MALCOLM JEEVES

Donald M. MacKay's Contributions to The Research Scientists Christian Fellowship and Christians in Science: The Early days[1]

It is a privilege to say a few words dedicated to the memory of Professor Donald MacKay. Dr Valerie MacKay, Donald's widow, was present at the CiS conference honouring Donald. Following the conference she telephoned me to express her appreciation of what I had said. More importantly, she shared with me more details of Donald's earliest links with the Research Scientists Christian Fellowship, the precursor of Christians in Science. With her permission, I have added some of these details relevant to my conference presentation.[2]

I suspect that one of the reasons I was asked to contribute is that I knew Donald years before almost all of you here were born. Approaching my 96th birthday in two weeks, it was my privilege to first meet Donald during the war in 1944. Donald had achieved a first class honours degree in physics at St Andrews University and like many of the very brightest of the young physicists at that time was recruited by C.P.Snow to work at the Radar Research Establishment in Surrey. It was there that he met Roland Dobbs, later to become an active member in the beginnings of the Research Scientists Christian Fellowship and also later to become Professor of physics at London University. Roland was engaged to my sister Dorothy and I went down to be present at the confirmation of Roland in the Anglican church. At that all too brief meeting Donald and I seemed to have an immediate rapport. However, it was some years later, after I had been demobilised from the army and was up at Cambridge, that I was able to renew my friendship with Donald. The photograph I'm showing you now was taken at the wedding of my sister when Donald was Roland Dobbs's best man. Unfortunately, I was not able to be present at the wedding in 1947 because I was still serving in Germany as an infantry officer with the First Battalion of the Sherwood Foresters, part of the "Desert Rats". The next two photographs taken in Germany are graphic reminders of the horrors of that war. They were taken when I was handing over to the Polish army officers a man called Aumeier who

1 This paper was first presented at the Christians in Science Autumn Conference 2022 –The Clockwork Image – Humanity, Artificial Intelligence and God; Celebrating 100th anniversary of Donald M MacKay

2 Biography of Donald M. MacKay written by Valerie MacKay for their grandchildren. (privately circulated)

had been the 2nd in command of Auschwitz concentration camp. He was responsible for the deaths of two million Polish Jews in Auschwitz. I took him up to Lubeck on the Baltic where I met a ship coming up the Baltic with representatives of the Polish army on board to effect the handover. Fast forward a few years and the next photograph shows Donald once again performing the role of best man at a wedding, this time at my own wedding in 1955.

It was in 1944 that Dr Oliver Barclay initiated the Research Scientists Christian Fellowship. Oliver often said that it was through Roland Dobbs friendship with Donald Mackay that Donald was brought into the RSCF at such an early stage in its history. Roland was doing a Ph.D at University College and Donald at King's College, London.

Donald's Friendship with Professor R. Hooykaas

Dr Oliver Barclay wrote, 'He (Donald) was the leading academic thinker for CiS for a long time. Until he became involved, thinking (in the group) had often revolved around questions over events such as Joshua's "long day" or the geographical extent of Noah's flood. He brought a strong reformed theological background, and allowed us to get to the fundamental issues. Donald seems to have perceived similar trends in Professor Hooykaas.'[3]

It was at the conference of the Research Scientists Christian Fellowship in 1948 that the impact of Professor Hooykaas on RSCF's thinking became evident.[4] Hooykaas's lecture, seemingly, opened the eyes of those present to wider horizons- not only from other centuries but also from foreign countries. Both his theological position and his relaxed common sensical stance owed much to Calvin. He never shared the nervous need felt by some Christians to defend God's 'patch'. All the world is God's and it cannot be taken from Him; one's only worry is that one may, in the perversity of one's own set ideas, miss the view that God wanted one to have, the path that could have been so much more illuminating. Hooykaas had written 'It has always proved futile to try to obtain scientific knowledge by immediate divine illumination, or even by extrapolation from the word of God'.[5]

> Only 10 days before the annual conference a letter had been sent out to participants. It read
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> 13th September 1948: 'Our programme for the conference has been somewhat altered by the fact that a very eminent Dutch professor hopes to be present. He is Professor R. Hooykaas, Professor of the History of Science at the Free University of Amsterdam. We believe we shall learn a lot from

3 Barclay, O.R. 'The RSCF in Historical Perspective', *Faith and Thought* (1988) 10, 5-11.

4 *ibid*

5 Hooykaas, R. *The Christian Approach to Teaching Science*, Tyndale Press (1960) p.10.

discussion and questions with Professor Hooykaas who is extraordinary well informed'.

There is, according to Valerie, a story behind this sudden change of plan and how it came about that Professor Hooykaas, unknown in England at that time, was invited to that RSCF London conference in 1948.

In July 1948 Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones, en route to the first IFES conference since the war, had met and had been much impressed by him and all he had to say. Lloyd Jones got in touch with his close friend Dr Douglas Johnson, the Secretary General of IVF ,and encouraged him to invite Hooykaas to the RSCF meeting,

Valerie Mackay has noted

> Donald and Professor Hooykaas came from a religious background where one's personal life is central – as a rescued friend and servant of Christ – but this dedication is set in a far wider context than the narrowly pietistic position. Where the pietistic tradition narrows the dedicated life to the vertical dimension – the life of the nun in her cell with God, for example – the tradition in which Donald and Professor Hooykaas were brought up has a breadth – an outgoing confidence also. It assumes that God is interested in not only in the individual soul struggling with temptation – the Lord's concerns are not even limited to his church – but extend also to the functioning of society as a whole...So in the reformed tradition, the whole world, the world of secular affairs, newspapers, commerce, education, politics and ordinary events, all belongs to God and is a place where it is important to consider first and foremost what God thinks.[6]

Donald's Gift for Communication

In the early 1950's the BBC became aware of Donald's gift for communicating complex ideas very clearly to the general public. Through Donald's contacts with the BBC the Research Scientists Christian Fellowship was invited to prepare a series of five broadcasts to go out in the Overseas Service of the BBC on Science and Christian Belief. In 1952 a small group of us met in London at the BBC to plan this series of five broadcasts. These were subsequently published by IVF under the title *Where Science and Faith Meet*.[7] The five contributors were James Torrance, at that time a research student at Oxford, Donald Mackay, Malcolm Jeeves at that time a research student at Cambridge, Robert Boyd and Oliver Barclay. James Torrance later became Professor of Theology at Aberdeen University, Robert Boyd, later to become Professor Sir Robert Boyd, F.R.S., one of Britain's leading space researchers. There is no doubt that the major influ-

6 *ibid*

7 *Where Science and Faith Meet*, IVP (1953)

ence in preparing the broadcasts was the thinking of Donald MacKay. The BBC presumably liked these talks for they invited RSCF for five more – this time for the Home Service of the BBC. A quote from Donald's contribution to these nicely captures Donald's emphasis on the importance of complementarity. He wrote 'Let us suppose we are meeting a human friend. "A mass of pink protoplasm rises to a height of five feet and begins to pucker and wobble up and down noisily" – but, of course, that's the wrong language. I should say "he rises to his feet wreathed in smiles and greets us heartily." Why should I? Because we came to meet a person, not just a thing, and it makes more sense to describe what happened in personal terms.'[8]

Donald's Influence on the 1965 International Conference of the RSCF

In 1965 the Research Scientists Christian Fellowship organised a week long international conference on science and Christian faith. Donald was a major figure in selecting the contributors and his thinking was pervasive in the week long discussions. It was evident that by this time Donald's regular contacts with Professor Hooykaas had become extremely influential in the development of Donald's own thinking. Professor Hooykaas was at the Oxford Conference and again his influence was evident throughout.

In 1965, I was back in Cambridge on a year of sabbatical leave from Australia and I was asked if I would attempt to put together a book reporting the main themes of the Oxford conference. As I began to write the book I was fortunate that Donald was willing to scrutinise what I was writing, critique it and offer recommendations for rewriting and improvement. The book was published under the title *The Scientific Enterprise and Christian Faith*[9] and was widely read both in the UK and in North America.

Donald's later contacts with Christians in Science will be covered by other speakers at today's conference. My contacts with him continued and it was a privilege when I was Vice Principal of the University of St Andrews to nominate him for an honorary doctorate which he duly received. Donald's contacts with Scotland continued when he gave the Gifford Lectures at Glasgow University in 1986. For three years before giving his lectures Donald was seriously ill with cancer and we are greatly indebted to his wife Valerie for seeing through their publication.

The words of Professor Longuet-Higgins on the fly cover of the book are an apt summary of the originality of Donald's thinking. Professor Longuet-Higgins wrote 'MacKay was an effective communicator of scientific and philosophical ideas', 'a first rate philosopher of science' and 'a vigorous Christian

8 MacKay D.M. 'Persons and Things,' B.B.C. Home Service (1952). Reprinted in 'The Open Mind,' IVP (1988), pp.13-19.

9 Jeeves, M. A. *The Scientific Enterprise and Christian Faith*, Tyndale Press (1969)

apologist who never allowed his religious convictions to short-circuit his scientific thinking.'[10]

I would add, as Paul Helm wrote in a short obituary of Donald 'Those Christians who knew Donald personally give thanks to the Lord for the life and gifts that He gave to him. It was a privilege to see at work someone who was wholly committed to the obedient service of his Maker and who readily recognised His Sovereignty over his own life and the whole of creation.'[11]

I was privileged to be with Donald ten days before he died and at his Thanksgiving and Memorial Service in Keele University Chapel. Dr Oliver Barclay's tribute to Donald at that service was extremely moving and underlined Donald's lasting contribution.

Malcolm Jeeves is Emeritus Professor of Psychology at the University of St Andrews

10 MacKay, D.M. B*ehind the Eye* (Valerie MacKay, ed.), Basil Blackwell (1991)

11 Helm, P. *The Contribution of Donald MacKay, Evangel* (1989) Winter, pp 11-13.