

In *Purgatorio*, Dante the pilgrim asks the shade Marco the Lombard why “the world . . . / is destitute of every virtue known, / swarming with evils, ever breeding more” (16.58-60). The answer to this question begins a three-canto long discussion of rational love, “the seed of every virtue growing in you, / and every deed that merits punishment” (17.104-105), but Marco’s initial response identifies clearly the essential two-part problem: “if the world today has gone astray, the cause lies in yourselves and only there . . . As you can see, bad leadership has caused / the present state of evil in the world” (16.82-104). Temporal viciousness stems from bad choices of individuals, identified in the poem as bad rational love, the faulty use of free will; but those individuals err largely because they have not been “nurtured well” (78). Bad leaders fail to form young souls properly. If Dante claimed the entire world had already “gone astray” in the 14th century, with souls led away “from the path that leads to truth, / pursuing simulacra of the good” (30.130-31), imagine where we stand morally today with more virtual simulacra of reality available to us than ever before. The other articles in this issue present some of the internet challenges for young people, teachers, and parents, along with steps we are taking in the Academy to help keep our students on the path of truth; but we need more than defensive or protective measures. We need a way to develop virtuous leaders or guides who, like Virgil with Dante, can make good choices for themselves and lead others to the end of that road of truth we travel together in the “journey of **our** life” (*Inferno*.1.1 [emphasis added]).

The Academy is only an initial formation that starts with the child, “the simple soul, pure in its ignorance / which . . . will turn to anything it likes . . . if guide or curb do not divert her love” (*Purgatorio*.16.88-93) and strives to finish with a pilgrim soul not fully developed, but ideally, “eager to rise, now ready for the stars” (33.145). The Academy can only get its students ready for adulthood and real leadership. The development of leaders requires further formation in an educational environment that builds upon the foundations of a solid high school program, providing a fully integrated view of truth and the good human life within that reality. Only a Catholic liberal arts college or seminary, because it is executing part of Christ’s mission to “teach all nations,” empowered by the Church, to which “all education belongs preeminently” (*Divini Illius Magistri*. Para 15), can provide true higher education for moral leadership. Pius IX further explains:

[I]t is clear that there can be no true education which is not wholly directed to man's last end, and that in the present order of Providence, since God has revealed Himself to us in the Person of His Only Begotten Son, who alone is "the way, the truth and the life," there

can be no ideally perfect education which is not Christian education. (*Divini Illius Magistri*. Para 7)

St. Mary's College is uniquely suited to develop leaders whose rational love is nurtured by grace and disciplined by reason, because it combines a Catholic liberal arts academic formation with the traditional liturgy and a fully Catholic life. In a recent article "Why Catholic Liberal Arts Schools Should Embrace the Traditional Mass," Dr. Peter Kwasniewski explains why a Catholic liberal arts education is a "radical" departure from the utilitarian approach to specialize education "because it goes back to the roots, the radices, of Western thought and culture." He also notes the importance of the traditional Mass:

A school community aspiring to be authentically Catholic (I am speaking here of schools in the Latin-rite West) must nourish and form its students by the Eucharist celebrated in the most worthy manner, according to the best of our heritage, which necessarily includes the Tridentine rite . . . This is not a mere matter of taste or preference; it is a matter of internal consistency within the educational program, a matter of consistency in its integrally Catholic ideals. (<https://traditionsanity.substack.com/p/why-catholic-liberal-arts-schools>)

In the United States only St. Mary's College can offer such a community centered upon the Tridentine Mass—daily and exclusively—as the integrating part of the entire program. This is not hyperbole, but the fascinating reality of our time: a fully Catholic post-secondary formation exists, for the moment, only in Kansas.

At St. Mary's College we recognize the only way forward is upward or, as Richard Weaver puts it in *Ideas Have Consequences*, back to the center from the periphery. We recognize, with Weaver, "the peril in which science and technology have placed our souls . . . [through] the substitution of means for end" (60), the "fatal confusion of factual particulars with wisdom" (58). We help our students see the threats to humanity posed by technological advances, pursued recklessly because of pride and the unbridled love of novelty—root causes of Modernism noted by St. Pius X in *Pascendi* (para. 40)—leading us to the point of surrendering, quite literally, to the machine. "Artificial intelligence" presents the culmination of the flight from the center of true Intelligence, Logos, and its very name reveals its driving force: the malevolent Artificer himself, "the father of lies." Even some of the technocrats who have

brought us to this point, the Dr. Frankensteins of our time, are now sounding the alarm about this monster of technology they have unleashed; but what we really need are leaders who not only recognize the problems but also provide the real and lasting solutions, men and women formed before the tabernacle, nurtured by the Sacred Reality, the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

By the grace of God, we will continue at SMAC on the course proposed by our holy founder Archbishop Lefebvre who proclaimed that “the future of the Church and her mission lies in teaching . . . The future of seminaries, religious vocations, and Catholic homes lies with Catholic schools.” In the College we have expanded the program and curriculum and have been legally approved to grant a four-year liberal arts degree by the Kansas Board of Regents. Last year we welcomed our current sophomores as the first class in that program. We have also begun the accreditation process. Please visit our new website (<https://college.smac.edu/>) and consider supporting our critical mission, especially by helping your own college-age students, or those you know, to understand that true education is not about acquiring job training or specific skills; it is about becoming fully human by understanding God, in Himself and in His creation, and our proper relationship with Him so that we can “persevere unto the end” on the path of truth leading others with us, “impelled/ by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars”(Paradiso.33.145 [the last line of the *Commedia*]).