

Robert C. Sturdy

Freedom from Fatalism

Samuel Rutherford's (1600–1661) Doctrine
of Divine Providence



Reformed Historical Theology

Edited by
Herman J. Selderhuis

in Co-operation with
Emidio Campi, Irene Dingel, Benyamin F. Intan,
Elsie Anne McKee, Richard A. Muller, and Risto Saarinen

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Abstract

The legacy of Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) endures chiefly through his devotional letters. His scholastic theology on the other hand has been criticized as overly deterministic and even fatalistic, a charge common to Reformed Orthodox theologians of the era. Recent scholarship on Reformed Scholasticism has provided the opportunity to reevaluate such claims. This project applies the new scholarship on Reformed Orthodoxy to Rutherford's doctrine of divine providence. The doctrine of divine providence touches upon many of the disputed points in the older scholarship, including the relationship between divine sovereignty and creaturely freedom, necessity and contingency, predetermination, and the problem of evil. Rutherford describes God's providence as a work of God's being, knowledge, will, and power. Therefore, following an introduction to his life and work, this project dedicates a chapter each to God's being, knowledge, will, and power. Utilizing all three of his Latin works of scholastic theology (*Exercitationes Apologeticae pro Divina Gratia* 1636, *Disputatio Scholastica de Divina Providentia* 1649, *Examen Arminianismi* 1668), special attention is paid throughout to place Rutherford within the larger scholastic context of his medieval forbears as well as his early modern contemporaries. In these first five chapters, the reader will note Rutherford's emphasis on an absolutely independent Creator and an absolutely dependent creation. Counterintuitively, the absolutely free and independent Creator does not utilize his sovereignty to dominate his subordinate creatures, rather he uses his own freedom to guarantee the freedom of his creatures. This will become clear in the final two chapters of this project, which deal with the scholastic definition of providence and the relationship between providence and human freedom, respectively. This analysis of Rutherford's understanding of God's sovereignty and free will challenges the older scholarship while making useful contributions to the ongoing, lively conversation concerning the same.

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Preface

“We do not slander the dead.” Prof. Dr. Antonie Vos spoke these words bluntly over breakfast early during my course of studies at the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit. His words, spoken with typical exuberance, one finger pointed to the sky, left an impression upon me and upon this work. Samuel Rutherford has been described as one of the leading Reformed scholastics of his era. He has been renowned as a pious man of letters, a superb preacher of the Gospel, and also characterized as a man that helped introduce a fearful form of theological fatalism into Scottish piety. The last of these characterizations is at the greatest risk of running afoul of Dr. Vos’s admonition. As the reader will learn, it is simply a misrepresentation of Rutherford and his rich and robust understanding of human freedom under God’s providence.

Despite being regarded as “the leading theologian of Scotland’s Second Reformation,” modern scholarship has not been entirely kind to Rutherford.¹ Beginning in 1981, James B. Torrance initiated what would become a series of highly critical evaluations of Scottish theology during the period of Reformed Orthodoxy.² Following Torrance, and clearly taking advantage of R.T. Kendall’s work *Calvin and English Calvinism*, Charles Bell carried out a similar line of critique in his *Calvin and Scottish Theology*.³ Thomas F. Torrance contributed as well, noting that Rutherford’s rigid, forensic, “necessary” theology led to a form of predestination and limited atonement that was a departure from the more evangelical Gospel of Calvin and Knox.⁴ More recently David Fergusson described Rutherford as a man whose theological convictions were the kind that do “violence...to the Christian message.”⁵

The past several decades have witnessed renewed attention devoted to Reformed Scholasticism that present an opportunity to reassess the older scholarship, in particular, the work of Richard Muller as well as the work of the Research Group John Duns Scotus and The Research Group Classic-Reformed Theology. Several recent

1 Guy Richard, *The Supremacy of God in the Theology of Samuel Rutherford*, Studies in Christian History and Thought (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2008), 1.

2 James B. Torrance, “Covenant or Contract?": A Study of Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34, no. 3 (1981): 225–43.

3 Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: the Doctrine of Assurance* (The Handsel Press: Edinburgh, 1985).

4 Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John Mcleod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 107.

5 David A. S. Fergusson, “Predestination: A Scottish Perspective,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46, no. 4 (1993), 466.

studies have benefitted from the insights of these contributions and applied them to Rutherford. John Coffey's superb intellectual biography of Rutherford, *Politics, Religion, and the British Revolutions: The mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) is one such work. Guy Richard's careful study of Rutherford, *The Supremacy of God in the Theology of Samuel Rutherford* (Eugene, Or: Wipf and Stock, 2008) is another.

Simon Burton and Aza Goudriaan essays can also be added to these works. Both appeared in *Reformed Orthodoxy in Scotland: Essays on Scottish Theology 1560–1775*.⁶ This work aims to contribute to the existing literature by examining Rutherford's theology of divine providence. Attention given to Rutherford's scholastic method, medieval background, and context in early modern thought, will address an identified gap.

I have found Rutherford to be richly rewarding and also a source of fairly sizable frustration. His letters and other devotional works are moving and poetic. The reader of such will find easy rewards. His works of scholastic theology on the other hand, require a bit more effort. This is not merely because they are written in Latin or use scholastic terms and distinctions neglected for hundreds of years. It is also because Rutherford's organizational structure and thought are not as tidy as many of his English and European counterparts. Rutherford's organization is not always obvious, and his main point is often buried under pages of citations and quotes from his "adversaries." Nevertheless, his obsessive dedication to citing sources, both friend and foe, rewards readers by inserting them in a truly catholic, international, and ecumenical conversation. One goal of this project has been to place the reader, who may lack proficiency in Latin or understanding of scholastic method, into this rich and complex conversation, where theological giants of old speak one to another across time, with Rutherford acting as host and moderator.

It is fair to say that my previous theological education gave me little preparation to enter such a conversation. As such, I owe a particular debt of gratitude to the two research groups named above. This debt has not only been absorbed through reading their work, but through many personal conversations where difficult concepts were patiently conveyed over, and over, and over (!) again. Scholars such as the late Willem J. van Asselt, Antonie Vos, Andreas J. Beck, Dolf te Velde, Philip J. Fisk, among others, are not only filled with knowledge of the history and complexity of Reformed Scholasticism, but they are also filled with the traditional Christian

6 Simon J. G. Burton, "Samuel Rutherford's Euthyphro Dilemma: A Reformed Perspective on the Scholastic Natural Law Tradition," in *Reformed Orthodoxy in Scotland: Essays on Scottish Theology 1560–1775*, ed. Aaron Clay Denlinger (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 123–140; Aza Goudriaan, "Samuel Rutherford on the Divine Origin of Possibility," in *Reformed Orthodoxy in Scotland: Essays on Scottish Theology 1560–1775*, ed. Aaron Clay Denlinger (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 141–156.

virtues of kindness, patience, and encouragement. It is the later of their gifts that have made the daunting task of studying such complex work a joy rather than a burden. Studying such work in the midst of a community such as ETF only added to the joy of the overall project. Though appreciative of each of the above, none deserves my personal thanks more than Prof. Dr. Andreas J. Beck, from whose attention to detail, knowledge, encouragement, and Christian commitment I have benefited and learned a great deal.

Not all debts are academic in nature. I have benefitted from several wonderful relationships with churches that I have ministered in, chief among these being Trinity Church in Myrtle Beach, S.C. and St. Alban's Anglican Chapel at The Citadel. There have been many days spent locked away with books, where I felt I was letting a congregation down. However, these two churches were never anything but fully supportive. In addition to these, St. Thomas's Church in Mount Pleasant, S.C., provided much needed support towards the end of this project.

At the beginning of this project, my children David and Genevieve thought what Daddy was doing was "cool." That time has passed! They have been a tremendous source of encouragement throughout, and it appears that they are ready to have a bit more of me present in the house. I'm sure my wife is ready for this project to be concluded as well. Her support, interest, and attention have benefited me more than anyone else. I'm especially grateful for her and owe her many thanks for helping bear the burden of this dissertation in ways too many to count.

It is my hope that the labors of many that have made this project possible will help the reader gain a better understanding of the Sovereign God who in his sovereignty, graciously guarantees the freedom of his creatures. This is Rutherford's doctrine of divine providence. It is both intellectually stimulating, spiritually challenging, and worthy of investigation.

ETF Leuven, Belgium

Rev. Robert C. Sturdy, July 2020

Introduction

In the Southwest corner of Scotland, along the sea bay known as the Solway Firth is a tiny rural settlement known as Anwoth in a parish of the same name. The parish is approximately 6.5 miles long and 2.5 miles wide, comprising some 10,500 acres.¹ There is little left of old Anwoth. However, if one takes a footpath from Gatehouse of Fleet to Creetown, it is possible to take a slight detour and come upon a fifty foot white granite obelisk, a monument erected to Samuel Rutherford, Anwoth's most famous minister. Following on further, after a bit of wood, is the "old-ivy smothered Kirk of Anwoth" where Rutherford preached twice every Sunday. Heaps of stone here and there and the largely intact church walls are all that remain of the little parish church. The ruins are described as "picturesque" and "eerie."²

In many ways the old Kirk at Anwoth is symbolic of the legacy of its first parish minister. Though his letters have seen over one hundred editions, his scholastic treatises are just as neglected as the old Kirk. Those who have ventured off the beaten path to explore Rutherford's neglected writings have not always been kind. Modern interpreters of Rutherford have identified him as exemplary of "High Calvinism" or "Legalistic Calvinism" that represents a radical departure from what they perceived as the more grace filled, heartfelt "Evangelical Calvinism" of John Knox (1514–1572), Robert Leighton (1611–1684), and the Marrow Men. What replaced "Evangelical Calvinism," according to this reading of Scottish Reformed Scholasticism, was a cold, rationalized, scholastic theology that was logically deduced from the cornerstone of double-predestination. Rutherford's theology of God's sovereignty and human liberty has been described as rigidly logical, determinist, and indistinguishable from philosophical necessity or pagan fatalism.

This study aims to reassess Rutherford's work through an investigation of his doctrine of divine providence, which this research project aims to outline in detail. Therefore, the main research question states: "What is Samuel Rutherford's doctrine of divine providence, and given its scholastic nature, how should it be properly understood against the background of medieval scholasticism and in the context of early modern thought?" In many ways, Rutherford's doctrine of divine providence is the perfect place to re-examine the readings outlined above. The doctrine of

1 Samuel Lewis, "Anwoth," in *A Topographical Dictionary of Scotland, Comprising the Several Counties, Islands, Cities, Burgh and Market Towns, Parishes, and Principle Villages, with Historical and Statistical Descriptions Embellished with a Large Map of Scotland and Engravings of the Seals and Arms of the Different Burghs and Universities* (London: Lewis and Co., 1846), 54.

2 Mountford John Byrde Baddeley, "The Lowlands," in *Scotland*, eds. M. J. B. Baddeley and C. S. Ward (London: Dulau and Co., 1901), 25.

divine providence is where the doctrines of God's sovereignty and decrees meet human liberty. For some recent interpreters of Rutherford, the intersection of these doctrines is explicitly threatening. God's providence approaches human liberty as an enemy to overthrow the freedom of the will, which is helpless to resist the arbitrary and fatal progress of God's will and power. However, in his own words, Rutherford described this mysterious encounter as a "friendly union," without threat or hindrance to the fundamental liberty of the human will. This study offers a comprehensive outline of how such a "friendly union" is possible, beginning with the foundational level of God's being, knowledge, will, and power before concluding with a detailed account of God's providence and human liberty.

1. Perspectives on Rutherford

As Coffey notes, Rutherford's posthumous reputation rests almost entirely upon his famous pastoral letters. His letters have seen over eighty editions in English and over fifteen editions in Dutch. They have also appeared in French, German, and Gaelic.³ A contemporary of Rutherford, the English nonconformist minister Richard Baxter (1615–1691), described Rutherford's collection of pastoral letters as second only to the Bible.⁴ The Church of England priest and leader within the Methodist movement, Charles Wesley (1703–1791), commended the letters for the "vein of piety, trust in God and holy zeal which runs through them."⁵ The English Baptist Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) declared the letters to be the "nearest thing to inspiration which can be found in all the writings of mere men."⁶ The letters are marked with a style Alexander Whyte, moderator of the General Assembly to the Free Church of Scotland, described as "seraphic."⁷

3 John Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6.

4 Robert Woodrow, *Analecta: Or Materials For a History of Remarkable Provinces; Mostly Relating to Scotch Ministers and Christians*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Maitland Club, 1842), 89.

5 Wesley published a selection of letters from Samuel Rutherford. See: Robert McWard, IX, ed., *Joshua Redivivus: Or, Three Hundred and Fifty-Two Religious Letters, by the late Eminently Pious Mr. Samuel Rutherford, Professor of Divinity, at St. Andrews* (Glasgow: John Bryce, 1765). The letters presented by Wesley can be found in: John Wesley, "Extracts from the Letters of Mr. Samuel Rutherford," in *Christian Library: Consisting of Extracts from and Abridgements of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity Which Have Been Published in the English Tongue* (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1753).

6 Spurgeon, quoted in: Alexander Whyte, "Samuel Rutherford and Some of His Correspondents," in *Lectures Delivered in St. George's Free Church Edinburgh* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1894), 12.

7 Whyte, "Samuel Rutherford and Some of His Correspondents," 78.

Coffey describes Rutherford's letters as a "puzzling phenomenon" made more puzzling by the fact that Rutherford's reputation during his own lifetime did not rest upon his letters or devotional works at all.⁸ Rather, the high regard with which he was held at home and his distinguished reputation abroad was due almost entirely to his works of scholastic theology, two of which were published on the continental mainland rather than in Britain. These works earned him the respect of such luminaries as the Dutch Reformed theologian Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676). Furthermore, his insights were responsible for him being invited to take the appointment of Chair of Divinity and Hebrew at the University of Harderwyck and a similar invitation was extended from the University of Utrecht. However, Rutherford declined both. Nevertheless, the invitations are a testimony to the international respect commanded by Rutherford for his works of scholastic theology.⁹

Though his reputation at home and abroad depended heavily upon his Latin treatises, the importance of his work was intentionally diminished by biographers within one generation of Rutherford's death. Thomas Murray, Rutherford's first biographer described his Latin works of scholastic theology as being "marked, we confess, with scholastic jargon, to a degree which renders it at the present day extremely forbidding, or altogether useless." He continued by wondering whether "such a composition should ever have been regarded as suited to the capacities, or favorable to the improvement, of theological students."¹⁰ Shortly thereafter Andrew Thomson described Rutherford's Latin treatises as suffering from "minute subdivisions and verbal distinctions, as well as by the undo obtrusion of logical forms."¹¹ Even Andrew Bonar writing in the nineteenth century, whose work is more hagiography than biography, described Rutherford's theological writing as "uninteresting and dry."¹²

In the secondary literature it is easy to gather an aversion to, lack of patience with, and even unwillingness to understand the methodology present in Rutherford's Latin works of scholastic theology.¹³ Such anti-scholasticism is no doubt the reason

8 John Coffey, "Letters by Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661)," in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 97.

9 Thomas Murray, *The Life of Samuel Rutherford, One of the Ministers of St. Andrew's, and Principal of the College of St. Mary's With an Appendix* (Edinburgh: William Oliphant, 1828), 257–62.

10 Murray, *The Life of Samuel Rutherford*, 169–170.

11 Andrew Thomson, *Samuel Rutherford* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1884), 112.

12 Andrew Bonar, "Sketch of Samuel Rutherford," in *Letters of Samuel Rutherford With a Sketch of his Life and Biographical Notices of His Correspondents* (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1891), 12.

13 For other examples see James Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland: Chiefly of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1888), 9–10; John Macleod, *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History Since The Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth

for the significant gap identified by Richard regarding Rutherford's scholastic theology.¹⁴ However, anti-scholasticism has been responsible for more than a gap in the literature insofar as it concerns Rutherford. In the last century studies pertaining to Scottish theology have viewed scholasticism as a "bad thing" that invaded Scottish theology from the continent.¹⁵ In Hugh Trevor-Roper's colorful description, Scottish scholasticism was "refreshed mainly by the stale waters of Calvinist bigotry fed to it through the narrow conduits of Utrecht and Sedan and Geneva."¹⁶ Such observations have fed into a larger narrative that seventeenth century Scottish Reformed scholasticism was nothing more than an intellectual backwater poisoned by continental Reformed theology. This is a historical claim that rests upon the thesis that an alternative form of Calvinism emerged around the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619). This alternative form was harshly predestinarian and replaced the more heartfelt "evangelical Calvinism" of John Calvin and John Knox.¹⁷

This predisposition against scholasticism, matched with the historical thesis of discontinuity between evangelical Calvinists and federal Calvinists has led to some unbalanced portraits of Rutherford. In his study *Calvin and Scottish Theology*, Charles Bell credits Rutherford and other Scottish scholastic theologians as ushering in a golden age of Scottish teaching and preaching. Yet at the same time he argues that such men "expounded their teaching in such a way as to produce very deleterious results."¹⁸ Clearly relying upon the thesis developed by R. T. Kendall in his study *Calvin and English Calvinism*, Bell argues that "the writings of Samuel Rutherford represent a further step in the development of Scottish theology away from that of John Calvin."¹⁹ Bell portrayed Rutherford as captive to the theological, political, and social thought of his day. He also noted Rutherford's tendency to trust more in syllogistic deduction than the biblical witness. Not only did Bell clearly

Trust, 1974); P.G. Ryken, "Scottish Reformed Scholasticism," in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark, Studies in Christian History and Thought (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 197.

14 Guy Richard, *The Supremacy of God in the Theology of Samuel Rutherford* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 6.

15 Ryken, "Scottish Reformed Scholasticism," 197.

16 Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Scottish Enlightenment," in *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Theodore Besterman (Geneva: Institut et Musee Voltaire, 1967), 1643.

17 See Alasdair Heron, "Foreword," in *Evangelical Calvinism*, ed. Myk Habets and Bobby Grow (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2012), xiii; Jason Goroncy, "Tha mi a' toirt fainear dur gearan: J. McLeod Campbell and P.T. Forsyth on the Extent of Christ's Vicarious Ministry," in *Evangelical Calvinism: Essays Resourcing the Continuing Reformation of the Church*, eds. Myk Habets and Bobby Grow (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 253–54.

18 Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Hansel Press, 1985), 71.

19 Bell, 83–84. See also Robert Tillman Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, Studies in Christian History and Thought (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011).

assert a discontinuity thesis, but he also argued that Rutherford's commitment to the tools of scholastic theology predetermined certain theological outcomes that were antithetical to scripture.²⁰

J. B. Torrance also advanced the thesis that a gap had emerged between the evangelical humanism of Calvin and the logically rigid, legalistic scholasticism of the seventeenth century Scottish divines. J. B. Torrance largely blamed this upon federal theology as well as the incorporation of the contractual nature of the Scottish concept of "banding" into their covenant theology.²¹ Unlike Bell, he had little to say regarding scholasticism. Rather, he argued that the Scottish concept of "banding" was a legal relationship based upon mutual conditions rather than unconditional love. Such a contract was therefore inherently legalistic.²² Torrance argued that this legalistic concept was read into the biblical language of covenant. Built upon this misreading, the Scots constructed their own version of federal theology which Torrance described as a "theology of politics which could be readily grasped by the man in the street in a land struggling for freedom."²³ Rutherford is implicated in this thesis by name.²⁴ Though Torrance does not see the problems inherent in scholasticism that Bell identified, he nevertheless argued that Rutherford and others were bound to the logic of federal Calvinism, which obscured their ability to rightly read the biblical witness.²⁵

T. F. Torrance, J. B. Torrance's brother, accepted much of the above though he broadened the conclusions.²⁶ T. F. Torrance described the general character of Rutherford's thought as a "logicalized form of Calvinism in which he quarried medieval and post-medieval argumentation used to 'great effect' against Arminians and Antinomians."²⁷ Elsewhere in the same book, he described it as a "scholastic brand of Calvinism."²⁸ The chief effect of this logicalized form of Calvinism was that the doctrines of God's grace were put forward in a necessitarian way.²⁹ The double decree of salvation and reprobation were interpreted in "necessary, causal, and forensic terms" resulting in "rigidly logically and determinist lines of thought." This system of logic was so strong that it could even force Rutherford to conclusions

20 Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology*, 70; 84.

21 J. B. Torrance, "Covenant or Contract?: A Study of Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34, no. 03 (1981): 253–4.

22 J.B. Torrance, "Covenant or Contract?," 228.

23 J.B. Torrance, 228.

24 J.B. Torrance, 226, 229, 236.

25 J.B. Torrance, 240.

26 Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996).

27 T.F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, 93.

28 T.F. Torrance, 96.

29 T. F. Torrance, 97.

that he would not have come to otherwise.³⁰ Despite the above, Torrance concluded his study on an optimistic note suggesting “Rutherford’s faithfulness to the Gospel message could be stronger than his logic.” In other words, Christ clothed with the Gospel rescued Rutherford from his captivity to scholastic reasoning!³¹

David Fergusson neatly ties together many of the previously mentioned themes in his “Predestination: A Scottish Perspective.” As with Bell and the Torrance brothers, Fergusson also accepts the thesis of radical discontinuity between Calvin and the “High Calvinists” of seventeenth century Scotland. If the Scottish theology of predestination is marked by “harshness, legalism, and a fatalistic attitude towards life” it is not because of Calvin and Knox during the Reformation, but rather the “High Calvinists” of which Rutherford is exemplary.³² Fergusson argues that God’s double decree of predestination and reprobation dominated the theological system Rutherford inherited.³³ Rutherford’s views on predestination had a series of disastrous theological and pastoral consequences.³⁴ His theology, logically deduced from the cornerstone of double-predestination, resulted in something akin to pagan fatalism which has no room for a genuine “sense of freedom that accompanies much human activity.”³⁵

There have been exceptions to these trends. Rutherford has been the subject of several academic dissertations.³⁶ Of these, William Campbell’s thesis is the most historically detailed, though it has been surpassed by Coffey’s work, covered below. David Strickland’s thesis offers a careful reading of Rutherford’s popular works of piety written in English. Strickland addresses issues of the freedom of the will as it relates to God’s sovereignty, albeit the discussion is short, and the intricate

30 T.F. Torrance, 105.

31 T.F. Torrance, 107.

32 David A. S. Fergusson, “Predestination: A Scottish Perspective,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46, no. 4 (1993): 457 and 466.

33 Fergusson, “Predestination,” 464.

34 Fergusson, 466.

35 Fergusson, 466, 475, and 476. More recently Fergusson has moderated some of his conclusions in light of reappraisals in Reformed Scholasticism. See: David Fergusson, “Divine Providence,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought*, ed. Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, and Graham Ward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 655.

36 C.N. Button, “Scottish mysticism in the seventeenth century, with special reference to Samuel Rutherford” (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1927); O.K. Webb Jr., “The Political Thought of Samuel Rutherford” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1964); David Strickland, “Union With Christ in The Theology of Samuel Rutherford” (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1972); J.P. Burgess, “The Problem of Scripture and Political Affairs as Reflected in the Puritan Revolution: Samuel Rutherford, Thomas Goodwin, John Goodwin and Gerrard Winstantley” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1986); J.L. Marshall, “Natural Law and The Covenant: The Place of Natural Law in the Covenantal Framework of Samuel Rutherford’s *Lex Rex*” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1995).

scholastic distinctions Rutherford relies upon are absent.³⁷ Nevertheless, he comes nearer to Rutherford's position than those outlined above. One of the most useful contributions of Strickland's thesis is an appendix of Rutherford's patristic, medieval, and early modern sources. While the author cautions that his list is incomplete, it is nevertheless impressively comprehensive.³⁸

2. Reassessments of Rutherford in Recent Literature

The first major reassessment of Rutherford in recent literature is John Coffey's superb intellectual biography *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford*.³⁹ Coffey's portrait of Rutherford avoids the hagiographical tendencies of some of the earlier biographers while also steering clear of the problems posed by more recent contributions. He is sympathetic to his subject, taking great pains to introduce the reader to Rutherford the scholar, pastor, theologian, political theorist, ecclesiastical statesman, and national prophet.⁴⁰ Coffey's treatment merits adding Rutherford the humanist and mystic to this list.⁴¹

Coffey's aim and achievement are much broader than this study, which more narrowly focuses on Rutherford's theology. Coffey's contribution in this narrower regard is important. Departing from Bell, the Torrance brothers, and Fergusson, Coffey argues that claims of discontinuity between the Reformers and the seventeenth century Reformed are exaggerated.⁴² Applying Richard Muller's scholarship on Reformed Orthodoxy, Coffey gains the critical insight that "scholasticism was a rigorous methodology that did not yield any particular set of doctrines, and it was employed by Calvin and Arminius as well as by the Reformed Orthodox."⁴³ Coffey argues that the case of Rutherford tends to confirm Muller's argument.⁴⁴

37 Strickland, "Union with Christ in the Theology of Samuel Rutherford," 81–7, and also Ch. 4.

38 Strickland, 210–255.

39 Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions*.

40 These are the chapter headings of Coffey's study. See Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions*, ix.

41 Coffey, 62–70; 82–97.

42 Coffey, 116.

43 Coffey, 118. Concerning Muller's scholarship regarding the "Calvin vs. the Calvinists" thesis, see especially: Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991); R. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics Vol I: Prolegomena to Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003); Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

44 Coffey, *Politics, Religion and The British Revolutions*, 118.

Following Muller, Coffey's neutral view of scholasticism permits him to engage Rutherford without the presuppositions of earlier scholars. Coffey does not assume that Rutherford's scholasticism represents a betrayal of the Reformation legacy of Calvin. Neither does he assume that it necessarily leads to theological fatalism. He rightly notes that that when the controversy raged between the "Antinomian" Marrow men and their more legalistic opponents in the eighteenth century, both appealed to Rutherford to support their cause. This is because a high view of grace as well as a high view of personal responsibility and freedom may be found in Rutherford's writings. Coffey argues that "the problem here is that historians fail to acknowledge that the orthodox believed in both predetermination and human agency."⁴⁵ The complex relationship between the two is outlined with painstaking detail in Rutherford's Latin works of scholastic theology. These works, entirely ignored by Bell, the Torrances, and Fergusson, are provisionally treated in Coffey's work. Coffey's summary treatment of this issue is admirable, especially considering it is but a small feature of a larger whole.⁴⁶

Three academic dissertations followed Coffey's work.⁴⁷ All three benefit from the new scholarship on Reformed scholasticism. San-Deog Kim's thesis uses Rutherford's catechism, *The Soume of Christian Religion*, as an organizational tool to analyze Rutherford's scholastic theology. This decision is understandable in one sense, as *The Soume* offers a systematic presentation of Rutherford's theology. It is problematic in another sense, in that while *The Soume* inevitably employs certain scholastic distinctions, it is by no means a work of scholastic theology.⁴⁸ A strength of Kim's thesis is an admirable engagement with Rutherford's contemporary sources, including Arminian and Jesuit theologians as well as an attempt to trace medieval influences. The thesis is at its best when Kim offers a close reading of Rutherford's English works.⁴⁹ Unfortunately, his engagement with Rutherford's Latin works of scholastic theology is minimal, and his exegesis of distinctions in these works can be unreliable.⁵⁰ Sang Hyuck Ahn's work is a detailed and comprehensive reading of

45 Coffey, 39.

46 Coffey, 117–38.

47 San-Deog Kim, "Time and Eternity: A Study in Samuel Rutherford's Theology, with Reference to His Use of Scholastic Method," (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 2002); Richard, *The Supremacy of God in the Theology of Samuel Rutherford* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008); Sang Hyuck Ahn, "Covenant in Conflict: The Controversy Over the Church Covenant Between Samuel Rutherford and Thomas Hooker," (PhD diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2011).

48 For Kim's justification of using *The Soume*, see Kim, "Time and Eternity," 20.

49 See especially Kim, ch. 5.

50 See for example his discussion on the *potentia absoluta et ordinata* distinction, which he equates to distinctions concerning the divine will. Though the distinctions concerning God's will and power relate, it is not clear that Kim understands them to be separate. Another critical distinction between natural and free causes also seems to have been misunderstood, thus confusing some of Kim's good

Rutherford's ecclesiology in relation to his covenant theology, and critically engages some of the previous scholarship on Rutherford.⁵¹ The third, Guy M. Richard's study, stands out as the only to be published as well as the first book length treatment of one of Rutherford's Latin works of scholastic theology.

As Coffey had done earlier, Richard also benefits from the new scholarship on Reformed scholasticism, which he applies to the *Examen Arminianismi*, a work of scholastic theology published shortly after Rutherford's death. Seeing the neutral, primarily methodological character of scholasticism leads Richard to a nuanced and balanced portrait of Rutherford. This is particularly evident in a shorter study of Rutherford's supralapsarianism, where Richard effectively argues for a softening of the interpretation of Rutherford's position. Richard rightly notes that the previous scholarship greatly overestimated the importance placed upon the decrees by Rutherford, arguing that "Rutherford has no dogmatic preoccupation with supralapsarianism or with the decrees in general." Richard even goes so far as to argue that Rutherford's supralapsarianism is often framed in infralapsarian terms.⁵² The overall effect is to moderate Rutherford's supralapsarianism, which had been described as stern and harsh in much of the secondary literature.⁵³

Though Richard's study is focused on a Latin work of scholastic theology, the wider world of scholastic theology, both in its continental expressions contemporary to Rutherford as well as in relation to medieval forerunners, remains largely unexamined. As Simon J. G. Burton has noted, "Richard's interpretation of Rutherford's scholasticism, while acknowledging an important Scotist dimension, still remains for the most part at the level of general scholastic paradigms."⁵⁴ In some places, Richard exhibits a lack of patience with scholasticism that was typical of the earlier scholarship on Rutherford. He describes Rutherford's other works of scholastic theology as burdened with a "prolix style" and a "nit-picking nature" of argumentation which was influenced by "Aristotelian categories of logic."⁵⁵ He continues, "the value of such writings in teaching theology is rightly to be questioned."⁵⁶ This lack of patience with scholasticism sometimes leads Richard to superimpose the thought of modern theologians and commentators onto Rutherford's theology

remarks concerning Rutherford's understanding of the freedom of the will. See Kim, "Time and Eternity," 98–100, 239–40.

51 See for example his engagement with Bell, Ahn "Covenant in Conflict," 100.

52 Guy M. Richard, "Samuel Rutherford's Supralapsarianism Revealed: A Key to the Lapsarian Position of the Westminster Confession of Faith?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59 (2006), 27.

53 Richard, "Samuel Rutherford's Supralapsarianism Revealed," 35.

54 Simon J.G. Burton, "Samuel Rutherford's Euthyphro Dilemma: A Reformed Perspective on the Scholastic Natural Law Tradition," in *Reformed Orthodoxy in Scotland: Essays on Scottish Theology 1560–1775*, ed. Aaron Clay Denlinger (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 123–24.

55 Richard, *The Supremacy of God*, 5.

56 Richard, 5.