

# INTRODUCTION TO FURTHER EXPLORATIONS OF POTEAT AND POLANYI



**Robert P. Hyatt**, Guest Co-Editor

The following six papers are drawn from the June 2014 conference at Yale, *The Primacy of Persons*, which marked the opening of the collection of unpublished manuscripts, letters, and other writings related to William H. Poteat at the Yale Divinity School Library.

In “Poteat and Psychoanalysis,” I examine Poteat’s understanding of Freud and his (Poteat’s) use of psychoanalytic terms in his critique of western culture. I also point to some of Poteat’s allies in the contemporary psychoanalytic community who seek to expunge Cartesian influences within psychoanalysis. Finally, I explore the psychoanalytic and philosophical roots of Poteat’s creativity leading to his writing of *Polanyian Meditations*.

Allen Dyer’s “Therapeutic Implications of Post-Critical Thought” examines Polanyi and Poteat’s understanding of the “madness of modernity” with its bifurcation of reality into a God’s-eye view of detached objectivity versus lived experience. Dyer explores the ways in which both Poteat and Polanyi’s post-critical analysis of the regnant culture of modernity is “therapeutic” and points the way to a recovery of personal action which combines “right thinking with right feeling.”

Ellen Bernal’s paper, “Health Care Ethics Consultation: Personal Knowledge and Apprenticeship,” reflects on the “haunting ambiguity” of her practice as a hospital ethicist. In 1990 she became Hospital Ethicist for St Vincent Medical Center. There she observed firsthand the attempt to achieve “objectivity” which resulted in the elimination of the “ambiguous elements” of lived experience to the detriment of patient care.

As a teacher of writing, Sam Watson’s “Writing into the Post-critical: the Mindings Collage,” developed a way, in collaboration with his students, to “encourage persons to recognize, honor and assume responsibility for the workings of their own distinctive minds.” By means of the “Mindings Collage” Watson has been able, in a printed format, to evoke from his students responses which might well be characterized in tone and substance as “oral-aural.”

Richard Prust's paper, "Poteat and the Challenge of Identifying Persons," rejects definitions of persons by category or attribute. Instead Prust plumbs the depths of Poteat's reflexive understanding of "I" as implicating both "act and actor" in a narrative context, a story, in which *I* have *intentional* being. Extending Poteat's notion of reflexivity to legal judgments, Prust concludes that if we give up on identifying persons the consequences for forensics will be grave.

In "Reflections of a White Ghetto Preacher on the Life and Teachings of Dr. William H, Poteat," Sam Mann analyses the roots of racism in white assumptions of superiority which pervade western culture. Mann senses a resonance between Howard Thurman's quest for freedom and W.H.Poteat's search "for his soul" Both call for the radical dismantling of a profaned culture. As a student of their teachings, Mann affirms a cultural renewal by means of *relationships* based on equality in power and authority.

Each of us whose papers are published here are profoundly grateful to Dale Cannon, guest co-editor, for his careful, scholarly and generous editing of our work. Each of our papers is immeasurably improved by his painstaking efforts.