Kingdom of God. These aspects will help us to see how synodality as journeying together can be seen and lived in catechesis as a contemporary activity of the Church. Still, synodality in catechesis is not without its setbacks and challenges.

The method which will be adopted to draw out these aspects of synodality in these two documents will be a bibliographical one, where several texts will be analysed and used as sources to substantiate the arguments presented. These texts will be made up of both documents of the Church and other texts of an academic and scholarly nature. The journey commences by seeking to develop a working definition of what is intended by synodality. Moreover, some difficulties in synodality in

the contemporary Church will also be highlighted. This will be followed by a very brief excursus of the path which catechesis has taken after the Second Vatican Council. This will bring us to the presentation of the two contemporary documents: the *Directory for Catechesis* and *Antiquum Ministerium*. Finally, specific aspects of the contents of these two documents will be studied in view of their practical implications to catechesis in the contemporary secularised world.

1. Synodality...and Some of Its Limitations

One of the most frequently used words in ecclesial circles and milieus today is the word 'synodality'. This is so much so that many are considering this term as a buzz word. There are many who have the impression that this word was coined in these last decades, or more specifically that it has been invented by Pope Francis who not only likes to use this word, but also has it at the back of his mind in whatever he says and does (Faggioli 2020, 354–59, 361–64; Marmion 2021, 448). We would be seeing things in a very simple way had we to see synodality in this way only, and as if this term was invented by contemporary human beings in their endeavours to understand things around them. In actual fact, although the word 'synodality' as a specific word with a very particular meaning was not always in frequent use as we know it today, still the process to which it refers has existed side by side with the Church from its very inception.

Synodality dates back to the origins of the Church, with some of the most important synodal moments dating back to the early Christian community and recorded in the book of the Acts of the Apostles (International Theological Commission 2014, 17; Marmion 2021, 444–45; Pierre 2021, 4). Amongst these moments, we find the episode when the apostles together decided that they should hand over their socio-charitable ministry to the seven specifically chosen persons and who "are men of good standing, full of Spirit and of wisdom" (Acts 6:3); and when the apostles together discerned on whether to take on the mission of proclaiming the Good News to those who were coming from beyond the Jewish world and religion, and were coming from the Greek and Hellenistic world of influence grounded in the polytheistic worldview (see Acts 10) (International Theological Commission 2018, 19). This type of discernment on matters pertaining to the Church and to the faith has continued throughout the epochs, ages, and centuries through the time of the Fathers of the Church (Marmion 2021, 444; Czerny 2022, 68). It did indeed find its apex during the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council which can be considered as the biggest expression and experience of discernment and synodality in the modern and contemporary times (International Theological Commission 2018, 24–42; Marmion 2021, 445; Czerny 2022, 68).

But what is synodality? For this very important question, there is no one straight forward answer since it seems that there are different interpretations of this word and to what it refers (Blanchard 2023). “A term as abstract or theoretical as synodality” (Segreteria Generalis Synodi 2023, 18) is not easy to define in a clear and unambiguous way. “Technically, ‘synod’ is a synonym for ‘council,’ though today we almost always use ‘council’ to denote only a general or ecumenical council (Nicaea, Trent, etc.), while ‘synod’ typically refers to something smaller or less authoritative. The Greek ‘synod’ has a biblical, patristic, and Eastern flavor; the Latin ‘council’ is distinctly Western. However, until very recently, ‘synod’ was often used interchangeably with ‘council’” (Blanchard 2023).

The Preparatory Document for the Synod on Synodality never attempts at defining synodality, but it simply expresses synodality as communion, participation and mission “by journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made.” (Synodus Episcoporum 2021, 2). This idea of synodality as journeying and walking together features prominently in both the Preparatory Document for the Synod on Synodality (Synodus Episcoporum 2021, 2, 4–11, 30) and in the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the October 2023 session of the Synod on Synodality (Segreteria Generalis Synodi 2023, 5–6, 18). In view of the lack of an agreed definition, for the purpose of this paper, we will be taking synodality to refer to this journeying together and walking together as a Church.

Synodality, in this perspective, is much more than the celebration of ecclesial meetings and Bishops’ assemblies, or a matter of simple internal administration within the Church; it is “the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission” (Synodus Episcoporum 2021, 10).

What is at stake is the ability to proclaim the Gospel by walking together with the men and women of our time, wherever they are, and practising the catholicity that emerges from walking together with the Churches that live in conditions of particular suffering (Segreteria Generalis Synodi 2023, 5).

Synodality is truly constitutive of the Church and of its mission if it seeks to remain in touch with the human being and the world throughout the ages, and if it seeks to communicate with the human being in the same way in which the Trinity did reveal the message of salvation to humanity (Segreteria Generalis Synodi 2023, 26). In the words of *Lumen Gentium*, “the whole Church appears as ‘a people gathered together by virtue of the unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’” (LG 4).

“Synodality is the free and logical human response, expressed in the shape of the Church (*forma ecclesiae*), to the grace of the triune God who calls his People

together...it expresses in the life of the Church something of the nature of the God whom she proclaims to the world, thus testifying to the correspondence between what she is and what she does, starting from the revelation of God in Christ” (Czerny 2022, 74).

The direct link between synodality in the Church and the Trinitarian communion clearly shows that synodality within the Church arises out of its very essence and constitutive reality of being Church. It is “a return to the Church’s true origins and sources” (Segreteria Generalis Synodi 2023, 26; Czerny 2022, 74). It calls the Church to live and to transmit the faith in a permanent way and not only in some aspects of it.

Through synodality, the Church is called to continue the mission for which she exists: to evangelise. It therefore constitutes its very essence and a fundamental way of being in the world. It is a prophetic way of serving everybody in our contemporary society as well. Taking a synodal outlook, the Church is enriched with a missionary spirit. It does not close in on itself, but it opens its door to all people and to other Churches. This renders the Church one of the signs of the time in that it becomes the sacrament of salvation to all the human race (Synodus Episcoporum 2021, 15). It constitutes listening to the Word of God today and transmitting it as it is under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, so that this Word may be a light and a guide to contemporary human beings (Pierre 2021, 5; Czerny 2022, 68, 80).

Synodality is typical of the action of the Holy Spirit who urges individuals who make up the Church to be united in the Holy Trinity, no matter what their outlook on particular issues may be (Segreteria Generalis Synodi 2023, 6). According to Pope Francis, “We must continue along this path. The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthens cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium” (Francis 2015). In this respect, synodality

denotes the particular style that qualifies the life and mission of the Church, expressing her nature as the People of God journeying together, gathering in assembly, and putting into practice ways of fulfilling its mission. In other words, synodality is lived out in the Church in the service of mission.

Synodality is also an expression of the ecclesiology of communion and the ‘pilgrim’ character of the Church (Marmion 2021, 445).

For Pope Francis, synodality is not just a way in which the Church can be governed, but a way of being Church. The Church must not be interested in results only but in the process of achieving those results (Faggioli 2020, 365–66). Therefore, for Pope Francis synodality is more a process than a goal.

Still the concept, practice, and reception of synodality as the way forward for being Church is not without its limitations. These stem from both human limitations and human resistances to synodality. Without seeking to be exhaustive and outline all the limitations in this part of the research, since this is not the focus of this study, it is important to summarise the most important and pertinent ones. “While, on the one hand, it is hard to be ‘against’ synodality given its roots in our tradition, on the other hand, there are voices within the Church who believe the term can be misinterpreted and presented as a kind of parallel authority, separate to the hierarchy, which leads to a ‘flattening’ of the Church” (Marmion 2021, 443).

This is one of the main issues which those who oppose synodality bring about to support their claim. Phrases such as “the introduction of a ‘lay parliamentarism’ under the guise of synodality” (International Theological Commission 2014, 113–19; Segreteria Generalis Synodi 2023, 48–49; Czerny 2022, 74), a *sensus fidelium* which is used as a lobbying tactic or a pressure group when this should be a result of discernment in a collective process of seeking the truth (Synodus Episcoporum 2021, 14; Segreteria Generalis Synodi 2023, 33–38; Marmion 2021, 451), and that “the *sensus fidei* is not a synonym for public opinion – it must be the truth rather than majority opinion that prevails” (Marmion 2021, 453) are often used as a form of argument to counteract the synodal climate which Pope Francis is seeking to instil in the Church as a return to the grassroots (Chapp 2022). The often-quoted episode is that of the German synodal way (Deutsche Bischofskonferenz and ZdK 2019) which is seen by those who seek to focus more on the limitations of synodality rather than on its benefits as a way which will lead to a deviant Catholicism which seeks to do away with any form of authority or centralised directions (International Theological Commission 2014, 71; Garth 2021; Liedl 2022). Thus, one cannot see synodality just as a strategy which aims to eradicate clericalism in the Church, or to undermine the authority of those who have been called to be its pastors, or even a strategy for organising the Church (Segreteria Generalis Synodi 2023, 49; Czerny 2022, 74). Still, considering synodality as unanimity in the expression of the faith is restricting synodality too much (Faggioli 2020, 367).

One of stumbling blocks for the process of synodality is the clerical mindset which can be found in particular areas of the Church. This hinders the process of walking together to seek the truth since clericalism is the direct opposite of synodality (Marmion 2021, 446–47). This clericalism is often demonstrated in very evident ways in the form of a very limited participation or at times even a total lack of it – of the lay faithful, especially female lay faithful who are barred from positions of responsibility and of governing and jurisdiction in the Church (Faggioli 2020, 367; Domingues 2022; Hatt 2022). This clericalism has led to two different situations in the Church. The first is the total marginalisation of women in the Church and the second is that the laity in general are negated their active role in the Church which is a result of the Sacrament of Baptism. Through clericalism, the laity have

often been treated as second class Catholics who are only given some space when there is a true lack of ordained ministers to do the task. Overcoming this clericalist mentality is not an easy feat.

A further limitation to synodality is more related to the process itself, and to what is necessary to embark on a truly synodal process than to the way in which third parties see and consider synodality. This limitation has to do with the general over-optimistic view of synodality which is being projected (Faggioli 2020, 360). Synodality is not just another way of simply implementing how to be Church and living as Church, but it may call for new structures which support this new way of being. The question that comes to mind is: Are the structures which currently exist in the Church fit for a synodal Church? The answer to this question is quite clear since a synodal Church requires new institutions which are in sympathy with synodality. As a corollary to this, the current Church institutions cannot just be adapted to suit the new vision of communion and synodality (Faggioli 2020, 368). This means that new structures need to be in place for a synodal Church. This is something which to date has not yet occurred, thus limiting the process of synodality.

2. Catechesis in an Emergent Ecclesiology – Towards Synodality in Catechesis

What was concluded earlier on synodality as constitutive of the Church and linked to its very essence means that “if synodality is an essential dimension of the Church, then it ought to be expressed in the Church’s ordinary way of living and working” (Marmion 2021, 446). Therefore, since the Church “exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ’s sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection” (Paul VI 1975, 14), then it stands to reason that catechesis which is one of the major ways in which the Church evangelises, also needs to be synodal in its essence. In a letter to the faithful in Germany in 2019, Pope Francis emphasised that the synodal path of the Church must be linked to the essential mission of the Church. This mission constitutes the task of evangelisation (Francis 2019).

Catechesis is intrinsically linked to evangelisation. It is indeed one of the ways in which the action of evangelisation of the Church still unfolds in our contemporary times. It is at the service of the new evangelisation (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, 38–41). This new evangelisation incorporates and is founded on synodality in that it is a missionary call to go forth and proclaim the Good News by proclaiming mercy and establishing dialogue among the nations (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, 48–54). Therefore, for

an effective catechesis by the Church whose constitutive element is synodality, catechesis cannot be less than synodal in nature.

The pre-Second Vatican Council ecclesial outlook was characterised by a very rigid hierarchical structure. It was primarily a top-down approach in the form of a pyramid, and the role of lay people was minimal and restricted only to those aspects and things which the hierarchy, due to its nature and role, could not perform (International Theological Commission 2018, 35; Alberich 2002, 171–72; Alberich and Vallabaraj 2004, 164–66). The Second Vatican Council proposed a Church which was founded on a totally different ecclesiology where every form of ministry and charism in the Church was to be an aid to the entire believing community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (International Theological Commission 2018, 46; Alberich 2002, 172–75; Alberich and Vallabaraj 2004, 166–68). In this model of being Church, the lay faithful had a much more pronounced ministry to serve within the Church in virtue of the common priesthood of the baptised, everybody according to his/her own specific calling (AA 2–4; LG 30–38). This was an echoing of St Paul's words in his First Letter to the Corinthians: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work" (1 Cor 12:4–6).

This ecclesiological shift and the emergence of the new way in which the Church was now looking at itself at the service of the contemporary human being was a very radical change: from an institutional Church to a Church which was charismatic and animated by the Holy Spirit (LG 39–42). This transformation has not taken place completely and we can still see tensions between the two models of how the Church presents itself in the world. Notwithstanding this, the new way of being a Church has still left an imprint on the different ministries and pastoral activities of the Church, amongst which we find catechesis. It is in this light that we need to consider the catechetical ministry which has developed in the Church after the Second Vatican Council. It is in this new context that the ministry of the catechist as a pastoral operator emerges more clearly, and it is in this particular perspective that one has to look at catechesis in the light of synodality in our contemporary world.

3. Aspects of Synodality in Very Recent Official Documents on Catechesis

In these last years, two very important documents strictly related to catechesis have been promulgated by the Universal Church. These are the *Directory for Catechesis* (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020) and the *Motu Proprio* in the form of an Apostolic Letter *Antiquum Ministerium* (Francis 2021). Indeed,

aspects of synodality can be found in these two documents not in a direct way but in a very latent and indirect way as a corollary to catechesis being an integral part of the mission of evangelisation of the Church. These two documents, each in a particular way pave the way to allow synodality to take a more central place in catechesis.

The *Directory for Catechesis* which was promulgated on March 23, 2020 by the then Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation has many aspects which augment synodality in catechesis. In this paper we are going to limit the discussion to structures set up to organise catechesis; accompaniment as a way forward for catechesis; and the catechists and their formation.

The *Directory for Catechesis* dedicates an entire chapter to explain those structures, setups and offices in the Church which are responsible for catechesis. This is done in chapter 12 of the *Directory* which is solely reserved to speaking about those structures within the Church which have been explicitly set up to organise catechesis for a fecund ministry. The chapter takes a top-down approach and commences from the highest level where we find the top-most institution – the Holy See, and then continues narrowing down the physical space to the local churches (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, 416–25; Bissoli 2022, 105–6; Willey and White 2021, 179–81). The *Directory* then speaks about the role of the Synod of Bishops and of the Councils of the Eastern Churches and of their role in catechesis (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, 411; Bissoli 2022, 104–5; Willey and White 2021, 177). The next level treated is the level of Episcopal Conferences which are active in particular nations and territories (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, 412–15; Bissoli 2022, 105–6; Willey and White 2021, 178–79). The grassroots level which the *Directory for Catechesis* speaks about is the diocesan level. It is here that we find the structures and setups which are the front offices of catechesis. The *Directory* speaks specifically of the diocesan office for catechesis which is responsible for the catechesis being imparted in the diocese (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, 416–25; Bissoli 2022, 105–6; Willey and White 2021, 179–81). It is within these structures, in an indirect way, that synodality is proposed as a way of being Church and of journeying together which can be fostered and lived in the Church today.

The catechesis based on witnessing which the *Directory for Catechesis* proposes for our contemporary times is not one which is only based on the transmission of the contents of the faith, but it is more explicitly founded on accompaniment (Bissoli 2022, 37–41; Willey and White 2021, 85–91). The theme of accompanying others in the process of discovering, of adhering to and of living the faith is a central one in the *Directory for Catechesis*. It is enough to state that there are at least 31 references to the theme of accompaniment in the entire *Directory* (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, 3, 50, 55, 64, 68, 85, 111, 113, 118, 132, 135, 139, 155, 179, 203, 234–35, 244, 252, 259, 261, 263–65, 271, 352, 370–71, 404, 419, 423). These paragraphs are scattered throughout the entire document, from the beginning

to the end. The concept and method of a catechesis based on accompaniment is inspired from the spirit of synodality, that is, from the call to a journey together of all the faithful, whilst keeping in mind that no one is alone on this journey, but all are moving together towards one common destination (International Theological Commission 2014, 1–3, 44–45, 70; Pierre 2021, 22).

The catechist as one of the major stakeholders in catechesis is also given a prominent position in the *Directory for Catechesis*. The *Directory* dedicates two separate chapters for the catechist. In chapter 3 of the *Directory*, the distinctiveness of the catechist is presented, starting from the identity of the catechist which emerges as a result of his/her particular calling to the mission of evangelisation at the service of the Word of God (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, 110–13). It then elaborates upon different types of catechists, commencing with bishops as the primary catechists who are helped by priests, deacons and consecrated persons (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, 114–20). The final part of the chapter is dedicated to lay catechists in all the different ways and forms of catechists starting from parents and grandparents to catechists who are specialised with different categories of people (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, 121–29). The latter must be seen in line with chapter 8 of the *Directory for Catechesis* which speaks about catechesis with specific categories of interlocutors (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, 224–82).

Chapter 4 of the *Directory for Catechesis* is dedicated entirely to the formation of catechists. The theme is introduced by outlining the nature and the goals of the formation of catechists (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, 130–32). It then expounds on the three dimensions of catechist formation, namely formation in being and knowing-how to be with; formation in knowledge; and formation in savoir-faire or knowing how to (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, 136–50).

The catechist, especially the lay catechist, is so important in the unfolding of catechesis in our contemporary world that Pope Francis issued a *Motu Proprio* in the form of an Apostolic Letter entitled *Antiquum Ministerium* (May 10, 2021). In this document, Pope Francis instituted the official Ministry of the Catechist as one of the recognised ministries within the Church together with that of the acolyte and of the lector (Francis 2021). *Antiquum Ministerium* rightly gives a lot of weight to the ministry of the catechist in the life of the Church. In this Apostolic Letter Pope Francis also draws a list of the qualities with which catechists need to be endowed.

Amongst the qualities which he mentions we find that catechists need to have a firm faith, and that they are mature as human beings so that they are able to work with others and especially to accompany the interlocutors who have been entrusted to their care. Other qualities which are mentioned by Pope Francis are that catechists need to be persons who participate fully in the life of the Church, that they approach others with open hands and hearts, and that they are able to live in communion with

the rest of the community in a practical way (Francis 2021, 8). All these qualities which are outlined in the *Motu Proprio* converge on the theme of synodality and lead to it if they are taken seriously.

4. Practical Implications for Contemporary Catechesis in a Secular World

Synodality can be seen as the experience of a Church which is able to work and to walk together towards a common goal, and all those who form part of the Church of Christ participate in this wide-ranging ministry in different ways and to different extents (Synodus Episcoporum 2021, 27). Catechesis as an ecclesial ministry is a textbook case where synodality can be practiced par excellence. Synodality as a journeying together can be envisioned as the process in which pastoral operators with different ministries, charisms, and even different expertise sit together around the same table to listen to each other with respect, and to appreciate the gift of each other in order to be able to plan a fecund catechetical ministry not from one point of view, but from all the different necessary aspects which the contemporary anthropological stance calls for in view of secularisation. Amongst the different thematic and scientific aspects which form part of the process of catechesis we find: the theological aspect, the biblical aspect, the pedagogical aspect, the didactic aspect and the sciences of education, the communication aspect, and the other different aspects of the human sciences amongst which we find psychology, sociology and pedagogy.

No one human being can boast that s/he has all the necessary competences in all of these different aspects. Consequently, to have a truly effective catechetical ministry one needs to rope in as many individuals as possible coming from different spheres in order to plan and project an effective catechetical ministry. It is in this way that the best human resources are utilised in the pastoral and catechetical ministry in such a way that the aims of catechesis are achieved to the highest degree. It is essential that the synodal way in catechesis takes the form of a deep reflection and analysis of the current situation in which the human being is living in a holistic way so that the discernment which ensues from the study of the contemporary context results in the best possible way in which the Good News can be proclaimed in such a situation.

The different organisational structures outlined in the *Directory for Catechesis* are not isolated one from the other, but all are called to work in a synchronous way both on the local level and on the wider universal level to seek to overcome challenges of a pastoral nature and to seek new ways of enhancing the mission of the Church through discernment (Synodus Episcoporum 2021, 27; *Segreteria Generalis Synodi* 2023, 27; Marmion 2021, 447). They are called to work hand-in-hand for a fecund and effective catechesis, which not only takes care of the result of the process, but also

of the way in which the process is made. It is precisely this that recalls the synodal movement within the Church and how this can be practiced in and through the process of catechesis. The voices of individuals from all levels are necessary and important to safeguard against the temptation of having structures which are higher up in this hierarchy simply seeking to find ‘office’ solutions to practical problems which they can never understand from their particular stance (Faggioli 2020, 369; Marmion 2021, 442). “The process of discussing and listening leads to concrete or real solutions rather than simply expounding theological ideas” (Pierre 2021, 10) which may lead to nowhere, except more frustration and alienation.

Moreover, those structures which are linked to the wider organisation of catechesis on an international level are called to be at the service of evangelisation and not to be served by the more local organisations (International Theological Commission 2018, 54). As a corollary to this, one may conclude that they should be organisational structures which are constantly called to work together with each other in a synodal accompaniment so that synodality will not only constitute a ‘word’ which is beautiful and nice to hear, and which they propose, but it will be an experience of a journey together of persons who depart from different points of departure, take different routes but at the same time, they are moving towards the same goal and destination. This synodal spirit at such a universal level, which then trickles down to the local level “requires certain dispositions: ‘a trust and openness,’ a mature sense of faith (*sensus fidei*), and a thinking with the Church (*sentire cum ecclesia*)” (International Theological Commission 2014, 88–105; Marmion 2021, 447–48). These constitute the witness which we as Church are called to bear in our secular world.

“In promoting synodality, Pope Francis wants the whole Church to be engaged in open and honest dialogue” (Segreteria Generalis Synodi 2023, 24–25; Pierre 2021, 6). This constitutes the promotion of an ecclesiology of communion on a wider level which becomes the *modus operandi* and the *modus vivendi* of the Church at all levels, starting from the widest to the more local instances (Marmion 2021, 444). It is at the local level, and specifically at the parish level that synodality in catechesis can be put into practice. It is at this grassroots level that synodality can be best experienced and lived in catechesis. Our point of departure is that we cannot take the ministry of catechesis as if this existed in the Church all by itself, and that synodality exists only *ad intra* within all the different structures which are intended to help in the organisation of catechesis. If this were so, we would be denying all the different charisms and ministries within the Church which are all aimed at evangelising the world from different points of view and through different dimensions (Synodus Episcoporum 2021, 28).

Synodality in catechesis can be studied from two different points of view: *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Synodality *ad intra* in catechesis can be clearly demonstrated through two particular processes: listening and speaking as one action, and discernment. Listening and speaking, and discernment can be considered as two distinct processes

even though listening and speaking are an intrinsic part of communal discernment (Segreteria Generalis Synodi 2023, 22, 28). However, before entering into the process of discernment, one has to have the ability to listen, and to speak up when called to. Listening can be juxtaposed to simply hearing, where hearing is just taking note of the sounds and utterances around you, while listening includes hearing and heeding to what is being said; it is being touched and moved to take action based on what is being said, discussed, and decided upon (Pierre 2021, 9). This includes the boldness to ask questions which for some may mean rocking the boat, whilst the true intention is to change things and to make them much better:

For true discussion to flourish, we must be moved by eagerness to raise questions that go beyond the apathy and indifference of reason that has given up, which is even worse than reason that is too cautious and ineffectual. We must adopt a stance of dialogue that moves us to seek the truth together, without any pretence of mastering it, without separating ourselves off into categories of opinion, without hiding resentfully behind the walls of pre-established identities.

The heart of the synodal experience is that of listening for God by listening to each other. We strive to listen to each other, opening our minds and hearts, freeing them from the pre-conceptions and prejudices that arise from ignorance and habit and that often generate division. We are called to set aside attitudes of complacency and convenience that lead us to make decisions purely because of the way things have usually been done (Czerny 2022, 82).

It is after one has listened that one is then called to speak. Speaking is the ability to voice one's position and to state things as one is moved to do so by the Holy Spirit on a particular issue and possibly also to propose some potential way/s forward. This speaking in the Spirit eradicates all forms of speaking with retribution, or with spite about others or what others are saying or doing. It is this type of speaking which is true of a genuine synodal dialogue which ensues when both human actions are present together under the guidance and the influence of the Holy Spirit (Segreteria Generalis Synodi 2023, 24–25, 28; Pierre 2021, 6). A setback to this is that not all catechists and pastoral operators are prepared to enter into such a dialogue, and to listen and to speak in a disinterested way.

Like all other ecclesial ministries, all pastoral operators involved in catechesis in our secularised society and especially catechists need to enter into the process of a continual discernment of what they are doing, and in reading the signs of the times in order to plan for a fecund catechesis which is in syntony with the contemporary interlocutor. In terms of what is being done in catechesis, discernment helps all pastoral operators at different levels to see whether they are truly fine-tuned to their interlocutors, or whether they need to adjust to have a more effective catechesis in our contemporary secularised social milieu (International Theological Commission 2014, 127). Such a process of discernment requires the active collaboration and

cooperation of a number of individuals coming from different areas of expertise (Synodus Episcoporum 2021, 30). This bringing together of persons coming from different areas with different epistemologies, to a process of discernment may prove to be very difficult or tricky to manage (Segreteria Generalis Synodi 2023, 28). This is because although the people coming from these different areas of specialisation all focus on the same human being or category of individuals, they may still find it difficult to understand each other and to see what the other is saying in the right context and in harmony with their vision. This may lead to a paralysis in discernment or to an exercise which is carried out once and then never repeated due to the seemingly unproductive experience which it proved to be. Moreover, not all discussions and dialogues aimed at discernment may lead to a final consensus. However, this should not discourage catechists and those responsible for catechesis. At times, discernment may require more cooking which in itself “means living with the tensions and conflicts and allowing mature solutions to emerge over time rather than yielding to the temptation of the quick-fix” (Marmion 2021, 454).

Synodality in catechesis can also be demonstrated *ad extra*. This is evident in the participation of catechists and other pastoral operators who labour in the catechetical ministry but are also active in other diocesan bodies and in diocesan life and beyond it. Catechesis can never be considered as an isolated ministry, or as a stand-alone ministry, but both in the Diocesan Pastoral Council and in the diverse Parish Pastoral Councils, catechesis is seen as an integral part of the evangelisation project of the entire Church, hand-in-hand with other ministries, both local and those on a wider universal level (International Theological Commission 2018, 81–84). In this respect, the process of discernment takes a central place as well (Synodus Episcoporum 2021, 30; Segreteria Generalis Synodi 2023, 31, 33–38). “Discernment is a hallmark of synodal spirituality. In a synodal Church, decisions are the result of communitarian discernment. Synodal discernment, before being institutionalized, must be a way of life, involving reciprocal dialogue and mutual exchange of gifts” (Pierre 2021, 15). Synodality in catechesis with other Church organisations and pastoral structures can be described as co-responsibility in the ecclesial action of evangelisation (International Theological Commission 2014, 125–26; Pierre 2021, 21).

The process of catechesis which the different local and universal structures all converge to aid and to impart is therefore not a catechesis which is just lip service, but a catechesis which is a process based on experience and on practice by those who are called to put it into action. Those engaged in catechesis are called to evangelise at a deeper level, and not just by word of mouth. Witness is a type of catechesis which transcends languages and speak much louder than words (Czerny 2022, 79). This is true witness which is faithful to the Christian call and it is very important in catechesis. As an action, it should precede all the words which the catechist may utter. This is the most effective catechesis in our contemporary secularised world since it is based on the advice given by Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*

where in paragraph 41 he reminds all those involved in evangelisation and catechesis that “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (Paul VI 1975, 41).

One of the greatest changes brought about by the Second Vatican Council constituted catechists as the primary pastoral operators who are central to the process of catechesis. Whilst before the Second Vatican Council, catechesis was considered as part of the ministry of priests and of seminarians only, after the Council, the lay faithful started to take on a more significant role in it as catechists. Today, the majority of catechists are lay persons, and the ministry of teaching as catechist is entrusted to lay persons.

The prominent place given to lay persons in the Second Vatican Council is grafted in the majority of the Constitutions, Declarations and Decrees of this Council. Notwithstanding this, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* has the pride of place for lay persons and the ministry of the laity. This Decree centres around the apostolate of the laity not in terms of demand and supply, that is, the laity being present and inserted where there is a lack of human resources and of ordained ministers and religious persons. *Apostolicam Actuositatem* posits that lay persons participate fully in the evangelisation mission of the Church in view of their baptism which makes them co-participants in the priestly, kingly and prophetic mission of Christ (AA; International Theological Commission 2014, 67, 70; 2018, 46, 53, 55–56). The Decree goes even further stating that in virtue of the Sacrament of Baptism, lay persons are duty bound to offer their particular share in the mission of evangelisation (AA 25).

The fact that the lay faithful have a central role to play in the Church’s mission of evangelisation in itself calls for synodality. This is because lay persons are neither called to create missions of evangelisation which counteract each other, nor to embark on so called missions of evangelisation which are not in line with the mission of evangelisation of the entire Church. On the other hand, lay persons are called to work and walk in tandem with the entire Church so that the Kingdom of God reaches to the end of the earth, and especially in those places where it proves difficult to achieve through the endeavours of priests and ordained ministers alone. Catechists as pastoral ministers have access to many different environments and contexts. This gives them the possibility to proclaim the Word of God in many different places linked to the world of work, in private homes and also during moments of rest and recreation (LG 33; AA 2). Notwithstanding this, catechists do not have a *carte blanche*, but they have to provide a service in synergy and in synodality with the rest of the Church, seeking to achieve the same goals and mission of the Church. Seen in this perspective, synodality is not only a way in which different pastoral operators can work together towards a common goal, but it is also seen as a particular way in which the Catholic Church lives and puts into practice its ministry today.

All of the qualities mentioned by Pope Francis in *Antiquum Ministerium* are somehow linked to synodality and are central to creating a synodal attitude in

catechesis. All catechists who have and live these qualities in their lives are already on a synodal journey, and it will therefore be easier for them to accompany others on the journey of discovering Jesus in their lives and to help others respond affirmatively to his call (Synodus Episcoporum 2021, 30). Still, one must bear in mind that nurturing these very specific characteristics is not always easy for catechists who may have been trained in other ways of helping others to grow in the faith. This state of affairs may at times be a hindrance to synodality. Moreover, it will not be an easy task to change catechists who have been formed and trained in other ways, and who have exercised their ministry in different ways, to change their *modus operandi*. Notwithstanding this, catechists who seek to adapt themselves to the emerging scenario and to the training which is required to achieve these goals have truly embarked on a synodal journey.

Taking a synodal route today means forging our way forward together in harmony under the direction and influence of the Holy Spirit through participation and co-responsibility (International Theological Commission 2018, 42, 48, 67). At certain times, this requires obedience and respect towards those who have been specifically chosen to lead the community and can therefore see the entire picture of evangelisation in a more holistic way (AA 23). All the diverse forms of evangelisation both as actions of the lay faithful and of ordained ministers can be called ecclesial if they are done in unity with the Church and with the same intentions of the Church.

The catechist's role in accompanying the interlocutors in the process of catechesis is a very important aspect in our contemporary secularised world. This is because the current cultural context does not offer any help to the interlocutors in terms of a religious socialisation. This has to be provided in its entirety by the catechist who is accompanying the person. Accompaniment also denotes the notion that whoever is on a journey, no matter how simple this is, has an important role to play in the same itinerary, together with a contribution which is necessary for the success of the journeying together. Those who are accompanying others on their catechetical journey of discovery of the faith always need to keep in mind that as much as it is important for them to take a proactive role in leading others towards the aims and objectives which they want to achieve, they likewise need to be constantly in tune and listening attentively to the cues which the persons whom they are accompanying may be giving them from time to time. This recalls the synodal activity of listening in order to be able to speak in the Spirit as an integral part of synodality and of walking and being together (Synodus Episcoporum 2021, 30). Moreover, those who are in the process of being accompanied do not only listen to their mentors, but they are duty bound to make themselves heard because they are also an important and valuable asset of journeying together (Synodus Episcoporum 2021, 30). The positive outcomes of journeying together can be fully and effectively achieved when those who are being accompanied speak up and make themselves heard, while those who are accompanying them listen to them sincerely so that they can offer the best possible service of

accompaniment in our particular circumstances of a secularised world. This listening and speaking evokes once again the notion of dialogue, where both those who are accompanying and those who are accompanied listen and speak to each other thus making the journeying together more fecund (Synodus Episcoporum 2021, 22).

Conclusion

Catechesis is not only that action by which the catechist transmits the faith to others or helps them to live the faith in a more mature way. It is primarily bearing witness. If catechesis is not endowed with witnessing, little will it influence the contemporary interlocutor. Synodality in catechesis is a manifestation of this witness on different levels. It starts from the witness which catechists are called to bear in front of those whom they are accompanying in their walk of faith. This level of witnessing is not only *ad extra*, but it has an *ad intra* aspect since it consists of the witness which catechists are called to give to each other by working harmoniously together and supporting each other in the journey of the Church towards the Kingdom of God whilst still in the world. This is done through listening and speaking, and discernment. This form of communion which denotes a stronger underlying ecclesiology of communion is the best witness one can give. It constitutes the best and most evident act of evangelisation which the Church can perform in the contemporary secularised socio-cultural milieu, where most of the people are more inclined and preoccupied with thinking about themselves rather than joining forces to work towards one goal.

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