

Richard A. Muller, *Providence, Freedom, and the Will in Early Modern Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2002)

This volume contains ten essays exploring the theme of the interaction of God's foreknowledge and providence with human freedom through the works of Reformed theologians from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. This is primarily a work of historical theology, yet its value will not only be for the one who desires to study the theologians whose writings are discussed, but for any student, minister, or inquiring Christian who seeks to grapple with this complex area of theology.

The present collection represents twenty-five years of Muller's writing on this topic, thus establishing him as among the most significant current thinkers in this field.⁹ Four of the essays have been previously published, although they have been edited afresh for this volume and their bibliographies have been updated. Students will be more or less familiar with Muller's explanation of the thinking of Reformed theologians of the era. Each chapter could be read alone as a significant contribution regarding its object of study, but the broadly chronological arrangement of the chapters means that Muller is able to trace the thread of Reformed doctrine through a process of development via restatements, refinements, and reformulations of the key concepts. Reading the work as a whole entails accepting repetition of the same themes in very similar terms. However, both the complexity of the matter (which means that repetition is frequently clarifying) and the sense of a narrative through the generations mitigate against this as a problem. There is also a thread of engagement with modern philosophical treatment of divine providence and the contingency of human acts, specifically regarding the debate between Muller and Paul Helm. This is both an historical debate in relationship to Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) and a discussion of theological definitions. This volume does not set out Helm's developed philosophical positions or discuss the biblical evidence in order to reach a determination of doctrine, but Muller convincingly establishes his understanding of the history of Reformed teaching.

9. See also Muller's *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017); *Grace and Freedom: William Perkins and the Early Modern Reformed Understanding of Free Choice and Divine Grace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

Key to Muller's methodology is his tenet that the categories of modern debate should not be imported into the past. Instead, theologians should be heard in their own words with due appreciation of the purpose of individual treatises and their context of debate and tradition. This means that his treatment in each chapter is detailed in the investigation of the works of each writer. Muller shows how they fit into the Reformed tradition with their own strengths and weaknesses, and how they arise from the longer tradition of Aristotelian logic and metaphysics, Augustinian theology, and Thomist expression of thought. Seeing scholasticism as method rather than a commitment to doctrinal content (77–78), Muller engages in detailed exposition of the technical terms of scholastic theology which were essential to the reasoning and conclusions of these Reformed thinkers. Close reading is required as one bears in mind the distinctions between different types of cause, different uses of the idea of necessity, qualifications of ways in which freedom can be understood, the distinction between *voluntas* ("will") and *arbitrium* ("choice"), and the abundance of Latin terminology are just some of the challenges for the reader. However, Muller guides with a steady hand and frequent reminders of the meanings of these terms. Each chapter concludes with a helpful section summarizing and restating points of significance.

The book begins with a helpful introduction which gives a foretaste of each chapter and how the theologian portrayed fits into the development of Reformed thought. Muller includes some general reflections on the difference between the debates in which the Reformed theologians of the early modern era were engaging with Roman Catholic and Arminian opponents from more modern debates about human free will (5–8). This introduces the terminology of determinism, compatibilism, occasionalism, and libertarianism, although these are not explicitly defined at this point. It is not until the final chapters with their more direct engagement with Paul Helm that definitions of modern determinism and libertarianism are given (248–49). Here, Muller concludes that even if by some broad definition the Reformed should be called compatibilists, "they remain compatibilists of a rather different sort than Edwards." Since some sprinkling of comments on this issue does occur in earlier chapters, it might have been helpful for these definitions to come earlier.

The overarching thesis of Muller's historical survey of the Reformed doctrine regarding providence and the freedom of the will is summarized as "the rise, development and decline of Reformed orthodoxy" (11). This begins with Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) whose distinctions

regarding freedom, fuller use of the faculty psychology and establishment of the terms of a causal network within which to understand the concurrence of human and divine willing which were a broadening discussion of the issues beyond Calvin. Theodore Beza (1519–1605) in the second chapter is also shown as developing a more detailed exposition of Calvin's doctrine of providence and moving forward from Vermigli by showing the wider cosmological implications.

Chapter 3 examines the teaching of Jacob Arminius (1560–1609), and here Muller is concerned to pinpoint the areas of debate between Arminius and his Reformed opponents. He then locates this in the area of soteriology and specifically God's foreknowledge rather than in definitions regarding the freedom of the will in libertarian/determinist terms (99–100). This chapter includes an enlightening discussion of the Molinist idea of a *scientia media* ("middle knowledge"), and the Reformed response to this in John Calvin (1509–1564), the confessions, William Perkins (1558–1602) and others.

In chapter 4 on Robert Rollock (c. 1555–1599), Muller shows how Rollock's focus fell more on the development of the faculty psychology to explain the senses in which the will acts freely and under necessity. A more detailed exposition of the will within the four states of human existence (before the fall, as fallen, as regenerate, and in glory) stands as one of Rollock's contributions to the development of Reformed thinking.

Lucas Trelcatius Jr. (1573–1607) is discussed in chapter 5 as a representative of the Leiden tradition and stood against Arminius's developments. Again, the tropes of a fully fledged exposition of faculty psychology in relation to the four states, albeit with some differences in the use of terminology, are seen in detail. Trelcatius made a significant contribution by developing the analysis of causality as a key to explaining divine and human interaction.

Chapter 6 examines the work of Thomas Goad (1576–1638), a member of the English delegation at the Synod of Dort, whose work was posthumously published by the Arminian John Goodwin (1594–1665) and found its way into eighteenth century collections of Arminian writings. While finding that Goad adopted something of a middle way between the Reformed and Remonstrant positions, Muller argues that he remained within the ambit of Reformed thought on concurrence and contingency. He places Goad's work as "a piece of irenic Reformed theology" (186) concerned about tendencies in some Reformed writers toward deterministic views.

Another English theologian, Stephen Charnock (1628–1680), is the subject of the next chapter. His *Treatise of Divine Providence* is in the form of homiletical exposition of theological topics, with a desire for practical

lessons as well as learned explanation. Still within the Reformed tradition, his use of distinctions regarding God's power and the possibility of things gives another formulation of divine concurrence. His welcome openness to recognizing an "element of mystery" (199) in this area of theology is a reminder that he had a more popular audience in mind.

The final three chapters each deal with the theology of Jonathan Edwards. Muller's analysis here shows how Edwards departed from (and perhaps misunderstood) some of the scholastic distinctions regarding necessity and causality, leading to a denial of real contingency. His philosophical heritage from Hobbes, Leibniz, and Malebranche resulted in a form of determinism and a radical turning away from the Reformed orthodox avowal of concurrence. Muller discusses the reception of Edwards in the nineteenth century and debates about Edwards's conformity to the Reformed confessions, the differences between Francis Turretin (1623–1687) and Edwards, and the specific divergences from the Reformed tradition in Edwards's definitions of necessity, contingency, and freedom.

This collection of essays is a work of remarkable scholarship which will undoubtedly advance studies of the individual theologians named and provide surveys of the literature for those who wish to delve deeper. It should also be read as an important contribution to ongoing theological debate about the interaction of providence and free will.

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Beck, Andreas J. *Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) on God, Freedom and Contingency: An Early Modern Reformed Voice*. Brill's Series in Church History and Religious Culture, volume 84. Leiden: Boston: Brill, 2022.

Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676), pastor, theologian, professor and rector at the University of Utrecht, and leading figure of the Dutch *Nadere Reformatie*, will be a name known to many in the English-speaking world. However, English speakers may be less familiar with Dutch scholarship which analyzes the particulars of his life and work. This magisterial work by Andreas Beck, professor of historical theology and director of the Institute of Post-Reformation Studies at the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit in Leuven, is the first English monograph dedicated to Voetius's theology. This edition is a translation by Albert Gootjes of a revised and updated version of his