

Preface

“...preachers must be challenged to turn this abundance of exegetical help into their own λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως for their own congregations.”¹ Thus Cecil McCullough concluded a short series of articles published in this journal and written in order to keep us up to date with recent scholarly developments in the study of the Letter to Hebrews. The articles in themselves are a masterly combination of breadth of knowledge and ease of presentation. In his final sentence, however, we are taken further and gain insight into the man himself.

Cecil McCullough is a scholar of integrity, ability and depth. His aptitude for languages both ancient and modern has granted him access to a world of books and ideas inaccessible to many. He has enriched us with the good things he has found. His doctoral studies on the letter to Hebrews drew him into what he has subsequently described as a love affair with that epistle, but his interests and expertise extend throughout the New Testament. A period of study in Germany gave indication that Cecil would always live on a broad scholarly map. Time spent in Beirut has given him a particular insight to the cultural context from which the New Testament springs, as well as providing a plentiful fund of stories of twentieth century life in the Middle East. From Beirut Cecil moved to Knox Hall, Dunedin where new insights were gained and enriching friendships formed. For the last twenty years he has served with distinction as Professor of New Testament in Union Theological College, Belfast.

The reference to ‘preachers’ quoted at the start of this article serves to remind us that Cecil has, throughout his working life, offered his considerable gifts in the service of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and Christian communities throughout the world. His role on the staff of Union Theological College has necessarily involved him in the education, pastoral care and support of those preparing for service in the church, but his contribution has gone wider. Whether in the oversight of University Chaplaincy, involvement in the Leuenberg Fellowship or concern for the doctrine and wider mission of the church, Cecil has invariably sought to help the church be the best that she can be.

His approach is always marked by a λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως. The manner of Cecil’s exhortation is almost always cheerful encouragement, although he is no soft touch. In the classroom he is a gifted and valued teacher who draws the best from his students. In the pulpit his sermons aim to challenge, strengthen and encourage. In the committee room he is at once a ‘team player’ and yet creative in his lead as new ideas are explored and the minefields of academic administration traversed. As a colleague he is gracious, generous and invariably good company.

We wish Cecil well on his retirement and place on record our appreciation of his collegueship by dedicating this issue of *Irish Biblical Studies* to him.

Rev. Donald Ker
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¹ J.C. McCullough, “Hebrews in Recent Scholarship (part 2)”, *Irish Biblical Studies* 16, 1994, p.120