

# EVANGELIZING New Vision - New Directions CATECHESIS

## 2016 Reflections

### Article 9. Apprenticeship in the Christian Life

By Jason Coito

#### PREFACE

*The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties  
of the men of this age, especially those who  
are poor or in any way afflicted, these are  
the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties  
of the followers of Christ.*

Francois Darcy-Berube's article on "Apprenticeship" call to mind the words of *Gaudium et Spes*: "The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the men [and women] of this age...are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ." The echo of these words to me is both theological and cultural. She writes, "apprenticeship requires a *model* that awakens in us the desire to reach a *goal*" (emphasis in original). Theologically, *Gaudium et Spes* appeals in its preface to an experience that has called the Church into the Paschal Mystery and into solidarity with all humanity (and all of creation). From parables to hagiography, our tradition often presents a model as the medium of instruction.

Culturally, I imagine the words of *Gaudium et Spes* scrolling upward before a star-filled sky in bold, yellow letters, a John Williams score swelling. The *Star Wars* saga, *Avatar: the Last Airbender*, *Harry Potter*—and other kids' stories with fans of all ages—are so often apprentice stories, in which the protagonist is guided to a mastery of self and some extraordinary power by a mentor. Apprenticeship as a model is compelling culturally and theologically. I recall a book jacket quote about Thomas Merton that read, "we see here a spiritual master at the height of his power." The witness of those who know Jesus and walk with him masterfully awakens in us the desire to be disciples. Their witness is "truly attractive" and is "perceived as Good News" (Darcy-Berube) and it proclaims Good News to others.

St. Augustine of Hippo is alleged to have said "to fall in love with God is the greatest romance, to seek him the greatest adventure, and to find him, the greatest human achievement." Because apprenticeship is so powerful, the ultimate success of our catechetical efforts requires that the

evangelized live the faith as a great love story, a thrilling adventure and a goal that deserves our striving. Christian apprenticeship points toward Christ as both the common goal of our striving and the mentor who accompanies us on the journey, inspiring our hearts to burn within us.

The consistent voice of research makes clear that the formation of adults is central to the life of the Church. One of the most important indicators of whether youth will maintain faith as adults is the presence of adults who model faith and support them. The work of Sherri Weddell, The Pew Forum on Church and Society, and the National Study on Youth and Religion (and Christian Smith's ongoing study of this data) align with Darcy-Berube's conclusion that "initiation into the life of *community*" is central. This research provides practical evidence for the efficacy of the vision of the catechetical documents that place adult faith as the model and goal of our catechetical endeavors.

Apprenticeship is truly of value, and apprenticeship is only possible when there are mentors who practice the art and discipline of Christian life with joy and commitment.

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