

In Memoriam: John J. Mulloy

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Incomparable. That was the carefully chosen word, a friend of mine used to describe John J. Mulloy upon first meeting him. John Mulloy was an exemplar of the vocation to the intellectual life. He was a teacher, a scholar, an editor, a prolific writer, a voracious reader across all academic disciplines; he was conscientious in his correspondences, when few write letters anymore, an indefatigable apologist for Catholicism, and a devoted disciple of the great historian Christopher Dawson, with whose name John J. Mulloy will forever be associated.

Back in the 1950s Thomas Molnar located a major weakness in American education in the severe poverty of the life of the mind among American high school teachers, which sometimes expressed itself as an anti-intellectualism. Mulloy, who taught high school for much of his life, went strenuously against the grain of this high school culture; teaching, writing, and speaking with all the vigor and force and love for his subjects that we associate with the great and distinguished amateur scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—Schliemann, Breasted, Tarn, Bancroft, Parkman, indeed, Dawson himself.

Mulloy's love of learning and the pleasure he took in the scholarly life is also singularly illustrative, inasmuch as they run against much broader trends in American intellectual life, which has become dominated by the university, with its cult of the Ph.D., and its legions of over-specialized and badly educated experts. Along these lines, the Dawson scholar, Edward King, has described Mulloy as a "popularizer," someone who interprets the arcane work of specialized scholars and researchers for the wider reading public. This role and position is crucially important to the well-being of civil society and the life of the church. As Russell Jacoby has argued in *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (1987), the disappearance of this class of writers and speakers, and the absorption of most everything to do with thought and culture into the university, has impoverished American society, and turned university professors into a brood of bored, chirping sectaries.

Consistent with his vocation as an intermediary between the scholar and his public, John Mulloy will be remembered most for his tireless propagation of the work of Christopher Dawson among Americans. I once expressed my concern to John about his habit of including extended quotations from Dawson's writings in his own essays. I worried that John's own voice was too muffled. With unaffected humility, he told me that he made these long insertions into his own essays in the hope that Dawson's ideas would shine brightly through his own prose. But John too had an influence on Dawson's thinking. John was studying Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Notre Dame during the early 1950s when

Robert Redfield and others were directing *The American Anthropologist* into concern for the study of world civilizations. John brought this move to Dawson's attention, and, as John wrote to me, Dawson "profited from that renewed contact with American anthropology."

I am deeply grateful for the life of John Mulloy: a vigorous, honest, and restless intellect in the service of the Church he loved so dearly. *Requiescant in pace.*