

REFLECTIONS ON THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS OF CASIRAS: A PERSONAL REVIEW

by Malcolm R. Sutherland, Jr.

Abstract. The history of CASIRAS and of *Zygon* is not only an intellectual history but a personal history—a history of human encounter with hopes and disappointments, dreams and concessions. Notwithstanding, it is the story of an ambitious enterprise with significant achievements and genuine promise of continued contributions to this important inquiry.

The twenty years of CASIRAS and its predecessor CASTS, which we celebrate today, is not only a story of exploration of ideas and theological encounters with the sciences, whose past and future challenges will be given voice by others in this anniversary issue of *Zygon*; it is also a very human story. It is a story of individuals working alone and together and of their exciting intellectual engagements, of course, but also of the sharing of their dreams and their disappointments, their successes and failures, their excitements and despairs. To be sure, this is not unique to this enterprise; it is a common if not universal dimension of the life of such institutions but a dimension which should not be forgotten nevertheless. It is not entirely a success story, but it is not a story of failure either. It is the story of significant strides forward despite considerable frustration.

It is the story of Ralph Burhoe, who can tell his own story more eloquently than any of us, but I will not forget my visits to his office at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in the early 1960s, to ask him to assist in an experiment at Meadville/Lombard, which he did and which led finally to the inauguration of the program and the establishment of the Center and the publication of *Zygon* we celebrate here.

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I remember the wonderful combination of enthusiasm and caution with which he responded to my inquiry and invitation. I realized that, as the executive officer of the American Academy, he was settled for life if he wished to be; and I wonder now at my own audacity to ask him to leave that for so insecure an experiment, to uproot himself from his beloved New England and come to Hyde Park. As I developed my invitation I could see him internally beginning to fashion concrete possibilities, but outwardly he was cautious.

There was, you see, a marvelous untimeliness about the inauguration of this endeavor providing frustrations and tensions with which we had to learn to live throughout its first decade.

The first of these had been anticipated by Ralph even as we visited in his Boston office. He recognized that my primary focus was upon the enrichment of professional education for men and women preparing for the ministry. Through association with the exciting thinkers in the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science (IRAS), I had concluded and urged Ralph to see that the time had come when these conversations and the fruits of research they inspired should be brought to bear upon the professional preparation for the ministry and subsequently upon religious faith generally. I forecast at the Center's opening more boldly than warranted, perhaps, that "Here a student's emerging theological and philosophical formulation would be systematically confronted by relevant concepts from today's science—relating religious theory to the insights, conceptions, and models of reality of contemporary science." Ralph cautioned, however, that far more research was necessary before adequate courses at the professional level could be fully useful.

Accepting his judgment on this, but impatient to have students enjoy what was already being anticipated by the engagement, we together arranged, first, to establish an interdisciplinary committee on theology and the frontiers of learning in order to plan an experimental curriculum at the professional level. Second, and more profoundly, we moved to organize what was to become the Center for Advanced Study in Theology and the Sciences (CASTS) for the necessary research to undergird that curriculum.

But, if the course offerings were premature from that perspective, they were even more untimely from another. The wave of anti-intellectualism and distrust of reason among that particular generation of students which was to sweep through American campuses, combined with many students' perception of science and technology as the arch enemies of humaneness and the perpetrators of the tragic war in Vietnam, made it nearly impossible for most students to entertain any likelihood that the sciences could be handmaidens of religion and ethics.

When I review the human story behind this Center, the human dimensions of the engagement we celebrate today, I recognize with some understanding and sympathy the agony of those sensitive and concerned students during the sixties and seventies as they combined our enthusiasm for the sciences with what they interpreted as the impotence or indifference of the educational establishment to challenge or to change the course of American foreign policy and ease their own discomfort in the face of the moral ambiguities that period presented them. These two perceptions unfortunately combined to reduce in their eyes the credibility of the Center's thrust.

This overly brief reference to the response of students to the curriculum they were being asked to take seriously, and to the establishment of a research center to support it, may appear as a digression from our chief interest in this anniversary celebration. But to understand the tensions with which the Center's early life was strained, we cannot overlook the impact of the larger context of American life in general and the American university life in particular during that especially difficult period, the force of which I certainly had not anticipated.

This negative response was, of course, not universal. Some students, some faculty members, and the trustees accepted the challenge of this approach to theological inquiry and supported it with enthusiasm. Among such faculty members was John Godbey, professor of Church History at Meadville/Lombard, who was unafraid to recognize how far back human history reaches into prehuman history and the possible relevance of evolutionary and ecological theories to contemporary theological understanding. These convictions grew out of his own historical scholarship, and he powerfully articulated them in at least two significant articles in *Zygon* on the need for a scientific theology. Similarly, among the trustees Donald Harrington, minister of the renowned Community Church of New York City, was an early Unitarian spokesman for the significance of this engagement; and the late Ralph Fuchs, distinguished professor emeritus of law at the University of Indiana and one-time president of the American Association of University Professors, worked vigorously to promote its acceptance.

Our story is also the story of George Riggan, then Riley Professor of Systematic Theology at Hartford Seminary Foundation, first full-time Fellow of the Center and one who has never lost his vision nor his enthusiasm for the Center's work. Profoundly supportive of Ralph's work while providing Ralph a theologically critical analysis, George's contribution to the Center's life cannot be overestimated. His relationship to Ralph and to Ralph's thought proved richly productive through weeks of conversations, seminars, institutes, and finally through the

travel with Ralph in order to find a suitable new home for the Center and assure its future. It is the story of Merle, George's wife, willing to move, if need be, to help him fulfill his appointment as First Resident Fellow, with Ralph, of CASIRAS. Firm in his support, critical in his judgment, scholarly in his contributions, George has surely been one of the Center's greatest friends and benefactors.

Reading the correspondence between these two men revealing their understanding of their task only increases our regret that it proved impossible adequately to fund CASIRAS at that time and realize their dreams and expectations. Wrote Riggan to Burhoe now some ten years ago, quoting Burhoe: "'Basic to problem solving is a new theoretical foundation reconciling the sciences and religion in a new understanding of values, their perception, appreciation, celebration, communication and enhancement.' That approach seems to me basic and would seem to me to place the heartiest claims upon our budget of energy, money and other resources."

Not the least of the School's tensions during the Center's early years at Meadville/Lombard was one by design. The other curriculum feature instituted at the School in that exciting year of 1964 was the establishment of its Center for Urban Ministry on the near north side of Chicago, with directors Neil Shadle and Ronald Engle of the Meadville/Lombard faculty. This was established as an on-going experimental ministry-to-metropolis, examining all preconceptions about the nature of the church and its ministry; exploring new forms, approaches, and methods; and indeed raising the experience and insights gained there as theological resources. This rationale was justification enough for such a center, but our additional hope was that these two centers would provide not only two distinct ways to work through theological issues, but, in tension with one another, would increase the vitality of the student's theological explorations. Only rarely was this actualized within individual students. (The greater tendency was to use this tension, as all others, destructively.) But when it did happen, the student's theology noticeably matured.

Burhoe came to Chicago in the autumn of 1964. The convocation initiating the enterprise was held in January, 1965. The First Faculty Committee, installed with considerable academic pomp, included besides Burhoe Professor John Hayward, theologian, and Professor Robert Tapp, philosopher of religion.

The Center itself was established in its own home at 5700 Woodlawn in October, 1966. Its first Fellows arrived that autumn. The first full-time, full-year Fellows were Professor George Riggan, Riley Professor of Systematic Theology at Hartford Seminary Foundation; Donald Gentner, professor of chemistry from the University of California,

Berkeley; Kenneth Cauthen, from the Crozer faculty; H. N. Wieman, professor at the University of Chicago; and John Ruskin Clark, a Unitarian-Universalist minister from San Diego.

The first issue of *Zygon* was published jointly by IRAS and CASTS at the University of Chicago Press in March, 1966. That journal, Ralph has suggested, is perhaps the most significant tangible contribution the Center has made, and his editorship kept its mission clear and explicit, and consequently saved it from becoming a journal for papers generally in the field of religion and science and more explicitly for papers which might contribute to or challenge the discovery and enrichment of scientifically justified theological affirmations.

The story of the interplay of individuals and ideologies who began to wrestle for control of the journal is too long to record here, but when it became clear to the University Divinity School that the Publication Board supported Burhoe's editorial policy and expected to retain Burhoe as editor, the Press became restless and the need to find a new "home" for *Zygon* became clear. Notwithstanding, the representatives of the University of Chicago Press deserve tremendous credit for their cooperation, patience, and craftsmenlike production of *Zygon*, despite many operational difficulties, from its inception in 1966 through 1978, with University Provost George Beedle's continued encouragement.

In that connection, if the work of CASIRAS is a human story, it is a story, too, of Edwin Abaya's editorial skill and unremitting labor as editorial assistant in the preparation of manuscripts for publication during the first decade—an unheralded, perhaps, but never unappreciated contribution to *Zygon's* standing as a reputable and scholarly journal.

Not incidentally, the Center's story is the story of the devoted support of Fran Burhoe, Ralph's first wife, her years of service to IRAS, and her enthusiasm for the Center, and Ralph's power to lift all our spirits as he wrote, once again out of the context of his fundamental understanding, his testimony of her contribution to his life and work.

And it is the beautiful story of Ralph's good fortune in meeting anew with Calla (who with her first husband, Grant, had enjoyed before his death pleasant, earlier associations with Ralph and Fran) and of their subsequent marriage, her tremendous energy on behalf of the Center, and her willingness to accompany Ralph wherever the Center might be reestablished once it became clear that Meadville/Lombard could no longer finance the Center and *Zygon* adequately. For the vision of the potential significance of the Center soon far outstripped Meadville/Lombard's limited resources, the Board's enthusiasm in view of student resistance, and the administration's realism as to the effect of inflation upon the fiscal capacity of the school.

It has been questioned, of course, from the beginning whether a tiny graduate theological school, principally designed to educate men and women for the liberal ministry, should itself engage a significant portion of its resources for fundamental theological research, more appropriate, perhaps, for a university to undertake. But this particular inquiry did not seem to be taking place systematically elsewhere, and a few of us at least were convinced of its promise and, indeed, of its necessity for the future of a credible and effective ministry.

The life of CASTS/CASIRAS then became the story of an exciting if brief period of exploration for adequate funding and a new home. Overtures to serve as the new home for the Center came from, among others, the Boston Theological Institute, Hartford Seminary Foundation, and the Institute on Science and Man at Rensselaerville in conjunction with the State University of New York at Albany.

On March 5, 1972, CASIRAS was officially founded to replace CASTS at meetings at Community Church in New York City, electing Donald Harrington as president of the board, Frank Opton as vice chairman, George Riggan as first senior fellow, and Malcolm Sutherland as acting executive director. While it was expected at that time to locate at Rensselaerville and affiliate with SUNY Albany, a choice made to move beyond sectarian sponsorship while remaining related to a university and other institutions, the final decision was to remain in Chicago within the Chicago Cluster of Theological Schools. In November, 1972, CASIRAS, replacing CASTS, negotiated with IRAS to continue publishing *Zygon*. And by January 1973 CASIRAS was fully incorporated as a not-for-profit institution "To study the relationship between religion and science with a view towards integrating religious beliefs and values with the conceptual systems of contemporary science." Ralph Burhoe, Ken Cauthen, George Riggan, Donald Harrington, Ervin Laszlo, Everett Clinchy, and Malcolm Sutherland were incorporators and directors.

When the time came to relocate *Zygon*, three major offers were extended, one from Boston University, one from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, and one from Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida. All were generous and earnest offers; the choice, difficult to make. What determined the choice, for at least some of us on the publication board, was the extent of time Karl Peters was to be given from his professional teaching responsibilities, as authorized by President Thaddeus Seymour and the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Rollins, to serve as *Zygon's* editor. The task demanded a tremendous amount of time and this offer, in at least that respect, was the most realistic. And the publication board and its editor would remain in control. No summary, however brief, can overlook the seriousness and generosity of the respective offers of all three of these institutions.

The human story behind this stage of the Center's life is the story of another servant, Professor Philip Hefner, of our host school for the anniversary celebration, whose devotion to IRAS, vision for CASIRAS, and labors on behalf of *Zygon* have resulted, among other fruits, in the design of a Th.D. program at the Lutheran School of Theology in this interdisciplinary field. With the encouragement and support of President William Leshner, it is the story of the Lutheran School's hospitality to CASIRAS and its records and activities, in cooperation with the Chicago Cluster of Theological Schools. And it is the story of their understandable disappointment bordering on dismay, that when *Zygon* left the University of Chicago Press it went to Rollins rather than to the Lutheran School. The quality and commitment of these two individuals shine even more brightly as they accepted that disappointment (which none of us can adequately measure) and continue unabated in their devotion to this engagement and their hospitality to the Center. Through the generosity of the Lutheran School of Theology, and under the leadership of Philip Hefner and Ralph Burhoe, courses and seminars by the Center continue, open to students from the various theological schools in the Hyde Park area.

When Meadville/Lombard was forced by financial limitations to give up responsibility for the Center, it gave up an entire ethos which tended, while it was there, to permeate the life of the school in an inexorable fashion. That ethos was a particular kind of discourse in which scholars brought their emerging ideas not to prove them right but to submit them to the scrutiny of other scholars for criticism and enrichment—papers in progress, ideas in ferment, not to prove but to improve. Not, I think, in Meadville/Lombard's 140 year history has a greater array of distinguished scientists, philosophers, and theologians—among them many Nobel Laureates—passed through its halls and engaged in such exciting theological speculation and inquiry, skepticism and reformation than in the decade 1964 to 1974. Those students and faculty members who cut through the prevailing clichés and predispositions of the period and took advantage of those great minds at work were significantly enriched.

As a consequence of the significant productivity of the Center, recognition of its work and of Ralph's inspiration and insight has come, with considerable thanks to Don Browning, professor at the University of Chicago and Dean of Disciples Divinity House, from the Templeton Foundation. The foundation awarded the Templeton Prize to Ralph in 1980 for his "Contribution to Progress in Religion." Today, scholars elsewhere are increasingly alert to *Zygon's* influence and increasingly reflect in their writing their indebtedness to the thoughts and insights the journal's articles have provided.

The story of the second decade of CASTS/CASIRAS and the growth of influence of *Zygon* is the story of the participation and substantive contribution of a new generation of seminal thinkers, including Karl Peters, *Zygon*'s editor and professor of Philosophy and Religion, Rollins College; and *Zygon*'s associate editors and editorial board members: Phil Hefner, about whom we have already spoken, professor of Systematic Theology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago; Solomon Katz, professor of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania; Don Browning, professor of Religion and Personality, University of Chicago; John Bowker, Dean, Trinity College, Cambridge University; Robert Sorenson of Sorenson and Associates, Inc.; Arthur Peacocke, Director of the Ian Ramsey Centre, Oxford University; Bernard Davis, professor of Bacterial Physiology, Harvard Medical School; and Eugene d'Aquili, associate professor of Psychiatry, University of Pennsylvania. Their work for IRAS and for *Zygon* and their concern for the future of CASIRAS are part of the inspiration for this anniversary celebration. Some of their vision of the future of CASIRAS is included elsewhere in this issue.

You will have discerned, I think, from what I have said, that despite the difficulties, tensions, and occasional disappointments, and despite our inability during its first two decades to finance the Center optimally, I believe that the creation of the Center and the publication of *Zygon* under Ralph's leadership and inspiration have made a substantial contribution to theological inquiry and hold even greater promise for the future. I also hope that you have discerned my own sense of gratitude for having been associated with this effort from its inception and with those who have been willing to share the implications of their research, scholarship, speculation, and reflection—both critical and reinforcing—on the Center's particular focus. On that foundation and with the profound commitment, energy, and insight of many of you here at this twentieth anniversary celebration of CASIRAS and *Zygon*, I have no doubt that the Center's promise will be fulfilled!