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## Editorial

We are pleased, with these next two numbers, to produce a special issue of *Irish Biblical Studies*. This is in acknowledgement and celebration of the eightieth birthday of John Thompson, who retired from the Chair of Systematic Theology at Union Theological College in Belfast back in 1984. Acknowledgements of this kind may be conventional enough, but it is not for the sake of convention that we are doing this. Rather, it is a token of the well-earned, well-deserved respect and esteem in which John Thompson is held by all those who have profited from his labours.

It is tempting to say more, but it is needless, for that task is undertaken by Finlay Holmes, who himself occupied the Chair of Church History at the same College as his colleague, and so is well-qualified to write the account which launches this number of *Irish Biblical Studies*. Genuineness of affection and respect clearly shines through it. John Thompson has specialised in the thought of Karl Barth and is one of his distinguished (and satisfying!) expositors. For that reason, the two other pieces in this issue are connected with Barth. The first, written by John Thompson's successor at Union, Stephen Williams, gives a general account of John Thompson's work as an interpreter of Karl Barth. Constraints of space mean that much more could be said than has been said here, but the author is contented if this piece directs readers to John Thompson's own writings.

The third, and longest, essay is by Karl Barth's distinguished biographer, Eberhard Busch. He was glad to pay tribute to John Thompson by penning this piece. We regret that Dr Busch himself was taken ill around the time when it was being written and submitted. Accordingly, we received the text in German and were not able to put in motion immediate arrangements for a translation. We are very grateful that, under great pressure of time, Rev. John Seawright has produced this for us. Although, for the most part, it does not deal with Karl Barth, it does chime in with our theme in two ways. Firstly, it turns to Barth towards its close. Secondly, it deals, in the context of the Reformation, with those very issues that preoccupied Barth in the dire days of the crisis of the churches

under Hitler. The regular and guest editors of *IBS* have consulted and agreed to publish this essay substantially as it stands.

In the next issue, three further contributors will publish essays on various themes in theology, not necessarily touching on Barth at all, but united in the desire to pay tribute to John Thompson. We join them here, in this first issue, and offer our cordial greetings and warm good wishes to our eminent friend and colleague, gentleman and scholar whose churchmanship is marked along with his scholarship this year, as he marks fifty years of service in the ordained ministry.