

# FIFTY YEARS OF DISCOVERING *PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE*, THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE POLANYI SOCIETY

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*This address to The Polanyi Society's June 13-15, 2008 conference at Loyola University in Chicago commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of Michael Polanyi's publication of Personal Knowledge and considers the generative influence of Polanyi's post-critical theory of knowledge that led to The Polanyi Society, its journal Tradition & Discovery and more than 2000 books and papers on Polanyi's philosophy.*

## 1. The Fountainhead

Taking time at a scholarly conference for consideration of the significance of Michael Polanyi's *magnum opus*, *Personal Knowledge: Towards A Post-Critical Philosophy*, is most appropriate since this work is the fountainhead of Polanyi's philosophical thought. Take away *Personal Knowledge* from Polanyi's philosophical works, and he is a significant and interesting thinker with keen and memorable insights. Without *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi would most likely be remembered today by a few scholars for his prescient grasp of the economic fundamentals that led to the collapse of the Soviet empire, his development of the principles of x-ray crystallography and chemical reaction rates, and essays on science and freedom, science and the humanities, and implications of gestalt psychology for epistemology. These are major accomplishments that outshine most persons in any time, but they do not rise to the level of a monumental and culture-changing work. *Personal Knowledge* is a choke slam, a *tour de force*, a massive argument. *Personal Knowledge* overturns the established intellectual hegemony of impersonal scientific knowledge. All knowledge is not impersonal, but personal; not detached but involved knowing. With the publication of *Personal Knowledge*, a revolution begins and by Polanyi's 100th birthday in 1991, we could say at Kent State that there has been "a tacit victory."<sup>1</sup> The ideal of strictly impersonal knowledge is no longer secure in the academy. Our participation in our knowing is more widely explored.

The date of the publication of *Personal Knowledge* in 1958 is an emergent event. We know that *Personal Knowledge* came together slowly as the outgrowth of Polanyi's Gifford Lectures at the University of Aberdeen in 1951-52. The invitation to do these lectures has two important aspects in understanding Polanyi. One aspect is the purpose of the Lectures. On the one hand, the Gifford Lecture program is seeking a person to address natural theology in a modern sense of religion without supernatural miracles. (Please note all detractors from Polanyi's interest in religion that the Gifford Lectures are regarded as about religion. His most important book was in response to the general problem of religion in an age of science.) Polanyi is in Aberdeen lecturing because of his growing reputation as a scientist who thinks about the role of faith in science and in a free society. When we say "faith" we mean the act of trusting in and believing in as used in Jewish and Christian faith. Polanyi's book, *Science, Faith and Society*, one year before the Gifford invitation came in 1947, given as the Riddell Memorial Lectures at the University of Durham in England in 1946, is part of the impetus for the Gifford Lecture

invitation. These Riddell lectures are what I call Polanyi's "inaugural address." They show most clearly where his life purpose is turning toward an epistemological reform of grand proportions.<sup>2</sup>

The second aspect of understanding Polanyi's Gifford Lectures is the suffering, the difficulty, and time it took him to produce first the lectures, then six years later the finished book of the lectures published as *Personal Knowledge*. This series of 20 lectures over a two-year period gives him time to think through and to build systematically his views. In this time, he is also in a great dialogue with the members of the Moot, a gathering of leading British sojourners and religious intellectuals who met to pray (again note the spiritual dimension all who detract from Polanyi's religious faith) and to diagnose, treat, and remedy the current crisis of totalitarian states that were destroying the spiritual heritage of Western civilization. He is also getting the help of a rising American philosopher, Marjorie Grene, as well as the creative interchange of lecturing during this time at major American and British universities. But Polanyi struggled for four years before he gave the Giffords.<sup>3</sup> Invited in 1947, he had to postpone them several times because he was not ready. Taking command of his insights and putting them into the forum of academic discourse was a major task in his move from professor of physical chemistry to research professor in social thought. Even after the Giffords were given in 1951-52, it is still six more years before they are published as *Personal Knowledge*. The total time from the Gifford invitation to the published book is eleven years of intellectual struggle, reflection, creative imagination, consultation and conversation, wide reading synthesized into the four parts of *Personal Knowledge*. In this time, Polanyi examines the essential structures of knowing, how they work to build a society and a civilization, and how they arise out of the biological and social history of humankind. When he finishes, he has tried to cover every angle, every argument that one could propose to uphold the philosophy of detached impersonal knowing as the true guide to knowledge and truth. Having found impersonal objectivity false, he also shows how knowing in science and everywhere depends upon the tacit components of personal knowledge.

Several things stand out about Polanyi's Gifford Lectures. One is they are among the most seminal of the entire Gifford series of over 100 years. Many Gifford lecturers are invited after they have already reached the apex of their careers. Few besides Whitehead and James' lectures are as ground breaking. Polanyi was beginning at least a fourth career after medicine, physical chemistry, and economics. *Personal Knowledge* is an achievement of a level of thought not reached by Polanyi before these lectures.

Another thing about the Giffords is that *Personal Knowledge* is a surprise and its scope and depth of argument are what make it the fountainhead nourishing and giving strength to all his later work. Separating *The Study of Man*, *Beyond Nihilism*, *Knowing and Being*, *The Tacit Dimension*, and *Meaning* from the ground work of *Personal Knowledge* misses the weight and seriousness of his epistemological program. To put it simply, without *Personal Knowledge* there probably would be no Polanyi Society or the large body of growing scholarship world wide.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Maben Poirier reports that there are now over 2000 publications on Polanyi.<sup>5</sup> *Personal Knowledge* is a solid foundation supporting all that Polanyi wrote afterwards.

## 2. The Polanyi Wilderness

In 1962 when I met Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* was barely known beyond its summary on the book jacket. One could not easily talk with university faculty or fellow students about Polanyi without having to do an introductory overview and justification for bringing up Polanyi's philosophical thought. There was no familiarity or basic background for discussing Polanyi. Bill Scott exhibits this problem in his important and early Polanyi discussion in *The Massachusetts's Review* of 1962.<sup>6</sup> Scott labels Polanyi's theory of knowledge "A

Gestalt Philosophy,” and in the article further identifies it as an “existential gestalt philosophy.” Both terms, existential and gestalt, provided more familiar handles for grasping what Polanyi is about, but they barely open the window to seeing a radical program of epistemological reform. This same difficulty of understanding *Personal Knowledge* is seen in the *festschrift* for Polanyi’s 70th birthday published in 1961.<sup>7</sup> The title of the *festschrift*, *The Logic of Personal Knowledge*, pays tribute to the book but there is little direct discussion of the book. Instead there is an organization of the contributed essays around the four parts of *Personal Knowledge*. Each part presents indirectly relevant essays. Except for Raymond Aron’s essay on “Max Weber and Michael Polanyi” and Marjorie Grene’s essay on “The Logic of Biology” the contributions to understanding *Personal Knowledge* are oblique and indirect. A beginner looking for guidance here will be bewildered by being thrown into gems of works by leading thinkers who associate themselves with Polanyi’s known concerns but do not directly discuss his epistemological arguments. The essay by Paul Ignatus “On The Hungary of Michael Polanyi” helps with some background on Polanyi’s Budapest years. Probably the greatest strength of *The Logic of Personal Knowledge* is the range of illustrious thinkers who honored him with their essays and the intellectual breadth and diversity that they represent from the physical sciences to social thought and philosophy. The *festschrift* shows that some major contemporary writers highly regarded Polanyi, but they had not yet comprehended enough his epistemology to discuss it.

Trying to construct a research proposal on Polanyi was like being in a wilderness without maps but lots of clues and a sense of no boundaries. A polymath who published in a wide range of journals, one had to look everywhere to see if Polanyi might have been there. That was how I found the incredible half page 1936 letter to the editor of the British journal *Philosophy of Science* that Polanyi titled “The Value of the Inexact.”<sup>8</sup> Polanyi had forgotten that he had written it. The day I showed it to Polanyi he smiled brightly realizing that as early as 1936, three years after immigrating to Manchester from the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin, he already had intuitively foreseen his whole theory of knowledge. The short letter protested the way philosophers of science describe science as exact, precise, and quantitative and how they actually operate with vagueness guided by skills.

I was fortunate that I was working personally with Polanyi for a year and had the advantage of talking with him about his life and work. Without that direct contact, it would have been much more difficult to develop a bibliography of his social and philosophical thought. When he came to the Center for Advanced Studies at Stanford, he brought with him papers for me that he thought were the main ones that he had published. There were about thirty papers. During that year, thanks to the great library collection at the University of California in Berkeley, I searched indices of every journal in English that Polanyi mentioned or knew. If Polanyi had published in it at sometime, I looked it up, and made a Xerox copy. Fortunately, the social and philosophical works of Polanyi were primarily in English, not Hungarian. From the small box that Polanyi brought, my bibliography and reading of his papers grew to a collection of over 120 social and philosophical papers in English, not including those published more than once in different journals.

Realizing that future study would benefit from having these papers of Polanyi, I got the Holbrook Library of Pacific School of Religion to pay for making a microfilm of all of these papers and to include the microfilm in their collection. The microfilm was published in 1963 as *The Collected Articles and Papers of Michael Polanyi* and included an 18 page catalogue and index to the papers.

*Personal Knowledge* was published first in England on June 20, 1958, and a week later in Chicago. At first, there were few reviews of it until after 1962. Scott and Moleski report about twenty. They were brief for the

scope of the work. May Brodbeck, philosopher of science, said Polanyi was “an obscurantist” and dismissed the book.<sup>9</sup> John Ziman, a physicist and philosopher of science, was sympathetic but thought Polanyi should have put more emphasis on scientific knowledge as social knowledge. He complimented Polanyi for showing common foundations of disciplines.<sup>10</sup> Carl Friedrich, a political theorist, saw in Polanyi’s approach grounds for a discussion of natural law.<sup>11</sup> Julian Hartt, a philosophical theologian, disputed that Polanyi is truly post-critical because he saw Polanyi as still making the mind the central shaper of our knowledge and called Polanyi a neo-Kantian.<sup>12</sup> In short, the reviews were not comprehensive in their understanding, and they showed the difficulty of reading Polanyi thoroughly enough to appreciate the coherence and force of his argument. Most striking to me is their not commenting on Polanyi’s grand thesis that we are living under a theory of knowledge that makes absurd human knowing and the human role in the fate of the earth. Polanyi, perhaps wisely, followed *Personal Knowledge* with shorter books and lectures that illuminated his major argument for a new theory of knowledge replacing the dogma of impersonal scientific knowing.

From 1958 to 1968 when *Intellect and Hope, Essays In The Thought of Michael Polanyi* was published, thanks to the work of William Poteat and Tom Langford, public thought and reflection directly on Polanyi was scarce.<sup>13</sup> One of the tasks was to introduce Polanyi to diverse academic audiences. This task was gradually undertaken in a number of ways: 1) dissertations, 2) interdisciplinary conferences, 3) Polanyi’s lectures at leading universities, 4) the development of The Polanyi Society, and 5) books on Michael Polanyi as a philosopher.

From the first dissertations in 1965 through 1976, the year of Polanyi’s death, there were 31 doctoral dissertations on Polanyi’s social and philosophical thought. The largest number was produced at Duke under the direction of William Poteat.<sup>14</sup> It was 1977, 19 years after *Personal Knowledge* before there was an introductory book on Polanyi. Composing a book on Polanyi had a number of challenges. First, you face what I saw as the problem of the first introductory book. Why a book on Polanyi? What’s so important about Polanyi? What does theory of knowledge about science have to do with everyday life? Privileged as I was by study with and close association with him for fourteen years, I felt an obligation to try to make him available to a general audience without misrepresenting or degrading the depth of his thought. So if you want to introduce a new figure of the rank of Polanyi who is going against the stream and who you see as crucial to your society, you have to figure out how to construct the story so that the grand point is clear, persuasive, and promising or in Whitehead’s terms coherent, adequate, and applicable to the problem. The books on Polanyi since 1977 have shown an increasing gradient of appreciation, sophistication and complexity for first readers with the exception of Drusilla Scott’s *Everyman Revived, The Common Sense of Michael Polanyi*, which I find is the friendliest for first readers of Polanyi. While slightly more philosophically technical, Richard Allen’s *Thinkers of Our Time, Polanyi* has a great advantage in brevity and balance. Allen, while inviting people into Polanyi’s major ideas and also discussing critically philosophical issues involved, manages to cover a lot in very readable space. Although I have not carefully yet studied Mark Mitchell’s new book, *Michael Polanyi: The Art of Knowing*, I am told it is a concise and sophisticated introduction. Andy Sanders’ *Michael Polanyi’s Post-Critical Epistemology* is definitely a book for philosophically-prepared readers as is Harry Prosch’s *Michael Polanyi, A Critical Exposition*. Jerry Gill’s *The Tacit Mode, Michael Polanyi’s Postmodern Philosophy* does a double service of introducing Polanyi’s post-critical philosophy and showing its constructive ways beyond postmodernism. Certainly, Scott and Moleski’s *Michael Polanyi, Scientist and Philosopher* has opened up Polanyi to a wider audience by telling the interesting story of Polanyi’s life and work. It also has the value of seeing Polanyi’s thought in the context of the events of the 20th century. Certainly, there is now a collection of books presenting Polanyi’s encyclopedic work. *Personal Knowledge* is no longer an uncharted territory without guides and maps.

### 3. Worldwide Lecturer

Even if the public did not understand well what Polanyi was saying in *Personal Knowledge*, university leaders wanted to hear more and find out what this scientist turned philosopher was saying. He was invited to major universities for lecture series. No doubt Polanyi's reputation for anti-communism, his views on economics and political freedom as well as his theory of knowledge made him an attractive figure to universities. Remember that this period was in the 1960's when the cold war was hot; students were criticizing the impersonal multiversity of higher education, organizing for freedom rides to southern states and beginning the Vietnam War protests. Theodore Roszak's *The Making of a Counter Culture* noted Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* as a sign that an upheaval was occurring toward a more responsible society.<sup>15</sup>

In Polanyi's lecture tours you can trace his pursuit of the themes from *Personal Knowledge*. These lectures become steps toward his last major books along with significant articles and pamphlets. These lectures punctuate and underline features in *Personal Knowledge* and in Polanyi's total work that need to be kept in mind today.

First, chronologically and logically, the human condition is foremost. We should not disconnect Polanyi's thought from his life's concerns. Before Polanyi was a physician or a physical chemist, he was a moralist as a child and as a student trying to sort out the problems of political liberty, individual and social action in a world moving from monarchy to social democratic institutions. The problems of Communism and Nazism, individual rights and social progress were enormous for his life. Knowing has for him a profound ethical dimension. Therefore, it is not surprising that after *Personal Knowledge*, the first lecture series often focus on this human predicament resulting from the impersonal scientific model of knowledge. The Lindsay Memorial Lectures at the University College of North Staffordshire in 1958, after *Personal Knowledge* is published, become *The Study of Man*.<sup>16</sup> They claim exaggeratedly to summarize *Personal Knowledge* and show how its theory of knowledge as common ground for natural science and historiography. The greater point here is the subject of understanding the human person in history and not succumbing to the fact-value separation model of objectivist history. In the 1960 Eddington Lecture at Cambridge, the theme is "Beyond Nihilism."<sup>17</sup> In this lecture, again the emphasis is upon the destructiveness of human beings bent on social amelioration but acting immorally because the beliefs and values that should restrain and guide them are undercut by the dogma of impersonal scientific knowledge. In 1961-62, as Distinguished Visiting Scholar at the University of Virginia and also in the McEnerney lectures at the University of California in Berkeley, Polanyi continued this campaign in this series on "History and Hope."<sup>18</sup> When I recall this dominant concern in Polanyi today, I wonder if one of the problems or questions that affects The Polanyi Society's vitality is our lack of continuing relevance, contact, and involvement in the struggle for human freedom and social improvement.

But the human condition for Polanyi could not be overcome today without a new theory of knowledge. This second point was already clear in *Personal Knowledge*, but it had not caught on. It was to this task of clarifying his epistemological proposal that Polanyi began to turn more directly at Merton College in Oxford University. One of Polanyi's first philosophy talks at Oxford was on "The Process of Knowing," a title that shows Polanyi going into the dynamics of his theory of knowledge. Amplifying the dynamics and architecture of the knowing process seem to be one of the results of Polanyi's personal encounter with the cold reception of Oxford analytic philosophy. When he traveled in September of 1962-63 from Oxford for a year at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, he arrived working on his Terry Lectures for that October at Yale.

For four years, from Oxford to Stanford, to Yale to Duke to Wesleyan University, Polanyi keeps revising these lectures until they are finally published in 1966 as *The Tacit Dimension*.<sup>19</sup> Marjorie Grene thought that Polanyi was going to ruin them by too much revision causing them to lose the flow of a public lecture. In this period, Polanyi is more intent on demonstrating the nature and principal elements of his theory of knowledge. The connection with the problems of human existence is present, but as you read these lectures you can see Polanyi's attempt to engage the skeptical academic world. Walter Mead's work today toward the republication of *The Tacit Dimension* is crucial for keeping widely available Polanyi's central and concise outline of his epistemological proposal. While it lacks the array of arguments in *Personal Knowledge*, it sets out the strategic elements of his campaign to change our epistemological outlook.

*Meaning*, Polanyi's last book completed with the help of Harry Prosch,<sup>20</sup> also is a gradual development taking nine years. The book in Polanyi's mind aimed to reach a level comparable to *Personal Knowledge* setting out again the cultural crisis of our era and how an alternative vision of human knowing is necessary to avoid disastrous consequences politically and socially. In this book, Polanyi and Prosch carry forward the nature and implications of tacit knowing both by extending the analysis more specifically to genres of human knowing and adding new terms to the vocabulary of tacit knowing. Though briefer than *Personal Knowledge*, this book shifts focus to a more inclusive, and more ultimate focus, "meaning." The choice of the word has an obvious relationship to the world of rhetoric and analytic philosophy even if it did not connect readily with the current work of those fields. What the book *Meaning* did do is to move Polanyi's epistemological proposal to a more inclusive audience beyond traditional Western religious and theistic outlooks without necessarily dismissing or contradicting them. Read from the background of Polanyi's prior work, the book is a helpful continuation of how Polanyi applies tacit knowing to major domains of creative human activity. Read without the *Personal Knowledge* and *Tacit Dimension* background, the book is less compelling. So far, *Meaning* has not received the attention that it deserves in spite of its joint authorship and the attendant debates about it. There is, however, another way of grasping *Meaning* which takes us to a new rubric for looking at the impact of *Personal Knowledge*.

#### **4. Interdisciplinary Study Groups and Conferences**

While I have traced the impact of *Personal Knowledge* through the follow-up books of Polanyi developed out of lecture series at universities, I have omitted that one of the major forces of his developing thought was the interdisciplinary study groups and conferences that grew out of this monumental work. In December of 1964 toward the end of the month several things were happening in New York City. One is that Polanyi was there making an agreement with Harper Torchbooks for a paperback publication of *Personal Knowledge*. Also, Marjorie Grene, Edward Pols--a professor of philosophy at Bowdoin College--and Polanyi were meeting with the Ford Foundation to obtain funding for a series of conferences on the topic "Study Group on Foundations of Cultural Unity."<sup>21</sup> These conferences developed not by focus on Polanyi's thought but by focus on the infection of scientism across the fields of intellectual inquiry. They sought to develop "a convergence of ideas separately developed in various fields...."<sup>22</sup> Leaders from the arts, natural and social sciences as well as philosophy were invited. Among them were William Poteat and Bill Scott. Polanyi was listed as chairman, but a major part of the organizing and editing of published papers from the group was done by Marjorie Grene. Edward Pols arranged for Bowdoin College's provision of facilities in a new center on campus especially designed for such meetings. Through these meetings and a host of others as far away as India, Polanyi was getting a hearing among persons aware of the problems of a culture dominated by scientism. The Study Group held two conferences at Bowdoin and then at the University of Texas between 1965 and 1969.

Also in the same week of December 1964, the former National Association of Biblical Instructors met at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Notice that the letters of this group are NABI, the Hebrew word for prophet. For years, NABI was the organization for college religion departments, seminary, and graduate schools of theology and religion. This meeting was the first one of this group that now was incorporated as The American Academy of Religion. At this first national meeting of the AAR, the President, James Price of Duke University, chose for his presidential address to have instead a panel of speakers on Michael Polanyi. The panel members were Tom Langford, Chair of the Religion Department at Duke, Ruel Tyson of the University of North Carolina, and myself still writing a dissertation on Polanyi. Michael Polanyi, William Poteat and Marjorie Grene were in the audience. I tried to give an outline of Polanyi's theory of knowledge. Tyson contrasted Polanyi and Kant. Langford focused on Polanyi's application of the Pauline scheme of redemption. The presentations were generously received with mainly questions of clarification and without critical opposition, Marjorie and Michael were encouraged, and afterward the Polanyi group celebrated the New Year at Polanyi's hotel.

Several features stand out in this survey of the growth and development of *Personal Knowledge's* impact. One is Polanyi's interdisciplinary outreach and collaboration. His work seems to have had its best hearing not in the halls of academic philosophy but in forums where inquirers sought insight on grand questions of cultural fragmentation and destruction of human values. The themes of recent violent history and grounds of hope are underlying concerns throughout. A second feature is the conviviality. Polanyi and Grene are gathering people with serious concern and willingness to explore ways for affirming a common vision of knowledge that restores confidence on what persons can do to continue human life with dignity.

## 5. The Polanyi Society

One of the lecture trips Polanyi made that led to conferences and further work on his thought was to the University of Dayton in 1969.<sup>23</sup> There in Dayton, a group called CHERS, an acronym for Consortium for Higher Education Religion Studies was led by an able clergyman and educator, Fred Kirschenmann. Dr. Kirschenmann, a one time student at Chicago Theological Seminary and former chair of the Religion Department at Yankton College, worked with not only the University of Dayton but also other academic institutions in the area including Wright State University, Antioch College, Wilberforce University, Defiance College, and Heidelberg College. They formed a consortium to deal with issues on values and religious questions in higher education. An exceptional student at Dayton University, Bruno Manno, suggested bringing Polanyi to the campus to lecture. Polanyi was invited, came, lectured, and received an enthusiastic response as a leading scientist turned philosopher providing a philosophical approach for the CHERS program. Polanyi they saw promoted the aims of renewing the relations of faith and of reason, science and religion, and a renewal of human values in higher education. To continue this direction, they wanted to bring Polanyi back to give more lectures. But this was 1968 and Polanyi was facing two major challenges. One was declining health showing mainly in lapses of memory and shorter periods of ability to work on his writing. He was already working on lectures on "Meaning" at the University of Texas at Austin and also at the University of Chicago. Fortunately for me, I had just been with him at the University of Chicago to talk with him and to attend one of his lectures in his "Meaning" project. It was one of those wonderful days with him like so many others when so lost in thought and walking to his lecture hall, we wound up lost and in the wrong place and were saved by a kind student who knew where he was supposed to be. Anyway, Polanyi recommended me to CHERS, and in the following academic year I commuted there from Stephens College to teach a course on Polanyi for faculty and graduate students from the member schools.

Among the faculty attending were Gene Reeves and David Griffin. Reeves became an active member of The Polanyi Society. Also during this time, Joe Kroger and John Apczynski attended one of the meetings as they were beginning their interest in Polanyi, and both later made substantial intellectual contributions to Polanyi's thought and Christian faith.

The CHERS program continued for several years with visiting lecturers each year. Bill Scott, Harry Prosch, Sigmund Koch, and Ruel Tyson all presented their views of Polanyi's thought and how they applied it. In a second time around, I did that with Polanyi on the resurrection and ecology. The climax of the CHERS program was in the spring 1972 when they brought Polanyi to the Dayton area again for an international conference called "The Culture and Crisis." We met in a seminary near the city of Dayton. Besides faculty and students from the CHERS colleges, there were about 34 participants from the United States, Canada, and England. Among them were Dale Cannon, Jerry Gill, Benjamin Ladner, John Brennan, Harry Prosch, Elizabeth Sewell and Marjorie Grene. Polanyi was the only speaker. Although Polanyi's presentations were affected by his memory lapses, the force of his ideas and the energy of the meeting were creative and hopeful. Besides an opening banquet and two formal talks, the group met with Polanyi in sessions of open conversation, moving from comment or question to discussion. It was clear that there was an affirmative spirit and unity with Polanyi's thought, and we were a unanimous group of one mind and spirit on the importance of Polanyi's thought for our time. So it was not surprising that it was proposed that we begin a network of communication by newsletters sharing thoughts, correlating our work and the works of others with Polanyi, and allowing for the possibility of future meetings. There was a sense of a coalescing intellectual movement of which we were a part. The CHERS office of Dr. Kirschenmann and Bruno Manno assumed the role of coordinator. Out of the need for an identifier for ourselves, we choose the name from *The Tacit Dimension*, "The Society of Explorers." The name fit the group well. It was not a disciplinary group but a multidisciplinary one. What was held in common was a sense that Polanyi's thought was opening a way for many fields of thought and research to move forward in their distinctive research and creativity but with a common framework that respected the human dimension and calling in all knowing, the importance of values that open, free, and sustain us in pursuit of truth and the good in our individual fields and in our society. I remember vividly without her exact words that on the morning of the third day, Elizabeth Sewell shared with us a brief poem she had written there during the previous night comparing Polanyi to a spring flowing like a brook that cleanses and renews. It was a powerful meeting. There was a sense that though Polanyi was aging, his important work was just beginning, and many of us were ready to carry on.

The Society of Explorers Newsletter in the fall of 1972 was the first publication of the Polanyi group. On the membership list are some still familiar names such as Walter Gulick and Aaron Milavec.<sup>24</sup> Our status as a group was different from the other groups with whom Polanyi had worked in the conferences on the Unity of Knowledge, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, the Society for Freedom in Science, or the Moot. We were mostly junior faculty members and graduate students, without superior distinction in our fields or institutions, and generally in teaching positions not connected with graduate research. In short, we were mainly younger scholars attached to a movement of thought not yet recognized as a major contribution or trend. Even our major mentors, William Poteat and Charles McCoy, remained interested but outside the newsletter-to-newsletter interchange of the group, leaving their students to keep them informed.

The winter 1972 and spring of 1973 Society of Explorers Newsletters list among new members Gus Bretyspraak, Jim Stines, Doug Adams, John Apczynski, Dale Cannon, and Phil Mullins. These are all, of course, people who continue to make contributions to the growth of Polanyian philosophy. During the summer of that year, a Society of Explorers conference was held at Skidmore College, where Harry Prosch was teaching. The

conference focused on the uses of Polanyi's philosophy in rhetorical theory, pedagogy, meaning in the arts, philosophy of language, and relationships to Bernard Lonergan and Karl Popper. This range of interests led to expanding the leadership of the Society of Explorers to a group of additional coordinators encouraged to organize and to gather connections in specific areas. The six areas and coordinators were: Art Studies - Douglas Adams, Educational Studies - Raymond Wilken, Medical and Psychiatric Studies - Allen Dyer, Philosophy Studies - Harry Prosch, Religious Studies - myself, Rhetoric and Communication Studies - Sam Watson.

Another change was made at the Skidmore conference of 1973. The name of the group was changed from The Society of Explorers to The Polanyi Society in order to be clear to persons looking for Polanyi studies. Also, a logo for a post-critical philosophical group was borrowed from Taoism by adopting the yin/yang symbol. The logo appeared on the masthead of The Polanyi Society "news bulletin." There is no record of any discussion of the adoption of this logo. It may have been an executive decision of the General Coordinator, Fred Kirschenmann.

It ought to be noticed that the polity of The Polanyi Society was very collegial and intending to be non-hierarchical. The title "coordinator" instead of president or chair person represented a spirit of mutuality and of democratic ideals. Authority was general in the Polanyian sense that we were committed to listening and to discerning as a group what we should be doing and where we should be going. Leadership positions were an honor to hold, but they were more a matter of service by someone who had ability, time, and institutional resources to support The Polanyi Society. Further, there was a welcoming of new persons into the group that made younger and older scholars at home regardless of their stage in study in the thought of Polanyi. That spirit is very much alive today in the travel fellowships supported by The Polanyi Society. It is the Polanyian wisdom that discovery and truth can breakthrough and come from persons and places that we may not have expected or yet seen.

The year 1975 was an important stage in the life of Polanyi and The Polanyi Society. The Michael Polanyi papers were superbly organized and catalogued by John M. Cash and archived in The Joseph Regenstein Library Department of Special Collections.<sup>25</sup> The choice of Chicago was a wonderful outcome to a contest for possession among several universities. Chicago is an appropriate location for many reasons. Also in 1975, Polanyi's last major work, *Meaning* was published. Polanyi had chosen T. F. Torrance to be his literary executor, and I had returned from England in the summer of 1974 after spending a year driving between Oxford and Cambridge working with Polanyi on *Meaning* at Oxford and with Arthur Peacocke at Cambridge on understanding the new biology unleashed by the discovery of the genetic code. One evening in Cambridge, I went over to Westminster College to hear the famous Barthian theologian T.F. Torrance who was giving a lecture to divinity students. To my surprise, he was expounding on science and religion and why students should be reading Michael Polanyi who had grasped the deep relations of science, faith and reality with the same kind of depth as Einstein's space and time in the theory of relativity. Afterwards we talked, and I mentioned my work with Polanyi, and Torrance encouraged me to submit a paper to *The Scottish Journal of Theology*, which I did.<sup>26</sup> The important thing is that three parts of this story came together in what I regard as the beginning of The Polanyi Society in the American Academy of Religion.

With the opening of the Polanyi papers at the Regenstein library in 1975, the publication of *Meaning*, and the annual meeting of the AAR occurring in Chicago, I was able to unite these events into an AAR Polanyi program. I was able to get Stephens College to provide enough honorarium for a lecture at the college to fly Torrance to Chicago and to Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri. This arrangement made it possible for Torrance to come and inspect the Polanyi papers at the Regenstein, to represent Polanyi at a University of Chicago

reception celebrating the publication of *Meaning*, to lecture at Stephens, and for us most significantly to take part in an AAR symposium called “Towards A Post-Critical Theology, The Influence of Polanyi.”<sup>27</sup> The principal speakers were Torrance and Ian Barbour. Our planning for the book reception and for the AAR symposium greatly underestimated the number of people that would come. The rooms were too small and about 75 people were trying to crowd into a space for twenty to thirty people. Also responding at the discussion were Joe Kroger, Aaron Milavec, Doug Adams, John Apczynski, Allen Dyer, Daniel Hardy, Frank Kirkpatrick, Robert Palma, Richard Prust, Gene Reeves, Loyal Rue, and Alford Welch. There was so much interest in Polanyi at this meeting that we decided to plan for an annual program at the American Academy of Religion. In retrospect, that decision led to the AAR becoming the site for the annual Polanyi Society meeting. So many of the interested persons were regular participants in the AAR, and the AAR provided a venue for our meetings. Despite high interest in Polanyi there was also diversity in outlook. There was disagreement on how to read and to interpret Polanyi generally as well as in religion and in theology. There was more consensus on applying him to the arts.

Gradually the other disciplinary areas of The Polanyi Society faded away. Harry Prosch organized a session at the American Philosophical Association on rhetoric and Polanyi’s philosophy. Raymond Wilken organized a conference on Polanyi and education at Kent State University and later the Polanyi centennial conference. The main arena for discussion became the AAR Polanyi meetings.

The story of The Polanyi Society has much interesting substance and detail remembered in the volumes of its journals. One is that Jere Moorman brought into its life an enduring awareness of the importance of Polanyi for the world of everyday life that we all share. He did and still does call attention to those issues from psychology to business ethics to humor. Moorman produced a book of cartoons about Polanyi and some of them were reprinted in *The Polanyi Society* newsletter and *TAD* until copyright issues prohibited them. What Moorman did was to show how humor works by the integration of incompatibles into surprising meaning and relationships. Several more things should be pointed out. In Britain, there was a parallel group with its own periodical called *Convivium*. *The Polanyi Society* newsletter and *Convivium* shared and reprinted articles from each others’ publication. Thanks to Richard Allen that journal and its Polanyian concerns have survived through the new British journal named *Appraisal*. Our North American journal name changed from *The Polanyi Society* newsletter in 1984 to *Tradition & Discovery*. I asked for suggestions from the membership, and we got only a few. Avery Dulles wrote that we should keep Polanyi in the name. I thought it should have a name suggestive of Polanyi’s grand themes. *Personal Knowledge* was suggested, but it seemed confusing and limiting to use the book title. So I chose “Tradition & Discovery” with the hope of including the breadth, challenge, and focus of Polanyi’s thought. There is also a contribution from either Bruce Haddox or Ron Hall, I think they were sitting beside each other, who commented at one of The Polanyi Society business meetings that we had enough good papers at our meetings to produce a journal. That insight was the beginning of our change from a newsletter format to a combination of news and also papers. The first years of the periodical were crudely done like a journal by cutting and pasting papers on to a 40 page format and Xeroxing them.

After the Polanyi centennial at Kent State in 1991, Phil Mullins took over as editor and improved the journal in so many ways. First, in the quality of its production, its appearance, and its content. Second, he put the journal into the scholarly literature through their indexing programs. Third, he raised the standards for publication by a process of peer reviews. His work, and that of Walter Gulick and Paul Lewis who ably assist him, has truly led and improved the significance and outreach of thought on Polanyi. We now have a journal of professional quality. For about ten years, the Society also has had a web site that continues to grow and

assures that Polanyi resources are available in the electronic world. The web site archives issues of *Tradition and Discovery* back to 1991 and also has many short articles by Polanyi as well as audio resources such as the McEnerney Lectures.

In the evolution of The Polanyi Society a number of organizational changes occurred. The annual meeting of the AAR became the location for The Polanyi' Society's annual meeting. The Polanyi Society became incorporated as a tax exempt professional society. The office of coordinator and editor of the journal were separated and done by different persons. When Phil Mullins became the editor of our periodical in 1991, David Rutledge was chosen to be Religious Studies Coordinator organizing the programs for the annual meeting through 1997. Martin Moleski, Walter Gulick and Paul Lewis continue today working to organize the Society's annual meeting. Walter Gulick became general coordinator in 1999 until Walter Mead was elected in 2006. This year Walter Gulick and Ron Hall are working to organize a Polanyi Society meeting at the American Philosophical Association meeting in December.

Let me come back to our purpose at this conference reflecting on *Personal Knowledge* after fifty years. When I began to study Michael Polanyi in 1962, I felt very alone. The Polanyi circle was very elite. There were few faculty competent to guide research. There was almost zero secondary literature. Today the situation is enormously different. The amount of scholarship is so extensive that it is difficult to examine all of it. The work of Scott and Moleski on Polanyi's biography has significantly organized and made possible much greater appreciation of the life, thought, and world of Polanyi's remarkable journey. The depth and value of Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* has called forth a legion of professors who think, teach, write, and apply insights and principles based on Polanyian philosophy. Tonight we can celebrate that that task is well on its way, and we are a part of it.

One of my goals in life after study with Polanyi was to help others to know his thought. Thanks to the power of Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge*, we are not alone today. Polanyi studies in England and Hungary, and The Polanyi Society in North America has helped to do that. Later this month another conference in Budapest by The Michael Polanyi Liberal Philosophical Association also celebrates the impact of Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge*. Their conferences and their journal *Polanyiana* combined with the British journal *Appraisal* shows the great productivity of thought created out of Polanyi's thought.

As we meet there are two concerns that we should still consider. One is the challenge of the impersonal understanding of scientific knowledge. Despite postmodernism and other forms of criticism, the overly simple reduction of everything to materially measurable quantities persists, although it keeps taking on new forms. The eliminative materialism of cognitive science and evolutionary biology, the excessive reliance on brute power by national states, and the mechanistic exploitation of the environment all thrive on a dead view of nature and reality. But secondly and perhaps more threatening is the growth of a global technological and industrial world also inflamed with a passion for material progress and without transcendent values to guide and control it. Here is a world likely to encounter the same problems of moral inversion that occurred in Europe and in America in the twentieth century. One of the bright moments in our midst is our Chinese member Yu Zhenhua.<sup>28</sup> In such persons, the understanding of Polanyi is becoming worldwide.

When I began studying *Personal Knowledge* and found meager and inadequate discussion of Polanyi, one day I took a look at what happened when Whitehead published his Gifford lectures *Process and Reality* and

discovered it was also nearly twenty years before substantial work built on his foundations. Great philosophical thought takes time to absorb and to pursue. “Tacit knowing” is now a phrase turning up in the public square without attribution and superficial understanding, but the phrase significantly is in circulation. I expect that we are at that moment when the impact of his thought will shift from Polanyi the man, as it did for Whitehead, to the terms and concepts that serve to guide us toward overcoming the dehumanization of life and constructing ways of bringing the growth of knowledge and civic and global life to a better understanding. The time is ripe to put Polanyi’s thought to work in constructive ways. Plato had his Aristotle. Whitehead has his Charles Hartshorne and John Cobb. Polanyi’s thought is ready and waiting for his creative explorers.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>For a view of the 1991 conference program and its papers, see *From Polanyi To The 21st Century, Proceedings of a Centennial Conference, Kent State University, April 11-13, 1991*, Richard Gelwick (ed.) (Biddeford, Maine: University of New England) 936 pages. For selected papers on “The Tacit Victory and the Unfinished Agenda,” see David Rutledge, Walter Gulick, John Apczynski, Doug Adams, and James Stines in *Tradition & Discovery*, XVIII, 1, pp. 5-18 and Joseph Kroger in *Tradition & Discovery*, XVIII, 2, pp. 10-14.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Gelwick, *The Way of Discovery* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2004), previously published by Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 42-47.

<sup>3</sup>See William Taussig Scott and Martin X. Moleski, S.J., *Michael Polanyi, Scientist and Philosopher* (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 203-231.

<sup>4</sup>Maben Walter Poirier’s *A Classified and Partially Annotated Bibliography of Michael Polanyi, the Anglo-Hungarian Philosopher of Science* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2002) provides a global resource of over a 2000 books and articles on Polanyi, as well as guidance to Polanyi’s non-scientific writings.

<sup>5</sup>Personal e-mail correspondence, May 9, 2008.

<sup>6</sup>“Polanyi’s Theory of Personal Knowledge, A Gestalt Philosophy,” 3: 2 (Winter 1962), pp. 349-68.

<sup>7</sup>*The Logic of Personal Knowledge, Essays Presented to Michael Polanyi on his Seventieth Birthday*, (no editor) (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1961). The book includes a valuable bibliography of Michael Polanyi’s scientific papers, a list of Polanyi’s nine books and 26 journals in which he has published, and Polanyi’s film *Unemployment and Money*.

<sup>8</sup>Reprinted in *Tradition & Discovery*, 18: 3 (1991-92), pp. 35-36.

<sup>9</sup>“A Review of *Personal Knowledge* by Michael Polanyi,” *American Sociological Review*, XXV (August, 1960), pp. 282-283.

<sup>10</sup>“The Two Towers,” *The Cambridge Review*, October 21, 1961, pp. 33-37.

<sup>11</sup> *Natural Law Forum*, VII, 1962, pp. 132-148.

<sup>12</sup> *The Christian Scholar*, XLIII (Fall, 1960), pp. 231-36.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas A. Langford and William H. Poteat (eds.), *Intellect and Hope, Essays In The Thought of Michael Polanyi* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1968).

<sup>14</sup> Poirier, *Ibid.*, pp. 245-249.

<sup>15</sup> New York: Doubleday, 1969.

<sup>16</sup> Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959.

<sup>17</sup> London: Cambridge University Press, 1960.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Polanyi, “History and Hope: An Analysis of Our Age,” *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 38 (Spring, 1962), pp. 177-195 contains a part of this four part lecture series.

<sup>19</sup> Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966.

<sup>20</sup> Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975.

<sup>21</sup> See Scott and Moleski, p. 258.

<sup>22</sup> Marjorie Grene (ed.), *The Anatomy of Knowledge, Papers Presented to the Study Group on Foundations of Cultural Unity* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969), p. viii.

<sup>23</sup> Scott and Moleski, pp. 280-281.

<sup>24</sup> The first issues of the Society of Explorers quarterly bulletin are bound into a volume under the later name *Tradition & Discovery, The Polanyi Society Periodical, Publications of the Polanyi Society, Fall, 1972, Through Winter, 1984-85* and archived in the office of the current editor, Prof. Phil Mullins, Missouri Western State University. There is some inaccuracy in the numbering of the early issues because in the 1974 Fall issue, the death of Michael Polanyi, February 22, 1976 is reported.

<sup>25</sup> For more information on these papers see "Special Issue: Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi," *Tradition & Discovery*, 23: 1 (1996-97). An expanded and updated version of this document is accessible from the Polanyi Society web page (<http://www.missouriwestern.edu/orgs/polanyi/>).

<sup>26</sup> "Discovery and Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 28 (August, 1975), pp. 301-322.

<sup>27</sup> *Tradition & Discovery*, 3:1 (Fall 1974), pp. 2-4.

<sup>28</sup> *On the Tacit Dimension of Human Knowledge* (Doctoral Dissertation, Bergen, Norway, University of Bergen, 2006\_.

## **POLANYI SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP**

*Tradition and Discovery* is distributed to members of the Polanyi Society. An electronic (pdf) version of the current issue as well as past issues back to 1991 are available on the Polanyi Society web site (<http://www.missouriwestern.edu/orgs/polanyi/>). The Polanyi Society has members in thirteen different countries, although 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 three issues of *TAD* each year.

Annual membership in the Polanyi Society is \$35 (\$15 for students). The membership cycle follows the academic year; subscriptions are due November 1 to Phil Mullins, Missouri Western State University, St. Joseph, MO 64507 (fax: 816-271-5680, e-mail: [mullins@missouriwestern.edu](mailto:mullins@missouriwestern.edu)). Please make checks payable to the Polanyi Society. Dues can be paid by credit card by providing the card holder's name as it appears on the card, the card number and expiration date. Changes of address and inquiries should be sent to Phil Mullins. New members should provide the following subscription information: complete mailing address, telephone (work and home), e-mail address and/or fax number. Institutional members/libraries (\$25/year) should identify a department to contact for billing. New individual members should write 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.