

Herd't's claim (see pp. 133–6) that the hyper-Augustinian tenor of classical Protestant soteriology is inimical to thinking through habitation in virtue for character development. In all of this, he makes great strides in reconnecting Protestant ethics to the wider Christian tradition.

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## Shao Kai Tseng, *Karl Barth*

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Mark I. McDowell

Reformed Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX, USA ([mmcdowell@rts.edu](mailto:mmcdowell@rts.edu))

Shao Kai Tseng's study of Karl Barth in the *Great Thinkers* series joins the chorus of texts that examine the theology of the Swiss theologian. This series approaches the introductory task by critically assessing the seminal thoughts of these thinkers through an analysis of primary source material and a keen awareness of their historical contexts. The goal is to provide a 'rich theological assessment and response from a Reformed perspective' (p. ix). The series is pitched at an evangelical Reformed audience, and while it is not the author's intent to proselytise evangelicals to 'Barthianism', one of his stated goals is to convince evangelical readers that many things can be learned from Barth and Barthians. Tseng sets about this task over the course of three chapters, and, in similar design to the previous two instalments by the same author in this series (on G. W. F. Hegel and Immanuel Kant), he outlines his subject matter by looking first at why Barth matters today, then moves to a summary of Barth's theology, and finally concludes with a chapter that provides a Reformed assessment of Barth.

Tseng begins the first chapter by situating Barth's theology on a broad theological spectrum that ranges from postliberalism, *nouvelle théologie* and Eastern Orthodoxy to evangelical theology. A significant contribution that this compelling book makes to the field of Barth studies is Tseng's description of the global reception of Barth. Not only does Tseng concisely detail the European and American engagement with Barth, but it is the lucid and accessible way that he also portrays the Sinophone reception of Barth that expands the horizon of Barth's influence.

The second chapter opens with a call for a fresh evangelical reinterpretation of Barth. Tseng ably demonstrates how early interpretations of Barth by Cornelius Van Til and Carl Henry, among others, have clouded the vision for evangelicals to clearly perceive Barth's theology. Embarking on a reappraisal of Barth's thought, our author employs George Hunsinger's hermeneutic by exploring Barth's theology through four major motifs, namely, 'actualism', 'particularism', 'objectivism' and 'personalism'. From this theological basis, Tseng leads the reader through a section that serves to challenge and correct ten commonly held 'evangelical myths' about Barth's theology.

This is a helpful section, in which Tseng attempts to dismantle faulty claims about Barth's theology that have been attached to, and subsequently hampered by, an

evangelical engagement of Barth's theology for some time. To note one example, Tseng addresses the misleading and hackneyed claim that Barth is neo-orthodox. While the seminal work of Bruce McCormack (in his *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*) has upended this label, it has remained fixed to Barth in some quarters of evangelicalism. Tseng examines the variety of meanings that relate to this category and shows that its use by German scholarship on the one side and Anglo-American evangelicals on the other has distracted readers 'from the complexity of Barth's theological vocabulary' (p. 64) and failed to account for the complexity of his thought. Other evangelical myths that Tseng attempts to resolve include Barth's purported denial of the historicity of the resurrection and the incipient universalism that is bound up with his doctrine of election, to name a few. While this reviewer is not entirely convinced by each of Tseng's efforts to exonerate Barth and his theology from evangelical accusations, this section does go a long way to render Barth less problematic.

The third and final chapter assesses Barth's theology from the position of classical Reformed theology and neo-Calvinism. Tseng proposes four points of analysis to advance the dialogue with Barth. These include knowledge of God, general and special revelation, the historical objectivity of the resurrection and the possibility of a Christian worldview. As in the previous chapters, Tseng offers a penetrating and perceptive analysis of Barth that spans much of his corpus. Through the process of drawing Barth into conversation with figures like Herman Bavinck, Geerhardus Vos and Abraham Kuyper, he is determined to locate Barth in closer proximity to the Reformed tradition.

One minor criticism of the book is the lack of attention that is given to the formative period of Barth's theological development in Göttingen in the early 1920s when he began teaching Reformed theology. Tseng dismisses this period rather quickly on the basis that Barth engaged the 'biased historiographies' of Heinrich Heppe and Alexander Schweizer (p. 43), a claim that is occasionally made by Reformed evangelicals to question Barth's Reformed *bona fides*. There is a touch of irony in this given the author's preoccupation with correcting inherited misinterpretations of Barth. What this period demonstrates is that Barth's entry into Reformed history and theology is far broader than his use of Heppe and Schweizer, and what the reader finds in these Göttingen lectures is a more illuminating picture of Barth and his relation to the Reformed tradition.

Closer attention to the biblical as well as the historical-theological texts of this period would also strengthen Tseng's overall interpretation and demonstrate that the doctrinal convictions evident in Barth's later work were forged decisively in Göttingen and by means of close attention to holy scripture. Tseng does a fine job locating Barth on the theological map that is drawn in the aftermath of critical idealism, and he effectively highlights Barth's relation to the legacy of Kant and Hegel, but one wonders if Tseng's account of plotting Barth's theological development would be enhanced if more credit was given to the determinative and abiding role the biblical text plays in Barth's formulation of topics that include the creature's knowledge of God, a theology of revelation, as well as Christology.

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