

INTRODUCTION TO POTEAAT AND POLANYI III



Dale Cannon

Guest Editor

The following two articles and set of six poems are drawn from the June 2014 conference at Yale, The Primacy of Persons, which celebrated the teaching career and intellectual legacy of William H. Poteat (1919-2000), long-time apprentice and intellectual ally of Michael Polanyi (for more on Poteat, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_H._Poteat). This is the third installment of papers first presented at the 2014 conference to be published in *Tradition and Discovery*. The first may be found in volume 42:1 and the second in volume 42:4. Another, longer group has been published separately as *Recovering the Person: The Philosophical Anthropology of William H. Poteat*, edited by Ron Hall and myself (Lexington Books, 2016).

The first article by David H. Nikkel, “Curing Disembodied, Dualistic Patterns of Thinking in the Academy,” brings out how Poteat’s philosophical teaching and writing, drawing upon Pascal, Kierkegaard, Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein, and Polanyi, pursued a kind of healing philosophical therapy within the academy. Nikkel then extends Poteat’s work by way of a post-critical, critical analysis of contemporary studies being done in what is called the Cognitive Science of Religion. He reveals how these studies remain subject to much the same dualistic, discarnate picture of human beings that was critiqued by Poteat and his mentors.

The second article by Murray Jardine, “The Political Implications of William H. Poteat’s Philosophy,” locates Poteat’s thinking firmly within the trajectory of 20th Century political theory that has for quite some time focused on diagnosing the origins and nature of the modern age. Jardine particularly highlights Poteat’s raising to our attention the dialectical, and at times incoherent, development of modern Western thought that has been the result of an unresolved competition between the ontologies of ancient Greek culture and ancient Hebrew culture. But Jardine’s article is not just retrospective; it prospectively sketches and provides a framework for conceiving how, once we understand this development, we might achieve a more stable resolution.

The third is not an article but is a set of six poems by Elon G. (Jerry) Eidenier, selected by Eidenier from a larger set that was sent to the Primacy of Persons conference, some of which were read by Bruce Lawrence, following his own opening plenary address. Lawrence, a personal friend of both Poteat and Eidenier, as well as a colleague of Poteat at Duke's Department of Religion, read them in place of their author, as Eidenier was not able to be present. The poems testify of Poteat's influence on Jerry in developing an approach to poetry where "feeling" is allowed to "become thoughtful as well as mindful," and, I should like to add, strikingly present in Jerry's poems.