

## **OLIVER R. BARCLAY AND SIR JOHN HOUGHTON**

### **OBITUARY**

#### **Professor Sir Robert Boyd CBE FRS**

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Robert Boyd who died recently was a very early member of the discussion groups that met in London immediately after the Second World War to develop the work of the *Research Scientists' Christian Fellowship*, which had started in 1944, and is now *Christians in Science*. Early on he was asked to speak to a group in Cambridge and came back acknowledging that he had not done well and that he needed to read much more and discuss with others before he could speak adequately. He became a regular contributor to the Conferences and then a speaker to Christian Unions and wider audiences. He often combined visits to speak on professional subjects with a talk to student groups or other audiences on science and faith issues. As he grew in professional reputation, this was often very effective and he became a major speaker in this field and sometimes appeared on TV and Radio on such issues. His was one of a group of BBC talks on 'Science and Christian Faith Today' that was published as early as 1953 by Lutterworth and which was seen as something of a breakthrough for an evangelical voice in the field. Later Robert contributed to *Christianity in a Mechanistic Universe* (IVP, 1965) and served on the Editorial Board of *Science and Christian Belief* from its inception in 1989.

Robert's early interest in science started when he was still a schoolboy, encouraged by his father who was a science teacher at a Technical College, and like Robert an active member of a Brethren Church. He went on to become an engineering student at Imperial College, London in 1941 and was recruited by the Admiralty in 1943 to develop mine detection and similar devices. His seniors recognised his ability and he was given a DSIR Research Assistantship at University College London to carry out experiments in Physics, thereby obtaining his PhD. He was always a most ingenious developer of very sensitive apparatus for measuring and detecting physical phenomena.

In 1995 Boyd was sent by Professor Massey to Australia and New Zealand to discuss research with rockets at Woomera. That was the first of many visits abroad concerned with space research. His research group became a pioneering centre for the development of spacecraft instrumentation and data. Accommodation for the group soon became inadequate in Gower Street and he obtained a grant from the electronic firm Mullards and with help from the University set up the Mullard Space Science Laboratory in Surrey, 30 miles away. It became a centre of excellence and of international importance for space research, attracting research workers from many countries. Innovative instruments were designed and built for flights in the early series of UK satellites launched in the 1960s and for early American and European spacecraft. These

were particularly concerned with probing the Earth's high atmosphere and with the emerging science of X-ray astronomy. As well as being laboratory Director, Robert maintained a 'hands-on' involvement with the development of the novel instrumentation, later encouraging his research team to become involved in developing instruments for the observation of the Earth's atmosphere with a view to understanding climate change. Although Robert was never directly concerned with manned flights, some of his apparatus was carried by manned rockets. No one was surprised when he was knighted or made an FRS.

Robert had a deserved reputation as an excellent team builder. He was warm and caring for staff and always carried an infectious enthusiasm for his work. At a crucial point in his career he was invited to become an office holder in his local church. He told one of us (ORB) at the time that he had had to weigh up very carefully how it would affect his work responsibilities before he accepted, saying that it might slow down his promotion but would not hinder his doing full justice to his research students and others who depended on him. As a matter of fact it probably helped his leadership style in the Laboratory. He had married Mary Higgins in 1949 and had a very close and happy family, with three children. In 1983 he retired somewhat early to look after his wife, who had developed Parkinson's Disease, and cared for her faithfully until her death in 1996. Two years later he married again, to Betty Robinson. He died aged 81. He was to some of us a model of a Christian who was an exceptionally gifted scientist and balanced his very demanding professional responsibilities with everything else and held a consistent and positive faith to the end.

### Correction

The Editors would like to point out that the article by Prof. Owen Gingerich published in *Science & Christian Belief* 16, 13-26, 2004, entitled 'Truth in Science: Proof, Persuasion, and the Galileo Affair', was originally published in *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 55, 80-87, 2003. The Editors apologise for not citing the original publication details at the time.

The article, as with all articles in *Science & Christian Belief* back to the first Issue, may be read at our web-site: [scienceandchristianbelief.org](http://scienceandchristianbelief.org).