

DONALD MACKENZIE MACKINNON
FBA, MA(Oxon), DD(Aberd, Edin), DUniv(Stir)

Donald MacKenzie MacKinnon, a Fellow of the Society since 1984, died in Aberdeen on 2 March 1994. He was born on 27 August 1913 in Oban, where his father, originally from Tobermory, was Procurator Fiscal. He was educated at Cargilfield School in Edinburgh and, as a scholar, at Winchester College. From Winchester he went in 1932 as a scholar to New College, Oxford, graduating with a First in *Litterae Humaniores* in 1935. He remained for a further year to study Theology; and in 1936 he won the John Locke Prize in Mental Philosophy. His teachers at Oxford included H H Price, R H S Crossman, Isaiah Berlin, H W B Joseph, A H Smith, R G Collingwood and Gilbert Ryle, and in Theology, R H Lightfoot, A M Farrer, C H Dodd and F L Cross.

His first academic post, very appropriately, was as Assistant to A E Taylor, the Professor of Moral Philosophy in Edinburgh University. While there he met his future wife, Lois; they were married in 1939. After a year he returned to Oxford, as Fellow and tutor at Keble College, where he remained until 1947. During the war years he administered and taught special courses for Air Force and Naval officer cadets. From 1945 to 1947 he was a Lecturer in Philosophy at Balliol College, and also held the post of Wilde Lecturer in Natural and Comparative Religion.

He then moved to the Regius Chair of Moral Philosophy at Aberdeen University, and remained there until 1960, teaching in a style which his students have never forgotten, but also serving very effectively as Dean of the Faculty of Arts from 1957 to 1960. He was then appointed - unusually for a philosopher and a layman - to the Norris-Hulse chair of Divinity in Cambridge. On retirement in 1978, he settled in Aberdeen, continuing active in writing in Philosophy and Theology.

Over many years, he was in constant demand to give public lectures in many different places: Scott Holland Lectures (1952), the Hobhouse Lecture, London (1953), Stanton Lectures in Philosophy of Religion, Cambridge (1956-58), Gifford Lectures, Edinburgh (1965-66), Prideaux Lectures, Exeter (1966), the Coffin Lecture, London (1968), Riddell Lectures, Newcastle (1970), D Owen Evans Lectures, Aberystwyth (1973), Drummond Lectures, Stirling (1977), the Martin Wight Lecture, London (1979) and Boutwood Lectures, Cambridge (1981). He received honorary doctorates from Aberdeen (1961), Edinburgh (1988) and Stirling (1989); and he was President of the Aristotelian Society in 1976-77, and of the Society for the Study of Theology in 1981-82. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1978, and (as noted already) of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1984. A *festschrift*, edited by Stewart Sutherland and Brian Hebblethwaite in 1982, and a conference on his thinking in Theology in 1986 were indicative of the impact of his thought.

These are historical facts of Donald MacKinnon's academic career. They do no more than hint, however at his real importance, which was as a thinker who influenced the work of many others. His major concern was to relate Theology and Philosophy to each other, seeking to bring theologians to take account of philosophical enquiry, and to bring philosophers to take a serious interest in Theology as a discipline.

His first training was in Philosophy, and throughout his life - including his 15 years of retirement - he retained an active concern with central issues of a metaphysical kind, about the world which we experience, our place in it and our relation to it, and with the opposition between Realism and Idealism, in the many different forms which it takes. But from the beginning he also had an interest in Christian Theology, and particularly in the points of contact between that theology and Philosophy - or, in his own phrase, the borderlands between the two disciplines. He sought to explore the bearing of Philosophy upon the attempt to set out in systematic form the faith which he himself held, in a time when that faith has had to face unprecedented challenges - not merely the challenge to reconcile its tenets with the current intellectual and scientific orthodoxies, but the demand to show that these tenets are actually intelligible at all. His time at Keble spanned the period when Logical Positivism, with its radical implications regarding Theology, was introduced into British Theology, particularly by A J Ayer, and had its greatest impact. With a wide and deep knowledge both of the great philosophical thinkers of the past and of contemporary Philosophy, and with a deep passion to pursue the truth wherever the search might carry him, he identified the doctrines and issues in Christian Theology which needed to be elucidated in order to relate it to the thinking and concerns of this century. He explored with great open-mindedness and tough-mindedness different interpretations of the doctrines and different ways of handling the issues, exploring the metaphysical presuppositions of the various possible positions, and their implications. And in doing this he had a major influence on the agenda which was addressed by a whole generation of younger theologians - many of them his own former postgraduate students.

The fruit of his wrestling came in a series of books. After editing a volume of essays, *Christian Faith and Communist Faith*, in 1953, he wrote *A Study in Ethical Theory* (1957), then (with G W H Lampe) *The Resurrection* (1966); shortly after these there appeared *Borderlands of Theology* (1968) and *The Stripping of the Altars* (1969). Then came the published version of his Gifford Lectures, *The Problem of Metaphysics* (1974), *Explorations in Theology* (1979), and *Themes in Theology* (1987).

His instinct for building intellectual bridges came out in some particular ways. An early interest for him was the theology of Karl Barth, and he was instrumental in making Anglican theological thinking of the time aware of the new direction which Reformed Theology was taking. In later life, he took part for 13 years in the annual Castelli Colloquia in Rome, which brought together Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians from across Europe; here again, his involvement provided a two-way channel of communication between British and Continental theologians.

Many who knew nothing of his writing or academic work knew of him as a colourful man. The impression of disorganisation - fostered in Aberdeen by what was once described as 'the knee-deep chaos of his office' - was thoroughly misleading, as his very effective terms as Dean of Faculty in Aberdeen and then in Cambridge proved. As regards his unconventional behaviour, it is no doubt the case that - as with Warder Spooner - a few stories circulating soon attracted other fabricated ones, perhaps not discouraged by Donald himself. Some of it simply reflected his other-worldliness, some the combination, typical in a Highlander, of an impish sense of humour and an independent-minded attitude - this latter perhaps being reinforced by the Wyckhamite's disdain for mere conventionality, as distinct from true courtesy. The motto of the founder of Marischal College well fitted one side of his character: 'They haif said. Quhat say they? Let thame say'. But even more characteristic, as befits a Highlander who was schooled at Winchester, were courtesy and consideration, along with a deep personal concern for his students, from the youngest undergraduate to sophisticated theology postgraduates embarking on a professional career, a concern expressed frequently in care, kindness and help given unsparingly when he was aware of a particular need.

Above all he will be remembered for his single-minded pursuit of truth. His search was at times arduous and taxing; and in times of difficulty his lifelong partnership with Lois, and her steadiness and support, were what enabled him to win through and to realise his exceptional gifts fully in later years. The books listed above are part of the realising of these gifts; but the greater part was in his major influence on others, and through their thinking on the shape and direction which Theology has taken in the last 30 years.