

# Tradition & Discovery

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## In This Issue

Preface .....	2
Responses to W. H. Poteat: Introduction .....	2
J. W. Stines, Guest Editor	
Contributors .....	5
The Polanyi Society Meeting Notice .....	6
Who Said What .....	7
Benjamin Ladneer	
Submissions for Publication .....	11
Meditations On The Shared Life .....	12
Bruce Haddox	
Haven't You Noticed That Modernity Is Bankrupt? Ruminations On The Teaching Career of William H. Poteat .....	20
Dale Cannon	
William Poteat's Anthropology: "Mindbody In The World" .....	33
Walter B. Mead	
Information on Electronic Discussion Group .....	44
Poteat On Modern Culture and Critical Philosophy .....	45
E. M. Adams	
Membership Information .....	51

# The Polanyi Society

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# Preface

This is *TAD's* first thematic edition: Guest Editor Jim Stines has put together a nice collection of essays honoring William H. Poteat, a thinker who has encouraged many generations of students to contemplate Michael Polanyi's work. Stines has more to say about Poteat and those who have written about him below. Two other matters are important to note: (1) David Rutledge describes the upcoming November 18 and 19, 1994 meetings of The Polanyi Society to be held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Chicago (see page 6); (2) this is the beginning of the academic year and annual dues need to be paid (please see the inserted sheet in this issue).

Phil Mullins

## Responses to W.H. Poteat: Introduction

J. W. Stines  
Guest Editor

The Polanyi Society, in its meeting with the American Academy of Religion in San Francisco in November of 1992 requested that an edition of *Tradition and Discovery* be devoted to the work of William H. Poteat.<sup>1</sup> This issue is the response to that request.

The career of Poteat as teacher and writer is having an increasingly profound impact; and one of the major routes of that impact has been by way of the Polanyi connection. Members of The Polanyi Society and subscribers to *Tradition and Discovery* will recall that conversations with Poteat constituted the Society program at the November, 1993, American Academy of Religion meeting in Washington, D.C. and that, in anticipation of that gathering, *TAD* published, in a 1993-94 issue (Vol. XX, no. 1), R. Taylor Scott's excellent introductory essay "William H. Poteat: A Laudatio". The present issue of *TAD* is something of a continuation and expansion of what was begun there; and that essay is recommended to readers of this issue who might have

*Tradition and Discovery* is indexed selectively in *The Philosopher's Index* and *Religion One: Periodicals*. Book reviews are indexed in *Index to Book Reviews in Religion*.

missed it.

As titles of a number of Poteat's writings clearly indicate, there has been far more than an incidental relationship between his work and that of Polanyi. However, it would be a mistake to assume that Poteat's work--even where Polanyi is explicitly invoked in such titles as *Polanyian Meditations*--is simply a piece of Polanyi scholarship. Indeed, Poteat has disavowed being a "Polanyi scholar" in the usual academic sense of such expressions; and any reader of Poteat's essays (or of his Ph. D. dissertation on *Pascal's Conception of Man and Modern Sensibility*) will notice that from the early nineteen fifties, before any affiliation with Polanyi, he was already at work giving expression to a postcritical sensibility possessed of its own genius and, from the beginning, engendered in a highly reflected relationship to the import of the Christian imagination for be-speaking our understanding and for understanding our beings as speakers and listeners. In the introduction to *Polanyian Meditations* Poteat indicates how his 1952 discovery of some early writings of Polanyi "accredited and greatly enriched the context within which initially to obey my own intimations"; and he goes on to describe his initial meeting with Polanyi and the "mounting excitement" with which he read a typescript of *Personal Knowledge* which he took from that meeting in 1955.

Hence, the relationship has been of the most fruitful sort. It is necessary to listen to Polanyi and Poteat each in his own right; and it would be a gross error to expect to meet, in Poteat's work, simply Polanyi's voice or a presumption to that. It is precisely because of this that there is, both actual and possible, the most authentic sort of colloquy between the two. It is a sense for that fact that has led so many of Poteat's students, working within the particular ambience of Poteat's teaching and writing-- and on such diverse themes as Arendt and authority, irony and epistemology, Wittgenstein and religious language, Walker Percy and cultural criticism, etc.--also to enter the world of Polanyi and into a conversation whose end is a continually receding horizon and which takes turns which certainly could not have been foreseen as inferences from a careful reading of Polanyi. Nevertheless, there is a shared elan which, negatively stated, has a close relationship to Soren Kierkegaard's claim that the issue of the modern sensibility is suicide. Positively stated, this elan is surely closely tied to a sense for "the primacy of persons".

It is this latter shared sensibility which will be evident in the following essays in response to Poteat--even where the name of Polanyi is scarcely invoked at all. Indeed, in a rather defiant act of what Kierkegaard termed "dialectical reduplication", Benjamin Ladner posed an instructive problem for the present editing procedure--one which I took to grow directly out of his attempt to be non-complicitous with the ubiquitous subtle subterfuges by which academic scholarship obfuscates the presence and the voice of the speaker. In the present scheme of things in the scholarly publishing world, the indexing of an article and making it available for electronic searches requires the appending of an abstract and "key words". Ladner simply refused this new form of presumption to an abstracted re-presentation of what he, in his own voice, wishes to say. Perhaps the reader will find that this refusal is a statement upon the article and/or that the article is a statement upon the refusal; here, also, perhaps there is a clue to the title of the article--"Who Says What"--minus question mark.

Ladner, Dale Cannon and Bruce Haddox were students of Poteat; and, although their modes of approach vary, each in his essay gives voice, among other things, to a sense for the person as a sense for a presence which is at once inalienable and yet, ironically, becoming utterly inapprehensible within modern and post-modern sensibility. (Cannon's discussion of Kierkegaard's Xenophon seems especially relevant here, as does Haddox's

discussion of Derrida). If this is so, how is this “diagnosis” related to Poteat’s work, and what ways to alternative sensibilities does that work broach? “A Shared Life”; “Modernity Is Bankrupt”; “Who Says What”--can one give a “respectable scholarly response” to these profoundly personal statements without, *ipso facto*, a presumption to personal withdrawal? These writers obviously speak from a context of intellectual passion characterized by belief that they have something worth saying, something to which they personally subscribe. Their response to my claim that this is so would surely be intensely ironic, but not unrelievedly so; for I am confident that none of them would assume the position, without irony, that their personal subscription is irrelevant. Each believes, indeed, quite to the contrary. Are “true believers”, as such, obviously extraneous to “good thinking and good scholarship”?

The essays by E.M. Adams and Walter Meade--clearly, also intensely concerned about a certain cultural despising of the person--are characterized by a different mood. Adams offers both appreciation and critique. He applauds “much of Poteat’s criticism of our cultural situation” and contends that the “modern Western mind is deranged.” However, he holds for a different view of the genesis and resolution of the state of affairs in terms of which we are in thrall “to an intellectual vision of humankind and the world that will not sustain the human spirit or a great civilization.”

Walter Meade, on the other hand--ranging with impressive familiarity over the whole range of Poteat’s writings--has provided a very careful and detailed analysis and exposition of some of the most important specific aspects and difficulties in Poteat’s work. His integrative focus is Poteat’s anthropology.

I wish to express my great personal appreciation to Phil Mullins and The Polanyi Society for encouraging this issue dedicated to making Poteat’s work more widely known and for asking me to assist in its production. Most especially, it has been a happy occasion to experience the enthusiastic complicity of the writers of these, I believe, outstandingly helpful essays.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> W.H. Poteat, from 1960 until his retirement in 1987, taught in the religion department at Duke University. The last of the series of titles and positions he held while at Duke was Professor of Religion and Comparative Studies. Prior to 1960 he held teaching positions at Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest and in the philosophy department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His major published works are: *Polanyian Meditations: In Search of a Post-Critical Logic* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985); *A Philosophical Daybook: Post-Critical Investigations* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990); *Recovering the Ground: A Philosophical Essay in Recollection* (Albany: State University of New York Press, forthcoming 1994); *The Primacy of Persons and the Language of Culture: Essays of William H. Poteat*. Edited with an Introduction by James M. Nickell and James W. Stines (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993); *Intellect and Hope: Essays in the Thought of Michael Polanyi*. Edited with Thomas A. Langford (Durham: Duke University Press, 1968).

## Contributors To This Issue

**E. M. Adams** is Kenan Professor of Philosophy Emeritus, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He retired in 1990 after 42 years on the faculty; he also taught at Harvard, Ohio University, University of Southern California, SUNY at Albany and the University of Calgary. In the Fall Semester of 1994, Adams will return to the classroom as N. Ferebee Taylor Professor of Philosophy at UNC-Chapel Hill. He is the author or editor of eleven books, the most recent being *The Metaphysics of Self and World* (1991) and *Religion and Cultural Freedom* (1993). Currently, Adams is working on a new book with the title "Reflections on a Society Fit for Human Beings."

**Dale Cannon** is Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Western Oregon State College, Monmouth, OR 97361 (Internet address: [cannodw@fsa.wosc.osshe.edu](mailto:cannodw@fsa.wosc.osshe.edu)). He is currently finishing a book tentatively entitled "Six Ways of Being Religious: A Framework to Guide Comparative Studies of Religion" that is due to be published by Wadsworth in August 1995.

**Bruce Haddox** is Professor of Philosophy and Religion and Chair of the Humanities Division at Simpson College, Indianola, Iowa. He studied with William Poteat at Duke from 1966-69.

**Benjamin Ladner** was, for more than a decade, President of The National Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Sciences. In the summer of 1994, he assumed a new position as President of the American University in Washington, D. C. Ladner was a graduate student working with William Poteat from 1966-70

**Walter B. Mead**, a professor of classical political philosophy at Illinois State University (Normal, IL 61790), did his Ph. D. work at Duke under Polanyi-advocate John H. Hallowell from 1960-63; hearing of the intellectual ferment that a young professor in the Religion Department was creating, he occasionally slipped into a corner of William Poteat's seminar room. Author of two books and many articles in normative political philosophy; Mead presented a paper on Plato and Polanyi at the 1992 meeting of The Polanyi Society. His essay in this issue is part of a longer metaphorical analysis of Poteat which is available upon request.

**Jim. W. Stines** is Professor and former Chairperson of the Department of Philosophy-Religion at Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C. W. H. Poteat was major professor for his Duke Ph. D. Among his writings are articles in *TAD*; and he is co-editor, with James Nickell, of the collection of Poteat's essays entitled *The Primacy of Persons and the Language of Culture* (University of Missouri Press, 1993). He is currently chairperson of the Philosophy of Religion-Theology Section of the American Academy of Religion, Southeast.

# November Polanyi Society Meeting To Be Combined With Visit To Polanyi Special Collection at the Regenstein

The regular meeting of The Polanyi Society held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society for Biblical Literature will be at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, November 19, 1994 in Conference 4G of the Chicago Hilton and Towers. Polanyi Society members and any other interested persons are invited to attend. The papers to be discussed and schedule are listed below. Since papers will not be read during the session, participants are asked to review papers beforehand; copies are available for \$5.00 from Dr. David Rutledge, Department of Religion, Furman University, 3300 Poinsett Highway, Greenville, SC 29613-0474 (803-294-3296). Free electronic copies may also be made available via the Polanyi Society electronic discussion group (for information on the electronic address, see page 5); if this is possible, complete instructions for FTP will be provided. AAR/SBL members are reminded that the schedule for the meeting is printed in the annual meeting program in the "Additional Meetings" section (p. 166).

Since the meeting is in Chicago, special arrangements have been made with the Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago to present a seminar on the Michael Polanyi Special Collection housed at the Regenstein. The seminar will be held Friday, November 18, 1994 from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. at the Regenstein in the Special Collections Seminar Room. Both an express bus and the Illinois Central run from the area of the Chicago Hilton and Towers to Hyde Park (within walking distance of the Regenstein). All scholars interested in Polanyi's work are invited to attend.

**Polanyi Society Meeting**  
**Saturday, November 19, 1994 9:00---11:30 a.m.**  
**Chicago Hilton Conference Room 4G**

9:00 a.m. David Rutledge, Furman University, Presiding

Ira H. Peak, Jr. Jefferson Community College  
*Multiculturalism and Intellectual Freedom: A Polyanian Analysis*

Respondent: Bruce Haddox, Simpson College

Barbara Bennett Baumgarten, Santa Paula, CA  
*A Theology of Embodiment*

Respondent: Phil Rolnick, Greensboro College

11:30 a. m. Business Meeting