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Dr. Paisley given “Freedom of Ballymena”



Ballymena Mayor, Hubert Nicholl and Dr. Ian Paisley

DUP leader Ian Paisley has been given the freedom of his home town, Ballymena, the highest accolade it can bestow. The 78-year-old politician and religious leader has been made a Freeman of the north Antrim borough at a special ceremony. Ballymena Mayor, Hubert Nicholl paid tribute to Mr. Paisley’s massive contribution to the town’s welfare.

He said: “Ian Paisley’s is a household name throughout Northern Ireland and much further afield. He is known as a faithful preacher of the Gospel and a tireless political representative, having served his constituents of North

Antrim at Stormont, Westminster and in Europe for many years. It is therefore appropriate that this council has seen fit to confer upon him its highest honour.”

The ceremony took place despite the opposition of some nationalist politicians. The SDLP boycotted the event, with councillor Declan O’Loan accusing Mr. Paisley of “divisive politics”. Mrs. Eileen Paisley and the Paisley children and grandchildren were joined by senior ranks of the Democratic Unionist Party for the ceremony.

Dr. Paisley founded the DUP in 1971 and has maintained his dominant position within it over the subsequent decades.

Last year the party achieved a result at the Assembly elections which gave it political supremacy in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Paisley was actually born in Armagh in 1926, but he moved to Ballymena at the age of two when his preacher father took over as pastor of a Baptist church in the town.

The DUP leader, who started the Free Presbyterian Church in 1951, is the eighth person to receive an honour that permits him to drive cattle through the town’s streets.

In his reply to the Mayor, Dr. Paisley spoke of his pleasure at being conferred with the Freedom. “I am greatly humbled in receiving the highest gift of the domain of Ballymena Council,” he said. “Whilst not born in Ballymena I was bred in Ballymena and always look upon here as my hometown. “My parents’ remains rest in the town’s cemetery and my roots and the development of my life have been centred here. “To receive this reward from the borough has therefore a special meaning to me.”

Dr. Paisley went on characteristically to use the opportunity to witness for Christ and to speak of God’s mercy to him over his many years in public life.