



## INTRODUCTION TO FURTHER EXPLORATIONS OF POLANYI AND POTEAT

**Gus Breyspraak**, *Guest Editor*

The following three articles are drawn from the June 2014 conference, *The Primacy of Persons*, which marked the opening of the collection of unpublished manuscripts, letters, and other writings related to William H. Poteat at the Yale Divinity School Library. William H. Poteat's writing and teaching reflected a long "apprenticeship" to Michael Polanyi of whom he said, "My debt to Polanyi is long and conspicuous."<sup>1</sup> He was also an influential ally of Polanyi.

The conference, sponsored by the Polanyi Society, drew some 35 former students, colleagues, friends, and others influenced by Poteat's publications. Participants, including several from Europe, enjoyed three days and evenings of convivial and vigorous intellectual exchange about topics that included overviews of Poteat's thought and development, explorations of his relationship to other figures in modern thought, applications of his thinking to various areas including philosophy, medical ethics, psychiatry, and theology, and recollections of Poteat's teaching and influence on students beyond the classroom.

The conference opened in the Day Missions Room of the YDS Library with the presentation of several gifts to the Yale Divinity School: a sculpture and a painting by renowned Greek artist Evangelos Moustakas, along with a framed, illustrated collection of original haikus about Poteat by internationally known haiku composer, Zoe Savinas, Moustakas' wife. Moustakas, a Greek sculptor, had a profound influence upon Poteat and became a close friend. They first met in Athens in 1968 when Poteat encountered a small sculpture of Alexander the Great and his steed Bucephalos that Moustakas had done. This encounter, a kind of "epiphany," occasioned a short essay, "The Voice of Orpheus," and eventually inspired Poteat's *Polanyian Meditations: In Search of a Post-Critical Logic*, where he developed his innovative conception of "mindbody" as the root and ground of all sense-giving and sense-reading.<sup>2</sup>

These gifts were acquired by Elizabeth Eidenier with donations raised from friends of Poteat, many of whom attended the conference. They were graciously accepted by Jennifer A. Herdt, YDS Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. During the opening

session, a display of the Poteat collection was presented by Martha Smalley, the Library's Director of Special Collections.

All of the conference papers, as well as videos of the presentations and lively discussions, are posted at [www.whpoteat.org](http://www.whpoteat.org). The Poteat website also gives other information about Poteat and will be an important resource for further scholarship in future years. Some of the papers discuss Polanyian influences on Poteat. Dale Cannon and Ron Hall are editing several papers for a planned volume on Poteat's philosophical anthropology. Other papers from this interesting conference may be published in a future issue of *Tradition & Discovery*, which has focused on Poteat's work in the past (see 20:1, 21:1, 27:3, 35:2, 36:2, and 40:2).

Participants and those who continue to benefit from the website and conference papers are grateful to the conference organizers, Dale Cannon, Walter Mead, and James Van Pelt, as well as the many donors to the conference fund, who together made this successful event possible.

The three papers that follow this introduction were selected for publication together in *TAD* because of their central focus on relationships between Poteat and Polanyi, two major intellectual innovators of the last century. The papers in this issue begin with Polanyi Society President David Rutledge's welcome and overview of Polanyi for participants who may have been relatively unfamiliar with Polanyi and his influence on Poteat. Then Phil Mullins and I sketch out the substantial personal contacts between these two men, showing a deep personal relationship between them over at least the twenty years of Polanyi's active and productive life. Finally, you will find David Rutledge's second contribution to the conference, which probes Poteat's debts to Polanyi, his differences with him, and his contributions to philosophy that took him beyond Polanyi.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>William H. Poteat, *Polanyian Meditations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 8.

<sup>2</sup>See Poteat's "Moustakas within His Ambience," in the collection, *The Primacy of Persons and the Language of Culture: Essays by William H. Poteat*, edited by James M. Nickell and James W. Stines (U of Missouri Press, 1993), 271-276; and his "Prologue" to *Polanyian Meditations: In Search of a Post-Critical Logic* (Duke University Press, 1985), 1-10. There is a striking description by Poteat of Moustakas' creative genius in action in *Recovering the Ground: Critical Exercises in Recollection* (SUNY Press, 1994), 68-70.