



Karl Barth's Infralapsarian Theology: Origins and Development, 1920-1953

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Shao Kai Tseng (DPhil, University of Oxford) is assistant professor of systematic theology at China Evangelical Seminary in Taipei, Taiwan. He is the author of a chapter in the *Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Christian Thought*, as well as several books and scholarly articles in both English and Chinese. Previously he served as a pastor at Faith Chinese North American Baptist Church in his hometown of Vancouver, British Columbia.

Does Karl Barth have a lapsarian problem?

“Who cares if Barth is supra- or infralapsarian in his Christology and doctrine of election?” writes Shao Kai Tseng in *Karl Barth's Infralapsarian Theology*. “The lapsarian problem is by no means a vainly scholastic inquiry detached from the life of the church. As Barth himself sees it, the lapsarian problem is most crucial because it struggles with the perplexing reality of humankind’s fallenness in light of God’s universal sovereignty and immutable holiness.”

In this latest volume in IVP Academic’s New Explorations in Theology (NET) series, Tseng takes on the conventional wisdom that Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth was a supralapsarian, instead arguing that he was inherently infralapsarian. If this is true, Tseng writes that Barth’s work must be taken more seriously by orthodox Reformed theologians like himself.

The lapsarian problem – whether or not divine election logically presupposes God’s will to permit the fall of humanity – is one that Barth wrestled with throughout his career. “In the Christocentric phase of his theology, supra- and infralapsarianism are dialectically woven into his Christological doctrine of election, making his theology basically infralapsarian,” writes Tseng. This distinction is important, he continues, because “Barth identifies himself as a supralapsarian, and Barth scholars as well as critics of Barth have long taken for granted that he is a supralapsarian without noting the strongly infralapsarian aspect of his dialectical theology.”

As the second volume in the NET series, *Karl Barth's Infralapsarian Theology* exemplifies some of the best new monographs and research that stimulates fruitful dialogue. Showing cutting-edge research in the fields of systematic, historical, practical and philosophical theology, these volumes demonstrate that theology is flourishing in dynamic and unexpected ways in the twenty-first century, through scholars young and senior.

“In this carefully argued, well-researched and well-documented exploration of the development and implications of Barth’s doctrines of election and Christology, Shao Kai Tseng demonstrates exactly why such a study is important,” praises Paul D. Molnar, professor of systematic theology at St. John’s University in Queens, NY. “This is certainly a book that Barth scholars will want to read and discuss. But it is a book that will engage and inform all theologians who are concerned about how to understand God’s love and freedom for us today in a way that does justice to both God’s love and God’s freedom.”

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