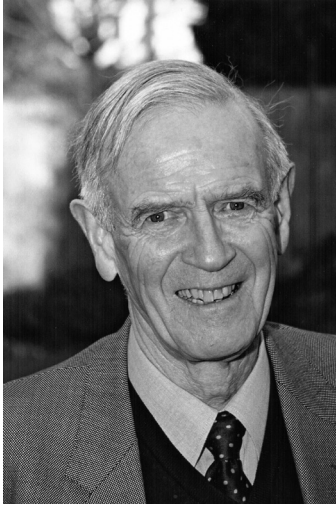


Obituary

Oliver Barclay (1919-2013)



Oliver Barclay, founder of Christians in Science, died in Leicester on 12 September 2013. He was born in Japan 94 years earlier, the son of CMS missionaries and great grandson of Thomas Fulwell Buxton MP, member of the Clapham Sect and colleague of William Wilberforce (Oliver wrote a biography of his ancestor, published in 2001). He was successively Assistant Secretary, Universities Secretary and General Secretary of the IVF (now UCCF). He will be primarily remembered as an evangelical leader and statesman, highly influential and respected in Christian circles, both student and nationally throughout the second half of the twentieth century. This reputation will probably overshadow his memory as a scientist and contributions to Christian science

during the same period. But his background was firmly in science. It could well have been his scientific training which led him to initiate a series of books in the 1980s on 'When Christians Disagree', with Christians setting out and having to defend evidence for their particular beliefs on divisive subjects within evangelicalism: women, pacifism, baptism and – the only one directly concerned with a scientific topic – on *Creation and Evolution*, edited by biochemist and future University Vice-Chancellor, Derek Burke.

Oliver went up to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1938 to read zoology. He graduated in 1942 and went on to do a PhD under the supervision of the Professor of Zoology, Sir James Grey. His thesis was on *The Locomotion of Lower Tetrapods*; his family understood his research as being on 'how toads walk'. In later years, Oliver wrote several books (*The Christian and Social Responsibility*, *Whose World?*, *Living and Loving*, *Salt to the World*) under the pseudonym 'A.N. Triton', hiding his true name lest his views were taken to be IVF policy. 'Triton' is a synonym for *Triturus*, the Crested Newt genus, which is a sort of first cousin of the Common Toad. In his history of the IVF (*Contending for the Faith: a history of the evangelical movement in the universities and colleges*), Douglas Johnson records that Oliver remained in Cambridge because he was 'engaged on post-graduate research of national importance'; Oliver himself put it, 'the main focus of my research was the mechanics of animal movement and human walking. This was partly motivated by the fact that a better understanding of these movements would allow the development of more effective artificial limbs.'

He obtained his PhD in 1945, and then spent a year demonstrating in the zoology department, with the aim of going on to teach in a university overseas, probably in China. However, in 1946 he was persuaded to join the staff of the IVF as its Assistant Secretary for a couple of years – and remained with the organisation for thirty-five years, the rest of his working life.

Oliver entered Cambridge as a Christian and was a powerful influence as CICCUC President for two years and then Chairman of the IVF Student Executive. In 1943, as a new graduate, he became aware of the desire of the IVF to establish a centre for Bible research and put the IVF in touch with the sale of a house in Cambridge owned by one of his relatives – a building which became the biblical study centre, Tyndale House. John Stott went up to the same college as Oliver in 1940 and the two became and remained good friends and mutual supports, long after their time at Cambridge. In his biography of John Stott, Timothy Dudley-Smith wrote that the two of them often used to cycle out to the Fens or to that mecca of birdwatchers, the local sewage farm – and talk more about theology than ornithology.

Oliver seems to have had a culture shock in passing from the self-disciplining life of an undergraduate (even one in the middle of a World War) to the constraints of scientific research. Writing about the IVF's recognition of spiritual needs of such people, Douglas Johnson (op. cit.) records,

Some of the loneliest people in the world proved to be some of the new science post-graduates. Before graduation they had enjoyed the comradeship of undergraduate life, only suddenly to find themselves as isolated back-room boys in a research department. There they struggled depressingly with the beginnings of a thesis and the task of setting up the appropriate apparatus. Their first need was for suitable Christian fellowship. Then the new graduate had an urgent need to arrive at a coherent 'world-view'. It was here that senior Christian colleagues 'who had been that way before' could be of such crucial value in friendship and advice.

In 1943, Oliver brought together in Cambridge a number of Christians involved in scientific research as a 'Scientist's Study Group'. In 1944 and again in 1945, he organised a 'Scientific Research Workers Conference'. Oliver has described the background:

At the first conference in 1944, one of the first papers was 'The relation between scientific and religious knowledge' ... Another was on 'Reductionism'. We were then chiefly research students doing PhDs and chose our programme to meet what seemed to us to be the issues at the time ... At the start we said we wanted to change the whole climate of thought about science and faith.

These 'Scientific Research Workers' Conferences' were soon formalised

by Douglas Johnson into a 'Research Scientists' Christian Fellowship' (RSCF), with Oliver as the Secretary and driving force, supported by a Committee under a titular Chairman (Originally R.J.C. (Bob) Harris, then John Bunton, Alan Weir and me from 1968-97. I stayed so long because I saw my task as little more than encouraging Oliver, who took the initiatives, made the contacts and did the effective organising. I handed on the Chairmanship to Colin Russell, but by then Oliver was taking a back seat, although still very much involved). RSCF was originally a section within the Graduates Fellowship. Its main national activity has almost always been an annual conference, usually held in London (supplemented in recent years by a 'Northern Conference'). For a long time, the very productive practice was for the conference to be based on previously circulated papers prepared (usually) by a university group of graduates and senior members, often with an introduction from a professional theologian to the subject being discussed. The conference time itself could then be spent wholly in discussion. The papers obviously varied in quality; the better ones were published in the *Christian Graduate*. Another RSCF initiative was running field courses in various places around the country, each day ending with an evangelistic or apologetic talk. In due course these were transferred to the Inter-Schools Christian Fellowship of the Scripture Union.

Oliver remained the Secretary and effective motor behind the RSCF up to and long after his formal retirement in 1980. As noted above, the Fellowship's origin was pastoral, but Oliver interpreted this in a much wider way than the normal meaning of that word, extending it into apologetics and what might be called pre-evangelism – seeking to remove illusory barriers to beliefs allegedly erected by science. When I came to London in 1956 to start my own PhD and was swept into the RSCF by Oliver, he told me that one of its main purposes was to discipline young scientists to read outside their subject and to write Christianly. There was always a 'London paper' at the RSCF Conference, drafted by a group convened and meeting in Oliver's office in Bedford Square and I seemed always to be a member of the group – my laboratory was only a few hundred yards up Gower Street in University College.

Oliver was clearly helped and stretched by his discussions with John Stott, begun when they were both students. He records,

I wrestled with evolution early on. The conclusion I came to was that if evolution was a scientific process, then there was no problem. If it is a philosophy however, that is a big problem, and since it is often used as a stick to beat Christians with, that basic 'naturalism' has to be confronted. The question of biblical interpretation is usually in the background. I was much helped by a long forgotten book *Christ and the World of Thought* by Daniel Lamont who was an evangelical Professor of Apologetics in Edinburgh.

Oliver's first publication was written in the year he obtained his PhD and was an earnest of an interest he pursued throughout life; its title was 'The meanings of the word evolution in biology and their bearing on the Christian faith', and was published in the *Journal of the Transactions on the Victoria Institute* (1946) 78, 91-107. His horizons were widened when he moved to London and the IVF office. He organised approximately quarterly evening meetings, often to discuss a book (*Miracles* by C.S.Lewis was one choice). He also convened a group of young scientists who went on to form the core of the young RSCF and beyond. It included Douglas Spanner, Roland Dobbs from University College, who introduced his friend from their wartime research together on radar, Donald MacKay from King's College, Robert Boyd from Imperial College, and from time to time, Malcolm Jeeves from Cambridge. An early fruit of this group was a series of BBC broadcasts, subsequently published in 1953 as *Where Science and Faith Meet*. The first essay in the booklet was written by James Torrance, who went on to become Professor of Systematic Theology in Aberdeen. It was followed by chapters by MacKay, Jeeves and Boyd; Oliver wrote a synthesising epilogue. Another initiative in the 1950s was to lay on a lecture during the Annual Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (now the British Science Festival). This took place every year until a new Secretary of the Association refused to advertise the lecture in the meeting programme, which meant that few people knew about it.

Oliver wrote years later that much of his thinking on science and faith was informed by Reijer Hooykaas and Donald MacKay. Hooykaas was Professor of the History of Science at the Free University of Amsterdam. He was introduced to Oliver and the RSCF by Martyn Lloyd-Jones who had met him in the Netherlands and arranged for him to speak at the RSCF Conference in 1948. MacKay – brought up as a 'wee Free' in Caithness – credited Hooykaas with having 'taught [him] to recognize the liberating implications of biblical faith [as distinct from rationalistic biblicism] for the freedom of science and for properly critical thinking'.

The RSCF also had a role in the wider student world. Douglas Johnson wrote of the post-1945 situation that

the approach of the senior members of the college staffs [he mentions Ambrose Fleming of University College London, one of the founders of the Evolution Protest Movement] mostly followed the lines of the older apologetics of the early part of the 20th century. Further rapid advances in science and technology were already demanding a new approach, new terminology and new thought-modes ... Two of the most prominent providing for newer generations of students were Donald MacKay [Professor of Communication at Keele and a future Gifford Lecturer] and Malcolm Jeeves [Professor of Psychology at St Andrews and later President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh; current President of CiS].

An early fruit of RSCF thinking was an IVP book *Christianity in a Mechanistic Universe* (1965), containing essays by Mackay, Frank Rhodes (who went on to become President of Cornell University), David Ingram (later Vice-Chancellor of the University of Kent) and Robert Boyd (responsible for the UK Space Programme in the 1970s). A particularly significant occasion was a small conference of thirty-six people from ten countries held in Oxford in 1965 intended (in Oliver's words) 'to set out a positive Christian view of science ... and to help forward the enunciation and dissemination of a Christian view of science which is true to the Bible and to historic Christianity'. Biblical illiteracy and liberal religious education were perceived as more threatening than evolutionary science. The findings of the conference were collated by Malcolm Jeeves as *The Scientific Enterprise and Christian Faith*, a book which was widely used in college courses, especially in North America. The conference (in the words of US historian Christopher Rios) 'signalled a reawakening within evangelicalism'.

Oliver was responsible for many other initiatives. He stimulated and organised professional working groups on a variety of topics: humanness (years ago I was a member of a group discussing the 'Nature of Man', chaired by a young lecturer called George Carey), the treatment of animals, objective knowledge (which led to a published symposium with that title, edited by Paul Helm; Oliver wrote about 'Objectivity in morality'). Valerie MacKay remembers Oliver telling her that he had established around sixteen such groups. Oliver was an excellent field biologist and one of the things he particularly enjoyed was teaching on the field courses set up by RSCF, particularly when this involved marine biology.

Douglas Johnson viewed the publications of the RSCF as being its most generally helpful contribution to the Christian cause. The lack of scholarly publications by evangelicals before the 1950s has been well documented. Its dearth is well illustrated by Oliver's circular before the 1948 Conference on 'the Christian view of nature'. He wrote 'There is no very satisfactory literature in English. Kuyper's *Calvinism* is good ... Orr's *The Christian View of God and the World* covers a wide area but is very good in parts. It is not worth reading every word of Orr as some is a bit dated.' Kuyper's book was published in 1898, Orr's in 1893. This is not the place to list significant publications produced by the RSCF/CiS, but Oliver's initiative in obtaining a grant from the Templeton Foundation for lectures on religion and science should be mentioned. It gave rise to three books: *The Search for God, Can Science Help?* by John Houghton (1992), *The Earth, Humanity and God* by Colin Russell (1994) and *The Earth Under Threat* by Ghilleen Prance (2004).

The RSCF had grown mightily from the pastoral concern of Oliver Barclay in the late 1940s. Forty years on, in 1986 I received on behalf of the RSCF a Templeton Foundation UK Award for 'sustained advocacy of the

Christian faith in the world of science'. The organisation changed its name in 1988 to Christians in Science (CiS), recognising that its ministry and membership was far wider than simply 'research students'. Its current membership is about 800, 150 of them outside Britain. In 1989, in association with the Victoria Institute (founded in 1865 to defend 'the great truths revealed in Holy Scripture ... against the oppositions of Science, falsely so called') CiS inaugurated a twice-yearly journal *Science and Christian Belief*, which was edited by Oliver for its first three years before he handed it on to Denis Alexander, an immunologist, who went on in 2006 to found the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion at St Edmund's College in Cambridge, in itself a tribute to how far the science-faith debate had come. Oliver's last paper on science and faith was 'Design in nature', published in *Science and Christian Belief* in 2006. It was typically Oliver Barclay – a strong, eirenic, Bible-based rebuttal of the idea of 'intelligent design', currently fashionable in parts of evangelicalism.

In his Cambridge days, Oliver would have walked many times from Trinity College to the Zoology Department. His most direct route was probably through the New Museums Site from Free School Lane, passing through the great wooden gates of the old Cavendish Laboratory – the gates through which Watson and Crick rushed to the nearby pub after working out the structure of DNA, shouting that they had discovered the secret of life. I suspect that Oliver was more likely than they to have noticed that the gates bear the words of Psalm 111 verse 2, sometimes called the research scientists' text, 'Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them.' It is a verse which is a fitting epitaph to Oliver Barclay, Christian, scientist and much else.

Sam Berry

The above tribute is drawn from Douglas Johnson's history of the IVF and an interview with Oliver on the web: http://cis.org.uk/upload/Resources/Interviews/interview_o_barclay.pdf, complemented by conversations with Malcolm Jeeves, whose links and knowledge of Oliver go back to the early days of the RSCF and with Valerie MacKay, who sent me reminiscences of her late husband, including details of his friendship and interaction with Reijer Hookyaas. I am grateful also to Bennet McInnes, Secretary of CiS from 1990 to 2000 for letting me have some of the early RSCF documents in his care and to Christopher Rios of Baylor University for allowing me to see sections of his forthcoming book *After the Monkey Trial* (to be published by Fordham University Press; see also his paper 'Claiming complementarity: twentieth-century evangelical applications of an idea', *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* (2011) 63, 75-84). I acknowledge also with gratitude, helpful conversations with Oliver's son John, Lightfoot Professor of Divinity at Durham University; Bishop Timothy Dudley-Smith; Dr Alan Kerry, Secretary of the Victoria Institute; Professor Derek Burke and Huw Spanner.