

Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology

Michaelmas (Fall) 2025

Term Dates:	September 8 – November 15, 2025
Department:	Theology
Instructor:	Michael J. Lynch (m.lynch@davenantinstitute.org)
Meeting Time:	Wednesdays 7:00pm – 9:00pm (Eastern Time)
Zoom & Recordings:	Populi > My Courses tab > course name > Conferences (left menu).
Delivery:	Populi is used for all course content & assignment submissions. Discord is used for additional community interaction.
Auditors:	No required attendance or assignments. Participation is greatly encouraged.

Course Description

How can free choice exist in a world governed by God's sovereign will? What is the nature of human freedom, and how does God's foreknowledge reconcile with human moral responsibility? This course explores early modern Reformed understandings of the relationship between free choice and divine sovereignty, examining theological, philosophical, and historical contexts from the 16th to 18th centuries. We will delve into the thought of key Reformed thinkers on the nature of freedom, divine providence, and human agency, while also considering classical and medieval perspectives that shaped these early modern debates. Through careful analysis, students will engage with the rich tradition of Reformed thought on the relationship between divine sovereignty and human will.

Course Format

The format of the course will be predominantly one of guided discussion. The instructor will often be doing most of the talking, but generally to illuminate and draw out themes from the text for discussion, rather than in straight-up lectures. Thus, students will be expected to come having read and engaged with the text selection for the week, and with thoughts prepared to contribute.

Classes will meet via Zoom for two each week and will be recorded for later viewing by students who cannot participate. Additional student participation and instructor interaction can take place on a private discussion board. Auditors have no requirements, but may participate in all class activities. If the scheduled time does not work for a particular student, they may drop the course according to the Drop Policy in the Academic Catalog.

Course Objectives

1. To discuss how early modern Reformed theologians understood human free choice
2. To appreciate the ancient and medieval background to early modern discussion of human freedom.
3. To explore how various theological doctrines, such as God's foreknowledge, relate to human free choice.

4. To better understand some of the more influential early modern views on free choice associated with Molinism, *praemotio physica*, etc.
5. To examine early modern faculty psychology.
6. To remark on the various scholastic distinctions at play in early modern expositions of human free choice.

Course Texts

van Asselt, Willem J. J. Martin Bac. Roelf T. te Velde. eds. *Reformed Thought on Freedom: The Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010.

Beck, Andreas J. *Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) on God, Freedom, and Contingency: An Early Modern Reformed Voice* (Leiden: Brill, 2022). [To be provided.]

Freddoso, Alfred J. “Preface,” in Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge* [...]. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988. [To be provided.]

Le Blanc, Louis. *Theses Theologicae*. London: Moses Pitt, 1683.

Muller, Richard A. *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017.

Suarez, Francisco. *On Efficient Causality: Metaphysical Disputations 17, 18, and 19*. Translated by Alfred J. Freddoso. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994. [To be provided.]

Synopsis Purioris Theologiae, Synopsis of a Purer Theology. Volume 1/Disputations 1–23 edited by Dolf te Velde. Translated by Riemer A. Faber. Leiden: Brill, 2014. [To be provided.]

Requirements

Expectations

1. Weekly readings (due before our meeting each week).
2. Weekly interaction with fellow participants and the instructor in live class sessions.
3. Students taking the class for credit or for a degree can have (at most) two excused absences from live class participation without penalty.
4. Late work: Grade reduction of -5% per calendar day upon instructor discretion. No assignments will be accepted after the last due date without an approved extension.

Graded Requirements

1. **Attendance (20%):**
Attentive and sustained participation in class is the primary requirement. For-credit students may have two excused absences.
2. **Weekly Reading Questions (30%):**
In order to stimulate discussion, Write 5 thoughtful questions for in-class discussion.
3. **Weekly Reflections (25%):**
Weekly (10) 1-page, typed, *single* spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font, reflections which engage with the assigned readings for that day. These may range from a simple digest of the material to an engagement with and reflection upon a single aspect of the reading.
4. **Oral examination OR Research Essay (25%):**
At the conclusion of the course, the professor will schedule a 15–30-minute Zoom

session to assess you on your mastery of the relevant concepts and material from the course. Essay: 10–12 typed pages, Times New Roman.

Grading Scale

Passing: ≥ 93 :A • ≥ 90 :A- • ≥ 87 :B+ • ≥ 83 :B • ≥ 80 :B- • ≥ 77 :C • ≥ 73 :C

Retake if Core: 70–72:C- • ≥ 67 :D+ • ≥ 63 :D • ≥ 60 :D- • < 60 :F.

Calendar

Week	Dates	Discussion Topics	Secondary Reading	Primary Reading
1	9/10	State of the Question and Historiography	Muller, 11–79	
2	9/17	Aristotle and Aquinas on Human Freedom	Muller, 83–138	Augustine, City of God, V.9–10 ; Aquinas, ST, Prima Pars, Q. 83
3	9/24	Introduction to Early Modern Expositions of Free Choice	van Asselt, 15–49	<i>Synopsis</i> [Thysius], 406–431; Le Blanc on Reformed .
4	10/1	Zanchi on Free Choice	Muller, 139–77	van Asselt, 51–93; Le Blanc on RC .
5	10/8	Junius on Free Choice	Muller, 181–210	van Asselt, 95–125; Le Blanc on Divine Concursus and Human Freedom (Forthcoming).
6	10/15	Gomarus on Free Choice	Muller, 211–57	van Asselt, 127–44; Le Blanc on Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom (Forthcoming).
7	10/22	Voetius on Free Choice	Beck, <i>Gisbertus Voetius</i> , 439–65	van Asselt, 145–70; Le Blanc on the Divine Decree and Human Freedom, Middle Knowledge (Forthcoming).
8	10/29	Turretin on Free Choice	Muller, 258–324	van Asselt, 171–200; Le Blanc on the Divine Decree and Human Freedom, Roman Catholics (Forthcoming).
9	11/5	Late Reformed Orthodoxy on Free Choice	Muller, “JE and the Absence of Free Choice;” Helm, “JE	van Asselt, 201–29; Le Blanc on the Divine Decree and Human

			and the Parting of the Ways?” [Both to be provided.]	Freedom 3, Reformed (Forthcoming).
10	11/12	Dominicans, Jesuits, and Conclusion	Freddoso: 1–81 (esp. 24–28); van Asselt: pgs. 231–42	Suarez, On Efficient Causality, 270–326