

Q&A: 'Expelled's' Robert Marks

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The Southern Baptist TEXAN's Jerry Pierce interviewed Robert Marks, a distinguished professor of engineering at Baylor University, regarding his role in the upcoming movie documentary "Expelled," starring Ben Stein. Last summer Marks' research website related to intelligent design (ID) drew enough criticism at the Baptist school that he was forced to move the site to an independent web server, remove Baylor's name from the research and also return private grant money donated to Baylor on Marks' behalf.

Prior to his coming to Baylor in 2003, Marks served on the faculty of the University of Washington in Seattle for 26 years. The following is excerpted from the interview.

TEXAN: First off, what is your faith background?

MARKS: I have been a follower of Jesus Christ since I was a junior in college. While at the University of Washington I was the Campus Crusade for Christ advisor for 18 years. I knew Walter Bradley, another distinguished professor of engineering at Baylor, an incredible man and one of the heroes in my life. I had heard him speak on the topic of the scientific evidence for the existence of God. I was up for moving on to an endowed chair in Colorado. Baylor was attempting through their 2012 Initiative to be the first institution that pursued research and celebrates a Christian worldview. I heard about that and I decided that was one thing I wanted to dedicate the rest of my career to. For that reason we came down to Baylor in 2003.

TEXAN: Why is there a conflict over ID at a self-identifying Christian school such as Baylor?

MARKS: Baylor had a reputation as an excellent teaching university that wanted to jumpstart its research programs. I have my name on about five books and about 300 academic publications. They wanted that reputation. But I realized after I came here that Baylor, with its goals, was attempting to do things that are contradictory and they needed to make decisions. One, they want to be recognized by the world as a critical research institution, and number two, they want to celebrate a Christian worldview.

Well, as Christians we are told not to seek the approval of the world. And so as I see it, Baylor is going to come to a place where they will have to make the decision on one side or the other—to be acceptable to the world or to pursue a Christian worldview. So that, I believe, is one of the things that is motivating what is happening right now.

There is a two-sphere model of education that says you have science, and you have your faith, and the two shouldn't intersect. You have a quote by the current president (William Underwood) that says the Bible is not a book about science. I claim that saying the Bible is not a book about science is like saying a cookbook is not a book about chemistry. Now, it doesn't address chemistry, but boy, there's a lot of chemistry in a cookbook. And the other thing about the two-sphere model—it is the only mode of Christianity that is acceptable to atheists. So if your goal as a Christian is to be compatible with the world, your only choice is the two-sphere model.

I also believe that any pursuance of truth requires consideration of a creator. And many people try to define science to exclude the possibility of a creator. And if you do that it isn't a pursuance of truth any more.

TEXAN: When did you first realize there might be a conflict between your work in ID and the academic priorities at Baylor?

MARKS: I first thought it was a dislike of Williams Dembski [a leading ID proponent formerly at Baylor and now at Southwestern Seminary]. William Dembski is a polarizing name at Baylor. I actually received a grant from a private organization, a Microsoft millionaire, and the purpose was to bring on Bill Dembski so I could see him a couple of days a week and actually have him in an office here to do some collaboration. Boy, [the Baylor administration] didn't like that. They sent back the money for it. And at the time, I thought it was William Dembski. And later on, when they shut down my website and with other comments that were made, there was no doubt—it was indeed intelligent design.

There is—and this is the topic explored in 'Expelled'—there is a Darwinian, atheistic mafia whose purpose is to ruin

the careers of anybody who delves into the idea of intelligent design. And we had kept it stealth from them that Bill was involved.

Now to be clear, at Baylor it wasn't stealth, as was suggested in a student newspaper article here. It was totally open at Baylor. I had the proposal. Bill Dembski's name was on the proposal. It is amusing that the previous provost actually blamed me for the president signing something [the research grant proposal] he didn't read.

We tried other avenues for grant money. The National Science Foundation said it did not fit the direction they were looking for. The Templeton Foundation turned it down as well.

TEXAN: Where does the research stand?

MARKS: The research is ongoing and I'm really excited about it. We do have some papers under consideration for publication in journals. The basic idea of what Bill Dembski and I are working on in evolutionary informatics is, simply put, evolution is modeled as an assembly line where complexity pumps out of the end. And it took a lot of smarts to assemble that assembly line. We've been working on measuring the information that would be required for that. And it's still going on. Through my background, a lot of people say, 'Boy, this Robert Marks, he's doing things in biology. He has no reason to do anything in biology because he's an engineer.'

Well, it turns out engineers have been doing evolutionary computing to design things for years. I've been involved in this area in simulation of evolution.

TEXAN: What's the result so far, in layman's terms?

MARKS: The universe as accepted by science in terms of size and age is not big enough or old enough to explain evolution. There just do not exist the probabilistic resources—the idea that evolution has a chance. People in ID have been saying this for a long time, but we're actually able to measure the information that is required and do it in bits—just like the same bits that we use in a DVD player, measuring that information content in bits—and the results are astonishing.

We have some papers that are being peer reviewed for journals. I did recognize that Bill was a name that was polarizing, so when we submitted these papers we submitted them without Bill's name on them. I don't know if this current publicity that I've gotten because of the Baylor situation is now going to hurt in the peer-review aspects. Currently, we want to do the research. I have actually tried to begin a draft of a book trying to explain the results of our research without the mathematics. I'm an engineer; it's hard for me to write a page without putting an equation on it. Bill, of course, is genius at doing that. He's one of the most talented men I've ever met. But he has the ability to write at a wonderful lay level without getting into all the details. I think that's a ways off, however, because we have a lot of other things to do before that.

TEXAN: Where do the negotiations with you, your attorney, and the Baylor administration stand right now?

MARKS: I believe the negotiations as of recently have just reached an impasse. I have moved the evolutionary informatics site onto a third-party server and it's still there. Currently, it's at evoinfo.org, and it includes the paper that was done. Then we've also added other affiliates from other universities who are also helping us with our work.

TEXAN: Have you screened the movie yet?

MARKS: Yes, I have. I sat there and I laughed. I laughed because I have seen this atheistic, big-science mafia squad come out and kill the careers of many of my friends. Guillermo Gonzalez, whom I knew at the University of Washington. Richard Von Sternberg, whom I recently met. And to see their motivation and their goals so clearly exposed in a Ben Stein sort of dry humor was incredible. I really, really enjoyed the movie. I think it is going to have an enormous impact. I hope it does.

The producers talked to me prior to the Baylor incident because they knew of my work with Bill Dembski. Then when the website was removed they came to Baylor and attempted to interview the president and a bunch of other people about this. They got some interesting quotes. Although they didn't get to interview the president, they did interview my dean, Ben Kelley.

If you'll notice, big science is trying to squash the talking about God in academia. People say ID is religion dressed up in a cheap tuxedo. Well, big science is atheism dressed up in a cheap tuxedo. Their motivation when you scratch the surface is so unreal in terms of propagating their atheism. Richard Dawkins and P.Z. Myers [noted atheistic evolutionists], they are chilling in what they are trying to do.

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