

In Memoriam: Peter Augustine Lawler (1951–2017)

May 23 began as an exciting day at *Modern Age*. We were preparing to head to Washington, D.C., for a special event to celebrate the just-released debut issue from our new editor, Peter Augustine Lawler. So many people had registered for the panel discussion that we worried the auditorium might not accommodate everyone.

Then, around 10:15 a.m., we received shocking news: Peter had died earlier that morning.

We were (and remain) stunned. For decades Peter was a treasured friend to *Modern Age* and the organization that publishes this journal, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI). Peter taught in the ISI Honors Program for many years, becoming a mentor to countless ISI undergraduates. He was a magnificent and beloved teacher, not least because he challenged students in ways that most professors never do. He was one of ISI's most popular campus lecturers as well.

Peter was a man of capacious learning. Not

many scholars can write as authoritatively and engagingly about Alexis de Tocqueville as about the HBO series *Girls* (or higher education, or Flannery O'Connor, or trans-humanism, or Orestes Brownson, or the latest blockbuster movie, or Walker Percy, or . . . well, you get the idea). A prolific writer, Peter contributed not just to *Modern Age* but also to *National Review*, the *Weekly Standard*, *First Things*, the *Intercollegiate Review*, *Public Discourse*, the *Library of Law and Liberty*, and many scholarly publications.

Before this year, *Modern Age* had had only five editors in its six-decade history. So when R. V. Young informed us that he would be

retiring as editor at the end of 2016, we knew we faced a major decision in choosing a successor. Dozens of impeccably credentialed candidates applied for the position. Narrowing down the field proved to be quite a challenge. At the end of a long and intensive search, Peter Lawler emerged as the clear winner. In fact, our search committee chose him unanimously.

That Peter was selected from a remarkably deep and talented field speaks to the passion, experience, and creative vision he brought to *Modern Age*. He had the credentials, of course. He wrote or edited eighteen books. He was executive editor of the acclaimed scholarly quarterly *Perspectives on Political Science*. He received the Weaver Prize for Scholarly Excellence. He served on President George W. Bush's Council on Bioethics. But Peter stood out for his wide-ranging intellectual interests and an all-too-rare ability to understand and actually engage with the arguments of those with whom he disagreed. That latter aspect was evident in Peter's writings: he didn't dismiss or caricature his intellectual opponents.

And it made him the ideal person to lead *Modern Age*. He was intent on making this journal something you don't see much anymore: a forum for debate and discussion among conservatives of *all* stripes. He delivered on the promise in his first issue. The spring 2017 *Modern Age*, which features the symposium "Being Conservative in the Year of Trump," is provocative, challenging, and timely, while offering a breadth and depth of perspective rarely found today.

Peter also created the issue that you hold in your hands, completing it shortly before he passed away. Both the spring and summer issues capture what he was aiming to create with *Modern Age*: a place where you won't always agree with what you read, but where

you will engage with the most important ideas being batted back and forth on the right, and where leading thinkers from all along the conservative spectrum hash out their differences. In creating this forum, Peter honored what *Modern Age* founder Russell Kirk identified as the journal's purpose: to "stimulate discussion of the great moral and social and political and economic and literary questions of the hour."

Shortly after Peter died, his widow, Rita Lawler, offered the perfect reflection on her husband. "He truly loved the students, and loved the books, and loved the work," she told us. "And he is counting on all of us to go forward with the work of liberal education."

Although we are overwhelmed by this loss, we will indeed carry on. We can think of no better tribute to Peter than to present to you this thoughtful issue he conceived, commissioned, and edited. He was an incisive commentator on the subject that our contributors address in the lead symposium: the threats to freedom in higher education. As Peter wrote in his editor's note, freedom in higher education is both a "burning issue" and a "perennial issue."

Peter had also mapped out and commissioned an exciting issue for the fall, and we look forward to bringing that to you.

Around the offices of *Modern Age* and ISI, the same word comes up again and again in discussions of Peter Lawler: *irreplaceable*. Although Peter can never be replaced, we have begun the search for his successor as *Modern Age* editor. We are confident that we will find a new editor who will bring similar skills and passion to the role. That, too, will represent a fitting tribute to a man we will long remember as a scholar, teacher, commentator, editor, and, above all, friend.

—The Editors