At an ECOSOC meeting in Geneva in 1955, McDougall suffered a stroke. After some months of rehabilitation, his secretary wrote of a ‘miraculous recovery’, though his movements were slower, he tired easily and he ‘has lost some of his spark’. He retired officially at the end of that year, aged seventy-one.¹ He remained in Rome, living in a set of rooms in the apartment of a younger colleague, Karl Olsen. He attended his office in FAO regularly until his death from complications of appendicitis early in 1958, at the age of seventy-four. An FAO choir sang at his funeral and FAO later initiated the biennial McDougall Lecture in his honour.² Bruce, his senior by one year, remained busy on company boards and as first Chancellor of The Australian National University from 1951 until 1961. He died in London, aged eighty-four, in 1967. Orr retired to his farm in Scotland but travelled constantly in the cause of better nutrition and was lauded by leaders of many countries for his work. The oldest of the three collaborators, he also lived longest; he was ninety when he died in 1971.

Unlike his collaborators, McDougall received little public recognition. The New Year Honours list of 1926 had recorded his elevation as a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG), ‘in recognition of his services to the Commonwealth’, doubtless at the request of Bruce. Some Australians, in his final years, wanted to recognise his later achievements. Creation of an ‘Australian’ room at FAO had been suggested a few years before McDougall’s death. Rivett’s successor at CSIRO, Ian Clunies Ross, who had known McDougall well in London, supported the idea with enthusiasm and also recommended a knighthood for McDougall. Others, including Casey, thought Bruce should be included in the tribute. Casey opposed the knighthood as McDougall had not been serving Australia for many years. Clunies Ross countered that he had been at Australia House until 1946 and was ‘still regarded as Australian at FAO’.³ The knighthood proposal seems not to have been taken further, but the room was established, furnished by Australia, and a portrait of McDougall painted and installed. Perhaps the political instinct was to avoid giving McDougall the publicity that a knighthood would bring, but to allow some recognition safely out of the way in Rome.⁴

¹ CSIR, 379/22/16, McDougall to Clunies Ross, 11 November and 7 December; Betty Steedman to Clunies Ross, 7 December 1955.
² Notes by sister Margery McDougall, January 1965; these and other recollections supplied by E. McDougall.
³ CSIR, 541, Clunies Ross to Tange, 25 November 1955; 379/22/16, Casey to McEwen, 12 January; Clunies Ross to Tange, 8 February 1956.
⁴ The Australian Room still exists and was extensively refurbished in 2011. It is considered a prestigious meeting room at FAO headquarters. Information from Department of Agriculture, Forests and Fisheries, Canberra.
Bruce is remembered in Australia chiefly as a prime minister who lost his own seat and, unfairly, as one who identified with Britain rather than Australia. One possible explanation for the neglect of his international work, which gave him high status overseas, is that it took place at times either when Australia lacked its own foreign office and diplomatic service or when both were in their infancy. International relations were distant in fact and in public consciousness, and often seen as the province of Britain, on behalf of the Empire as a whole. The nutrition controversy of the 1930s did not stir public interest in Australia as it did in Britain; wartime measures to limit food consumption existed, but on a far less onerous scale. The activities of the League of Nations were of limited interest. Australians knew little of Bruce's vigorous work in London on their behalf. Bruce held no appeal for his former political colleagues, still less for the Labor Government in power for most of the 1940s; all were content to let his work go unnoticed.

That McDougall's name is unknown in the country with which he is still associated at FAO is understandable. He spent only 10 years of his life in Australia, and those chiefly in a rural settlement in the outlying state of South Australia, far from centres of influence. Relatively few officials in Melbourne and in Canberra knew him firsthand. Those who worked with him overseas were generally impressed by his tireless efforts and his abilities, though there were exceptions, particularly in the 1920s, when his closeness to Bruce, outside the regular establishment, probably caused resentment. In later years, the factors that kept Bruce out of public view did so even more effectively for McDougall, who had avoided prominent positions. Beyond that, there are clues in some of the comments made by Australians in his later years. Coombs's 'virtuous con-man' phrase suggests a lack of gravitas. Nutritionist and FAO staff member Dr W. A. Aykroyd recalled that despite unfailing kindness, particularly to younger colleagues, McDougall 'did not always suffer fools gladly and his comments on people and things could at times be withering'. Karl Olsen wrote warmly of his generosity and friendship, adding:

\[...his means of shepherding his ideas were wit and hospitality...His dinners were well known. There was no stint of food and drink and they were certainly never dull. If he could not get a man to go to dinner he would buy him a drink. A great deal got done at the bar in between quotes from poets, the Scriptures and hilarious and sometimes naughty stories about his colleagues...Some of his stories were deadly and this is one reason why he had some enemies.\]

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5 NLA, MS6890/5/3, undated text of recording by Dr Wallace Aykroyd, Director, FAO Nutrition Division.
6 Ibid., Karl Olsen to John McDougall, 23 February 1965.
In the FAO years, McDougall worked hard to project an Australian image, using his congeniality to emphasise it. Dr A. R. Callaghan recalled

a very happy party in Rome in 1954 at which every Australian known to F. L. McDougall had been invited to meet the Australian Delegation. The [FAO] 1954 Conference had just finished, the strain was off, and Frank McDougall was ready to celebrate. We sang Australian songs with great gusto, including Waltzing Matilda, mainly, I am sure, because we all felt that Frank McDougall was enjoying his Australian contacts so much.  

Coombs wrote that he gave his capacity to consume beer as evidence of his authenticity. ‘When I die’, Mac would say solemnly, ‘I hope they will inscribe on my tombstone the tribute, “He never left his beer unfinished”, I have earned it.’ Yet Coombs thought that he was not generally considered an Australian and asserted his Australian credentials too much.

Those who knew McDougall best believed the conviviality masked loneliness following the end of his marriage in the late 1920s. The loneliness may also explain his patience with and even enthusiasm for drafting sessions, committee meetings and conferences. Lester Pearson reported to Ottawa from a Wheat Advisory Committee meeting that participants favouring a conference included Australia ‘because McDougall loves conferences’.

Paul Hasluck, a young diplomat in London when he knew McDougall, later Minister for External Affairs and Governor-General, probably captured the essential McDougall when he wrote: ‘He loved being busy in and around the corridors of power. The Heaven which I hope he now enjoys would be an endless succession of conferences, with much plucking of elbows and prompting of delegates and sharing of plans with the archangels.’

McDougall was, of course, far more than an eager ‘committeeman’. His contribution to the international world formed in the aftermath of war was the result of vision and boundless imagination, driven by the values he had adopted as a young man—pragmatism, independence and above all optimism—and shaped by all that he had learned on his journey of trade, science, economics and of human nature. He had dared to challenge entrenched thinking. Although his ideas had not always been accepted and his plans had sometimes come to nothing, he maintained a determined optimism. And so he became a driving force in the creation of an international organisation aiming to better the lives of millions.

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7 Ibid., text of broadcast in the ’Countryman’s Session’, 26 October 1958.
8 Coombs, Trial Balance, pp. 41–2; Interview with W. Way, 7 April 1995.
11 Sir Paul Hasluck to W. J. Hudson, 9 June 1986. Copy in my possession.
Figure 22 F. L. McDougall.

Source: E. McDougall.