



Ethical Leadership

Inaugural Address

By Anthony J. Aretz, Ph.D.

on the occasion of his inauguration

as the sixth President of the College of Mount St. Joseph

March 19, 2009

Sister Barbara Hagedorn and the Sisters of Charity, Chair of the Board of Trustees Kathy Kelly and members of the Board, Presidents Emeriti Sister Jean Patrice Harrington and Sister Francis Marie Thrailkill, the Honorable Bill Seitz, presidents and chancellors, delegates, invited guests, students, faculty and staff, dear friends, and most important, to the members of my family, thank you for being here today on this momentous occasion to celebrate the past, present, and future of the College of Mount St. Joseph.

I also offer a loving thank you to my wife, Terry, in this the 26th year of our marriage, for being there every step of the way along this amazing journey that brings us to this point in our lives together. It hasn't always been easy raising three boys, especially when they were all in diapers at the same time I had started my Ph.D. program. Through the years, our sacred union, our marriage that was made in heaven, is what provides each of us the love and strength to help each other in meeting the challenges that have come our

way. We still have far to go and I know that God will always be with us as we continue to discern and fulfill His will.

I also want to recognize our three boys, Tommy, David, and Michael, all blessings from God, each beginning their own adult journey in their own unique way.

My mother, Ruth, is also here from Lafayette, Indiana. I guess you can never thank your parents enough for all they have done for you. Mom, a big reason I am here today is because of the loving and supportive family that you and dad created.

My sister Tamara and her husband Kevin are here from Chicago. She is a loving sister and I know that she, my mother, and I all wish our entire family could be together today, but God decided to call my sister Tonya, and my father, Don, back to their heavenly home too soon for us. But our faith assures us this separation is only temporary.

I also want to thank all of my other relatives who made the journey to be here today. For once, our cousins in Cincinnati did not have to travel to Lafayette to attend an Aretz family function. I remember fondly the many family get-togethers we used to have, both in Lafayette and here in Cincinnati. Our families may have been apart physically, but the effort we made to be together made us close.

Finally, I also want to express a special appreciation to all those who worked so hard in making the College of Mount St. Joseph shine today. Their names are in the program and there are too many to mention, but please know that I am grateful for all the hard work and loving care that went into every detail in making today such a wonderful experience. We have shown the Mount at its best.

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200 years ago, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton founded the first congregation of women religious in the United States. Her work continues today through the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, the sponsoring congregation of the College of Mount St. Joseph. In learning about the noble history of these Sisters, I am continually inspired by the leadership they have shown in meeting the needs of the orphaned, the sick, the poor, and the students in their schools. If you look closely, what emerges is a story of inspiring leadership that puts the needs of others before their own.

The Sisters were also among the first women to attend graduate schools, to earn the degrees they needed to become some of the first women to lead schools, colleges, hospitals, and social service agencies. The leadership of these early Sisters helped pave the way for many of the opportunities women enjoy today.

In its early years, when the Mount was an all women's institution, the Sisters of Charity instilled these same leadership characteristics in their students. The Sisters taught them not to be satisfied with mediocrity, but to aspire to the greatness that was in each of them. These students were taught to become, and they were expected to be, women of character (Wilson, 2003).

Today, the College of Mount St. Joseph is a proud recipient of this heritage. Since its founding in 1920, the Mount community has always shown leadership by facing challenges that came its way, often by drawing on the same entrepreneurial spirit of the early Sisters in being the first to try new approaches or methods. During WW II the Mount went to a tri-semester schedule that allowed its graduates to finish their degrees in three years rather than four to provide more medical technicians for the war. For this effort, the Mount was awarded a citation for meritorious service to the Country.

In the 1970s and '80s, under the leadership of President Harrington, the Mount had many firsts. It was the first institution in the area to offer a Weekend College program for adult students. In 1982, the Mount became the first institution to offer cooperative education for all liberal arts and sciences majors. We also began our first graduate program and Project EXCEL for students with learning disabilities, so they too could succeed in college. In 1986, the Mount became a coed institution and also launched Project SCOPE to help prepare more African-American students for success in college.

During the last 20 years, under the leadership of President Thrailkill, the Mount expanded its athletics program, including the difficult challenge of starting a football program. We expanded our graduate offerings and began our first doctorate program in physical therapy. We were one of the first campuses in the country to go wireless. The Mount also built a new student activities center and launched its Building Excitement Campaign that led to the construction of the excellent athletic facilities we enjoy today,

along with a parking garage and extensive renovations to our Residence Hall and Art Building.

Whenever there was a need or a challenge, the Mount community always responded with purpose and courage. To this fact, I am truly appreciative of the legacies of the two past presidents of the Mount, Sister Jean Patrice Harrington and Sister Francis Marie Thrailkill. I am assuming the presidency of a strong institution that has prospered and grown under their stewardship. The Mount community and I are truly grateful for your astute leadership.

I know that with your continued support, we are up to the task of continuing this wonderful story. It is this continuing story that offers evidence of the Mount's leadership and entrepreneurial spirit, which brings us to this day, when we begin another chapter.

I'm sure you will all agree, and many have told me they do, that this has been an interesting year to assume a college presidency. From the winds of Hurricane Ike that battered Cincinnati and our campus, to the throes of the current economic tsunami, to the arson fires and tragic death of one of our students just a couple of weeks ago, we have had our share of challenges. So yes, this has been an interesting year, but it has been a year when the Mount community has again risen to the occasion, persevered, and demonstrated why the Mount is so special.

I have told many people since arriving at the Mount that this is a special place. It is special because it is a caring community. I have visited dozens of college campuses during my academic travels, but I have never experienced such an intense, genuine, and gracious spirit that lives so strongly on this campus. Every person at the Mount takes pride and joy in doing their best and helping others. The Mount is a community that cares.

So where do we go from here? What is next for the Mount? Again we find ourselves facing a challenging future. The economic and demographic threats are daunting. The Mount has been able to absorb the severe economic blows thrown at it this year because we were in such good financial shape coming into the storm.

Who knows when this economic crisis will end, but I and others believe we have reached a tipping point in the financing of higher education. What has worked in the past will not work in the future. We will need to work hard to keep tuition affordable, or we face pricing ourselves out of the range of what a typical middle class family can afford. If you add to this financial challenge the projected decline in the number of high school graduates in Ohio, our challenge becomes even more urgent.

As the examples I mentioned earlier showed, the Sisters of Charity and the College of Mount St. Joseph have always met their challenges by addressing the need at hand. Today is no different. Once again the Mount is being asked to draw on its leadership and entrepreneurial spirit to chart a new course, but to where? What is the need we are being asked to address today?

All we have to do is read any news source on any given day and we will find several reports that portray a nation in trouble. As I have already mentioned, it is easy to see that we are facing a historic economic challenge, but I believe we are also facing a more fundamental challenge. This challenge is more basic and far deeper.

If you look at the causes of the economic recession, one theme that emerges is that the recession is the result of uncontrolled selfishness and run-away greed. Or simply put, our current economic challenge, at its core, is really an ethical challenge.

It is stunning to realize how easy it is to think of several recent examples of how one person can wreak havoc in the lives of others. Too many people in positions of authority have placed their faith in the idols of power, wealth, and pleasure, rather than in the noble ideals on which our country was founded.

It is unfortunate that for many of our leaders this pursuit of power, wealth, and pleasure has replaced the pursuit of virtue. For our country to recover and prosper we need ethical leaders, virtuous citizens with the personal honor and integrity to do the right things for the right reasons in spite of pressures to the contrary.

I also believe that higher education is partly to blame for the problems we face today. Let me explain. The first colleges in our country, at the time they were founded, offered a

unified liberal arts curriculum—electives, majors, and professional programs did not exist. Although there were differences among the colleges, the same curriculum was taught to all the students attending the same school.

The purpose of this liberal arts curriculum was to develop the knowledge, character, and skills of the students who would become our doctors, lawyers, ministers, and politicians, in short, the leaders our young country needed to prosper.

To underscore the emphasis on character development, the topic of the typical senior capstone course was moral philosophy, and it was taught by the college president.

Now compare this curriculum to what is taught today at many of our colleges and universities. What becomes apparent is that the basic purpose of higher education has changed. The emphasis is no longer on character development, but on job training.

In one respect this change has been good for our country. We owe a lot of our economic success to the byproducts of higher education. But at what cost? What have we lost in the pursuit of developing an “educated work force” rather than leaders of character? In making room for the required professional courses to produce an educated work force, some colleges and universities removed those courses that directly contributed to moral and ethical development. It is unfortunate that many college graduates in this country walk across the stage to get their diploma without ever have taken an ethics or moral philosophy course.

Fortunately, some institutions, such as the Mount, do retain a remnant of the original curriculum in requiring students to take at least one ethics, philosophy, and religion course. I think we can do more and we will do more.

However, I am not advocating a return to the liberal arts curriculum of the 17th century. I am proposing a return of virtue, personal honor, and integrity to their rightful place as a foundation of a college education.

It is interesting that personal honor is something we don't hear or talk much about today, which is a shame. Maybe it is because we have forgotten what honor truly means, or

that it is a vague concept that is difficult to obtain. But honor is attainable, by everyone, who strives to live a life possessing “honesty or integrity in one’s beliefs and actions.”

“We will not lie, steal, or cheat, nor tolerate among us anyone who does.” This is the honor code of the United States Air Force Academy. Seven of us here today took an oath to this code as freshmen and I taught under it as a professor for 17 years.

What I learned in all these years is that when it comes to leadership, honor is everything. Honor is the glue that holds it all together. Today we call it walking the talk, but what it really means is that people are willing to voluntarily follow your leadership because they can trust you. People are given positions of authority, but they have to earn the trust of their followers to be considered a leader. Great leadership is not given; it is earned through trust.

Leadership fads come and go, but in all my years of teaching and thinking about leadership, I have always kept honor and integrity at the core. More simply, what I have learned is that ethical leaders lead by example—they personify honor and integrity in action.

Our country, our city, our schools, our churches, our world, need ethical leaders. In fact, this need is so great, so important, and so urgent that the College of Mount St. Joseph is embarking on a bold initiative to rediscover how a college can again provide the kind of ethical leadership we need to prosper. Our goal is no less than the Mount is going to establish itself as a national leader in undergraduate ethical leadership development.

This vision will be accomplished by being one of the first civilian colleges or universities in the nation to successfully establish a comprehensive and systematic ethical leadership development program that fully integrates all aspects of the undergraduate experience. Curricular and co-curricular activities will be aligned and integrated through ethical leadership development experiences. These experiences will provide the theory, context, and practical experience necessary for our graduates, not only to have successful careers, but more importantly, to possess the moral courage to live personal lives of integrity, promote justice, and speak the truth.

Over 2,000 years ago, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle recognized that the only path to a free and just society was (and still is) for its citizens to be ethical. Our country was founded on this principle. When ethics, virtue, or honor are lacking, governments will be quick to step in and fill the ethical void in order to avoid anarchy, often with new laws that constrain freedom in an effort to prevent ethical lapses.

It is easy to get depressed by the many recent publicized events that have contributed to our economic crisis because integrity has been lacking. Our government is already busy working on legislation to “fix” our integrity crisis. No doubt, there will be new ethical laws similar to the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, created the last time we ran into ethical lapses that led to a financial collapse. Governments will always step in to regulate behavior and further constrain our freedom when we fail to constrain unethical behavior ourselves.

Our hope for a brighter future comes not from ethical compliance legislation, but from refocusing on the ethical and moral development of our youth.

The excellent educational experience we provide at the College of Mount St. Joseph will be enhanced to more deliberately aid in the moral and ethical development of our students. We will enable our graduates to become the best ethical leaders they can be, so that our country continues to be the great nation that it is today, and that we will continue to enjoy the freedoms that many have sacrificed so much to create.

What the Mount can offer is a unique ethical leadership development experience, an experience grounded in the intellectual tradition and the social teachings of the Catholic Church and the spiritual charisms of the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, so that our graduates make a difference. We will draw from our founding history of developing students of character to provide our current students the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need, not only to have productive lives, but to have a purposeful and meaningful life, a life in which they are keenly aware of their moral responsibilities and duties to serve the common good, especially for those who are most in need. These virtues are captured succinctly in the Sisters of Charity charisms of humility, simplicity, and charity.

Another important way to differentiate the Mount’s ethical leadership development experience is our Catholic identity. As a Catholic institution, we believe certain truths. First of all, we believe in God. Second, we believe that God created us with a sacred

nature. We are not just biological material that happens to think, but sacred beings with immortal souls. Unfortunately, much of our public discourse tends to portray just the opposite—that human nature is not special.

The difference between the spiritual or Christian humanism the Mount offers as a Catholic institution and the secular humanism dominant in society is critical. We are quickly approaching an age when the advancement of science, especially bioscience, could afford us the ability to fulfill Descartes' dream (The President's Council on Bioethics, 2003). Descartes', a mathematician and philosopher of the 17th century, dreamed of a time when we would be wise enough to use our scientific knowledge to control nature to end, or at least moderate, our human frailties.

In fact, the United States President's Council on Bioethics thinks science could soon offer us several non-therapeutic benefits, such as: the genetic technology to create perfect babies, selected for their superior physical, athletic, or intellectual attributes; or the chemical ability to alter our moods at will, so that we are always happy; or the technology to prolong life itself, or at least significantly moderate the frailties of old age. This reality may be closer than we think. Just recently, an article in the BBC News (2009) noted that The Los Angeles Fertility Institute is offering parents the ability to genetically determine the eye and hair color of their children by selecting only the desired embryo from several that have been fertilized.

This is an ominous event. Science, in offering great potential to cure many of our ills, also offers us the ability, in a way, to become like God, with the ability to create and re-define human nature to satisfy our own desires. As with any scientific advancement, there is the potential for good, but also the potential to use the same knowledge for harm. How are we to decide what is good and what is an abuse? Science, by its nature, does not contain an ethical system that can inform these decisions. Science only knows how to generate knowledge, not how new knowledge should be used.

I mention this concern not to propose a halt to scientific progress, but to raise our awareness that we are now faced with an ethical conversation we have not had in a while. That is, contemplating the metaphysics of what it means to be human. I am concerned we have lost the ability to even have this conversation. I am afraid, to quote

the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. (1963), that “Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.”

How are we as a society going to answer the important question of what is a good life? Or in more practical terms, what ethical choices are best for the improvement of the common good? If our current economic crisis and ethical erosion is any indication, we are not prepared for this task.

We have an economic crisis now, but a crisis of humanity could be on the horizon. Does our future lie in material and physical perfection, or the spiritual and moral perfection of a virtuous life? At some point we must have a conversation about what it means to be fully human, or scientific progress and market forces, left to their own methods, could create a dehumanized “Brave New World,” so well described by Aldous Huxley.

Where will the ethical and moral leadership come from that will guide us on this perilous journey? How are we preparing the leaders of tomorrow to engage in the ethical conversations needed to decide our future as human persons? We must choose wisely, since our humanity is at stake.

Pope Benedict the XVI, during his visit to the United States last spring (2008) in an address to the presidents of Catholic colleges and universities, spoke to the necessity of an education grounded in a Christian humanism, where wisdom discerns truth through a dialogue of faith and reason. To quote a few of his remarks on this point, “The Church’s primary mission of evangelization, in which educational institutions play a crucial role, is consonant with a nation’s fundamental aspiration to develop a society truly worthy of the human person’s dignity. . . It is important therefore to recall that the truths of faith and of reason never contradict one another. . . In articulating revealed truth she serves all members of society by purifying reason, ensuring that it remains open to the consideration of ultimate truths. Drawing upon divine wisdom, she sheds light on the foundation of human morality and ethics. . . Similarly the Church never tires of upholding the essential moral categories of right and wrong, without which hope could only wither, giving way to cold pragmatic calculations of utility which render the person little more than a pawn on some ideological chess board.”

It is precisely the ethical and moral foundations of a spiritual humanism that provide the wisdom we need to be more than animals, to be fully human. It is precisely a spiritual humanism that informs the educational culture of a Catholic institution that provides the ideal environment for the formation of ethical leaders.

Aspiring to be a national leader in ethical leadership development, the College of Mount St. Joseph is hoping to provide leaders who are advocates for what it means to be fully human while we pursue our scientific, political, and economic future. In choosing a transcendent moral framework that esteems human nature as sacred, and deserving of respect and dignity, we are placing our hope in God's wisdom.

We can pursue Descartes' dream, but we also need to avoid the fate of Icarus. We should avoid being so enthralled by technology that we would fly too close to the sun, realizing too late that we have gone too far, crashing in a pile of hubris and losing what it means to be fully human. The Mount is, and will remain, a profoundly human institution. As we face these future challenges together, I would like to recall what Teilhard de Chardin said in his famous quote, "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience."

It is my hope that the College of Mount St. Joseph, by focusing on ethical leadership development, will educate and develop leaders, leaders of character, that given the opportunity will rise to the occasion and have the moral courage to do the right thing for the right reasons.

In closing, I would like to invite everyone in this room today to join the College of Mount St. Joseph in achieving the noble vision I have presented, if not here at the Mount, then within your own circle of influence. Our city, our country, and our world need good, virtuous people to come forward as ethical leaders, selflessly working to benefit the common good in order for us to freely pursue full, purposeful, and meaningful lives, truly deserving of our sacred human nature.

Thank you and God Bless!

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