

In Memoriam

Malcolm R. Sutherland, 1916–2003

Malcolm Sutherland was one of the persons most responsible for establishing the science-and-religion dialogue in Chicago and the journal *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*. Educated at Miami University, Western Reserve University, and Meadville Lombard Theological School, he ministered to congregations in Hoopeston, Ill., Charlottesville, Va., Milton, Mass., and Harvard, Mass. In 1959 and 1960 he was Vice President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, and from 1960 to 1975 he was President of Meadville Lombard Theological School.

As the President of Meadville Lombard, Sutherland led the reformulation of the seminary's curriculum to help future ministers reflect theologically in the light of contemporary scientific knowledge. In 1959 he had become acquainted with the work of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science (IRAS) and especially with Ralph Wendell Burhoe, the Executive Director of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Sutherland invited Burhoe and other IRAS scientists and theologians to Chicago during the early 1960s to give lectures on science and religion. In 1964 he offered Burhoe the invitation to become a professor at Meadville Lombard, to direct a new Center for Advanced Study in Theology and the Sciences (CASTS), and to establish *Zygon* as the joint venture of CASTS and IRAS.

Since the first issue of the journal in March 1966, Sutherland has served as the co-chair of the Joint Publication Board of *Zygon*, representing CASTS and its successor CASIRAS (Center for Advanced Study in Religion and Science). He also was President of IRAS (1967–68, 1975–77) and Chaplain at the 1977 and 1982 IRAS Star Island Conferences. In 1982 he received an Academic Fellow Award from IRAS, and he was awarded the most distinguished honor of the Institute, that of an honorary officer, when he was elected in 1980 to the permanent position of Honorary Vice President.

To those who have worked with him, Sutherland will be remembered as a wonderful and supportive friend, a quiet counseling partner, a man with a smile and a twinkle in his eye, a gracious enabler of the work of others, and one who inspired others with his vision and high standards.

In his 1964 remarks that helped inaugurate the work of CASTS and *Zygon*, which are published in the March 1966 issue, Sutherland envisions an approach to theological reconstruction that

reflects the faith that the knowledge coming out of the frontiers of learning today is not basically destructive but, on the contrary, is a rich resource for our understanding of our destiny and its determinants. It presupposes taking science seriously, not using it simply to prove the truth of an already accepted doctrine or scripture but to help illumine our understanding of the human enterprise and its environment.

But this engagement also takes theology seriously. We are not abandoning this intellectual enterprise nor ignoring the church and its history, pretending that there is nothing to learn from our rich heritage. Religion has had its superstitions, its naïvetés, and its moments of resistance to newly acquired knowledge that threatened earlier convictions; but the sciences have occasionally had their misconceptions and their own peculiar moments of arrogance, too.

We do not arbitrarily discard the patterns and the myths informing religious institutions of our own or of others but seek, rather, to bring them into significant discourse with the models of reality posited by the various sciences. We do not confuse the task of worship with tests in a laboratory, but we do say that they can no longer remain apart as though one had no message to bring the other.

Our present stress upon the contributions of science for theology should not be interpreted as implying our disregard for the contribution of the humanities, especially the arts, for theological inquiry, or as suggesting that theological affirmations as expressed in the monumental patterns of worship and myth have nothing to say to the scientists and their understanding of the human enterprise. Clearly, we seek reciprocity, a genuine dialogue between these disciplines where participants respect and seek to understand one another.

Sutherland's vision of forty years ago is strikingly current, and his spirit continues to be present in the work of new generations of women and men who stand on the shoulders of one of the originating giants of our enterprise.

—Karl E. Peters