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Rev Professor Ernest Best

**Rev. Professor Ernest Best**

**23<sup>rd</sup> May 1917 – 1<sup>st</sup> October 2004**

Ernest Best, or ‘Paddy’ as he was widely known, was both scholar and ordained minister, and sought always to hold the two together despite any pressure to separate them.

Brought up in Belfast and educated at Methodist College, Queen’s University and Assemblies College he was assistant minister in First Bangor Presbyterian Church before being ordained to the charge of Caledon and Minterburn in the Presbytery of Dungannon in 1949. Apart from a two year spell in Austin Theological Seminary, Texas Paddy served the congregation until his appointment, in 1963, to the University of St. Andrews as lecturer in Biblical Studies and Theology. In 1974 he succeeded William Barclay as Professor of Divinity and Biblical Studies in Glasgow, where he worked until his retirement. Glasgow University honoured his contribution with the award of the degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1997.

During his time at St. Andrews Paddy was responsible for developing the teaching of Biblical Studies in the Faculty of Arts as well as the Faculty of Divinity. In Glasgow he was noted for energetic hard work and for his involvement in the whole life of the University. As scholar and teacher Paddy could display a daunting rigour when he sought to cross examine ideas where he detected sloppy thinking, but he also sought to encourage all students, whatever their ability, where he saw that they were making an effort to grasp the subject in hand. Both the rigour and the encouragement sprung from the quality of his Presbyterian roots. As his 1988 study, ‘From Text to Sermon’ illustrates, Paddy had a deep concern that the Bible be used responsibly in worship. His interests, however, were not narrowly ecclesiastical but extended to the whole of life. Whether as gardener, golfer, traveller or raconteur he was good company, and his humour always came to the fore.

As Associate Editor of Irish Biblical Studies Paddy made significant contributions to the development of this journal, right from the year

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of its foundation. A survey of the 26 articles and reviews of which he was author serves to illustrate the variety of his interests and the breadth of his competence. Following his first book on the relationship between Christ and his Church his two major areas of research were the Gospel according to Mark and the Epistle to the Ephesians (where his International Critical Commentary is masterly, not least in its technical detail.). However for IBS he also wrote on the Corinthian Correspondence and reviewed work on *inter alia* Parables, Prophecy, Rhetorical patterns and Johannine Studies.

Words at the end of Paddy's study on 'Disciples and Discipleship', published in 1986, serve not only as summary of a scholarly examination but also the testimony of Paddy's own pilgrimage,

*"What does it mean to follow Jesus? It means to drop in behind him, to be ready to go to the cross as he did, to write oneself off in terms of any kind of importance, privilege or right, and to spend one's time only in the service of others. Can this be summarised in the tag 'imitatio Christi?' This is often done, but Mark leaves us in no doubt that Christian disciples cannot imitate Christ. At every stage where it seems that the disciple goes after Jesus and does what he does Mark clearly distinguishes between the disciples and Jesus. It is not just that Jesus was the first to walk along the way of humble service to the cross and that men must follow, for Jesus is set in a much more unique position. This comes out in the final programmatic statement with its distinction (10:44-45): all minister to others, only Jesus gives his life a ransom for many, and the many include the disciple who is moved to follow and minister."*

Rev Donald Ker