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CHARLES S. McCOY:

POST-CRITICAL CHRISTIAN FEDERALIST

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Preface

A few years ago, about the time that William H. Poteat retired, the Polanyi Society honored him with a special meeting focusing on his thought; this was followed by a *TAD* issue (21:1), guest edited by Jim Stines, in which former students and colleagues wrote essays about Poteat's work. I am particularly pleased to have had the opportunity to put together a similar special meeting and this *TAD* issue honoring Charles S. McCoy, who retired in 1994 after teaching 35 years at Pacific School of Religion/Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley. At the Polanyi Society meeting in November of 1997, there was a banquet for McCoy attended by about 30 friends, family and Polanyi Society members. Following the banquet, there was a session with papers analyzing McCoy's creative scholarship; these and McCoy's brief response are the material in this issue.

McCoy has for many years been a leader in the Polanyi Society. He frequently played an active role at Polanyi Society annual meetings, but also worked on some special projects; he gave one of the major addresses at the Kent State Polanyi Centennial conference in 1991 and has written several things for *TAD*. McCoy discovered Polanyi a year or so before the publication of *Personal Knowledge*; he met Polanyi in Berkeley in the early sixties and later visited him twice in Oxford. Since the late fifties, he has innovatively drawn upon Polanyi's thought, blending it carefully with other philosophical and theological resources to produce his own post-critical, Christian federalist perspective.

Like Poteat, McCoy introduced many students to the thought of Polanyi. From the early sixties, he regularly taught a graduate seminar on Polanyi--one which Polanyi himself actually attended at one point when he was in the Bay Area; McCoy also directed or was a reader for many dissertations and theses in which Polanyi's thought was central. Richard Gelwick, Phil Rolnick, and I, authors of three of the essays included here, were students, in different decades, introduced to Polanyi by McCoy. Gelwick arrived in Berkeley in the early sixties; he wrote the first theological dissertation on Polanyi and produced the first bibliography of Polanyi's non scientific writing. I studied with McCoy in the seventies, during the period in which McCoy founded the Center for Ethics and Social Policy. Rolnick worked with McCoy in the eighties but did his doctoral work at Duke with another Polanyi scholar, Thomas Langford.. The introduction to Polanyi of the fourth contributor here, Doug Adams, came as an undergraduate at Duke, although he too later studied with McCoy at PSR/GTU and eventually became a colleague teaching at PSR/GTU with McCoy for almost twenty years.

Phil Mullins

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*.

NEWS AND NOTES

Argumentum Kiado, a Budapest press, published translations, in 1997, into Hungarian of three key Polanyi texts: Andras Beck translated *Science, Faith and Society* and *The Tacit Dimension*. Dezsö Banki translated *The Study of Man*. The three works are included in one volume under the title *Tudomány És Ember*.

The last several issues of *TAD* have invited proposals for the Polanyi session of the upcoming World Congress of Philosophy in Boston in August. Here is the program for the session, titled "Polanyi's Tacit Knowing," on August 14, 2:00-5:30 p.m.

Phil Mullins, Missouri Western State College, "Peirce's Abduction and Polanyi's Integration"

Walter Gulick, Montana State University, "Exploring Polanyi's Theory of Emergence: How Does Ontology Relate to Causality, Temporality, Integration and Meaning?"

Richard Gelwick, University of New England, "Polanyi's 'Society of Explorers' and Whitehead's 'Aims of Education,' the Quest for Integration"

Éva Gábor, Technical University of Budapest, "Polanyi and the Traditions of Liberal Philosophy in Central Europe"

An *Appraisal*-sponsored Polanyi Conference at Sheffield, UK occurred in April of 1998; revised versions of the papers will be published in the next 2 issues of *Appraisal*. The next conference will be on Friday, April 9th and Saturday April 10th, 1999, at the University of Surrey, Guildford. Fee, with room, breakfast and lunch on Saturday, plus papers in advance, will be about L40 Sterling. Papers are invited, especially proposals primarily interested in the further application of Polanyi's ideas. Not all papers need be directly related to Polanyi. Please send

proposals and enquiries to R.T. Allen, 20 Ulverscroft Rd., Loughborough, Leich. LE113PU, England or e-mail (Richard_Allen_21@compuserve.com).

Lee Congdon published "Possessed: Imre Lakatos' Road to 1956" in *Contemporary European History*, VI, 3 (1997), 279-94.

Elizabeth Newman's article "Theology and Science Without Dualism" appeared in *The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences Bulletin*, 17, 1 (Winter 1997), 15-23.

Dick Schmitt posed an interesting query a few months ago for the Polanyi electronic discussion list: Following the title page of *Personal Knowledge*, there is a dedication to Sir Thomas and Lady Taylor. Who were the Taylors and why was *Personal Knowledge* dedicated to them? Since nobody reading the list discussions seemed to know the answer to this question, Schmitt did some library sleuthing and discovered two Taylors who Polanyi might have known. One was Sir Thomas Werton Johns Taylor (1895-1953), a chemist who was knighted in 1952. The other candidate, Sir Thomas Murray Taylor (1897-1962), is, however, almost certainly the Taylor to whom Polanyi's book is dedicated. Thomas Murray Taylor, who was knighted in 1954, was a lawyer, Scottish politician, and, at the time of Polanyi's Gifford Lectures, was the Principal of the University of Aberdeen. Taylor and his wife would thus have been Polanyi's host and hostess. In addition, this Sir Thomas followed Polanyi (*Science, Faith and Society*, 1946) in the Riddell Lectureship at the University of Durham (*The Discipline of Virtue*, 1954).

Although there have been three issues of *TAD* per year for several years, this number is not set by policy. It is conceivable that some years, there might be four issues and there have been years in which there were two. To eliminate confusion--and especially to please serials librarians--*TAD* will now carry a cover notice "completes volume X" in the final issue of a volume.



Charles S. McCoy

Permutations of Post-Critical Thinking: Themes in Charles McCoy's Life and Thought

Phil Mullins

ABSTRACT Key Words: Charles S. McCoy, Michael Polanyi, H. Richard Niebuhr, federalist theology, Plato, religion and higher education, organizational ethics

This essay reviews the contributions of Charles S. McCoy in three areas: religion and higher education, theology and ethics. I analyze McCoy's primary ideas as a blending of influences from covenantal theology, Plato, Michael Polanyi and H. Richard Niebuhr.

I. Introduction

These remarks are intended as a rough survey of the array of things which Charles McCoy has been concerned with as a Christian theologian and moral philosopher, educator and lively human being now in his seventy fourth year. I am particularly interested in commenting upon the ways in which the philosophical ideas of Michael Polanyi have been taken up and creatively recast in his own context by McCoy. Most of the readers of these words will know Charles McCoy through his long involvement with the Polanyi Society. Although I focus upon McCoy's ideas, at the outset, it should be clear that ideas are not separate from action. Certainly in McCoy's case, his thoughtful life has been that of a change agent, one informed and inflamed by the ideas and the images valent in his history. Nor are McCoy's ideas and engagements, I am sure he would say, to be conceived as narrowly or privately his own in ways the Cartesian and later the Romantic traditions sometimes have taught us to think about persons. McCoy always insists, with one of his favorite teachers Johannes Althusius, that persons foremost are symbiotes,¹ social companions existing in and constituted by interdependence. McCoy's life and work reflect his immersion in a social location; he has been a participant in a social conversation which includes not only his predecessors and contemporaries, but is directed toward those who will come after us. I begin by noting a few biographical details and weaving with them a broadly contoured map of McCoy's interests and endeavors. I identify McCoy's work as falling largely into three areas: religion and higher education, theology, and ethics. To be sure, such a mapping does not pick up some important things such as McCoy's ongoing interest in the arts. Nevertheless, my gross effort at representation does set forth some useful markers.

II. Three Areas of Work

McCoy was born a southerner, a North Carolinian, and it is to those roots that he regularly returns; he was first educated in North Carolina schools and the university and then went to seminary at Duke University. As an undergraduate, he first became actively involved with the civil rights movement, and this has been an important commitment in his life and writing, both early and late. McCoy went to Yale for Ph. D. study; although he worked with many others, H. Richard Niebuhr and Robert Calhoun were his chief mentors. His focal area was theological ethics in the modern period, but he wanted a dissertation topic that related theological ethics to the Bible. Niebuhr suggested, and Calhoun concurred, that McCoy consider a study of the seventeenth century federalist theology of the Dutch figure Cocceius. In his dissertation work in the mid fifties, McCoy rediscovered and began to mine federalist theology and covenantal perspectives; he has worked within the context of federalist or covenantal metaphors since his graduate

education. It is fair to say that covenantal thought is McCoy's chief resource; it informs his reflection in every area in which he has worked and most especially his theological reflection. However, it is certainly also the case, as I discuss below, that covenantal perspectives are always blended seamlessly and creatively with influences from Plato, H. Richard Niebuhr and Polanyi, three additional primary influences.

McCoy spent a few years on the faculty at the University of Florida as his graduate education concluded. It was here at the suggestion of an economist friend, that he first read Polanyi's writing. He later discussed Polanyi's importance with Calhoun and Niebuhr and followed up, after the publication of *Personal Knowledge* in 1958, with further Polanyi study. In 1959, McCoy came to Pacific School of Religion, in Berkeley, where the temperature was moderated by the fog, but the real air was heady and invigorating. He remained for over thirty years teaching at Pacific School of Religion and the Graduate Theological Union, which he helped to organize, and working on various projects with University of California faculty as well as business, political and religious leaders and institutions in the Bay Area and across the nation. Classes on Polanyi, Niebuhr, Plato and covenantal theology were in his regular cycle of courses.

Although it is difficult succinctly to summarize the issues McCoy worked on at Florida and in the early years at Pacific School of Religion, it is fair to say that religion and higher education was an important topic in his early career which McCoy studied and wrote about. I need only to reference his work here since Richard Gelwick's essay in this issue covers this area. McCoy came to Pacific School of Religion as a specialist in religion and higher education, but his interests even in this specialty spilled out in several directions. He was interested in the ways in which the Christian church could work on campus; he was interested in the place of church-related colleges in the broader fabric of higher education. With Neely McCarter, in 1959, he wrote an early book, *The Gospel on Campus*,² and a second book in 1972, *The Responsible Campus*.³ McCoy was involved with campus ministry nationally and in Berkeley in the sixties and seventies. He was interested in theological education and its reform throughout his career. He was deeply involved in ecumenical ventures and was a figure who pushed for the ecumenical educational experiment that came to be the Graduate Theological Union in the sixties.

Not entirely independent of religion and higher education issues are other concerns that might be dubbed more explicitly theological. Below I have more that is concrete to say about McCoy's theological ideas, but here their general context needs some attention. From early in his career, McCoy has struggled to articulate the character of religion and the nature of theological analysis. On one hand, the attempt has been to fashion a broad based understanding that will make clear to the contemporary secular academy that theology still belongs in the university and is still enormously useful for understanding human vitality in its diversity. On the other hand, McCoy's writing about theology from the fifties to the present has often rather bluntly criticized many other Christian theological approaches as misguided. Many Christian thinkers have, unfortunately, thought that only Christians do theology and this orientation royally irritated McCoy for an entire career:

...to limit theology to the Christian community involves a misunderstanding of the theological task, a misunderstanding that poses serious problems for the Christian scholar seeking to relate his own reflection to the thought of other scholars.⁴

Much Christian theology has long been embarrassingly unhistorical and too ready to jump on fashionable philosophical bandwagons:

... it is precisely the theological task to recognize that man always views reality from a limited human

perspective and is bound to interpret the whole of experience through some particular event or segment of experience which grasps him as revelatory, not through some supposedly universal consciousness. If this be true, many Christian theologians for the past two centuries have indeed sought escape from the scandal of particularity. Under the guise of openness, this escape has been attempted by taking a stance within some currently popular intellectual viewpoint and undertaking to prove that this standpoint provides the universally valid demonstration of Christianity (“MTR”, 17).

As this quotation makes clear, McCoy’s views about theology and religion fall generally within the furrows first plowed by his teacher H. Richard Niebuhr. There is a consistent emphasis upon the social or communal, the historical and traditional, and the experiential, the remembered and anticipated as mediated through the symbolic. In several ways, Niebuhrian theology has not been well understood or fared well in recent history. Some Niebuhrian elements long emphasized by McCoy, for example, the importance of social location, have now been prudentially absorbed into much theology and religious studies in our obviously pluralistic environment. But the constructive implications of Niebuhrian insights are not yet well worked out in theology and religious studies. Figures like McCoy who have done creative, constructive work (within the Niebuhrian paradigm) on the “mystery of location,” have not garnered much attention. In sum, McCoy’s theological thinking which falls into the Niebuhrian vineyard, but is overtly covenantal or federalist in orientation and buttressed in a Polanyian or post-critical philosophical idiom, has not been widely understood; figures like his friend Jurgen Moltmann, however, are notable exceptions to this generalization.

Although it is not separate from his theological reflection, for purposes of clarity I have omitted above any comments on McCoy’s work as an ethicist. Concern with ethics and writing on ethics has been a constant throughout his professional career, but clearly this work became central and focused from the early seventies forward. This was the point at which the Center for Ethics and Social Policy was established and the collaboration with Fred Twining and others began; this collaboration produced fruitful projects in business, healthcare, and politics (as well as other areas) and eventually led to establishment of other policy ethics centers. The core ideas of McCoy and his collaborators have passed into the normal idiom used now in much religious and philosophical ethical writing. Today it is common to hear ethicists speak about organizational ethics, but this was not the case in the mid seventies when the Center’s work began. Perhaps more important than the voices of academic ethicists, are the voices of decision makers in some important large businesses who are no longer completely unsettled by talk about “ethics.”⁵ Part of McCoy’s mission as an ethicist working with different groups has been to make ordinary people believe that ethics is a sensible, non esoteric reflective activity that persons and groups can and should do, even though it does not solve all problems. McCoy certainly respects the intricate and diverse traditions of philosophical and theological ethics, but he has not taught that everyone must know these by chapter and verse; to do ethics seriously has not meant, according to McCoy, to become an academic ethicist. Also McCoy has especially emphasized that ethical reflection can and needs to take place at different levels: “As reflection on the moral significance of human action, ethics takes place on different *levels of agency*.”⁶ Analysis must recognize and focus on the several different levels of comprehensiveness: it can attend to individual agents, but also to organizational or institutional agents, to social sectors or professions, and ultimately to a total society. About much of McCoy’s work in ethics there has been a note of common sense and an orientation to the non specialist. This has not always garnered praise in the academy.

Much of McCoy’s ethics work has emphasized the power of organizations in contemporary society. To take organizational power seriously has meant, for McCoy, taking the complexities of organizations and the importance of policy more seriously. But the study of organizations and the attempt to affect policy, according to McCoy, is not a

domain that academic ethicists can readily enter assuming they know the territory and can call the shots. The Center's work called for a "triadic approach"⁷ which brought together ethicists, social scientists and experienced organizational policy makers; this novel approach (grounded in McCoy's federalist orientation) is centrally important to organizational ethics, although that importance remains little understood. No single group has a privileged perspective and each group can learn from the skills of others; perspectival commitments are bound together and need each other in a dynamic process.

In McCoy's reading, the politics of the sixties and early seventies often emphasized social responsibility, but did not focus clearly enough on organizational decision making. The projects of the Center and the writing of McCoy and his collaborators zeroed in on ethics in policy formation. The policy making process requires not only financial inputs, but also a broad range of information concerned with social issues and the political environment of organizational action. Organizations need a feedback process which monitors the social environment and sponsors genuine discussion, at several levels in the organization, of social impacts of policy options. In an early publication, McCoy (and his collaborators) spoke of a "comprehensive ethic" (*ECPP*) for corporate policy which balanced institutional self-interest, responsibilities to multiple constituencies and social vision. In sum, McCoy's work as a ethicist has been creatively attentive to organizational action and to the ways in which ethical reflection can be institutionalized in the organizational decision making process.

Finally, it is of some importance to note (with painful brevity) that McCoy's work in ethics does draw upon Niebuhr's *cathekontic* ethics or ethics of the fitting. Like his teacher, McCoy acknowledges his own identity as a Christian moral philosopher or social ethicist. This implies that the model for responsible or fitting action for McCoy is understood as response to the ongoing action of the God known in Christian history. That is, God is present and active among us and it is the Christian's tricky business to discern the challenging, changing requirements of loyalty. Those within the Christian fold always find themselves both engaged in repentance for our idolatries and called to commitments involving cooperation with God's on-going liberating activity which is moving toward a consummation.

III Four Influences

I can give somewhat more definitive character to McCoy's post-critical thinking by examining the ways in which he appropriates what I have above termed the four principle influences which are woven together in his ideas: a reading of Plato, the thought of H. R. Niebuhr, federalist or covenantal theological ideas and Michael Polanyi's philosophical perspective. By briefly treating each of these different elements, I hope to show how they flow together and constitute McCoy's reflective orientation.

Plato

McCoy readily acknowledges that the problems Plato sets and the directions in which he approaches solutions have always intrigued him. In many senses, McCoy interprets all of Plato through the so-called early dialogues. He is concerned to avoid a fundamentalist or overly literalist approach to Plato's perspective. McCoy recognizes the dialog form (best evident in early work) as not merely literary but as constitutive of Plato's approach and convictions. It implies a community with implicit covenants and a framework for exploration. Further, it implies, as Polanyi also emphasizes, that inquiry is important; there is a covenant to pursue the unknown. Communal belief or existing covenants are the ground for exploration; language is the medium through which we explain that which we believe is real in the community and through which further exploration proceeds. Those who inquire must presuppose the

possibility of something in order to inquire and speak about it; but to presuppose something doesn't mean that it is a reality. McCoy holds that Plato was not very literal about the forms, but that Plato was, as a dialectician, an astute student of dynamic part-whole relationships. McCoy socially contextualizes Plato and, as I have implied, he wants to link Plato, Polanyi, Niebuhr and federalist theology. To mention just one of these complements, Polanyi's ideas about skills and their acquisition, tacit integration, the convivial and passionate moorings of inquiry, his emphasis upon discovery, comprehensive entities and particulars—at least all of these Polanyian elements—are put to service to socially contextualize Plato.

H. Richard Niebuhr

Above, I have noted that Niebuhr was one of McCoy's important teachers and that McCoy's thought takes his point of departure from Niebuhr's consistent emphasis upon the social or communal, the historical and traditional, and the experiential, the remembered and anticipated as mediated through the symbolic. McCoy's thinking about what religion is and what theology is, as well as his efforts to do constructive Christian theology, fall within the Niebuhrian paradigm, but it is a Niebuhrian paradigm recast in federalist and Polanyian ways (one might plausibly argue that Niebuhr already loosely fits within the federalist paradigm).

Students of McCoy often recall his regular and provocative class comment that Niebuhr's *The Meaning of Revelation* will likely be the most important book in theology in the twentieth century.⁸ Like Niebuhr, McCoy's writing always emphasizes the priority of faith in human affairs and the historical, revelational context of human faithfulness; faithful living is always in a particular interpretative community, a location with concrete centers of value and loyalty which are often in tension but are mediated through the valent stories and symbols and the lives of social companions. Religious faith, for McCoy, permeates or binds together elements of life. In *When Gods Change*, McCoy argues that one must look for human religiousness in the "most inclusive wholeness of human acting, intending, and believing", in what he dubs a "realm of actuality" (*WGC*, 162). Religious faith "pervades a realm of actuality. A god is that reality believed in as shaping history and our realm of actuality" (*WGC*, 162). McCoy contends that most ecclesiastical theology has long operated within the "Constantinian paradigm" (*WGC*, 165) and has been unable to see the vibrant diversity of human faith and the plurality of gods. He suggests that phenomena, such as the emerging pluralism of global culture and the rise of deconstructionist thought, challenge Constantinian presumptions and will hopefully transform theology.

Like Niebuhr, McCoy has emphasized the plurality of faith as a human phenomenon; more than Niebuhr, McCoy has developed a vocabulary to discuss complex and changing patterns of loyalty and commitment. His federalist theology background and his absorption of a Polanyian framework for discussing persons and communities have been helpful in his work. McCoy describes the ways in which humans negotiate the web of meaning through which they live:

The context of meaning within which our earliest memories are set is cultural. It is meaning that belongs to the community before we arrive on the scene. We receive and respond to patterns existing before our appearance. Gradually we are inducted into this community of interpretations, and participate in revising its interpretations and passing them to subsequent arrivals.

The meaning already present is better understood not so much as propositions as valencies, commitments, love and loathing, warmth and tension. . . . Meaning in this sense is not about

differentiated parts of our world but rather is a field of force, an integrated wholeness of covenantal relations (*WGC*, 99).

McCoy carefully links and yet distinguishes meaning, experience, action and religious commitments:

As it binds the differentiated elements and levels of human action and actuality into wholes, religious commitment pervades human experiencing. But it is not identical with experience. What we are designating here as religious concerns the field of force *ordering* human action. . . . Commitments of higher valency set the pattern of lesser commitments and thus reveal the believing and valuing of an action system. Religious faith is no more separable from human living than is design from a building (*WGC*, 194).

The place and character of gods McCoy describes as always bound up with directed human energies:

Deity is the comprehensive power believed in as linking events together in a meaningful whole, the sovereign reality of world occurrence, the power which, just as a magnet gives to iron filings the pattern of a magnetic field, shapes the fields of human commitments, loyalties and actions. As selfhood provides a center of experience, so deity means the reality and the pervasive valency of experiencing (*WGC*, 104).

Our gods are comprehensive entities in whom we believe; our gods form the “most comprehensive horizons of human commitment and identity” (*WGC*, 204). As such, they are, at one and the same time, McCoy argues, projections of believers’ aspirations, ultimate commitments that impel believers to break beyond the world of the status quo, and powerfully experienced “reality that breaks in upon us no less than we break out toward it” (*WGC*, 205).

Federalist Theology

The preceding discussion sketchily notes some ways in which McCoy’s theological reflection creatively articulates and expands social and historical elements with which Niebuhr earlier wrestled. However, McCoy explicitly identifies his work in theology as operating within a “federal or covenantal paradigm. . .” (*WGC*, 171). For McCoy, his dissertation work on Cocceius and the federalist theological tradition convinced him that the covenant was a powerful root metaphor within which to organize the kind of social and historical approach to humanity on which he was already working. Federal theology and political philosophy are important for understanding the shape of modern societies, but McCoy believes that in many ways federalist or covenantal thinking extends beyond political philosophy and is second nature—although it is not recognized—within many modern societies. Contemporary accounts of “federalism” often fail to acknowledge the federalist theology and its richness. Discussions of “federalism” usually focus only upon political philosophy emphasizing division of powers and checks and balances. McCoy construes the federalist theology as much more inclusive: “. . . federalism understands the relationships between God and the world and among humans as based on covenants among their members, some tacit and inherited from the past, others explicit and made or renewed in the present” (*FF*, 12). The covenant root metaphor is one that combines attention to association or combination and levels of comprehensiveness:

...the inner nature of social groups and the relationships among them are understood as covenantal by federalists. Primary social entities such as families, congregations, occupational guilds, and

commercial organizations exist by virtue of the tacit and explicit compacts defining relations among members and committing participants to the group. More comprehensive social structures are based on compacts among less inclusive groups. In political organization, a town is made up of a compact among families, a province of a compact among towns, a commonwealth of a compact among provinces... The elements of voluntary participation, of the rights and responsibilities of membership, of commitment to the group and its patterns of governance, and of holding leaders to their covenanted obligations are central to a federal order whether ecclesiastical, economic, or political (*FF*,13).

In the federalist tradition, McCoy found what became his primary affirmation about the God known in Christian accounts: “In federal perspective, the most fundamental affirmation about God for Christians is that God is the Faithful One, who makes covenant and keeps covenant” (*FF*, 13). The sense of God as the Faithful One points to the way in which God is continually active and shaping the whole creation. Federalism has an emphasis upon process, according to McCoy’s reading; federal orders are subject to redesign:

In federal theology this dynamic element is affirmed by viewing the creation of the world and humanity, not as complete, but as developing toward ever greater fulfillment within the unfolding economies of the covenant of God. God’s covenant is not a static order but a pattern of changing relations in the world toward greater justice and love (*FF*,14).

Especially from Cocceius, McCoy draws fundamental ideas about who humans are and how they fit into the unfolding pattern of history and cosmos. Humans are sinful and our knowing is partial, but there is “social achievement resulting from the interaction of humans in covenant as God’s grace works in the redeeming activity of historical process” (*FF*, 78). Nature, humans and history are part of a covenantal process moving “toward an unknown future and consummation in God” (*FF*, 78). Cocceius holds (and McCoy with him, in his late twentieth century rendition) that :

humans are created mutable, changeable, in process, open to the obedient love of God through which they have community with God and with one another. In the rebellion and disobedience that constitutes the fall into sin, humans become immutable, resistant to change, denying the process in which they were created that leads toward fulfillment in God (*FF*,78).

From these federalist ideas about human beings and history, comes McCoy’s response to global diversity and historical change: “Pluralism is the complement, not the enemy, of liberation” (*WGC*, 211). McCoy reads the signs of history as on a course of liberation; this course is God’s action but it is also human action or response. Liberation is always coupled with deeper insights into oppression:

. . . pluralism reminds us decisively of the multiple sources and shapes of oppression. Radical evil in history, radical sin in human life, take varied forms. Liberation continues, but new forms of oppression emerge. In part, every liberating achievement opens awareness to new horizons of oppression. In part, the forces of liberation in one generation buttress the oppressor of the next (*WGC*, 214).

It is the ongoing cycle of breaking out of oppression (Niebuhr’s permanent revolution) that McCoy suggests is central to the Christian’s sense of history and deity:

The remembered God of the covenant becomes the means for breaking out of oppressive socio-political-theological conditions toward more encompassing liberation and a more comprehensive conception of the covenant God (*WGC*, 218-219).

Michael Polanyi

Those familiar with Michael Polanyi's ideas will undoubtedly already have noticed, in the quotations from McCoy's writing used above, that often McCoy uses a Polanyian idiom to articulate his theological and ethical ideas. Polanyi's thought is the epistemological glove that snugly fits McCoy's federalist and Niebuhrian theological hand.

In a very straightforward way, McCoy has pointed out that he thinks Polanyi's thought introduces a new era in philosophy:

The critical period of Western philosophy, opened by Descartes and brought to its zenith in the Enlightenment, is coming to an end, and the post-critical era is emerging. Michael Polanyi, it appears to me, is the most important philosophic figure opening up this new direction and delineating its basic elements. Of the critical pretensions to have found a way, either through philosophic rationality or by means of scientific method, to a universal perspective, Polanyi points out that thinkers of the critical period have pursued "a mistaken ideal of objectivity"⁹

After noting some forerunners in Peirce, Niebuhr, and federalist thought, McCoy affirms "Polanyi has brought the tendencies produced by problems of the critical perspective into systematic focus and pioneered a new epistemological method with imagination and comprehensiveness" ("PR", 34). What McCoy dubs the "Polanyian Revolution" ("PR", 35), he compares to the Copernican revolution, noting that Polanyi's new method appreciates the achievements and rigor of critical thought but transcends it and recovers (by recasting it) "the pre-critical appreciation of tradition, culture, and community" ("PR", 35).

McCoy's high esteem for Polanyi's work values both the critical and constructive thrusts of Polanyi's thought. Put into McCoy's own idiom, both the critical and constructive elements are concerned with location:

The Polanyian Revolution consists, first of all, in reminding us that knowing occurs within human locations and from perspectives shaped by these locations. Second, the Polanyian Revolution explores with delicacy and precision the epistemological meaning of human location that has implications for the entire spectrum of human knowing and action ("PR", 35).

The critical element of Polanyi's epistemology reveals the hubris involved in speaking, philosophically or theologically in the imperial mood as if we occupied an ontological peak. Polanyi's elucidation of the from/to structure of all knowing recasts knowing in post-critical perspective. It recontextualizes knowing and recovers the importance of our skills; it embeds knowing in the background of location and emphasizes the action involved in knowing. McCoy emphasizes that

the fiduciary dimension of knowing is recovered. Humans rely upon elements from their social location, tradition, and community in order to affirm what they believe is knowledge. The pre-

critical notions of “faith seeking understanding” and “believing in order to understand” take on new meaning as Polanyi sets forth the tacit component involved in critical knowing (“PR”, 36).

Further, McCoy argues, Polanyi’s account of knowing transforms the dualistic (knower and known) and individualistic approach enshrined in the critical tradition:

Post-Critical hermeneutics is triadic in structure, involving a knower rooted in culture and community, what is being interpreted within its context, and those for whom the interpretation is intended, who are also rooted in culture and community (“PR”, 36).

Polanyi’s approach also reorients the manner in which scientific, social scientific and philosophical thinking have considered reflection as either subjective or objective.

Finally, Polanyi’s thought has in it an element found also in Niebuhrian, federal and Platonic thought: it reaches out to the unknown and is never satisfied with the status quo. The lure of the unknown beckons:

Heuristic passion, says Polanyi, empowers and guides the creative endeavors of humanity and impels humans to venture ceaselessly toward the new, toward the unknown. Thus human community lives ever on the verge of discovery, poised between the driving promise of past fulfillment and the magnetic anticipation of further fulfillment drawing us toward the promise of the future (*WGC*, 204-205).

Dwelling in, for Polanyi, is for the purpose of breaking out. It is just this double movement that McCoy finds perfectly captures his sense that human existence is a nomadic one:

Humans dwell in a world when they believe in its reality and live with commitment toward that reality. But living with creativity means dwelling in one’s world with a passion which seeks beyond it. . . . Every human horizon proves temporary (*WGC*, 205).

ENDNOTES

¹Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition* (Westminister/John Knox Press, 1991): 55. Additional references use only *FF* and page numbers in parentheses.

²Charles S. McCoy and Neely McCarter *The Gospel on Campus* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1959).

³Charles S. McCoy, *The Responsible Campus* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972).

⁴Charles S. McCoy, “The Meaning of Theological Reflection,” in *Faith Learning Studies* (New York: Faculty Christian Fellowship, 1964): 22. Additional references use only “MTR” and page numbers in parentheses.

⁵ See especially *Corporate Ethics: Prime Business Asset* (New York; The Conference Board, 1988), a mono-

graph which McCoy co-authored with several others under the Conference Board's name. This document represents the importance of McCoy's work with important groups like The Conference Board.

⁶ Charles S. McCoy, "Creation and Covenant: A Comprehensive Vision for Environmental Ethics," *Covenant for a New Creation*, eds. Carol S. Robb and Carl J. Casebolt. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991: 220. This account of agency certainly is part of McCoy's approach before this recent essay.

⁷ Although this term is not highlighted in *Ethics in the Corporate Policy Process*, (Berkeley: Center for Ethics and Social Policy, 1975), the first major monograph McCoy wrote with Mark Juergensmeyer and Fred Twining (which was based upon an early C.E.S. P. project with Wells Fargo Bank), the monograph makes clear that the complexity and scope of ethical problems make it necessary for organizational decision makers to join forces with social scientists and ethicists to work constructively on organizational response. This conjunction of perspectives became a hallmark of C.E.S.P. projects and came to be known as the "triadic" approach or method. Additional references use only *ECPP* in parentheses; there are no page numbers in this important, short (14 page) monograph now out of print.

⁸ Charles S. McCoy, *When Gods Change: Hope for Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980): 205. Here McCoy comes closest to this memorable classroom statement as he discusses the importance of Niebuhr's account of revelation. Additional references use only *WGC* and page numbers in parentheses.

⁹ Charles S. McCoy, "The Polanyian Revolution: Post-Critical Perspectives for Ethics," *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical* 18:2 (1991-92): 34. Additional references use only "PR" and page numbers in parentheses.

The Innovating Covenant

Exploring The Work Of Charles S. McCoy

Philip A. Rolnick

ABSTRACT Key words: covenant, change, loyalty, liberation, pluralism, globalism, innovation, continuity, "seven deadly sins"

Charles McCoy's lifework calls for covenantal understanding and commitment as a call to innovation in theology and ethics. McCoy embraces liberation, pluralism, and globalism as the solution to the current difficulties of theology. As he looks toward the future, McCoy rejects positions which lament and tend to obstruct the movement toward liberation, pluralism, and globalism.

Our problem is never to bolster the power and vitality of an ineffectual, dying deity. Instead, it is finding ways to respond to the awesome power of God coursing through natural and historical occurrence.¹

From the time of his doctoral dissertation at Yale in 1956, a dissertation called, "The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius," Charles McCoy has plumbed the meanings of covenant in the broadest possible range of matters human and divine. From writing scripts for Radio Free Europe shortly after World War II, to organizing freedom marches in Mississippi with Martin Luther King, Jr., to a distinguished career in theological ethics, McCoy has never ceased developing and applying covenantal thinking to theological, ethical, and political problems.

While McCoy's covenant is always well informed by the past, his sense of covenant moves through history towards a future destiny. Covenant does not mean stolid loyalty to a past formula or creed. Choosing and acting well in the midst of change is McCoy's way of being steadfast and loyal to covenantal commitments of ultimate import. For McCoy, being steadfast usually means changing and adjusting to the new, sometimes even stimulating, catalyzing, or provoking the new. Much like the church Father, Irenaeus, McCoy sees growth and development as one of the primary purposes of the creation. God is to be met and responded to amid the demands of historical, embodied, community life. Hence McCoy remains an avid student and translator of past scholarship. For him, history is a vital instrument which must be studied, clarified, and constantly renewed in present applications. History is also the medium in which covenantal loyalties are fulfilled through faithful action.

Since McCoy has never published a systematic work (and given his dislike of anything too imperial, it would be out of character for him to do so), we must look to many of his varied publications to gain some sense of his overall direction. Throughout his career, liberation and pluralism play decisive roles; but we must also include his vision of global solidarity and culture to make sense of the liberation, and to give it a sense of direction.

I. McCOY'S COVENANT

In McCoy's thought, the notion of covenant is so fundamental that we can almost call it "metaphysical," at least in the sense that covenant functions to direct our thought to an understanding of ultimate reality. Portraying the

development of covenantal thinking in Kaspar Olevianus (1536-1587), McCoy (along with co-author J. Wayne Baker) summarizes: “The covenant pervades the world as that which places the divine stamp of pattern, purpose, and grace on the whole of nature and history.”² Here the origin of life, the creation, is portrayed as the original covenantal action of God imbuing all that is with “pattern, purpose, and grace.” The divine stamp pervades not only what is (ontology), but also what is becoming (history). McCoy’s embrace of this part of the covenantal tradition suggests a covenantal “metaphysics,” but one that McCoy wants to distinguish from the scholastic tradition:

the created order is based on the covenant of God, so that the divine commandments permeate the nature of things. Federalism, therefore, has its *lex naturae* in a manner similar to what can be found in the scholastic tradition. But this moral order in creation derives from the faithful will of God in covenant, not from some rational or natural rigidity at the core of reality.³

As put here, the origin, purpose, and destiny of life is covenantal and so takes on a metaphysical character. However, since McCoy seeks to avoid metaphysical rigidity, he consistently eschews the language of metaphysics and ontology and replaces it with the language of covenant. The functions of the two languages are quite similar; the tacit differences are revealing.

In the covenantal tradition, covenant even precedes creation and history: “For Cocceius, the covenant existed prior to history within the Godhead; love, community, and faithfulness are, therefore, what Christians believe to be at the core of the divine reality.”⁴ “Love, community, and faithfulness” are the stuff of which covenant is made, even the “core of the divine reality.” For McCoy, the rational aspects of the natural world are a function of divine faithfulness, a personal quality of divinity which precedes the rational and gives it a more encompassing and more meaningful framework.

COVENANTAL EPISTEMOLOGY

For McCoy, the covenant not only is our best way of describing the ultimate nature and the ultimate why of things, it is also our best way of knowing them. Rather than retreating into skepticism when confronted with the difficulties of grounding knowledge vis-à-vis the subject/object distinction, McCoy synthesizes the thought of Michael Polanyi and the Federal theological tradition in arguing for a “communal basis of human commitment” that tacitly underlies all human knowing and acting.⁵ Rejecting “ecclesiastical limitations and philosophical bifurcations,” McCoy claims “the covenantal wholeness of human experiencing” for his starting point.⁶

In attempting to develop this more expansive, covenantal epistemology, McCoy warns against those systems which methodologically remove the possibility of religious or human meaning before the discussion gets underway:

There are locations which assure that the gods remain invisible and from which it is therefore unwise to begin if we wish to see the scene of human believing and discover the meaning of theological transformation.⁷

Something important about McCoy is manifest in this passage: while being cautious about affirming or denying specific beliefs of specific traditions, he has an ear for the melody of human believing and commitment. Thus he repeatedly asserts something like the following:

Covenants of human living are founded on believed-in *reality*, that final sovereignty or deity that is the source of original creativity, that defines consummation, assures coherence, and to which a root

metaphor refers. Humans live, not toward illusion, but toward what they are convinced is actual.⁸

Notice that what is here affirmed is primarily epistemological, not metaphysical. What is affirmed is the *belief* of reality, while apparently nothing is directly stated about the ontological accuracy of the belief, nothing, that is, with the possible exception of “the source of original creativity.” Below, we shall more fully consider the significance of McCoy’s ambiguity toward the referent while he affirms the fiduciary dimension of all human knowing, belief, and significant action. On the other hand, he clearly rejects the claim that “faith is a form of knowledge.”⁹

In contrast to what McCoy calls the dyadic paradigm of subject and object, he asserts that “Knowing is triadic, taking place within the covenants of human living that define communities of interpretation and provide the root metaphors and stories informing human understanding.”¹⁰ In this expanded paradigm, the knower is historical, social, and necessarily a recipient of, and a participant in, the communal quest for ultimate meaning, a quest which began before the knower and will, in all probability, continue long after the individual disappears from the community scene.

While one might be tempted to see a similarity between McCoy’s historical, communal epistemology and Stanley Hauerwas’ notion of the Church as the historical vehicle of the kingdom of God (See e.g., Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*), McCoy, unlike Hauerwas, specifically rejects any ecclesial privileging. To the contrary, McCoy cites with favor Rosemary Ruether’s global, all-inclusive understanding of “catholic”:

Theology is losing its confinement as an exclusively ecclesiastical science, but only because it is finding its place in a reintegrated view of the human community. It is losing its place as the science of a particular ecclesiastical tradition or even of a single historical faith, such as Christianity, but only because it is beginning to glimpse its place as the horizon of a human history that is truly catholic. It is losing its place as a science confined to the sacral of the “religious” sphere, but only because it is finding its place within the totality of human activities and the arts and sciences that reflect on and create these activities.¹¹

The plural voices which this “catholic” account admits into the conversation is central to McCoy’s entire project. He not only believes that each community can learn something from other ones (and that all communities *ought* to do so), he also sees yielding claims of ecclesial, epistemological privilege as a necessary aspect of ongoing faithfulness to the covenantal tradition. The specific challenges to covenantal participants in 1997 are not the same as those that Bullinger or Cocceius faced. As McCoy advocates the covenant, one cannot be true to current historical demands by simply repeating positions and solutions of the past.

COVENANTAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Seeking to avoid individualism on the one hand and rigidity of communitarian belief and practice on the other, McCoy reaches back to the covenantal thought of Johannes Althusius (late sixteenth to early seventeenth century) and draws from it some of his key anthropological notions, particularly the identification of human beings as “symbiotes.” While Althusius was ostensibly writing works of politics, religion played a crucial role in his understanding. Althusius and McCoy alike refuse to segregate the dimensions of human life. Not only is there a symbiosis among human beings, there is also an implied symbiosis among all areas of human interest. Power takes many forms, but it arises from the symbiotic associations of humans living and covenanting together. In this symbiotic vision, human interaction is primary as it occurs within the covenanted groups of human life, whether familial, religious, political, or any other.¹²

When applied to the human relation to God, this symbiotic view takes on several developmental possibilities:

“God alone knows the whole of the divine will, so human knowledge may be true without being adequate or complete.”¹³ Over the course of McCoy’s career, the implications of the partiality of human knowledge of the divine leads McCoy to embrace pluralism as a moral ought and an epistemological aid. By listening to other communities and symbiotes, the limitations of our own viewpoint can be profitably expanded. This kind of expansion constitutes McCoy’s idea of covenantal loyalty.

Because humans can only attempt to enact the will of God on the moving stage of history, being stuck in any position can become a theological danger. In McCoy’s historical analysis, Augustine sees the restlessness of the human heart as a result of the Fall. Quite to the contrary, McCoy, après Cocceius, sees such restlessness as implanted in the original creation as part of the conditional possibility of human response to God through historical action, process, and openness to the new. According to McCoy,

In the rebellion and disobedience that constitutes [sic] the fall into sin, humans become immutable, resistant to change, denying the process in which they were created that leads toward fulfillment in God.¹⁴

Human beings, symbiotes, *ought* to be en route toward expanded understandings of God and other human viewpoints. The process of change is an intentional, *sine qua non* of a fully human life. In the midst of such change, the covenant, or rather, our understanding of covenantal loyalties, provides the necessary unitary element.

As we pursue the unitary element, we must do so from the particular perspective of our given and/or chosen location. As McCoy puts it:

Perspective does not seem to be a flaw or an embarrassment but a fundamental, constituting condition of human location. I am unable to understand my own experience if it is stripped of perspective. Nor can I understand how my fellow humans can claim to experience anything apart from their specific perspectives.¹⁵

In this manner, the particularity of human location is more like a gift than a burden, but it does require attending to others from other locations as we emerge toward an increasingly global culture. So, for example, while McCoy asserts that “Jesus Christ is the root metaphor of the federal paradigm,” at least as understood from a Christian perspective, he adds that “this paradigm also permits us to understand faith perspectives of other communities and thus to deal with the pluralistic context of human believing.”¹⁶

COVENANTAL CHRISTOLOGY

Criticizing much of traditional christology for its correlation of Jesus Christ with human sin, and equally criticizing those ethicists who attempt a different starting point than Jesus Christ (e.g., natural law or secularity), McCoy offers a *tertium quid*: “Jesus Christ as Lord of creation is prior to Jesus Christ as Redeemer, and the latter meaning must be affirmed as a function of the former.”¹⁷ The creational, incarnational meaning of Jesus Christ is primary and “is in no way dependent upon sin.”¹⁸ In an earlier work, written with his late wife Marjorie, McCoy puts it even more bluntly: “Jesus did not have to die on Calvary, but in every fragment of his life there was present the love that would be willing, if necessary, to be nailed to the cross.”¹⁹

The relational, covenantal action of the triune God is already present as grace in the creation. As we have seen

above, McCoy's notion of sin is more like resistance to the often painful processes of changing social responsibilities, rather than a once and for all ontological diminishment. As McCoy puts it:

Jesus Christ as Redeemer is the Incarnate Lord who continues and fulfills the process initiated in creation; the Incarnate One performs a task set in God's creative intention, a task achieved in the light of sin but not a function that would have been unnecessary without sin. For Christian faith and action, Incarnation directs our attention to the triune God, to creation in process toward a goal as well as to the Logos become flesh.²⁰

In this christological position, McCoy rejects anything that would interfere with the freedom which renders covenantal interaction meaningful. As incarnation redirects our attention toward a process, toward a goal, it intensifies and illuminates the steadfast purpose of God already present in the original act of creation.

But McCoy puts the connection between creation and incarnation much more boldly: "the act (Logos) made flesh reveals the act (Logos) made world."²¹ Having so strongly affirmed the connection between the Incarnate One and the world, two of his key themes, intellectual pursuit and the striving for social progress, naturally follow. Loyalty to Christ, which is to say, covenantal loyalty to God, includes loyalty to all humankind and all worthy human endeavor.

Nonetheless, McCoy recognizes that our communities are, especially in the quickened pace of the late twentieth century, constantly confronted and "apparently" threatened with onrushing developments. McCoy's christology is a tailored fit for these onrushing developments, since he sees the "Incarnate Christ" as the one who "can give hope and courage to confront an apparently threatening reality, insight for response, and strength to move into an uncertain future."²²

Throughout his work, McCoy avoids the rendering of *logos* as Word, insisting instead on *dabar*, an earlier term from the putative Hebrew. McCoy would have us translate this critical incarnational term from the Prologue of John as "*covenant action*." The best English equivalent for *dabar*, other than "covenant action," is, he contends, "I give you my word."²³ Polanyi's insight into the fiduciary dimension of all human knowing is here joined to McCoy's creative adaptation of the Protestant, covenantal tradition, a tradition which has always found salvation by faith as primary, faith being understood as in Martin Luther's usage as *trust*.

II. MCCOY'S SEVEN (or thereabouts) DEADLY SINS

1. THE ONTOLOGICAL PEAK

Anyone who adopts what McCoy calls the "imperial mood" in his writing or speech is likely to be asked, "And from what ontological peak do you make such a statement?"²⁴ Again and again, McCoy points to the provisional, historical, moving nature of human life and knowledge. As discussed above, he does not mean that human knowledge is not true—just that the greatness of the covenanting God is greater than any single, or collective, human viewpoint. The limitation of the human perspective before God calls for openness and cooperation with other human communities as the sensible way to broaden our limited perspectives. Pluralism is thus vital to McCoy's thought. Human beings need to hear one another in order to transcend their own limitations. Such cross-cultural listening is evidently part of the divine architecture. But in order to converse with other cultures, other religions, other races, we must speak as would be partners and would be friends, not as imperial conquerors. So when McCoy addresses the current state of theology,

he first asks: “How can religion and deity be reconceptualized without assuming a universal point of view or reducing the variety of faiths to fit a single definition?”²⁵ All expressed points of view must instead recognize their own historical limitations, the need for pluralistic discussion, and the goal of global solidarity.

According to McCoy, belief in Jesus Christ should keep those who believe off the ontological peak: “The confession that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life seems to me a confession of Christian faith that adjudges Christians as well as others as *not being* the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”²⁶

Proclamations from the ontological peak have undoubtedly done much damage through the centuries of human history. However, at this stage of human history, McCoy’s warning seems particularly apropos; for a truly global conversation among the world’s peoples and faiths is unlikely when one or more sides is speaking in the “imperial mood.” Christians most of all might remember that much of the Sermon on the Mount is about humility: “Blessed are the poor in spirit” . . . Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” For the wrath of McCoy is revealed against all who ascend and speak from the ontological peak.

2. INDIVIDUALISM

Undoubtedly taking a cue from Polanyi, H. Richard Niebuhr, and others, McCoy sees individualism as an unfortunate byproduct of the Enlightenment philosophy. McCoy’s covenantal theology and anthropology run directly counter to individualist tendencies. McCoy would contend that the breakup of the Enlightenment project and the problems left in its wake are due to the falsified, mythical notion of the individual from Descartes forward. The very posing of the subject/object distinction as a philosophical problem, as well as the philosophical skepticism which may be said to have arisen out of the failure to resolve such questions, questions which only arise when it is assumed that knowledge takes place between an isolated knower and a set of facts, McCoy would disallow at the outset. The fiduciary dimension of all knowledge and the way our community initiates us into its insights through its elaborate filtering mechanisms are prior, unaccounted for, and unpaid debts in the Cartesian and subsequent individualistic systems. As McCoy puts it:

Just as the experience of humanity generally is one of being in midpassage, so also emerging into self-awareness as individuals is discovering that we are joining a process already under way before we arrive.²⁷

3. TOO “CHRISTIAN”

McCoy wants Christian theology to rid itself of “narrow, impersonal conceptions of truth” and to open itself to a new kind of global conversation which encompasses the broadest imaginable range of human interest and commitment:

The diversity of academic viewpoints is opened to us through Christian faith, and the necessity of taking the variety seriously is affirmed. Not only do we learn to be grateful for the companions who confront us with the limits of our vision, but we see also that the academic context of rigor and disagreement may become an arena of God’s self-revelation and call to commitment . . .²⁸

From this unflinching openness to diverse viewpoints, McCoy actually opposes, at least on church-related campuses and seminaries, furtherance of the sense of Christian uniqueness. This concern, which he somehow got the Board of

Education of the United Methodist Church to publish in 1972, should be understood in its historical context, a context wherein McCoy's chief concern was Christian dominance. Paradoxically, McCoy is arguing that, in our current global context, Christian faithfulness requires more than Christian input.

As a medical practitioner might do, McCoy assesses the serious symptoms of Western theology and is led to his diagnosis: the culprit is the "Constantinian paradigm" which "has assumed and accepted the *dominance* of organized Christianity in society."²⁹ This Constantinian paradigm includes the tendency to restrict theology to the ecclesiastical sphere. Hence both Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth are equally flawed in this shared assumption, regardless of the materially different positions they take on other points. Bernard Lonergan and David Tracy are found to be somewhat improved over their Protestant brethren, but they are still faulted because their pluralism is limited to Christian pluralism.³⁰ But the strongest fire is directed at Thomas F. Torrance, whose Barthian, neo-orthodox interpretations are found to be emanating from the ontological peak.³¹ In his published works, his personal presentations, and his social efforts, McCoy truly celebrates the emerging global culture. Any proposed theology which is not pluralistic, all-inclusive, and ultimately global will not meet his approval. Christian orthodoxy or neo-orthodoxy he dismisses as something of a new fad, an understandable, yet inadequate and somewhat regrettable response to the current historical situation.

McCoy really wants to avoid separating what is Christian and what is fully human without having them be identified. His global vision would forbid no one from the conversation and would likewise have no one dominate that conversation.³²

4. WHINING

Perhaps because he is convinced that God is working through even the most problematic events of human history, McCoy does not despair at the vast changes thrust upon our current time; and he does not sympathize with those who do. So when McCoy heard Karl Rahner's remark that "theology is tired," he seemed to enjoy another Catholic theologian's response: "It is not theology but Rahner that is tired."³³ Delving beneath the humor of this interchange, we may glimpse the fundamental challenge which is now presented to theology. Rahner, by most all accounts, represents one of the most interesting and prolific theological writers of the twentieth century. Yet McCoy sees him, and most of the great theologians of our century, as more or less passé; for "Western theology is caught between the currents of pluralism and the forces of liberation emerging now in global society."³⁴ As McCoy sees it, one can either bemoan the shrinking domain of church and theology, or one can rejoice at the way God is working through the emerging pluralism and liberation. McCoy's theology and ethics clearly choose the latter and forego any sense of nostalgia for what is passing away.

Addressing the needs of the present, McCoy writes: "our own home cannot be identical with the one that our parents or grandparents occupied. Our task is to make a home of the place in which we now live." With a touch of his characteristic humor, McCoy quips about those who feel troubled by the difficulties of the present time: "My father got to marry my mother, but I must go out and marry a perfect stranger."³⁵ For McCoy, ours is an exciting time. We should respond faithfully, rejoice, and be glad in it.

5. RATIONALISM

The Polanyian influence on McCoy is evidenced by his consistent call for something more than rational in

addressing the most serious issues. Yet in saying this, it should be remembered that the tacit dimension of human knowing is not irrational or infra-rational. More accurately, it is pre-rational or perhaps supra-rational. McCoy, in his professed likes and dislikes of a given theologian or even of a theological school, seems to be influenced by such an understanding of the tacit power that energizes and drives the whole process forward.

Arguing for something more than the exclusively rational, he writes:

identity crises are not overcome by analysis and understanding exclusively. These procedures may lead to recognition of the dilemma and to rational comprehension of possible solutions. But life is more encompassing than reason, however broadly conceived. Real living is acting, meeting, responding with believing, reflecting, evaluating as a constant accompaniment.³⁶

McCoy's overall direction seems as much guided by intelligent hunches as by intelligent analysis. For example, when reading *When gods Change*, particularly the early chapters, one gets the feeling that he confronted the theological aporia of our time, felt the futility of attempting to rework the old system, and then just found something of a Hegelian sublation (*Aufhebung*) through the wholehearted adoption of liberation, pluralism, and globalism, three movements toward which he was already predisposed, if not actively involved.

Once McCoy has embraced liberation, pluralism, and globalism as solutions rather than problems, his dismissal of the discursive direction of certain Thomist writers (Garrigou-Lagrange) and of Barth and Eberhard Jüngel begins to make sense. The problem is apparently not in what is being advocated. At least some of what they are arguing for is similar to what McCoy would affirm. McCoy's objection seems to be in the mode of the discourse itself, which isolates itself through an excessive rationality targeted at a thin slice of church theologians and philosophers. As McCoy puts it:

it is necessary to recognize that we live, not in a time of the twilight of the gods or the death of God, but rather in a time of the reappearance of the gods and the manifest liveliness of God. The fears of theologians that religion and theology are fading away derive from the theologians' insularity. In the world outside sectarian and academic enclaves, it is a time of the dawning of new and multiple deities, a time when isolated religious communities are being drawn out of themselves by a globalization of culture. It is a time when the reality of religious believing is inundating the rational methods of the Constantinian paradigm. It is a time of changing gods and changing theologies.³⁷

So once again the problem, the crisis, becomes McCoy's opportunity and road to new insight. The gods are reappearing and "the manifest liveliness of God" is at work in our time, but the reappearance that McCoy envisions is embodied, where, for example, "a kiss may give meaning to forgiveness beyond the power of explanation."³⁸

6. RACISM

Just as a kiss may say more about forgiveness than a discourse about it, McCoy has done more about racism than he has written about it. In his earlier years in North Carolina, his pro-integration activities in church ministry and on the Duke campus brought him into heated conflict with some church authorities. Later, in July, 1961, he actually planned the Mission to Mississippi with Martin Luther King, Jr. and was briefly arrested there. As a probable result of the manner in which he organized the efforts, McCoy was not badly treated. Before any public appearances, he contacted the local authorities involved, informed them of his intentions, and called them to their highest understanding of the gospel.

McCoy relates racism to the failure to think pluralistically: “The ability to perceive plurality in the human community, rather than regard others as inferior versions of ourselves, is no small achievement.”³⁹ McCoy sees pluralism as a many faceted movement with philosophical, social, cultural, and theological possibilities of varied development. Its opposite would be a kind of monism, a “one size fits all” view which would fall into McCoy’s general distaste for the “imperial mood.”

7. THE FALLACY OF DICHOTOMOUS THINKING

One of McCoy’s favorite whips to crack, “the fallacy of dichotomous thinking,” appears wherever seemingly irresolvable bifurcations force thinking and believing into reduced avenues of expression. Here especially, McCoy sees the problem as the methodological starting point, particularly those arising out of the dreaded Constantinian paradigm. The problematic list includes subject/object and subjective/objective; essence/existence and substance/accident; noumenal/phenomenal and theoretical/practical.⁴⁰ However, one could easily add faith and biblical studies, science and religion and yet others. McCoy’s critique of neo-orthodoxy arises out of his conviction that Barth et al. have exacerbated the dichotomies:

First, it continued the dichotomies of Western thought, took them to radical theological conclusions, and thereby hastened the crisis of a theological paradigm based upon a split world. Second, neo-orthodoxy continued the well-established tradition restricting theology to the Christian ecclesiastical sphere. Indeed, neo-orthodox theology makes it clear that intellectual bifurcations and ecclesiastical limitations reinforce one another.⁴¹

In McCoy’s analysis of these bifurcations, different poles will be experimented with before the trend swings back the other direction. However, neither pole of the bifurcated world view will sufficiently address the current challenges. Instead, McCoy’s solution is to foster the stream of covenantal thinking which begins with Bullinger, reaches a peak in Cocceius, and is fostered by diverse thinkers closer to our own time, such as Charles Sanders Peirce, Michael Polanyi, and H. Richard Niebuhr.

While interesting studies could be done on how each of these sources affects him, McCoy, like all competent theologians, is a unique synthesis of these various sources. What seems to be a common theme is the attempt to overcome the dualisms or dichotomies that have pervaded critical thought. So, for example, Niebuhr’s project of a relational ethics of responsibility is incorporated in McCoy’s development of covenantal commitment. From such thinkers as Niebuhr, McCoy grasps the significance of the problem of privileging one pole or another of a dichotomy. He then attempts to seize upon the problem as a clue to the solution, a solution which will involve an Hegelian *Aufhebung*, in which the framework is enlarged by pluralistic inclusivity.

III. A DELIGHT IN INNOVATION

Charles McCoy is a theologian who delights in the new, the fresh, the innovative. He really appears to thrive in the challenging arena of shifting paradigms and radical change, even threatening change. As such, he is one who was born at the right moment in history; for he does not fear change. He actually likes it.

Change is not only something in which McCoy sees possibilities for the good. Failure to adapt to changing conditions, clinging to an outworn past, he characterizes as sinful. In contrast to the Golden Age/Fall mythology of Genesis 3, McCoy counters: “humans are created not at the height of their potential, but mutable, in process toward a consummation hidden in God. Sin means a fall into immutability, into stasis.”⁴² In this view, immutability, blocking

the process intended for humanity, constitutes the corruption of human nature, which must be understood as mutable nature.

By implication, most churches would be characteristically guilty of this understanding of sinfulness: “Yet the activities and worship in the churches seem organized to insure that nothing new or unanticipated will ever happen again.”⁴³ McCoy’s *Transforming Cross* argues the point from the positive perspective: standing before the cross of Christ does not leave us as we were. The cross transforms us in the general direction of liberation, pluralism, and globalism. Resistance to the transformational process imprisons human life:

A living society requires diversity of commitments, values and purposes in order to make room for and encourage the recognition of the innovation without which the past becomes a noose and the changing present a scaffold trapdoor into oblivion.⁴⁴

As we saw above, covenantal commitment supports change once it recognizes the historical nature of all things human. The fundamental Christian insight and belief of incarnation likewise recognizes the particularities of historical human nature and in the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth successfully addresses those particulars.

Throughout *The Responsible Campus*, McCoy advises Christian colleges to cease looking toward the sectarian past and to accept instead what he calls the “public present.” The implication, for both the church college and more radically, for Christianity itself, is that McCoy sees a role for church colleges and for Christianity writ large, but only if they are continually transformed, only if change is embraced instead of resisted:

Views of the cosmos held by churchmen in the past have been overturned, to the profit of man and faith. Cherished beliefs have been called into question, usually forcing Christian thinkers to discard spurious or irrelevant meanings. Painful as this process may be, it is essential if Christianity is not to settle into a mire of antiquated notions and replace faith in the living God with *idolatrous loyalty* to an ever dying past.⁴⁵

Such “idolatrous loyalty” to outworn notions of the past might even be considered for membership among McCoy’s deadly sins, perhaps as the most pernicious of them all.

From Polanyi, McCoy takes the insight that “the Christian understanding of God is not a static dogma but rather a heuristic impulse to break through and move beyond accepted conceptual frameworks.”⁴⁶ Religious belief serves to prepare its symbiotes for the exigencies of the required journey by the strengthening action of fiduciary relations. In McCoy’s view, the fearful will cling while the faithful will move forward in spite of apparent threat and danger. McCoy’s insight is that the greatest danger of our time normally lies in the status quo:

human communities *dwell* in their faith in order to *break out* toward God’s future. The absorption of change is always a central purpose of religion; and this purpose of religion means ever new beginnings.⁴⁷

According to McCoy, theological change is possible, historically demonstrable, and generally desirable. The hope for theology which he sees is based on theologians ceasing to bemoan the crumbling paradigms of the past, and instead, energetically embracing new possibilities thrust before us. He sees one era closing and another opening. Success or failure will depend upon how three testing conditions are met: liberation, pluralism, and emerging global culture.

IV. INTERLOCUTORY REMARKS

THE “WHAT” OF BELIEF

A repeated theme in McCoy’s work is that “believed-in reality” draws people forward in their covenantal living. But what role does the *content* of human belief play? Perhaps to pursue methodology with greater focus, McCoy’s statements seem to leave some ambiguity on the “what” of belief:

Covenants of human living are founded on believed-in *reality*, that final sovereignty or deity that is the source of original creativity, that defines consummation, assures coherence, and to which a root metaphor refers. Humans live, not toward illusion, but toward what they are convinced is actual.⁴⁸

As we briefly touched upon above, what is the reality of the referent? Is it the belief that generates “original creativity,” or is it the reality of the living God that does so? No one would deny the considerable power of human believing, but can anything more be said about the what or the who of belief? How much ontology is behind the epistemology? How important is it that the belief be based on, and then again and again be increasingly based on, the reality of the referent itself?

By way of analogy, scientists have many theories or beliefs about the physical universe. While these beliefs also have a shaping power, some of them have proven to be wrong and to have been harmful to those who had assumed their validity. Such was certainly the case with the now discarded medical practice of bleeding. Just as science continually reshapes itself on the basis of new discoveries about its referent, what role, what interaction is there between the actuality of God and religious belief?

Consider McCoy’s statement: “We must remember that a god becomes God in human believing.”⁴⁹ Several points come to mind. The first is the generosity of spirit in which McCoy insists upon addressing all human faith commitments. Furthermore, his understanding of the fiduciary aspect of religious faith reminds us that *trust* and *value* are at the center of such human faith, wherever it is placed. But what happens when the trust is misplaced? Can the values be wrong? And since I am sure that McCoy would agree that values can be wrong and that trust can be misplaced, does this not imply that the *content* of belief is a vital part of the entire quest? Dramatic episodes of faith gone awry abound—Waco, Jonestown, Cheiry, Switzerland, Hale-Bopp, etc. In each of these destructive events, a strong fiduciary element, and perhaps even a covenantal one, was present. Was it not *what* they believed that led to disaster? After all, without some cognitive content to religious belief, ethics itself is not feasible.

Is the God that we believe in also capable of speech? If God is not to be thought of as deaf and dumb, then what role, if any, is there for revelation? McCoy believes that God has/is an “awesome power . . . coursing through natural and historical occurrence.” In addition to natural and historical occurrences, is direct, personal interaction possible with God? an interaction that leads to what Eberhard Jüngel has called a *Sprachgewinn*, “a speech gain”?

As an advocate of “dynamism and becoming,” McCoy writes: “Change is a constitutive element of all human understanding of God and therefore also of all theology and ethics.”⁵⁰ I believe that this advocacy of change in theology and ethics implies that content can be wrong, that it often is wrong, or more positively, given the historical nature of human life, however good our thinking may be, it can improve. But progress in this or any other sphere can only be measured by the relative approach toward or regression from the referent.

LIBERATION—ITS MEANING AND VALUE

While appreciating McCoy's stated and implied understandings of liberation, some questions still arise. Is all liberation good? Should some change be resisted? Has McCoy ever met a liberation he did not like?

McCoy's advocacy of change predisposes him toward the new, but as a theologian who stands within the covenantal tradition, what are the values of the old that he would have us maintain? What is the relation between liberation as a general principle, and *what* people do once they are liberated? Taking Aristotle's criterion from Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is liberation for the sake of something else, or for its own sake? So, for example, should liberation be complemented by the pursuit of aretaic ideals, such as the true, the beautiful, and the good? What happens to liberation sought apart from a steadfast ideal?

GRACE, PERSON, AND CONTINUITY

In the final analysis, McCoy, who is an unflinching advocate of human thought, effort, action, and change, does offer a stabilizing word about something more than human effort:

When all that we can do is done, however, we must remember that we rely not on human energies alone but on a sovereign power at work in the reality of historical process, a power making for liberation—"new every morning; great in faithfulness" (Lam.3:23). And strange as it may seem, when we commit our lives to that sovereign reality we experience a surge of power greater than our own efforts, greater even than the synergistic power experienced in community.⁵¹

After so much emphasis on human effort, this *fiduciary* confession of something which comes to us beyond our own work, something which may bear the venerable title of grace, is a welcome balance. Is this something also and perhaps primarily a some *one*? If so, what are the ongoing, personal qualities of Deity that might be understood within McCoy's covenantal framework? Certainly, becoming, change, and transformation are human imperatives in McCoy's theology, but what of God? How much continuity is in God?

A CONCLUDING APPRECIATION

Polanyi's great metaphor, "Dwelling In and Breaking Out," might be the best way to summarize McCoy's lifelong commitments and career efforts in theology, ethics, church affairs, politics, social relations, and consulting with business leaders. A sense of excitement, enjoyment, and hope is often manifest in McCoy's work, qualities which arise from his eye for creative possibilities. And these creative insights are most likely to appear during moments of general crisis and confusion. In this light consider McCoy's assessment, published in 1980, of the theological situation:

Theology as practiced in the Western world exists between one era now drawing to a close and another just dawning. A profound transformation in theology is taking place around us.⁵²

Charles McCoy has already been an influential part of that transformation.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Charles S. McCoy, *The Responsible Campus: Toward a New Identity for the Church-Related College* (Nashville: Division of Higher Education, Board of Education, The United Methodist Church, 1972), 61.
- ² Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition* With a Translation of *De testamento seu foedere Dei unico et aeterno (1534)* by Heinrich Bullinger (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 39.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 52. Much recent neo-Thomist thought cannot be said to fall into metaphysical rigidity. See the analysis of W. Norris Clarke's and David Burrell's work in my *Analogical Possibilities: How Words Refer to God* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.
- ⁵ Charles S. McCoy, *When gods Change: Hope for Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 172.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 178. See also, *Ibid.*, 191, 198.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 180.
- ¹¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972), 2, as cited in McCoy, *When gods Change*, 24.
- ¹² McCoy and Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism*, 59.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 75.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.
- ¹⁵ McCoy, *When gods Change*, 105.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 191.
- ¹⁷ McCoy, *Responsible Campus*, 60.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ Charles S. McCoy and Marjorie Casebier McCoy, *The Transforming Cross* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977), 84.
- ²⁰ *Responsible Campus*, 60.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 65.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 61.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 62.
- ²⁴ See, for example, *When gods Change*, 29.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁸ McCoy, *Responsible Campus*, 65-6.

²⁹ McCoy, *When gods Change*, 28. Emphasis added.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 80.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

³² *Ibid.*, 214, 221.

³³ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

³⁶ McCoy, *Responsible Campus*, 42-3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 200.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁴² McCoy, *When gods Change*, 215.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁴ McCoy, *Responsible Campus*, 100.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 64. Emphasis added.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴⁷ McCoy, *When gods Change*, 148.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 238. In *The Responsible Campus*, p.63, McCoy borrows a phrase of H. Richard Niebuhr in referring to God at work in creation, "the grace of doing nothing."

⁵² *Ibid.*, 166.

Faith as a First Principle in Charles McCoy's Theology and Ethics

Richard Gelwick

ABSTRACT Key Words: faith, fiducia, multiculturalism, pluralism, Cocceius, H.R. Niebuhr, Michael Polanyi, campus ministry, theology/university, commitment, covenant.

Charles McCoy's Christian theology and ethics are based in a covenantal understanding that provides a way for Christians to engage the many views in the modern university. McCoy's approach has both openness and commitment; it is akin to and supported by the fiduciary thought of Johannes Cocceius, H. R. Niebuhr, and Michael Polanyi. By seeing the way faith as trust operates in human beings, McCoy has laid foundations for Christian theology in a multicultural and pluralistic age. Most important is McCoy's argument that there are many theologies, even Christian theologies, and the life of Christian faith is always one of growth and of exploration.

As a doctoral student under Charles Sherwood McCoy, I now realize that it takes a life time to recognize debts to a great teacher. While I have prized being the first doctoral student to graduate under his supervision and to have had his influence in choosing and pursuing the thought of Michael Polanyi, it is only by reflection that I see how grand his teaching was. In 1960, when I went to Pacific School of Religion to study under McCoy, I went with great expectations of him. It had been reported that H. Richard Niebuhr had said of McCoy "that of all the doctoral students that I have taught, I would rather have him as a colleague more than any other."¹ Further, another Yale Divinity School faculty member, J. Edward Dirks, had said that Charles McCoy was instituting at Pacific School what would be the most outstanding graduate program in religion in higher education in America.² Looking across a continent to Berkeley, soon to become a revolutionary center in higher education, I was attracted to the curriculum that McCoy was building for his teaching program. At Pacific School, religion in higher education and campus ministry were being approached through studies of "Christianity and Contemporary Intellectual Movements" and the "Mission of the Church on Campus" taught by McCoy. In these core courses, it was clear that his approach was toward a rigorous theological grappling with the intellectual beliefs and behavior of the academic world. At a chaplain's conference at Yale University in 1957, I had noticed McCoy's aggressive intellectual acumen in an exchange with Julian Hartt, principal conference speaker.

What I found so important in Charles McCoy's teaching and writing is expressed in the title of this presentation "faith as a first principle." From understanding faith as a dynamic and integral foundation of Christian life to faith as a pivotal issue in Christian theology and ethics in their engagement with society, McCoy developed the primal roles of faith in our being as humans. I do not recall seeing it in McCoy's printed words, but it was a dictum that one should speak of "Christian faith" and not "the Christian faith." It was fundamental to McCoy's outlook since I first studied with him that faith is a condition of being human, that faith is integral to all human being, and one could not speak of "the Christian faith" as if it were monolithic and static. In one sense, McCoy early saw there are many Christian faiths, that faith is fluid with the flow of human being, and that Christians share with all humans this faith characteristic. Put another way, McCoy's theology while grounded in his own Christian commitment was already open to and aware of the pluralism, diversity and creativity that we have come to see in our time of multicultural emphasis.

Besides McCoy's sense of the primal nature of faith in our being human, McCoy was a pioneer in pursuing the ways of faith in the depth of our intellectual formulations and in our practical affairs. Three figures among McCoy's many writings early stood out as examples of his pursuit of the role of faith in life and in thought. One was

McCoy's study and use of the covenant theology of Johannes Cocceius that emphasized the personal fiduciary relation of God and humans in contrast to the formalism of orthodox Calvinism. Another was McCoy's study and use of H. Richard Niebuhr's relational and radical monotheistic thinking. The third was McCoy's attention to Michael Polanyi's fiduciary epistemology, who at that time had no doctoral students and few theologians searching his books. What all of these major thinkers have in common in their work is a deep grasp of the way we are persons of faith, and their grasp is one that takes us to central issues of commitment.

When speaking about the nature of faith within McCoy's theology, as in most Protestant theology, it is important to note that faith is not a supernatural act of God in the soul. Faith, in part, is an act of human being, though invited by the ground of all being and truth that Christians name as God. Faith is premise and disposition, network of background and community understandings and readiness to trust and to follow. McCoy's sense of the nature of faith that is being developed in his thought is akin to the *willingness* of the scientist to accept atoms as true just as much as it is akin to a Christian's acceptance of the doctrine of the Incarnation. Indeed McCoy follows in the Reformation teaching of justification by faith alone where the chief moment of faith is *fiducia*, trust, a supremely personal and involving confidence in the grace of God. When turning to the scientific disciplines, their faith is found to have a comparable structure.³ This notion of faith fits Polanyi's comparison of his fiduciary principle in knowing as being like the "Pauline scheme" of redemption.

As a theologian called to address the religious situation in higher education, McCoy's approach was appropriate to dealing with any discipline or dimension because it sprung from his dealing with the nature of faith as a first principle of human being. How he understood faith and how he applied it to the range of issues of our century would unfold in a career that moved to development of a center for ethics and public policy, centers for business ethics as well as explorations in the arts and in historical theology.

This comprehensive range of able theological writing and teaching is partly explained by what I am calling McCoy's first principle, his understanding of faith. To show this fecund understanding, I want to examine what I regard as a McCoy *tour de force* and a prologomena to a life of advancing our understanding of faith.

In 1964, the Faculty Christian Fellowship, a national ecumenical organization of Christian scholars, associated with the National Council of Churches and the national Student Christian Federation, and also the sponsor of the journal, *The Christian Scholar* which later became *Soundings*, began publishing a series on "Faith and Learning: Examining the Academic Disciplines." For this series, McCoy wrote "The Meaning of Theological Reflection."⁴ In this essay, McCoy set forth an approach rooted in his understanding of faith that remains a viable way for theology today and in the future. As we will see, the essay shows his roots in Cocceius' covenant theology, H. R. Niebuhr, and Michael Polanyi, but it distinctively challenges all humans, premodern, modern, and postmodern to examine and to discover the character and meaning of faith. Four concerns structure McCoy's discussion in this essay: 1) the implications of reflection in faith, 2) the meaning of theology, 3) misunderstandings which impede conversation in the academic community, and 4) the role of theology in the university's conversation.⁵ What will emerge is the sense in which McCoy's early approach through his focus on faith as a first principle is why his theology is intrinsically post-critical.

Implications of Reflection in Faith

McCoy begins by acknowledging his own standpoint in Christian faith. From that standpoint, McCoy sees in the world "an organic wholeness and covenantal faithfulness." This world's coherence are grounded, not in human

imagination, but in God known through trust in the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and particularly in Jesus Christ. Then in a very subsidiary and focal awareness like formulation, McCoy says: “As trust and as standpoint our faith opens us to the possibility of knowledge and provides spacious dimensions for investigation.”⁶ He does not say just “standpoint” but “as trust and as standpoint” which combines the indwelling, the commitment, and the attending to of knowing and of exploring emerging in Polanyi’s thought. Further, McCoy immediately recognizes that there are other “trusts and standpoints” with different commitments. He claims that all persons have this character as he says “All who profess knowledge have a foundation of basic trust and presuppose some conception of reality which shapes their investigations and molds their conclusions.”⁷ Significantly, McCoy in the description of faith emphasizes “trust” which is the active and personal commitment of the self. He clearly does not limit or reduce faith to a set of intellectual propositions.

“Trusts and standpoints” is definitely akin to the structure of tacit knowing though not derived directly from it. In this formulation, the person is the pivot around and through which trust and standpoint occur. In the classical sense of *fides qua creditur*, the faith by which one believes, and *fides quae creditur*, the faith which is believed, McCoy’s approach sees them as together. Just as Polanyi could not see explicit knowledge without the fiduciary elements seen in subsidiary awareness, McCoy cannot see Christian standpoint or any standpoint apart from the personal acts of trust. What also stands out seen from our present perspective is that McCoy fashions his theological outlook in a post-critical way without making any argument for the post-critical itself. What this ease in approach suggests is that what we now call “post-critical” was already developed in McCoy’s thinking as he worked in the field of theology and that what Polanyi offered was support and further elaboration of this approach.

In concise terms, McCoy describes the Christian standpoint that he holds and that he sees Christians share.⁸ One feature is a belief in a unity that “underlies and permeates the variety of our experience, that meaning and purpose are present within the perplexities of history.” This unity is grounded in God who is hidden and revealed. Jesus Christ is the divine logos become flesh, and logos is understood not as logical reason but the divine ordering that is mysterious yet self-disclosing. Most important is that in the divine logos, God has not only created the world but has also promised faithfulness to humankind. It is from our faith in God’s covenanting with us that we can believe that in our experience we are confronted with “a dependable reality.” The natural and moral order of the world are dependent upon this God who is faithful and the “Power beyond the powers of nature and history.” It is in this “context” as McCoy calls it, that Christians see the possibility of knowledge yet deny the finality of their and other’s conceptualizations of truth.

The term “context” here bears comment because it again underlines McCoy’s sense of faith and knowing as embodied not only in person and community but also culture, society, and history. The beliefs Christians and others hold always function out of the background of assumptions that they have lived and used. Trust and standpoint cannot be detached from the layers and communities of our existence.

Also, McCoy’s rejection of a finality in Christian or other conceptualizations of truth emphasizes the venture and risk in our trust and standpoint. We are so involved in our knowing that faith cannot be a seizure or capturing of truth. Our faith as Christians or as any other belief system is finite seeking the infinite. Trust and standpoint become a following always subject to revision and to correction.

It is at this point of the complementary relation between commitment and openness in the nature of Christian faith in “the vision of God as Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer which the event of Jesus Christ gives us” that McCoy introduces Michael Polanyi.⁹ McCoy describes the way the British physical chemist turned philosopher sees “the fiduciary element in rigorous thought.” McCoy points to Polanyi’s two types of authority, general and specific, the

first providing a framework of inquiry and the second dictating conclusions. McCoy also introduces Polanyi's criticism of the ideal of detached knowledge and the concept of tacit knowing. These insights from Polanyi help to show that "to arguments that this commitment closes us to reality we can only reply by showing the spacious dimensions of truth to which it does indeed open us and by suggesting that other commitments, e.g. logical positivism, enclose one within a much narrower reality."¹⁰

As a theologian then, McCoy sees this understanding of faith as setting out the possibility of engagement and of discovery with all seekers of truth. Reflection in faith is dialogical, from faith to faith, and for him such dialogue begins in a context of Christian belief in the Incarnation that means minimally four things: 1) that the entire universe is sacred by its Creation in Jesus Christ and worthy of rigorous study, 2) that Christian scholars are called to think sacramentally into this Logos which nature and history reveal and conceal, 3) in all authentic pursuit of truth we are responding to the call of God, and 4) a Christian scholar stands in finitude between the truth that forms the basis of his/her thought and the truth to which he/she moves, the truth that is the fullness of God.¹¹

Here McCoy is writing in the early 1960's, a time when campus ministry was vigorous and reasonably funded. He speaks to the role of the professional campus minister and to the lay Christian in an open and inquiring university. He has tried to show how a person can be both committed and open and how this stance is at one with all persons. Scholars across the country and students working with him felt inspired and equipped to carry on this discussion in the academy as rightful members of a community of inquiry, of faith and of learning.

The Meaning of Theology

From this faith component in all human knowing and being, McCoy went on to show that theology is a normal and helpful consequence of this condition. But theology, as McCoy sees it, is not confined to reason explicating the contents of Christian belief. Theology arises first from our being creatures of faith. The origins and deeper meaning of theology is in the exploration of ultimate commitments whether Christian or of some other persuasion.

The grounds for this understanding McCoy finds in the uses made of the term by Plato, Aristotle and Clement of Alexandria in the ancient world and in Michael B. Foster, Kierkegaard, Wilhelm Dilthey, R. G. Collingwood, T. E. Hulme, Karl Mannheim, and H. Richard Niebuhr in the modern world.¹² The essence of this understanding of theology is that theology is the exploration of "absolute presuppositions" and the clarification of "conceptualizations based on revelatory experiences."¹³ It is important to notice that McCoy's definition of theology includes two contrasting and opposing notions. From its Greek origins, theology is like first philosophy, the examination of the most basic assumptions of reality. From its biblical origins, theology is not philosophical reasoning but recital or story of those illuminating and integrating moments that hold us yet cannot be fully put into words.

McCoy's conception suggests that all persons can and should do theology whether they are Christians, positivists, or atheists. For him, the study of theology is a way of knowing developed out of Greek philosophical and biblical roots that pertains to all human endeavor. From Plato, Aristotle and Clement come the sense of theology as investigating ultimate understanding of reality, metaphysics, or first philosophy except that Clement adds the biblical view of God's ineffable mystery. This addition by Clement creates the essential tension within theology of dealing with both the rational and revelatory components of human commitments and conceptualizations of reality. McCoy states this universal applicability of theology as rational examination of ultimate beliefs coupled with the ineffable mystery of the ultimate in the following way:

This tension not only illumines the grounding in revelation of Christian theology. Turned back upon

theological reflection, it suggests that no ultimate conception of reality is intellectually self-validating, but always rests upon postulates and convictions which are not self-evident. At the foundation of every total view of the world, there is a point analogous to that of God's revelation for Christians upon which the whole rests.¹⁴

McCoy calls this human condition the "theological predicament." While "Christian thought...rests ultimately on faith, so also it may be demonstrated that the views of others rest upon convictions beyond demonstration in terms of reason and experience."¹⁵

It is helpful here to notice McCoy's broad understanding of revelation. In saying that all persons participate in the theological predicament, McCoy notices that everyone has their equivalent of Christian revelation in their ultimate presuppositions and commitments. Having faith in the value and validity of a comprehensive standpoint or absolute presupposition means being grasped by something beyond verification. Here we notice another view akin to Michael Polanyi's observation that we cannot both live and think within our commitments and at the same time examine them. In Polanyian terms, ultimate commitments or absolute presuppositions that guide us in discovery and finding of new knowledge are frameworks that we indwell for attending to a problem.

So far then, we have seen in McCoy's thought how faith is characteristic of human being and how this faith character presents all humans with the challenge of doing theology as a way of self-understanding of their commitments. Also, this attempt at self-understanding cannot be fulfilled by rational analysis alone because it is bound with our own trusts upon which we depend so personally that they cannot be fully explicated, only recognized. In a sense, it would be appropriate to quote Polanyi, "we know more than we can tell." McCoy, however, realizes that his view of theology is contrary to a number of contemporary views leading him to point out their "misunderstanding of theology."

Misunderstandings of Theology Impeding Academic Conversation

Today, perhaps more than in the 1960's, theology has receded from the public forum. Theological inquiry is even unlikely in most of the American Academy of Religion. What McCoy saw in misunderstandings of theology may help to explain this retreat and isolation.

Here McCoy's discussion is intense and polemical taking on major theological figures of the last two centuries. Limited by our time, we can only indicate McCoy's critique. It begins by noticing that in American higher education, excepting schools with continuing strong religious foundations such as Roman Catholic and fundamentalist, theology has been absent from the curriculum. This absence has arisen partly from the understanding among academics that theology is obscurantist, imperialistic, shoddy and uncritical, not worthy of academic status along with other disciplines. There is hope, McCoy thinks, that this view of theology is changing, but he cautions that we have to look at "the fault of theologians in the isolation and misunderstanding of theology."¹⁶

One general error of theologies in the last two centuries is the attempt to define a universal framework or condition and then to demonstrate how Christianity meets this condition better than any other standpoint or world view.¹⁷ Rationalism in the eighteenth century tried to show that the validity of Christian faith could be proven by rational means. Schleiermacher later tried to build a philosophy of religion of the religious consciousness and to show how Christian faith is superior in articulating human religious consciousness. Ritschl saw in humans the capacity to

value which is absent in nature and then saw in the Kingdom of God the way of fulfilling human's ethical nature. Even existentialism in its contemporary form is used to analyze the human predicament to which Christianity is the answer.

What McCoy then asserts reminds one of Polanyi's notable confession of limitations in the preface to *Personal Knowledge*, "All affirmations published in this book are my own personal commitments; they claim this, and no more than this for themselves." McCoy says:

Only by accepting and confessing this situation of particularity can the theologian be true to his task....if we are to relate theology to contemporary intellectual movements, then we must accept the theological stance of confessed commitments as our starting point, not seeking escape into a supposed universal point of reference.¹⁸

Despite this sharp critique of modern liberal theology, McCoy does express gratitude for the interest in new intellectual currents in theology which have taught us much.

Besides the error of trying to establish a universal standpoint of which Christian faith is the highest form, McCoy also criticizes those who have tried to limit theology to Christian faith.¹⁹ He notes two general consequences of this view: 1) theology is unrelated to metaphysics and first philosophy, and 2) Christian theology is the only theology. This limited vision of theology has had the value of countering the universalizing approach mentioned above, but it distorts the understanding of faith and the theological predicament. Among those who have segregated theology from philosophy are Gustaf Aulen and Hendrik Kraemer. Karl Barth, McCoy points out, "states the matter more carefully" by acknowledging that he knows that natural theology does exist but says that he cannot understand "how it is possible for it to exist." Barth also says that the knowledge of God attained by human reason is philosophical speculation, not God. McCoy questions whether Barth has confused metaphysics and natural theology and then goes on to suggest that this position at least has the merit of showing the possibility of conversation between Christians and other ways of thought.²⁰ Like Barth, Hendrik Kraemer separates theology from philosophy of religion and science of religion yet Kraemer saw in such efforts a "disguised theology" suggesting that exposing and examining such presuppositions and commitments could be a part of theological reflection.

The second misunderstanding of making theology too exclusively Christian is seen in those who claim that only Christian revelation provides the ground for theology. Besides being seen in Schleiermacher, Barth, Kraemer and others, but not in H. Richard Niebuhr, McCoy also finds it in Tillich. Tillich despite his interest in and openness to other religions claims that in the Logos become flesh, "Christian theology has a foundation which infinitely transcends the foundations of everything in the history of religion which could be called 'theology.'"²¹ Sir Walter Moberly, major spokesperson for "the university question" in Great Britain, takes the same stance in his description of theology as "the study of the self-revelation of the living God" and as done in the Christian community only by a committed person.²² This way of thinking leads to the mistaken separation of the church as a community of faith and the university as a community of learning. McCoy asks, "Is it true that no other community has 'faith' except the Christian church?" No wonder then that many would dismiss the church as a place of subjective thought and assign to the university the task of objective study. Such formulations by able theologians have unwittingly supported the false ideal of knowledge as objective, without presuppositions, and detached from the person by suggesting that theology is based upon a subjective condition not open to others.

The Role of Theology in the University's Conversation

The challenge of theology in the university is to hold in tension the two themes developed above. On the one hand, theology is to search for and examine those presuppositions on which "all academic discipline and intellectual system rest." On the other hand, theology is to acknowledge that there is a commitment beyond these presuppositions that defies our rational analysis and arises from that which grasps our heart. Here McCoy writes:

This dual meaning also illumines our meeting with persons in the university. We may meet them on apparently intellectual ground as we discuss ideas, compare ideologies. Beyond this, however, we seek to understand them as persons in the trust and loyalties by which they live.²³

This conversation cannot convert or produce faith, but it will clarify, enlarge, and open up the "the situation of real choice."

The Post-Critical and McCoy's Idea of Theology

From the review of McCoy's essay on "Theological Reflection," it is clear that his understanding of faith leads to a major epistemological emphasis. Faith as trust and as standpoint are basic to our knowing. Put another way, McCoy by making faith a first principle of doing any kind of theology demands an acknowledgement by the theologian, Christian or non-Christian - reflective believer or non-reflective believer, that they consider the trusts and standpoints that underlie their outlook. Further, this call for awareness of the prior trusts and the prior revelatory like phenomena that shape each person's standpoint is a call to start with one's own personal story rather than a preformed list of topics, issues, or doctrines. There is no theistic question, no Christological question, no ontological question, no eschatological question, no soteriological question, or other traditional question that determines the content. The question seems to be "Where are you coming from when you make claims about ultimate reality?" Such a way allows the person to both examine their own experience and to place themselves among the options that are alive, which may include the agnostic, the atheistic, or anti-metaphysical.

While this approach looks very open in principle, it may also be "logocentric" or biased toward the Western tradition of philosophy and of theology. To engage in the examination of first principles and of valued beliefs is the skill of those trained in such things. One can see how such a process would be possible and helpful to persons with theological and philosophical training. The person trained in physical or biological science may find such an inquiry difficult and probably uninteresting. As their standpoint is one that excludes the value of metaphysical inquiry, they will likely avoid or dismiss such a conversation. If they were postmodernist, they would see this conversation as weighted toward the established tradition and with little to gain.

Another way of considering this issue of defining theology as inquiry into our trusts and standpoints is to take McCoy's criticism of those who have tried to base theology upon some universal condition of human nature and experience. By building upon the premise that all humans are persons of faith, McCoy seems to have set up a universal condition to which his notion of theology is the answer. Theology is a way of self-understanding for all humans. However, McCoy does not fall into the same trap that the other Christian theologies did. The reason is that his notion of faith and of theology is open in terms of its content. Like Polanyi and the polarity of personal commitment and universal intent toward the truth, McCoy sees all of us as living by trust and standpoint, but those positions are our own. These positions may lead to standpoints that radically differ from others. There is no requirement in this thinking

process that we arrive at a common point, a universal truth. McCoy's faith principle, like Polanyi and H. Richard Niebuhr, does not have to arrive at a defined truth.

Still that position seems open to question, too. Behind this movement from faith as trust and standpoint to self-critical reflection upon our personal commitments and beliefs lies another tendency. There is an assumption that in looking for our basic presuppositions and loyalties, we will find our god or gods. It seems that there is a requirement for all humans that they have some "center of value" or loyalty. McCoy points out the later Barth's overcoming the limiting of theology to Christian revelation by quoting from Barth's *Evangelical Theology*:

But many things can be meant by the word "God." For this, reason there are many kinds of theologies. There is no man who does not have his own god or gods as the object of his highest desire and trust, or as the basis of his deepest loyalty and commitment. There is no one who is not to this extent also a theologian. There is, moreover, no religion, no philosophy, no world view that is not dedicated to some such divinity.²⁴

McCoy and Barth seem to share the same assumption which looks like a universal condition for all humans. But again, if one reads carefully, McCoy's statement is consistent as an expression of his own theology and leaves open the alternatives that could be expressed by contrary views. In thinking this way, McCoy is somewhat like Karl Barth's saying that he knows there is such a thing as natural theology yet he does not understand how it is possible for it to exist. Clearly there is a difference between saying that from my standpoint it seems that all persons have a center of value or god and saying that all persons must admit that they have an ultimate belief, god, or gods.

Logically and intentionally, McCoy's development of faith as a first principle is compelling. It is supported by the work of Polanyi and H. Richard Niebuhr. It fits the common outlook of our late twentieth century pluralism. The course of theology since the 1960's, however, raises a question. Looking back to the place of theology in the academic world, we do not see the rich discussion and creative development among scholars that was envisioned. The very idea of a national organization called "The Faculty Christian Fellowship" or a serious intellectual journal called "The Christian Scholar" seems quaint at best and fundamentalist and pietistic at worst. The theological renaissance within the academic world did not happen. The major voices of the Niebuhrs, Tillich, and Barth are nearly historical fossils. Many of those inspired to go into the academic world trained in theology are doing ethics, literature, philosophy, sociology and other studies where "theological reflection" is non-existent.

To what extent then does this deterioration in theological reflection follow from McCoy's standpoint and those who have shared a similar vocation? As already suggested, McCoy and those like him may have expected too much intellectually of the academic world. At Manchester University and later at Oxford, Polanyi was reported as notorious for turning social occasions into discussions of basic beliefs. Theologians following McCoy and Polanyi find themselves in the somewhat awkward position that their concern for basic faith commitments is not a common concern. Ethics has become the more common area of reflection in the academic forum, and theology seems left to the clergy and the seminary. Such a statement, however, is not effective in criticizing McCoy's understanding of theology because McCoy does not separate theology and ethics. A view of theology as only a discussion of systematic and coherent beliefs within a faith misses the thrust of McCoy's first principle. For McCoy, theology is always about trust as well as standpoint, or about our action as well as our conceptions. This implication of faith's determinative force in theological reflection is seen in McCoy's major book, *When Gods Change, Hope For Theology*.²⁵

Hope For Theology

Understanding McCoy's first principle will show both how theology is not as dead as suggested above and how theology is not separated from ethics. Looking at the changing of the gods in our time, McCoy sees hope because he sees a new pattern. Rather than focusing on particular standpoints or isolated types of view, McCoy emphasizes the wholeness of human experience. There is a fundamental relation of the person to the encompassing gift of the whole of experience that is our world. As God gave the world including us, there is a response of trust by our very primal receiving and dependence upon this world. As we rely upon this world and networks of communities to live and to work, we also again trust. Networks, loyalties, and faith from nature to human being are covenants, relationships of trust. So when McCoy is talking about theology as reflection upon the commitments of the self, he is talking about the actions, alliances, routines, habits and programs of everyone. McCoy's insight is that we can find our theology in the examination of this life of faith.²⁶

Looking at the late twentieth century's theological situation, McCoy finds transformation and opportunity occurring because he sees global theological change in pluralism and in liberation.²⁷ He clearly outlines the collapse of the Constantinian paradigm in theology with its insular confidence in its absolute truth and its imperialistic attitude toward other views. He also reminds us that "unbelievers also believe."²⁸ In this new world of competing outlooks, McCoy sees that "The covenant God of historical promise and fulfillment is revealed in the changing patterns of human belief."²⁹ Rather than a sense of loss, McCoy has a sense of hope that in new patterns of human response theology will widen and deepen as it takes seriously that God is active in all experience.

In my view, McCoy's development of faith as first principle enables him and others in theology to engage knowledgeably with the complex struggles for life, peace and justice in our time. It does the very crucial task of helping one to understand their own place, "location" as McCoy now calls it, and to engage all persons beyond linguistic skirmishes and battles about theological terms. What I know as a theologian sharing the same tradition of faith as McCoy is that when I am talking, negotiating, and deciding about the arrangements of human affairs, particularly in politics, medicine, higher education as well as in church and in family, I am always engaged in the activities of faith. The organizations, the affiliations, the networks, the webs that form the patterns of a life are covenantal. These relationships begin in trust and in hope. We are joined with all humans in this venture of building the trusts that enable us to live and to advance human well being. McCoy opens, keeps open, and leads us into risks and rewards of a life of faith either as theologian or as a responsible human being.

The narrowness of the popular, and often the academic notions of theology, have cut off the dialogue, but McCoy's broader view has also shown us how to be in the conversation even if we are not at the center, a goal of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's dying thoughts. Much good has been done by biblical studies such as the quest for the historical Jesus and the Jesus seminar. Much help in understanding what Christians believe has come from looking at the relations of postmodern physics to Christian beliefs. The truth of Christian faith is still intelligible and coherent enough to seem true to its followers. Those achievements can only be shared where all have "common ground" as Polanyi called it in talking about the relation of science and of religion.³⁰ McCoy like Polanyi has shown this common ground.

Polanyi's Post-Critical Thought

As suggested earlier, McCoy was post-critical before Polanyi's philosophy developed this classification for fiduciary thinking. But McCoy has seen in Polanyi much more than most theologians in leading positions. T. F. Torrance has made much of how Polanyi's epistemology allows us to see the way the relations of space, time and

incarnation can be seen together.³¹

McCoy seems to share with Torrance the belief that theology and natural science are “at work in the same world seeking understanding within the rational connections and regularities of space and time where they pursue their respective inquiries and let their thinking serve the reality into which they inquire.”³² They also diverge in their goals. Torrance wants to show how scientific theology can be while McCoy wants to show how Christian theology can be itself and be open as well, have dialogue with other views and can benefit Christian understanding by helping it to grow and to discover greater views of God’s work in the world.

During the Polanyi centennial celebrations of 1991, McCoy delivered two addresses that showed his way of seeing faith as an ever changing growth in understanding our basic beliefs and standpoints. In one address, McCoy outlined ways in which Polanyi’s revolutionary post-critical perspective challenges our approaches to education.³³ McCoy spoke of six ways that Polanyi’s tacit knowing asks education to reorient itself by recognizing: 1) how the tacit dimension makes possible learning itself, 2) how genuine learning is discovery itself developing our power to indwell and to breakout, 3) how the heuristic drive is inborn in humans, 4) how learning is a convivial or communal, not individualistic process, 5) how the structure of education is like the structure of tacit knowing, and 6) and how discovery/learning is life long and a function of the whole human community. Here we see again how McCoy’s understanding of theological reflection makes it possible to see the faith principle at work but without having to explicitly name it’s relevance to education.

In the second address, he uses Polanyi’s epistemology to address the current role of ethics.³⁴ Again McCoy finds six important challenges: 1) the peril of moral perfectionism and forcing ethical ideals on others, 2) the failure of “dilemma ethics” to recognize the tacit coefficients that underlie the debate and provide the background for it, 3) the danger in moralism’s absolutizing its own moral norms because it does not recognize the tacit ground of their human location, 4) the exposure of the weakness of ethical rationalism’s trying to have a universal reason by ignoring the tacit cultural and historical components of all human reason, 5) the communal nature of virtue rather than the often held view that virtue is only an individual achievement, and 6) the sense of permanent revolution and liberation in all human endeavors, including ethics, because of the from/to structure of knowing.

In these two addresses and throughout McCoy’s writings, it is clear that McCoy brings together the insights of Cocceius and H. R. Niebuhr. We live by faith as trust in the world given to us, the world understood by Cocceius as God’s covenantal gift. Our faith is an indwelling and a breaking out, a reliance upon in order to attend to the continued giving of creation and our being to us. Our response to this world is ever challenged to renew itself in the unfolding of life with our human companions. Niebuhr’s sense of this life as permanent revolution is found in Polanyi’s belief in humanity as a society of explorers. As faith is the first principle of McCoy’s theology, we can also see that it is the keystone of Polanyi’s thought and post-critical theology.

Endnotes

¹ Harland Hogue, Professor of Homiletics, Pacific School of Religion, on faculty at time McCoy was recruited for the new position sponsored by the Danforth Foundation.

² Personal correspondence to Richard Gelwick, January, 1960.

³ Cf. “Faith,” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, F. L. Cross (ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, pp. 499-500.

- 4 Faculty Christian Fellowship, 475 Riverside Dr., New York: New York, 24 pages.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 7 *Ibidem.*
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 10 *Ibidem.*
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-14.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- 15 *Ibidem.*
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp.15-18.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 20. McCoy's reference is to *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 1951, pp. 15, 18.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
25. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
28. *Ibid.*, pp, 33, 37.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

30. "Science and Religion: Separate Dimensions of Common Ground," *Philosophy Today*, 7 (Spring, 1963), pp. 4-14.
31. *Space, Time and Incarnation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1969.
32. *Ibid.*, p. viii.
33. "From Ptolemy to Copernicus to Polanyi: Post-critical Perspectives For Epistemology and Education," *From Polanyi To The 21st Century: Proceedings Of A Centennial Conference, Kent State University, April 11-13, 1991*, pp. 307-316.
- 34 "The Polanyian Revolution: Post-Critical Perspectives For Ethics," *Tradition and Discovery*, XVIII, (Number 2, 1991-92), pp. 33-39.

Submissions for Publication

Articles, meeting notices and notes likely to be of interest to persons interested in the thought of Michael Polanyi are welcomed. Review suggestions and book reviews should be sent to Walter Gulick (see addresses listed below). Manuscripts, notices and notes should be sent to Phil Mullins. Manuscripts should be double-spaced type with notes at the end; writers are encouraged to employ simple citations within the text when possible. Use MLA or APA style. Abbreviate frequently cited book titles, particularly books by Polanyi (e.g., *Personal Knowledge* becomes *PK*). Shorter articles (10-15 pages) are preferred, although longer manuscripts (20-24 pages) will be considered.

Manuscripts should include the author's name on a separate page since submissions normally will be sent out for blind review. In addition to the typescript of a manuscript to be reviewed, authors are expected to provide an electronic copy (on either a disk or via e-mail) of accepted articles; it is helpful if original submissions are accompanied by an electronic copy. For disks, ASCII text as well as most popular IBM and MAC word processors are acceptable. Be sure that electronic materials include all relevant information which may help converting files. Persons with questions or problems associated with producing an electronic copy of manuscripts should phone or write Phil Mullins (816-271-4386). Insofar as possible, *TAD* is willing to work with authors who have special problems producing electronic materials.

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Charles S. McCoy: Orphic Sleuth of the Seminary As School of the Dance

Doug Adams

ABSTRACT Key Words: Charles S. McCoy

These anecdotes and a limerick humorously celebrate the life and work of Charles S. McCoy.

To communicate Charles McCoy's Polanyian contributions to the field of arts and religion, I render thoughts through a limerick; for such a form and the puns which accompany it are high art if one appreciates (as McCoy does) the polyvalency which both language and humor offer. As background to a hearing of that limerick, one may remember the following insights into McCoy's life and scholarship.

1. In "A Federal Paradigm," a section of his book *When Gods Change: Hope for Theology*, McCoy discerns that his covenantal use of Polanyi's epistemology is better exemplified by Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot than by Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes:

The contrast between a static and a covenantal view is illustrated in the mystery stories of A. Conan Doyle and those of Agatha Christie. In the stories by Doyle, there is a static world of facts. To solve a mystery, Sherlock Holmes collects a sufficient amount of data to construct the truth about a situation that was puzzling. This is an understanding of history and the world informed by the traditional Western paradigm. In the Christie stories about Hercule Poirot, reality has a more elusive, shifting quality. Data surrounding the mystery or the murder are there, but they take on different meaning and valency in relation to different total perspectives into which they may be absorbed. Whereas for Holmes there is a single true pattern to be discovered by placing fact on fact, for Poirot there are quite different ways in which it is possible to integrate the clues related to the mystery. Agatha Christie leads her readers on by inviting them to dwell in first one and then another integration of particulars into a whole. The resolution at the end of the story provides a surprise as Poirot breaks out to an unexpected integration of data that is more inclusive and artistically satisfying (see especially the fascinating "solution" in *Murder On The Orient Express*) (*When Gods Change*, 185-186).

McCoy has long taught courses in "literature and theology"; and so his writing includes examples from literature and an appreciation of how a solution to a mystery (like a solution to a scientific problem) is "artistically satisfying." When asked how he would want himself remembered through an endowment at the Graduate Theological Union's Center for the Arts, Religion and Education, McCoy responded by specifying "The Charles S. McCoy Fund for Theology and Literature" which honors him and continues his work "in probing the artistic dimensions of faith and the theological depth of literature" through courses, lectures, and publications. Similarly, McCoy directed that the memorial endowment to his wife (Marjorie McCoy, who developed many dramatic presentations) be specified for Arts' programming at Pacific School of Religion where McCoy taught for three decades and is Professor emeritus of Theological Ethics.

2. McCoy has written an article on "the Seminary as School of the Dance"; and he has strongly supported the non-verbal arts as tacit modes of knowing. Once when a dance friend of his was included on a panel discussing the

possibilities of arts in worship, a logical positivist sarcastically asked from the audience, “How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?” While most of us on the panel recognized that the questioner was using that old question to stigmatize the panel’s inquiry as trivial, the dancer on the panel responded, “Is that modern dance or classical ballet?” She went on to explain that modern dance takes much more room per person as it includes falling and rolling on the floor to discover the real consequences of a fall, whereas ballet deriving from the royal court precluded fall and takes far less room per person. With another dancer, Judith Rock, I have explored such differences (percussive vs. sustained, locomotor vs axial, and asymmetrical vs. symmetrical) in “Biblical Criteria in Modern Dance: Modern Dance As Prophetic Form” (for the 1979 International Conference on the Bible and Dance in Jerusalem) now a chapter in *Dance As Religious Studies* (New York: Crossroad, 1990) edited by Diane Apostolos-Cappadona and Doug Adams. McCoy brings one together with persons from a wide range of the arts who help newly to inform one’s thinking.

3. McCoy is serious but not solemn. He loves to argue and, like Polanyi, can be fascinated by small arguments as well as big ones. During the year I came to know Polanyi at Duke University in 1964, Bill Poteat was constantly vigilant to keep Polanyi working on the mind/body problem when Polanyi was easily drawn to consider many other matters: for example, how a frisbee performed in flight when thrown by students outside the Faculty Apartments where Polanyi lived on campus. Similarly, I remember being puzzled at times when McCoy would launch into a major argument about some small matter in a Pacific School of Religion faculty meeting in my early days on the faculty. Colleague Bob Leslie explained that McCoy was raised in a home where the father expected an argument at every meal; so McCoy feels at home only when he is in an argument! I have learned that while Charles takes each argument seriously, he does not take each argument solemnly. The difference between being serious and being solemn I once learned from reading Russell Baker’s column in the New York Times. Baker noted, “A child at play is serious; but a jogger is solemn. Living in New York is serious; but living in Washington D. C. is solemn.” An argument with Charles McCoy is serious but not solemn.

4. Insights by C. K Chesterton have delighted both Charles and Marjorie McCoy. Among Chesterton’s witty phrases to be remembered are the following: “Angels can fly because they take themselves so lightly” and “The best is the enemy of the better.” When McCoy was listed as a preacher in the seminary chapel, many students would attend expecting to listen to an excellent sermon; but he would have the congregation break into small groups and discuss an intriguing question as the sermon. In classes too, he was careful to draw out the insights of each of the students and not inhibit them by too great a display of his own brilliance.

5. He believes in the Trinity, at least the one at the end of Wall Street and the one in Berkeley (both churches). While others bash corporate America, McCoy helps a corporation learn to give voice to ethics. He created the Center for Ethics and Social Policy at the Graduate Theological Union.

6. Poems in *The Orphic Voice* by Elizabeth Sewell explore Polanyian epistemology through the Orphic myth. I add the observation that while both Orpheus and Pan play musical instruments, Pan does so to seduce the sheep and people and lead them into captivity and slaughter; but Orpheus plays and leads the rocks and trees to move more freely. McCoy is more of an Orpheus than a Pan; and he is more of a Poirot than a Holmes. Charles sees through the pretenses of leaders (especially if they are Republicans) and enjoys political humor. To his great amusement, I once told him Henry War Beecher’s comment that in the face of our nation’s problems, most leaders say they are at their wit’s end, without having gone far.

With those thought in mind, I offer this limerick to a most encouraging colleague.

McCoy is a sleuth of a man;
Of Hercule Poirot he's a fan.
Our Charles is not baiting
nor gating nor hating.
He's Orpheus rather than Pan.

He's dreamed of a school of the dance
Where gracefully arts have a chance;
Where students like trees
May move with some ease
at carnivals held in the manse.

McCoy neither Doyles nor spins;
but arguments he often wins.
While leaders all panic
or some become manic,
he dances on heads of the pins.

With Sewell he "undoes the curse
that splits us in" two: "prose and verse"
Creating a Center as ethical mentor
"and shaping finds the universe."

A Response to the Essays On My Thought

Charles S. McCoy

ABSTRACT Key Words: Thought of Charles S. McCoy; faith principle; covenantal or federal paradigm; post-critical perspective; Michael Polanyi; H. Richard Niebuhr; Plato

This brief essay comments on the several preceding essays analyzing Charles S. McCoy's thought.

I am grateful to the Polanyi Society for honoring me with the session Nov. 21, 1997, on my thought and to the authors of the papers that provided the focus of the discussion. It pleased me especially that they drew on a wide spectrum of my writing and my activities.

1. Perspective Within Christian Faith

Richard Gelwick rightly points to what he call the “faith principle” at the core of my life and thought and to my location within the Christian community of faith. For myself, faith means trusting in and seeking to be loyal to the triune God understood through Jesus Christ, the Bible, the Christian tradition , and the wider experience of the human community. Christian faith in this sense must retain its focus on believing and relying rather than being reduced to rigid biblicism, creedalism, ecclesiasticism, and moralism.

When faith is understood as human believing, trusting, and acting within a context of great mystery and varied understandings of that mystery, this faith principle becomes a way to recognize that all humans live by faith, the strong meaning of faith as believed-in reality. We can then be clearer about faith as shaped within the Christian community of interpretation and also have a point of departure for identifying, understanding, and relating to the diverse communities of interpretation among academics, in the organizations of society, and in organized religion.

Faith informs also the continuous valuing that is woven into human reflection and action, thereby providing the basis of ethics and morality. As in other communities of interpretation, Christian faith shapes the criteria for action, for evaluating change, and for giving meaning to love, justice, and liberation.

2. The Covenantal or Federal Paradigm

Phil Rolnick emphasizes the importance of the covenant in my theology and ethics as well as in my continuing involvement in social action and change. The notion of covenant shapes my understanding of God, the natural world, history, human nature, and community. By means of covenant, the relational dimensions of faith, value, and action are brought more clearly into view. Humans believe and trust in relation to others in community and to what is relied upon as real. Valuing means being good for selves and other beings in relation to a center of value. Action takes place in a communal context of interacting persons, values, commitments, and loyalties. In the federal tradition of the Christian community, the unfolding of the covenant of God provides a way to understand the development of the world from creation to consummation.

Rolnick speaks of the covenant as almost “metaphysical” for me. This would be correct except, first, for

the connotations metaphysics has acquired in Western thought. My view does have kinship with what Aristotle is seeking in his treatise on First Philosophy, especially as interpreted by R. G. Collingwood, but not with the misunderstanding of Aristotle's intent because of the location of the work after the treatise on Physics in the Aristotelian corpus and, as a result, misinterpreting the meaning of metaphysics as "beyond the physical." Second, the conviction that covenant provides the most comprehensive root metaphor for viewing the world derives for me more from communal heritage than from rationality conceived as operating somehow above and beyond the context of community, as many who are engaged in what they call metaphysics seem to assume.

3. Primary Influences

Phil Mullins deals helpfully with the main influences shaping my thought. To Plato, federal theology, Michael Polanyi, and H. Richard Niebuhr, I would add the Bible, within the perspective noted above. With reference to Plato, Mullins is correct that I understand the dialogues not as purveying a form of absolute idealism, a common misunderstanding arising from taking the criticisms of Aristotle as aimed at Plato rather than from a careful reading of the dialogues themselves. The dialogue form, as Mullins notes, is not merely a literary device but is central to Plato's method, with implicit covenants suggested and tacit dimensions presupposed, providing the basis for breaking out toward new insights. This reading not only offers, in my view, a more accurate way to understand Plato but also suggests ways to connect his thought with that of Polanyi, Niebuhr, and federalism.

Mullins is also on target in noting the strong and pervasive influence of H. Richard Niebuhr throughout my work and the ways in which I extend Niebuhr's thought. By background and practice, I am more of a social activist than was Niebuhr, a characteristic about which he often chided me in a friendly manner. That difference, however, does not alter my continuing dependence on much of his overall approach to theology and ethics.

At no point is my modification of Niebuhr more important than in my discovery and use of federal theology and its close relation to the rise of federal political philosophy and practice. The virtual elimination of post-Reformation thought from most histories of theology has left contemporary religious and political scholarship ignorant of important movements related to the development of modern society, and unaware especially of federalism, which provides the most pervasive and growing political pattern of the twentieth century and one of the most powerful moral philosophies actually operative within Western social institutions. Federalism also fits well within the plurality of faiths implied in Niebuhr's confessional interpretation of Christian faith.

4. The Post-Critical Perspective

Even before my study with Niebuhr, I was reaching for what I would learn from Michael Polanyi to call "post-critical." Niebuhr nurtured this direction, so that reading *Personal Knowledge* was not so much an adventure in a strange land as a time of liberating illumination of a homeland in which I was already dwelling. All the authors emphasize the post-critical character of all my work. They have described it well.

Doug Adams, in his inimitable fashion, points out the importance of art for my thought, as well as the artistic and playful elements in all that I do. For this, I am indebted to my family, to Niebuhr and Polanyi, and to my wife Margie.

If there is any label that fits me, I suppose "post-critical Christian federalist" would be it, and that may offer the most appropriate comment with which to conclude this response.

Notes on Contributors

Doug Adams is Professor of Christianity and the Arts at Pacific School of Religion and Graduate Theological Union (1798 Scenic, Berkeley, CA 94709) where he was a colleague of Charles S. McCoy for almost 20 years. Among his many publications, *Transcendence With the Human Body In Art (1991)*, recently reviewed in *TAD* (24:2 [1996-97]: 37-39), Adams regards as his most directly Polanyi- influenced scholarship.

Richard Gelwick has for many years been the General Coordinator for the Polanyi Society. He is the author of many articles on Polanyi as well as *The Way of Discovery: An Introduction to the Thought of Michael Polanyi (1977)*. As a graduate student working with Charles S. McCoy, Gelwick wrote the first dissertation on Michael Polanyi's non scientific thought. Gelwick retires at the end of the Spring 1998 term from his position as medical humanist at the School of Osteopathic Medicine at the University of New England (11 Hills Beach Road, Bitteford, ME 04005; e-mail: rprogel@juno.com).

Phil Mullins has been the editor of *TAD* since 1991 and is author of a number of articles on Polanyi published in a variety of journals; he teaches in an interdisciplinary humanities program at Missouri Western State College, St. Joseph, Missouri 64507 (e-mail: mullins@griffon.mwsc.edu). In the mid seventies under Charles McCoy's direction , he wrote a dissertation on hermeneutical and aesthetic applications of Polanyi's thought and later worked with McCoy at the Center for Ethics and Social Policy.

Charles S. McCoy, Professor Emeritus at Pacific School of Religion/Graduate Theological Union (1798 Scenic, Berkeley, CA 94709), is the author of many books and articles, including several in *TAD*, which make use of Michael Polanyi's thought. McCoy's long professional career has been not only that of a scholar but also that of an activist and a teacher. He introduced generations of graduate students in Berkeley to Polanyi's thought; this issue of *TAD* explores McCoy's own innovative ideas.

Philip A Rolnick is Associate Professor of theology and ethics at Greensboro College where he is also director of the Ethics Across the Curriculum program and general editor of Greensboro College's forthcoming book on ethics. Rolnick earned his Ph. D. in 1989 from Duke University where he worked with Thomas Langford after being introduced to Michael Polanyi's thought in his M.A. with Charles McCoy at Pacific School of Religion/Graduate Theological Union. Rolnick is the author of *Analogical Possibilities: How Words Refer to God* (1993)

Polanyi Society Membership

Tradition and Discovery is distributed to members of the Polanyi Society. This periodical supercedes a newsletter and earlier mini-journal published (with some gaps) by the Polanyi Society since the mid seventies. The Polanyi Society has members in thirteen different countries though most live in North America and the United Kingdom. The Society includes those formerly affiliated with the Polanyi group centered in the United Kingdom which published *Convivium: The United Kingdom Review of Post-critical Thought*. There are normally three issues of *TAD* each year.

The regular annual membership rate for the Polanyi Society is \$20; the student rate is \$10. The membership cycle follows the academic year; subscriptions are due September 1 to Phil Mullins, Humanities, Missouri Western State College, St. Joseph, MO 64507. Please make checks payable to the Polanyi Society. Dues can be paid by credit card by providing the following information: subscriber's name as it appears on the card, the card name, and the card number and expiration date. Changes of address and inquiries should be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to Mullins (fax: USA 816-271-5987; e-mail: mullins@griffon.mwsc.edu).

New members should provide the following subscription information: complete mailing address, telephone (work and home), institutional relationship, and e-mail address and/or fax number (if available). Institutional members should identify a department to contact for billing. The Polanyi Society attempts to maintain a data base identifying persons interested in or working with Polanyi's philosophical writing. New members can contribute to this effort by writing a short description of their particular interests in Polanyi's work and any publications and /or theses/dissertations related to Polanyi's thought. Please provide complete bibliographic information. Those renewing membership are invited to include information on recent work.

WWW Polanyi Resources

The Polanyi Society has a World Wide Web site at <http://www.mwsc.edu/~polanyi/>. In addition to information about Polanyi Society membership and meetings, the site contains the following : (1) the history of Polanyi Society publications, including a listing of issues by date and volume with a table of contents for recent issues of *Tradition and Discovery*; (2) a comprehensive listing of *Tradition and Discovery* authors, reviews and reviewers; (3) information on locating early publications; (4) information on *Appraisal* and *Polanyiana*, two sister journals with special interest in Polanyi's thought; (5) the "Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi" which provides an orientation to archival material housed in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Chicago Library; (6) photographs of Michael Polanyi.

Electronic Discussion Group

The Polanyi Society supports an electronic discussion group exploring implications of the thought of Michael Polanyi. For those with access to the INTERNET, send a message to "owner-polanyi@sbu.edu" to join the list or to request further information. Communications about the electronic discussion group may also be directed to John V. Apczynski, Department of Theology, St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778-0012 E-MAIL: apczynski@sbu.edu PHONE: (716) 375-2298 FAX: (716) 375-2389.

