

I am very grateful to [William O'Leary](#) for alerting me to [Dr. Caroline Farey's](#) article, "[The Truth Will Set You Free](#)" (*Faith*, Vol 41, No. 5, Sept-Oct 2009) which has served as a basis for some [excellent discussion on my blog](#) about the concepts of [divine pedagogy](#) vs. [shared praxis](#) (a methodology espoused by [Dr. Thomas Groome](#), whom she does not name in the article)

Dr. Farey is highly respected in catechetical and academic circles and serves as the Director of the BA in Applied Theology (Catechesis) at [Maryvale Institute](#) (United Kingdom). Her article, "The Truth Will Set You Free," serves the catechetical community well in proposing a deeper discussion of the concept of divine pedagogy. She is correct in asserting that, in the *General Directory for Catechesis*, the bishops of the Church articulated a number of intriguing and potentially revolutionary concepts for the renewal of catechesis only to see very little in the way of attempts to unpack these concepts and apply them to the craft of catechesis. Many of us read and studied the GDC and enthusiastically greeted concepts such as divine pedagogy, the primacy of adult formation, and the catechumenate as the model for all catechesis while at the same time asking, "what does this mean for catechesis?" Few have attempted to unpack these concepts rendering the GDC as a "drive by" document for all too many. We heard a sound and we were stirred to attention but the shots missed and so we go about our business as usual.

Farey then goes on to propose what she says is a good example of an attempt to further define the intriguing concept of divine pedagogy: [The Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Craft of Catechesis](#) (Dr. Petroc Willey, Rev. Dr. Pierre de Cointet, Mrs. Barbara Morgan; San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2008). I have not read this book yet (and therefore have no beef with it) but have ordered a copy and look forward to reading it because I welcome further insight on the concept of divine pedagogy. Disappointingly, Farey only shares one example of how the pedagogy of God can help us discern good catechetical methods. She quotes the authors as saying that the *Catechism's* arrangement into 4 four parts (creed, sacraments, moral life, prayer) is not arbitrary but reflects the 4 dimensions of a living Christian faith. I doubt that many would see this as a particularly new insight. She then asks her readers how many resources follow a catechetical structure that links these 4 dimensions together. Frankly, I wouldn't hesitate to say that the [Finding God](#) program that I am privileged to use in my faith formation sessions links these 4 dimensions together beautifully. All the more reason I am looking forward to reading the book Farey recommends because I'm eager to learn something I don't know and I'm hoping the book will deliver.

As I mentioned, I have no beef with the book Farey recommends. What I do disagree with, is her implying that somehow the rise of divine pedagogy suggests the downfall of shared praxis, a catechetical process defined by Dr. Thomas Groome, who himself described the concept of divine pedagogy as the most "amazing" and "remarkable" concept proposed in the *General Directory for Catechesis* ("Total Catechesis/Religious Education: A Vision for Now and Always", in [Horizons and Hopes: The Future of Religious Education](#), edited by Thomas Groome and Harld Horell. NY, Paulist Press, 2003). Groome's shared praxis approach has inspired countless catechists over the past 30 years to make a clear connection between our faith and lived experience. Farey offers what she calls "An Example of Discernment of Method" but then goes on to simply criticize Groome's shared praxis approach without any indication of which principles from divine pedagogy she used to arrive at her conclusions. Thus, the

reader learns nothing about how to use principles of divine pedagogy to discern method but comes away warned that shared praxis method will ensure disaster.

And the conclusions that Farey reaches about the pitfalls of the shared praxis approach are not so much examples of the problems of the shared praxis approach as they are examples of bad catechesis – period. The kinds of problems that she identifies would be the result of a poorly formed catechist no matter what methodology he or she is using. Here are her stated concerns about shared praxis and my responses.

- First, she wrongly asserts that, in the shared praxis approach, “God’s message tends to be the shortest moment.” That is completely false. The first step, which surfaces examples from human experience is always to be the shortest step in the process. It is an entry point, nothing more. The 3rd step in which the Faith of the Church is presented is to be the longest movement in the session.
- Second, Farey suggests that, when following the shared praxis approach, the following occur:
 - “one loses control of the content of the session.”
 - the session “quickly moves into the realm of psychology rather than catechesis.”
 - the Faith of the Church “tends to need to be given in a defensive manner”
 - participants will be “led into spending their time and attention on typical human responses that they hear all week, and by this may have been led even further away than they were before.”

What I find troublesome here is that Farey seems to assert that, when following the shared praxis approach, these will necessarily occur. While it is true that any of the above *may* happen, it is my contention that none of them are inherent in the shared praxis approach but are, rather, simply examples of bad catechesis that can occur in any process that is facilitated by a poorly formed and trained catechist. I agree with the comment made by one of the readers of [my blog](#) that Farey’s examples are extreme and, in real experience, rare.

- Third, Farey states that “if one does try to speak of the Faith of the Church after this, it will likely be corrective of what someone has said.” In my mind, that is precisely one of the things that the Faith of the Church does for us...it serves as a corrective for our often directionless or wrongly directed patterns of behavior. I’m reminded of Jesus’ pattern of “You have heard it said...however, what I say to you is...” which is a corrective approach. If a catechist “ameliorates the Faith in order not to hurt the feelings of someone” then once again, that is simply poor catechesis, and not an inherent flaw of the shared praxis approach. In *any* approach, a catechist can and should expect participants to feel free to question what is being presented and a catechist who is not firmly formed may be tempted to ameliorate the Faith of the Church.
- Finally, Farey then claims that the shared praxis approach puts the catechist in a defensive manner and in the position of “needing conviction, clarity, and argument as well as knowledge” in order to respond to participants who have voiced contrary positions. I would think that in any setting and any catechetical approach, we would want the catechist to have conviction, clarity, and argument and to be ready for participants who will question or voice contrary opinions.

In conclusion, Farey explains that her article is “an attempt to awaken people to the need to seek out the kind of renewal of methodology to which the Church exhorts us so that the Faith is learnt again holistically, for life, for prayer and, ultimately, better to enable people to love of worship.” I agree wholeheartedly that this needs to be done but I don’t believe her article models at all for us how to accomplish this through the application of principles of divine pedagogy to a methodology, in this case, the shared praxis approach. In other words, her critique of the shared praxis approach lacks evidence of the use of concrete principles from divine pedagogy as the basis for said critique. One comes away feeling that she simply doesn’t like the shared praxis approach. Once again, my contention is that embracing divine pedagogy does not necessitate abandoning the shared praxis approach. My hope, however, is that the principles of divine pedagogy can provide insights for how the shared praxis approach, and all methodologies, can be renewed, modified, and taught in such a way that catechists clearly know to avoid the mistakes that prevent the Faith of the Church from being presented in a holistic fashion and in such a way that God’s saving actions are seen, in and of themselves, as formational.

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