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## Baylor Releases Polanyi Center Committee Report

Oct. 17, 2000

by [Larry D. Brumley](#)

Baylor University President Robert B. Sloan Jr. today released the report of the Michael Polanyi Center peer review committee, which was appointed last spring to assess the purposes and activities of the controversial center.

The eight-member committee, composed of academics from throughout the country and chaired by Dr. William F. Cooper, professor of philosophy and former dean of the Baylor College of Arts and Sciences, concluded that the Polanyi Center's mission of fostering dialogue regarding the history and philosophy of science and especially the relationship between science and religion is important, even if sometimes controversial.

The report further stated that "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." Polanyi Center Director William Dembski's research and writings in the area of intelligent design have been the most controversial aspects of the Center's work, even though its academic mission is much broader.

Specifically, the committee recommended that the University establish an advisory committee, to be composed of Baylor faculty members from disciplines related to the Center's work, to assist in planning and reviewing its activities. The report also said that the linking of the name of Michael Polanyi to programs related to intelligent design is, on the whole, inappropriate, given the late scientist's views as expressed in his book *Personal Knowledge*. The committee recommended that the University discontinue the use of the name while continuing the Center's work within the Institute for Faith and Learning. The Polanyi Center has resided administratively within Baylor's three-year-old Institute for Faith and Learning since it was established in 1999.

"I want to express my deep appreciation to Dr. Cooper and the other members of the review committee for their diligence and dedication in carrying out their charge," Sloan said. "They invested many hours in reviewing and evaluating the work of the Polanyi Center and have delivered a well-written and thoughtful report. I accept all of the committee's recommendations and have asked Provost Donald Schmeltekopf to implement them fully and specifically as soon as possible.

"I am pleased that the central mission of the Center has been affirmed and that the committee has underscored the fact that support of academic freedom includes protecting controversial ideas," Sloan said. "We certainly could have and should have handled more effectively the program's implementation, but we will correct some of those early mistakes by acting on the committee's recommendations, specifically to appoint a faculty advisory committee and to discontinue the use of the Michael Polanyi name."

Schmeltekopf said work will begin immediately on appointing the advisory committee.

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"I will be consulting with Dr. Wallace Daniel, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and others on the appointment of an advisory committee that includes faculty members from disciplines that relate to the history and philosophy of science as well as those disciplines that touch on the relationship between science and religion. Its role will be to clarify policies and practices and serve as a sounding board for these programs in the Institute for Faith and Learning. I also anticipate that the committee will play an important role in encouraging better communication between the Institute and various academic departments on campus."

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