

## **THE EXTERNAL REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT BAYLOR UNIVERSITY**

The External Review Committee was convened to review the status of the Michael Polanyi Center at Baylor University, which was established a year ago with the primary aim of advancing the understanding of the sciences. In the early summer, members of the Committee received copies of books and articles relevant to the work of the Center. On September 8 and 9, 2000, the Committee met to discuss what they had read, to hear from persons who addressed matters about which the Committee was concerned, and to formulate a response to the charge the Committee had been given. The vigorous discussions about the issues contained in the charge reflected the variety in the backgrounds and perspectives of the Committee members. The outcome of these discussions was a thorough and even-handed review of the concerns before the Committee.

It is important from the outset to emphasize that the sciences at Baylor University are the inheritors of a long and distinguished tradition. For many years, undergraduate instruction in the sciences at Baylor has been conducted in an exciting and effective manner. The graduate and research programs are solid and well respected throughout the scientific community. Not only have students and faculty been active in the mainstream of scientific disciplines, but they have also pursued initiatives in new areas and directions. Baylor's heritage, in this regard, is clearly one of which it can be proud.

The relationship of the sciences to other academic fields is a further responsibility that Baylor seeks to address. Relationships between the sciences and the humanities, as well as issues relating to the environment and public policy, are matters of real concern to the Baylor community. The Committee strongly endorses, therefore, the aim of enhancing the public understanding of science, particularly as this is expressed through serious work in the history and philosophy of science. This particular responsibility is one that has already been recognized by the institution of the Herbert H. Reynolds Lectureship in the History and Philosophy of Science. Efforts in this area could well receive an appropriate and timely emphasis on the part of the university.

Given the university's tradition, there is a natural interest also in the relationship of science and religion. Research in this area ought to be strongly encouraged, at the same time recognizing that this goal is best served by promoting a variety of perspectives. The university should continue to foster a broad range of scholarship in this domain and in this way contribute to the active dialogue between science and religion now in progress. The Institute for Faith and Learning would seem to be an appropriate administrative structure for furthering this end.

Within the broad range of issues that bear on the relationship between the sciences and religion, those raised by recent work on the criteria appropriate to claims of intelligent design could well find a place. As research members in the Institute for Faith and Learning, Drs. William Dembski and Bruce Gordon would be enabled to pursue their interests in these areas. It is important to carry out this work in ways that encourage dialogue with faculty in a variety of fields.

An advisory committee composed of members of the Baylor faculty would be of strategic importance in clarifying policies and practices for the science and religion component of the Institute for Faith and Learning. In addition, this committee could serve as an effective sounding board for such programs undertaken by the Institute. It could also provide helpful communication with those academic fields from which its members would come.

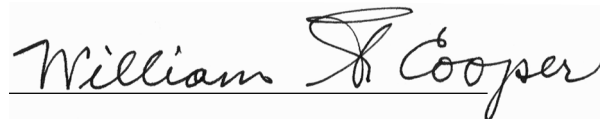
Given Baylor's tradition, issues related to the interaction of science and religion need to be dealt with openly and freely, and these should be of continuing interest within the program of the Institute for Faith and Learning. Given the present circumstances, these discussions might best be carried out under the broad umbrella of the Institute through adequate administrative structures.

It is quite appropriate to associate the name of Michael Polanyi with discussions relating to science and religion. However, Polanyi explicitly indicated that he did not think that an agency such as that implied by claims of intelligent design need be invoked when dealing with the growth in complexity of the living world over aeons past (*Personal Knowledge*, p. 395). Given this, and given also the debates that have surrounded the Michael Polanyi Center from its origins, it would seem best that whatever research is carried out at Baylor on the design inference should not bear the Polanyi name. The more inclusive mandate of the Institute for Faith and Learning would allow it to accommodate research of this sort while pointing to a broader range of interests as well.

The recommendations of the Committee can thus be expressed as follows:

- (1) It is important for a university in the Christian tradition to take an active interest in issues involving the complex and changing relationships between science and religion. This mission can best be fostered by the University's Institute for Faith and Learning where it seems to be naturally at home. In pursuing this mission, room should be made for a variety of approaches and topics. It would clearly be too restrictive on the part of the Institute to focus attention in this area on a single theme only, such as the design inference.
- (2) Nevertheless, the Committee wishes to make it clear that it considers research on the logical structure of mathematical arguments for intelligent design to have a legitimate claim to a place in current discussions of the relations of religion and the sciences. Although this work, involving as it does technical issues in the theory of probability, is relatively recent in origin and has thus only just begun to receive response in professional journals (see, for example, the essay by Elliot Sober in *Philosophy of Science*, 66, 1999, pp. 472-488), the Institute should be free, if it chooses, to include in its coverage this line of work, when carried out professionally.
- (3) An advisory committee to the Institute for Faith and Learning, composed of Baylor faculty members, should be appointed to assist in planning and reviewing the science and religion component of the Institute.
- (4) For the reasons stated above, the Committee believes that the linking of the name of Michael Polanyi to programs relating to intelligent design is, on the whole, inappropriate. Further, the Polanyi name has come by now in the Baylor context to take on associations that lead to unnecessary confusion.

In conclusion, fostering dialogue regarding the history and philosophy of science and especially the relationship between science and religion is important, even if sometimes controversial. Willingness to encourage such dialogue is a measure of the commitment of an institution to the flourishing of academic freedom.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William F. Cooper". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

William F. Cooper, Chair  
External Review Committee

October 16, 2000