



Norman Geisler's sublapsarian Calvinistic soteriology: A critical analysis from a reformed perspective

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ABSTRACT

Evangelical theologian Norman L. Geisler is a prolific Christian theologian, philosopher, apologist, and educator, whose influence has substantially impacted American evangelicalism and beyond. Geisler has authored over one hundred works, is the founder of an evangelical seminary and a university, and has served as a professor at numerous evangelical seminaries and universities. In addition, he is a former president of the Evangelical Theological Society, a founding member of the Evangelical Philosophical Society, and a founder and first president of the International Society of Christian Apologetics.

Geisler claims to affirm a moderate Calvinistic soteriology, yet he seems to diverge from traditional forms of Calvinism. No critical study has yet evaluated his theology to see how it aligns with classic Reformed Calvinistic thought. This thesis offers a thorough analysis, critique, and evaluation of Geisler's soteriology from a Reformed perspective and clarifies the extent of his continuity with any forms of traditional Calvinistic soteriology.

KEY WORDS

Amyraldianism, Arminianism, Calvinism, Depravity, Election, Atonement, Infralapsarianism, Free Will, Monergism, Predestination, Sublapsarianism and Supralapsarianism

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	I
ABSTRACT	II
CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	1
1.1 INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND, PROBLEM STATEMENT & KEY QUESTIONS	1
1.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC’S BACKGROUND	1
1.2.1 Problem Statement.....	2
1.2.2 Main Research Issue and Question	3
1.2.3 Secondary Research Questions.....	3
1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES	3
1.3.1 The Aim	4
1.3.2 The Objectives.....	4
1.4 HYPOTHESIS / CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT	5
1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	5
1.6 BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW	5
1.7 A SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE CORRELATION BETWEEN POINTS 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, & 1.6	8
CHAPTER 2: DEFINITIONS AND OVERVIEW OF SOTERIOLOGY SYSTEMS	10
2.1 THE DEFINITIONS AND BACKGROUND TO REFORMED/CALVINISTIC AND ARMINIAN/WESLEYAN SOTERIOLOGY MODELS	10
2.2 DEFINING TERMS AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE TWO MODELS	10
2.2.1 Defining the Essence of Calvinism	10
2.2.2 Calvinism Defined within a Soteriological Frame of Reference	11

2.2.3	A Historical Conflict among the Reformed over God’s Sovereignty Exercised.....	12
2.2.4	The Basic Three Lapsarian Models & Importance	14
2.3	HISTORY AND MAIN POSITIONS OF A SUPRALAPSARIAN	15
2.3.1	Theodore Beza a Key Developer of Supralapsarianism.....	15
2.3.2	The Basic Five Points within a Supralapsarian Decree Model	16
2.4	HISTORY AND MAIN POSITIONS OF INFRALAPSARIANISM.....	17
2.4.1	Infralapsarianism in Church History.....	17
2.4.2	Synod of Dort.....	18
2.4.3	John Calvin.....	18
2.4.4	Augustine.....	18
2.4.5	The Basic Five Points within an Infralapsarian Decree Model	19
2.5	HISTORY AND MAIN POSITIONS OF SUBLAPSARIANISM	20
2.5.1	Sublapsarianism in Church History	20
2.5.2	Moise Amyraut and John Cameron of the Saumur Academy	20
2.5.3	The Basic Five Points within a Sublapsarian Decree Model	21
2.6	COMMON VIEWS AMONG ALL THREE MODELS	22
2.6.1	Unity on the Doctrine of Sovereign or Unconditional Election	22
2.6.2	Unity on the Doctrine of Total Depravity and Effectual Calling to Salvation.....	22
2.7	MAIN POSITIONS OF AN ARMINIAN/WESLEYAN LAPSARIAN DECREE MODEL.....	25
2.7.1	Jacob Arminius in Church History	25
2.7.2	A Student of Theodore Beza	25
2.7.3	Arminius’ Decree Model	26
2.7.4	John Wesley Adopted Arminian Views.....	27
2.7.5	The Basic Five Points within an Arminian/Wesleyan Decree Model	28
2.8	NORMAN GEISLER’S POSITION	30
2.9	CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	31

2.9.1	The Essence of Calvinism	31
2.9.2	Historical Conflict.....	32
2.9.3	The Basic Three Calvinistic Decree Order Models.....	32
2.9.4	The Supralapsarian View	32
2.9.5	The Infralapsarian View.....	33
2.9.6	The Sublapsarian View.....	33
2.9.7	Common Themes among all Three Models	34
2.9.8	Norman Geisler’s Position	34
CHAPTER 3:	A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF GOD’S NATURE AND ESSENCE	35
3.1	GOD’S NATURE AND ATTRIBUTES	35
3.2	DEFINITION OF GOD: A BRIEF HISTORY OF HOW THEOLOGIANS HAVE DEFINED GOD	35
3.2.1	Clement of Rome and Polycarp: God is an Omniscient Pure Father	36
3.2.2	Augustine: God is the Collective Sum of his Attributes	36
3.2.3	Thomas Aquinas: God is His Essence of Perfections	37
3.2.4	John Calvin: God’s Divine Attributes Define Him	38
3.2.5	Jacob Arminius: God is the Chief Good	39
3.2.6	Stephen Charnock: God is Ultimately His Nature.....	39
3.2.7	J.L. Dagg: God is the Essence of His Character	40
3.2.8	R.L. Dabney: God’s Character Manifests His Nature	40
3.2.9	J.P. Boyce & Charles Hodge: God Can Partially Be Known by His Divine Attributes	40
3.2.10	L.S. Chafer and Merrill F. Unger: God As Defined by the Westminster Confession.....	41
3.2.11	H. Orton Wiley: God as Absolute Reality and Perfect Personality	41
3.2.12	J.I. Packer: God is Defined by His Attributes & Perfections	42
3.2.13	Robert Reymond: God’s Essence is Infinite, Eternal, & Unchangeable	42
3.2.14	R.C. Sproul: God is an Infinite, Holy, and Sovereign One.....	42

3.2.15	John F. MacArthur and Richard Mayhue: God's Perfections Constitute his Essential Nature	43
3.2.16	Summary: God is Defined by His Essence as Manifested in his Attributes	44
3.3	THE WILL/DECREE OF GOD	44
3.3.1	Calvinism on the Will/Decree of God.....	45
3.3.2	Divine Voluntarism versus Divine Essentialism.....	46
3.3.3	Norman Geisler on Essentialism versus Voluntarism.....	47
3.3.3.1	Possible Examples of Voluntarism in Calvinism: William Perkins and William Ames.....	48
3.3.3.2	Norman Geisler's Rejection of Voluntarism.....	50
3.3.4	Arminian/Wesleyan View of God's Will/Decree	50
3.3.5	Summary on God's Will	51
3.4	GOD'S ATTRIBUTES	52
3.4.1	Omniscience.....	53
3.4.1.1	Supralapsarianism on God's Omniscience.....	53
3.4.1.2	Infralapsarianism on God's Omniscience	54
3.4.1.3	Sublapsarianism on God's Omniscience.....	54
3.4.1.4	Arminianism/Wesleyanism on God's Omniscience	55
3.4.2	Omnipresence	55
3.4.2.1	Supralapsarianism on God's Omnipresence	56
3.4.2.2	Infralapsarianism on God's Omnipresence	56
3.4.2.3	Sublapsarianism on God's Omnipresence	57
3.4.2.4	Arminianism/Wesleyanism on God's Omnipresence.....	57
3.4.3	Omnibenevolence.....	58
3.4.3.1	Supralapsarianism on God's Omnibenevolence or Common Grace to All.....	58
3.4.3.2	Infralapsarians on God's Omnibenevolence or Common Grace to All	59
3.4.3.3	Sublapsarians on God's Omnibenevolence or Common Grace to All	59

3.4.3.4	Arminian/Wesleyans on God’s Omnibenevolence or Common Grace to All.....	60
3.4.4	Simplicity	60
3.4.4.1	Supralapsarians on God’s Simplicity	61
3.4.4.2	Infralapsarians on God’s Simplicity	61
3.4.4.3	Sublapsarians on God’s Simplicity	61
3.4.4.4	Arminianism/Wesleyanism on God’s Simplicity.....	62
3.4.5	Immutability/Impassibility	63
3.4.5.1	Supralapsarians on Immutability/Impassibility.....	63
3.4.5.2	Infralapsarians on Immutability/Impassibility	64
3.4.5.3	Sublapsarians on Immutability/Impassibility	64
3.4.5.4	Arminianism/Wesleyanism on Immutability/Impassibility.....	65
3.5	CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	66
3.5.1	Theologians have Commonly Defined God by his Attributes that Guide His Will.....	66
3.5.2	Norman Geisler’s Views Compared to Reformed/Calvinistic Positions	67
3.5.3	Norman Geisler’s Views Compared to Arminian/Wesleyan Positions.....	68
CHAPTER 4:	GOD’S WORK OF PROVIDENCE IN CREATING MANKIND IN HIS IMAGE.....	70
4.1	GOD’S CREATION	70
4.2	GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY AND PROVIDENCE OVER AND WITHIN CREATION.....	70
4.2.1	Providence.....	72
4.2.2	Transcendence and Immanence	74
4.2.2.1	What is Transcendence?	75
4.2.2.2	Transcendence and Eternal Activity	75
4.2.3	What is Immanence?	77
4.2.3.1	Immanence and Activity in Creation	78

4.3	ORIGIN OF HUMANITY	79
4.4	NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS: CREATED IN GOD’S IMAGE	80
4.5	CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	81
4.5.1	Norman Geisler’s Views Compared to Reformed/Calvinistic Positions	81
4.5.1.1	Summarizing Geisler’s Five Points in Relation to all Three Calvinistic Anthropologies.....	85
4.5.2	Norman Geisler’s Views Compared to Arminian/Wesleyan Positions	86
CHAPTER 5:	THE ORIGIN OF SIN AND ITS EXTENT AND EFFECT ON CREATION.....	88
5.1	THE FIRST SINS IN THE UNIVERSE AND FALL OF MANKIND	88
5.2	THE ORIGIN OF SIN IN HISTORY AND ADAM	88
5.2.1	The Three Calvinistic Schools of Thought on Sin’s Origin	89
5.2.2	The Supralapsarian and High Calvinistic School of Thought on Sin’s Origin	89
5.2.3	The Infralapsarian and Sublapsarian Calvinistic School of Thought on Sin’s Origin	92
5.2.4	The Arminian/Wesleyan School of Thought on Sin’s Origin.....	94
5.2.5	Norman Geisler’s Thoughts on Sin’s Origin	95
5.3	THE NATURE OF SIN	95
5.3.1	The Nature of Sin as Described by Calvinists	96
5.3.2	The Nature of Sin as Described by Arminian/Wesleyans and Non-Calvinists	97
5.3.3	The Nature of Sin as Described by Norman Geisler	100
5.4	THE EFFECTS AND EXTENT OF SIN	100
5.4.1	Supralapsarians on the Extent and Effect of Sin	101
5.4.2	Infralapsarians on the Extent and Effect of Sin	102
5.4.2.1	Common Grace and Some Universal Love to All in Infralapsarianism.....	103
5.4.2.2	Similarity and Differences between Supralapsarians and Infralapsarians on Sin.....	105

5.4.3	Sublapsarians on the Extent and Effect of Sin	106
5.4.4	Arminian/Wesleyans on the Extent and Effect of Sin	108
5.5	THE EXTENT AND EFFECT OF SIN IN NORMAN GEISLER'S THEOLOGY	109
5.6	CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	110
5.6.1	Norman Geisler Compared to the Reformed/Calvinistic Positions	111
5.6.2	Norman Geisler Compared to the Arminian/Wesleyan Positions	113
CHAPTER 6:	CHRIST'S INCARNATION AND HIS ATONING WORK OF REDEMPTION.....	115
6.1	CHRIST AND HIS WORK OF REDEMPTION	115
6.2	THE INCARNATION	115
6.2.1	Calvinists on the Incarnation of Christ.....	116
6.2.2	Arminian/Wesleyans on the Incarnation of Christ.....	117
6.2.3	Norman Geisler on the Incarnation of Christ	118
6.3	THE OFFICES OF CHRIST	118
6.3.1	Calvinists on Christ's Threefold Offices.....	118
6.3.2	Arminians/Wesleyans on Christ's Threefold Offices.....	119
6.3.3	Norman Geisler on Christ's Threefold Offices	119
6.4	THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST	120
6.5	THEORIES OF THE ATONEMENT & GEISLER'S ATONEMENT POSITION	120
6.5.1	Eight Theories of the Atonement	121
6.5.2	Norman Geisler on the Atonement	121
6.6	MEANING AND APPLICATION OF VARIOUS THEOLOGICAL TERMS RELATED TO ATONEMENT	122
6.6.1	Propitiation and Its Meaning for Calvinists and Arminians/Wesleyans.....	122
6.6.2	Reconciliation and Its Meaning for Calvinists and Arminians/Wesleyans	123
6.6.3	Substitution and Its Meaning for Calvinists and Arminians/Wesleyans	124

6.6.4	The Extent of the Atonement Question	126
6.6.4.1	Limited Atonement View of the Supralapsarian and Infralapsarian Calvinists	126
6.6.4.2	Unlimited Atonement View of the Sublapsarian Calvinists and Arminians/Wesleyans	129
6.6.4.3	Unlimited Atonement View from the Arminians/Wesleyans.....	136
6.6.5	Norman Geisler’s View of the Atonement and Extent	137
6.7	CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	138
6.7.1	Norman Geisler Compared to the Reformed/Calvinistic Positions on the Atonement	140
6.7.2	Norman Geisler Compared to the Arminian/Wesleyan Positions on the Atonement	140
CHAPTER 7:	GOD’S PLAN OF GRACE AND PROVIDENCE IN APPLICATION.....	142
7.1	AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ORIGIN AND APPLICATION OF DIVINE GRACE IN SALVATION	142
7.2	THE ETERNAL ORIGIN AND PLAN FOR SALVATION ACCORDING TO ORTHODOX THEOLOGIANS	143
7.2.1	An Arminian/Wesleyan View of the Eternal Plan of Salvation	144
7.2.2	A Calvinistic View of the Eternal Plan of Salvation.....	144
7.2.3	Norman Geisler on the Eternal Plan of Salvation	145
7.3	THE DEFINITION OF ORDINATION AND/OR ELECTION IN THE SEQUENCE OF SALVATION DECREES	146
7.3.1	All Three Calvinistic Soteriology Models Affirm Some Type of Unconditional Election	147
7.3.2	Norman Geisler’s View of Eternal Election.....	148
7.3.3	The Surrounding Context on Geisler’s Ideology: Calvinism, Thomism, & Classical Theology	150
7.3.4	Theological Criticisms of Geisler’s Strict Eternal Now View of Election	154

7.4	THE APPLICATION AND ELEMENTS OF GOD'S DECREE: REGENERATION AND CONVERSION (REPENTANCE AND FAITH).....	155
7.4.1	Provision of Grace in Application in the Calvinists & Arminian/Wesleyan Doctrine	156
7.4.2	Provision of Grace in Application in Norman Geisler's Theology	157
7.4.3	Common and Prevenient Grace in Calvinists and Arminian/Wesleyans.....	158
7.4.4	Norman Geisler's View of Common and Prevenient Grace	160
7.4.5	Monergism: An Effectual Conviction and Calling to a Passive Regeneration Causing Conversion to Repentance and Faith	161
7.4.6	Synergism: Irresistible Prevenient Grace, Awakening, and Regeneration through Repentance and Faith for Salvation that Can Be Resisted	165
7.4.7	A Drawing Serial Grace (Ambulatory Model): A Modern Low Calvinism Synthesis of Monergism and then Synergism that Culminates in Regeneration with Repentance and Faith	166
7.4.7.1	Five 19 th and 20 th Century Moderate Calvinists and Their Process Grace Models	167
7.4.7.2	Kenneth Keathley: A Low Calvinistic Serial Model of Grace	168
7.4.7.3	Billy Graham: A Low Calvinistic Serial Model of Grace	170
7.4.7.4	B.H. Carroll and Oliver Crisp: Serial Grace and Libertarian Forms of Calvinism	171
7.4.7.5	E.Y. Mullins: A Relational and Libertarian Monergism Model of Grace	172
7.4.7.6	Amyraldian Libertarian View of Man and Grace	173
7.4.8	Moderate Calvinists Have Sought to Avoid Mechanical and Molecular Determinism Models.....	174
7.4.9	Concerns of Compromise in Irresistible Monergism Models of Grace	176
7.4.10	Summarizing a Moderate Calvinist Applied Grace View as Historically Rooted in Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, and Amyraut.....	176

7.4.11	Effectual Serial and Libertarian Grace Model Illustrations: Love Lavished Leads to Libertarian Loyalty to the Lord.....	179
7.4.12	Norman Geisler’s View on Grace: Is Grace Irresistible or Resistible?	181
7.4.13	Norman Geisler’s View of Monergism and Synergism	183
7.5	CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS	184
7.5.1	Norman Geisler Compared to the Reformed/Calvinistic Positions of Election and Grace	185
7.5.2	Norman Geisler Compared to the Arminian/Wesleyan Positions	189
7.5.3	Concluding Statement	191
CHAPTER 8:	FINAL OBSERVATIONS ON NORMAN GEISLER’S SOTERIOLOGY	193
8.1	CONCLUSIONS	193
8.2	SUCCINCTLY SUMMARIZING WHAT IS AN AMYRALDIAN SOTERIOLOGY: MNEMONIC TERM S.A.V.I.O.R.	196
8.3	OVERVIEW AND DEFINITIONS OF S.A.V.I.O.R.	198
8.3.1	“S” for Sacred Image of God in Mankind	199
8.3.2	“A” for Abandoned Goodwill	200
8.3.3	“V” for Victorious in Substitutionary Atonement.....	201
8.3.4	“I” for An Intellectual Immutable Election.....	202
8.3.5	“O” for Overflowing or Overwhelming Drawing Grace	203
8.3.6	“R” for Regenerated Eternally/Forever	204
8.3.7	Sublapsarian Amyraldian Soteriology Described in S.A.V.I.O.R. Forms a Basic Model.....	205
8.4	A SUMMARY OF GEISLER’S CONTINUITY WITH AMYRALDIAN CALVINISM (MODERATE CALVINISM): HIS VIEWS IN RELATION TO S.A.V.I.O.R.	205
8.4.1	Geisler Had Clear Continuity with Amyraldianism on the Sacred Image of Mankind.....	207
8.4.2	Geisler Had Clear Continuity with Amyraldianism in the Abandoned Goodwill (Depravity) of Mankind.....	208

8.4.3	Geisler Had Some Continuity on the Victorious Substitution Atonement for All of Mankind	209
8.4.4	Geisler Has Some Continuity with Election being Rooted in God's Mind and Not in a Foresight Election Model of the Arminians/Wesleyans	211
8.4.4.1	Excursus #1: Merging Geisler's Eternal Flow and Kenny Rhodes' Dynamic Immutability	216
8.4.4.2	Excursus #2: Geisler Could Have Emphasized More of Aquinas' Aeviternity Model	219
8.4.4.3	Excursus #3: A Lutheran View on God's Condescension to Aid our Understanding	223
8.4.4.4	Excursus #4: E.Y. Mullins' View of Election Combined with the Views of Aquinas, Pieper, Rhodes, and Geisler May Harmonize the Most	224
8.4.4.5	Two Calvinists Who Placed the Plan of Redemption in Aeviternity: Donald Grey Barnhouse & James Robinson Graves	227
8.4.5	Geisler's Overflowing or Overwhelming Persuasive Effectual Grace Model.....	229
8.4.6	Geisler's Regenerated Forever Grace Model.....	232
8.5	FINAL ASSESSMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS	233
8.5.1	Geisler in Relation to Supralapsarianism	234
8.5.2	Geisler in Relation to Infralapsarianism.....	235
8.5.3	Geisler in Relation to Sublapsarianism, Moderate Calvinism.....	236
8.5.4	A Mysterious Sublapsarian: A Final Statement	238
	REFERENCE LIST	240

CHAPTER 1:

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.1 INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND, PROBLEM STATEMENT & KEY QUESTIONS

The body of Christ has wrestled with the best way to define and systematize the doctrine of God's foreordination, providence, and man's will in relation to salvation. Various theological systems have developed in church history. One stream, Calvinism, has various levels within it. The counter system has been known as Arminian/Wesleyan theology. These models have been the major streams of thought in Christianity.

1.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC'S BACKGROUND

An interest in this subject began over twenty years ago during a senior seminar research class. The class interacted with Norman Geisler's monograph *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of God's Sovereignty and Free Will* (1999a). Geisler asserted in that work that God "is in sovereign control of everything we choose, even our salvation" (1999a:17). In his view, "only those who are elect will believe" (1999a:17). In that work, and other writings (2004:144), Geisler claims to affirm a moderate form of Calvinism. Geisler has stated from texts like Ephesians 1:4, 2 Timothy 2:9, and Revelation 13:8 the Bible teaches that "salvation was not decided or gained in time, and it cannot be dissolved or lost in time" because "salvation was effected in eternity and for eternity" (2004:315). In his systematic theology writings, Geisler has stated "the biblical, theological, and historical evidence favors the moderate Calvinist view" (2011:786).

He describes his type of Calvinistic thought when he explains the origin of salvation. He asserts that salvation was "decreed from all eternity," that John 1:13 and Romans 9:16 teach salvation does not depend upon a human decision or will because people are predestined in accordance to God's own pleasure and will (Eph. 1:5), and that "salvation is based in a free, self-determined act of God" (2011:813). Those statements seem to suggest he affirms some type of a Reformed Calvinistic soteriology.

As a Thomistic philosopher (2011:21-22), evangelical theologian, apologist, prolific author, evangelist, and major voice for both American and international Evangelicalism, Geisler claimed that he affirmed a moderate form of Calvinism in soteriology concerning God's sovereign grace in election and human responsibility. This claim deserves reflection and attention through a thorough analysis of his soteriology as presented in his various writings.

Historically, sublapsarianism, or a moderate form of Calvinism, developed in part from Moise Amyraut during the Reformation era (Amyraut, 2017:91-113). Millard J. Erickson has been one

modern proponent of sublapsarianism (Erickson, 1985:826-841). Also, Augustus H. Strong in his *Systematic Theology* (1907) articulated a sublapsarian form of Calvinism. Those theologians provide a basis for comparing Norman Geisler's claim to a sublapsarian moderate form of Calvinism. As to infralapsarianism, possibly another form of a moderate or lower form of Calvinism, that model has been promoted by theologian Charles Hodge (Hodge, 1995:2:320). Supralapsarianism, a higher or stronger form of Calvinism, has been promoted by theologian Robert L. Reymond (Reymond, 1998:488-502). All three of those models affirm some common ideals in regards to depravity, personal unconditional election, efficacious grace, and monergism leading to conversion.

To date, however, no thorough analysis and evaluation of Norman Geisler's soteriology from a comprehensive critical analysis of his various works has been undertaken, much less with a special focus on his claim of a sublapsarianism form of moderate Calvinism.

1.2.1 Problem Statement

Norman L. Geisler's writings and ministry have extended around the globe. As a prolific author and educator his influence has been widespread and significant in North America and beyond. As an evangelical theologian promoting an evangelical theology (Geisler, 2011:13), he has often in print and in lectures referred to himself and his theology as a moderate form of Calvinism affirming total depravity, election, a form of irresistible grace (Geisler, 2004:144-145), and some type of perseverance and preservation of the saints (Geisler, 2004:300-303). He classifies high Calvinists as supralapsarians, strict Calvinists as infralapsarians, and his model as a sublapsarian moderate Calvinism (Geisler, 2011:816).

Geisler has articulated and argued for a modified sublapsarian Calvinistic soteriology. Yet to date no thorough analysis of the major positions and facets of Norman Geisler's soteriology, with a comparison of his views with the three major schools of Calvinistic thought (supralapsarianism, infralapsarianism, and sublapsarianism) or Arminian/Wesleyan views, has been conducted through a literature analysis of his many writings to assess where he may align or diverge from any of those schools of thought. The extent to which his soteriology model exhibits continuity or discontinuity with traditional Calvinism remains unexamined and unknown. This lack of knowledge leaves open the question whether he retains sufficient continuity with any form of Reformed theology to justify his association with a moderate form of Calvinistic soteriology.

Upon initial examinations of his writings, he seems to use the language and the paradigm of some type of Calvinistic soteriology model. Yet it is unclear in the specifics as to how he defines

his terms, whether he does so consistently, and whether those definitions within his soteriology model represent any substantial continuity with any form Calvinism. If he has redefined or modified his soteriology in a substantive manner that exhibits more discontinuity from any of the central affirmations in Calvinistic thought (from the supralapsarian, infralapsarian, and sublapsarian models), then his model is likely mislabeled. This could potentially lead to confusion and dilution of what truly constitutes a Reformed and Calvinistic theological soteriology. In particular, it could also lead to a distortion of what constitutes an Amyraldian or sublapsarian form of soteriology. A critical analysis of his soteriology could establish clarity as to how his soteriology model aligns with the existing models of soteriology.

1.2.2 Main Research Issue and Question

Does Norman Geisler's soteriological confession display sufficient continuity with any of the three major Reformed Calvinistic soteriology models? Or does he substantially differ from all the various Calvinistic models? If he does have more discontinuity with all forms of Calvinistic thought, does that mean he has more continuity with the Arminian/Wesleyan model of soteriology?

1.2.3 Secondary Research Questions

Some questions that arise from the main research question are as follows:

- What are the common and unified themes among all three lapsarian strands of Calvinistic soteriology?
- What is the Arminian/Wesleyan soteriological position?
- What specific areas in Norman Geisler's soteriology align with Calvinistic soteriology?
- What specific areas in Norman Geisler's soteriology align with the Arminian/Wesleyan soteriology model?
- Does Norman Geisler affirm monergism, synergism, or some other view on the origin and cause of faith?

1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

One primary focus will govern this research along with some supporting objectives for that primary aim. The analysis will seek to examine Geisler's soteriology more comprehensively than has been conducted by any other research in relation to his soteriology. This examination will be conducted through a detailed analysis of his soteriology in relation to key themes within the doctrine of salvation.

1.3.1 The Aim

The main aim of this dissertation is to test Norman L. Geisler's assertion that he teaches a sublapsarian moderate Calvinist soteriology. He has claimed to be a moderate Calvinist. He classifies himself with some type of sublapsarian or Amyraldian tradition.

1.3.2 The Objectives

To date, Reformed theology has normally been identified by one of the three types of lapsarian models. These models are known as supralapsarianism, infralapsarianism, and sublapsarianism. Norman L. Geisler self-identifies as a sublapsarian moderate Calvinist.

First, from a Reformed and evangelical perspective this research aims to define the major Reformed and Calvinistic lapsarian models of soteriology as well as the Arminian/Wesleyan model of soteriology that will serve as the basis for evaluation and identification of Norman Geisler's soteriology.

Second, this research aims to analyze and evaluate Geisler's core affirmations within his soteriology.

Third, this research aims to understand and contrast his views with the Reformed Calvinism model or models of soteriology.

Fourth, this research will give special attention and focus on themes related to monergism and synergism so as to help identify which side of the theological persuasion Geisler aligns with in his soteriological position.

Fifth, this research will from those discoveries attempt to draw conclusions and determine whether Geisler has more continuity or discontinuity with many, some, or none of the key positions from the main schools of Reformed thought in his soteriology and self-described position as a sublapsarian moderate Calvinist.

Those five objectives may be succinctly summarized:

- To establish what common points exist in all three Calvinistic lapsarian soteriology models that can serve as a guide for comparing and contrasting Norman Geisler's soteriology.
- To establish the positions found in the Arminian/Wesleyan tradition on soteriology that can serve as a guide for comparing and contrasting Norman Geisler's soteriology.
- To establish any points in Norman Geisler's soteriology that align with the standard concepts in a Calvinistic soteriology.

- To establish any points in Norman Geisler's soteriology that align with the standard concepts in an Arminian/ Wesleyan soteriology.
- To discern where Norman Geisler stands in relation to the Calvinistic and Arminian/Wesleyan soteriology models.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS / CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

The hypothesis for this research is that Norman Geisler's confession of a modified Calvinistic soteriology does not retain sufficient continuity with the main truths and positions of any of the three major forms of a Reformed Calvinistic soteriology.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research will assess Norman Geisler's soteriology from a Reformed and evangelical theological perspective. It will be conducted on the basis of a qualitative study (Merriam, 2002:3-15). The research will develop from an analysis (Madsen,1992:74) of Norman L. Geisler's primary literature. From those primary writings the major affirmations of Geisler's soteriology will be extracted, evaluated, and examined in light of similar or correlating soteriological perspectives from the three schools of Calvinistic thought by various theologians who represent those models.

Secondary theological, biblical, historical, and exegetical resources from both Reformed Calvinistic and Arminian/Wesleyan persuasions will be used to gather supporting ideas related to the various themes in Geisler's theology and as related to major soteriology models. These resources will form a guide to compare and contrast Geisler's model so it may be identified and properly classified within a theological paradigm.

As far as the ethical aspects are concerned, the thesis will comply with the requirements of the North-West University, as well as the Department of Higher Education. The ethical risk in a study of this kind is minimal.

1.6 BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

In conducting a review of Norman Geisler's writings (Vyhmeister, 2001:181), it is found that many resources remain available for use and study as primary sources. Norman Geisler has approximately one hundred monographs in print, along with many articles in various journals and his ministry teaching website, that provide invaluable insight into his theology in general and soteriology in particular. Among his most helpful works are his larger four-volume

Systematic Theology (2002-2005) and his condensed *Systematic Theology in One Volume* (2011). These works discuss God's decree, election, atonement, and human will.

Other significant works are single-volume monographs addressing particular nuances or facets of soteriology or related themes. His work, *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* (1999a), covers Geisler's view of how election, free will, and Christ's atonement function in his soteriological model.

Additionally, Geisler's work, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (1999d), covers a wide variety of theological topics that pertain to soteriology. This volume offers insight into many key themes in Geisler's thoughts on God, his nature, and the ways in which other theologians have articulated various soteriological themes in their writings, evangelistic methodologies, and Geisler's thoughts on those expressions. One article in particular in this work, "Divine Essentialism," provides insights into Geisler's understanding of how God "wills things" (1999d:216). He contrasts in this article divine essentialism against divine voluntarism and in doing so explains his views on immutability, God's sovereignty, and God's elective purposes (1999d:217-218).

Four other works contributed to the research in ascertaining an accurate view of Geisler's soteriology. Geisler's article, "God Knows All Things," in the work *Predestination & Free Will*, edited by David and Randall Basinger (1986:63-84), highlights his perspective on God's omniscience in relation to human will, along with counter-perspectives to his views from other authors. His work with co-author Jason Jimenez, *The Bible's Answers to 100 of Life's Biggest Questions*, deals in some detail with questions about how election relates to salvation, some matters related to theodicy, and the extent of human depravity (2015:31-32,98-100). Also, his work, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective*, co-authored with Paul D. Feinberg, discusses the question of whether or not humans are free (1980:193-206). In this work he covers the various models of determinism as well as indeterminism and libertarianism.

Another unique article by Geisler, "God, Evil, and the Dispensations," in the work *Walvoord: A Tribute*, edited by Donald K. Campbell (1982:95-112), highlights how Geisler articulates a theodicy. This article helps to explain how Geisler views and articulates the permissive decree of God in relation to sin and human freedom. Similar themes by Geisler are taken up in his works *Unshakable Foundations* (2001) and *When Skeptics Ask* (1990:59-74). He explains in those works his perspectives on how evil originated and continues in the universe in relation to God's will, nature, and human will. He covers themes related to human freedom, how God created humanity with the potential for evil that people then made "actual" (1990:63). He also articulates his views on whether God could "make a world without evil" (1990:69) and why this

particular choice of the world we all live in now remains the best option of all options. He discusses throughout this section how human freedom intertwines with God's overarching teleological purpose of an ultimate goal with a "perfect world with free creatures" (1990:73).

Lastly, Geisler's commentary on Colossians in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary* edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (1985:667-686) provides some insight into his exegesis of various texts related to God's will and human will. Here and in other resources Geisler explains his views on how these ideas may be harmonized.

Resources related directly to Geisler's position will also help establish a base for comparison of his views with the main views within the continuum of thought on soteriology. *Calvin's Commentaries* (1998) and his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1975) have been valuable in examining Geisler's views on soteriology. His works provide an early basis for the Reformed and Calvinistic view and a mirror for examining Geisler's position.

A contrasting work against Calvin's ideas has also been helpful in examining the basic ideology of Arminianism. *The Works of Jacob Arminius* (1986) articulates a view of the decrees of God and universal atonement within a conditional election model. These views give insight into a second major model that has existed within the Arminian stream of theology, and help establish a second model as another mirror for Geisler's perspectives. A more modern presentation of this stream of thought has been by David Carter: *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical* (1983). These works provide helpful material to compare Geisler's theology with an Arminian and Wesleyan perspective.

A third major model that existed in and around the time of the Synod of Dort developed from the theologian Moise Amyraut and those after him such as John Preston. The volume *Amyraut on Predestination* (2017) provides a model that became a prominent view inside of the American Bible Conference Movement. This work offers a unique perspective that attempted to harmonize God's particular decree with some type of universal atonement. *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (2007), by Jonathan Moore, offers another view of a type of universal atonement model that remains distinct from the Amyraldian model. Preston's model promoted some type of special design in the atonement that impacts soteriological applications. Geisler seems to classify himself as a theologian in this sublapsarian stream. These works will also provide primary resource material for examining how much Geisler aligns with this model of soteriology.

Many secondary resources have also been used in this research. These sources expand further the basis of various Calvinist and Arminian models of soteriology when used as standards when

examining Geisler’s model of soteriology. The following brief list of secondary resources provides an overall guide to the major themes related to the doctrine of salvation.

Loraine Boettner’s work, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (1932), is a modern work from a Calvinistic model that presents a classic case for God’s absolute sovereignty and unconditional decrees for the salvation of humanity. Boettner’s work offers a basic or standard Calvinist model of soteriology. This work provides a solid resource to compare Geisler’s views to a Reformed soteriology.

Many systematic theology volumes from the Reformed and evangelical tradition have been helpful in explaining views on how God’s decree, grace, and election relate to one another. Charles Hodge’s three-volume *Systematic Theology* (1997), Louis Berkhof’s *Systematic Theology* (2017), Richard A. Muller’s four-volume set, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (2003), Robert Reymond’s work, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (1998), and William G.T. Shedd’s volume *Dogmatic Theology* (2003) cover a Calvinistic Reformed model of soteriology with detailed discussions on God’s decree and atonement.

From those resources, and related materials from this century and prior centuries, this dissertation will examine, critically assess, extract, and engage Norman Geisler’s soteriology as it relates to the three major models of Calvinistic thought.

1.7 A SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE CORRELATION BETWEEN POINTS 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, & 1.6

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 1 THROUGH 5	AIM & OBJECTIVES	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
What are the common and unified themes among all three lapsarian strands of Calvinistic soteriology?	To establish what points exist in all three Calvinistic lapsarian soteriology models that can serve as a guide for comparing and contrasting Norman Geisler’s soteriology.	In order to determine these unified themes, theological works ranging from systematic theologies to doctrinal monographs to commentaries from the three strands of Calvinism will be examined. Those findings will be collated and presented.
What is the Arminian/Wesleyan	To establish the positions found in the	In order to determine these points, theological works

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 1 THROUGH 5	AIM & OBJECTIVES	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
soteriological position?	Arminian/Wesleyan tradition on soteriology that can serve as a guide for comparing and contrasting Norman Geisler's soteriology.	ranging from systematic theologies to doctrinal monographs to commentaries from the Arminian and Wesleyan tradition will be examined. Those findings will be collated and presented.
What specific areas in Norman Geisler's soteriology align with the Calvinistic strands of thought?	To establish any points in Norman Geisler's soteriology that align with the standard concepts in a Calvinistic soteriology.	Through a thorough literary analysis of many of Norman Geisler's writings his positions on key themes related to a Calvinistic soteriology will be examined, collated, and presented.
What specific areas in Norman Geisler's soteriology align with the Arminian/Wesleyan soteriology model?	To establish any points in Norman Geisler's soteriology that align with the standard concepts in an Arminian/Wesleyan soteriology.	Through a thorough literature analysis of many of Norman Geisler's writings his positions on key themes related to a Arminian/Wesleyan soteriology will be examined, collated, and presented.
Does Norman Geisler affirm monergism, synergism, or some other view on the origin and cause of faith?	To discern where Norman Geisler stands in relation to the Calvinistic and Arminian/Wesleyan soteriology models.	Through a thorough literary analysis of many of Norman Geisler's writings his positions on this one essential Calvinistic theme will be examined, collated, and presented.

CHAPTER 2:

DEFINITIONS AND OVERVIEW OF SOTERIOLOGY SYSTEMS

2.1 THE DEFINITIONS AND BACKGROUND TO REFORMED/CALVINISTIC AND ARMINIAN/WESLEYAN SOTERIOLOGY MODELS

Defining of terms and positions helps bring clarity to any conversation or research. The understanding of the historical context of theology models also brings clarity to the interlocutors. Two main models of theological soteriology exist and relate to this research.

2.2 DEFINING TERMS AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE TWO MODELS

Any examination of doctrinal systems will yield better fruit when the examiner grasps the definitions of terms and their history. The debate between the Reformed/Calvinistic tradition of Christianity and the Arminian/Wesleyan model of Christianity has deep roots in the history of Christianity. How theologians define each system highlights the essence and the key points of each system.

2.2.1 Defining the Essence of Calvinism

When examining and explaining the theological terms of Reformed Calvinism, often called Covenant theology, according to R.C. Sproul (Sproul, 1997a:99), one would do well to define terms. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1932:5:353) explained that the term Reformed theology, often known as Calvinism, has multiple senses that share a close association to each other while still retaining key distinctions. Some describe Reformed Calvinism as the teachings from John Calvin. Some understand the term to describe the body of doctrine confessed by the Reformed Protestant churches. Warfield noted that people sometimes use the term Calvinism to describe the holistic set of ideas ranging from social, political, theological, and ethical views that developed in particular states and civilizations (Warfield, 1932:5:353). Those three senses of the term give a broader focus to the subject.

However, a narrower focus on Calvinism sometimes occurs when people analyze the subject of predestination as taught within Calvinism. In the minds of some, like Loraine Boettner, the terms predestination and Calvinism coalesce as the essence of that theology (Boettner, 1932:7). Boettner (1932:7), however, did not agree that Calvinism can be properly reduced to that central essence. Others, such as Michael Horton, also follow that line of thought in rejecting that Calvinism can be narrowed down to that single or primary central theme (Horton, 2011:30). Reformed Calvinist theologian Edwin Palmer (1972:5) asserted that although many think of the

term predestination when hearing the term Calvinism, such an idea is wrong. This focus seems too narrow when seeking to define and understand the background to Reformed Calvinism.

David Steele and Curtis Thomas offer a mediating or alternative option in defining Calvinism. Their view steers a course in between the more broadly focused analysis of Calvinism, as set forth by Warfield's threefold set of definitions for what defines Calvinism, and the more narrowly focused analysis of Calvinism in which predestination summarizes the central theme. Steele and Thomas give an explanation that establishes Reformed Calvinism as a theology with a unique emphasis in regard to the doctrines of God and his nature and will, mankind's sin, and the Lord's application of grace in salvation (Steele and Thomas, 1963:22-23).

Other evangelicals seem to have arrived at a similar conclusion as well. For example, John Feinberg (1988:70) believes the heart of the Calvinism versus Arminianism debate revolves around the doctrinal concepts pertaining to "God, man, sin, and salvation". J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston seem to have a perspective similar to that of Feinberg. For them the essence of Reformed Calvinism pertains to human sinfulness and helplessness and the sovereign will of God that administers grace in a monergistic manner (Packer and Johnston, 1957:58). W.S. Reid seems to have thought in a similar vein too. For him, God's will, human sin, and the application of grace form the heart of Reformed Calvinism (Feinberg, 1988:70). In particular Feinberg states,

From the biblical teaching comes what we might call the material principle of Calvinism: the sovereignty of God. Some believe this is the real core of Calvinistic thinking, and to a certain extent it is. The Calvinist believes that the central thought in the Scriptures is that the Triune God, one God in three persons, is totally independent of all else and absolutely self-sufficient. Within the interrelation of the three persons of the Godhead, God is completely and fully expressed in every way. Man cannot by any means understand what this means, except that with regard to everything outside himself, God is completely and fully sovereign. God has no correlates, but rather is completely and totally absolute (1978:180).

2.2.2 Calvinism Defined within a Soteriological Frame of Reference

This focus, as articulated by W.S. Reid, seems to grasp the framework of the majority of literature focusing on soteriology. The background to soteriology seems to strongly connect to the interrelated themes of God's will, mankind's fall into sin, and the Triune Lord's work to apply grace or justice to mankind. Often those points materialize in what many Reformed Calvinist theologians, like W.S. Reid, explain as the five points of Calvinism (1978:181). Edwin Palmer explains that those five points are often stated in the following manner: (1) God's plan for

mankind's fall into a sinful condition that leaves mankind totally depraved; (2) God's sovereign choice to elect or not elect sinners based upon his free choice alone that is unrelated to any effort or choice on mankind's part; (3) God's purchase of the elect through Christ's sacrificial atonement; (4) God's work to irresistibly overcome the elect's bondage in sin so as to cause regeneration and faith in those elected ones; and (5) God's providence that sustains faith in the elect until their glorification (Palmer, 1972:9-80).

Numerous theologians throughout history have expanded those basic themes of God's will, mankind's sin, and the Trinity's work to apply grace and justice to humanity through a soteriological lens that examines the biblical data through each member of the Trinity's work in relation to history and human will. Modern twentieth-century theologians like R.C. Sproul in his work *Grace Unknown* (1997), Duane Edward Spencer in his work *Tulip* (1979), David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas' work *The Five Points of Calvinism* (1963), Michael Horton's monograph *For Calvinism* (2011), Loraine Boettner's classic work *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (1932), Anthony Hoekema's *Saved by Grace* treatise (1989), the dual-authored work *The Doctrines of Grace* by James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken (2002), and a work by a compendium of authors in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* (Schreiner & Ware, 2000) all examine the biblical data through a lens that frames the theological conversation in or around the themes of God's will, mankind's sin in relation to God's will, and God's providence in applying grace and justice to sinful mankind.

2.2.3 A Historical Conflict among the Reformed over God's Sovereignty Exercised

Those twentieth-century authors articulate the essence of Calvinism through a soteriological frame of reference that connects God's sovereignty to mankind's sin and redemption in grace or mankind's punishment in justice. Their expressions of the five points remain consistent with the historical delineation of Calvinism that developed in the Synod of Dort from 1618 to 1619. At that time the "fundamental Christian doctrine" of "predestination" had been "attacked" (Osterhaven, 2001:354) by the Remonstrants. Historian Philip Schaff noted that the Remonstrants in 1610 had set forth their views of God's will in relation to grace and justice through *The Five Arminian Articles* (Schaff, 1892:545-549).

Additionally, historian Kenneth Scott Latourette explained that Jacob Arminius, the chief teacher for the views advocated by the Remonstrates, had been a disciple of Theodore Beza (Latourette, 1975:765). During that time a "momentous struggle over doctrine broke out within the Dutch Reformed Church" and various theologians were arguing and divided "between supralapsarians and infralapsarians" (Latourette, 1975:765). Jacob Arminius rejected both of

those lapsarian options. He in turn, along with the Remonstrants, promoted an alternative version of theology that was summarized in five points. Arminius' view of God's eternal decrees and how those operated in and throughout history established a distinct view of how God worked with his creation in regard to redemption and condemnation.

Arminius' key foundational point that formed the underlying premise throughout his soteriological paradigm revolved around the type of decree God made in eternity. In his mind, even though "all the decrees of God have been made from eternity" that affirmation did not establish any "absolute necessity" (Arminius, 1986:2:709-710). That premise surfaced in all his particular articulations of how God worked in providence through creation, redemption, and condemnation. The lack of necessity developed positively through a theology of contingency that rested upon the will of the human person before a decree could become actuality.

To understand Arminius' reaction and the distinct model that he and the Remonstrants set forth, one needs to understand the theological context he studied under so as to better understand his counter positions. This counter soteriology model he offered created a basic paradigm that few, if any, have really ever escaped in any scholarly analysis of soteriological options. Even modern attempts to break free from the Synod of Dort and Arminius' five-point soteriological paradigm has achieved little success. Possibly, those who call their theology Traditionalism or Provisionalism have made the newest attempt.

Yet a review of the main works from that movement reveals they are still working with the same basic model and points as were the Remonstrants and the officials at the Synod of Dort. The collective chapters by various writers in the book *Anyone Can be Saved* reveal that the same paradigm exists in their efforts to construct a distinct soteriology model (Allen, Hankins, and Harwood, 2016). Adam Harwood (2016:ix) makes a preliminary qualifying statement that their collective team rejected the two main Calvinist-Arminian paradigms and presuppositions.

However, the entire book argues for a model or a paradigm that follows the basic thrust developed by the Synod of Dort and the Remonstrant articles. None of the substantive themes or issues significantly differ from the basic literature on Calvinism, Arminianism, or hybrid versions of the two. Their book covers six subjects: (1) God's eternal plan (pages 9-15), (2) mankind's fall into sin (pages 37-53), (3) the atonement of Christ (pages 55-64), (4) the sovereignty of God in election that they explain as corporate and conditional (pages 90-117), (5) and free will of those, who cooperate with the Holy Spirit's grace (pages 119-131). Lastly, (6) this cooperation actualizes God's grace and yields a permanent and irreversible salvation of those conditionally elected (pages 133-141).

Those themes, though somewhat of a hybrid formulation, remain consistent with the paradigm that developed with great prominence in the Synod of Dort versus Remonstrance debate. The main two soteriological systems have remained the primary foundational models that theologians in general work with from that point of history till the modern day. Therefore, because of this general frame of reference, almost all theologians generally work within that construct when examining and explaining a soteriology. An examination of what Arminius rejected in those main two lapsarian forms of theology will help set the stage for the alternative model that Arminius and the Remonstrants attempted to establish.

2.2.4 The Basic Three Lapsarian Models & Importance

Almost any discussion concerning soteriology usually leads to some discussion concerning God's omniscience and how he ordered the logical outworking of his plan of salvation. Rolland McCune (2009:218) states that "there are basically three configurations in the logical order of the one unified decree of God that comprehends whatsoever that comes to pass". Theologian Floyd Barackman has written that these three models have been labeled as supralapsarianism, infralapsarianism, and sublapsarianism (Barackman, 1998:507). Some theologians, like J. Oliver Buswell, have classified the sublapsarian position as the Amyraldian perspective (Buswell, 1963:135). A.H. Strong acknowledged only two types of lapsarian views (supralapsarian and sublapsarian), yet he divided the sublapsarian into two types with one model he called the "Anselmic view" (Strong, 1907:779). The Anselmic sublapsarian model would align more with what some theologians call the infralapsarian model. Millard J. Erickson also divided the models into three categories, supralapsarian, infralapsarian, and sublapsarian (1985:826).

Charles Ryrie (1999:368) notes that some theologians do not "recognize" any distinction "between infra and sub" decree models. Loraine Boettner is one Reformed Calvinistic theologian that does not mention the sublapsarian model and instead only presents supralapsarian and infralapsarian models (1932:126-130). Robert Lightner acknowledges that Calvinists could be found in all three models (1991:291).

Each of these three models pertains to how God orders "man's creation, fall, election, and salvation" (Barackman, 1998:506). Some Reformed Calvinistic theologians do not think much value exists in the effort to know how God's mind worked in this area. For example, Wayne Grudem (1994:679), after discussing two of the lapsarian models, asserts that "Scripture does not give us enough data to probe this mystery, and moreover, it does not seem edifying to do so". Charles Ryrie thinks that these constructs or paradigms of how God ordered his decrees did not confirm much of anything (1999:368). Robert Lightner also questions whether the

decree orders were how God really sees these matters (1991:290). James Quiggle (2012:38) suggests when discussing these matters that “no list, of course, can fully capture, nor accurately define, exactly what God thought and did in eternity-past”. Yet, even with that admission, he makes an effort to delineate the order of God’s decrees based upon “reason and logic to what scripture says” (2012:38).

However, Lewis Sperry Chafer, while admitting that some speculation exists in this topic, asserted that this subject presents “some great issues” (1993:178). Additionally, he thought this matter of the order of God’s decrees constituted “vital doctrine at its very foundation” (1993:182). Paul Enns (2008:212-213) shares a similar idea in that he thinks this subject has significant “practical ramifications” for how one views God and lives out the faith. Rolland McCune (2009:218) argues for a particular order yet does so with a warning that any position in this area should be held with “a great deal of humility and tentativeness”. Reformed theologian Michael Horton (Horton, 2011:524) does not think the decree order lacks significance because these decree models “impact the shape of salvation as it relates to God’s eternal decision”. Theologian Herman Bavinck (2004:392) recognized the value of the various models yet concludes that the subject matter is “so enormously rich and complex that it cannot be reproduced in a single word”. For him, the decree of God contains “varied omnilateral interaction” (2004:392).

Theologian James Oliver Buswell (1963:134) stated that this scriptural issue of decree order is revealed to help the finite mind understand God’s logical order. Geisler (1990:11) taught that logic reflected orderly thought. Francis Pieper also suggested that God’s revelation of himself in this decree order structure has been revealed by God in scripture so that mankind can understand him and his divine works. According to Pieper (1951:2:38), “since we human beings are bound to the sequence of time, God has himself revealed to us in his word in what order and sequence our thoughts regarding God and God’s will must move in order to be correct thoughts”.

2.3 HISTORY AND MAIN POSITIONS OF A SUPRALAPSARIAN

For a theologian to properly understand supralapsarianism it helps to examine when the doctrine developed in history. Supralapsarianism has a distinct decree model that differs from other Calvinistic models. It also has substantive differences with the Arminian/Wesleyan model.

2.3.1 Theodore Beza a Key Developer of Supralapsarianism

In the wake of John Calvin’s influence and proliferation of his main theological views, several Calvinistic oriented confessions developed. According to Earle E. Cairns, the Belgic Confession

and the Heidelberg Catechism became central standards for the Reformed Calvinistic faith in Holland (Cairns, 1996:317). The University of Leyden also became a central educational center that promulgated the Reformed Calvinistic thought (Cairns, 1996:317). Anglican theologian J.I. Packer asserted that it is there where Jacob Arminius studied and was exposed to a form of Calvinism that apparently caused him some alarm (Packer, 2002:375).

Philip Schaff (1982:846) noted that it was there where “Calvin’s faithful friend and successor, Theodore Beza” continued to promote Calvin’s ideology from Geneva. During Calvin’s life, Beza had become the most “distinguished orator” and “next to Calvin” the “most celebrated theologian” (Schaff, 1982:856). This transition from Calvin to Beza, however, brought with it some new nuances.

J.I. Packer has shown that after Calvin’s death, Beza developed Calvin’s ideas on God’s decree into a more distinct system that theologians describe as supralapsarianism (Packer, 2002:375). F.H. Klooster has asserted that Beza was the “first to develop supralapsarianism in this new sense” (2001:375). M. James Sawyer has explained that Beza shifted the emphasis of Calvin’s teaching in this area to a model that made “absolute divine sovereignty” the central theme of theology (Sawyer, 2006:315). This theology placed such an emphasis on God’s sovereignty that it explained every decree, even the decree of humanity’s creation and fall into sin, as an extension of the decree for election to grace or damnation. As Klooster (2001:1155) notes, “supralapsarians considered God’s ultimate goal to be his own glory in election and reprobation”. Creation and the fall were logically necessary extensions of the first decree of absolute predestination in Beza’s model (Packer, 2002:375). Concerning Beza and his theology historian Philip Schaff (2002:873) has stated:

Beza was the chief theologian of the Reformed Church after Calvin. Principal Cunningham has shown the part Beza played in bringing about the transition from the original Calvinism to the scholastic form, hard and mechanical, and so unconsciously preparing the way for the great reaction from Calvinism, viz. Arminianism; for Arminius had been a student in the Genevan Academy under Beza.

2.3.2 The Basic Five Points within a Supralapsarian Decree Model

This more developed scholastic model of soteriology that Beza taught could properly be summarized in five key points that highlight how God’s decree in eternity planned through absolute necessity the moments of history for mankind’s redemption and damnation. Theologian Robert Reymond, a modern supralapsarian advocate, has summarized the five points from a supralapsarian perspective. Reymond, who follows the thinking of Beza in this

area (1998:488), explains that at the heart of the five decrees of a supralapsarian model is the primary emphasis they call the “particularizing principle” (1998:490). Reymond (1998:490) argues that this “particularizing principle” functioned in the entire five decrees as the “unifying principle of the eternal purpose of God”. The more common five points within historical supralapsarianism are: (1) the decree that, for God’s own glory, he elected some sinful people to salvation and also chose to damn the rest of sinful mankind; (2) the decree to create a world with those elect and non-elect people in that world; (3) the decree that all those people would fall into sin; (4) the decree to redeem the elect by the work of Christ Jesus; (5) the decree for the Holy Spirit to apply the work of Christ to the elect sinners (1998:488-496).

That five-point model common to supralapsarian Calvinists and promoted by Beza ran into a problem with the Protestant theologian Jacob Arminius (Cairns, 1996:317). According to Earle E. Cairns, Arminius, who as a student studied at the University of Leyden and in Geneva directly under Beza, opposed this form of Calvinism and made an effort to “modify Calvinism” (Cairns, 1996:317). James and William Nichols think that in Arminius’ mind the supralapsarian decree by which God thought of some as elect and others as non-elect prior to the decree of their actual existence in creation amounted to a horrid doctrine (Arminius, 1986:2:710-711). Arminian scholar Roger Olson believes that in Arminius’ mind the decree to create was not the means unto the end for reprobation. The supralapsarian model of Calvinism in the Arminian theological perspective has historically skewed God’s character as in their minds it makes God the author of evil (Olson, 2006:74).

2.4 HISTORY AND MAIN POSITIONS OF INFRALAPSARIANISM

As with supralapsarianism, infralapsarianism has a unique approach to the decree of God. It differs from the other two Calvinistic models. It also differs from the Arminian/Wesleyan model. The following sections examine the history of this model and its advocates.

2.4.1 Infralapsarianism in Church History

Supralapsarianism seems to have been chiefly promoted by Theodore Beza. Infralapsarianism seems to have been heavily promoted by the Synod of Dort. Furthermore, it is probable that two major theologians in history promoted this model. However, one of those theologians who held this position may have evolved over time, making it difficult to pin down exactly where he landed in this matter.

2.4.2 Synod of Dort

Infralapsarian theologians view the order of God's soteriological decrees in a different order than the supralapsarians. This model has advocates within the Synod of Dort as well. William G.T. Shedd has argued that history seems to suggest the Synod of Dort held more to the infralapsarian position (Shedd, 2003:340). Herman Bavinck (2004:338) also thought that the Synod of Dort's judgments were along the lines of infralapsarianism. Some theologians, such as F.H. Klooster, believe that the Synod of Dort had a majority of infralapsarians within its body in contrast to the supralapsarians (Klooster, 2001:1155).

Theologian Louis Berkhof certainly believed that history testified to "two different conceptions" concerning God's sovereign decree of predestination that "gradually emerged" (Berkhof, 2017:89). R.V. Schnucker suggested that, generally speaking, the Reformed theologians at the Synod of Dort and after seemed to adopt a position in contrast to supralapsarianism and more in line with something closer to infralapsarian views (2001:607). Southern Baptist Reformed theologian Bruce Ware has taught that some theologians believe that the Reformed tradition has for the most part made infralapsarianism the "dominant position" (Ware, 2006:48). According to Bruce Ware (2006:48), all the major Reformed creeds and confessions adopt the infralapsarian view.

2.4.3 John Calvin

Some debate exists as to what perspective Calvin held concerning the order of God's decrees. Augustus H. Strong (1907:778) suggested that Calvin's earlier views were more supralapsarian in nature while in his later years he expressed more of an infralapsarian view. Charles Hodge acknowledged that some dispute has existed over which model Calvin articulated (1995:2:316). Hodge thought that some of Calvin's writings favored the supralapsarian model while in other places it appeared that Calvin supported the infralapsarian view (1995:2:316). James Oliver Buswell expressed the same idea as Hodge regarding Calvin's later years. He thought Calvin certainly held to the infralapsarian position (1963:135).

2.4.4 Augustine

R.V. Schnucker believed the antiquity of the infralapsarian model extended even back to Augustine (2001:607). Some theologians have labeled this model as "moderate Calvinism" (Culver, 2005:388). Consequently, Alan Cairns has argued that what is commonly labeled as Calvinism today could really be a model that exhibits the main principles and teachings of Augustine (2002:47-48). R.K. McGregor Wright (Wright, 1996:230) asserts that Augustine's thought and teaching countered the Pelagians and functioned as a summary of theology from

the early church fathers. Karl Barth (1957:307) even went so far as to assert that Augustine fathered the “classical predestinarian doctrine”.

In examining the actual teachings of Augustine, one will discover that he did not use the modern lapsarian terminology. However, Geerhardus Vos argued that Augustine’s explanations on how sin developed and how from that condition God elected some to salvation means that Augustine embraced the infralapsarian model (2012-2014:150). In regards to sin, Augustine (1997:5:445) stated unequivocally that sin occurs because of people’s own will when they exercise their will against the will of God. He argued further that people ruin themselves through falling away from grace through the choice to sin. From that condition of sin, God then elected some to experience election and predestination to eternal life (1997:5:515-516). Charles Hodge’s investigation of the teachings of Augustine led him to believe that indeed Augustine supported the infralapsarian perspective (1995:316).

2.4.5 The Basic Five Points within an Infralapsarian Decree Model

An infralapsarian view of God’s decree alters the order in which God manifests his sovereignty by asserting that election, damnation, and sin does not occur prior to the logical decree to create. Another essential difference in infralapsarian views versus supralapsarian views pertains to the manner in which God does not elect someone. God decreed to create, and then after people choose to sin, God then orders or manifests the decree to elect some and then to pass by others. Sin justifies the reason why some do not come to experience election and faith in this model. Geerhardus Vos said this model taught that “God’s decree not to grant the grace of salvation to certain persons lying in sin” (2012-2014:1:153) gives justification for their damnation. In contrast, the supralapsarian position makes the fall into sin a means to the end for the “revelation of God’s retributive justice in the punishment for their sins” (Vos, 2012-2014:1:153).

The logical order set forth by infralapsarians seeks to make the reason for some experiencing damnation a consequence for sin. It rejects the double predestination ideology that occurs in a supralapsarian model. Kenneth Keathley argues that infralapsarianism asserts some aspect of conditionality within the reason for some of the decrees (2010:145). Additionally, it proposes that God allows or permits some events to occur that he does not directly cause. It asserts that God has an “asymmetrical relationship with election and reprobation” (Keathley, 2010:145). John MacArthur (2017:505-506) describes it this way:

Scripture teaches an unequal ultimacy with regard to election and reprobation—that is, while God does indeed decree both the salvation of some and the damnation of others, there is a necessary asymmetry in these decrees. . . . When God chose some and not others for salvation, he regarded them not as morally neutral but as already-fallen creatures. . . . In the case of the elect, he actively intervenes—setting his love on them, determining to appoint Christ as their Savior and to send the Spirit to sovereignly quicken them from spiritual death unto new life in Christ. In the case of the non-elect, however, he does not intervene but simply passes them by, choosing to leave them in their state of sinfulness and then to punish them for their sin. While he is the efficient cause of the blessedness of the elect, he is not the efficient cause of the wretchedness of the non-elect; rather, he ordains them to destruction by means of secondary causes.

Rolland McCune taught that those asymmetrical aspects exist in an infralapsarian model because the doctrine of election and passive reprobation occur after the decree to permit the fall (2009:218). Loraine Boettner described five points in infralapsarian models as follows: (1) the decree to create; (2) the decree to permit the fall of humanity into sin; (3) the decree to elect some to salvation and to pass by others; (4) the decree to provide the atonement for the elect; and (5) the decree to send the Holy Spirit to apply the blood of Christ to the elect for their redemption (1932:126).

2.5 HISTORY AND MAIN POSITIONS OF SUBLAPSARIANISM

Another decree model has been labeled sublapsarianism. This model has some distinct features that make it different from both supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism. This model seems to have developed in the era of the Protestant Reformation. One key feature is this model places atonement prior to the decree to elect.

2.5.1 Sublapsarianism in Church History

One of the most prominent voices for this model came from the theologian Moise Amyraut (1596-1664). A school known as the Saumur Academy popularized this model. Eventually his sublapsarian view became known as Amyraldianism.

2.5.2 Moise Amyraut and John Cameron of the Saumur Academy

While some scholars like Dirk Jellema explain sublapsarianism as infralapsarianism (1978:937-938), others such as Louis Berkhof ignore it or do not even recognize it as an option within the paradigm of lapsarian positions (2017:89-96). Yet historical theology has shown that another lapsarian option has existed within the Reformed heritage. Sometimes this third position has

been called sublapsarianism or Amyraldianism. B. Demarest notes that this sublapsarian view developed from a theologian by the name of Moise Amyraut (1596-1664), a French Reformed theologian at the Saumur Academy in the seventeenth century (2001:607). Alan Cairns additionally notes that Amyraut popularized and articulated a decree model that altered the placement and extent of the atonement in the lapsarian decree order (2002:16).

This particular French Reformed school of thought that Moise Amyraut embraced seems to have been taught to him by John Cameron (1579-1625). D.P. Thomson has shown that Cameron was a Scottish theologian who was greatly admired in the Reformed Church circles that he loved and served (1978:183). From this school the sublapsarian decree model originated, altering the place of the atonement in the scheme of how God ordered his redemptive plan.

2.5.3 The Basic Five Points within a Sublapsarian Decree Model

Matthew Harding provides an overview of the sublapsarian model that Amyraut taught. Harding's translation of Amyraut's work shows that the sublapsarian model had this as the decree order: (1) the decree to create humans as natural beings; (2) the decree to permit humanity's fall into sin; (3) Christ's atonement for all offered upon the condition of faith; (4) the election of many to the faith; (5) the Holy Spirit's work to apply the atonement and secure the salvation of the ones unconditionally elected (2017:99-120). Rolland McCune writes that the placement of atonement prior to election in the sublapsarian view asserts that "God elected some to an already-provided-for atonement" (2009:218). In this Calvinistic model the atonement of Christ is made for all. As Millard J. Erickson (1985:829), a modern sublapsarian theologian, stated, "Christ died for all persons, but his atoning death becomes effective only when accepted by the individual." Matthew Harding's translation of Moise Amyraut's work (2017:100) describes Amyraut's view of the atonement offered to all this way:

The Redeemer has been taken from their race and made a participant in the same flesh and the same blood with them all, that is, from a same human nature conjoined in him with the divine nature in a unity of a person. The sacrifice that he offered for the propitiation of their offenses was equally for all; and the salvation that he received from his Father to communicate to men in the sanctification of the Spirit and in the glorification of the body is ordained equally for all, provided—I say—that the necessary disposition to receive it (in men) is equal in the same way (Amyraut, 2017:100).

In the sublapsarian model, the atonement provides the justification for the preaching of the gospel to all people. All could be saved, hypothetically, if they would exercise faith in the

atonement made for them. As Amyraut explained, Christ offers himself as redeemer to “give salvation to men provided that they do not refuse it” (Amyraut, 2017:106). This sublapsarian model has been designated by theologian Millard J. Erickson as a “moderate form of Calvinism” (1985:835). In this view “God logically decides first to provide salvation, then elects some to receive it” (Erickson, 1985:835).

2.6 COMMON VIEWS AMONG ALL THREE MODELS

Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck (2004:392) has stated that the decree order of God is an “interconnected pattern” that is “enormously rich and complex”. Bavinck sees the decree of God as a “varied omnilateral interaction” (2004:392). Wayne Grudem (1994:679) has noted that inside of Reformed circles a significant dispute has existed over these lapsarian decree models. In his view “there is probably some element of truth in each one” (1994:679). Rolland McCune (McCune, 218), a sublapsarian theologian, even suggests that diving into this matter in the first place poses its own set of difficulties. Charles Ryrie (1999:368), who classifies himself as a moderate Calvinist, as does Norman Geisler (2004:144-145), expresses a concern that the lapsarian decree order would not confirm much of anything (Ryrie, 1999:368).

2.6.1 Unity on the Doctrine of Sovereign or Unconditional Election

However, Ryrie’s teacher, and a moderate Calvinist, Lewis Sperry Chafer, suggested that this decree order remains an important issue. Chafer recognized that to some degree theologians speculate on these matters, yet even so he thought the decree order issue highlights important doctrine (1993:3:82). It seems that the reason important doctrine exists in the decree model has to do with the central theme within all three models. The Calvinistic models, as well as the non-Calvinistic models, all grapple with the way in which God elects some to salvation in eternity prior to earthly history. While each lapsarian model (supra, infra, and sub) displays some differences, one similarity runs through all three of the Calvinistic models. As Chafer noted (1993:3:82), each Calvinistic model affirms in some way or another “that divine election is the sovereign choice of God which expresses his grace apart from every form of works foreseen or actual.” This similarity runs through each decree model.

2.6.2 Unity on the Doctrine of Total Depravity and Effectual Calling to Salvation

Furthermore, two other similarities surface in each of the three models. All three models teach that a person experiences such a level of depravity that he or she will not come to saving faith in Christ without God electing that person and working to effectually draw that person to faith. Though the supralapsarians differ from the infralapsarians and the sublapsarians in the order in which God sees the person’s fall into depravity, all three affirm that the fall into depravity

necessitates God to act through a choice to elect, otherwise none would come to eternal salvation.

That depravity, consequently, means that for someone to experience faith the person must experience an inward work of grace to such a degree that it moves the person to faith in Christ's atonement for his or her sin. All three Calvinistic lapsarian models affirm this point. The slight difference between them in this area seems to be in nomenclature. The supralapsarian and the infralapsarians speak of the efficacious grace in such a way that people must come to faith. Sometimes they term this "irresistible grace". Bruce Ware (2000:211) would be a representative of the infralapsarian Calvinistic perspective, and he defines effectual grace this way:

The Holy Spirit is able, when he so chooses, to overcome all human resistance and so cause his gracious work to be utterly effective and ultimately irresistible. In soteriology, the doctrine of irresistible grace refers to the Spirit's work to overcome all sin-induced resistance and rebellion, opening blind eyes and enlivening hardened hearts so that sinners understand and embrace the gospel of salvation through faith in Christ.

That language by Ware aligns with the terms used by the supralapsarian Calvinist Robert Reymond. In describing the effectual call of God upon an elect sinner Reymond (1998:715) asserts that "God's summons *must* be in some way intrinsically efficacious, since the man being summoned is dead in his trespasses and sins and is unable to do anything to advance his salvation until he is enabled to do so". This work of God certainly moves the sinner to respond through repentance and faith. This efficacious call of God is directly linked to the work of the Lord regenerating the sinner. As Reymond (1998:718) explains,

By the regenerating work of his Spirit, God the Father irresistibly summons, normally in conjunction with the church's proclamation of the gospel, the elect sinner into fellowship with, and into the kingdom of, his Son Jesus Christ. His call is rendered effectual by the quickening work of the Spirit of God the Father and God the Son in the hearts of the elect. His repenting and his believing are his divinely effected responses to God's effectual call, which, taken together, are indicative of his conversion.

The moderate Calvinists, who usually adopt the sublapsarian decree model, agree with the supralapsarians and infralapsarians on human depravity, unconditional election, and that some type of effectual grace must occur to bring the elect to faith. However, they differ on the order and purpose of the atonement and apparently the type of strength used to bring the person to faith. The sublapsarians believe Christ made a provision for all people. As Moise Amyraut taught, the grace of the Lord from the death of Christ does "not exclude anyone" (Amyraut,

2017:103). The universal provision is available for all while it only applies “to those who believe” (2017:104). Those who do believe come to faith through an effectual call that results in the conversion of the elected sinner. Yet the effectual call is sometimes said to be an act that will certainly result in one’s conversion but not that it must result in that conversion. Millard J. Erickson (1992:293) describes it this way: it is not that the elect “who are called *must* respond, but that God makes his offer so appealing that they *will* respond affirmatively.”

Other moderate Calvinists who adopt a universal provision yet limited application of the atonement describe the call to salvation in a similar way as does Erickson. They assert that this effectual call will certainly move the person to faith while not being irresistible per se. For example, Augustus H. Strong rejected the terminology of irresistible grace (1907:792). He articulated this effectual grace as an event that gives elect persons a new set of affections that restores their freedom so that they may rightly exercise it and choose God for salvation (1907:793). Kenneth Keathley’s words might also apply here: “The Holy Spirit appeals, persuades, and wins. And the elect find the drawing ‘irresistible’” (Keathley, 2010:107). Another moderate Calvinist, John Walvoord (1954:123-124), describes it this way in following Augustus H. Strong:

A proper view of efficacious grace, then, fully recognizes its certain result in the salvation of its beneficiary. In every case, the one who receives efficacious grace is instantly saved. While the experience of the individual, faith in Christ, is a result of choice and act of the human will, it is nevertheless a work of efficacious grace. Efficacious grace never operates in a heart that is still rebellious, and no one is ever saved against his will.

It seems that the terms used by moderate sublapsarian Calvinists shift from asserting that God’s grace works in an irresistible way that *must* produce a positive response to a position that asserts that redemptive grace when applied *will* enable and certainly guarantee the elect person will respond by repentance and faith. Moderate Calvinist Arnold Fruchtenbaum (2013:71) describes it this way: “efficacious grace emphasizes that by this means God gives divine enabling to the elect which then enables them to respond to the gospel. Without this divine enabling, their sin will keep them from responding or even having a desire to respond.”

That description aligns with how Moise Amyraut explained the effectual grace of God that accomplishes salvation. Amyraut did not think God violated a person’s will to effect repentance and faith in the elect person. He taught that a person believes because of the Spirit’s effective “persuasion” (Amyraut, 2017:139). Amyraut taught that “love is movement of both the emotion and will” (2017:139). This work of God through “rational arguments” will “induce men to receive some truth” and this occurs without “constraint or violence” against one’s will (2017:139).

Nonetheless, even with this difference in terminology from irresistible to effectual, all three models embrace the idea that mankind is depraved, God must elect one to eternal grace, and the Holy Spirit must apply the work of Christ to the elect sinner through a type of grace that results in the certain act of faith in the elect sinner. Supralapsarian and infralapsarian Calvinists embrace a limited atonement. The sublapsarian Calvinists embrace the provision of a universal atonement with a particular application only to the elect. All three affirm some degree of particularity in both election and the atonement when viewed through the lens of application. All three affirm that human depravity requires some type of move from God before people can experience faith in that atonement.

2.7 MAIN POSITIONS OF AN ARMINIAN/WESLEYAN LAPSARIAN DECREE MODEL

An intense debate and difference in the body of Christ has existed throughout history in relation to God's will and human will in salvation. In contrast to the Reformed Calvinistic view, the Arminian/Wesleyan view has competed for loyalty of the hearts and minds of Christians and theologians. The Arminian/Wesleyan decree model has a substantive difference in the way God works with humans to accomplish salvation.

2.7.1 Jacob Arminius in Church History

Jacob Arminius remains a notable figure in the history of the body of Christ. His education and shift in views on God's sovereignty has marked a distinct course of theological thought that continues today to influence a significant portion of Christ's body. His model of theology led to a new trajectory away from the models offered by Calvin and Beza.

2.7.2 A Student of Theodore Beza

In 1559 Theodore Beza succeeded John Calvin as the first head of the Genevan Academy. He developed the Reformed views of Calvin further and in doing so made it more "rigid" (Schnucker, 2002:382). These rigid views were present when one of his students by the name of Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) entered the Geneva Academy on New Year's Day in 1582 (Shepherd, 2003:18). Arminius experienced first hand the more rigid form of thought on God's sovereignty under Beza. "Beza thrust into the centre of his thought a sovereignty that [to Arminius and his followers] seemed indistinguishable from the arbitrary assertion of naked power" (Shepherd 2003:18).

Arminius himself embraced the Reformed view of divine providence. However, he experienced a strong aversion to Beza's supralapsarian model of soteriology. In his reaction to what some call high or strong Calvinism, Arminius developed a model of theology that opposed all forms of

divine determinism concerning election (Allison, 2011:291-292). Yet it was not merely supralapsarianism that Arminius opposed. He also opposed infralapsarianism. For him any model that did not take into consideration a person's choice of repentance and faith lacked biblical warrant (Arminius, 1956:1:243).

2.7.3 Arminius' Decree Model

Arminius' views were a reaction to the supralapsarian model, which asserted that creation served as a means leading to the reprobation of the non-elect. Arminius thought of that as a horrible way to view God's decree (Arminius, 1986:2:710). Instead of God decreeing people as elect or non-elect prior to being created, Arminius opted to place creation as the first decree in the decree order (Arminius, 1986:2:711).

Next, Arminius rejected the idea that God ordered by decree the fall of mankind into sin. He specifically stated, "Adam did not fall through the decree of God, neither through being ordained to fall nor through desertion, but through the mere permission of God" (Arminius, 1986:2:716). In this matter he clearly opposed the idea that God caused one to sin or to fall into sin.

As to the resolution of mankind's fallen nature, Arminius argued from a Christocentric model that placed Christ's work prior to the decree of election. Jesus was appointed as the mediator who would dispense salvation, making it efficacious (Arminius, 1986:2:718-719). However, that efficaciousness to make one elect or non-elect hinged upon God's foresight of what these persons would do when the Holy Spirit offered the grace of Christ to those particular persons. Arminius stated on the salvation and damnation of persons:

This rests or depends on the prescience and foresight of God, by which he foreknew, from all eternity, what men would, through such administration, believe by the aid of preventing or preceding grace, and would persevere by the aid of subsequent or following grace: and who would not believe and persevere (Arminius, 1986:2:719).

How could one summarize all of Arminius' ideas on the decree of God? Arminian scholar Roger E. Olson explains and summarizes Arminius' thought by asserting that the central theme to this model hinges upon Jesus Christ being the primary one who was predestined (2006:183). Arminius rejected both the supralapsarian model and infralapsarian model as insufficient models. As Olson (2006:183) explains of Arminius:

He believed that the Calvinist schemes of God's decrees either treated humans as abstract entities, who were not yet created much less fallen when God decreed to save some and damn others (as in supralapsarianism), or treated Jesus Christ as secondary to the

predestination of some fallen humans to salvation and others to damnation (as in infralapsarianism). In fact, supralapsarianism, Arminius was convinced, fell to the second objection also. He insisted on working out a scheme of the decrees of God that treats the objects of God's decrees—humans—as already fallen and as desired by God for salvation through Christ.

Arminius seems to have developed a severe concern over both supralapsarian and infralapsarian ideology because they imply that God is the author of sin (Olson, 2006:103). This ideology seems to have been more of his concern than the preservation of free will. Arminius made known his concerns about the more Calvinistic decree order because it made God the only sinner who really did not sin by sinning. In discussing the more Calvinistic decree order models Arminius said,

From these premises we deduce, as a further conclusion, that God *really sins*. Because, (according to this doctrine) he moves to sin by an act that is unavoidable, and according to his own purpose and primary intention, without having received any previous inducement to such an act from any preceding sin or demerit in man. From the same position we might also infer that *God is the only sinner*. For man, who is impelled by an irresistible force to commit sin (that is, to perpetrate some deed that has been prohibited), cannot be said to sin himself. As a legitimate consequence it also follows, *that sin is not sin*, since whatever that which God does, it neither can be sin, nor ought any of his acts receive that appellation (Arminius, 1986:1:630).

2.7.4 John Wesley Adopted Arminian Views

Arminius' views were extended into history further by those who followed his ideology. In particular, the theologians responsible for adopting his ideas and articulating his ideology further into church history were Simon Episcopius, Philip Limborch, and most prominently John Wesley (Olson, 2006:185-189). The trajectory set a standard for explaining the divine decree order with a focus upon Jesus Christ as the chief one predestined, and then all who voluntarily cooperate with grace identify with Christ and become elect and predestined (2006:184-185).

Wesley's defense of the conditional nature of election extended Arminius' ideas further into Christendom. It has been estimated that Wesley traveled around two hundred thousand miles, preached around forty thousand sermons, and had over seventy thousand followers at the end of his life (Liardon, 2008:88). His message and theology concerning election, predestination, and human free will followed that of Jacob Arminius. Wesley taught that God permitted the fall of mankind instead of it being caused by God's positive decree (2007:10:261). In addition to

rejecting the positive decree to sin, something Wesley (2007:10:261) called a “horrible decree,” he also rejected unconditional election of some to eternal saving faith. In Wesley’s mind he followed the thinking of Arminius that the decree of God to election pertains to those who by faith choose Christ. As Wesley (2007:10:266) stated, “God did decree from the beginning to elect or choose, in Christ, all that should believe to salvation”. Those who experience reprobation do so because they “obstinately and finally continue in unbelief” (2007:10:266). When Wesley was asked whether he believed in unconditional election he stated in no uncertain terms that such an idea could not “be found in holy writ” (2007:10:266).

Methodist minister and historical scholar Thomas Oden (2012:176) believed that Wesley preferred to see God as having “precognition” of human free acts instead of the idea that God “preordained” the acts of mankind. Oden understood Wesley to have taught that God truly intended to save all, that Christ died for all, and that Romans 9:21 does not teach any doctrine of a pretemporal decree to damn a sinner (Oden, 2012:177). In summarizing Wesley’s position Oden (2012:178) argued that Wesley’s issue was as follows:

If absolute predestination to reprobation is true, the sincerity of God’s promises is put in question. For how could God be straightforward in his call to all to repent if repentance were impossible or already absolutely negated by a pretemporal divine decree? One who is not given the power to do good cannot justly be condemned for not doing good. One cannot justly be condemned of sin if the means to escape sin are not present. Who could be justly condemned for doing evil if he could only do evil? Unbelief could not be the basis of the condemnation of those who did not have the power to believe. God’s sovereignty is manifested through free will, not undermined by it ... The sovereignty of God must be viewed not abstractly but in conjunction with God’s other attributes.

2.7.5 The Basic Five Points within an Arminian/Wesleyan Decree Model

The Arminian/Wesleyan lapsarian model differs from the supralapsarian and infralapsarian models in structure and order. However, it has some close similarity to the sublapsarian position in order while also containing a difference in the definition of God’s decree concerning the origin of a person’s faith. In contrast with supralapsarianism, the Arminian/Wesleyan decree model rejects the idea that God decreed the fall of mankind in Adam. The Arminian/Wesleyan model aligns with both the infralapsarians and sublapsarians in that God only permitted the fall of mankind into sin.

However, the Arminian/Wesleyan model rejects the idea in both the supralapsarian and infralapsarian models that places unconditional election prior to the atoning work of Christ. It

aligns in this area with the sublapsarian model in that it affirms that Christ's atoning work logically precedes the divine decree of election. However, even though both the sublapsarian model and the Arminian/Wesleyan model affirm that election occurs logically next in this divine order after atonement, the Arminian/Wesleyan model parts company with the sublapsarian position of the Reformed/Calvinistic faith and adopts a conditional elective ideology.

The Arminian/Wesleyan decree model begins with an essential view that these decrees are "extrinsic acts of God" (Arminius, 1986:2:709). These acts of God, according to Arminius, may only become actual or real when the act of the creature makes the decree of God become effectual (1986:2:709). Although Arminius explained his decree model in more than the traditional five points that some commonly associate with these types of discussions, it can still be properly narrowed down into five key elements: (1) the creation of the universe and mankind in a state of original righteousness (1986:2:710-711); (2) Adam's fall through God's permission (1986:2:716); (3) the appointment of Jesus Christ as Savior so that he may recover the fallen (1986:2:718-719); (4) the election of those whom the Lord sees or knows through his "prescience and foresight" and who will "believe by the aid of preventing or preceding grace"(1986:2:719); (5) the perseverance of the Lord's elect—those who respond to the Spirit's grace and continue in it (1986:2:719).

A central element to understanding the ideology of an Arminian/Wesleyan model is that the human person has the power prior to regeneration to resist the grace of the Lord. This "capability of resisting the Holy Spirit" (1986:2:721) exists in each person. Each person may exercise that will for or against Christ's offer of redemption. This idea permeates the Arminian/Wesleyan paradigm of how God's decrees work themselves out with individuals in actual time and history. The Arminian scholar Roger Olsen provides a summary of how a person's free will to receive or resist grace functions in this Arminian model. Olsen (2006:76) states:

From the Arminian perspective prevenient grace restores free will so that humans, for the first time, have the ability to do otherwise—namely, respond in faith to the grace of God or resist it in unrepentance and disbelief. At the point of God's call, sinners under the influence of prevenient grace have genuine free will as a gift of God; for the first time they can freely say yes or no to God. Nothing outside of the self determines how they will respond.

This thought about human will as key to the effectiveness of grace in one's life has been stated clearly by modern Arminian/Wesley scholars. For example, R. Larry Shelton (1983:485) has explicitly stated that God's grace provides fallen people with the restored ability that "makes a faith response possible". This ability given to them is "in contrast to the Calvinist position that

views depravity as being so complete that moral response is impossible” without an irresistible “call to the elect” that causes “faith” (1983:485). To emphasize this point even further he adds, “there is cooperation, or synergism, between divine grace and the human will. The Spirit of God does not work irresistibly, but through concurrence of the free will of individuals” (1983:485).

Modern scholar Thomas C. Oden, also in the Arminian/Wesleyan stream as a Methodist theologian (Callahan, 2001:853), affirmed as well that this election of God becomes effectual for salvation only when one responds through his free will. Consistent with the views espoused by Arminius and Wesley, Oden asserted that God’s omniscience does not determine people’s free acts: “God knows what will happen, but does not unilaterally determine each and every event immediately, so as not to respect human freedom and the reliability of secondary causes” (Oden, 1987:1:71). This position of Oden continues to make the free will of humanity central to the effectual outworking of God’s decree, as Arminius argued.

2.8 NORMAN GEISLER'S POSITION

Geisler set forth in his systematic theology all four decree order models (Geisler, 2004:184). He admitted that while much agreement exists on the source or origin of salvation, and that scripture teaches a doctrine of election, there remains much disagreement on the way election works and how it should be understood. Geisler (2004:184) noted, “The fact of God’s election is clear in Scripture; it is the progression of his choices relating to election that is the subject of much dialogue”. He described all three Calvinistic models and labeled these models with specific designations of higher and lower forms of Calvinistic thought.

Supralapsarians are described as “hyper-Calvinists” (Geisler, 2004:3:185). Sometimes Geisler labeled this form of Calvinism as “extreme Calvinism” (Geisler, 1999a:55). According to Geisler (1999d:235), this supralapsarian, hyper, or extreme form of Calvinism found its roots in something he termed as a “radical form of voluntarism”. He viewed this extreme or hyper form of Calvinism as the supralapsarian model that teaches double predestination. This double predestination occurs prior to the decree to create. The decree to elect or reprobate occurs above or logically prior to the fall of mankind (Geisler, 2004:3:185).

That model differs from the infralapsarians that Geisler described as “strong Calvinists” (Geisler, 2004:3:185). He described infralapsarians as those who reject double predestination and place the decree to elect below or after the decree to permit the fall of mankind into sin (2004:3:185). He also recognized that infralapsarians teach a limited atonement as do the supralapsarians (2004:3:184). However, unlike supralapsarians, who teach that God actively reprobates others, the infralapsarian model teaches that God passively passes by those not elected (2004:3:184).

This is related to God's permissive providence (Geisler, 2003:2:593). Permissive providence differs from God's active or efficacious acts where God causes something to occur.

He described the sublapsarians as "moderate Calvinists" (Geisler, 2004:185). Sublapsarians place the atonement prior to election and also reject double predestination (2004:3:185). He also described these sublapsarians as Amyraldians (2004:3:185). Not only in Amyraldian thought does election follow atonement, but in this sublapsarian model Geisler recognized that the atonement is universal in provision (2004:3:185). Geisler (1999a:192) explicitly stated that "Christ died for the sins of all mankind". The sublapsarian model he described also adopts the permissive providence view concerning those not elected (Geisler, 2004:3:185). Geisler (2001:786) explicitly stated that he thinks the "biblical, theological and historical evidence favors the moderate Calvinist view". The term "moderate" equals Amyraldian sublapsarianism in Geisler's thought.

2.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Sometimes people define Calvinism differently. Some define it as a broad system that covers more than salvation. Others use the term to describe one's soteriology. Beyond those two options, some use the term to describe a model that combines various ideas from the Reformed stream. Understanding the options and the precise way one uses the term helps bring clarity to the subject.

2.9.1 The Essence of Calvinism

Some theologians describe Calvinism in the broad sense. In doing so the theology encompasses at least three emphases: (1) the teachings of John Calvin; (2) teachings of the Reformed churches; (3) the social, political, theological, and ethical views of Reformed Calvinism. Warfield described Calvinism in that broad sense.

Some, however, define Calvinism with a more narrow focus, seeing Calvinism more as an emphasis and model of theology pertaining to predestination and election to salvation. In this model Calvinism relates mostly to God's sovereign act of saving sinners by his omnipotent will. Theologians who focused on this definition were Loraine Boettner and Michael Horton.

Still others embrace a hybrid view of Calvinism. In this model they see both the broad ideology and narrow ideology as valid expressions of Calvinism. Yet they emphasize that the main themes find consensus and prominence in doctrines pertaining to God's will, human will, and the application of grace in salvation. Sometimes this model summarizes those themes under the "five points of Calvinism" related to human depravity, election, atonement, the Spirit's work of

calling to grace, and the work of the Lord accomplishing sinners' perseverance. David Steele, Curtis Thomas, John Feinberg, J.I. Packer, and O.R. Johnston followed this model of thought in describing the emphasis of Calvinism.

2.9.2 Historical Conflict

Jacob Arminius spent time as a student under Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva, and that led to serious concerns emerging from him concerning Beza's teaching on God's sovereignty. Arminius thought Beza's model implicated God in sin and made him the author of sin. This led to Arminius developing a decree model that heavily emphasized human will in each phase of the decree order process. On the basis of his teachings, a group arose known as the Remonstrants. The Remonstrant disciples argued like Arminius and composed their theology into a focus of five key points to summarize their theology of salvation.

Those expressions led to a counter argument being offered by another portion of the body of Christ. A Synod of Dort was convened and these officials and theologians examined the views of Arminius as conveyed by the Remonstrant theologians. They countered the views with their own views that have been nicknamed the "five points of Calvinism". This model stressed God's sovereign work in the creation, election, and application of grace in the lives of sinners.

2.9.3 The Basic Three Calvinistic Decree Order Models

Through history, as various theologians examined these doctrines pertaining to God's sovereignty and human salvation, some decree order models have been developed. Not all theologians have been fond of these three models that have been labeled supralapsarian, infralapsarian, and sublapsarian models. Some theologians like Wayne Grudem, Charles Ryrie, Robert Lighter, and others have suggested that the order of these decrees is speculative.

However, other theologians differ and have taught that these decree order models contain some important ideas and truths that have much to merit their inclusion in theological discourse. Lewis Sperry Chafer, Paul Enns, Rolland McCune and Michael Horton thought these lapsarian decree models were important and helpful to forming a healthy holistic theology. Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck recognized the value in all three models and even asserted that a new model could be developed to capture a more holistic view of God's omnilateral action.

2.9.4 The Supralapsarian View

Theodore Beza framed a model labeled as supralapsarianism. In this model God's decree to elect and reprobate occurs prior to creation and the fall. Creation serves as the means for the manifestation of the decree of election and damnation. God ordains the fall of mankind, atones

for the sins of the elect, draws them to salvation by the Spirit, and causes them to persevere in the faith. This model places the logical order in these steps:

- (1) Decree to elect and reprobate
- (2) Decree to create mankind
- (3) Decree to ordain the fall of mankind into sin
- (4) Decree to make atonement for the elect
- (5) Decree to apply salvation to the elect and secure them for eternal salvation

2.9.5 The Infralapsarian View

When the Synod of Dort met to examine the views of the disciples of Arminius in the Remonstrant articles, a model developed in that convention that has been called infralapsarianism. This model took a different route in explaining election and reprobation. The moment or point of election in this model did not occur until after the fall of mankind into sin. In infralapsarianism a limited atonement is often articulated while in the Synod of Dort they affirmed unlimited sufficiency of the atonement that was efficient only for the elect. However, it offered a more passive explanation as to why some were not saved. The non-elect were passed by in passive providence instead of being actively consigned to reprobation by God's decree prior to the fall. This model places the logical order in these steps:

- (1) Decree to create mankind
- (2) Decree to permit the fall into sin
- (3) Decree to elect some to salvation while passing by others
- (4) Decree to redeem the elect.
- (5) Decree to apply salvation to the elect and secure them for eternal salvation

2.9.6 The Sublapsarian View

In the Reformation era two theologians, John Cameron and Moise Amyraut, popularized another decree model labeled as sublapsarianism. This model differed from both supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism in several key areas. It placed atonement prior to election in the logical order. Additionally, this model, unlike the other two, taught an unlimited view of the atonement. Atonement was provided for all in provision while being limited to only the elect in full application. These two aspects made this model much closer in alignment to the Arminian view of the decree model. However, it retained a difference in that election did not hinge upon a person's positive response to grace through free will. Sublapsarianism retained unconditional election in contrast to conditional election. This model places the logical order in these steps:

- (1) Decree to create all
- (2) Decree to permit the fall of mankind
- (3) Decree to make atonement for all
- (4) Decree to elect some to salvation after the universal offer of salvation is hypothetically made to all that they freely reject
- (5) Decree to apply salvation to the elect and secure them for eternal salvation

2.9.7 Common Themes among all Three Models

Though each of the three models has some differences in the logical order of the decrees, the three share some key marks of unity. First, all three models recognize that mankind experienced a fall into depravity that hinders their ability to make any movements towards grace. Second, all three models embrace a form of unconditional election. This also means that all three views reject conditional election as taught in the Arminian/Wesleyan decree model. Third, all three models embrace some type of grace that when applied accomplishes salvation for the ones elected.

2.9.8 Norman Geisler's Position

Geisler has explained in his various writings all three decree models found in the Calvinistic theologies. In his writings he has used some distinct terminology to describe these various models. When he speaks of the supralapsarian decree model he uses the terms "hyper-Calvinism" or "extreme Calvinism". He noted that this model affirms double predestination and limited atonement as key features. When he spoke of the infralapsarian decree model he used the term "strong Calvinism" to describe this middle level form. He noted that it recognizes the decree to permit people to fall into sin and also the permissive decree to pass by the non-elect. When he spoke of the sublapsarian decree model he described it differently than both the supralapsarian and infralapsarian model in that he used the term "moderate Calvinism" to describe that model. He noted that this model placed atonement prior to election and after a permission for the fall of mankind into sin. He recognized also that this model recognizes a universal atonement where Christ's death benefits all of mankind. Geisler stated that he accepted the sublapsarian or moderate Calvinism model. He suggested that this model has the most weight in that "biblical, theological, and historical evidence favors the moderate Calvinist view" (Geisler, 2011:786).

CHAPTER 3:

A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF GOD'S NATURE AND ESSENCE

3.1 GOD'S NATURE AND ATTRIBUTES

A key aspect to the doctrine of soteriology relates to the nature of God. The essence or nature of God relates directly to how he administers salvation. An improper view of God can lead to an improper view of salvation. A proper view of God can establish a proper view of salvation.

3.2 DEFINITION OF GOD: A BRIEF HISTORY OF HOW THEOLOGIANS HAVE DEFINED GOD

Theologians through history have made efforts towards explaining who God is from the Bible and from natural revelation. Some have questioned whether God can be properly defined. In answering this question modern theologian Robert Lightner (1973:10) stated, "Yes, and no." In his perspective theologians cannot fully define God and explain who he is (Lightner, 1973:10).

However, he did think God could be classified and explained to such a degree that God would stand out as one who is exalted and "incomparable" before and "above all others and all else" (Lightner, 1973:10). He thought this could be done through a study of his attributes that arise from his "perfect nature" (Lightner, 1973:10). Through those revelations of God in scripture Lightner (1973:12) concluded a good definition of God has been stated in and through the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Similar efforts have been made by theologians through the centuries. From the theologians of antiquity to modern theologians, definitions have been offered to explain the God of the Bible. Some have offered more detailed definitions. Others have defined God with extreme brevity. Yet through history numerous theologians have made sincere efforts to offer a theological definition. As these theologians have defined God, one of the more common methods has been to describe God on the basis of his nature, essence, or perfect attributes. Through a study of those attributes these various theologians have set forth ideas on who is the God of the Christian faith.

Furthermore, to properly analyze Norman Geisler's soteriology and claim to a sublapsarian or Amyraldian moderate form of Calvinism (2011:816), it helps to understand how God is commonly defined by various evangelical theologians and then how Geisler defines God and explains who God is. God's nature and essence determines or influences how he rules and governs. This research will examine various evangelical theologians, including early patristic

teachers, Calvinists (in all three levels), and Arminian/Wesleyans define God, so that a foundation exists for comparison with Geisler's view of God and overall model of soteriology.

One's view of God has major implications for one's soteriology. Richard A. Muller (2003:238) noted this practical connection to God's essence and his predestinating will. Therefore, a brief historical examination of how God is defined in his essence, his will, and in his particular attributes will set the foundation for a healthy critical analysis of Geisler's stance in relation to other evangelical theologians.

3.2.1 Clement of Rome and Polycarp: God is an Omniscient Pure Father

Some evidence exists that the earliest of theologians in church history defined God by examining what they saw as his attributes or his essential characteristics that constituted his nature. It seems they understood God through an analysis of his essence and nature. Though readers will not find from the early fathers a systematic theology, as one would find in more systematic writings of Calvin onward, traces of how they sought to define God surface throughout their letters.

Two early teachers provided some brief descriptors in defining God. Clement (1994:1:7) defined God through his nature, explaining that God was a "Father" who was full of "mercy and loving-kindness." Clement even described God's nature by stating what God cannot do and what he can do. He established that God's nature is what binds his will to action. He stated of God, "nothing is impossible with God, except to lie" (Clement, 1994:1:12). Terms used by Clement (1994:1:13, 15, 21) to define God were these: "holy, undefiled," "majestic," and one who "seeth all things, and who is Ruler of all spirits".

Polycarp, like Clement before him, defined God through various adjectives that described the nature of God. According to Polycarp, God's perfections reveal who God is in his nature and in his relationship to his creation. For example, Polycarp (1994:1:34) defined God as the one who "perceives all things," and that no person can hide or keep secrets from this Lord. This reference highlighted the omniscience of God.

3.2.2 Augustine: God is the Collective Sum of his Attributes

Some theologians believe that Augustine stands as the chief theologian and fountainhead in both Protestant and Roman Catholic church history. Bradley Gundlach is one of those who presented Augustine in that light. He said Augustine is the "greatest of the Latin fathers," and that as a theologian he exercised "an unparalleled influence on Western Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant" (Gundlach, 2001:121). He was a giant in the history of the Church, and

“most Western theological movements claiming orthodoxy take their stand in the Augustinian tradition” (Gundlach, 2001:121). One of his chief theological emphases revolved around God’s love. “Augustine saw Christian love for God and neighbor as the supreme goal of life and learning” (Gundlach, 2001:121-122).

Augustine also focused on the essential attributes of God when explaining who God is. He offered key characteristic traits of God’s essence to define him (Augustine, 2001:1:46). The list that Augustine provided in his explanation of God exhibited many resting attributes of God as well as some of his works that flow from his attributes. His words eloquently portray how he defined God:

Most high, most excellent, most potent, most omnipotent; most piteous and most just; most hidden and most near; most beautiful and most strong, stable, yet contained of none; unchangeable, yet changing all things; never new, never old; making all things new ... always working, yet ever at rest; gathering, yet needing nothing; sustaining, pervading, and protecting; creating, nourishing, and developing; seeking, and yet possessing all things. Thou lovest, and burnest not; art jealous, yet free from care; repentest, and has no sorrow; art angry, yet serene; changest Thy ways, leaving unchanged Thy plans; recoverest what thou findest, having yet never lost; art never in want, whilst Thou rejoicest in gain; never covetous, though requiring usury (Augustine, 2001:1:46).

Those brief two, three, and four-word descriptive terms for God in each sentence capture the vision and concept Augustine had of God. For Augustine, the essence of God could also be seen in the names chosen to represent God in scripture. Theologian Robert Culver noted that Augustine offered many descriptive terms and names to highlight God’s character because of the many needs that humans have for God. Culver stated, “One must go to a thousand places to meet natural needs. All the soul’s needs are met in God himself, and nowhere else, hence he is bread of life, water of life, LORD, Most High, Rock, and Shepherd” (Culver, 2005:58).

3.2.3 Thomas Aquinas: God is His Essence of Perfections

However, even with the difficult task of capturing all that makes God who he is, some theologians do indeed offer a succinct definition for God. As with the prior theologians noted, often the definition for God develops around his nature and attributes. Aquinas took this approach. Norman Geisler (1991:14; 1997:28), who praised Thomas Aquinas as one of the greatest minds of history in the body of Christ, recognized the writings of Aquinas as grand material. In examining Aquinas, one discovers that Aquinas offered one of the most succinct definitions for God among those who have tried to define God. He stated that “God is not only

his own essence, as shown in the preceding article, but also His own existence” (Aquinas, 1948:1:17) (Aquinas, 1948:1:16). Furthermore, Aquinas noted that by examining perfections one can see and understand God. As he stated, “All created perfections are in God. Hence he is spoken of as universally perfect, because he lacks not . . . any excellence which may be found in any genus” (Aquinas, 1948:1:21).

Nonetheless, as common in methodology among evangelical theologians, Aquinas unpacked that short and succinct definition in one hundred and thirty-two pages of explanation on what that nature and essence of God is. In similar manner as Augustine, Aquinas touched upon the names of God as a means to understanding his nature. Aquinas (1948:1:61) thought no name can properly capture the full essence of God; they can only describe him in an “imperfect manner” because the names “fall short of a full representation of him.” However, he did concede that the scriptural names of God do “signify the divine substance, and are predicated substantially of God” (Aquinas, 1948:1:61).

When working with this model or approach centered on defining God by his attributes, some theologians believe God can be defined by examining those traits of God (Chafer, 1993:1:187). They do not think this can provide a total or exhaustive view of God. But to the degree one can understand his attributes, to that degree God can be known.

3.2.4 John Calvin: God’s Divine Attributes Define Him

Consequently, some of those attributes noted by these various theologians function as pivotal axioms in any analysis of any theologian’s soteriology. When attempting to define God and his being, his nature or essence, it remains imperative to realize that this matter forms a central element to the discussions concerning soteriology. Calvin (1960:1:37) argued that for a person to properly understand himself that person must know God. Yet Calvin (1960:1:41) also refrained from trying to provide a solitary statement with a definition of what or who God is. Instead, he developed his definition of who God is by focusing more on the traits of God’s nature as the more proper and important way to know how to know or define God (Calvin, 1960:1:41). It seems as if he thought it better to define God by writing about all of his known characteristics than through trying to summarize those in a few sentences.

That approach by Calvin highlights only a difference in theological methodology, not in theological substance. Instead of trying to summarize all of the attributes of God into one coherent definition, Calvin seems to have preferred to define God by examining the individual attributes. Among this delineation of God’s essence Calvin emphasized to a heavy degree that God manifests himself to humanity through his acts of accommodation. William Stacy Johnson

(2009:15) has noted that “accommodation is one of Calvin’s most important teachings about God.” This concept from Calvin teaches that God communicates his nature and essence to humanity in ways that conceptually relate to the normal or natural human experiences.

Calvin also emphasized the transcendent nature of God. This emphasis permeated his theology. Calvin’s teaching and exaltation of God’s “absolute transcendence” and his “total otherness,” as noted by Francois Wendel (1963:151), “dominates the whole of Calvin’s theological exposition.” From this high transcendent view of God, Calvin articulated that the clearest and most sure method of knowing God’s essence occurs through Christ. It is “through Christ” that “God makes himself known to us” (Wendel, 1963:154).

This Christ-centered emphasis upon the revelation of Jesus Christ, which established the pedagogical apex for knowing God, surfaced years later in a similar manner through the writings of the Calvinistic theologian E.Y. Mullins. Mullins served as president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the early 1900s in the state of Kentucky. When answering how one knows God, Mullins (1917:41), like Calvin, emphasized that the “supreme source” of knowledge of God occurs through “the revelation of God in and through Jesus Christ.” Calvin’s emphasis on Christ as mediator bridged the chasm of God’s transcendence and brought God near or immanent to humanity through Christ.

3.2.5 Jacob Arminius: God is the Chief Good

Arminius wrote about what constitutes God’s nature. He admitted, as have many others, that people are not able to know fully or in totality the nature of God. However, he did think one could attain some knowledge of God (Arminius, 1986:2:338). He described God as “Spirit” and one to whose essence no other attributes can be “added.” He described God in his essence as “simple and infinite,” and one who is “incorruptible” (Arminius, 1986:2:339). Furthermore, this incorruptible being is “one” and exists in his essence as the “Chief Good” (Arminius, 1986:2:339).

3.2.6 Stephen Charnock: God is Ultimately His Nature

Many theologians after Calvin have followed this route as well in explaining or defining God by a focus on his nature or essence. Stephen Charnock (1628-1680) wrote a work entitled *Existence and Attributes of God*. J.D. Douglas (1978:214) considers this as “his most important work.” In this work he noted that “the nature of God is the foundation of worship” (Charnock, 1840:192). Charnock described God’s essence as related to his infinite being. Power, understanding, and knowledge comprise the essence of God in Charnock’s perspective. He stated that God’s “essence is infinite, and so is his power and understanding” (Charnock, 1840:460).

Charnock's approach has been common among those after Calvin's era. Theologian Robert A. Muller (2003:231) has also emphasized that this essence approach to understanding and describing God has been a common (but not monolithic) approach in the Reformed tradition. In Muller's theology (2003:232) the focus and language used to describe God commonly surfaces through "an initial discussion of essence" that then moves to the "doctrine of the divine attributes". Muller (2003:236) believed this was so because scripture offers "exegetical warrants for the use of essence language. In . . . Hebrew" the "word translated as 'wisdom' in Proverbs 8:14 relates to 'essence'."

3.2.7 J.L. Dagg: God is the Essence of His Character

Furthermore, one of the earliest writing Baptist theologians, J.L. Dagg, followed this line of thinking as well. Dagg served as a major educator within the Baptist movement in the United States within various educational institutions from 1834 until 1854, when he retired from the Presidency of Mercer University, in Georgia (Nettles, 2005:326). He too established that God's nature is his character and from his character he wills. In his explanation of God he stated that to understand one's duty to God one must "know his character." To know that character, Dagg set forth the characteristics or attributes of God to explain his nature. He listed eleven traits that he thought described God's character and concluded that these essential traits constitute the true knowledge of him that produces in people a reverence for "his character" (Dagg, 1990:92).

3.2.8 R.L. Dabney: God's Character Manifests His Nature

In the 1800s, theologian Robert L. Dabney (1871:44) continued the tradition of explaining the Reformed Calvinist perspective of God in terms of his essence. In highlighting the importance of God's essence (character or nature) above that of God's acts, Dabney (1871:44) stated, "let us not say that God is nothing else than his acts." Therefore, he thought that to define God one must study all of his distinct attributes, and from that process of study discover the "boundless character" of God that manifests God's "essence or nature" (Dabney, 1871:45).

3.2.9 J.P. Boyce & Charles Hodge: God Can Partially Be Known by His Divine Attributes

James Petigree Boyce, founder of the first Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, studied under some strong Reformed Calvinist theologians at Princeton Seminary (Willis, 2009:3). Reformed scholar Timothy George traced Boyce's education that produced this Baptist Calvinist theologian. George (2001:75) noted that "Boyce received his formal theological training at Princeton Theological Seminary, where he studied from 1849 to 1851 under Archibald Alexander, his son Addison Alexander, and—above all—Charles Hodge." Hodge's three-volume

Systematic Theology became the guiding standard for Boyce's own theology text (George, 2001:75). Boyce also defined God through his divine attributes. He believed the "attributes of God are those peculiarities which mark or define the mode of his existence, or which constitute his character" (Boyce, 1887:65). Boyce's theological method was consistent with his teacher Charles Hodge. Hodge (1995:1:337, 366-441) in his *Systematic Theology* taught that "God can be known" and he describes God through explaining his divine attributes. Yet Hodge, like Boyce, who said that "God cannot be fully known" (Boyce, 1887:11), likewise had also taught that God cannot be "comprehended" because a person cannot have of God an "exhaustive knowledge" (Hodge, 1995:1:335).

3.2.10 L.S. Chafer and Merrill F. Unger: God As Defined by the Westminster Confession

Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952), a sublapsarian, unlimited atonement, moderate Calvinist (1993:3:180-199), thought in a way similar to Calvin that the Bible never offered a specific and precisely defined statement or assertion to describe God (1993:1:188). In his view, all the attributes collectively and in relation together comprise the essence or nature of God (Chafer, 1993:3:223-224). In an effort to offer some type of short definition for God, Chafer used the Westminster Larger Catechism. Following it Chafer stated:

God is Spirit, in and of himself infinite in being, glory, blessedness, and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, unchangeable, incomprehensible, everywhere present, almighty, knowing all things, most wise, most holy, most just, most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth (Chafer, 1993:7:173).

Merrill F. Unger (1909-1980), a student of L.S. Chafer, also followed the moderate unlimited Calvinist perspective that his teacher Chafer affirmed (Unger, 1988:124). In his discussions of God he did offer a brief definition of God:

God as revealed through the Scriptures is the one infinite and eternal Being. He is purely spiritual, the supreme personal Intelligence, the Creator and Preserver of all things, the perfect Moral Ruler of the universe; He is the only proper object of worship; he is tri-personal—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit constituting one Godhead (Unger, 1988:480).

3.2.11 H. Orton Wiley: God as Absolute Reality and Perfect Personality

As a teacher within the Holiness Wesleyan movement, H. Orton Wiley produced four volumes of theology for his theological heritage. As a systematic theologian in the Arminian/Wesleyan tradition he taught that God existed as "the Absolute" and "self-existent" being that distinguishes

the Christian God from various other “philosophical theories” (Wiley, 1940:1:273). God, according to Wiley (1940:1:272), is “the ground of all finite being and rational intelligence.” Though a conservative theologian, Wiley’s definition of God as a ground of finite being resembles the language of liberal theologian Paul Tillich (1951:1:238) who described God as “the ground of being.” Notwithstanding the common descriptive terms used to describe God by Wiley and Tillich, the former theologian retains an evangelical view of God by his understanding of God as an absolute being who is pure and perfect in personality. Wiley’s (1940:1:299) view of God affirms that God, as the perfect power, reality, and being, functions in a unified manner with his perfect personality. Wiley (1940:1:366) held that all the attributes or perfections of God manifest themselves in two ways, “his holiness and his love.”

3.2.12 J.I. Packer: God is Defined by His Attributes & Perfections

J.I. Packer (1973:33), who is from the Anglican Calvinist stream of thought, explained that humanity was created in order to “know God.” Yet to know God one must understand who he is. Yet as presented earlier, some theologians do not offer a succinct definition for God (Chafer, 1993:1:187). The theologians that do not offer a specific or succinct definition for God seem to refrain from that because in their perspective, as Lewis Chafer (1993:1:187) asserted, “no definition can completely exhaust the idea in question,” and therefore they offer neither a succinct nor thorough definition for God. Packer, like Calvin, did not give a single succinct definition of God. He unfolds the idea of God through an explanation of his many divine attributes and perfections (Packer, 1973:75-108).

3.2.13 Robert Reymond: God’s Essence is Infinite, Eternal, & Unchangeable

Robert Reymond affirmed a supralapsarian Calvinist perspective of soteriology. Throughout his entire discussion on God in his work on systematic theology (Reymond, 1998:168-203) he emphasized the unchanging aspect of God’s nature. He specifically said, “God’s being is identical with his attributes” (Reymond, 1998:163). Reymond (1993:162) believed that all of God’s attributes define his essence. Reymond rejected the idea that one attribute takes precedence over the others. The ranking of attributes, in his view, is evident in the work of theologians following scholasticism (Reymond, 1993:163). He utilized the Westminster Confession of Faith and positively affirmed it as a good guide for a definition of God (Reymond, 1993:160,164).

3.2.14 R.C. Sproul: God is an Infinite, Holy, and Sovereign One

R.C. Sproul (2014:49) highlighted the difficult task of defining God due to the immense degree of difference between the infinite God and finite humanity. Because of this, “no human being

has the ability to understand God exhaustively” (Sproul, 1992:31). This issue highlights the doctrine of God’s incomprehensibility (Sproul, 1992:31). Sproul (1992:32) elaborated on what this doctrine does and does not mean by stating:

The incomprehensibility of God does not mean that we know nothing about God. Rather, it means that our knowledge is partial and limited, falling short of a total or comprehensive knowledge. The knowledge that God gives of himself through revelation is both real and useful. We can know God to the degree that he chooses to reveal himself. The finite can ‘grasp’ the infinite, but the finite can never hold the infinite within its grasp. There is always more to God than we apprehend.

As to defining what one can know about God, Sproul approached the matter through three categories that the church has historically adopted when examining and explaining who God is. One way to define God is through a *via negationis* (Sproul 2014:49-50). This approach defines God as “not finite,” and “not mutable” (Sproul, 2014:50). The second approach to defining God occurs by a *via eminentiae* (Sproul, 2014:50). This category of description takes “known human concepts or references to the ultimate degree, such as the terms omnipotence and omniscience” (Sproul, 2014:50). And third, God can be defined through a *via affirmationis* (Sproul, 2014:50). These statements assert ideas such as “God is one, God is holy, and God is sovereign” (Sproul, 2014:50).

3.2.15 John F. MacArthur and Richard Mayhue: God’s Perfections Constitute his Essential Nature

John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue (2017:505), infralapsarian Calvinists, have taught that mankind can know God to the degree that he has chosen to reveal himself. They also, as others, admitted that though mankind may know God this knowledge has limitations. Mankind’s knowledge cannot comprehend God in his totality. People cannot know God in an exhaustive way (MacArthur and Mayhue, 2017:145). However, to the degree God has revealed himself in his names and in his perfections, one can understand the essence or nature of God. MacArthur and Mayhue (2017:161) stated that “the attributes of God are his characteristics, the various aspects of his essence or nature.”

In a deeper examination of church history on this topic, these two theologians explained that God’s perfections remain intricately associated with his essence. They rejected the idea that God’s perfections are a part of or piece of his nature (as they claim was taught by medieval realists), and they also rejected the idea that some of his perfections are subordinated to one central perfection (as they claim was taught by Open Theists) (MacArthur and Mayhue,

2017:162,163). For MacArthur and Mayhue (2017:164), “God’s essence is identical to his perfections.”

3.2.16 Summary: God is Defined by His Essence as Manifested in his Attributes

This brief historical examination of various theologians in the diversified traditions highlights some markedly unified perspectives on who God is. Pre-Reformation theologians, Reformation theologians, and post-Reformation theologians have very similar perspectives on how to define God. Even the two decisively different streams of soteriology, Calvinist and Arminian/Wesleyan, have some substantive unity in how they view God’s essence.

The next logical point of study relates to how God functions from his character. How does God’s essence function in his will and through the manifestation of those particular attributes? These next sections will construct from the base definition a fuller picture of God as he has revealed himself in scripture.

3.3 THE WILL/DECREE OF GOD

Calvinism in its three versions and Arminianism have some unity as well as diversity in how the various theologians from these traditions explain God’s will. In this section, “God’s will” refers to God’s decisions of volition, i.e., his will to act. God’s decree is expressed in various ways in scripture. One prominent way to speak of his decree is his will (Berkhof, 2017:75).

An important question regarding God’s will is this: does it arise from his knowledge, or does his knowledge arise from his will? Theologians Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest have analyzed this issue and have commented on the will of God in the grand scheme of history. How does God will or plan for all that occurs in history? They rightly asked:

If God has an overall plan, does he determine to accomplish all of his purposes in the same way or does he determine to accomplish some of them supernaturally apart from any normal means and others instrumentally through ‘natural’ forces or human agents? ... Can all things, including the spread of sin and the destruction of the wicked, be said to be a part of God’s all-wise and loving plan in some way? ... If God’s will is the ultimate cause of all occurrences in nature and history, does it follow that creaturely freedom and responsibility are thereby eliminated? ... How does finite human decision-making relate to God’s sovereign and eternal plan? (Lewis and Demarest, 1996:293)

The answer to those types of questions has led to the development of at least three models of theology inside of orthodox evangelicalism: (1) positions within some form of Calvinism, (2) positions within some form of Arminian/Wesleyan views, and (3) Molinist views. The position

one adopts here has some substantial ramifications in how the perfections or attributes of God's character manifest themselves in relation to creation. This prior theological commitment establishes axioms and guideposts that form the framework of one's theology. From that point the various theologians construct the rest of the theological system in the various doctrines.

3.3.1 Calvinism on the Will/Decree of God

The five-point Calvinist R.C. Sproul set forth this matter for how the Reformed Calvinist model answers the question of how God knows what he knows and when he knows it. He stated that God knows all from the point that he chose to will/decreed all. God "knows all because he created all and has willed all" (Sproul, 1992:46). In speaking against prescience and in a sense Open Theism, Sproul (1992:46) argued that God does not know all because he studied with a perfect or superior intellect and from that comprehends all of facets of the universe. In his mind it "is impossible for God to know all without controlling all, and it is impossible for him to control all without knowing all" (Sproul, 1992:46).

Calvinist scholar William G.T. Shedd held a view similar to that of R.C. Sproul. He too argued that God's divine will or plan had to exist prior to God knowing what would come to pass. A divine will or decree must be set in order for God to know something as a certain event. Shedd stated, "the divine decree is the necessary condition of divine foreknowledge. If God does not first decide what shall come to pass, he cannot know what will come to pass" (Shedd, 2003:313).

The moderate sublapsarian Calvinist Millard J. Erickson also tackled this topic in a work fully devoted to this single topic. In his work, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It*, he correctly acknowledged that, when arguing from the more Calvinistic persuasion (God's will determines what he knows), the problem of evil surfaces as one of the more serious problems for the Christian faith (Erickson, 2003:253). Outspoken atheist George Smith (2000:42) has argued that the idea of a God governing with a sovereign will who is also simultaneously totally good and benevolent establishes a logical contradiction and impossibility. Christian theologians and philosophers recognize this tension and criticism from opponents against Christianity as a formidable criticism (Erickson, 1985:414). Erickson (2003:189-190) describes this problem in some detail with these words:

Probably the most severe intellectual problem for any theism, Christianity included, is the problem of evil. It can be stated simply: If God is all-powerful, he will be able to prevent evil from occurring. If he is all-loving, he will certainly want to prevent evil. Yet there is obviously evil in the world.... If God knew all that would happen and failed to prevent it, he

certainly is culpable. If, beyond that, he actually willed or caused everything to happen, he is especially repugnant.

Erickson's points on the issue with God's will in relation to evil and the criticism alleged by the atheist George Smith highlight the need for explanation in how God orders and governs his universe. Erickson, as a moderate Calvinist, supported the idea that God does nothing in an arbitrary way that violates his good nature. Therefore, evil does not occur because God authors evil.

In explaining God's will or plan or purpose Erickson has defended the view that God's actions are consistent and harmonious with his good nature. God may will all things in some sense, including evil, but he does so in some way or some sense that does not run contrary to his good and holy nature (Erickson, 1985:277). This leads to the examination of how God wills or plans his actions in relation to his universe. Does God will or plan matters by mere sovereign will alone? Or does God will and plan matters in accordance with his nature?

3.3.2 Divine Voluntarism versus Divine Essentialism

When examining God's nature and then subsequently his will, or his purpose and plan (sometimes stated as decree), theologians often grapple with the way in which God plans, chooses, or wills something. As noted by the numerous theologians throughout history, God's attributes are the expression of his essence-character. The criticism that God cannot be both good and sovereign seems to occur through a misunderstanding of the way in which God wills all matters of the universe. The two options are: (1) that God wills matters and therefore they are right merely because he willed them; or (2) God wills matters in accordance with his good nature and therefore wills nothing that is not good. These two positions form the two broad perspectives known respectively as divine voluntarism and divine essentialism. A significant strand of theologians from all three Calvinistic models as well as Arminian/Wesleyans concur that the more biblical perspective is that of essentialism—that God wills from his perfect character. God is his character and that character displays his glory. Moderate Calvinist Charles Ryrie (1990:19), commenting on this, stated, "The glory of God is what he seems to be, which in this case is what he really is. It is God seen in some or all of his characteristics."

Calvinists of all persuasions have taken this position, as noted by Millard Erickson. For example, moderate or low Calvinist theologian E.Y. Mullins (1917:339) asserted succinctly and directly that "God is more than will" (Mohler, 1997:14). Mullins (1917:339) criticized forms of Calvinism that exalted God's will as an act of God apart from his character. He called this an "abstract method" type of Calvinism in which God's will is explained "apart from his character" (Mullins,

1917:339). God's sovereign will, according to Mullins, functions from the heart of a divine Father. Mullins gave an affirmation and a warning: God "is an infinite person, rich in all moral attributes. He is the eternal Father, as Christ is the eternal Son. We must never, therefore, exalt the mere will of God, apart from his character as so revealed, in our efforts to define his sovereignty" (Mullins, 1917:339).

In such a position Mullins affirmed a theological theory of God's will known as divine essentialism (Geisler, 1999d:216-218). This theory concerning God's will asserts that "God cannot will contrary to his nature. He cannot lie (Heb. 6:18). He cannot be unloving, nor unjust" (Geisler, 1999d:217). High and low Calvinists have held this view, which emphasizes that God's purpose and decrees are in accordance with his good and holy character.

Sonny Hernandez (2018a:9), even as a supralapsarian high Calvinist, has in a similar fashion as Erickson and Mullins argued that God ordains all that occurs from his nature. This refers back to the concepts noted earlier about God's essence. The common approach by a vast number of Christian theologians relates back to how they define his essence. The common approach has been to explain that God's divine nature (essence) is manifested through his attributes; God does not do or ordain anything contrary to his nature (Hernandez, 2018a:9).

Infralapsarian Calvinists also affirm this perspective on God's will or plan. Theologians Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, who represent the infralapsarian perspective, see divine essentialism as the means to explain sin without implicating God in the process of sin's entrance and occurrence in history. They reject the idea that God unilaterally wills/decrees every single event in the universe from his position as sovereign. They argue that God wills from his nature and therefore he can only will that which corresponds to his nature. They stated:

God's decrees are chosen freely, but God cannot deny himself, lie, or determine to do anything unholy or unjust. God's choice of ends was not arbitrary but in accord with attributes of wisdom, holiness, and love.... It is not mere will that decrees, it is the whole being of God the Father who decrees. The agent choosing the divine purposes is God the Father, not just his will abstracted from him. So we insist that God's freedom does not include the power of choice contrary to his attributes, but the power of self-determination according to them.... the Almighty makes decisions with integrity and authenticity. God's sovereignty is absolute, but not tyrannical (Lewis and Demarest, 1996:311-312).

3.3.3 Norman Geisler on Essentialism versus Voluntarism

This essentialism model of how God wills or decrees matters runs contrary to voluntarism. According to theological voluntarism, God's will alone makes a decree right; the choice, act, or

determination is right merely because God did it. In that model “God’s mere assertion of a command to do or refrain from doing an action or type of action renders these either right or wrong” (Fletcher, 2001:1250). Norman Geisler believed that some who promoted extreme or high Calvinism as a model of theology did so because of a root in voluntarism. Of this type of divine will view he stated:

At the root of extreme Calvinism is a radical form of voluntarism, which affirms that something is right simply because God willed it, rather than God willing it because it is right in accordance with his own unchangeable nature (a view called essentialism) ... All extreme Calvinists are voluntarists, either explicitly or implicitly (Geisler, 1999a:235).

Geisler (1999a:242) believed that some forms of high or extreme Calvinism “stand or fall with voluntarism.” He argued that if one affirms that God may only will that which is consistent with his “immutable nature,” such a view lacks compatibility with the idea that sees God’s will as “supreme over everything else, even over whatever nature he has” (Geisler, 1999a:237).

3.3.3.1 Possible Examples of Voluntarism in Calvinism: William Perkins and William Ames

It does not appear that all high Calvinists align with voluntarism. But, implicitly there may be some strong associations with that ideology when related to the divine will of reprobation if the theologians held that God wills to reprobate one prior to creation and/or the fall into sin. If supralapsarian theologians assert that God reprobates the non-elect to hell merely because of his will to do so, and does not root it in the righteous character of God, that type of approach could rightly be understood as some form of voluntarism. These matters will be explored in more detail in Chapter Seven.

It helps to see the context of Geisler’s comments about extreme or high Calvinism having some within it who promote voluntarism. Indeed, some in history have so focused on God’s will apart from his character that it does appear to have created a higher form of Calvinism that elevated God’s will over even his own character. One theologian, William Perkins (1558-1602) appears to have held to high Calvinist views with his stance on double predestination. Writing on Perkins, Jonathan Moore (2007:37) explained that Perkins’ view of reprobation did not include sin as the functional reason for the justification of God’s choice to reprobate one to hell. According to Moore (2007:33-34), Perkins held to a supralapsarian view of God’s decree and did so in such a way that he explained the will of God to elect and reprobate as “double predestination” that occurred with “complete symmetry between election and reprobation.”

Jacob Arminius also criticized Perkins' view in a letter he wrote to Perkins. Arminius (1986:3:301) understood Perkins to have taught that people were predestined to hell without any reference to sin in the one reprobated. The will of God to create and bring about the fall serves as the means to election and reprobation (Breward, 1970:186). Sin did not constitute the reason for the reprobation.

Modern theologians have interpreted Perkins in that way. R.T. Kendall also thought that Perkins promoted a form of high Calvinism through a supralapsarian model. Kendall (1997:55) believed Perkins made double predestination a central theme in his doctrine of God's will. Creation served as the means to predestination for Perkins (Kendall,1997:55). Perkins' work, *A Golden Chain*, certainly seems to read that way. G. Michael Thomas (1997:129) also thought that Perkins' doctrine of predestination followed the view of Theodore Beza, i.e., a high supralapsarian model.

Another supporting piece of evidence relates to William Ames (1576-1633). He also described God's will/decreed in such terms that it does appear that the will/decreed stood above all else. Ames experienced conversion as a student under the preaching of William Perkins (Sprunger, 2001:52), and seems to have adopted Perkins' model of a highly exalted emphasis on God's will. In his work, *The Marrow of Theology*, he discusses in fifty-four articles and propositions the will of God, but he does not emphasize the link between God's will and his nature. He does mention this connection in his first article briefly by asserting that God's will/decreed "agrees with the divine nature" (Ames, 1968:94). But from that point his emphasis is that God acts because of his mere counsel to decide that action. This emphasis seems to negate his view of God's nature as the determining factor of the acts of God.

For example, in Ames' articles thirty-two through thirty-four he seemed to place primacy in the will of God over God's essence. He stated, "the good pleasure of God is an act of the divine will freely and effectively determining all things" (Ames, 1968:97). An essentialist view would more likely assert that the good pleasure of God is an act consistent with his essence or nature or some attribute. If any doubt remains, his comment in article thirty-four seems to reveal that he contradicted or undermined what he stated in article one, that the divine will agrees or works in concert with the divine nature. In this article Ames (1968:94) stated of God's will, "this will is truly free, because whatever it wills it wills not by necessity of nature but by counsel." Again, an essentialist view would not separate God's will from his nature or essence. To the contrary, essentialism would assert that God will by necessity act in accordance with his nature.

3.3.3.2 Norman Geisler's Rejection of Voluntarism

Geisler rejected voluntarism. He aligned himself with divine essentialism. For Geisler, supralapsarianism roots predestination and reprobation of some in the mere arbitrary will of God, and in doing so unhitches God's will from his nature. Of this form of Calvinism Geisler (2011:943) has stated, "divine voluntarism is without philosophical (rational), biblical, or practical foundation."

This does not prove to what degree Geisler aligned or did not align with other forms of Calvinism, as not all supralapsarians argue from a voluntarism base, but it certainly does reveal his rejection of this one form of high Calvinistic thought. Further examination will show to what degree Geisler agreed or disagreed with Calvinism in other areas. But in this area he could not be any clearer. Geisler (2011:945) adopted essentialism and believed that "God cannot change in his nature," and because of that "whatever he wills must be in accord with his immutable nature."

3.3.4 Arminian/Wesleyan View of God's Will/Decree

The Arminian/Wesleyan view has also promoted the idea that God's decree flows from his nature. Generally speaking, this strand of theology has agreed with the many theologians throughout church history that God wills from his essence. It promotes the idea that God wills or decrees from his righteous nature.

Though there may be a difference of emphasis between their model and the more Calvinistic models (excluding voluntarism models) concerning God's will, the general theme that God wills or decrees from his nature occurs within the Arminian/Wesleyan movement. The Calvinists at times will place more emphasis on God's will arising from his sovereign omnipotence while the Arminians/Wesleyans will at times place more emphasis on God's willing that arises from his omniscience or nature of love. Both models believe God is love, but in models of soteriology they prioritize differently how God manifests his love. As Kenneth Keathley (2010:48) has observed of the Calvinistic stream, "they often see God's sovereignty as the defining characteristic by which all other attributes are understood". On the other hand, some significant strands of Arminian/Wesleyan scholarship have placed greater weight and emphasis on the love of God as the chief attribute that governs the will of God (Keathley, 2010:45).

Arminius discussed God's will by arguing that God is the Chief Good. Therefore, God's decree or will is a manifestation or expression of himself. He specifically stated it this way: (1) God "wills himself. (2) He wills all those things which, out of infinite things possible to himself, he has by the last judgment of his wisdom ... determined to be made" (Arminius, 1996:343). Arminius'

(1996:343) view directly affirmed that God wills from himself and that God is the “Chief Good.” This highlights his allegiance to an essentialist view, i.e., God as the totality of what is good by his essence and nature wills the good from his good nature.

Modern-day Arminian/Wesleyan theologians continue to express that theme as taught by Arminius. From God’s good nature he wills or decrees events of the universe. For the Arminian/Wesleyan teacher to teach that the Chief Good, to use Arminius’ terms, wills or determines all matters merely by his will, which includes reprobation for some, would create problems for how they see God’s good character (Olson, 2006:74). This heritage of theology focuses on a “vision of God as good (loving, benevolent, merciful)” and that “God is guided by his nature and character when making decisions” (Olson, 2006:75).

This same thought regularly occurs in the writings of various Arminian/Wesleyan scholars. Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell (2004:8) openly admit that in their perspective this debate hinges more on the dispute over God’s character in action, not on God’s power. In their minds this issue between Calvinism and Arminian/Wesleyan views revolves around which view “does a better job of representing the biblical picture of God’s character ... whose nature is holy love” (Walls and Dongell, 2004:8). In their perspective and complaint against a Calvinistic view centered on God’s will above love, they assert that they believe God’s character of love governs how he wills (Walls and Dongell, 2004:220).

Granted, their complaint may be more accurately pointed at voluntarist forms of Calvinism, but the point herein highlights their idea so as to show that even among Arminian theologians the effort exists to attach God’s will and/or decree to his character. That ideology aligns with a major stream of Christianity that asserts that God’s will arises from his nature or essence. As Walls and Dongell (2004:218-219) summarized, “God necessarily exists in an eternal relationship of perfect love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God’s will must always be understood as an expression of his essential nature of perfect love”. That places these theologians as well in the stream of divine essentialist thought.

3.3.5 Summary on God’s Will

Theologians from the Calvinist, moderate Calvinist, and Arminian/Wesleyan streams of soteriology have defined God in similar fashion. One of the most common approaches to defining God in all models of theology has been to do so by articulating that God is who he is in his essence, i.e., in the total summation of his attributes. This theme has existed in continuity from the earliest of theologians in the patristic era, through the Middle Ages, into the Reformation era, post-Reformation, and modern periods.

Among these definitions, some theologians give more emphasis to his will while others place more emphasis on his nature of love. These differences in emphases have led to different formulations on God's decree/will in relation to human will. Norman Geisler has labeled those views as extreme Calvinism, strong or strict Calvinism, and moderate Calvinism. Sometimes he substitutes the word extreme with the word high. For him, extreme and high seem to mean the same in reference to a supralapsarian model of Calvinism. He equates extreme or high Calvinism with supralapsarian models, strict or strong Calvinism with infralapsarian models, and moderate Calvinism with sublapsarian models. He classifies himself as a moderate Calvinist.

Geisler rejected a voluntarist form of Calvinism. He argued that this model places God's will as operating apart from or so emphatically above and over his attributes that God wills without regard to his nature of love for all of humanity. As noted earlier, Geisler (2011:943) has stated, "divine voluntarism is without philosophical (rational), biblical, or practical foundation." He argued there are "serious theological problems with voluntarism" (Geisler, 1999a:237). At the root of his dissent from this type of Calvinism, Geisler (1999a:238) thought this view meant "whatever he wills is ipso facto right." In his mind, if this perspective were true, "God could will that love is wrong and hate is right, or that injustice is right and justice is wrong" (Geisler, 1999a:238).

It does seem that some higher Calvinists have asserted forms of God's will in such a way that God's will formed the superior or central motif for understanding God. William Perkins and William Ames seem to have in some sense exalted God's will above all else as the central motif in how God expressed himself in his acts. Though Ames tried to root God's will in his nature, his later statements seem to say the opposite, or at least establish contradictory positions. Perkins, Ames' mentor, also seemed to emphasize God's sovereign will, as exemplified through his view of the reprobation of people for no reason other than to display God's will. Geisler certainly takes issue with this form of Calvinism. His characterization of that view would also seem to suggest he thought it impossible for a supralapsarian (what he calls an extreme or high Calvinist) to consistently affirm divine essentialism. In his words, "all extreme Calvinists are voluntarists, either explicitly or implicitly" (Geisler, 1999a:235). This would seem to suggest that even if a supralapsarian theologian affirmed divine essentialism (God wills from his essence) in Geisler's (1999a:237) mind he thought at the very least an implicit inconsistency existed in that theologian's position.

3.4 GOD'S ATTRIBUTES

A common theme among the many theologians throughout church history has been that God's attributes define his essence. The numerous theologians cited in section 3.2 highlighted the

broad unity among many theologians from various traditions in the body of Christ. God's attributes, however many there are, constitute his nature and essence. From his essence or nature God wills or decrees. All four major soteriology models, (1) Supralapsarian Calvinism, (2) Infralapsarian Calvinism, (3) Sublapsarian Calvinism, and (4) Arminianism/Wesleyanism speak of some key attributes of God that relate to God's work of redemption. Examining how those ideas are expressed from those traditions provides another area in which to examine the continuity and discontinuity in Geisler's soteriology model.

3.4.1 Omniscience

In contrast to open theism, which believes God learns through becoming aware of new data from his creation, all the versions of a Calvinistic soteriology as well as a classical Arminian/Wesleyan soteriology affirm that God knows all (Pinnock, 1994:119). Terry Miethe has provided a succinct and clear definition of omniscience. He wrote that omniscience "refers to the fact that God has complete and perfect knowledge of all things, including himself and everything actual or potential in his creation" (Miethe, 1988:149).

3.4.1.1 *Supralapsarianism on God's Omniscience*

Supralapsarian theologians define God's omniscience as him knowing all from within himself. Geerhardus Vos (2012-2014:1:20) stated that God's knowledge "comprises all things great and small, free and necessary, past, present, and future." In this view of omniscience Vos explained that God's knowledge occurs from his will to decree that knowledge. In the same way R.C. Sproul (1992:46) described this matter, that God knows all because he willed all. Vos articulated God's foreknowledge in a similar trajectory of thought. Foreknowledge, an aspect of omniscience, exists because that arises from the decree. Vos (2012-2014:1:83) stated, "foreknowledge must therefore rest on the decree."

Another supralapsarian theologian, Robert Reymond, explained that God's omniscience includes knowledge of all, and added that wisdom is even included in that omniscience. He stated (Reymond, 1998:184), "God knows all things, and all true propositions (omniscience), always has and always will know all things, and cannot learn more or forget anything he knows." As to what arises first, decree or knowledge, Reymond (1998:189,190) held the perspective that "every event" God has "certainly decreed," and therefore God knows all because "God did in fact ordain whatever comes to pass". This meant for Reymond (1998:190) that because God foreordained all that he "knows all things infallibly".

3.4.1.2 *Infralapsarianism on God's Omniscience*

William G.T. Shedd represented an infralapsarian model of theology. Though he uses the term sublapsarian, his order reflects that of the infralapsarian model (Shedd, 2003:326-344). Sometimes theologians use the terms infralapsarian and sublapsarian as synonymous terms (Cairns, 2002:234). That is the case with Shedd.

In affirming omniscience, Shedd (2003:286) elaborated that God's knowledge is not a knowledge developed by the "senses," nor is it a knowledge that develops by a "gradual acquisition". Shedd also uniquely described this omniscience in relation to foreknowledge. Of this he stated, "God's omniscience from the creature's point of view is foreknowledge; but it is not foreknowledge from God's point of view." This view is argued from the perspective that God has knowledge of an all-in-one single intuition. As Shedd (2003:286) explained it, "the infinite mind comprehends all things in one simultaneous intuition, and, consequently, there is for it no 'before' or 'after.'" Any serial thoughts or intervals in between thoughts have been excluded by Shedd's view (2003:286).

John MacArthur Jr. and Richard Mayhue (2017:505), also infralapsarian theologians, set forth a description of God's omniscience that affirms that God knows all from within himself. They explained that God knows himself perfectly (MacArthur and Mayhue, 2017:174). This perfect knowledge "precedes all things outside God, never being derived from reality outside himself" (MacArthur and Mayhue, 2017:175). They also asserted that omniscience means God never learns or increases in his knowledge (MacArthur and Mayhue, 2017:175). MacArthur and Mayhue assert that God's knowledge in some sense constitutes his essence of one divine thought or act. As they explain it, this knowledge of God exists in "one eternal and simple (not having parts but having distinctions) act (exertion of energy)" (MacArthur and Mayhue, 2017:174-175).

3.4.1.3 *Sublapsarianism on God's Omniscience*

Rolland McCune (2009:219), a sublapsarian theologian, offers a fairly detailed presentation of God's omniscience. He too, as with the other two types of Calvinistic theology models (supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism) asserted that God's knowledge exists in one "immediate, simultaneous and eternal knowledge of all things past, present, and future, whether actual or possible" (McCune, 2009:221). He rejected the idea that God learns (McCune, 2009:221). He explained God as having complete knowledge without any process of "induction, deduction, logic, comparison, use of the senses, or otherwise from the known to the unknown"

(McCune, 2009:222). He wrote of God, “all events and objects of knowledge are a single act of eternal intuition” (McCune, 2009:229).

Similar thoughts have been explained by Millard Erickson. Representing another sublapsarian perspective, Erickson (1985:835) argued that the moderate Calvinist perspective is the sublapsarian perspective. As a moderate Calvinist, Erickson (1985:272-278) discussed the omniscience of God under the heading of God’s greatness and infinity. Terms and phrases Erickson (1985:275,276) used to describe God as omniscient were “immeasurable” in his understanding, one who “knows every truth”, and one who in wisdom has “access to all information.”

3.4.1.4 *Arminianism/Wesleyanism on God’s Omniscience*

The Arminian/Wesleyan perspective of God’s omniscience does not so much differ from the Calvinistic explanations above as to the essential elements. The key difference between these models relates to how omniscience works with foreknowledge and contingency within creation (Forlines, 2011:60-61). In those areas some differences exist, but concerning God’s absolute and full knowledge (omniscience), “Classical Arminianism” has “agreed with Calvinism” according to the Arminian professor Forlines (2011:61).

Like the Calvinistic models, an Arminian/Wesleyan view of omniscience affirms the idea that God knows all. H. Orton Wiley and Paul T. Culbertson (1946:97) asserted from the Arminian/Wesleyan perspective that God has “perfect knowledge”, and this is of both “himself and all things.” Modern Arminian scholar F. Leroy Forlines (2001:71) agrees with that perspective because God’s “knowledge is infinite.” God’s knowledge of the past, present, and future has no limits and no deficiencies (Forlines, 2001:72).

3.4.2 *Omnipresence*

The classic attributes known as omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence comprise attributes that theologians often use to describe God’s sovereignty. To be sovereign, as many theologians would assert, God must have these three traits. What good would it do for God to have all knowledge (omniscience) if he were not totally and fully present throughout the universe where he could see and know what was in that sphere of creation? Another way of saying that would be, how can God know every aspect and nuance about every place of the universe if his presence does not in some sense, though not in a pantheistic or panentheistic sense, fill that area?

J.R. Graves (1883:53), a higher type of Calvinist theologian from the 1800s, noted that God has manifested “all his transcendent attributes for his own declarative glory” and all of these flow from his mind and determination. A part of that manifestation of his transcendent attributes pertains to his omnipresence. God is all-knowing and present everywhere in his universe. From his full presence everywhere God’s sovereignty providentially rules over and in that area where he exists.

However, that idea is not unique to the Calvinist view. John Wesley also held to the view that God had to be sovereign and omnipotent throughout his creation. Thomas C. Oden explained well Wesley’s view on this. Oden (2012:43) stated that Wesley’s view of God being almighty remained connected to the view that for God to rule in any area of creation he must be present in that area to rule. The two ideas, omnipotence and omniscience, in Wesley’s thought according to Oden (2012:43) “cannot be imagined without the other.”

3.4.2.1 *Supralapsarianism on God’s Omnipresence*

Geerhardus Vos (2012-2014:1:12) as a supralapsarian representative taught that God fills every space of the universe with his entire being. Though God’s presence, according to Vos, manifests itself differently from one place to another, this presence exists everywhere (Vos, 2012-2014:1:12). This different manifestation of his presence would guide the type of providence God extends or exercises in that particular sphere.

Supralapsarian William Ames explained God’s omnipresence in connection to the providence of God. Since God is omnipresent he governs all areas in either a common or special sense. Ames saw that the root of God’s providence and government was his presence in and through all of creation. He stated that “everything naturally looks toward an end; it is thus necessary that things be directed and governed by an intelligence which is everywhere present and omnipotent” (Ames, 1968:109).

3.4.2.2 *Infralapsarianism on God’s Omnipresence*

No substantive differences seem to exist between the infralapsarian model and the supralapsarian model concerning God’s omnipresence. God’s presence fully extends to all facets and realms of the creation in infralapsarian models of theology. The differences between this position and others would not be on God’s presence that pervades the entire universe, but in some cases the way in which God effectuates his presence in some areas. Supralapsarian models would assert that God actively ordained some to non-election. Infralapsarians would assert that God in his presence permits or allows some to sin and become non-elect by not effecting an alternative.

Three infralapsarian theologians, Oliver J. Buswell, John MacArthur Jr., and Richard Mayhue, affirmed with clarity that God is omnipresent, i.e., he exists in every sphere of reality. Buswell described this as God's infinity. For him to say God is infinite means "God is omnipresent" (Buswell, 1962:37). For Buswell (1962:116), since God is infinite Spirit, this meant he has no spatial boundaries and is accordingly omnipresent.

MacArthur and Mayhue (2017:173) asserted that God "transcends space." God is present in his full self in every area because he is present everywhere. "God upholds the created order" as he fills that space with his presence (MacArthur and Mayhue, 2017:174). The creation and every place in the universe, even heaven and hell and people themselves, are before and with God who is present in that area.

3.4.2.3 *Sublapsarianism on God's Omnipresence*

As with supralapsarians and infralapsarians, sublapsarians also embrace the full omnipresence of God. No substantive differences occur in this area from this model of thought. Sublapsarians, however, do align more with infralapsarians (in that God permits sin and violations of his will more) than with supralapsarians (who assert some type of active causation by his presence and ordinance). Sublapsarians affirm that God is present everywhere, but they would reject that his presence is always effectuating some event. God's presence may effectuate events for the good or permit events that violate God's character (Strong, 1907:419).

Two sublapsarians, A.H. Strong and E.Y. Mullins, embraced ideas of God's omnipresence that align with all three Calvinistic models. Strong asserted that God in his "totality" exists and "penetrates and fills the universe in all its parts" (Strong, 1907:279). The presence of God means for Strong that he governs in providence over his creation. In his words, "there must be a governing mind and will, and this mind and will must be the mind and will of God" (Strong, 1907:426). Presence assures one of his present providence.

Sublapsarian E.Y. Mullins (1917:25) defined omnipresence this way: God "is present in all his power at every point of space and every moment of time." In Mullins' perspective, God is not confined to any part of the world. God is both transcendent and immanent.

3.4.2.4 *Arminianism/Wesleyanism on God's Omnipresence*

Arminian/Wesleyan theologians have historically agreed with the more Calvinistic heritage of Christianity that God is omnipresent. No substantive or identifiable difference seems to occur between these two traditions in this area. Arminian and Pentecostal Bible scholars William W. Menzies and Stanley M. Horton (1993:51) have both asserted that God is "present everywhere"

and “not limited by space.” Charismatic and Arminian scholar Charles Carrin even places this attribute, along with the attributes of omniscience and omnipotence, as one of the three major attributes of God. He said, “it is impossible for him to be absent anywhere” because in the Spirit the Lord “permeates the universe and regions beyond” (Carrin, 2017:30). Likewise, a major Arminian theologian, F. Leroy Forlines (2001:71), summarized God’s omnipresence as God “the ever present One.”

3.4.3 Omnibenevolence

The term omnibenevolence has been used by Norman Geisler. Though not a common term among Reformed scholars, Geisler (2011:940) seems to have used this term to describe God’s goodness in love to all. Among Reformed Calvinistic scholars the term “common grace” has mostly been used to describe God’s love and goodness to all (Reymond, 1998:402). Arminian/Wesleyan scholars use various terms to describe this concept. However, in a similar way as Geisler, the grace of God in the Arminian/Wesleyan tradition is described and taught as universal and impartial (Wiley & Culbertson, 1946:109).

3.4.3.1 *Supralapsarianism on God’s Omnibenevolence or Common Grace to All*

Supralapsarians differ here among themselves. Some within this stream of theology deny that God’s grace extends to anyone but the elect. However, others in the same camp admit that God does extend some grace to all people. Diversity exists here in the higher Calvinistic models on how best to explain this. Some prefer to restrict the idea of grace and love only to the elect. Others, however, describe some common favor of God to elect and non-elect.

David J. Engelsma has defended the High Calvinist position that restricts grace only to the elect. He takes a strong stand, asserting that the idea of common grace is “absurd” and that it could be viewed as a “blasphemous” doctrine (Engelsma, 2003:64). His close disciple, Sonny Hernandez, also agrees with that position. He, as a High Calvinist, asserted that “God does not love everyone in the entire world. He loves only his elect, and he hates the wicked” (Hernandez, 2018b:88). Geerhardus Vos also expressed ideas that seem to restrict God’s grace only to the elect. He thought it best to keep a distinction between God’s work of providence with creation and his work of salvation and recreation (Vos, 2012-2014:1:156).

However, other five-point Calvinists in the high or supralapsarian stream disagree with the idea that God has withheld his love and grace from the non-elect. Supralapsarian theologian Cornelius Van Til (1974:381) argued that theologians need “not conclude that there is no sense in which God has a favor to the unbeliever.” Though he does not use the term “common grace” to describe these blessings, he admits that the unbeliever receives a measure of “God’s favor”

that he calls “blessings for the unbeliever” (Van Til, 1974:382). Additionally, he said, “God’s attitude toward” his enemy “must therefore in some sense be one of love” because the believer is commanded to “love his enemy” as a way to imitate “God’s attitude toward that enemy” (Van Til, 1974:383).

Robert Reymond also endorsed the idea of some form of grace to all. In discussing God’s divine providence over the entire world he identified the goodness that everyone receives as a form of grace. He sees God’s providence touching all people and as such it is “one manifestation of his common grace to undeserving sinners” (Reymond, 1998:402). He saw common grace serving in a sense the overall “purposes of special grace” (Reymond 1998:383).

3.4.3.2 *Infralapsarians on God’s Omnibenevolence or Common Grace to All*

In contrast to the highest forms of Calvinism as expressed in supralapsarian models, infralapsarian theologians generally all agree that God extends some grace to all. Robert D. Culver (2005:415) asserted that he embraced the idea from Calvin that “general grace had been bestowed on all mankind.” In his perspective, without this grace from the Spirit to everyone “life in society would cease” (Culver, 2005:415). Common grace in his analysis has evidenced itself by every good thing the Spirit has given to mankind (Culver, 2005:415). This providence of grace is “impartially available to all men” according to J. Oliver Buswell (1962:172). That each person has life, breath, and all things they possess as good in this life signifies a degree of grace God has applied to them (Buswell, 1962:172).

3.4.3.3 *Sublapsarians on God’s Omnibenevolence or Common Grace to All*

Sublapsarian theologians have also asserted that scripture teaches a common grace from God upon all of creation. John Walvoord, a disciple of Lewis Sperry Chafer and his successor as president of Dallas Theological Seminary, summarized how a moderate Calvinist sees grace. In his perspective Christ’s death atoned for the sins of all people (Walvoord, 1969:187). Consequently “all grace stems from Christ’s death on the cross for our sins” (Walvoord, 1988:94). Some grace and benefit of it touches the whole human race.

Rolland McCune also adopted the idea that common grace touches all of humanity. In his perspective it occurs through the “universal work of the Holy Spirit” (McCune, 2009:173). This grace provides a basis for common cultural and civic good among the community (McCune, 2009:173). This grace also in his perspective “restrains certain effects of depravity” (McCune, 2009:173). He described common grace as God’s “love in his benevolence toward all people” (McCune, 2009:260).

3.4.3.4 Arminian/Wesleyans on God's Omnibenevolence or Common Grace to All

Arminian theologians affirm a grace that extends to all. However, they explain this grace as a more powerful work that enables all to believe the commands of the gospel. All three strands of Calvinists do not seem to extend this much efficacy to the idea of common grace as the Arminian/Wesleyan theologians do. Arminius himself stated that because people are "assisted by this grace" such people "may believe" (Arminius, 1986:2:53). Sometimes Arminius called this "sufficient grace" (McCune, 2009:721). This common or sufficient grace arises from God's "general love towards all mankind" (McCune, 2009:722).

Modern Arminian/Wesleyan theologians continue to teach that idea that Arminius taught. H. Orton Wiley and Paul T. Culbertson (1946:261) have also taught that this grace of God is "not limited to his redemptive work" because God extends a "prevenient grace" that touches mankind prior to personal redemption. This common or universal grace is "comprehensive, including all human desires after God, all drawings of the Father, all convictions of the Holy Spirit" (Wiley & Culbertson, 1946:263). Those works of the Spirit upon all were described by Wesley (2007:10:232) as the light of God in humans that restored to them some degree of freedom. This grace or light of God according to Wesley (2007:10:233) touched all and "instils into their hearts good desires." In his mind this consequently made "man to be in some degree a free agent" (2007:10:233). In contrast to the Calvinistic versions of common grace that only extend love but no ability to all, Wesley (2007:10:230) thought that there was a "measure of freewill supernaturally restored to every man" from the "supernatural light" that "enlightens every man in the world."

3.4.4 Simplicity

Theologians have used this term to describe God as one being who is indivisible. God is said to have no parts, as he is totally one in essence in his entire being. Norman Geisler (2003:42) defined God as immaterial, one in unity, and immortal. God's simplicity means that he "does not have potentiality" (Geisler, 2003:42). Geisler rooted simplicity in the idea that God is immutable: "whatever cannot change cannot be divided, for division is a form of change" (Geisler, 2003:43). And since God cannot change he must be "indivisible" (Geisler, 2003:43).

Calvinist theologian Wayne Grudem (1994:177) prefers to use the term "unity" rather than "simplicity" to describe this attribute of God. He explained God as a being whose attributes permeate his entire being. God is not part love and part holiness. Instead, God is fully love and

fully holy in his entire being as he is a unified being. Grudem said, “God’s whole being includes all of his attributes” (Grudem, 1994:178).

3.4.4.1 *Supralapsarians on God’s Simplicity*

Geerhardus Vos (2012-2014:1:5) taught that God as a simple being meant that he was “without composition. There are no distinctions in God between his genus and species” (Vos, 2012-2014:1:9). In God, he said, there is no distinction between “substance and form” (Vos, 2012-2014:9). Furthermore, he said there is no distinction “between slumbering capacity and action” (Vos, 2012-2014:1:9). He described these three aspects as God’s “logical composition,” his “natural composition,” and his “supernatural composition” (Vos, 2012-2014:1:9).

William Ames understood God’s simplicity to impact God’s knowledge. As he taught, “God’s understanding is simple, without composition” (Ames, 1968:87). Therefore, “God’s understanding is unchangeable” (Ames, 1968:87). This would mean, as he understood it, that God cannot do anything differently in one way from another way (Ames, 1968:87). For Ames this meant it related to the way God willed. Because of God’s simplicity, he does not have a multifaceted will. His will, like his being, is “single and totally one in him” (Ames, 1968:87). Ames believed God’s single and simple being connected to the will of God in that as a simple being he never had a change in his will. “The will of God is unchangeable because he always wills the same in the same manner” (Ames, 1968:87). Therefore, God’s simple being is intricately connected to his will as neither has parts. Both are indivisible.

3.4.4.2 *Infralapsarians on God’s Simplicity*

Little difference exists with the definition of God’s simplicity by infralapsarians. William G. Shedd, John MacArthur, and Richard Mayhue all define God’s simplicity in a similar fashion as did the supralapsarians. For Shedd (2003:276), God being simple means he is “uncompounded, incomplex, and indivisible.” MacArthur and Mayhue (2017:174) asserted that God’s simplicity means “all his perfections are his essence.” For these teachers God as a simple being cannot be divided into parts, he is “indivisible” and one God in “unity” (MacArthur & Mayhue, 2017:190).

3.4.4.3 *Sublapsarians on God’s Simplicity*

Interestingly, some sublapsarians seem to say much less about God’s simplicity. Several theologians from this tradition write very little or even nothing on this topic. Floyd Barackman (1998:47) mentions briefly that God has “one, undivided, divine nature.” Millard J. Erickson devotes no full section to this topic in his systematic theology. The closest that he came to addressing the matter was when he said theologians should “conceive of the attributes of God

as his nature, not as a collection of fragmentary parts nor as something in addition to his essence” (Erickson, 1985:266). He is a “unified being” (Erickson, 1985:266). Tony Evans had no section devoted to simplicity. Additionally, he seemed to take the view that God may act from one part or prior portion of his character “rather than out of the previous part of his character” (Evans, 2008:41). This position would seem to be a direct contrast to how William Ames understood God’s will in relation to his being. Ames thought God’s simplicity meant that he had only one unified essence and because of that his will was always one with no variation to it. Evans seems to divert from that in a sense. Erickson (1985:279) does, too, in that he suggested God is not “static” but instead should be seen as “stable.” Erickson (1985:279) taught that God is “active and dynamic” in a way that is consistent with his unified essence or “nature.” This will receive more attention when the attribute of immutability is examined.

Of those that do devote sections to this idea, A.H. Strong, Lewis Sperry Chafer, and Rolland McCune have written of God’s simplicity the most thoroughly among the sublapsarian tradition. Strong (1907:259) noted that God’s simplicity or unity meant that his “divine nature is undivided and indivisible.” In Strong’s (1907:259) view this doctrine meant that “there is but one infinite and perfect Spirit,” a God whose “divine nature is numerically and eternally one.” Chafer described God in contrast to mankind. Mankind, he taught, is a “compound of spirit and matter” (Chafer, 1993:1:213). However, God is “uncompounded, incomplex, and indivisible” (Chafer, 1993:1:213). McCune emphasized similar themes on this topic as Chafer and Strong. He asserted that this means God is “not susceptible of division in any sense of the word” (McCune, 2009:204). However, in a somewhat similar sense as Erickson, McCune clarified that God is not merely a simple being. God is also a “complex being” who in his “multiplicity of attributes” remains one “indivisible being” (McCune, 2009:204). He also does not connect simplicity the same way Ames did in God having one static will. For McCune (2009:241), God’s simplicity does not mean “immobility.” This too will receive more attention under the topic of immutability.

3.4.4.4 *Arminianism/Wesleyanism on God’s Simplicity*

Jacob Arminius spoke directly to the matter of God’s simplicity. He argued that God’s essence is “simple and infinite” (Arminius, 1986:2:339). He held that the “essence of God is one” and that it is “pure from all composition” (Arminius, 1986:2:339). Wesleyan theologian Thomas Oden, likewise, affirmed God’s simplicity. He taught that God is not “divided up” into various “attributes” (Oden, 1987:1:40). God’s essence is all his attributes because “God is fully and simultaneously all these attributes”; God exists in all his attributes and continues simply and completely as God (Oden, 1987:1:40). Oden (1987:1:57) also emphasized that God cannot be divided into parts. He understood this to mean that “simplicity is the opposite of composition” (Oden, 1987:1:57).

3.4.5 Immutability/Impassibility

The attribute of immutability, sometimes also described as impassibility or closely associated with it, refers to God being stable, constant, and unchanging in his nature. Alan Cairns (2002:224) has stated that this term means that God “cannot change or be changed in his essence or perfections.” Likewise, Norman Geisler (2011:445) wrote that God in his nature cannot change because it is “impossible for him to change.” Specifically, Geisler (2011:445) stated that “there are things” that God “cannot do, namely, he cannot act contrary to his immutable (unchangeable) nature.” In following Aquinas, Geisler (2011:445) taught that since God has no potentiality because he is pure actuality, that meant God cannot change because everything that changes “has potentiality.” Robert Culver (2005:133) describes these two ideas together. He taught that “God is as immutable and impassible as he is also immortal.” The connection between immutability and impassibility has to do with God’s nature not changing and thus he cannot suffer or experience emotions. Culver (2005:217) stated that impassibility is sometimes expressed as God being “incapable of suffering” because God has no capacity “for any emotions”. For him, to reject impassibility is to undermine or disrupt also the attributes of “simplicity and immutability” in the Godhead (Culver, 2005:224). Immutability and impassibility, therefore, are interwoven. They will be discussed together because they function in unity.

3.4.5.1 Supralapsarians on Immutability/Impassibility

As noted earlier with Ames’ view of simplicity and the will of God, God’s immutability and impassibility had an intricate connection for Ames. God has but one universal will. His essence and his will do not change. Ames stated that one should see God’s divine will the same as one sees his nature. God is one in both being, essence, and will according to Ames (1968:87). He stated, “the will of God is single and totally one in him” (Ames, 1968:87). This unchanging essence of God means according to Ames (1968:87) that “the will of God is unchangeable.” On the basis of Malachi 3:6, Ames (1968:87) taught that God’s will has no beginning or sequence to it because his will is “eternal.”

Robert Reymond (1998:178) taught that God’s immutability means that God remains constant in his being and his purpose; his essential nature or character never grows, develops, or changes. Interestingly, like Erickson, Reymond made a definite effort to distinguish this from immobility and inactivity. He rejected a “static” form of “immutability” and described this as a “dynamic” form of “immutability” (Reymond, 1998:178).

A.W. Pink, also considered a supralapsarian theologian, stated that God’s immutability applied to three areas (Supralapsarian’s Weblog, 2019). He stated, “God is perpetually the same” in “his being, attributes, or determinations” (Pink, 1975:35). According to Pink (1975:36), God’s “will

never varies.” He explained this doctrine as a basis to the assurance that God can and will fulfil his word and promises (Pink, 1975:37).

3.4.5.2 *Infralapsarians on Immutability/Impassibility*

Charles Hodge expressed the idea of immutability in asserting that it meant God never develops or grows. God can “neither increase nor decrease” as he experiences neither a “process of development” nor “self-evolution” (Hodge, 1995:1:390). This changelessness extends also to his knowledge and power. God can never increase, grow, or decrease in his knowledge and power (Hodge, 1995:1:390). All of God’s attributes and his essence remain fixed, unmoved, and stable (Hodge, 1995:1:390). Yet, as with others who offer a qualification, Hodge (1995:1:391) avoided describing God as immobile and inactive.

John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue also provide an explanation of God’s immutability. They too assert that this relates to God’s “essence, character, purpose, and promises” (MacArthur & Mayhue, 2017:169). They answer the objections to immutability from those who claim that scripture teaches that he changes; these are better understood as “apparent changes” when God acts in his “relations to people” (MacArthur & Mayhue, 2017:170). When offering a specific definition, these two theologians also describe how this idea differs from the Greek ideology. According to them, in some Greek perspectives God is “static” (MacArthur & Mayhue, 2017:929). A static view would be more along the lines of an impassible view of God. They counter by asserting that the proper view teaches that God is immutable because of his “unchanging character” which highlights the “dependability of God” (MacArthur & Mayhue, 2017:929).

3.4.5.3 *Sublapsarians on Immutability/Impassibility*

Some differences among sublapsarians exist on this topic. For example, Lewis Sperry Chafer argued for God’s immutability yet rejected the idea of God having no emotions (impassibility). However, Rolland McCune argued for God’s immutability and his impassibility. Chafer (1993:1:217) argued that God does not move or grow in his knowledge and that he could not experience any alteration in his holiness. However, Chafer (1993:1:218) argued that God is not without mobility. God’s love will govern his relations to his creation so that he can “sympathize with their sorrows” and “answer their prayers” (Chafer, 1993:1:219). Chafer and McCune expressed similar ideas. McCune (2009:236) affirmed that God is constant, unchanging, and stable in his essence. In his view God cannot grow or deteriorate in any way (McCune, 2009:236). God remains the same in “his person and perfections” (McCune, 2009:236).

However, in direct contrast to Chafer, McCune adopted the idea that God cannot experience sympathy with his creation. Chafer's view of God's mobility, relating emotionally to creation, is different than the way Rolland McCune described God. In McCune's view, to say that God experiences emotions and is involved emotionally with his creatures violates the doctrine of immutability (McCune, 2009:213). He sees immutability so interwoven with impassibility that they must function together with God having no experience or change in either essence or emotion. In his words, God is incapable of "suffering grief or unhappiness" because "God is constitutionally changeless," and God cannot "change himself, even voluntarily" (McCune, 2009:213). In other words, God cannot even decree to will himself to certain emotions in relation to his creation. God "lives in a state of permanent and unalterable blessedness, an infinitely absolute happiness and satisfaction" (McCune, 2009:213).

Other sublapsarians cover only immutability and do not mention impassibility. Barackman, Strong, and Erickson did not address or embrace impassibility. Barackman (1998:50) adopted the standard immutability perspective in asserting that God's nature never undergoes development or change. In his words, "God's nature and purpose always remain the same" (Barackman, 1998:50). A.H. Strong (1907:257) thought all change would have to be to the better or to worse, and therefore, God cannot change as he is perfect. Yet he too, as others, rejected the idea that this meant God lacked mobility. He thought "immutability must not be confused with immobility" (Strong, 1907:258). Millard J. Erickson (1985:278-279) adopted that idea that God is dependable and constant, the terms he uses to describe immutability. But he was careful to explain how this differs from impassibility. He rejects the idea that God is sterile and without action (Erickson, 1985:279). He criticized the views that God does not feel emotion. Instead he saw God functioning with a "genuinely sympathetic response to those he loves" (Erickson, 1985:280). Erickson (1985:279-280) believed that any view which made God inactive, or without emotion, was a form of immutability that disconnected God totally from his own creation that he has chosen to relate to and interact with by his being and essence. He thought those models arose more so from Greek ideology instead of biblical Christianity (Erickson, 1985:279).

3.4.5.4 *Arminianism/Wesleyanism on Immutability/Impassibility*

In this tradition Thomas Oden offered one of the most thorough explanations of God's immutability. He used the terms "divine reliability" and "constancy" in describing God's unchanging nature. He also guarded against any idea that God's unchanging nature meant that he is unresponsive to his creation. In his perspective, to adopt what has been seen as impassibility misconstrues the other attributes of God. Immutability must be in his thought connected to God's other "divine qualities, such as mercy, love, and justice. If pressed in

isolation from God's character as responsive, empathic, and compassionate, then the assertion of the divine reliability turns easily into an abstract, speculative assertion of divine rigidity and unresponsiveness" (Oden, 1987:1:111). He rejected the idea that immutability meant that God does not move, act, or feel emotion. He did not think God experiencing emotion or acting in response to his creation meant that a change occurred to God's nature or will (Oden, 1987:1:111).

For Oden (1987:1:112) his readings of the early fathers, a special focus of his, yielded the idea that God maintained an unchanging love for creation that he also executed with responsiveness to his creation because of his love for that creation. In following the early father Lactantius, Oden (1987:1:113) taught that God will act in flexibility with his creation as history progresses in various situations, yet even so God "remains faithful to his own unchanging will to sustain, love, and redeem creation." Oden also said something that resembles what Erickson noted about Greek ideology. Oden (1987:1:113) warned that "immutability is sometimes stated in wooden, Aristotelian terms that wholly lack these vital energies of the biblical witness to God's constancy."

3.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Several ideas have surfaced from this chapter that relate to this study on Geisler. The views of how to define God impact how one views salvation. If one believes in voluntarism or essentialism that will influence the position one has on salvation. Furthermore, the way a theologian defines God's essence and his attributes will have a strong connection to the formulation of soteriology.

3.5.1 Theologians have Commonly Defined God by his Attributes that Guide His Will

From an analysis of church history evidence reveals that many theologians have examined the idea of God and made an effort to define God. Theologians regularly admitted that he could not be totally defined. However, the overall consensus appears to have been to make an effort through an examination and consequent explanation of his character or qualities. By defining his attributes theologians have presented the nature or essence of God.

Other than some supralapsarians, theologians from both the Reformed/Calvinistic and Arminian/Wesleyan traditions have seen God as acting from his nature in his various actions, decrees, or providential government. This has often been known as the essentialist view of God, i.e., God acts according to or in harmony with his nature and that makes the act just, good,

or right. This perspective differs from the voluntarist view of God's will in which his mere act to will something makes it just and good.

3.5.2 Norman Geisler's Views Compared to Reformed/Calvinistic Positions

Norman Geisler's positions have some harmony and affinity with the Reformed/Calvinistic stream of thought. He also has some differences with one particular strand of Reformed/Calvinistic thought. These similarities and differences highlight some unique aspects of his soteriology.

First, Geisler embraced the idea that God acts in accordance to and with his nature. In agreement with many Reformed/Calvinistic theologians, as well as Arminian/Wesleyan theologians, he adopted the idea that God decrees or acts from his nature. This thought has some commonality between both Reformed and Arminian versions of theology. Geisler (1999d:216-218) stated that God wills something because it flows from his good divine nature. He contrasted this position with voluntarism that teaches that something that God wills is good, whatever it is, merely because he willed or decreed it (Geisler, 1999d:216). Geisler adopted the view that "God cannot will contrary to his nature. He cannot lie (Heb. 6:18). He cannot be unloving, nor unjust" (Geisler, 1999d:217). Therefore, "divine essentialism must be correct" (Geisler, 1999d:217).

Second, regarding God's attributes, Geisler adopted stances in close harmony with all three stands of Calvinism in the areas of omniscience, omnipresence, omnibenevolence (though identifying more so with the infralapsarian and sublapsarian strands on this point of God's grace and love to all), simplicity, and immutability/impassibility. In a few areas he did deviate to some extent from some forms of higher Calvinism, as within the supralapsarian model. For example, Geisler rejected the idea that for God to foreknow all he must decree to will all. Geisler's view of foreknowledge rejects the idea that God's foreknowledge exists because God *actively* determined all. This would place him at odds with the supralapsarian strand of Calvinism as taught by someone like William Ames.

However, in stark contrast to sublapsarian models of Calvinistic thought, which Geisler claimed he affirmed (moderate Calvinism), Geisler adopted the more supralapsarian model of God and his decree. Geisler (2019a:1:7) held that God had no chronological or logical order to his thoughts. Infralapsarians and sublapsarians have often stated that God has logical order to his thoughts, but not chronological order. But Geisler rejected both chronological and logical order and asserted that because God is an eternal simple being his nature and thoughts are one with no chronological or logical order to those thoughts. In his thinking, because God is eternal and

simple he could not have forethoughts as commonly stated. Geisler (2019a:1:13) taught that God “simply knows eternally.” Whatever God “thinks, he has forever thought” (Geisler, 2019a:1:13). This thought from Geisler runs very close to how one supralapsarian scholar, Herman Hoeksema, discussed this matter. According to Hoeksema (2004:1:228), because God is immutable, simple, and one in being, the “counsel of God is one.” He rejected any idea that a “temporal order” existed in God’s decree (Hoeksema, 2004:1:236). The order found in God’s decree, as often discussed in the lapsarian discussions, can best be described as “various moments in the one divine conception” (Hoeksema, 2004:1:228).

That single conceptive decree ideology of Hoeksema seems to be very close to what Geisler (2019a:1:7) meant when he asserted that God had one single “contuition.” Though rejecting voluntarism, something common in some supralapsarian forms of Calvinism, Geisler did seem to embrace a form of God’s knowledge that a higher form of Calvinism, as with supralapsarian Hoeksema, has commonly taught under the points about God’s immutability, simplicity, and impassibility. Where sublapsarians or moderate Calvinists seem to have steered away from impassibility, Geisler, while claiming to be a moderate Calvinist, seems to have at least in this area adopted a view more in line with how a supralapsarian describes God’s immutable and impassable mind with his knowledge.

3.5.3 Norman Geisler’s Views Compared to Arminian/Wesleyan Positions

In areas that often have wide unanimity among Calvinists and Arminian/Wesleyans, Geisler aligned with the Arminian/Wesleyan views. He affirmed ideas that both sides generally seem to define and accept as standard ideas in an evangelical model of theology. In the areas of omniscience, omnipresence, simplicity, and immutability substantive common ground exists from both sides when defining terms. Though the application of those definitions in actual scenarios sometimes differs, much agreement can be found in both models of theology.

Additionally, Calvinists and Arminians very often agree that God determines to act from his nature instead of merely from his will alone, as sometimes seemingly presented in voluntarist models of Calvinism. Geisler and the Arminian/Wesleyan model agree here. Two strands of Calvinism generally also agree in this while the supralapsarians seem divided in how to explain that.

Lastly, Geisler did use language here that identified more with sublapsarians and the Arminian/Wesleyan tradition concerning God’s universal love for all. Though sometimes infralapsarian Calvinists, like John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, and sublapsarians, like Millard J. Erickson and A.H. Strong, agree that God loves all, it is only the sublapsarians and the

Arminian/Wesleyans that agree and connect God's universal love to the death of Christ, who in their view died for each and every person of the human race. Geisler used a term not often used in the standard systematic theology textbooks. He described one of God's attributes as omnibenevolence. Some describe this idea under the idea of God's goodness, but Geisler seems to extend this idea to a unique place in his model that differs from the way other theologians describe God's goodness.

Therefore, he aligns best with neither supralapsarians nor infralapsarians. Even though infralapsarians do speak of God's love for all through common grace, Geisler's position connects more with sublapsarians who embrace limited atonement (later sections will deal with this) and even more specifically with Arminian/Wesleyans, in that God's love is required to be given to all because his essence is love. Calvinists, in all three models, more commonly deny that is *required* to give love to all.

Geisler offered three reasons why God's nature and essence required him, who is totally love in his essence, to extend that love to his universe and creatures. He argued that God's infinity, simplicity, and necessity requires God to love and to extend his love to all in contrast to those who limit it only to some (Geisler, 2011:586 and 584). Because God is infinite, Geisler (2011:586) argued that his love must also not be limited anymore "than his nature." Also, since God is simple he cannot be divided into parts. Consequently, God according to Geisler (2011:586) "must be wholly and completely love." Lastly, because God is a necessary being, in Geisler's (2011:586) mind this meant God by his very nature "must love." Whereas Calvinists normally assert that God loves by choice (an unmerited gracious choice), Geisler taught God must love because of his nature.

A theologian from the Arminian/Wesleyan tradition who comes closest to describing these matters similarly as did Geisler is Thomas C. Oden. Though Oden does not use the single term "omnibenevolence" to describe God's goodness, love, and universal atonement, he does come close by treating God's goodness, divine benevolence, and love together sequentially under the heading of God's character. For example, Oden (1987:1:117) stated that God's divine benevolence and goodness "qualifies all other divine attributes." God's actions, like his power, are in Oden's (1987:1:117) view directly related to him being "benevolent." Oden's (1987:1:98, 118) twin summary truths to describe God in full, holiness and love, means that God's holiness is extended to all through reaching out to the entire universe in love, because God is in his nature love.

CHAPTER 4:

GOD’S WORK OF PROVIDENCE IN CREATING MANKIND IN HIS IMAGE

4.1 GOD’S CREATION

One of the first logical points to the lapsarian decree models relates to original creation. Two of the Calvinistic decree models (infralapsarian and sublapsarian) and the Arminian/Wesleyan model begin with the decree to create. The supralapsarian model, however, does not begin with that decree. It begins with the decree to elect and damn. But it does still place the decree to create in the early part of the decree order with it falling in the second step of the model. Therefore, this decree to create and its position in the overall decree model, when examined, will show where Norman Geisler had continuity or discontinuity with the various models regarding this decree and its outworking, i.e., God’s activity to implement the decree in history. The position of creation in God’s decree order as well as the definition of what it means for God to create mankind and to govern over that which he created has substantive and relevant implications and correlations to one’s overall soteriology model. One’s anthropology establishes the foundation for one’s hamartiology that consequently intricately relates to soteriology.

4.2 GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY AND PROVIDENCE OVER AND WITHIN CREATION

One of the major dividing lines in historical Christianity pertains to how theologians articulate God’s position as sovereign and his activity over his creation through providence. Providence, an extension of God’s mind in action, relates to how he has planned the course of history and then executed that plan through his power, wisdom, and presence. The concept of providence relates to God having thought for all matters “both small and great” and has been sometimes used virtually as a synonym for “God” (Moule, 1962:940). This common idea of providence being used as a synonym for God has validity in the common history of public vernacular. For example, George Washington, the first president of the United States under the current constitution, commonly referred to God as “Providence” (Novak & Novak, 2006:118). James C. Rees (2007:103) noted that this was Washington’s preferred “word” and that he “used the term with great frequency”.

Of course, some theologians have not appreciated the lapsarian conversation while still affirming a strong view of providence. Calvinist theologian Rousas John Rushdoony (1994:69) thought the idea of trying to understand any type of “time sequence in God’s thinking” amounted to a terribly false “assumption.” Moderate Calvinist Charles C. Ryrie shared a similar idea as did

Rushdoony. He did not think much enlightenment came from this study (Ryrie, 1999:368). Yet he too, held to a strong view of providence (Ryrie, 1999:49).

Nonetheless, theologians from a wide spectrum have ventured into this analysis of God's mind planning history with that plan coming to fruition through providence. Even Chris Cone, who stressed that God is free from all time and "is not bound by time" (Cone, 2019:140), still recognized some type of planning administration period of God in eternity (Cone, 2009:216). Therefore, theologians usually have shown some type of appreciation for the issue. Erwin Lutzer (1998:153) noted that the greatest minds have wrestled with this topic with an understanding that it had major implications for the Christian faith. Even those from the more liberal persuasion of thought, as with Paul Tillich (Spiceland, 2001:1200), who taught at Harvard University, Union Seminary, and the University of Chicago, sought to harmonize how an infinite God can be transcendent and immanent with his creation as sovereign while working with creation through providence.

How God relates to his creation before the entrance of sin into the universe and after the entrance of sin into the universe has been a perplexing issue for theologians from many various backgrounds. Though not a representative of conservative theology, Tillich still explained the dilemma theologians from the two broad traditions face in this matter when one emphasizes one theme to the neglect of another. Tillich (1951:266) noted that too much emphasis on God's foreordination makes "God the only active agent." On the other hand, he noted as well that too much emphasis on God only foreseeing events of history makes him a mere omniscient spectator to history as his creatures run history (Tillich, 1951:266).

In contemplating the universe, those who affirm a Christian theistic worldview begin with God who created. In his mind he chose to create. In contrast to Zoroastrianism, a view that Joel Kupperman (1995:923) noted escapes the problem of evil because it teaches good and evil are eternal and "equally matched," a Christian worldview begins with a necessary being, God, who is both "ontologically and logically necessary" (Sproul, 1994:159). In the Christian worldview God is a "self-existent and independent being" (Sproul, 1994:159). Therefore, all that exists in creation in some sense is dependent on the one singular independent being, the Sovereign. Calvinist theologian Robert Letham (2019:271-272) has rightly noted,

Everything that exists was brought into being by God; this was a free act of God's will, not an emanation from his being, and there was no pre-existing material. Consequently, all that is not God is contingent, dependent on him for its existence and continuation.... [this is] a stark contrast to ideas prevalent in paganism, where the universe was often held to be a [sic] emanation from a Supreme Being, or a matter to be pre-existent.

God in the orthodox Christian worldview stands as the sovereign Father who in providence rules over that which he created. All forms of Calvinistic thought and the Arminian/Wesleyan view agree with this basic philosophical and theological foundation. The major streams of thought were historically aligned regardless of the denomination. Though that may not be the case today with historic denominations, substantive agreement still remains among the Reformed Calvinistic streams and Arminian streams in the present century. Foundational concepts related to the existence of God, his revelation to his created world, and the universe as his creation, with humanity being a special part of his creation, establish the basic boundary lines for those within the theistic worldview (Sire, 2004:23).

4.2.1 Providence

The doctrine of providence has three basic ideas associated with it in the field of theology. Van A. Harvey (1964:198) has defined it as (1) “divine preservation” where God “sustains all creatures in their distinctive natures and powers;” (2) “divine cooperation” where God not only sustains but “actively concurs in these creatures’ action in such an intimate way” that the creatures’ actions are related to themselves and to God; (3) “divine government” where God as the Sovereign “fulfills his purpose for the creatures by guiding them.” Theologians usually speak of providence with one or all of those definitions.

Calvinists and Arminians historically embrace a similar view of providence. The key difference between the two schools of thought exists in the degree to which a person’s will participates with God in his actions to guide humanity. Calvinists place a stronger emphasis here on effectual causation whereas the Arminian school places greater emphasis on human choice to cooperate with a form of liberty to choose otherwise. Arminian scholar Roger E. Olson recognized that the degree of difference in the two schools of thought relate to God’s divine government and his extent to cause definite effects. He stated, “most attention and controversy in the doctrine of God’s providence surrounds the third aspect: governance” (Olson, 2006:117). The key difference surfaces in the question related to God’s degree and level of determination. Does God determine even the decisions of moral agents? Or does God allow humans to have a sphere of liberty to govern their own choices that could have been otherwise (Olson, 2006:117)? This issue becomes more central in the sections devoted to the origin of sin and human will in salvation. However, the general difference as noted in this paragraph does exist between the two broad schools of thought. As to causation, usually termed effectual power or efficacious acts of God, all three Calvinist schools embrace some form of efficacy to God’s providence flowing from his decree.

Norman Geisler (2011:688) likewise defined providence in three categories: (1) God's providence that created the world to exist; (2) the world's continued existence as God preserves it; and (3) the control God exercises over the world through providence. He made the distinction that God is the sovereign one and from his sovereign status he governs through providence (Geisler, 2011:688). He defined providence by following the definition offered by two theologians, one from Princeton Seminary, Calvinist Archibald Alexander Hodge, and the low/moderate Calvinist Augustus H. Strong, the former president of Rochester Theological Seminary. Both these theologians were Calvinistic in their soteriology and embraced a form of positive efficacy in God's providential acts.

A.A. Hodge (1890:43) described providence as "God effectually" governing "all his creatures and all their actions". A.H. Strong also described providence as a type of effectual work of God. In defining the term Strong (1907:419) stated, "providence is the continuous agency of God by which he makes all the events of the physical and moral universe fulfill the original design with which he created it." Strong (1907:441) expressed providence mainly through the two ideas of "permissive providence" and "efficient causation."

Yet, maybe not in contrast to those theologians (but it may be), Geisler added another aspect to his view of providence that does not seem to have the same level of emphasis in other systematic theologies as within his model. A term not frequently used among theologians, "omnisapience," has a central place in the heart of Geisler's view of providence. He defined this as "God's wisdom" and "unerring ability to choose the best means to accomplish the best ends" (Geisler, 2011:515). When tying this to providence, Geisler (2011:693) intertwined God's omnisapience into the infinite "knowledge, wisdom, and power" of God working in concert within himself as he "knows the best way to utilize them in accomplishing his overall purpose." Therefore, the work of the Lord is effectual, yet the type of means to make it effectual has a distinct nuance to it not discussed in some theologies. Geisler (2011:689) asserted, therefore, a view that acknowledges God as "omnipotent," which results in the corresponding idea that from his omnipotence "nothing hinders" him from the "accomplishment of his will." God "can do anything that is possible to do" (2011:689).

In short, Geisler (2011:699,702) believed that God's omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, and omnipresence were exercised through omnisapience, that consequently meant that God has "complete providential control over his creation" and this results in a "general and particular providential control over all creation." Those comments establish a strong stance that also has an instrumental means through which God actually works his will into the universe. However, having noted all that, a balanced analysis has to recognize a qualifying comment from Geisler on God's sovereign providence. The degree of impact this

statement has cannot yet be determined in this chapter. This will be more closely examined in the specific condition of mankind's will after the fall (Chapter 5 of this research) and in relation to the application of redemption (Chapter 7 of this research). However, to continue building each block of the analysis, that comment remains important to capture for the ongoing evidentiary analysis.

Geisler (2011:702) noted in conclusion concerning God's providence that "even without the exercise of his persuasive influence on free creatures, God can control the destiny of all things simply by his infallible foreknowledge of how every free creature will choose to exercise his freedom" (Geisler, 2011:702). In his mind, his view of providence "stands between two extremes: fatalism and indeterminism" (Geisler, 2011:689). The underlying goal of Geisler's (2011:689) model and conclusions could not be stated any more plainly than this: "divine providence, however, maintains both certainty and liberty." Indeed, the title to one of his books on this topic utilized the word "balanced" as a descriptive term for God's sovereignty and human will (Geisler, 2010:3). Furthermore, to illustrate that, Geisler had on the cover of that book the famous scales of justice that have long symbolized the balanced discovery of truth inside courtrooms or legal systems. Therefore, those ideas likely will have a more substantive significance in this analysis as it progresses deeper into Geisler's intricate nuances for soteriology.

4.2.2 Transcendence and Immanence

The historical conversation in the community of Christ pertaining to God's sovereign providence and human responsibility has consistently brought to the forefront the subjects of God's transcendence and his immanence. These two theological ideas have strong correlation to God's activity with his creation. Everything he does would seem to fit into one of these two categories. In some cases, one might simplify the debate with a pendulum perspective, with those focused more on transcendence leaning more towards the sovereignty models (often labeled as Calvinistic models) and those focused more on immanence leaning more to the human responsibility side of the pendulum (often labeled as Arminian models).

Norman Geisler thought that the move away from transcendence to the stress on immanence led one down the path of human-centered models of theology (2019a:1:220), even to process theology or what Geisler has sometimes termed Neotheism (1997:71-93). However, he also recognized that too much emphasis on transcendence had consequences for the Christian faith. He noted that too much focus in the other direction, related to God's existence beyond this world yet not in and with this world, yields the fruit of deism (Geisler, 1985:33).

4.2.2.1 *What is Transcendence?*

This concept highlights the “outside of this world” nature of God. It conveys the idea that God stands outside of creation and exists independently of it. A transcendent God, metaphysically speaking, lives and acts over and beyond the earthly sphere. It connotes his power and authority. Calvinist scholar Vern S. Poythress (2014:92) explained that God’s transcendence conveys his status as the one in overall control. God being outside of time and creation, and over it with his power and knowledge, means that by his divine power he rules over his creation with full authority (Poythress, 2014:93).

Norman Geisler spoke in a similar fashion concerning God’s transcendence. In defining this idea Geisler (2003:518) expressed the position that God remains “above, beyond, other than, and more than the world.” In his mind God’s transcendence also connected intricately to his sovereignty: the “One who is in control of all creation must be beyond all creation, and the One who is beyond all creation is transcendent” (Geisler, 2003:520).

4.2.2.2 *Transcendence and Eternal Activity*

To rightly understand Norman Geisler’s soteriology and his claim to a moderate Calvinistic soteriology, which includes his claim to a sublapsarian scheme in the decree model, a brief examination here aids in the intended quest. More will be said later, especially in the final sections where the research will present some final conclusions. But Geisler had an unusual explanation of God’s transcendence worth initial notation. This researcher watched Geisler explain and illustrate in a classroom lecture how sovereignty and human freedom interact, and that has led to some intrigue and concern from at least one scholar doing a brief analysis of his position. He used a chair (symbolizing God’s unchanging essence) that remained stable and explained that when one prays the person is the one that changes orientation around the chair (Geisler moved from the right side of the chair to the left side of the chair), the chair does not move. Geisler explained that in eternity God never changes and he exists as a timeless being. In describing God’s eternality he asserted that “God has no past or future, only a present: He is an eternal Now” (Geisler, 2003:95).

However, even with that position, Geisler (2019a:1:263) denied God is a static and immobile being. He taught (2019a:1:263) “God is not static.” To the contrary, Geisler (2019a:1:263) thought God exists with a “dynamically active” function in and with his creation. But, interestingly, this activity relates not to just within the creation (a matter of immanence), but God has dynamic, flowing, never-ending activity in eternity with himself. To use his exact words so as not to miss any aspect of this key position, Geisler (2019a:1:264) stated that “even in eternity

there flowed the ceaseless and changeless activity of the eternal love among the members of the Trinity.” How can one combine that perspective with the earlier statement where God has no past or future but only the present through an eternal now? Later sections in this research will interact with this key point. Briefly stated now as a prelude to that, one of Geisler’s students, John Feinberg, challenged Geisler on this very idea of some type of eternal now view of God. In critiquing Geisler’s view, Feinberg (1986:86, 87) noted that the “equally timeless” view of God causes problems in a clear position on God’s relationship to “foreknowledge to determinism”.

Though a deeper examination of this will occur in the specific section on soteriology, some additional preliminary points may set the stage for examination. In Geisler’s most specific work dealing with God’s sovereignty and salvation, he made some strong statements on God’s eternity. He described God as the “Unmoved Mover who nevertheless moves things. God is unmovable, but he is not immobile. He is pure Actuality, and as such, he is continually active” (Geisler, 2010:124). Geisler seems to use this model as a basis to build the moderate Calvinist view he claimed to affirm.

In fact, he placed himself in the view or same category as other moderate Calvinists that he named (Geisler, 2010:147-148). Several of those, however, seems to have held to a different form of transcendence and Calvinism than he did. For example, he named Lewis Sperry Chafer (1993:3:180-181), who embraced a moderate Calvinist view in God’s decree, with atonement for all preceding sovereign election (Chafer incorrectly mislabeled the decree order names by defining sublapsarians as infralapsarians and infralapsarians as sublapsarians). James Oliver Buswell (1963:134-35), who rejected a moderate Amyraldian decree order and embraced infralapsarianism, and William G.T. Shedd (2003:340-341), who also held to the infralapsarian view (but mislabeled it sublapsarianism). Furthermore, Geisler cited Charles Ryrie, who did not seem to hold the lapsarian issue in high regard for theological importance. However, Ryrie and Chafer both agreed Christ’s death was a provision for all, versus supralapsarians and infralapsarians for whom unconditional election occurs logically before the atonement decree.

But Geisler used those theologians, and more, in his effort to construct a balanced soteriology that heavily utilizes the transcendent eternity view of God, a view Giesler said meant God has no sequences or temporal nature to his thoughts or acts (Shedd, 2003:148). Not only does Geisler think God’s transcendent eternity means God has no sequences, he also thought transcendence meant God’s “acts are not chronologically or logically sequential” (Shedd, 2003:149). This formed a key part to his foundation that impacts his soteriology that this research will unpack in later sections. For now, this highlighted point in the category on God’s providence, as it relates to eternity (transcendence) and history (immanence), establishes an important key to a proper understanding of Geisler’s overall soteriology.

Until those subsequent sections arise for analysis, the point herein remains this. The harmonization of Geisler's eternality view, whereby he thought "even in eternity" God acted and "flowed" with a "ceaseless and changeless activity of the eternal love among the members of the Trinity", poses some apparent substantial material that on the surface, as noted by one of his very own students, causes some concern for the continuity and consistency of his model to any Calvinistic soteriology model. How can there be *changeless activity that flows in eternity* among the Godhead, a dynamic model contrasted to a static model, while simultaneously affirming God has no sequences either in chronology or even logically so? Several of the theologians Geisler cited in support embraced, in contrast to Geisler, some type of chronological or logical sequence in their view of God's transcendence, creation, and providence.

4.2.3 What is Immanence?

The concept of God's immanence relates to his work inside the universe he created. It conveys his close presence and proximity in and with his creation. Again, the words from Reformed scholar Vern S. Poythress rightly explained the doctrine of immanence. He said, "God's immanence means that he is everywhere present and is intimately involved in the events in this world" (Poythress, 2014:93). God in his providence has chosen not only to function outside, over, and beyond creation, but he has chosen to enter into time, history and creation through his presence. By virtue of being omnipresent, God has an immediate presence and immanence throughout the universe. His immanence means that God functions and has a presence with, around, and even within every aspect of creation while still maintaining his distinct status apart from the creation. Archibald Alexander Hodge (1976:18) stated of this attribute that God exists in his presence "everywhere" and "in every point of space and within the inmost constitution of all created things at the same time."

Norman Geisler also spoke of God's immanence and expressed the concept as God being with his creation by his presence. Geisler linked God's immanence to the doctrine of his omnipresence. If God is present everywhere this equals immanence. In his position "God's immanence means that he is within or present to the entire universe" (Geisler, 2003:527). Yet, even with the link between omnipresence and immanence, Geisler did make an important distinction and qualification between the two ideas. God's omnipresence means he remains "present to all of his creation," but the doctrine of immanence means God has a presence even "within it" (Geisler, 2003:527). Like A.A. Hodge, Geisler also carefully guarded against the flaw of thinking this equalled pantheism. While God exists around and within the universe and all of its spheres, God remains distinct and apart from it even while being within it. His nature does not become the nature of the universe. The universe does not exist as an extension of God's nature (Geisler, 2003:527).

4.2.3.1 Immanence and Activity in Creation

The idea that God dwells with, around, and within the universe highlights the doctrine of God's sustenance as he cares for, sustains, governs, and guides his universe through providence. God's presence means he exists in the entire sphere of the universe with his entire nature present. This impacts the universe. Both A.A. Hodge, a Calvinist, and Norman Geisler, asserted that the universe actually dwells in God himself though not as a part of his nature. Hodge (1976:20) wrote, "the whole universe exists in God." Geisler too shared that idea and position. Citing Acts 17:28 Geisler (2003:527) stated, "God is not only within the universe, but the universe is within God." That sets forth a clear, strong descriptive view of intimacy in immanence.

That the universe exists within God and with God being around, over, in, through, and with it, that presence of God has some universal implications in the universe. God's presence functions as an effectual sustenance to that creation. A.A. Hodge's very descriptive explanation of how this impacts the universe helps to explain the importance of immanence for the universe itself and the life of it.

The Christian doctrine of the divine immanence ... is the very essence of religion. It admits and adjusts itself to the complementary doctrine of the divine transcendence.... This being, moreover, transcends all the limitations of space and time. He is everywhere present in his eternal essence. The whole essence, with all its inherent properties, is present at every moment of time to every point of space. As First Cause he is the constant, abiding, supporting, and actuating basis of every second cause. All creatures exist and act only as they exist in him. At the same time, he acts through every atom from within and upon every atom from without. "In him all things live and move and have their being" ... This is a function of the divine personality....The extension of our knowledge of the physical universe effected by modern science, rendering visible to the us the absolute unity of the cosmos, the uninterrupted continuity of the chain of cause and effect, as well as of design, through all space and time, has not altered, but it has greatly emphasized, this religious conception of "the divine immanence" (Hodge, 1976:25,26).

The immanent presence of the Lord has major ramifications for the universe itself. Inseparably linked to God's omnipresence, the universal presence of God sustains, guides, and energizes the creation. Through this presence his providence relates to history as he works within his creation to glorify himself.

4.3 ORIGIN OF HUMANITY

The eternal decree of God, as expressed in all of the major lapsarian models, has significance for the study of soteriology. What occurs in earthly chronological time has prior eternal roots within God's eternal mind or eternal decree structure. As explained in Chapter Two of this research, two Calvinistic decree models (infralapsarian and sublapsarian) and the general Arminian decree model (usually a sublapsarian type) places God's decree to create humanity as the first in the order. On the other hand, the supralapsarian model places God's decree to create mankind as secondary to the order to elect and condemn.

Norman Geisler relies heavily upon the teaching of Thomas Aquinas at this point. Geisler (2003:431), while examining and explaining the doctrine of creation, asserted that Aquinas stood as the "greatest Christian thinker of the Middle Ages," and he added in a similar manner like Aquinas that "time begins with creation." With Aquinas' line of thought, Geisler (2003:431) taught that God as Creator existed only before in a "logical sense" and not in a "chronological sense." This would harmonize with Geisler's position that God and the universe exists as an eternal now, i.e., to God all things exist in the present. In Geisler's exact words, "Both time and space were created with the universe. There was no time before the world began, only eternity. God is prior to the universe in order, but not in time" (Geisler, 2003:437).

Consequently, because of this eternal now perspective, although Geisler mentions the various decree order options among Christian theological models (2004:184), and claims to affirm a moderate Calvinist perspective throughout various places in his writings (2011:786), he does not like either a chronological or logical order to the decree model scheme. He claims to hold a moderate Calvinist view, which historically has been more aligned with the sublapsarian or Amyraldian perspective. But, Geisler (2004:186) spoke of an "operational order" in God's decree rather than a logical or chronological order.

Yet, even so, with this model he still, in spite of his hesitancy and aversion to the standard models, seems to have a model that plays out temporally in earthly chronological time through succession that has alignment with the sublapsarian decree model by placing creation before the fall, then fall, and then atonement. His operational order in earthly chronological time historically unfolds in what would be a sublapsarian eternal order. But he does not describe this operational order as logical or sequential eternal thoughts of God. He viewed it as follows:

God eternally willed things to happen in a certain temporal sequence (one after the other), just as a doctor wills in advance the patient's cure by prescribing, for instance, the ingestion of a pill a day for a week. Hence, God willed, for example, that Creation would occur before the Fall, and that salvation would be provided after the Fall (Geisler, 2004:186).

In spite of his effort to reformulate the language used to describe the decree model, this description above still aligns with the sublapsarian or Amyraldian moderate Calvinist order. Geisler's view of historical reality provides the order in the sense that he still shows continuity with a sublapsarian Calvinist order. Geisler places atonement and provision for salvation after the fall, and the fall after creation, and therefore that resembles the moderate Calvinist perspective. However, he does revise the eternal aspect of the model. Therefore, this too seems to have significance in analyzing his soteriology model. His precise formulation has some continuity while also having some discontinuity with the standard Calvinistic formulations.

4.4 NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS: CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE

A mark of all orthodox theology has been the confession that God created mankind in his image. Mankind manifests the grand and glorious pinnacle of God's creative act as Moses recorded in the first two chapters of Genesis. Donald G. Bloesch (1978:88) highlighted the historic view when he stated that God "created" man and that he was "in the image of God and endowed ... with freedom for service and fellowship." Anglican theologian Michael F. Bird (2013:23) expressed the position that the most essential and core doctrine to a proper anthropology relates to the image of God in mankind. He explicitly stated this when he said, "the central component in the doctrine of humanity is the affirmation that humans are created in the *imago Dei*, that is, the 'image of God'" (Bird, 2013:657).

According to historical theologian Gregg R. Allison (2011:321), the "Church has historically" taught "that God created human beings in his image." Calvinist theologian R.C. Sproul also has affirmed this position that humans reflect the image of God. God made mankind in his image; this means that a human exists as an "intelligent and moral being" who has a "mind, a heart, and a will" (Sproul, 1992:131-132). The same thought exists among Arminian theologians. F. Leroy Forlines (2001:136-138) thought the image of God in mankind meant that a person has a rational mind and heart that expresses itself through the will. The same thoughts have been found in Lutheran theology as well. Francis Pieper (1950:516) taught that in Lutheran theology the image of God meant that mankind had an "intellect and will" in "his personality" that reflected the nature of God.

Geisler's view of the image of God in mankind did not differ from any of the prior views as expressed by the various theologians noted. The image of God guaranteed that mankind had "dignity" and that as the special creation of God mankind possesses "sanctity" (Geisler, 2003:450). Additionally, Geisler (2003:450) believed that mankind represented God's image by displaying "intelligence" along with "moral characteristics." Lastly, the image of God in mankind resembles God in that a human person has a will with volitional likeness to God. In Geisler's

(2003:451) words, mankind has been given “ability to respond” and with this volitional freedom we have a moral responsibility and “accountability for this freedom.” At creation “one of the things God gave to humanity was a good power called free will” (Geisler, 2010:34).

4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

All soteriology models in evangelical Christianity develop from a foundation of anthropology because God through providence works to redeem sinners. Two truths of key importance arise from the first two chapters of scripture. First, God exercised his character by providentially producing from nothing this universe that has within it mankind. Second, this mankind he created bears his image. These intelligent beings display on a finite level their Creator. Mankind bears the image of God and because of that we have a special relationship with the Lord from the essence of our creation. Humanity has a special value that sets humans apart from the rest of creation. As expressed in the creeds, such as the Apostles’ Creed, and from the earliest periods of church history till the present day, the orthodox body of Christ has confessed God as the creator of heaven and earth, of mankind, and the provident ruler over his creation.

4.5.1 Norman Geisler’s Views Compared to Reformed/Calvinistic Positions

Norman Geisler has close continuity with several of the standard ideas found in virtually all Calvinistic theology models in relation to anthropology. Nothing in his views related to the constitutional essence of mankind differs with the main Calvinistic expressions in any substantive manner. For Geisler, as with the mainstream Calvinists, to affirm that God created the universe and mankind places God in the sovereign position over the creation.

Five areas reveal Geisler’s ideas in relation to the Reformed/Calvinistic position. First, Geisler affirmed that God created the universe from nothing. He based this on scripture as well as logic. He argued that “nothing cannot make something, but someone (i.e., God) can make something out of nothing” (Zacharias & Geisler, 2003:27). In speaking of the necessity for a first cause of the universe Geisler noted the irrationality of thinking the universe could produce itself. He argued:

What caused the universe? Was it caused by some natural phenomenon? Is it self-caused? Has it always existed (uncaused)? Or did something or someone else cause the universe? If the universe had a beginning, then it needs a first cause. To appeal to natural causes—the laws of nature, as the justification for the origin of the cosmos—seems just as absurd as someone concluding that the glass sphere discovered in the forest was a result of some natural phenomenon. We can likewise rule out a self-caused universe as impossible; to be

self-caused it would have had to have existed (in order to be the cause) and have not existed (in order to be caused) at the same time (Giesler and Bocchino, 2001:88).

Those perspectives by Geisler (1990:16), based upon the law of non-contradiction, run parallel to the same position and logic that Calvinist scholar R.C. Sproul articulated. Working with the same base of logic, Sproul explained that self-creation has no rational basis. As he taught, “the concept of self-creation is logically impossible” (Sproul, 1994:157). In Sproul’s perspective, only four options exist for the question related to the origin of the universe: (1) it is an illusion; (2) it is self-existent and eternal; (3) it is self-created; or (4) it is created by something self-existent. In focusing in on the option that scientists and atheists most often adopt, self-creation, Sproul, in similar fashion as Geisler, argued that such an idea remains utterly irrational and absurd. He stated:

For something to come from nothing it must, in effect, create itself. Self-creation is a logical and rational impossibility. For something to create itself it must be able to transcend Hamlet’s dilemma, “To be, or not to be.” Hamlet’s question assumed sound science. He understood that something (himself) could not both be and not be at the same time and in the same relationship. For something to create itself, it must have the ability to be and not be at the same time in the same relationship. For something to create itself it must be before it is. This is impossible. . . . Nothing anywhere, anytime, can create itself (Sproul, 1994:157).

In that vein of thinking as expressed by Sproul, a position rooted in the laws of logic, Geisler and other theologians agree that God exists as the primary cause of all that exists in the universe. In Geisler’s (1999c:165) words, “God’s literal creation of the universe is vital to Christianity.” That view is not, of course, unique to a Calvinist theology. Scholars from all evangelical streams affirm that position. But, even so, Geisler has continuity here in that foundational point with the Calvinists and that establishes the basis to the points pertaining to God’s providence over his creation.

Second, because God created the universe and with it mankind as a part of that universe, God rules as a providential Father over the universe. Because God created the universe and mankind he continues to sustain it. Of this work Geisler (1999c:166) taught, “God did not cease to relate to the world he had created. He continually operates in it. He sustains its very existence.” This ongoing work he calls “providence” (Geisler, 1999c:166). Each of eight aspects of creation have a corresponding aspect of providence. (1) God created the world and he now preserves the world through providence (Geisler, 1999c:167). (2) The world coming to be is by providence continuing to be (Geisler, 1999c:167). (3) God creating the world from nothing is now kept from extinction by providence (Geisler, 1999c:167). (4) God made the universe with a

beginning to it and he now through providence conserves it (Geisler, 1999c:167). (5) In original creation God produced the universe and now by providence he acts to reproduce the universe (Geisler, 1999c:167). (6) Through initial creation God generated the universe and now by providence he governs that which he generated (Geisler, 1999c:167). (7) God in making the universe has a direct relation to his purpose to providentially care for that which he made (Geisler, 1999c:167). And (8) God as Creator exists as the originator of the universe that he now operates through providence (Geisler, 1999c:167).

Geisler's comprehensive and carefully categorized view of providence aligns closely with the views of even the supralapsarian Calvinist Robert Reymond (1998:398) who endorsed the idea that God as Creator upholds, directs, disposes, and governs "all creatures, actions, and things" within the created universe. Just as the Calvinist scholar James Montgomery Boice (1986:176) could say following the principles as set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, "God has not abandoned the world he created, but rather works within that creation to manage all things," so too did Geisler (2011:702) assert that "God's complete and sovereign control over all human events—past, present, and future—stands firm."

Third, as noted in the section on the means by which God exercises his providence, Geisler adds a unique emphasis in his discussion of providence that does not occur in some theologians' models. He affirms God as both transcendent over and beyond creation and immanent in and through creation. But the connective means he uses to facilitate this over and within interaction has a unique nuance to it. Though it is not uncommon for Calvinists to discuss God's wisdom, often articulated through the broader sphere of omniscience, Geisler highlights with a greater emphasis than common the idea of God's *omnisapience*. This seems to take on a more concrete means, and maybe a different route, to the end for Geisler's particular idea of sovereign providential rule in application to mankind. The particulars of how he works that out within his view of a person's will after the fall into sin and human will in relation to the application of grace in personal salvation will shed more light on his soteriology.

Fourth, Geisler spoke of an operational order that flows from God's eternal decree. In this point, Geisler seems to have adopted a stance that even his own student John Feinberg (1988:70), who classifies himself as a Calvinist, thought violated the standard view of God in relation to his universe. Geisler affirmed the idea that God exists and functions in an "eternal now" reality. Therefore, Geisler thought the logical or chronological idea of some order in some eternal decree could not harmonize with an "eternal now" reality of the Godhead. Therefore, his sublapsarian decree order had a different combination to it than the standard forms of Calvinism. The order occurred only in the temporal providence of earthly history. God, in eternity, had no sequence or logical order in the decree. Though Geisler in practical terms

affirmed the sublapsarian order he did so through an earthly natural chronology by God's moving of history in that order. He did not place the order in God's eternal mind. This highlights some definite discontinuity in Geisler's perspective with classical Calvinistic models.

Fifth, Geisler and the general Calvinistic perspective on the key traits that constitute the image of God in mankind display a common and substantive unity. God, as the Creator of the universe who reigns as the sovereign over (transcendence) and within (immanence) his universe, included within his universe a special set of creatures that reflect his divine image. God's design for mankind manifests his essence in and through them. Humans have a unique nature that reflects the character and attributes of God. Humans, as spiritual and material beings, have both sacredness and dignity because of their divine root and divine design from the author of all life. Any Gnostic thought that only the spirit, but not the body, displays the sacred image of God finds certain and clear denunciation in Geisler's (1983:677) theology. Additionally, mankind has intelligence, a moral capacity both in essence and expression, and through original design had a volitional freedom to exercise obedience or disobedience.

Those ideas align well in continuity with the general Calvinistic view of mankind from various Calvinist theologians. Even the highest forms of Calvinist teachers in church history would not differ from Geisler in these areas. Though a supralapsarian Calvinist might encounter an opposing argument that in theory their stance on meticulous determination through an active effectual means with Adam would undermine a legitimate view of free will, they do at least in theory try to retain some form of original freedom in Adam.

For example, one of the highest Calvinists in church history, William Ames (1968:114), noted that it was "man himself in his abuse of free will" that served as the "principal cause" of his fall into sin. A recognition of some type of freedom of the will existed. The high or "strict Calvinist" (George, 2001:26) John Gill thought being made in God's image meant God created man in his image with an original ability for proper "thinking" and "reasoning" (Gill, 1980:1:12). Again, some recognition of the will of man existed.

Speaking broadly for Reformed theology as a whole, supralapsarian theologian Geerhardus Vos (2012-2014:2:11) embraced the idea that the image of God in mankind "comprises both the intellectual and the moral nature of man." In his perspective God's image at the minimum meant mankind is "spirit and possesses understanding," a "will," and "soul" that "can act in a way that corresponds to their destiny" if "they rest in God" (Vos, 2012-2014:2:13). Vos (2012-2014:2:60) held that "*liberum arbitrium* [free will] existed before the fall but no longer after the fall."

Other Calvinists within lower forms of Calvinistic thought hold similar ideas of anthropology. Strong Calvinists, to use Geisler's term of the middle Calvinist position (usually infralapsarian and/or advocates of limited atonement), also affirm original free will within mankind in Eden. R.C. Sproul (1986:66) held that before the fall into sin mankind had both the ability to sin and the "ability to not sin" (sic). Moderate Calvinists (sublapsarians, unlimited atonement) have also taught this view of anthropology. Floyd Barackman exemplified a moderate Calvinist teacher that recognized a form of original free will in mankind. God's image in mankind meant that mankind in the Garden of Eden originally had the power of "self-determination" (Barackman, 1998:293). Through "full knowledge" and a purposeful deliberate act of the will Adam "chose to accept Eve's offer (Gen. 3:6) rather than to follow God's command (2:16-17)" (Barackman, 1998:294).

4.5.1.1 Summarizing Geisler's Five Points in Relation to all Three Calvinistic Anthropologies

In three areas, Geisler taught ideas consistent with the Calvinistic anthropologies of church history. One, he affirmed creation from nothing (*ex-nihilo*). Two, because of that Creator-to-creation relationship Geisler saw a direct providential role as God functioned as Father over the universe he generated. He viewed God as both providential over creation (transcendence) and within creation (immanence). Three, Geisler embraced five traits that have been commonly expressed in Calvinistic anthropologies. He affirmed (a) mankind's dignity; (b) mankind's sanctity; (c) mankind's rational and moral intelligence; (d) mankind's moral character qualities; and (e) mankind's original volitional freedom or ability to sin or not to sin.

However, in two areas a unique emphasis or nuance appeared in Geisler's discussions of providence. Though Geisler did indeed make statements that align with a more Calvinistic perspective on providence, all of those assertions and positions have a qualification that may modify his initial Calvinistic appearance. His stress on how providence functions highlights a position possibly outside the boundaries of classical Calvinistic thought.

First, his view of omniscience might establish an operational motif in God that distinguishes his model from the more standard Calvinistic soteriology models. That view will surface more in subsequent chapters, where hamartiology and soteriology come into a more specific focus in relation to human will in connection to God's will. For now, the evidence in Theology Proper yields enough for further exploration, but not enough data for a conclusive categorization in this chapter. It does, however, segue into the summary for any correlations he has to an Arminian/Wesleyan model of theology.

Second, Geisler's unique perspective on God as always being in an eternal reality seems to create a paradigm that other Calvinists have noted as a break from standard Calvinistic thought. Geisler's student, John Feinberg from the Calvinistic tradition, expressed concerns about Geisler's view. Feinberg (1986:86, 87) thought Geisler's perspective created an unstable and illogical form of soteriology in relation to divine determinism. Though Geisler says he adopted a moderate Calvinist stance, his unique way to define God's decree order as only an earthly chronological operational order instead of an eternal logical or sequential order suggests he has some discontinuity in this area with standard forms of Calvinistic thought.

However, an eternal now perspective, if based upon the unmoved mover idea and coupled with the impassibility doctrine of God's nature, could theoretically align more with an extreme or supralapsarian model of Calvinism. Subsequent chapters will reveal how Geisler works out this idea in practice from his eternal now perspective in correlation with the doctrine of election and predestination. However, his unique manner of defining the lapsarian order as only an *operational earthly order* that develops within the providence of earthly time shows some discontinuity from at least the two lower forms of Calvinism, i.e., the sublapsarian and infralapsarian models.

4.5.2 Norman Geisler's Views Compared to Arminian/Wesleyan Positions

Arminian/Wesleyan theology does not have an extremely recognizable difference per se in the field of Theology Proper pertaining to original providential creation. Theologians from this line of thought have affirmed the three distinct categories analyzed above in such a way that substantive unity can exist in those areas. For example, H. Orton Wiley and Paul T. Culbertson from this heritage clearly taught God exists as a transcendent being. They affirmed God has "no bounds or limits" as he stood "superior to time" and "free from temporal distinctions of past and future" (Wiley & Culbertson, 1946:92). Furthermore, they held to God's divine providence and almighty will as the reason for the universe. The universe, in their perspective, "owes its origin to the omnipotent power and unconditional will of God" (Wiley & Culbertson, 1946:133). The Arminian/Wesleyan teachers have also penned words that express their intent on conserving the providential rule of God over all of his creation. Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell (2004:151) claimed that in their view "God is in control and all things are indeed ordained and governed by him in some sense." In their perspective, as within a Calvinist scheme, they claim that what God "chooses" and purposes to "accomplish" he will "certainly succeed in doing so" (Walls & Dongell, 2004:152). In the words of Jacob Arminius (1996:367), "the acts of providence ... are preservation ... and government". God is the Almighty Creator and transcendent one who also works within creation through his power that "serves universally and at all times" (Arminius, 1996:367). God's extrinsic acts of providence in time and history flow from his prior "internal act"

(Arminius, 1996:368). That means that “God does nothing, or permits it to be done in time, which he has not decreed from all eternity” (Arminius, 1996:368). Yet herein Arminius (1996:367) noted too, as did Geisler, this “rule of providence” arises from the “wisdom of God.”

Additionally, the dignity and sacredness of creation has been espoused by this theological tradition. William Menzies and Stanley Horton (1993:81) spoke of humanity as the “special creation” of God. This special creation manifested the image of God through their “moral image,” through their “freedom,” and by an “intellect” that formed the “rational personality” in “human beings” (Menzies & Horton, 1993:85,87). As Arminian scholar Forlines (2011:6) noted, “in his totality, man is a thinking, feeling, acting being. He thinks with his mind, feels with his heart, and acts with his will.” The father of Arminian ideas, Jacob Arminius (1996:362-363), spoke clearly of mankind’s created image that reflected God through rational capabilities that surfaced through the mental apprehension, “understanding,” and through an act or “mode of liberty” in the “will.”

All of those ideas related to God’s creation, mankind as a reflection of God’s image, and God’s rule and government both over and within his creation, exist in Geisler’s theology. No stark difference or contrast exists in this field. The one issue, as noted earlier, in Geisler’s emphasis or nuance in regard to omnisapience may, however, find more continuity here with the Arminian views than the Calvinistic views. The omnisapience view of Geisler and Arminius’ discussion of providence exercised through wisdom may in subsequent sections yield more affinity to one another and less with Calvinistic models. However, conclusions must wait for further analysis in subsequent doctrinal sections.

CHAPTER 5:

THE ORIGIN OF SIN AND ITS EXTENT AND EFFECT ON CREATION

5.1 THE FIRST SINS IN THE UNIVERSE AND FALL OF MANKIND

In an effort to analyze, understand, and compare Norman Geisler's claim to moderate Calvinism one can trace his theology through his sublapsarian decree order paradigm. In the prior chapter, however, one aspect of his theological model came to the forefront. Geisler rejected the standard eternal decree model and instead articulated an *operational* model. He set forth the decree order in relation to how it unfolds in actual earthly history. His order remains virtually the same as the standard sublapsarian decree though framed differently by placing it in an earthly chronological order.

Therefore, the next decree within a moderate Calvinist order pertains to God's choice to place the fall after the decree to create. However, as noted earlier, supralapsarian theologians place the order to elect or not elect first and then the decree to create. Infralapsarians and sublapsarians place the decree to create first. All three models have in third place the fall of mankind, whether by election (Supralapsarianism) or permitted (both infralapsarianism and sublapsarianism).

Geisler's perspective on how sin developed and its impact on the nature and the will of mankind will offer additional evidence as to how much continuity he has or does not have with the various Calvinistic soteriology models. The Calvinistic schools of thought and Arminian/Wesleyan schools of thought have voluminous amounts of material related to humanity's fall and its consequences. A key matter that almost always divides the higher form of Calvinism from the lower forms, and even the Arminian/Wesleyan position from the Calvinistic versions, relates to the active or permissive aspect of God's decree.

5.2 THE ORIGIN OF SIN IN HISTORY AND ADAM

Orthodox Christianity or evangelical Christianity has universally confessed from the earliest of its history that God has no sin in him, in his actions, and that sin had a beginning exterior to God himself. The doctrine of sin has an essential "applicational sense" to the doctrine of the gospel (Hannah, 2001:201). In contrast to Zoroastrianism that affirms the eternal dualism of a "good God and a wicked devil fighting against one another" (Hume, 1959:211), historic Christianity has asserted the exact opposite view—that only God existed prior to a good and holy creation (Geisler, 2004:80). Geisler's succinct explanation of the origin of the universe, its original state,

and the subsequent development of sin captures the overall essence of his view. He stated (Geisler, 2004:80-81):

According to theism, God is absolutely perfect, and he freely created the world; knowing that evil would arise, he made the world anyway. If God is perfect, and if the world he made is not eternal but was made perfect, from whence did evil come? The response of theism consists in pointing out several basic facts. God cannot produce or promote evil; he can only permit it. Nevertheless, since he is all-powerful, he can both defeat evil and also bring about a greater good when he allows it.

In general, Geisler's view that sin originated from created beings and not from God has been articulated by both the Calvinistic and Arminian/Wesleyan streams. Some particular differences do exist, as will be examined more closely in this chapter. Nonetheless, substantial agreement exists in the various schools of thought that sin has a beginning from the creation itself.

5.2.1 The Three Calvinistic Schools of Thought on Sin's Origin

Theologians sometimes admit the challenge and difficulty in explaining the origin of sin when they embrace the concepts of God's total sovereignty over all, his perfect holiness, and perfect love, which means sin cannot arise from his good nature. Calvinist theologian Charles Hodge (1995:1:429) stated that the issue of a theologian seeking to harmonize the problem of evil with the benevolent goodness of God in light of his knowledge and power has "tried the faith of men in all ages of the world". Moderate Calvinist theologian Millard J. Erickson has noted as well that this struggle exists and has theological landmines associated with it. He noted that the issue remains a "severe problem," and that it may even be the "most severe of all the intellectual problems facing theism" (Erickson, 1985:414). Some theologians even think that the way some Calvinist scholars explain the matter places them in contradictions that compel the Calvinist to cover their contradictions with the term "mystery" (Keathley, 2010:14).

5.2.2 The Supralapsarian and High Calvinistic School of Thought on Sin's Origin

Various high Calvinists offer ideas on how sin originated in God's universe. Usually, these theologians classify themselves as supralapsarian Calvinists. However, some may not use that exact term while still identifying with the ideology generally associated with this stream of theology. This school has the strongest emphasis on God's immutability and efficaciousness to his decrees. Yet many, but certainly not all, make an effort to place sin's origin in and from created beings while trying to avoid the idea that God authored sin.

Herman Hoeksema (2004:1:236), a representative of supralapsarian Calvinism, rejected any form of eternal dualism as an explanation for sin (2004:1:351). He placed sin as originating in history through the angelic realm and with Adam and Eve (Hoeksema, 2004:1:353). Satan fell at some point in heaven and then appeared as the first tempter to Adam and Eve, leading them astray into the first sin of humanity (Hoeksema, 2004:1:360-364).

However, Hoeksema did not accept the permissive decree as an explanation of how sin originated in actual history. Some supralapsarian theologians make an effort to distance themselves to a degree from the permissive decree idea while still asserting that sin begins in actual angelic and human history. Hoeksema (2004:1:226) argued that when referencing the “sinful deeds of men and devils” theologians should not do so from the perspective “only of God’s permission” but “also of his determination.” This determination means that sin in time and history “should come to pass” because “the counsel of God is immutable” (Hoeksema, 2004:1:227). The agencies of history, in this supralapsarian scheme, fulfill the eternal decree as they work outwardly and author sin that God determined in eternity.

This emphasis on immutability, and not a permissive type of decree or determination which does not make God the author of sin, sometimes leads to some ambiguous answers in the supralapsarian position on sin’s origin. Hoeksema does not specifically answer this common dilemma. He makes assertions regarding God’s universal control and also humanity’s total accountability for originating sin. He discusses actual sin arising from Satan, who led the “rebellion originally instigated in heaven among the angels,” and that this was Satan’s own “fall and corruption” (Hoeksema, 2004:1:356). The same thought exists in his perspective on Adam’s fall, which “was entirely contingent upon the free will of Adam” (Hoeksema, 2004:1:334).

Nonetheless, having placed the origination of sin in both Satan and Adam, and the emphasis resting upon Adam for sin’s occurrence, Hoeksema still asserted that mankind was only the “second cause” of sin (Hoeksema, 2004:1:330). However, that “second cause is not sovereign, not even in man’s thinking and willing, and not even when he sins” (Hoeksema, 2004:1:330). After citing numerous verses of scripture related to God’s work with sin in the universe (Ex. 4:21; Rom. 9:18; Isa. 63:17; 2 Sam. 16; 1 Sam. 2:25; Amos 3:6; Acts 2:23 and 4:24-28) Hoeksema (2004:1:331) summarized the providence of God this way: “Surely, the Scriptures teach very plainly that the Lord, although he certainly is not the author of sin, nevertheless controls absolutely all wicked deeds of evil men.”

Geerhardus Vos, a supralapsarian (Olinger, 2016), explained that “the origin of the first sin in Adam” constitutes an “unsolvable problem” (Vos, 2012-2014:1:88). Vos felt the tension by his own admission. He appealed to mystery in this area (Vos, 2012-2014:1:88): “We must say that

the relationship of God's decree to the first free sin is also inexplicable. One thing is certain: Sin, as far as its reality is concerned, did not come from God, although it receives its certainty from God's decree."

Yet in the end, even as a supralapsarian theologian, he adopted some type of permissive decree as a means to protect God's holiness. He affirmed that the "permissive decree is no less a certain decree than any other", and that "by permitting sin in his decree God remains completely free of any wrong" (Vos, 2012-2014:1:96). Vos had a serious concern about equating God's decree and providence so tightly to God's nature that it could lead to pantheistic views. Of this concern he said that if God is "made the doer of all doing, then one must also go a step further and make him the being of all being" and that places one "extremely close to idealism and pantheism" (Vos, 2012-2014:1:189).

Supralapsarian Robert Reymond also affirmed a comprehensive decree over all matters in the universe while unequivocally asserting that "whatever sinfulness ensues proceeds only from men and angels and not from God" (Reymond, 1998:373). He held simultaneously to the view that God decreed mankind's each and every action and idea while also asserting that people commit sin through their own freedom and personal determination (Reymond, 1998:373,375). Through secondary causes God's decree with sin occurs through created beings so that God is not "the author of sin" (Reymond, 1998:374-375). Yet, when contemplating the question of whether Adam could have done differently (not chosen to sin), Reymond (1998:374) maintained that "from the viewpoint of the divine decree, the answer is no".

Other high Calvinists, however, have not been as nuanced, guarded, or as willing to walk the theological tightrope in an effort to maintain the two theological poles of God's comprehensive determination of all matters and human freedom of determination as a substantive and sufficient source for sin's origin. For example, R.C. Sproul Jr. (Sproul, 1999:43-51), after examining various possible reasons as to how sin developed in Eve's heart in Eden, argued that the "culprit" was "God" as he "introduced evil into his world". As if he were examining a crime scene, Sproul Jr. (Sproul, 1999:52) placed God at the scene (for he is omnipresent), acknowledged that God had the means through his power (omnipotence) for the changing of "Eve's inclination," and a "motive" in altering her good inclinations as he wanted Eve to fall into sin.

Sproul Jr. took a step here that his father, Sproul Sr., did not take and even rejected. R.C. Sproul Sr. stated that Adam and Eve did not have a sinful human nature and they were creatures with free will. When pondering God's sovereignty, his holiness that cannot tempt or lead one into sin, and human free will of self-determination, Sproul Sr. (Sproul, 1986:31) said he did not know why they chose to sin. He rejected the idea that God could be the culprit of their

sin as Sproul Jr. argued. Directly in opposition to that, Sproul Sr. (Sproul, 1986:31) stated that such an idea, that God caused their sin or any sin, was “absolutely unthinkable”. Sproul Sr. (Sproul, 1986:31) said that he did not know how sin originated and he admitted he had at that time not found anyone who did know. In his effort to explain the origin of sin in Adam and Eve he adopted the permissive view of God’s sovereignty. In his view God’s foreordination of all events, including sin’s entrance into the world, means that “God must have decided to allow it to happen.” Several times in his explanation Sproul Sr. used the term God “allowed” sin to enter into the world. Sproul Sr. summarized his position (Sproul, 1999:32), “The fact that God decided to allow us to sin does not absolve us from our responsibility for sin.”

High Calvinists and supralapsarian Calvinists wrestle with the best way to explain how a holy God and responsible beings created without sin could initially sin. Some of them adopt the idea that God decreed to permit these first sins to enter into the universe. Though they still place the decree to elect and reprobate prior to sin, and then see subsequent actions in the decree as the outworking of the first decree to elect and damn, they usually make efforts to reject the idea that God authored sin. Some, of course, claim that these assertions constitute clear contradictions that highlight the irrationality of their view. Calvinist scholar R.L. Dabney (1996:233), though not much of a supporter for any lapsarian view, thought the supralapsarian decree model “misrepresents the divine character and the facts of Scripture in a repulsive manner.”

5.2.3 The Infralapsarian and Sublapsarian Calvinistic School of Thought on Sin’s Origin

The lower Calvinistic soteriology models, infralapsarians and sublapsarians, have a different placement for the decree of sin than the supralapsarians. In contrast to supralapsarians, these two models place the decree for sin to enter into the world after the decree of creation. Neither place election nor reprobation prior to the fall. Furthermore, in general these two decree order models have an emphatic stance on the permission doctrine for how sin entered into God’s universe. Though some supralapsarians have used the permission doctrine as to how sin arose in Satan and the Edenic parents, the way the subsequent decrees unfold under the first decree may possibly undermine the permission idea to explain sin’s initial entrance into the universe. The infralapsarians and sublapsarians see an asymmetrical relationship between decrees for the good and the decree for sin and evil. These ideas were summarized well by Louis Berkhof (2017:90) when he said,

There is some difference of emphasis ... Supralapsarians (with few exceptions) are willing to admit that the decree relative to sin is permissive, but hasten to add that it nevertheless makes the entrance of sin into the world a certainty. And infralapsarians (with few exceptions) will

admit that sin is included in God's decree, but hasten to add that the decree, in so far as it pertains to sin, is permissive rather than positive. The former occasionally over-emphasize the positive element in the decree respecting sin, and thus expose themselves to the charge that they make God the author of sin.

In the prior quote, Berkhof mentioned only infralapsarians. But the same principle applies also to sublapsarians because they too align with the infralapsarians in the first two points of the decree order—creation and then a permission of the fall. In these two schools of thought there are two key aspects. First, both models place the decree for sin's entrance into the world after the creation of mankind and before the decree to elect. This avoids the idea that the fall into sin must of necessity occur because a people or status of reprobation already exists, that other decrees must work out through a necessary set of beings sinning to consequently experience reprobation. As R.L. Dabney (1996:233) voiced in his objection to the supralapsarian scheme, it makes "creation a means of their salvation or damnation."

Second, these models accept a decree of divine permission in contrast to an active decree that has a positive efficacy. In other words, sin occurs through a permissive decree while goodness occurs through an active or efficacious decree. Infralapsarian theologians John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue (2017:505) explain this as an asymmetrical decree. They mean that God works actively in one decree and permissively in another decree.

For example, when speaking of the doctrine of sin within a Calvinistic context, infralapsarian theologian William G.T. Shedd (2003:318, 340) noted that the "permissive decree relates only to moral evil." In relation to the fall of mankind this decree order does not have a fall occurring in order to fulfill the necessity of having some reprobated in sin. Shedd argued that the decree to create mankind holy and then to permit and allow him to fall preserves the integrity of God's holiness and mankind's responsibility. He stated of this decree order, "preterition supposes the free fall of man and his responsibility for the existence of sin" (Shedd, 2003:340).

Sublapsarians explain this matter in the same way as do the infralapsarians. Sin occurs in the decree order after the decree of God to create mankind in a holy and sinless condition. God does not cause Satan or Adam to sin. Sin originates in the creatures through an act of their own self-determination. God's overarching decree remains holistic for all of God's created order. Sublapsarian Lewis Chafer (1993:1:232) stated the holistic nature of the decree:

Whatever was to transpire in time was decreed from eternity, whether good or evil, whether great or small, whether wrought directly by God or indirectly through agencies. The decree itself provided for the free actions of creatures ... Regarding that which is good in

contradistinction to that which is evil, a discrimination is usually made: the one being by divine appointment and the other by divine permission.

Likewise, other moderates or sublapsarians explain this permissive decree as the root or origin of sin in the universe. Sin arose from God's will of permission and not from his will of causation. God caused creation to occur. He permitted, however, sin to occur in the divine order of decrees. Moderate Calvinist Floyd Barackman (1998:507) said, "this permission is not causation." God's decree for it to occur means that in "his permissive decree God chose to allow sin to come into existence" (Barackman, 1998:73). This differs from the supralapsarian position that asserts God caused the fall into sin. The sublapsarians align with the infralapsarians in making an effort to insert permission into the divine plan so that God does not author and cause sin in the universe. Barackman (1998:292-293), more of a sublapsarian theologian, held that God decreed for angels and humans to have a will and probationary period in his divine order that allowed them to author and create sin by their own wills.

5.2.4 The Arminian/Wesleyan School of Thought on Sin's Origin

This tradition of theology has some consensus too as to the origin of sin. Both Arminius and Wesley, and subsequently their followers, have stressed that created beings birthed sin into this universe. Arminius (1986:2:150-152) placed the blame for the first sins of the world on both the Devil and Adam and Eve in the Garden when tempted by the Devil through the serpent. In his view God did not cause, predestine, or work in any way to make sin certain or a necessity. Specifically, Arminius (1986:2:716) asserted that "Adam did not fall through the decree of God, neither through being ordained to fall nor through desertion, but through the mere permission of God". Wesley also placed the origin of sin in the hearts of Satan and Adam. In the late 1750s he focused on this doctrine and preached his position on the origin of sin (Outler & Heitzenrater, 1991:325). Specifically, Wesley said (Wesley, 1991:330), "Satan has stamped his own image on our heart in self-will also." In one sentence Wesley placed the origin of sin in both Satan and humanity and connected it to pride and selfishness.

That thought by Arminius has consistently been followed by the Arminian/Wesleyan scholarship down through the five centuries. Sin originates from creation and places people in a lost condition needing divine grace for redemption. J. Rodman Williams (1996:225), an Arminian, follows the same line of thinking as did Arminius in teaching that Satan and humans were the original authors of sin and in that order. Additionally, Thomas Oden (2012:157-159), a modern Wesleyan who often wrote to preserve Wesley's original views, retained the same line of thinking as did Wesley in asserting that sin began with the pride of the angelic spirits and in

humans who both exercised their God-given liberty against the design and purpose of their Creator God.

5.2.5 Norman Geisler's Thoughts on Sin's Origin

Geisler gave an extensive treatment of this subject in his book *The Roots of Evil*. Additionally, this researcher attended the last class that Geisler taught prior to his death, *The Problem of Evil*, taught at Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina, and received from Geisler helpful insights into his perspective on the origin of evil. Some of what he taught from that class he also shared and wrote in his article, "God, Evil, and the Dispensations".

First, Geisler noted a classic syllogism some use to explain the origin of evil. He described one view using this three-point syllogism: "God is the author of everything in the world. Evil is something in the world. Therefore, God is the author of evil" (Geisler, 1978:45). Geisler rejected this syllogism and specifically thought the second premise had a serious flaw. He noted too that, for theists who affirm a good God who exists as the source of all good, this God "cannot also be the fountainhead of evil" (Geisler, 1978:45).

To explain an alternative view Geisler closely followed the lead of Augustine. The solution that Geisler (1978:46) found in Augustine related to the view that sin is "not a thing or a substance," but instead "it is a privation or lack in things." Therefore, it does not follow logically that "God created evil" (Geisler, 1978:46). The corruption of originally good things occurred through that which was created doing something to negate or corrupt the good that God made (Geisler, 1978:46-47). Through the "free choice" of those that God created, sin arose, as through "that freedom," the capability existed for the "actualizing of evil" (Geisler, 1978:48). Satan, originally created as Lucifer, "sinned and rebelled against God (1 Tim. 3:6), leading to one-third of the angels with him (Rev. 12:4)" (Geisler, 2011:660). Satan, who was in a perfect environment in heaven, sinned and it "arose from Lucifer's free will" (Geisler, 2011:660). Geisler (2011:807) thought Ezekiel 28 spoke of Satan inspiring the prince of Tyre, viewing that text as an allusion to the origin of Satan and his sin occurring through pride.

5.3 THE NATURE OF SIN

What is sin? Calvinist Charles Hodge (1995:2:130) said the issue that question presents is one of the most difficult in theology. When one determines what constitutes the essence of sin, then one has defined the nature of sin. The core or nature or essence of sin relates to the underlying principle. To examine this principle, it helps to examine the very first sin scripture. From that first sin subsequent sins developed in the universe. Therefore, believers can gain some

enlightenment on the essence of sin by examining the foundational or first sin in God's universe. All other sins seemingly have their origin in the original sin.

5.3.1 The Nature of Sin as Described by Calvinists

Calvin described sin through the idea of pride. Calvin (1960:1:245) followed Augustine's thought: "pride was the beginning of all evils." This constituted the essence or chief principle of sin. Additionally, Calvin's (1998:84) comment in his commentary on 1 Timothy 3:6 reveals his view that the sin that began with the devil was related to his pride.

Calvinists after Calvin, in all of the various shades, have asserted the essential nature of sin relates to pride and self-love over and above love for God and his law. John Gill (1980:6:602) in the 1700s, a high Calvinist, thought that the first sin in the universe occurred through an act of "pride" from the "devil." Jonathan Edwards also thought the original sin in Lucifer that set the foundation for all future sins related to pride. At least three times in his analysis of the first sin he described Lucifer's sin as one that developed from "pride"; this led to a rebellion by the devil and some angels seeking "their own honour" (Edwards, 2000b:2:607, 608, 610, 612).

The eighth president of Yale University and conservative Calvinist Timothy Dwight also taught that sin had a deep root and relation to pride in the desire to take over one's life and direction independently of God (Clouse, 2001:359). He believed that the rebellion of both the devil and the companions who followed him against the Lord related to the first sin of pride (Dwight, 1836:108). This pride that constituted the first sin in the universe meant that the devil and angels "rose up in rebellion against their Creator" (Dwight, 1836:109).

However, not all Calvinists have been so certain as Dwight on this matter. Charles Hodge did agree the original angels were sinless. As Hodge said (Hodge, 1995:1:643), "Their original condition was holy." But when trying to give a certain answer as to the nature of the sin of Satan and the angels who sinned with him, Hodge (1995:1:643) asserted that "the nature of their sin is not revealed." Yet even after suggesting it had not been revealed, he seemed to accept the general consensus within Christianity. He noted (1995:1:643) that "the general opinion is that it was pride, founded on 1 Tim. iii 6."

Moderate Calvinist Larry Richards, however, thought a clear connection existed between Satan's first sin and the first human sin. He too thought that pride led to the rebellion of Satan and the angels who became demons. Rebellion against the law of God, either in omission or commission, arises from love toward God turning to love of self, a prideful focus. Satan's "inner corruption," he said, has been revealed by scripture through the terms "of a pride that stimulates violence and rebellion" (Richards, 1998:7). In his view this pride manifests itself in the choice

and desire and action to rule oneself independently of God (Richards, 1998:8). This root sin of pride established a pattern: Satan tempted Eve and then Adam through Eve. Satan fell through pride and works in history to attack God's creatures to lead them to sin as he sinned. Satan works to appeal to a person's pride and to one's desire to be independent (Richards, 1998:10). Richards saw a connection between the first sin of humanity and the first sin of Satan. He said (Richards, 1998:9), "underlying the rebellion of both Satan and Eve was a desire for independence from God."

Calvinistic theologian Robert Pyne (1999:207) has argued that sin has the unifying principle of "prideful rebellion." This view closely resembles a similar idea expressed by A.H. Strong. For Strong, sin is related to the matter of pride for self, a turning from focus on God to focus on oneself. He stated, "the essential principle of sin" is "selfishness" (Strong, 1907:567). Pyne (1999:209) summarized the nature of sin very well when he said this:

Sin is always directed against God ... We oppose God in the name of self-interest, so pride has often been identified as the essence of sin. Sinful pride causes us to exalt ourselves rather than God. We rebel against his will by pursuing our own, we defend that rebellion through self-justification, and we seek independent freedom when he calls us to dependent faith. Sin is always against the purposes of God and the interests of other people, supporting only the twisted interests of self.

Moderate Calvinist Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum also explained that the first sin in the universe related to the sin of pride and focus on oneself. In his view Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 explain the nature of the first sin. He said that Lucifer focused on his "wisdom, beauty, power, and authority" and from that it "led to the rise of pride" (Fruchtenbaum, 2020:532). "Satan" committed this first sin and "the first sin ever was the sin of pride" (Fruchtenbaum, 2020:532).

5.3.2 The Nature of Sin as Described by Arminian/Wesleyans and Non-Calvinists

Arminian scholars vary somewhat on this matter. Some hardly touch the topic of Satan's first sin and its nature. For example, Charles Carrin does not think Scripture explains the nature of the first angelic sin. In his view "scripture is silent" on the nature of sin that "originated in him" (Carrin, 2017:159). Also, William Menzies and Stanley Horton (1993:97-88) do not give much detail on the origin Satan's first sin. However, they have discussed briefly sin of Adam and Eve. In their brief discussion of Adam they spoke of how sin developed "in the free choice of God's creatures", but not so much on the nature of that sin or the essence of what constituted that sin (Menzies & Horton, 1993:88).

Others, however, have shed some additional perspectives on this matter. Wesleyan scholar Charles Carter has admitted something similar to what Charles Hodge stated about the question of sin and evil. He noted that this question about evil is a “universal, vexing, and enigmatic” one (Carter, 1983:237). In his view this issue has “perplexed the minds of men and women from the greatest to the least throughout human history” (Carter, 1983:237). His colleague, Wayne E. Caldwell (1983:1072), thought that the first sin in Satan occurred through the sin of “envy” or “pride”. From that rebellion and his downfall he set himself on a course to destroy believers (Caldwell, 1983:1073). Satan then acted in Eden and “greatly intensified” the temptation of Eve and Adam “to disobey God” (Carter, 1983:249). Satan tempted Adam and Eve in a way that connected them to his own act of sin and rebellion by enticing them to “an individual drive towards self-expression”, which is another way of referring to self-focus or pride of life disconnected from the Lord’s design for them (Carter, 1983:249). This act of desire and “personal pride” in Eve replaced “faith and obedience to God” in this “temptation drama” where “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life (1 John 2:16; cf. James 1:13-15)” led Eve and Adam to travel a path of sin as did Satan (Carter, 1983:252). Adam and Eve followed Satan as their new head. The nature of their sin, pride, reflected the same nature of Satan’s sin.

Another charismatic scholar from the Arminian tradition, J. Rodman Williams, has held that Satan’s sin and the first parental sins in Eden were related to pride and a self-focus instead of a focus on God. In examining the origin of sin and the nature of those sins in the angelic and human realms, Williams expressed the view that at the heart of these sins unbelief and pride mixed together to form the rebellion against God. He said (Williams, 1996:225) that with Satan’s sin “the picture suggests pride to be at the center of it.” Following the commonly cited verse in 1 Timothy 3:6, Williams (1996:225) thought the angelic rebellion in heaven prior to Adam and Eve’s sin led to the angelic host’s fall with Satan as the “head” of those who followed him. Satan then duplicated his sin scenario as he led the first parents into a similar sin against God. Williams taught (1996:233) that through unbelief and pride Satan tempted Eve to follow his path, so that she would “pridefully exalt herself to the place of God.” Williams (1996:233-234) cited several OT and NT texts (Psalm 10:4; Prov. 16:18; Isaiah 2:11; Amos 6:8; Zech. 10:11; Obadiah 1:3-4; Matt. 11:23; Luke 10:15; Matt. 11:29; and Phil. 2:6-8) that he believes establishes pride as a key element in the nature or root of sin. In similar language as that used by A.H. Strong about selfishness, Williams (1996:235) classified pride as “selfish desire” that led the first parents into their sin. He summarized the “very nature of sin” stating that “a lack of love toward God is the heart of all sin” that manifests itself in “disbelieving his word” and “pridefully placing oneself above God” by “disobeying his commandments” (Williams, 1996:243).

Henry C. Thiessen, a long-time professor of Dallas Theological Seminary in Texas, did not embrace the normal Calvinistic theology that generally existed among that seminary's Calvinists, who mostly held to a moderate or Amyraldian form of Calvinism. Though some, like Walter A. Elwell (2001:1193), classify Thiessen as "moderately reformed", that seems incorrect. Thiessen's work in its original form embraced prescient and conditional election. Thiessen rejected unconditional election and embraced the Arminian/Wesleyan view of foresight election. He taught that "in election God has decided to save those who accept his Son" (Thiessen, 1949:345).

He rejected the idea that election and predestination were "unconditional and absolute" (Thiessen, 1949:349). In all three lapsarian forms of Calvinistic thought, as explained in Chapter Two of this research, some type of unconditional election exists where the lost person does not contribute to that election. In 1979, Vernon D. Doerksen revised Thiessen's (1979:257-266) work and in that revision set forth a view of unconditional election in contrast to Thiessen's original view of foresight election.

That change from Thiessen's original writing may be why Elwell mistakenly thought Thiessen was a moderate Calvinist. It would be difficult, however, to easily classify him within the Calvinistic stream, as all lapsarian forms of Calvinistic thought embrace some type of election not ultimately rooted or based upon prescience and human faith. Election has to be rooted in eternity and not grounded in humans for it to be some type of Calvinistic thought.

Thiessen examined the origin and nature of sin through the first sin in the universe with Satan. As he stated (Thiessen, 1949:196), "evil originated in heaven and not on earth." He believed that God created Satan holy, free from sin, and with desires aligned towards God his creator. But (Thiessen, 1949:196) through a "choice of self" that preferred self over God, Satan with "undue ambition and the desire to surpass God" led him and the other angels with him to their fall. Thiessen also used 1 Timothy 3:6, which discusses pride and selfish ambition, as a text applicable to this situation. Though he did recognize that "deep" mystery existed in this area, his explanation overall aligns with the common theme that pride, selfishness, and a will of self-focus led to the fall of Satan and the demons. He also agreed that Satan tempted the first parents to act like he did in the fall. Thiessen followed A.H. Strong's view on the nature of Adam and Eve's sin. They acted through a "free act" that desired to place "self" as "supreme" (Thiessen, 1949:248). Therefore, the nature of the sin in both Satan and the first parents related to pride, focus on self, and some type of independent desire.

A contemporary of Thiessen, H.A. Ironside, also believed the nature of the first sin of the universe developed from the root of pride. Ironside earned the name, "Archbishop of

Fundamentalism” because of his wide influence (Gloege, 2003:325). As an evangelist and seasoned pastor in the famous Moody Church of Chicago, and through his publishing efforts of over 50 books that sold over one million copies, Ironside had an “extensive influence” (Gloege, 2003:325-326). He rejected the Calvinistic position on sovereign unconditional election and instead embraced foresight election, in which God and the devil both made a choice (election) and the person’s will to believe or not believe formed the final determinative status of the person (Ironside, 1981:29-30).

When examining the nature of the first sin in the universe, Ironside believed Ezekiel described this situation with the fall of Satan in Ezekiel 28:11-19. Ironside (1949:191) noted that this passage explained the “original condition and fall of Satan himself”. Satan’s fall occurred through a sin that was rooted in pride. Ironside (1949:193) said, “It was pride that turned an archangel into a devil.” For Ironside, the first sin expressed itself through pride and self-focus and this led to mankind’s demise as well.

5.3.3 The Nature of Sin as Described by Norman Geisler

As briefly mentioned in section 5.2.5 on Geisler’s position on the origin of sin, he affirmed, as numerous theologians from both traditions have, that the root of sin related to the pride that Lucifer exhibited in his rebellion against God. Geisler did not spend much time expressing how one solitary sin such as pride relates to all of the sins that flow from it. He listed a variety of major sins he found in scripture. He noted scripture highlights sin as acts of omission, commission, rebellion, transgression, evil, wickedness, and unbelief. He listed (Geisler, 2004:101) a variety of specific sins: “pride, deceit, murder, plotting evil, quickness to do wrong, false testimony, and troublemaking.” However, brief as it may be, he did affirm that all sin arises from the chief sin of pride. Pride characterizes the essence or nature of all sin. As Geisler (2004:104) stated, “at the root of *all* sin is pride, which was the evil that prompted Lucifer’s rebellion against God.” In his view (Geisler, 2004:105) pride forms a base to the two other most fundamental sins, the “lust of the flesh, and lust of the eyes”.

5.4 THE EFFECTS AND EXTENT OF SIN

The three types of Calvinistic soteriologies have some differences in how they explain the impact or effect of sin. Though all of them agree on the universal extent in that sin touches every human, they have some variation in views of the degree of damage that sin does to each person. In this area some notable differences occur even among those who claim a Calvinistic stance in soteriology. Some of these differences can be seen in the way the formal Reformed confessions expressed their views on these matters (Cochrane, 1966:11-220).

5.4.1 Supralapsarians on the Extent and Effect of Sin

Supralapsarian theologians affirm with all orthodox believers that sin touches each and every person of the human race. No human experiences conception or birth without having been impacted by the sin passed down from Adam onward. A key to the universality of sin relates to patriarchy, the headship of Adam over the human race. Supralapsarian William Ames (1968:114) stated that because all were created in Adam and because he functioned as the “root and head,” all experience a fall into sin. Likewise, contemporary supralapsarian Robert Reymond (1998:438) sees the headship of Adam as the unifying link to the universality of sin. He noted that “God imputed to the race” the “guilt” and “corruption” from Adam’s sin.

When discussing the effect this sin has upon all of humanity, supralapsarian theologians more often than not, if not virtually in all cases, adopt a view of depravity they define as total depravity that renders people totally unable to respond to any grace of the Lord without divine grace to effect the response. The key words used by this tier of Calvinistic theologians to describe the effects on the sinner are “total inability.” These high Calvinists, or to use Geisler’s term, extreme Calvinists, describe the human mind and heart as totally dead (unable to act) in sin. As described by David Engelsma (2014:79-80), these people have “not the least ability to heed the call” of the gospel. Engelsma, as a supralapsarian, believes that God has actively designated some for grace and some for damnation and therefore when those prepared for damnation hear the gospel they have no ability (total inability) to believe. In his words, when hearing the gospel call “it was totally impossible for them to do what the call required” (Engelsma, 2014:80). This is so because in his decree model sinners are reprobated in the first decree position. As he noted (Engelsma, 2014:82), “God’s purpose with the call to those he has not elected is not their salvation but their damnation.”

That position by Engelsma seems to differ from the way those at the Synod of Dort described the matter. In Article V the Dort confession stated that “the cause or guilt of this unbelief, as well as all other sins, is nowise in God, but in man himself” (Schaff, 1988:3:581). The damnation or sin of unbelief according to Dort happened through mankind “abusing the freedom of his own will” (Schaff, 1988:3:587-588).

The idea of total inability due to sin and God’s universal hatred and lack of any love for the non-elect permeates the extreme or high Calvinist models. Other supralapsarian theologians describe the human condition in that way too. Geerhardus Vos spoke regularly of mankind’s total inability to do any spiritual good when describing sin’s impact upon all of mankind. In his description of mankind’s moral and natural ability Vos (2014:2:58-62) used the terms “inability”, “spiritually incapable”, “moral inability”, “spiritual inability”, and “total inability”. By these terms

Vos taught that sinful mankind could not in any sense desire, recognize, or move towards God or the truth. The non-elect, those designed for damnation, deserve judgment even though these people have responsibility that “is not limited by inability” (Vos, 2014:2:62). In other words (Vos, 2014:2:62), even if someone cannot do anything but reject God, the gospel, and truth, this does not excuse the person for their sin and rejection and the consequent condemnation.

Robert Reymond also uses the term “total inability” to describe the condition of mankind. Without irresistible grace, which occurs only for the elect, the non-elect have zero ability to do any spiritual good. Reymond (1998:453) stated that “man is totally or pervasively corrupt, he is incapable of changing his character or of acting in a way that is distinct from his corruption.” The condition of mankind in sin, says Reymond (1998:453), and especially the non-elect who will never experience anything other than this condition, leaves mankind in a position where they are “unable to discern, to love, or to choose the things that are pleasing to God.” In relation to the gospel call this total inability leaves people condemned before God even if they have no innate ability or awareness of their sin that has so disabled them. As Reymond (1998:454) stated, “God deals with man according to his obligation, not to the measure of his ability.”

5.4.2 Infralapsarians on the Extent and Effect of Sin

When infralapsarians describe the human condition, they usually adopt positions and language very similar to the supralapsarian position. Sometimes they use the term “total depravity” rather than “total inability”. But some use those terms in a synonymous manner. They both affirm that sin has touched every person of the human race because of Adam’s headship. Furthermore, infralapsarians believe that irresistible grace must occur so that people will exercise faith in Christ. The differences among the infralapsarians tend to be more about the degree to which common grace impacts mankind. The infralapsarians generally accept the doctrine of some common grace while still holding firmly to total depravity and the consequent need for irresistible grace to overcome that depravity. Norman Geisler described these infralapsarian theologians as strong Calvinists, one step below the supralapsarian extreme Calvinists.

Lorraine Boettner serves as an example of a strong infralapsarian Calvinist who retains the idea of total inability. However, he does admit that some virtue can exist in mankind even though he retains the language of total inability. Of man’s total inability he said (Boettner, 1932:61), “this doctrine of total inability” does not “mean that all men are equally as bad,” nor does it mean that everyone is “entirely destitute of virtue”. Positively he wrote that it does mean that each person “rests under the curse of sin” and that in this sinful condition mankind is “wholly unable to love God or to do anything meriting salvation” (Boettner, 1932:61). Mankind’s condition in his thought

(Boettner, 1932:61) has an “extensive” level of corruption, but this corruption is not “necessarily intensive.”

Boettner (1932:62) explained further that though mankind is “free” it does not mean that he can “originate the love of God in his heart.” Mankind is like a bird with a broken wing, he is “free to fly but not able,” and therefore mankind has the “natural” freedom “to come to God” yet he is still “not able” because he is broken in depravity (Boettner, 1932:62). Yet this does not totally exclude some goodness from common grace that all people exhibit. Common goodness in the unregenerate (Boettner, 1932:61) “are but as plucked and fading flowers.” These virtues arise and in one sense are good but in the unregenerate nature they “are only temporary.”

John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, two infralapsarian theologians, do not differ very much from how Boettner explained the effect sin has on humanity. Though they use the term “total depravity” in their presentation heading to describe mankind’s sin problem, the idea still conveys total inability. They admit that “unbelievers can do good things for society”, but man is also “fully corrupt,” and that corruption extends to every person so deeply that it impacts “all of man’s thinking, reason, desires, and affections” (MacArthur & Mayhue, 2017:467). In essence this means that mankind suffers from the “complete inability” to “please God” (MacArthur & Mayhue, 2017:468). This impact and universal effect upon all of mankind consequently means that a person must experience irresistible sovereign grace to experience salvation. As they stated (MacArthur & Mayhue, 2017:468),

Therefore, man’s spiritual state is not one of relative neutrality, in which he is able to accept or reject God and his gospel. He is an active hater of God (Rom. 8:7) who cannot accept spiritual truth (1 Cor. 2:14). The total depravity of man demonstrates the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation. Man can do nothing. God must accomplish all as a gift of sovereign grace.

When they speak of “sovereign grace” one must understand their definitions. They define sovereign grace as a “sovereignly efficacious call, inherently powerful to overcome the effects of depravity and to bring them to repentance and saving faith” (MacArthur & Mayhue, 2017:576). This type of effectual or irresistible grace has to occur because mankind in his natural condition of sin remains in “spiritual death,” i.e., he is a “spiritual corpse, entirely unresponsive to the spiritual truth proclaimed in the external call of the gospel” (MacArthur & Mayhue, 2017:576).

5.4.2.1 Common Grace and Some Universal Love to All in Infralapsarianism

However, MacArthur, in contrast to the way some extreme or supralapsarian Calvinists describe God’s love, does retain the idea that God has a genuine love for all people. He divides God’s

love into eternal and temporal types of love. This will be covered in more detail in Chapter Six when examining Christ's work of redemption. But briefly, here it will suffice to show that some differentiation exists in the way God relates to totally depraved humanity. Some of the major supralapsarian theologians reject the common grace ideology and assert that mankind's total depravity/inability means mankind is designed (actively so by the first decree) for wrath and judgment. But infralapsarians insert into the equation some level of grace upon the sinners so that even while in sin they do receive some form of goodness upon them. However, that grace is restricted or structured in such a way that it has no relation to the special efficacious work of sovereign grace that overcomes the sinner's depravity.

This distinction of how sinners relate to some aspects of God's grace, however, occurs not because of differing views of depravity, but because of differing views on God's providence, common grace, and possibly even the extent of the atonement in some sense. MacArthur and Mayhue (2017:558) have distinctly affirmed that God functions as the "Savior of all men in a temporal sense" while also being a "Savior of the elect" in a special or "eternal sense." Interestingly, in the systematic text, the saving aspect focuses only on God and not as a reference to Christ. But in John MacArthur's commentary on 1 Timothy 4:10 he unites this text to both God the Father working in the Son through the atonement. In the 1995 commentary, MacArthur (1995:168) stated that "all men will enjoy to some extent the same kind of salvation as believers enjoy ... The difference is one of degree, not kind." In contrast to the systematic text explanation, the commentary asserted that this text teaches the "work of God in Christ" (MacArthur, 1995:169).

Additionally, this teaching regarding God's temporal and common love for all exists in MacArthur's 1996 book, *The Love of God*. In this book, he reiterated this text in 1 Timothy 4:10 is related to the Savior's common love for all people. In his words (MacArthur, 1996:116), "Jesus Christ is proffered to the world as Savior. In setting forth his own Son as Savior of the world, God displays the same kind of love to the whole world that was manifest in the Old Testament to the rebellious Israelites." Even more pointedly, MacArthur (1996:204) added to that perspective that the "Lord Jesus Christ is the official Savior, not of the elect only, but of the world of mankind indefinitely." As the savior of all mankind (MacArthur, 1996:204), "any" and "all may come to him as Savior." This work of Christ actually does some saving in that it gives to mankind "common grace" (MacArthur, 1996:117). In MacArthur's view (1996:124), but maybe not so much in Mayhue's view if judged by the systematic text with MacArthur (unless MacArthur evolved away from his ideas he taught in 1995 and 1996), "God's love extends to the whole world. It covers all humanity." In some sense (MacArthur, 1996:117), God's love in Christ or as God the Father touches every person in the human race; this love grants to them all (even

in their depravity) “grace”, “compassion,” instructive “admonitions”, and the “free offer of the gospel to all.”

Similar ideas were stated by Boettner. Though mankind is depraved and fully unable to move towards God for salvation, he believed that “many temporal blessings are thus secured for all men, although these fall short of being sufficient to insure salvation” (Boettner, 1932:160). This common grace occurs in and through the Holy Spirit’s “general influences” in a “greater or lesser degree” upon “all men” (Boettner, 1932:178-179). This common grace does lessen the impact of sin in a person while still not being enough to “kill the core of sin” (Boettner, 1932:179). Common grace enlightens people enough to the degree that they understand what they should do, yet this grace does not “give that power” to them for actual conversion because this grace when mixed with depravity may be “resisted” (Boettner, 1932:179).

5.4.2.2 *Similarity and Differences between Supralapsarians and Infralapsarians on Sin*

These three theologians (Boettner, MacArthur, and Mayhue), who represent what Geisler would call strong Calvinism as infralapsarian advocates, have much in common with supralapsarians in their positions on mankind’s universal total depravity. They all agree that every human has been touched by sin. Furthermore, that sin has left each person totally dead in sin and unable to do anything to please God or move towards salvation and grace. Both affirm that one must experience an inward efficacious or irresistible call of God to overcome the sin nature.

However, a slight difference does arise between how they relate the sin nature to God’s action to apply some type of grace to the sinner. Supralapsarians normally restrict common grace and describe it merely as God’s providence over humanity or deny that any such idea of grace exists. David Engelsma (2003:61) described it this way: God “by his providential power ... keeps his creation in existence”, and this is “not grace.” Additionally, the idea that God has some type of love for the non-elect is categorically and emphatically rejected by the supralapsarians. Engelsma (2014:83) directly and without ambiguity stated that “Reformed preaching will not approach to the audience with the declaration: God loves all of you”. Sonny Hernandez, a supralapsarian disciple of Engelsma, also asserted that the idea of some type of love upon all of depraved sinners is not any type of grace to them. In his words (Hernandez, 2018a:36-37), “God does not love nor does he provide grace to the wicked. His grace and love are reserved for the elect only.”

Therefore, in supralapsarian and infralapsarian theology mankind’s depravity is universal (all of mankind suffers from depravity) and that depravity impacts mankind to such a degree that they

are unable (total inability) to do anything to merit or move towards their own eternal salvation. However, these two theologies have a slight distinction in the way they classify and see human depravity in relation to God. Supralapsarian theologians reject in general that mankind may do some good in and through the power of common grace. For them common grace does not even really exist. Infralapsarian theologians see a place for common grace to work in and upon lost sinners, even the non-elect who never come to faith. This common grace gives them some ability to do some good in the world as they experience some benefits of God's goodness that at least prevents them from being worse than they are, and for some moves sinners to have some understanding and awareness of their sinful condition and obligation before God.

5.4.3 Sublapsarians on the Extent and Effect of Sin

Sublapsarian theologians affirm that sin impacts each and every person. No person escapes from the corruption from Adam's headship. Like supralapsarian and infralapsarian teachers, they too see all of humanity in a sinful condition and suffering from moral and spiritual depravity. Yet, because of their unique placement of the atonement of Christ in the decree paradigm their model manifests a slightly different perspective on the effect sin has on the human race. Sublapsarian ideology allows for more room for the atoning grace of Christ to concurrently affect sinners who, while having a depraved and corrupt nature, have some light and grace instilled in them from the work of Christ.

Sublapsarian theologian Michael F. Bird (2013:666) highlighted that sin has "left humanity condemned, estranged, defiled, enslaved, and dead". Moise Amyraut (2017:76), a sublapsarian whose name led to the idea of sublapsarian Amyraldianism, articulated the universal sin of Adam that "opened the door for death to envelop the whole human race and ruin the world from top to bottom." Sin left no one untouched. The impact was universal in extent.

However, a slight difference in the effect of sin exists in Amyraut's thinking in contrast to the standard supralapsarian and infralapsarian perspectives. In Amyraut's thinking, he retained the original view of John Calvin that Theodore Beza later distorted (Clifford, 2007:12-17). In Amyraut's (2017:86) view mankind has fallen into sin and because of this we are "not able to repair ourselves." All come forth, even in the womb, in "disorder and corruption in their nature" (Amyraut, 2017:89).

But the sublapsarian view as originally taught by Amyraut relies heavily upon the "dualistic understanding of the gospel" (Clifford, 2007:13). The common grace of the Lord Jesus from his atonement, which is placed prior to the act of electing, has a more emphatic benefit in how it sufficiently impacts all of mankind (Clifford, 2007:172). This two-sided or dualistic view of grace

for all (sufficient grace) and the doctrine of universal depravity formed a unique approach for Amyraut. In his view (Clifford, 2007:15), mankind's "depravity and corruption has adversely affected man's willingness" and not so much his "basic natural ability".

Recall that infralapsarian Boettner used the broken wing of a bird illustration to describe mankind's depravity. Mankind is like a bird with a broken wing; the bird is unable to fly because of the broken wing. Mankind is like that bird, with wings but broken (in sin) and consequently unable to fly (embrace Christ). Amyraut makes a distinction between mankind's willingness and mankind's ability. Clifford, a sublapsarian Amyraldian, uses instead of a bird analogy a runner on a track analogy to show the difference. A runner who twists his ankle and is disabled from running suffers from a natural physical limitation (Clifford, 2007:15). Therefore, if he does not run, to "reprimand him in such circumstances would be unkind and unjust" (Clifford, 2007:15). However, if a runner "refuses to race for no good reason, he is justly reprimanded" due to his unwillingness. "His failure to race is a moral disability" instead of some natural or "physical disability" (Clifford, 2007:15)

Sublapsarian Amyraldians, therefore, see mankind as within a dual sphere of reality. Mankind is depraved and sinful, corrupt from the womb, and yet because of Christ's sufficient grace mankind is "still able to repent but unwilling to do so where God is concerned" (Clifford, 2007:15). Millard J. Erickson (Erickson & Hustad, 1992:115), a sublapsarian moderate Calvinist, partially highlighted the difference between these concepts when he contrasted what "will happen" versus the idea of what "must" happen in God's decree. Sinners, who experience total depravity, need grace so that they "will believe" the gospel (Erickson, 1985:931).

Though Erickson (1985:915,925,933,942) did not fully and consistently embrace the ideas set forth by Amyraut with relation to sin and depravity (though he aligns more with Amyraut as a sublapsarian), and instead chose to use the language of total inability to describe mankind's condition (more of a supralapsarian position), Erickson did grasp the concept of distinction between something that must occur (necessity) and something that will occur (certainty). A sinner who is *certainly unwilling* to turn to Christ does not equal someone who of necessity cannot come. Someone who will not come cannot come because of the certainty of his sin, not the necessity of his sin.

In other words, nothing makes a person incapable of coming to Christ other than his or her own unwillingness. A person does not have to sin (a must or necessity), but he or she inevitably or certainly will sin and refuse to come to Christ without divine grace working to counter that certainty. This distinction remains important for sublapsarian Amyraldian soteriology.

The Molinist Calvinist (a type of moderate unlimited atonement Calvinism) Kenneth Keathley captured what Amyraut taught when Keathley stated (2010:88), “depravity makes sin inevitable, it does not make any particular sin necessary.” Unbelief in Christ then, a particular sin, would not be a necessity but it would be a certainty in this perspective. Though from a Molinist model, Keathley in that perspective captures more the Amyraldian ideology (a moderate sublapsarian ideology) with mankind’s depravity and the impact of sin on lost humanity. Luis De Molina (1535 – 1600) and Moise Amyraut (1596 – 1664) were both born in the 1500s and both died in the 1600s with only 64 years separating the times of their respective births. As such they were in the grand scheme of church history in close proximity to each other with their ministerial functions and in this sense even with their ideological views on the way sin impacts humanity.

5.4.4 Arminian/Wesleyans on the Extent and Effect of Sin

Arminian and Wesleyan theologians agree with the supralapsarian, infralapsarian, and sublapsarian view that all of mankind has suffered from the fall of Adam. Sin permeates everyone and none escapes the sinful curse that rests upon all of humanity. They also take sin seriously in the impact it has upon all of humanity. However, some differences do exist in the way in which Arminian/Wesleyans articulate these matters from their Calvinistic brethren.

Arminius affirmed that all of mankind suffers from sin. When examining Adam’s first sin in Eden, Arminius adopted a patriarchal or headship principle of theology. Adam represented (patriarchal legal headship) mankind and all of mankind existed (seminal headship) in Adam’s “loins” (Arminius, 1986:156). When Adam sinned this produced a system of reproduction where each and every person born from that single line suffers from both “temporal” as well as “eternal death; they are devoid of that righteousness and holiness” (Arminius, 1986:56-157). This view of Arminius has remained consistent in the teaching of Arminians after him. Scholars such as Roger Olson (2006:33-34, 142-157) have retained this perspective in modern Arminian theologies.

Wesley also, like Arminius, affirmed that Adam’s sin corrupted the entire human race. This doctrine for Wesley (2007:6:63) remained an essential aspect of true Christianity. In Wesley’s (2007:6:264) thought Adam’s sin made all others sinful, so that Adam’s original sin extended to all of humanity. As Wesley (2007:65) stated, “ye were born in sin ... by nature ye are wholly corrupted ... In Adam ye all died”. This view of Wesley has also continued to be taught in conservative streams of modern-day Wesleyan theology. H. Orton Wiley (1952:101) agreed with Wesley’s idea that to deny the universal original sin upon all of humanity was to reject Christianity and embrace a form of paganism. Wiley (1952:98) emphasized the same point as

did Wesley, that “not only are all men born under the penalty of death” but that all people experience a “depraved nature” from birth.

However, as much as Arminius and Wesley would agree with the Calvinists on the universal extent and impact of depravity or corruption upon all of humankind, their perspective has a distinct difference from that of the Calvinists. They have agreement on the universal corruption of sin, but they differ on how that corruption impacts each person in light of the grace of God that interacts with each corrupt person. Richard Watson (1851:48) highlighted this unity when he said of the two streams of theology (Calvinist and Arminian/Wesleyan), “The true Arminian, as fully as the Calvinist, admits the doctrine of ... total depravity”.

Modern-day theologians from this tradition see it in the same light as Watson. Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell have also asserted that, concerning sin itself and the original corruption mankind experiences from birth, the two streams of theology have historically had unity on the extent of sin (universality) and its impact (total depravity). Walls and Dongell affirm that a true Wesleyan/Arminian view of sin aligns with the Calvinistic idea of total depravity. As they said (Walls & Dongell, 2004:67), “Wesley affirmed the dreadful effects of the Fall in the strongest terms, agreeing fervently with his Calvinist contemporaries that sinners, left to themselves, stand utterly hopeless and helpless before God.”

The differences, therefore, between these two schools of thought, relate not so much to the doctrine of sin and total depravity, but rather to what the atoning grace of Christ does to these sinners prior to faith in Christ. The Calvinist schools of thought, though with some variation in explaining depravity among the three forms, embrace the idea that mankind is corrupted and either unable (supralapsarian and infralapsarian models) or unwilling (sublapsarian Amyraldian forms) to come to Christ. Arminians and Wesleyans also agree that sin touches each person from birth and this sin leaves mankind in a hopeless condition and in need of grace to counter the corrupting and crippling effects of sin on the human will. Yet they assert, as will be seen more in the next chapter, that Christ’s atonement presently grants some type of receptive ability for all sinners to receive Christ in the gospel with the current grace given to them.

5.5 THE EXTENT AND EFFECT OF SIN IN NORMAN GEISLER’S THEOLOGY

Norman Geisler embraced the view that Adam represented the human race in the Garden of Eden. In his view every single person from Adam onward has a sinful human nature. As he stated (Geisler, 2015:95), “Adam’s free choice was self-determined ... and became the root whereby the entire human race inherited a sinful nature”. Adam’s headship over the human race

meant that “every descendent of Adam—every person born of natural parents since the Fall—is spiritually dead” (Geisler, 2004:123).

However, the effect of that deadness, sin’s effect upon the sinner, does not mean he accepted the high/extreme Calvinist (supralapsarian) view or the strong Calvinist (infralapsarian) view. He rejected those definitions of what it means to be dead. In his view, to be dead means separated from God. He accepted total depravity as one being dead (separated from God) in sin. He defined depravity as “the inability to initiate or attain salvation without the grace of God ... Sin affects the whole person—mind, emotions, and will. Human beings are radically depraved in their being” (Geisler, 1999e:542-3). However, he did not accept the definition of total depravity in an “intensive sense” (Geisler, 1999e:543). Sin corrupts one “extensively,” but this does not mean God’s image in mankind is “erased,” only “effaced” (Geisler, 1999e:543).

Furthermore, and worthy of notice as a distinction that will influence Geisler’s view of the application of grace in salvation (Chapter Seven of this dissertation), he rejected the idea that depravity means one cannot understand the truths of God and the gospel. Of this perspective he says (Geisler, 2004:123), “a sinner is not dead in the sense of not being able by God’s grace to understand and accept salvation.” This sentence may mean that he aligns with the sublapsarian idea as taught by Amyraut. However, it may mean something else. To know for sure the extent and implications of this view waits for a closer examination of his views on calling, conversion, and how those acts of the Holy Spirit relate to mankind’s will in the application of grace.

But, certainly, what can be said here is that he does not have continuity with either supralapsarian or most infralapsarian theologians as their definition of total depravity aligns more with the definition of total inability. This distinction for Geisler surfaces in his opposition to presuppositional apologetic methods that he believed naturally and usually flow from the higher forms of Calvinism. In Geisler’s (1999e:540) view the higher forms of Calvinism led to presuppositionalism because in their view “sin vitiates human ability to understand God’s revelation or receive his redemptive grace”.

5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Geisler’s views on the origin of sin, the nature of sin, the extent of sin, and the impact of sin on humanity and the world reveal his ideas on some key areas of his theology. In several areas he aligns with both Calvinistic and the Arminian/Wesleyan traditions of thought. His most obvious differences occur with the supralapsarian and infralapsarian Calvinist traditions. That much is not surprising, as he claims to affirm a sublapsarian or moderate Amyraldian form of Calvinistic

thought. However, some additional insights have been discovered that may suggest he has some substantive (at the most) and subtle (at the least) differences in his view even from his own confession of a moderate Calvinistic stance.

5.6.1 Norman Geisler Compared to the Reformed/Calvinistic Positions

Three key points exist that reveal Geisler's thought in relation to the Reformed/Calvinistic view of depravity. First, some definite continuity exists between Geisler and all three versions of the Calvinistic models on the origin of sin. In fact, Augustine, a forefather to Calvinistic thought and one revered not only by Calvinists of all shades and stripes but also by Christians overall, greatly influenced Geisler in this area (Brown, 2003:256). Geisler (1978:46-47) agreed with Augustine's approach and definition of sin. Sin originates from creation and has not always existed. Sin occurs in creation through the privation of good.

Geisler stood in agreement with some of the supralapsarian theologians and all of the infralapsarian and sublapsarian theologians that sin began in the angelic realm and with Adam and Eve. He, however, definitely rejected some supralapsarian positions like that of R.C. Sproul Jr., who taught that God authored and created sin. Of course, many supralapsarian theologians would also reject what Sproul Jr. taught. But also, Geisler did place his decree of sin in a different place than all supralapsarian theologians. Even though Geisler describes his model as an operational order (more related to actual time and history), he sees sin as occurring after the plan to create. Therefore, he differs with all supralapsarian decree order models.

He, consequently, has continuity here with both infralapsarian and sublapsarian theologians in his view that sin developed after the plan and purpose of God to create mankind. Moreover, in this trajectory, Geisler agrees with both infralapsarians and sublapsarians that sin occurs through God's decree of divine permission. This continuity clearly places Geisler in a moderate or lower form of Calvinism, whatever else may or may not exist in his ideology in relation to Calvinism.

Second, Geisler's view on the nature of sin has much in common with the Calvinistic models. As with several of the Calvinistic theologians, he accepted the idea that sin fundamentally has to do with pride and some type of focus on self. However, he did not write much on this aspect of hamartiology. As Geisler (2004:104) stated, "at the root of *all* sin is pride, which was the evil that prompted Lucifer's rebellion against God." In his view pride forms a base to the two other most fundamental sins, the "lust of the flesh, and lust of the eyes" (Geisler, 2004:105). In this area Geisler had continuity with Calvinists such as Augustine, Calvin, John Gill, and Timothy Dwight, those associated more with the higher forms of Calvinism. Yet Geisler also has continuity here

with the lower Calvinistic models of Larry Richards, Robert Pyne, and Arnold Fruchtenbaum, all teachers within the moderate or lower forms of Calvinistic soteriology. Geisler held the same idea as to the nature of sin as these Calvinists. So in this sense Geisler has significant alignment with these Calvinists.

Third, as to the extent and effect of sin, Geisler agrees with the Calvinists in the universal extent of sin. He even agrees with them on the headship of Adam being the source of all human corruption from Adam's original sin in Eden. The universality of sin exists in Geisler's theology. However, what that sin does to humanity does have some variation within Geisler's view. For certain, he rejects the idea of total inability. If total depravity carries the definition of inability to receive salvation without the help of God's grace, as almost always taught by supralapsarians and some infralapsarians, then Geisler without reservation rejected that definition. In his view, to be dead in sin means to be cut off and separated from God, not that one's will and image is eradicated or erased.

This view can be seen furthermore in his apologetic model. He rejected the high Calvinistic presupposition apologetic model because in his view that model asserts that sin has erased the human will to such a degree that people cannot understand even basic common truths that relate to God and the gospel. Instead, Geisler believed that God's grace sustains people enough that they can understand some truths about God and the gospel while still needing more grace to appropriate it personally for one's own salvation. In this sense, Geisler seems to have some continuity with Amyraut and the sublapsarian tradition.

However, some of his language seems to differ with Amyraut and the moderate Calvinists. To avoid committing the logical fallacy of a hasty conclusion (sometimes known as the fallacy of converse accident), an "error of trying to argue from a particular" matter to a "general" conclusion too quickly without justification, further examination needs to occur before assigning Geisler to a true sublapsarian viewpoint on the effect of sin (Walton, 1999:432). That reservation exists because of at least two reasons.

First, the sublapsarians differ somewhat among themselves. Millard J. Erickson, a sublapsarian Calvinist, affirmed unlimited atonement and the sublapsarian decree order. However, he used the language of total inability in the doctrine of sin's effect on humanity. Furthermore, that type of sublapsarian model differs from what seems to have been Amyraut's view on the effect of sin on people. Amyraut, as with modern moderate Calvinistic Molinists (like Kenneth Keathley), had a view of sin's effect that differed from some modern sublapsarians like Erickson.

Second, it would be hasty to assert here a conclusion prior to closer examination of Geisler's view of how God's works to move a sinner to faith. Sublapsarians, like Erickson and Amyraut, even with some differences on the effect of sin (Erickson describing it as total inability and Amyraut describing it as total unwillingness), agree that grace must work in such a way to effect or cause one to come to faith (some form of monergism or vivifying influence). So, knowing that piece to Geisler's theological puzzle will help with a more accurate assessment of his hamartiology and soteriology. He may have significant and substantive continuity here with the Amyraldian/sublapsarian tradition. However, it is possible that his distinct way of defining depravity may place him even in more discontinuity than continuity with the Amyraldian/sublapsarian models. Without seeing how Geisler applies or defines grace when interacting with a sinner, deciphering the degree of continuity here in this section with the Amyraldian/sublapsarian view remains a tenuous effort at best. Therefore, a more certain conclusion here would suffer from a premature judgment without proper evidence to warrant such a conclusion.

5.6.2 Norman Geisler Compared to the Arminian/Wesleyan Positions

Geisler expressed nuances and positions in his views of sin that have some similarity to how Arminian/Wesleyan models describe the doctrine. Yet this should be expected because in many respects the Calvinistic traditions and Arminian/Wesleyan tradition align in the initial aspects of hamartiology. Some Reformed theologians even accept conservative forms of Arminian/Wesleyan theology as a "valid expression of Reformed theology" (Olson, 2006:47).

Arminian/Wesleyan theologian H. Orton Wiley (1952:107) made a helpful point in that he thought one should make a distinction between the more conservative and original form of Arminian theology (also upheld by Wesley) and later models that "leaned too far toward Pelagianism". He expressed the unity and continuity with Calvinistic Reformed theology and Arminianism in this way (Wiley, 1952:107): "In its purest and best forms, Arminianism preserves the truth found in the Reformed teaching.... With the Reformers its holds to the unity of the race in Adam, that 'in Adam all have sinned,' and that all men 'are by nature children of wrath'". Geisler would align well with this type of Arminian/Wesleyan model because in the initial matters related to the origin, nature, and to a degree the extent of sin in which original Arminianism and Calvinistic Reformed models shared a substantive degree of unity.

More specifically, Geisler would concur with the Arminian/Wesleyan models that accept created beings as the author of sin. Additionally, Geisler, like Arminius, adopted the idea that sin developed from a disposition of pride. Here Geisler has direct continuity with Arminius. Furthermore, Geisler agreed with the idea that sin left mankind in a condition of depravity. This

depravity extended to the whole person and touched his entire being. However, with Arminius and Wesley, Geisler would reject the language of total inability. Geisler would concur with the Arminian/Wesleyan tradition that one may believe when aided by God's grace.

However, the *extent of aid* one needs cannot be ascertained here in this chapter. The certainty or outcome of that grace in aid remains an area of study in subsequent sections. The extent of aid and the position one takes on what that aid will or will not certainly do will help bring great clarity as to Geisler's ideology in whether he has more continuity with the Calvinistic perspective on faith or the Arminian/Wesleyan perspective on faith.

CHAPTER 6:

CHRIST'S INCARNATION AND HIS ATONING WORK OF REDEMPTION

6.1 CHRIST AND HIS WORK OF REDEMPTION

One of the key differences between the various Reformed Calvinistic soteriology models relates to the general work of Christ in his life and death. In particular, a very clear and distinct difference between the various lapsarian models exists in where to place the atonement in the decree model. Furthermore, a difference occurs in the extent of the atonement and what effects the atonement has on the world in general and the elect in particular.

To properly analyze and understand Norman Geisler's soteriology a thorough analysis of his view of the life and death of Christ in the work of redemption must occur. Additionally, because Geisler has stated that the atonement in a functional order occurs prior to election in his sublapsarian model, the analysis of this will follow his model's order by examining this matter prior to the analysis of election and the application of grace. Supralapsarians and infralapsarians differ here with sublapsarians because those two models place atonement after the order to elect.

Geisler, at least in this order, does align with the sublapsarian model by seeing atonement as functionally prior to election. Therefore, because of that this chapter will examine the issues related to Christ's life and death before examining the topic of election and the application of grace to sinners. This will preserve the natural order that Geisler used in his writings.

The life and death of Christ remains a central truth for all orthodox Christians. All three of the sublapsarian models affirm Christ's life and physical death as a non-negotiable truth of the true Christian faith. In fact, during the heated fundamentalist and modernist controversy, Bishop John L. Nuelsen (1996:2:295), writing in the famous 1917 four-volume set "The Fundamentals," succinctly stated that "orthodox theology is Christ-centric." Geisler has long been associated with the orthodox fundamentalist-evangelical movement's devotion to a Christ-centered theology. He believed that Christ functioned as the "tie between the testaments, the content of the whole canon, and the unifying theme within each book of the Bible" (Geisler, 1968:7).

6.2 THE INCARNATION

The incarnation and life of Christ remains central to any soteriology model. Broadly speaking it not only remains central to the doctrine of salvation but it also establishes the central tenet of the faith for Christianity. John Walvoord noted that "the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ is the central fact of Christianity. Upon it the whole superstructure of Christian theology depends"

(Walvoord, 1969:96). Expounding further with even greater intensity, Thomas R. Schreiner wrote that a rejection of this core truth places one in line with the antichrist:

Those who reject the truth that the historical Jesus is the Christ are identified as antichrists (1 John 2:22). Nor does such a denial merely affect their relationship with the Christ. When they deny that the human Jesus is the Christ, they also deny the Father. If they reject Jesus as God's true Son, this is tantamount, whether they realize it or not, to denying the Father as well (2:23). Only those who acknowledge that Jesus is God's Son belong to the Father. Refusal to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ is no trivial error, nor is it simply a temporary lapse of judgment; anyone who separates the Christ from the historical Jesus is an antichrist (cf. 4:2-3) (Schreiner, 2010:124).

6.2.1 Calvinists on the Incarnation of Christ

No serious controversy exists among Calvinists on where they stand in the line of historic orthodox theology. Even those who do not classify themselves as Calvinists recognize the historic evangelical witness of the various levels of Calvinism in relation to historic orthodoxy. Paige Patterson, who does not align with Calvinism, expressed his appreciation for the Calvinists and their allegiance to historic doctrine. Of the Calvinist heritage he stated, "undoubtedly full-blown biblical Trinitarianism would be espoused by those of a more Calvinistic persuasion" (Patterson, 2001:69). In all three levels of Calvinism, these theologians affirm without reservation the deity of Christ and the humanity that occurs through his incarnation.

Supralapsarian Herman Hoeksema (2004:1:501) noted that Christ is "two natures" that were "united in the one person of the Son of God." Through the virgin birth, though mysterious, Christ Jesus took to himself "human nature" (Hoeksema, 2004:1:504). Infralapsarian theologian William G.T. Shedd (2003:616) has stated clearly as well that Christ the Word "came to possess human characteristics in addition to his divine". In this incarnation the "union of two diverse natures, a divine and a human" formed "one single person" (Shedd, 2003:617). Sublapsarians also agree with this and affirm the divine incarnation. Millard J. Erickson affirmed this doctrine and its vital importance to soteriology. He taught that "Jesus' humanity cannot be overestimated" as the "issue in the incarnation is soteriological" (Erickson, 1985:706). Through the incarnation, Erickson (1985:706) says, "deity and humanity were united in one person."

Certainly, Calvinism has unity in this area. No substantive distinction exists among any of the three forms of Calvinism in relation to Christ as the incarnate God-Man. They all concur here and recognize the essential issue and consequences of a failure to affirm this historic doctrine.

6.2.2 Arminian/Wesleyans on the Incarnation of Christ

Certainly some Arminian/Wesleyans may fall into liberal views, as admitted by their own teachers. For example, Walls and Dongell (2004:45) have admitted that “liberal Protestantism” has been sometimes more connected and “akin to Arminianism” and even so much so that sometimes it cannot be distinguished from “full-blown secular humanism.” They admit further that their tradition in American evangelicalism has tended to have a reputation of being “theologically shallow” (Walls & Dongell, 2004:45).

Therefore, to qualify what portion of the body of Christ is being examined, the term “conservative” has been added to describe the portion that does affirm the deity and humanity of Christ. The scholars noted in this section represent conservative Arminian/Wesleyan scholars. To do otherwise would not properly align with the analysis being conducted on Geisler to determine where he stands in relation to the Calvinist and Arminian streams. Whatever conclusion arises from this research on Geisler’s soteriology, he is a conservative and if he aligns more with the Arminian or Calvinist soteriology models (or even a combination of the two), he could never honestly be labeled as anything other than a conservative who affirmed the historic fundamentals of the Christian faith. Therefore, only the conservative Arminian-Wesleyan perspective on the incarnation will be asserted in this section since those do exist.

Arminius affirmed the full deity and humanity of Christ. He also connected this doctrine to the saving act of Christ in his priestly role. He affirmed that “the Word of God, who from the beginning was with God, and by whom the worlds, and all things visible and invisible, were created, ought himself to be made flesh, to undertake the office of the priesthood” (Arminius, 1996:1:415). John Wesley, as did Arminius, affirmed the deity and humanity of Christ in the incarnation. His sermon “On Working out our Own Salvation” based upon Philippians 2:12-13 very clearly explained his position. He taught that God humbled himself to take to himself human nature by becoming a “common man,” and a “real man, like other men” (Wesley, 2007:6:507). These themes Arminius and Wesley taught have continued to surface in conservative Arminian and Wesleyan theologians of the modern era. Wesleyan H. Orton Wiley (1952:178) explicitly affirmed the incarnation, stating that Christ Jesus is “two natures in one person” and this “was effected by the incarnation.” Likewise, modern Arminian scholar F. Leroy Forlines devoted an extensive section to affirming this truth in contrast to ancient Christological heresies. He affirmed that the “incarnation is the union of the divine and human natures” (Forlines, 2001:174).

6.2.3 Norman Geisler on the Incarnation of Christ

Geisler made it clear that he adopted the standard definitions of historic orthodoxy on Christ Jesus. He affirmed the main historic creeds related to Christ and his relation to the Trinity as well as his relation to humanity (Geisler, 2011:557-558). Additionally, he carefully explained his position to show that Christ took to himself humanity while not giving up his infinite deity. He said, “it was not God becoming man, but the second person of the Godhead adding humanity ... he embraced another nature—humanity—in addition to his divinity” (Geisler, 2001:70). Lastly, Geisler (2011:553) without any ambiguity condemned the false theories of Christ and his nature by rejecting Arianism, Docetism, Nestorianism, Monophysitism, and Apollinarianism.

6.3 THE OFFICES OF CHRIST

Many theologians recognize Christ as the God-Man who functioned in three distinct roles. As the Lord he functioned as a prophet, as a priest, and as a king. John Walvoord set forth those basics of Christ and his role in those offices. As a prophet Christ “revealed God not only in his spoken ministry but in his life and person” (Walvoord, 1969:136). As a priest Christ fulfilled this role by “offering gifts, sacrifices and intercession” (Walvoord, 1969:136-137). And as the OT prophesied about a coming “King who would fulfill the promise of God to David” Jesus “fulfilled the requirements of the prophesied King” (Walvoord, 1969:137). R.C. Sproul (1992:101) summarized it this way: “Whereas in the Old Testament the mediating offices of prophet, priest, and king were held by separate individuals, all three offices are held supremely in the one person of Jesus.”

6.3.1 Calvinists on Christ’s Threefold Offices

All three versions of Calvinists align here in accepting that Christ functioned as prophet, priest, and king. Some differ as to the time at which Christ’s kingship formally occurred (a difference of eschatology), but all agree that Christ is king. Supralapsarian Herman Hoeksema (2004:1:529, 535, 563) affirmed all three roles of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. Louis Berkhof (2017:301, 306, 307), who leans mostly towards the infralapsarian view with his acceptance that sin falls within the permissive decree of God, affirmed too that Christ was recognized “as a prophet” who also in his priestly work was “both priest and sacrifice” in his work for the “removal of sin.” Berkhof (2017:341, 345) also recognized that Christ functions as both as a spiritual king (his rule over his people or the church) and also as the king over the universe through his “providential and judicial administration of all things in the interest of the Church.” Lastly, sublapsarian theologian Augustus H. Strong devoted an extensive section in his systematic work to the threefold office of Christ. He explained Christ’s role in these three offices with approximately sixty-six pages devoted to this subject of Christ’s work, especially on his priestly

work of atonement and intercession. He summarized his affirmation of these truths saying, “the Scriptures represent Christ’s offices as three in number—prophetic, priestly, and kingly” (Strong, 1907:710).

6.3.2 Arminians/Wesleyans on Christ’s Threefold Offices

The Arminian/Wesleyan tradition has also affirmed the basic three roles of Jesus Christ as prophet, priest, and king. Jacob Arminius (1996:2:382-383) noted that Christ functioned as a prophet by preaching truth and confirming it with his personhood. Furthermore, he functioned as our priest in order to obtain salvation for mankind (Arminius, 1996:2:380). As priest he sacrificed “his body and blood” and then interceded for the people “before God” (Arminius, 1996:2:381). Arminius (1996:2:384) taught that Christ functioned in his kingly office by being “Lord over all things” as well as by administering his law and legislation, conferring blessings related to salvation, and as circumstances related to the final judgment to come.

Modern scholars in this tradition have maintained these ideas that Arminius set forth. Thomas Oden (2001:280) from the Wesleyan tradition affirmed that Christ came to “do the threefold work of messianic prophet, priest, and king.” As a teacher he exercised his prophetic office, as a priest he suffered and died for the sins of the world, and in his resurrection he received his kingdom and rules over it (Oden, 1989:2:280).

Likewise, the Arminian/Pentecostal scholars Menzies and Horton acknowledged these roles of Christ as well and affirmed that they relate to his work in redemption. They taught that in these three roles Christ exercised his “mediatorship” between “the Father of heaven and the people of earth” (Menzies & Horton, 1993:66). Christ exercises his mediator role as God’s “anointed Prophet, Priest, and King” (Menzies & Horton, 1993:66). In his work to redeem humanity Christ fulfilled the prophecies that foretold of “a coming one who would unite in himself the functions of prophet, priest, and king” (Menzies & Horton, 1993:67).

6.3.3 Norman Geisler on Christ’s Threefold Offices

Geisler does not deviate from these theologians noted earlier in that Christ served in three roles in the work of redemption. As with the Calvinist and Arminian/Wesleyan streams of thought, Geisler connected these roles to the doctrine of salvation. In his view “Jesus’ teachings recorded in the Gospels were part of his prophetic ministry” (Geisler, 2011:1508). Furthermore, as a priest Christ functioned as a “sacrifice for them” as he died as a “substitute for our sins” (Geisler, 2011:1508). Lastly, Christ is King who now sits on a heavenly throne and will one day exercise this on the earth when he returns to sit on his glorious throne here at the “renewal of all things” (Geisler, 2011:1508-1509).

6.4 THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST

Calvinists in all levels and Arminians have definite differences in their models of soteriology. However, at the base level both models of soteriology recognize that the atonement of Christ establishes the only hope for sinners to find peace with God. In that much the two schools of thought agree. Paige Patterson (2007:545), who does not classify himself as a Calvinist but identifies himself as an Anabaptist theologian, has asserted that he believes the life and death of Christ stand as “the central facts of salvific history”. A.A. Hodge (1987:13) representing the Calvinist heritage also stated that concerning the gospel “the Atonement is evidently the central and principal element.” Hodge (1987:14) also recognized that at least the conservative evangelical wing of the body of Christ affirmed the centrality and vital necessity of the atonement of Christ. Arminius (1996:2:720) noted that the blood of Christ established the means for the “expiation of sins” and the “redemption and reconciliation of sinners” to God. In Arminius’ view Christ “offered himself and his blood to his Father in heaven” (Arminius, 1996:2:720).

Even the more liberal persuasion of the Arminian stream from the anti-substitution atonement and Open Theist perspective agree that only the atonement of Christ can redeem humanity from their sins (Eberle, 2015:19). Harold R. Eberle (2015:502, 493), who adopted the “Christus Victor” view of the atonement, has in spite of his more liberal views of God and his knowledge (Open Theism), recognized that through Christ’s death God forgives our sins. In his “covenantal” atonement view, which seems to misunderstand the dynamics of the penal substitution theory of the atonement, he still embraced the idea that “Jesus is the propitiation for us” (Eberle, 2015:500).

Therefore, across the board and diversity of thought from the Calvinists to Arminian/Wesleyan teachers (even one from a more liberal persuasion) these theologians recognize Christ’s death as central to mankind’s reconciliation with God the Father. The famous evangelist Billy Graham taught and preached that the cross stood as the “focal point of the Christian faith” and “of all history” (Drummond, 2001:70-71). Graham’s presentation of the centrality of Calvary has been in some form the theme of the Christ-followers since the days of the apostles. As Michael F. Bird (2013:385) summarized, “Evangelicals have a crucicentric gospel for good reason.”

6.5 THEORIES OF THE ATONEMENT & GEISLER’S ATONEMENT POSITION

Even though Christ-followers have made the cross central to the gospel presentation and the theology of soteriology, that does not mean unanimity has existed on the exact meaning of the atonement. Therefore, to properly analyze Geisler’s atonement and accurately compare his views related to the Calvinist and Arminian models, a basic overview of the various atonement

theories helps in that effort. Several differing and competing options have been articulated throughout church history.

6.5.1 Eight Theories of the Atonement

Through church history eight distinct theories of Christ's death have been taught. A few of those do not qualify as legitimate options for those who affirm the truth of the Bible. Nonetheless, various theologians have embraced differing ideas. However, in all of the orthodox views one can find some truth. Calvinist theologian R.C. Sproul (2014:156) reminded Christians of the multifaceted aspects in the work of Christ on the cross:

There are many strands to consider when looking at the atonement, and some people make the mistake of focusing exclusively on one strand, trying to find in it the entire significance of the atonement. We must see that all of the strands are aspects of a complex work of redemption.

Michael Bird (2013:410) has noted that three main categories exist for the eight atonement theories. These are: (1) historical (recapitulation, ransom, and victory theories), (2) subjective (moral influence and exemplary theories), and (3) objective (satisfaction, governmental, and penal substitution theories). Like Sproul, Bird (2013:410) also accepted the fact that "most of the atonement modes described above have some scriptural warrant for their assertions." Of the eight theories noted, Bird (2013:410) thought the "recapitulation, Christus Victor, exemplary, satisfaction, and penal substitution models can all be safely traced back to scripture to varying degrees." However, unlike Sproul (2014:160-165) who exalted the penal substitution theory to the primary position, Bird (2013:414) took the view that the "Christus Victor model" has primacy and "provides the canopy" that covers and connects "the other modes of the atonement". In Bird's view this model provides the "integrative hub" that holds the other theories together (Bird, 2013:414).

6.5.2 Norman Geisler on the Atonement

In general Geisler recognized the centrality and vital importance of the atonement to Christianity as a whole and in particular to the doctrine of soteriology. Geisler saw unanimity within the evangelical body of Christ on this point. He said, "all evangelical theologians agree that Christ died 'for our sins' (1 Cor. 15:3). Likewise, all believe that Christ made atonement for us" (Geisler, 2011:828). Not to agree with this view would in his mind place one outside of the evangelical faith. Geisler (2020:457) believed that the doctrine of the atonement constituted one of the thirteen essentials as noted in the Apostles' Creed and one of the "essential doctrines of the Christian faith".

Geisler recognized and evaluated the numerous theories of the atonement through church history. He examined eight theories of the atonement that various teachers at various times have presented (Geisler, 2020:828-840). Like Sproul and Bird, Geisler also agreed that each theory has some element of truth. In his words, “there are dimensions of truth in all these views” (Geisler, 2020:838). Yet even with that admission, he did think some theories on the whole “could not be justified biblically”, and were “not adequate explanations of how salvation is accomplished” (Geisler, 2020:828).

In his perspective, after reviewing the eight options in Christianity and examining strengths and weaknesses of each view, one model in his thought did have the greatest strength. He adopted the penal substitution view as the superior view. As he stated,

While each of the ... theories of the atonement contributes some truth to the overall redemptive acts of Christ, the *substitution view*—meaning that Christ’s death brought substitutionary satisfaction to God—fully explains the necessary *objective* basis (in God) for the atonement. Without Christ, the God-man, paying the price for our sins, God could not be just and yet the Justifier of the unjust, as Paul declared him to be (Rom. 3:21-25). Without the Just dying for the unjust, God’s justice would not be satisfied, and without justice being appeased, God’s mercy could not be released to declare the otherwise unjust sinners to be justified in his eyes, hence, qualified for heaven (Geisler, 2020:840-841).

6.6 MEANING AND APPLICATION OF VARIOUS THEOLOGICAL TERMS RELATED TO ATONEMENT

In an analysis of continuity or discontinuity with Geisler’s view of the atonement three key terms and definitions come to the table and require close attention. Geisler has continuity with the Calvinists and the evangelical Arminian/Wesleyan streams of Christianity on his broad view of the atonement. In those areas much unity exists in all the various streams of the broad body of Christ. Therefore, a more specific study with a narrow focus on the key terms of the atonement will highlight whether Geisler differs in any of his definitions related to the essence and function of the atonement in contrast with the various Calvinist and Arminian/Wesleyan streams.

6.6.1 Propitiation and Its Meaning for Calvinists and Arminians/Wesleyans

This key term “propitiation” has enormous ramifications in one’s theory of the atonement and even how that theory applies when examining the extent of the atonement (covered in section 6.6.4). Calvinist James Oliver Buswell (1968:1665) noted that this “semi-technical” term “signifies an objective provision for pity or mercy.” Likewise, the moderate Calvinist John F. Walvoord (1969:154) defined the term as “the satisfaction of all God’s righteous demands for

judgment on the sinner by the redemptive act of the death of Christ.” His teacher and moderate Calvinist Lewis Sperry Chafer also defined propitiation in that sense. Chafer (1993:7:259) taught that Christ’s work as the propitiator is accomplished in his death that “answered the just demands of God’s holiness against sin”. Higher Calvinists like John Owen and Sonny Hernandez have offered definitions for propitiation as well. Owen (1967:10:283) also explained the death of Christ in terms of propitiation. He asserted that this term means that Christ in “his blood” was “accepted as an atonement and propitiation for us, himself being priest, altar, and sacrifice.” Likewise, Sonny Hernandez (2018b:31-32) defined the meaning and significance this way: “Christ propitiated the Father’s wrath by substituting himself in the stead of his elect to remove alienation that existed between them and God.”

Arminians and Wesleyans from the conservative evangelical perspective also adopt the idea of propitiation through Christ as substitute. Representing the modern Arminian persuasion F. Leroy Forlines (2011:209) believed that “propitiation” was the “most inclusive term in the New Testament denoting atonement.” He believed that this term meant “to turn away” God’s “wrath and restore a person to favor with God” (Forlines, 2011:209). The payment of Christ as a propitiation includes in it the ideas of paying the penalty as well as a provision for righteousness (Forlines, 2011:209). Arminius (1996:3:329) himself taught that Christ’s death functioned as a substitution that expiated sins and served as a remedy appeasing the wrath of God through his sacrifice for sins. Arminian scholar Roger E. Olson (2006:223) believes that this is the standard view among Arminian/Wesleyan scholars, citing support for it from “Arminius, to Wesley, Wiley, and Oden.”

6.6.2 Reconciliation and Its Meaning for Calvinists and Arminians/Wesleyans

The key word “reconciliation” has a close and overlapping significance with the idea of propitiation. It too conveys essential aspects of the doctrine of redemption. E.C. Blackman (1962:16) spoke of this term as describing two estranged parties brought back together and in the biblical sense this refers to the steps God has taken “to overcome this alienation” between him and mankind through what Christ provided. Calvinist theologian Herman Hoeksema also held that basic idea for reconciliation. Of this term he stated, “reconciliation means that the cause of estrangement of man in relation to God—sin—is removed” (Hoeksema, 2004:1:560). Hoeksema (2004:1:560) also emphasized that in scripture this functions as “absolutely one-sided” because God the “reconciler” worked in Christ so that mankind is “reconciled to him.” High Calvinist Sonny Hernandez agrees and noted the close connection between reconciliation and propitiation. Of the meaning and connection he said, “reconciliation is inextricably linked to propitiation because it is concerned with removing the alienation between God and man and restoring the fellowship that man once had with God” (Hernandez, 2018b:43).

Moderate Calvinists have the same understanding of this term as do the higher Calvinists. Lewis Sperry Chafer (1993:7:262) noted that reconciliation means “someone or something is thoroughly changed and adjusted to something which is the standard”. In agreement with the higher Calvinists, he noted that God is not the one reconciled to mankind, but instead it is mankind who “is thoroughly changed” in his or her “relation to God” (Chafer, 1993:7:262). Millard J. Erickson, also a moderate Calvinist like Chafer, concurs with all of these Calvinists on the meaning of reconciliation. In defining it Erickson (1985:814) noted that reconciliation means an “end to the enmity and estrangement” that existed between God and mankind. In reconciliation “our hostility toward God is removed” (Erickson, 1985:814-815).

Arminian/Wesleyan teachers have also understood reconciliation in the same basic sense as the Calvinists noted. Modern Arminian scholars Menzies and Horton have taught that the atonement of Christ accomplishes reconciliation. They described the atonement as the cause and “reconciliation is the effect. We are reconciled to God because of the cross of Christ” (Menzies & Horton, 1993:100). The non-Calvinist Henry Thiessen, who is more closely aligned with Arminian views, also saw the close connection of cause and effect in this term. He said, “closely associated with the idea of propitiation is the thought of reconciliation. The two ideas seem to be related to each other as cause and effect: Christ’s death ‘propitiated’ God, and as a result he is ‘reconciled’” (Thiessen, 1949:327). Wesleyans have articulated this line of thinking as well. Wesleyan scholar Thomas Oden (1989:2:349) has stated that in the atonement of Christ he functioned as the means to “remove the obstacle” in order to “pardon” and for “reconciliation of the guilty.” Oden (1989:2:354) describes this further by adding that “reconciliation” is a “peacemaking event in the divine-human relationship.”

6.6.3 Substitution and Its Meaning for Calvinists and Arminians/Wesleyans

The doctrine of divine substitution has become a hallmark doctrine of vital importance, especially since the time of the Reformation, when this idea became very central to any presentation of the doctrine of the atonement. Calvinist scholar Wayne Grudem (1994:579) emphasizes this idea so strongly to the point where he calls it “the orthodox understanding of the atonement”. The non-Calvinist fundamental Baptist evangelist John R. Rice (Sider-Rose, 2003:544-545) thought this idea and doctrine held such a status that if one rejected the idea of Christ’s substitutionary death such a person “is not saved” (Rice, 1994:410). Clearly, these words verify how strongly various streams of conservative Christianity have held to this particular theory of Christ’s atonement.

Historically speaking, the Reformers popularized this theory of the atonement (Allison, 2011:398-405). Allison (2011:401) noted that both “Calvin and Luther focused on the atonement

as a penal substitution.” Major Reformed confessions also emerged that spoke of this theory of the atonement. The Heidelberg Catechism, Formula of Concord, and the Belgic confessions were some of the major confessions that adopted ideas that highlighted the penal substitution aspect of Christ’s provision (Allison, 2011:401).

Furthermore, from this theory emerged one of the most famous advocates for high Calvinism in church history, John Owen (Toon, 2001:877). In Owen’s perspective, if one embraces the substitution theory then only three options exist as to the question of extent and the logical results. These options will receive more attention in the next section related to extent. For the moment, it is enough to mention here that Owen (1992:36) became one of the chief defenders and promoters of the substitution theory, and he argued that this view, if consistently followed, logically leads to a limited atonement for just the elect. As J.I. Packer (1999:12-13) said of Owen’s writings on this subject, “no comparable exposition of the work of redemption ... has ever been done since Owen published his.” In succinct form Owen argued that if Christ was the true substitute (appeasing God’s wrath for all) then all must be saved. That all are not saved means that the substitute (Christ) was only for the elect (Owen, 1992:36).

However, Arminian/Wesleyan theologians would not agree that one must abandon a substitution theory if one rejects the limited atonement view. Certainly the higher Calvinistic streams of thought would question the consistency and logical coherency of the Arminian/Wesleyan claim. Owen and many others through history have challenged them on this area of logic. Nonetheless, consistent or not, through history various Arminian/Wesleyan theologians have confessed their allegiance to this theory of the atonement. Arminius (1986:2:221) himself spoke fairly vividly of his view that Christ stood in the place of sinful humanity and by his interposition between God and mankind “satisfied Divine Justice” from God who because of mankind’s sin was “justly angry” on account of those sins.

Wesley seems to have spoken of Christ’s substitution in mankind’s place as well. Thomas Oden (2012:53) has concluded that Wesley taught that Christ “suffered for all humanity, bore our punishment,” and “paid the price of our sins for us.” His view of Wesley seems accurate. Wesley (2007:5:237) in his sermon “The Lord Our Righteousness” expressed the substitution idea, preaching that Christ “bore our sins in his own body upon the tree” and by that he “made a full atonement for” humanity.

Some, but not all, Arminian and Wesleyan teachers have continued to affirm substitution as Arminius and Wesley did. Arminian teachers such as Roger Olson (2006:221-241) and Thomas Oden, Richard Watson (1851:2:102, 104), and Thomas Summers (1888:258) all taught the substitution theory of the atonement. Some, of course, did not retain the substitution theory. The

argument made by those like John Owen, that if one embraces the substitution theory consistently one must embrace either universalism or redemption only for the elect, seems to have also influenced some in the Arminian/Wesleyan heritage. H. Orton Wiley, quoted often in this research as an Arminian/Wesleyan representative, seems to have believed that if one did embrace the penal substitution theory one did indeed have to adopt “universalism or limited atonement” (Olson, 2006:238-239).

6.6.4 The Extent of the Atonement Question

The issue of the extent of the atonement has produced considerable debate in the history of the body of Christ. Even among those who identify as Calvinistic the debate has been intense, with substantive voices landing in divergent places. Though the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement has been the key emphasis among Calvinists and among many leading Arminian voices too, a split has emerged on this matter among those who affirm the penal substitution theory.

Even at the Synod of Dort, a strong Calvinistic convention that responded to and opposed the Remonstrant view of soteriology, the conversations on how to define and explain the atonement produced some considerable debate, and even conflict to such a degree that lives were placed in jeopardy when one representative by the name of Gomarus challenged Martinius “to fight a duel” over this issue (Thomas, 1997:147). G. Michael Thomas (1997:147), in his research on this Synod, discovered that “nothing caused greater division at the Synod of Dort than the question, ‘For whom did Christ die?’” Other scholars, like David Allen, agree with the point Thomas made. Allen (2016:150) also stated, “the single, most disputed issue among the Reformed delegates at the Synod of Dort concerned the extent of the atonement.” This diversity has continued past the Synod not only among Calvinists but among the Calvinistic and broader Arminian/Wesleyan streams of the body of Christ.

6.6.4.1 *Limited Atonement View of the Supralapsarian and Infralapsarian Calvinists*

From the Synod of Dort onward two schools of Calvinistic thought, supralapsarians and infralapsarians, defended the idea that Christ died only for the elect. A key reason for this relates to the placement of the atonement in their decree order (after election) and by that placement these teachers define the intent of the atonement within a penal substitution paradigm for only those elected. The common idea among these two streams of Calvinism relates to the idea that Christ functioned as the means to secure the faith of the elect by his intent to purchase only them in his sacrifice. Election in the decree precedes his work and

therefore he is carrying out the fulfilment of their election by securing their faith by his purchase of it through the cross.

Supralapsarian evangelist and teacher A.W. Pink (1930:119-120) explained succinctly this idea of Christ's intent and the design of his death in relation to the ones elected by divine sovereignty. He said, "Christ came here to carry into effect God's sovereign purpose of election, to save a people already 'His' (Matt. 1:21) by covenant settlement" (Pink, 1971:112-113). His limited atonement idea is further strengthened by his definition of the atonement as a substitution in which Christ functioned as the "covenant-Head of God's elect, as their legal representative" (Pink, 1971:81). Christ's work according to Pink (1971:94) from Matthew 1:21 and Ephesians 1:4 meant he was not dying "to procure a people for himself, but to secure a people already his". In his view the intent or design of the atonement related to God's elective purposes. Christ's death secured the righteousness, faith, and salvation of only the ones chosen in eternity past (Pink, 1971:119). By his death the efficacy is certain and guaranteed so that each one of those elected shall experience and benefit from the atonement for righteousness and eternal salvation (Pink, 1971:120-226).

Infralapsarians also affirm the same idea, that Christ's death carried out the design or single intent to save only the elect. Again, as with supralapsarians, infralapsarians place the decree to elect prior to the work of Christ to atone for sinners. Therefore, Christ's work functioned as a means to the end in securing the salvation of only those elected. Charles Hodge (1995:2:318-320, 545-546), a representative of the infralapsarian school of thought, agreed that the atonement of Christ had an intention and design only for the elect in some sense, though he did not deny that the atonement had some impact in securing "innumerable blessings, both providential and religious" for the "whole race at large" (Hodge, 1995:2:545).

Nonetheless, even with that admission, he taught that the primary intent and ultimate design of the atonement resolves the issue (Hodge, 1995:2:545). In his mind, if God has elected some in eternity past, which he affirmed, then it would seem contradictory for Christ to die equally for all (Hodge, 1995:2:548). In his view the "righteousness of Christ did not make the salvation of men merely possible, it secured the actual salvation of those for whom he wrought" (Hodge, 1995:2:552). Hodge also connected this to the idea of Christ's representation. The Lord "acted as the representative and substitute of those only who are ultimately saved" (Hodge, 1995:2:552).

R.C. Sproul has also argued in the way that Pink and Hodge did on the nature and design of the atonement. In discussing the Trinitarian harmony on the atonement, Sproul (1997a:163) emphasized the idea that Christ actually accomplished redemption, not merely making it

possible. Sproul's (1997a:164) question to those who reject limited atonement was the following: "Is Christ a real Savior or merely a 'potential' Savior?" (Sproul, 1997a:164). Sproul (1997a:168) noted that the answer rests not with the discussion on the value or sufficiency of Christ's death, but instead the answer is determined by "its *design*."

This type of thought from both the supralapsarians and infralapsarians has been the common perspective among their Calvinist streams. These two streams of thought have produced much literature that aligns with the idea that John Owen proposed. Owen's treatise on this has been "considered by many to be the classic work defending limited atonement" (Allen, 2016:197). Owen's belief in substitution and the implications of that have, according to David Allen (2016:197), become "famous" arguments for the limited atonement perspective. The argument is set forth in this manner:

Christ suffered for either all the sins of all men, or all the sins of some men, or some of the sins of all men. If the last statement is true, then all men are still left with some sins, and so no-one can be redeemed. If the first statement is true, then why are not all men freed from sin? You may say, because of their unbelief. But I ask, is unbelief a sin? If it is not, why are men punished for it? If it is a sin, then it must be among the sins for which Christ died. So the first statement cannot be true! So it is clear that the only possibility remaining is that Christ had laid upon him all the sins of some men, the elect, only. It is this that I believe is the teaching of the Bible (Owen, 1992:7).

This view by Owen within the penal substitution paradigm has had a significant influence in the minds of various evangelicals wrestling with what theory of the atonement to believe. Some, as noted earlier, believe this logic has such consistency that one truly only has two options: (1) embrace limited atonement, or (2) reject the doctrine of substitution and embrace some other theory. The Calvinists in both the supralapsarian and the infralapsarian streams have defended this version of thought in great numbers.

The founder of the first Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, James P. Boyce (1887:313-340), affirmed this line of thinking on the atonement. He thought the question of "what was the design" or intent of Christ's death planned by the Father led to a limited atonement view (Boyce, 1887:338). From the Presbyterian branch of Christianity popular author and theologian R.C. Sproul spoke in these terms as well. He noted that the issue revolves around the design and intent of the atonement (Sproul, 2014:167). He specifically taught that "God's design and purpose for the cross were to save only some of fallen humanity by satisfying the demands of his justice" (Sproul, 2014:169). That "some" Sproul (2014:169) spoke of were "those whom" the Father "chose from the foundation of the world."

6.6.4.2 *Unlimited Atonement View of the Sublapsarian Calvinists and Arminians/Wesleyans*

Another strand of theologians has existed, however, that takes a common or similar view on the atonement. One form of Calvinism, the moderate or low or sublapsarian form, has articulated a type of atonement paradigm that affirms Christ died for all in some sense, and in that degree they have some harmony here with the Arminian/Wesleyan wing of Christianity. While these two schools still differ on election and monergism, key issues that certainly divide the two schools of thought, they do find some common ground here. And interestingly, even the sublapsarian Calvinists find some common ground with the infralapsarian Calvinists and those in Calvinism that admit, as did Charles Hodge and James P. Boyce, that Christ's death does have some extended impact beyond the elect. Therefore, the sublapsarian strand of Calvinists and the Arminian/Wesleyan strand have a degree of harmony in that one area with those who admit that at least some blessings from the atonement extend beyond the elect.

The moderate Calvinist stream has often, but not always, been identified as the Amyraldian school of thought. Some within the moderate Calvinist perspective would not technically be classified as Amyraldians, but these would still affirm some type of atonement that extends to all beyond the elect. Sometimes these theologians were labeled as hypothetical universalists. Some of these were likely, according to Jonathan D. Moore (2007:92), still within the infralapsarian school of thought while affirming the universality of Christ's death for all in some sense. It seems that some, like John Preston, limited Christ's intercession only to the elect while allowing for the atonement in some sense to belong "equally to all without exception" (Moore, 2007:92).

Therefore, in a technical sense David Allen (2016:xvii) seems to be right that a distinction can be made between hypothetical universalists and some within the Amyraldian streams of thought. Though both held to some form of unlimited atonement they differed in other areas related to the nature of God's decrees. But as Allen (2016:xvii) noted, they "all affirmed universal atonement."

That distinction between the hypothetical universalists and sublapsarian Amyraldians has application to this research because in comparing Geisler to his claim to affirm an operational sublapsarian Amyraldian theology it would not then be accurate to use the hypothetical universalists as the standard to compare with Geisler if Geisler has classified himself and his soteriology as moderate or sublapsarian Amyraldianism. The sublapsarian stream with unlimited atonement and the hypothetical universalist stream with unlimited atonement have enough of a difference in the order of their decree model that Geisler's comparison to his own confession

needs to remain within the sublapsarian stream, primarily with recognition of how much discontinuity or continuity he has to other streams in the broader Calvinist and Arminian streams of thought. If this technical, yet proper, distinction is not made, it could easily slant the study to suggest that Geisler has a greater discontinuity with the moderate Calvinist view (as he claimed to affirm) than actual reality because of the sharp differences he would have with the hypothetical universalists in the decree order. Geisler's understanding and use of the term "moderate Calvinist" relates to the sublapsarian Amyraldian stream of teaching that affirms a type of unlimited atonement. Geisler may, as do all Amyraldians, rightly align with Amyraldians in the atonement while still definitely differing with the hypothetical universalists who adopt a much different decree order than would Geisler or the sublapsarians.

Additionally, the early 1600s Amyraldian school of thought, often known as the "French Reformed Academy at Saumur," has since the early era of their primary leaders (John Cameron and Moise Amyraut) affirmed the idea that Christ's "satisfaction" occurred for the "sins of all people" and that this gave the ground "for the universal gospel offer" (Allen, 2016:163, 164). This perspective related also to the distinct placement of Christ's death in the order of decrees. Amyraut thought and taught that God decreed Christ to come as Savior to the whole world, more than the elect, prior to the decree to elect many to salvation (Amyraut, 2017:99-100). In Amyraut's sublapsarian model, the placement of this decree of election after the universal atonement protects the death of Christ from being "ignominious" and ineffective by not "producing any effect towards the salvation of men" (Amyraut, 2017:113).

6.6.4.2.1 *The Most Distinctive Key to Sublapsarian Amyraldian Calvinism*

That distinct difference in placement of the atonement decree has been an essential key upheld by past and present Amyraldian or sublapsarian moderate Calvinists. Modern Anglican Amyraldian sublapsarian Michael Bird has recently explained this viewpoint. He said, "the work of Christ, apart from its application, is coextensive with humanity and it is sufficient for all" (Bird, 2013:431). This universality can logically, according to Bird (2013:432) and the Amyraldian stream, work in concert with election and predestination by asserting that "God's decree to designate Christ as Savior logically precedes God's decision to save the elect." Election in the sublapsarian Amyraldian tradition makes it Christocentric. As Bird says, "God's purposes in the Son" are "what shape election, rather than election that shapes God's purposes in the Son. It should be obvious that God cannot elect humans to salvation unless he has first elected a Savior" (Bird, 2013:432).

This school has often been labeled merely as four-point Calvinism. Kenneth Good stated that in many circles the Amyraldian school has been given the four-point Calvinist designation. He

said, “the disciples of Moise Amyraut followed this teacher into what has been called ‘Amyraldianism,’ and this became the first organization of the system currently known as ‘Four Point Calvinism’” (Good, 1988:108).

These four-point moderate Calvinists have been common. In their version they reject the limited atonement doctrine, even though, as noted earlier, some teachers not within the moderate Calvinist classification (for example, infralapsarians) have extended the atonement further than just to the elect without actually being within the Amyraldian or sublapsarian model. Indeed, this point has caused much contention among theologians who have great unanimity in many areas related to soteriology. R.C. Sproul (1997a:164) rightly recognized that the limited atonement part of Calvinism is “probably the most disputed” point of the five. But the distinct placement of the decree for atonement prior to the decree to elect almost always leads to the idea of an unlimited provision in the atonement. In that sense sublapsarians, the Amyraldian tradition, has made a unique contribution to the field of soteriology that differs from the supralapsarians and infralapsarians.

6.6.4.2.2 Two Twenty-First Century Amyraldian Sublapsarians

Two modern twenty-first century theologians, and contemporaries of Geisler, have given helpful presentations and explanations as to the sublapsarian Amyraldian (moderate) form of Calvinism. These explanations offer some light, and also reveals a matter related to election and the application of it. That aspect will weigh heavily into the analysis of where Geisler stood in this stream known as Amyraldian sublapsarianism and his claim to be within that stream as a moderate Calvinist. Two theologians, Millard J. Erickson and Rolland McCune, have taught a form of moderate Calvinism. Their teaching of sublapsarianism will serve as another helpful guide for evaluating Geisler’s continuity with Amyraut.

Rolland McCune, a moderate Calvinist, examined the three lapsarian views in his systematic theology. He gave three reasons why he thought the Amyraldian sublapsarian view aligned with scripture more than supralapsarian and infralapsarian views. First, “it agrees with the biblical data that says God provided Jesus in his love for the whole world, not just for the elect” (McCune, 2009:2:219). Second, he believed that a sublapsarian order “agrees with the biblical statements concerning a universal provision and offer of salvation” (McCune, 2009:2:219). Then, his third point relates to the doctrine of atonement in relation to election. He said:

It is more biblical to say that God elected some to an already-provided-for atonement. Ephesians 1:4 suggests as much. Believers are ‘chosen in (*en*, in connection with) Christ before the foundation of the world.’ This seems to imply that the provision for salvation

accomplished by Christ was logically contemplated before specific individuals were purposed to have its redemptive accomplishments applied to them. The other views have God electing persons to a salvation that theoretically He had not as yet planned. The supralapsarian view suffers even worse under this principle. It has God electing and reprobating people that, in His mind, are not even created, much less fallen. In this view, He has also not contemplated a salvation to which to elect some or a damnation to which to send others (McCune, 2009:2:219).

Another Amyraldian sublapsarian Calvinist that has had significant influence in evangelicalism is Millard J. Erickson. As a prolific author and as one who has served in both pastoral ministry and the academy at numerous evangelical colleges and seminaries, Erickson has been a major voice in the last century and this current century. Walter A. Elwell (2001:385) called him both a “theologian” and “prophet” that the “evangelical world would do well to listen carefully to.”

In Erickson’s mind it makes better sense of scripture to see election flowing out of an atonement already provided for in God’s decree. He also rejected the idea that this equals Arminianism (Erickson, 1985:835). It is, in his words, a “moderate form of Calvinism” (Erickson, 1985:835). Erickson highlighted that this view had been taught by Augustus H. Strong as well. In following Strong’s view, Erickson (1985:834) noted that Strong believed the decision by God in his decree to provide salvation is prior to the decree of election. Erickson (1985:834) even highlighted that Augustus H. Strong thought Calvin held this type of view in his commentaries. That aligns with Amyraut’s thinking as well. Amyraut, according to Alan Clifford (2007:11), thought that what he taught in these matters was a “reaffirmation of the balanced biblical insights of John Calvin himself!”

Whether or not Amyraut truly reflected Calvin’s thought and teaching is debatable. Paul Matthews Van Buren (1980:130-131) in his PhD dissertation at Drew University concluded that the issue related to Christ’s death for all humanity, yet “the fact that not all believe is left by Calvin as a tension, resolved neither in favour of universalism nor in favour of a limited atonement.” Additionally, Archibald Alexander Hodge (1976:388) did not think either that Calvin gave a direct exact answer to this question on the extent of the atonement. In his words, Calvin has “not left behind him a clear and consistent statement of his views” on this precise question (Hodge, 1976:388).

Some, of course would disagree with that idea of inconsistency or lack of clarity in regard to Calvin. Roger Nicole, Tom Nettles, and Stephen Holmes have maintained that Calvin taught a limited atonement (Allen, 2016:66-95). However, some scholars disagree with that and remain convinced that Calvin did teach an unlimited atonement. Elijah Waterman from Yale University,

R.T. Kendall, Kevin Kennedy, and David Allen (2016:66-95) all believe that Calvin did clearly teach an unlimited atonement position.

Nonetheless, even with that question on Calvin remaining a legitimate one, these theologians (McCune and Erickson) highlight their continuity with Amyraut's sublapsarian soteriology, in which the atonement was designed for the whole world with the decree to elect following the atonement. Regardless of whether that was or was not Calvin's view, this particular stream of Calvinistic thought gained traction and emerged in history as one stream of thought with a unique decree model that allowed for a universal atonement while still affirming a sovereign election.

6.6.4.2.3 *Three Twentieth-Century Amyraldian Sublapsarians*

Three well-known theologians in the twentieth century, who lived and taught just prior to Geisler's life and ministry, also promoted a form of Amyraldian sublapsarian theology. Therefore, adding these to the research adds more historical contextualization for a proper analysis of Geisler to determine whether his version of sublapsarian Amyraldian theology has close continuity to those within the general timeframe of his life and ministry.

First, Augustus H. Strong taught an Amyraldian sublapsarian soteriology model. In Strong's view (1907:777) it made more sense to place election and calling to salvation as subsequent acts of Christ's work to redeem. He even thought that Calvin shifted from his earlier writings and eventually embraced a soteriology that accepted a form of "universal atonement" (Strong, 1907:777). For Strong (1907:779) "particular persons are elected, not to have Christ die for them, but to have special influences of the Spirit bestowed upon them." Therefore, the decree to atone for sinners occurs after the decree to create and to permit the fall (Strong, 1907:778). Furthermore, he said of the atonement:

The scriptures present the atonement as having been made for all men, and as sufficient for the salvation of all. Not the *atonement* therefore is limited, but the application of the atonement through the work of the Holy Spirit. Upon this principle of a universal atonement, but a special application of it to the elect, we must interpret such passages as Eph. 1:4,7; 2 Tim.1:9,10; John 17:9,20,24—asserting a special efficacy of the atonement in the case of the elect; and also such passages as 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 2:2; 2 Tim. 2:6; 4:10; Tit. 2:11—asserting that the death of Christ is for all... Unconscious participation in the atonement of Christ, by virtue of our common humanity in him, makes us the heirs of much temporal blessing. Conscious participation in the atonement of Christ, by virtue of our faith in him and his work for us, gives us justification and eternal life (Strong 1907:771, 772).

Additionally, Strong made a connection about common grace and natural life from the atonement of Christ that resembled the idea that Amyraut had also taught. For Amyraut, the atonement of Christ purchased the common grace for the whole world as well as eternal salvation for the elect. This layered or dual focus scheme allowed for common grace and special grace to both flow from the atonement (Clifford, 2007:16, 172-173). Of this continuity with Amyraut, Strong specifically stated (1907:772):

If it be asked in what sense Christ is the Savior of all men, we reply: (a) That the atonement of Christ secures for all men a delay in the execution of the sentence against sin, and a space for repentance, together with a continuance of the common blessings of life which have been forfeited by transgression. If strict justice had been executed, the race would have been cut off at the first sin. That man lives after sinning, is due wholly to the cross. There is a pretermission, or “passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God” (Rom. 3:25), the justification of which is found only in the sacrifice of Calvary.

Second, E.Y. Mullins, served as a key figure in the massive Southern Baptist denomination and former president of their first seminary. This first seminary, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, followed the sublapsarian model of theology common to Amyraldianism (Humphreys, 2001:181-182). One can see the difference with his model of theology versus that of the model proposed by W.T. Conner. In Mullins’ (1917:303-358) systematic theology, he treated atonement prior to the subject of election, the hallmark of a sublapsarian soteriology model. However, W.T. Conner (Garrett, 2001:205), who was a student of Mullins at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, did not take the decree order model that Mullins embraced. Conner’s (1937:151-182) systematic theology placed God’s decree to elect in salvation prior to the plan to provide atonement.

Furthermore, Mullins did recognize a sequence in God’s elective decrees. It is common to say that these are logical decrees. However, in Mullins’ (1917:47) view God’s elective purposes have a sequence, which made his sublapsarian model a unique model in that he saw the logical decree as actually having some type of eternal sequence or serial flow to it. In his view, God’s election worked through a sequence. God elected one person and then, on the basis of what God would accomplish in that person’s works for others in the gospel, God then in sequence elected more in a serial flow of sequenced elections. One maybe could classify this view as a type of serial election or sequential view of election. Albert Mohler, current president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, noted this modified form in Mullins’ thought. He thought Mullins still held to the doctrine of election in continuity with the “Calvinistic tradition” while still promoting a “significantly modified” form of Calvinism (Mohler, 1997:14).

But this election according to Mullins occurred from an atonement that preceded it in the decree order. And that atonement for Mullins (1912:32) was a “propitiation” and an objective “substitutionary atonement” that Christ made “for all” (Mullins, 1917:336). Mullins was so sure of this universal atonement that he emphasized it by saying “there are numerous passages of Scripture which leave no room for doubt” (Mullins, 1917:336). Also, highlighting in this universal atonement something common among Amyraldians who followed Amyraut’s thinking, Mullins noted that general graces that everyone receives even if in unbelief arise from the atonement. Mullins (1917:336) stated of this dual or bifocal model:

In 1 Timothy 4:10 a distinction is made between the race as a whole and those who believe. God is ‘the Savior of all men, especially of them that believe.’ This last passage makes clear the fact that all men do not share equally in the benefits of the atonement of Christ. Those who remain in unbelief are not saved. Yet even they share many of the common blessings of life through the work of Christ. God’s anger against human sin is restrained in order that men may repent.

Mullins, also like Amyraut, who recognized some mystery regarding God’s will and human will (Clifford, 2007:14), acknowledged that this subject has some mystery to it that goes beyond our finite abilities to grasp. Mullins (1917:347) admitted that if asked can we totally resolve these perceived tensions of God’s sovereignty and human freedom he would reply in the negative. He also did not believe that we could fully understand God’s reasons why he chose to use this method in saving sinners (Mullins, 1917:348).

Third, another sublapsarian in the Amyraldian stream who had a significant voice in the twentieth century was Lewis Sperry Chafer. He founded Dallas Theological Seminary in 1924 (originally named Evangelical Theological College) (Hannah, 2009:76). The thoughts of this theologian have significance to this research as well because Norman Geisler taught at Dallas Seminary and claims he held to views like those as set forth by the men who studied under Chafer. Geisler (2010:147-148) said that his balanced and moderate form of Calvinism was in line with “moderate Calvinists, including ... Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord,” and “Charles Ryrie,” all of whom were teachers at Dallas where Geisler taught from 1979 to 1988. Ryrie (1999:368) taught that the substitutionary death of Jesus was “unlimited in its extent.” John Walvoord (1969:187) also embraced unlimited atonement as a moderate Calvinist. Both Walvoord and Ryrie were students of Chafer.

Therefore, since Chafer spoke on this topic more than Ryrie or Walvoord, it makes sense to examine his unlimited atonement form of sublapsarian Calvinism as that will provide another

substantive basis for comparison with Geisler's view, especially since Geisler claimed affinity to these theologians.

Chafer identified himself as a moderate Calvinist and embraced the idea that Christ died for more than the elect. Though his systematic errs by switching the proper names between infralapsarians and sublapsarians, he embraced the sublapsarian model while wrongly labeling it the infralapsarian view. In describing the sublapsarian order (which he wrongly called the infralapsarian order) Chafer (1993:3:180) stated that this decree model "places the decree to provide salvation before the decree to elect" and from that it "allows" for the view "that Christ wrought an unlimited redemption." Chafer (1993:3:184) classified himself in this category as a "moderate Calvinist." In his thinking, this view is "more the belief of Bible expositors than of theologians, which fact is doubtless due to the truth that the Bible, taken in its natural terminology and apart from those strained interpretations which are required to defend a theory, seems to teach an unlimited redemption" (Chafer, 1993:3:184). Chafer examined all of the universal terms used in scripture to speak of Christ's death. In his view the texts were remarkably clear, so clear that he asked this question in relation to his conviction of biblical worldwide inclusive terms used to describe unlimited atonement: could God "use any more explicit language than he used to express such an intent?" (Chafer, 1993:205).

6.6.4.3 *Unlimited Atonement View from the Arminians/Wesleyans*

The Arminian/Wesleyan heritage has a similar view as that of the sublapsarian unlimited atonement Calvinists. They too usually place the decree to redeem by Christ's death prior to the decree to elect and predestine. Arminius (1996:2:709-719) placed God's decree to create mankind first, then mankind's fall by permission, and then the first act of God towards salvation in his model is Christ's death for all of humanity.

This line of thinking has continued through history with the Arminian/Wesleyan stream subscribing to the idea that Christ died for each and every person of humanity. Puritan minister John Goodwin, who died fifty-six years after Arminius, taught that Christ's death was intended for all and not only for the elect (Goodwin, 2004:128-166). Goodwin confidently asserted that this idea rested upon "pillars" of "scripture, reason, and authority" and so much so that no person could "reasonably question the truth" of it (Goodwin, 2004:326).

Wesleyans have also maintained this viewpoint. Wesleyan Thomas Oden linked the universal aspect of Christ's death back to the Adamic headship of Adam. Just as Adam "represented all" of the "human family" so too did Christ represent the "whole of humanity" (Oden, 1989:2:382). In

his view the Wesleyan heritage of theology affirms that “Christ belongs to them all” (Oden, 1989:2:382).

Furthermore, Henry Thiessen, who subscribed to four of the five points in the traditional Arminian/Wesleyan scheme of soteriology (embracing only eternal security), also embraced the sublapsarian unlimited atonement viewpoint. He rejected the idea that Christ died only for an elect set of people. In contrast he taught Christ’s death “secured for all men” some benefits (Thiessen, 1949:330). Some of those benefits that Christ’s death secured for all people related to a delay in execution for sin, common blessings of life for all, time for repentance, and the removal of all obstacles in God’s mind for a sinner’s salvation unless wilful rebellion remains in the sinner (Thiessen, 1949:330).

These three teachers highlight a general and common view among the Arminian/Wesleyan stream of thought, even from one who though not fully Arminian/Wesleyan (Thiessen affirmed eternal security) still aligned more with that stream than not, at least in soteriology matters. The Arminian/Wesleyan stream clearly adopts the idea that Christ’s death extended to all and has some benefit to all in some sense. Furthermore, this strand of theology unites with the moderate Calvinistic theologians in that atonement logically precedes the decree to elect. Some sublapsarian teachers from both the moderate Calvinist and Arminian/Wesleyan stream see the atonement as having some immediate benefit upon all before regeneration. For some it serves as a reason for the delay in execution for sin that calls for the death penalty.

6.6.5 Norman Geisler’s View of the Atonement and Extent

Geisler (1999b:147) thought that the death, atonement, and resurrection of Christ were “absolutely crucial to the truth of historic Christianity (1 Cor. 15:1-4).” Through a historical and logical analysis Geisler identified the fundamental nature of Christ’s atonement in place of sinners. From the historical view following the Apostles’ Creed, Geisler (2020:461) noted that it taught Christ Jesus’ “suffering and death for our sins.” From the logical approach Geisler found that some soteriological essentials existed, among which he listed the doctrine of Christ’s atoning death (Geisler, 2020:483). Certainly these affirmations from Geisler show that he believed the death of Christ for sinners formed a key central doctrine for the Christian faith.

Additionally, Geisler defined the type of atonement he believed scripture taught. He ruled off the table many liberal or incorrect views of Christ’s death. In his analysis of numerous theories of the atonement he clearly thought some options were “incompatible” with scripture and not “adequate explanations of how salvation is accomplished” (Geisler, 2011:828). Though he believed that the various theories contained an element of truth in them, and that each view

highlighted some attribute of God, in his final analysis he believed that the substitution view of atonement captured the fullest witness of scripture (Geisler, 2011:840). As he said,

While each of the ... theories of the atonement contributes some truth to the overall redemptive acts of Christ, the substitution view—meaning that Christ’s death brought substitutionary satisfaction to God—fully explains the necessary objective basis (in God) for the atonement.... Without the Just dying for the unjust, God’s justice would not be satisfied, and without justice being appeased, God’s mercy could not be released to declare the otherwise unjust sinners to be justified in his eyes and, hence, qualified for heaven (Geisler, 2011:840-841).

Furthermore, when examining the question of the atonement’s extent, Geisler did indeed adopt the standard sublapsarian view that Christ’s death extended to each and every person in the human race. He could not have stated his view for an unlimited atonement in any clearer terms than he did. Of the extent he said, “there are no verses” when “properly understood” that one can use to “support limited atonement, but there are numerous verses that teach unlimited atonement, that is, Christ died for the sins of all humankind” (Geisler, 2010:241). On his view the atonement was about provision. Instead of focusing only on the design of the atonement, Geisler argued that there was more than one intention in the atonement. Here he sounds like an Amyraldian for his dual-natured language. As Geisler (2010:256) said, it constituted a “false dilemma” by those who argue there is “only one intention for the Atonement.” In his view another intention existed in Christ’s death: God “also intended that Christ would die to provide salvation for all” (Geisler, 2010:257). After examining over twenty-two texts related to the atonement Geisler (2010:261) summarized his view on this by stating:

The plain meaning of numerous biblical texts is that Christ dies for the sins of the whole world—all of humankind. Atonement is unlimited in its extent. Only by straining and stretching the texts can contrary meaning be attributed.

6.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Geisler’s view of Christ, his life, and work of redemption gives significant insight into his theological positions. Before speaking to the more particular aspects related just to the narrower issue of his degree of continuity or discontinuity with the Calvinistic and Arminian/Wesleyan streams of thought, a broader analysis with his overall relation to historic orthodoxy helps to identify him as within the stream of historic orthodoxy. Geisler’s teaching traveled within the single evangelical river of orthodoxy, and recognizing this can help others better recognize the unique stream he traveled within his overall orthodox Christology. Rivers often have multiple

tributaries feeding them, and likewise Geisler moved in the broader evangelical river while also simultaneously moving in a narrower stream in that broader river of orthodoxy. This can be seen in three ways.

First, Geisler affirmed the view of Christ's incarnation in continuity with the historic evangelical creeds of the Christian faith. He taught that Christ Jesus lived as deity and humanity in one person. He also firmly rejected major Christological errors such as Arianism, Docetism, Nestorianism, Monophysitism, and Apollinarianism.

Second, Geisler affirmed the three major offices of Christ Jesus. He taught that Christ Jesus fulfills three offices: prophet, priest, and king. As a prophet he exercised his role as teacher. As priest he exercised his role in death. As the resurrected Lord he will function as king.

Third, with the broad historic church Geisler affirmed that Christ indeed did die in his flesh. Furthermore, not only did he just die in the historical sense, but he died with significance for humanity in that his death functioned as the means for salvation to the world of humanity. Though Geisler believed the numerous theories had some elements of truth within each one, he recognized some as much more biblical than others. Of those various options Geisler affirmed the penal substitution view as the view with the greatest amount of biblical support. The doctrine of Christ dying for sinners constituted for Geisler an essential of the Christian faith.

Consequently, Geisler's specific view on the atonement provides some clear insights into the heart of his soteriology model. As an evangelical within the historic orthodox stream, he identified with conservative Christianity by his affirmation of the doctrine of penal substitution. Furthermore, his writings reveal in the more narrow focus how he has discontinuity with two strands of Calvinism (supralapsarian and infralapsarian) while having some continuity with the sublapsarian stream. Additionally, his writings reveal he has continuity to a degree even with the Arminian/Wesleyan stream in that sublapsarian views among the moderate Calvinist and Arminian/Wesleyan stream overlap.

Therefore, now it is proper to turn to that narrower focus and analysis of Geisler's views in relation to Calvinistic and Arminian/Wesleyan thought. Since Geisler, Calvinists, and Arminians/Wesleyans have some unanimity in the broader areas related to the incarnation, the offices of Christ, and for conservatives to a large degree on penal substitution atonement, the analysis will now focus on the narrower issue of the purpose and intent of the penal substitution atonement. When examining this narrower area of doctrine, the research highlights more the differences here than in the other aforementioned doctrines.

6.7.1 Norman Geisler Compared to the Reformed/Calvinistic Positions on the Atonement

Geisler differs from the supralapsarian and infralapsarian stream of thought on the decree order of the atonement. Both supralapsarians and infralapsarians place the position or decree for atonement after the decree of election. Furthermore, even in the Canons of Dort, under the first section, articles 1 and 2 discuss mankind's fall into sin and Christ's atonement prior to article 7 that discusses God's decree and election. This order certainly differs from the supralapsarian order. One possibly could even make the case that the sublapsarian order was utilized by Dort in the first main section. If so, the sublapsarian has continuity with the order set forth in the Synod of Dort. If the Synod intended that, then the Canons of Dort pose some discontinuity with both the infralapsarians and supralapsarians because in both models they place election prior to atonement.

With Geisler affirming some type of order where he focused on atonement prior to election, that position establishes a very significant point of discontinuity in his thought with the higher forms of Calvinistic thought (both supralapsarian and infralapsarian). As Michael Bird (2013:431-432) noted, when the decree to elect precedes the decree to atone that means the doctrine of election shapes one's Christology. Geisler rejects that model and in turn places the decree to elect after the atonement. It seems he thought Christ's atonement should shape one's view of election and not the reverse.

Furthermore, the higher forms of Calvinism seem more often than not to assert or emphasize one single purpose of the atonement. The higher Calvinist forms (supralapsarian and infralapsarian) emphasize the design of the atonement to secure eternal salvation for the elect. That narrow focus implies that Christ died only for the elect. Geisler clearly rejected this view. In his view Christ's death had a dual or multiple purpose to it. That clearly placed him closer to the Amyraldian stream of thought. Amyraut and those from his stream thought Christ's atonement had several facets to it that ranged from being the source for common grace, a provision for everyone to justify the preaching of the gospel for all, as well as to the actual securing of salvation for the believer. Therefore, the atonement had some benefit to all, more than just the elect, while still having a specific eternal benefit to the elect.

6.7.2 Norman Geisler Compared to the Arminian/Wesleyan Positions on the Atonement

Sublapsarians, Amyraldians and Arminians/Wesleyans have historically had some close similarity to each other in the area of the atonement. For the conservatives that have embraced penal substitution atonement within the Arminian/Wesleyan stream, which seems to have been

Arminius' and Wesley's view, their position does not drastically differ from the one that Geisler and other Amyraldians have affirmed. Geisler agrees with the Arminian/Wesleyan stream that Christ's death had a purpose for each and every human person.

Interestingly, one aspect of thought that has surfaced among those in line with the Arminian/Wesleyan stream has been the benefit of Christ's death in delaying the judgment of God on sinners. Henry Thiessen presented this view that the provision of Christ did give some benefit by delaying the immediate execution of sinners. Geisler seems not to have given this concept very much thought if any at all. Geisler did not make a clear or strong link of the atonement to these forms of grace. It seems to have been implied and secondarily recognized, as with infant salvation, but he did not express this view with the same degree of clarity as other theologians.

However, Geisler's colleague at Dallas Seminary, John Walvoord (1998:94), seems to have made this connection that any or all grace (including common grace) extends from the cross of Christ. But Geisler in his view of the common grace of God seems not to make this direct connection. He did teach that "common grace to unsaved persons" helps to make "living in this corrupt world possible" (Geisler, 2011:775). What did Geisler mean by the term "possible"? That seems to be unknown. These statements give readers implications to what he seemed to have thought. Did atonement make life possible? If so, then he may have affirmed some type of atonement delaying judgment and granting some type of life to those in the fallen world.

But Geisler does not seem to make a direct statement to give a clear view of how he defined or articulated the concepts of delaying justice and granting some type of life. Did the light of Christ in every man or the natural common graces of Christ actually give something to mankind because Christ purchased a delay in justice and granting some type of life toward those in the fallen world by his death on the cross? The Arminian/Wesleyan stream does seem to highlight those points while Geisler does not give a definitive or extensive enough answer to yield firm conclusions. Implications exist in Geisler's theology on this, but not direct and unequivocal assertions.

So in that sense Geisler may not have directly disagreed so much with the idea as much as he merely does not venture into the idea to affirm or deny it. Therefore, Geisler seems not to have a stated or expressed continuity of thought in this area since he did not address the matter with explicit clarity. What the Arminian/Wesleyan teachers, and some Amyraldians too, have explicitly asserted on this does not seem to clearly continue (continuity) as an explicitly expressed or explicit feature of Geisler's theology in relation to the atonement. Seminal ideas seem to exist for Geisler on this, but a mature expression of it did not occur.

CHAPTER 7:

GOD'S PLAN OF GRACE AND PROVIDENCE IN APPLICATION

7.1 AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ORIGIN AND APPLICATION OF DIVINE GRACE IN SALVATION

One of the most decisive and notable marks to a soteriology relates to the doctrine of how God elects a person and brings the person to faith. Are people elected to faith? Or are people elected on the basis of their faith? Does God react after a person chooses him (conditional election) or does a person respond to God's choice (God's election of lost mankind)? Usually this one doctrine, often a direct correlation as to how election and predestination function in application within time and history, reveals whether one aligns more with the Calvinistic or Arminian/Wesleyan streams of theology. All inerrantists in the evangelical or fundamentalist streams of thought have to admit that God spoke of election in the Bible. The terms exist throughout the scriptures. Consequently, those who affirm the authority of scripture believe in election even if definitions of the term vary among the interpreters.

Even non-Calvinists recognize that no proper view of soteriology can omit the doctrine of election and predestination if a theologian desires to teach an adequate and faithful view of scripture. For example, Paige Patterson in a 1998 chapel message at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, founded by a Calvinist, J.P. Boyce (George, 2001:79-82), noted that "any approach to soteriology which omits the Bible doctrine of election is incomplete, inadequate and misleading" (Moore, 1998:37). Furthermore, Erwin Lutzer (1998:153), speaking more from the Calvinistic pendulum of faith, stressed that the ideas related to the origin and application of grace, whether ultimately based upon election and predestination or human free will, have "to the greatest minds in the history of the church" highlighted one's view of the gospel.

Furthermore, even those outside of the standard orthodox faith have noted the importance of the doctrine of election in a Christian theology. Karl Barth in his massive fourteen-volume set of dogmatic theology emphasized the central place of election in the gospel. He stated, "the doctrine of election is the ... central word in the whole doctrine of reconciliation" (Barth, 1942:2:88). Emil Brunner (1950:303) also noted that the doctrine of election, though dangerous and when wrongly understood can cause a disaster in the faith, constitutes a core aspect of biblical revelation. He stated, "Election constitutes the centre of the Old and the New Testament" (Brunner, 1950:1:303). Brunner (1950:1:305) added even further when focusing on the gospel that the doctrine of election directly relates to the "good news of 'sonship' and of the Kingdom of God".

As an evangelical Norman Geisler recognized that the doctrine of election had a major impact on how one understood God and soteriology. He openly made an effort to build a soteriology that includes the doctrine of election while doing so in a certain way to avoid what he calls extremes on both sides. Geisler (2010:19) sought to build a moderate or “balanced (or middle) view”. Out of this moderate view he attempted to build “a third view” with a hope “to balance sovereignty and free will, accepting both as biblical truths and seeking to reconcile them without making one or the other dominant to the exclusion of the other” (Geisler, 2010:19). He still claimed, however, that his view aligned with the moderate Calvinist viewpoint.

Geisler acknowledged that in a moderate Calvinist view some differences existed between a moderate Calvinist and a moderate Arminian view of soteriology. Yet he also noted that in some key areas agreement does exist. The key question in this chapter, as in the entire dissertation, remains the degree of continuity Geisler’s theology had with each view, the Calvinistic view or the Arminian/Wesleyan view. Does Geisler tilt his mind and teaching more towards the way of the moderate or sublapsarian Calvinist or the Arminian/Wesleyan in the way he defines election and the application of grace? It has been shown in earlier sections that Geisler claimed to affirm a type of sublapsarian order with his placement of atonement prior to election in the sequence of God’s decrees. That order of placement (even if defined as an operational order) established Geisler as having significant continuity in the sublapsarian stream of thought. How he defines election, regeneration (monergism as in most forms of Calvinism, synergism as in Arminian/Wesleyan forms, or some hybrid form as in some moderate Calvinist forms), and the will in relation to applied grace will reveal much more about Geisler’s model and how much continuity or discontinuity he has with either system of soteriology.

7.2 THE ETERNAL ORIGIN AND PLAN FOR SALVATION ACCORDING TO ORTHODOX THEOLOGIANS

Orthodox theology recognizes that God transcends earthly time and exists beyond our sphere of reality and existence. The plan for salvation existed in the mind of God prior to earthly history. The root plan of salvation, therefore, exists outside of time. Charles C. Ryrie (1995:1962) spoke of the “eternal covenant” from Hebrews 13:20 and explained that this related to the “redemptive covenant before time began.” His teacher, Lewis Sperry Chafer (1993:5:28), elaborated on that covenant more extensively, noting that God had a plan in which the “Persons of the Godhead” made an agreement (covenant) as to “the part to be executed by each” member of the Godhead in the work of redemption. A colleague of Charles Ryrie, Robert P. Lightner (1991:143), also explained that “the divine plan of salvation” was “formulated in eternity past” and pertained to the “historic death of Christ” as a “part of the divine plan as the solution to the sin issue of

humanity.” Salvation, according to Lightner (1991:145), “is as eternal as God is and as ordered as he is too.”

Kevin Conner and Ken Malmin (1983:92) also highlighted that the concept of salvation has roots in the idea of an eternal covenant that unfolds through the history of creation. Since it was an eternal or everlasting covenant, mankind did not participate in the agreement even though it does relate to mankind (Conner and Malmin, 1983:93). In this eternal covenant “each person in the Godhead would fulfill their part in the contract which involved creation and redemption” (Conner and Malmin, 1983:93). According to Conner and Malmin (1983:95) the concepts of “God’s foreknowledge, election, calling, and predestined purposes” relate to this covenant.

7.2.1 An Arminian/Wesleyan View of the Eternal Plan of Salvation

John Wesley (2003:806) briefly wrote of this eternal covenant. In his comments on Hebrews 13:20 Wesley noted that the eternal covenant is “the Christian covenant.” This eternal covenant according to Wesley (2003:806) differed from the temporal Jewish covenant. God established this eternal covenant by the “application of that blood” and this covenant remains “forever” (Wesley, 2003:806). This divine everlasting covenant of the Lord in Wesley’s thought (Wesley, 2003:806) makes the person that experiences it “inwardly and outwardly holy”. Furthermore, Wesley (2003:736) commenting on the time aspect from 2 Timothy 1:9 noted that this work of eternal redemption was given to us by the Lord’s “gracious purpose” prior to the time “the world began.”

One of the clearer voices regarding the eternal covenant or everlasting plan of redemption has been that of F. Leroy Forlines. Representing a modern Arminian/Wesleyan stream, Forlines noted that the eternal covenant or eternal plan of redemption unfolds progressively through history (McAfee, 2016:144). In Forlines’ theology the “divine redemptive program” is a “single thread of God’s redemptive work” that runs inside of history from Genesis to Revelation (McAfee, 2016:144). This divine eternal covenant or plan works throughout history in the historical covenants and culminates in the new heaven and new earth (McAfee, 2016:144).

7.2.2 A Calvinistic View of the Eternal Plan of Salvation

All three streams of Calvinistic thought have affirmed some type of eternal covenant of redemption in which God planned prior to history for the salvation of mankind. John Gill (1980:6:776) (representing a higher form of Calvinism) taught that this covenant was “made before the world began” from the “counsels of God.” The infralapsarian Calvinist William G.T. Shedd has a similar view as that of Gill. Shedd (2003:679) taught that the covenant of redemption “is made between the Father and the Son” and established the plan that the Son

“performs a work of atonement and redemption.” In Shedd’s (2003:679) thought the covenant of redemption and idea of a covenant of grace were “two modes or phases of the one evangelical covenant of mercy.” This same idea as taught by Gill and Shedd has been taught also by the low or moderate Calvinist Michael Bird. In Bird’s (2013:226) view the eternal covenant is “conceptually correlated” with the “covenant of grace” as mentioned in Hebrews 13:20. It specifically relates to the work of Christ in the divine plan of redemption made before time began. Bird (2013:226) stated, “this eternal covenant included the sacrificial ‘blood’ of Jesus, which is an expression of God’s plan for Jesus to be the Lamb of God slain before the creation of the world (Rev. 13:8).”

7.2.3 Norman Geisler on the Eternal Plan of Salvation

Geisler does not specify in explicit or exact words the concept of a covenant of redemption. His discussions on the covenants were with the covenants of earthly history. He explicitly taught that scripture mentioned seven covenants: (1) Edenic, (2) Adamic, (3) Noahic, (4) Abrahamic, (5) Mosaic, (6) Davidic, and (7) the New Covenant (Geisler, 2011:1378-1412). However, that does not mean Geisler rejected the idea of an eternal origin of salvation.

Geisler (2004:3:181) taught that “God is the author of our salvation” and that “salvation originated with God in heaven.” This particular sentence has significance as it will relate to some of the conclusions in the final chapter. For now, it suffices to note that heaven seems be a part of the everlasting sphere (what Aquinas called aeviternity) and not technically eternity. In eternity there was only God, nothing else. Heaven would seemingly relate to the sphere or realm that stands in between eternity and historical time. Geisler (2005:4:294) said heaven is “God’s dwelling place, the final destiny of the righteous.” He also recognized heaven as “aeviternity” (Geisler, 2005:4:316).

Geisler seemed to speak more of a divine or eternal plan of redemption than a particular covenant of redemption. He spoke of God’s “eternal purpose with all its glorious riches” in his commentary on Colossians (Geisler, 1983:675). Geisler (2015:99) also has asserted that “God chose us before we chose him (Eph. 1:4). He loved us before we loved him (1 John 4:10, 19).” In his view “salvation originated in God’s decision to save us” and that decision was by God “based in a free, self-determined act” without any “external or internal compulsion” in God to “create or to save. He did both freely” (Geisler, 2004:3:181,182).

These statements help to reveal Geisler’s (1997:73) view of salvation. Unlike open theists, whose theology Geisler (1997:88) labeled as “neotheism” or “new theism” because they believe God learns through historical succession of experiences in time, Geisler (1997:88) affirmed that

God is “infinite in understanding” and that in relation to salvation God has “foreknown and predestined us from the foundation of the world (Romans 8:29-30).” Clearly Geisler affirmed that salvation originated in the eternal mind and decision of God before creation existed in time. Though he did not regularly (if ever) classify or articulate this with covenantal language, he did root salvation in the origin of an eternal or everlasting plan from an eternal God.

7.3 THE DEFINITION OF ORDINATION AND/OR ELECTION IN THE SEQUENCE OF SALVATION DECREES

Two of the three lapsarian decree models (supralapsarian and infralapsarian) designate the decree of election prior to the decree for atonement. However, the sublapsarian view of God's decree order places the decree of election after the atonement. This distinctive placement makes the sublapsarian Calvinistic model unique among the three models offered in the various forms of Calvinism. The sublapsarian, or Amyraldian moderate Calvinist, stream of thought has historically made the case that election relates to the person being chosen in the already provided-for atonement.

Additionally, the issue of election and the application of it in time with a person brought to faith (articulated differently by the two soteriology models) establish one of the most basic and fundamental dividing lines for the two different forms of soteriology. How a person defines election and the experience of faith in Christ definitively positions a person in either the Calvinistic stream or the Arminian stream of soteriology. Stanley J. Grenz has properly noted this definitive marker. Grenz stated (1994:589):

The central issue between Calvinists and Arminians focuses on the relationship between God's eternal decision and the historical personal response to the gospel: Does the act of repentance and faith happen because God foreordains it (Calvinism), or does God foreordain this event because it happens in history and as a consequence he foreknows it (Arminianism)? Stated more theologically, is the divine foreknowledge (understood as God's cognition of events before they occur) dependent on divine foreordination (understood as determining that these events will happen)? Or is foreordination dependent on foreknowledge?

In earlier sections it has been shown that Geisler adopted what he termed an “operational order” of the decrees. In his view the eternal plan of salvation unfolds in time and space in progressive steps. His operational order places election after the atonement, a key marker of the moderate or sublapsarian Calvinistic view. But does he define election in continuity with the Calvinistic stream or the Arminian/Wesleyan stream of thought? Are some elected solely by

God's decree and others passed by with no relation to God's foreknowledge? Or is a person's election based upon the person's faith response? Or does God elect based on some type of foreknowledge and decree yet not in the prescient or foresight model? Does election relate to God's infallibility and omniscience or does election relate primarily to God's decretive will? These types of questions naturally surface in any study of one's theory of election in soteriology. R.C. Sproul (2019:228) noted that "the difference between Reformed theology and Arminian theology, then, is how each system explains why some are not saved."

7.3.1 All Three Calvinistic Soteriology Models Affirm Some Type of Unconditional Election

Supralapsarians, infralapsarians, and sublapsarians all have some unique features and nuances of difference. Supralapsarians place election prior to creation. Infralapsarians place election after the fall but before the atonement. Sublapsarians place election after the atonement and prior to the application by the Spirit. However, all three models unite at least on the single point that election to salvation does not occur because people meet some condition. This constitutes a fundamental position of unity in all three models. All with one single voice unite on the common point that lost people do nothing to contribute to their own election. With such unity one may see this as central or at the foundation of what it means to confess a type of Calvinistic soteriology.

The supralapsarian Calvinist Robert Reymond has defined election as an act of God unrelated to a person's faith or efforts. His view would align with what has been classified as unconditional election. Of this idea he stated, "God did not set his love upon the elect from all eternity because of foreseen faith or good works, or perseverance ... or any other condition or cause in them" (Reymond, 1998:466). This aligns with the classic statement of unconditional election, i.e., humans contribute nothing to their own election. This election or choice took place in Christ in eternity prior to mankind existing in time and history (Reymond, 1998:467).

The infralapsarian Calvinist R.C. Sproul also affirmed that lost mankind makes no contribution to one's own election. This model also, as with the supralapsarian model, rejects the idea of a conditional election (Sproul, 2019:77). In Sproul's (2019:77) view this "denies the biblical view," and undermines the biblical view of "unconditional election," the view he equates as the "Reformed doctrine." Sproul (2019:82) explained further that God has "chosen certain vessels for salvation, and these are so predestined and foreordained that they are particularly and unchangeably designed."

The Amyraldian or sublapsarian moderate Calvinist stream of thought, which also claims alignment within the Reformed umbrella on election, has taught that lost persons contribute nothing to their own election. Faith occurs as the result of God's election prior to the lost person coming to faith. Election does not rest on the ground of people turning to God in faith (foresight election). Amyraut (2017:113) taught that election took place in God's eternal counsel where from that base (not from a lost person's faith) God elected and predestined those to whom he would give saving faith. In his view God elected some and left others in their own sin of rejection (Amyraut, 2017:115). As he stated, God's "election is efficacious for some" whereas the unbelief in others rests upon "their own blindness and moral perversity" (Amyraut, 2017:116).

7.3.2 Norman Geisler's View of Eternal Election

Geisler has claimed that his definition of election aligns with the moderate Amyraldian Calvinistic stream of thought. He has even asserted that he has taught a view similar to the view of his colleagues that he taught with at Dallas Seminary in the United States (Geisler, 2010:147-148). In discussing what he terms as a balanced view of election Geisler (2010:148) noted that the view he espoused aligned with the following teachers he classified as moderate Calvinists, a term he used to describe his own view: "W.G.T. Shedd, J.O. Buswell, Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, Emory Bancroft, Fred Howe, and many others".

Geisler's views can be understood in three key points. First, in defining election, Geisler (2010:130) rejected the idea of a "paradoxical approach." Geisler (2010:130-131, 132) made a distinction between paradoxes, logical contradictions, and "mysteries in the Christian faith." When making his case for a balanced view of election, Geisler does admit that this issue falls into the category of a mystery. He stated, "we suggested that divine sovereignty and human freedom fall into this ... category—they are a mystery. We know both are true, but we do not know exactly how they fit together" (Geisler, 2010:132).

Second, Geisler established two broad categories that he defined as extremes in regard to election. He rejected what he classified as the extreme Calvinistic version of election. This would equal the supralapsarian viewpoint where election is totally or primarily rooted in God's will over all else (Geisler, 2010:138). He used the supralapsarian model of William Ames to describe the extreme view. Ames (1983:153) stated that the decree to elect or predestine has no dependence upon a "cause, reason, or outward condition, but proceeds purely from the will of him who predestines." Geisler (1999d:216-218) believed this type of election ideology had roots in divine voluntarism instead of divine essentialism. In his view, this model describes election based entirely upon God's will, and makes election "independent of foreknowledge" (Geisler, 2010:138).

Additionally, on the other side of the theological pendulum, Geisler explained why he rejected the extreme form of Arminianism/Wesleyanism. He described the extreme Arminian/Wesleyan view as the view that teaches that God elects a person “based upon foreknowledge” (Geisler, 2010:142). He described this Arminian/Wesleyan view as a foresight type of election, i.e., “God simply knew what was going to happen” (Geisler, 2010:143). Geisler (2010:143) taught that this view contradicts the texts which deny that human decision is the cause of God’s choice. To the idea that lost mankind’s choice functions as the cause of God’s choosing, Geisler (2010:143) responded saying that such an “idea flies in the face of the whole biblical teaching on grace” and that it runs “contrary to the clear teaching that salvation does not spring from the will of man.” Geisler (2010:143) even referenced specific verses (John 1:13 and Rom. 9:16, often cited by Calvinists) that he interpreted as denying human will or decision as key to one’s election.

Third, as to his own view of election, Geisler (2010:145) made an effort to define election as “in accord with foreknowledge.” He taught that “the fact of God’s election is clear in Scripture” (Geisler 2004:3:181,182). In this type of election he stated that he believed it could function as an alternative “open to both moderate Calvinists and moderate Arminians” (Geisler, 2010:145). He claims this view is a “balanced view since it is a middle perspective between extreme Calvinism and extreme Arminianism” (Geisler, 2010:145). He seems to have tried to affirm a form of unconditional election in those assertions.

However, his choice of words seems unusual here. Instead of saying “there is no condition to election” (unconditional election), Geisler (2011:814) instead wrote, “there is no condition to God’s giving salvation”. Election and salvation, however, refer to different concepts. He then also asserted (Geisler, 2011:814) “there is one (and only one) condition laid down for receiving the gift of eternal life: faith (Acts 16:31; Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8-9).” To provide even further light on Geisler’s view a fuller quote of his explanation may help. Geisler (2011:814) added to the above that:

Therefore the reception of salvation is conditioned on our belief. Salvation is unconditioned from the perspective of the Giver, but it is conditioned from the view of the receiver (who must believe in order to receive it). In short, salvation comes from God, but we must receive it through faith: “For *by* grace you have been saved *through* faith” (Eph. 2:8 NASB).

Additionally, Geisler defined the sublapsarian order of decrees in his chart in an unusual manner that differs from how most moderate Calvinistic sublapsarians articulate election. He rightly defined the order, a sublapsarian order, but he expressed it in a historical operational order. On the fourth point where sublapsarians place election after the atonement, Geisler (2011:815) stated it meant God would “elect those who believe and pass by those who do not.”

What one might expect to read, that God has “elected those who will believe,” is not what one finds in this section. However, this writer admits that may be an overly technical analysis.

Theoretically, one could argue that the only ones who will believe will be those the Spirit efficaciously draws into faith. So if Geisler places election and calling in one category he could technically retain continuity with the Calvinistic point of view. That aspect will be explored in detail under the issues related to regeneration, monergism, and synergism in the following sections of this chapter. But the wording by Geisler in this section has some slight discontinuity with the normal wording used by Calvinists in general. However, that alone does not establish definite and ultimate discontinuity from the Calvinistic faith as so set forth in the moderate stream. His rejection of foresight election suggests significant continuity with the Calvinistic stream of thought. So the issue here seems to be one of clarity and consistency.

7.3.3 The Surrounding Context on Geisler’s Ideology: Calvinism, Thomism, & Classical Theology

Geisler’s definition of election does not seem to give as much detail and precision to the concept of how God elects as do other moderate sublapsarian Calvinists when they define election. Geisler seems to use the broader term “salvation” when describing the unconditional nature of God’s work. He does not express an idea of unconditional election to salvation in the common vernacular of Calvinists. This difference seems to exist because of the background commitments and ideas he affirms in relation to God and time. Where others will speak in more detail of God’s distinct elements within his decree, Geisler has apparently refrained from giving those details. His understanding and application of classical theism impacts the way he articulates election and the way he refrains from articulating it.

One of the dilemma’s in interpreting Geisler on eternal election relates back to his description of God’s eternal knowledge. James R. White (2000:25) noted that Geisler’s language used to describe God’s knowledge is “unique.” But what makes it unique seems to be, unlike the impression White apparently tried to make, that Geisler does not give the explicit details to God’s single thought/decreed where other theologians have done so.

Furthermore, it is probably a hasty conclusion by R.C. Sproul Jr. (2000:15) to assert that Geisler affirms “historic Arminianism,” i.e., God chooses in sequence or consequence to human faith. Even James R. White (2000:20), in the book where Sproul Jr. wrote the foreword, contradicts (or maybe qualifies) Sproul’s assertion by saying Geisler taught a “modified form of historic Arminianism.” This highlights that even these two higher Calvinists are not exactly in unison on how to classify Geisler’s view. With that much ambiguity from two authors in the same book

addressing the same person (Geisler) along with acknowledged qualifications already noted, could someone qualify or classify his view as a modified form of Amyraldian Calvinism? If Geisler advocated a “modified Arminian” view does that allow room for the idea that he taught a modified moderate Calvinism? The noted qualifications and different assertions by two theologians in the same book against Geisler give evidence that Geisler’s view does not fit the tight parameters that have sometimes been set for an analysis of Geisler.

Geisler’s “eternal now” view suggests he has tried to reject a sequential structure for God’s decree. Though James White said Geisler’s view is unique, it may not be as unique as he thought. There have been some expressions in other theologians among the Reformed and Baptist traditions that spoke in terms close to how Geisler has spoken on God’s knowledge and decree.

For example, Richard Land has argued that a Baptist soteriology in the vein of a John Leland from the 1700s had a mixture of Calvinistic ideology and Arminian ideology in it. Land (2010:46-48,49) believed that a Baptist soteriology in the Sandy Creek tradition, Leland’s stream of thought, “was neither fully Calvinist nor remotely Arminian” but “different and distinctive from both.” In the same vein as Geisler, Land (2010:54) noted that election is “connected to” God’s “foreknowledge in a significant way (Rom. 8:29-30; 1 Peter 1:2).”

Additionally, as with Geisler, Land (2010:55) taught that the idea of a past, present, and future are all one immediate present now with God. In Land’s (2010:56) words, “from God’s perspective there can never have been a single moment when God has not had the totality of His experience (their acceptance and after, or their rejection and after) with each and every human being as part of his ‘present’ (i.e., eternal) experience and knowledge.” Land (2010:58) calls this model “congruent election.”

However, this “eternal now” or “congruent election” model has some similarity to how some supralapsarian, infralapsarian, and even sublapsarian Calvinists describe God’s knowledge. Examples of this one “eternal now” or one thought or one intuition has been articulated in all three models. For example, Herman Hoeksema (2004:1:228), a supralapsarian, has asserted that God’s simplicity means the “counsel of God is one.” That counsel of God is in Hoeksema’s view “one divine conception.” He does note that “various moments” (Hoeksema, 2004:1:228) can be gleaned from that one counsel, but his classical view of God as a simple being does impact how he describes God’s knowledge.

Infralapsarian Calvinists John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue also spoke of one single eternal decree. They stated (MacArthur and Mayhue, 2017:505), “God’s decree is a single and timeless

act within himself in eternity". They too spoke of logical order of elements in the one decree, but they describe that as a necessary factor due to human language limitations (MacArthur and Mayhue, 2017:505). Their view has similarity to Geisler's "eternal now" view.

Sublapsarian Calvinist Lewis Sperry Chafer also wrote in a similar way concerning God's decree. He stated (Chafer, 1993:1:228), "God formed his decree in eternity ... being eternal, all its parts are, in the mind of God, but one intuition". He too offered a breakdown of how this thought developed in logical order. For Chafer (1935:35), the counsel of God, though one single intuition, carried within it a "means to the accomplishment of his purpose." Again, this view by a sublapsarian Calvinist reveals the dedication of all three streams of Calvinistic thought to a classical view of God as a simple being who in eternity has no development or chronological learning phases.

Geisler affirmed, as did those Calvinistic theologians, that God had only one single thought or a set of simultaneous thoughts (single counsel or purpose) in eternity. The best way to capture this concept fully is to let Geisler speak for himself and quote his actual words. The eternal thought (or maybe thoughts) of God in Geisler's mind has no chronological or logical order to them in the eternal realm. Therefore, he spoke of God as "knowingly determining and determinately knowing from all eternity everything that happens, including all free acts" (Geisler, 1986:70). He added even further to this idea that "all aspects of the eternal purpose of God are equally timeless" (Geisler, 1986:70-71).

Geisler did not recognize chronological and logical sequence in the mind of God with his decrees, and consequently it would appear to suggest that election and belief occur simultaneously in God's mind in eternity past. This impacts how one explains what occurs in history. If there is no sequence to the thoughts in the eternal intuition then it would seem to suggest that every moment of history has been simultaneously created or produced in the mind of God. This would imply that some are eternally known as believers and some others are eternally known as unbelievers in one single, simultaneous, intuitive thought of God that he chose or decreed (or has eternally existed in his mind) without any serial flow or sequence to it. To verify that this seems to be what Geisler taught, another more extensive quote may aid the interlocutors. Geisler (1986:71) defined this concept further saying:

... if God is an eternal and simple Being, then his thoughts must be coordinate and unified. Whatever he forechose cannot be based on what he foreknows. Nor can what he foreknows be based on what he forechose. Both must be simultaneous and coordinate acts of God. Thus God knowingly determined and determinately knew from all eternity everything that would come to pass, including all free acts. Hence, there are truly free actions, and God determined

they would be such. God then is totally sovereign in the sense of actually determining what occurs, and yet humans are completely free and responsible for what they choose.

Additionally, to corroborate this and show why this view of Geisler's seems probable, some context of Geisler's thought may help. Geisler identifies himself as within the Thomas Aquinas stream of thought. He wrote his master's degree thesis at Wheaton College in a field related to Thomas Aquinas and his work later at Loyola University extended further his research into Aquinas and Thomistic thought (Detzler, 2016:402).

Furthermore, Geisler admired and adopted the Thomistic view of God and his nature. This view he embraced in the stream of Aquinas forms the essence of Geisler's view that God is the unmoved mover, the simple being that has no change in him. Geisler (1991:21) stated this of his admiration for Aquinas' theology:

Aquinas can provide a philosophical answer to the growing influence of the finite god of process theology. There is no better philosophical system capable of answering the threat raised by process theology and defending the traditional theistic and biblical view of God as an eternal, unchanging, and absolutely perfect being.

Furthermore, this allegiance to the Thomistic stream of thought materialized in his writings against process theology, what he described as neotheism. In his work *Creating God in the Image of Man?* Geisler presented his position from a classical theist perspective. These ideas help us to see the foundation for Geisler's definition of eternal election. Of classical theism Geisler (1997:25) stated this:

Classical theism is the traditional Christian view of God—the God of Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, the Reformers, the Puritans, and, until recently, the vast majority of evangelicals. This view was true of both classical Arminians and Calvinists.

From this work against neotheism Geisler articulated and explained with some specificity his position on God as a simple being who had no changing thoughts or serial activity in his omniscient counsel. In this work he noted that he would use Aquinas' "view to explain classical theism" (Geisler, 1997:25). Several distinct quotes from Geisler will help reveal his position. Seven key quotes reveal how Geisler (1997:27, 29-30, 30, 31, 33) affirmed a timeless, simple, non-temporal, infinite, eternal God who elected sinners:

1. God's indivisibility follows also from his immutability ... For if God could be divided, then he could change. But God is unchangeable by nature. Thus he cannot be divided. He must be absolutely simple in his nature.

2. According to classical theists, God is not temporal. God is beyond time.... whatever exists in time can be computed according to its before and afters. However, a changeless being has no before or afters; it is always the same. Consequently God must be timeless.
3. God's eternity is not divided; it is all present to him in one eternal now.
4. The "now" of time is moveable but the "now" of eternity is not. Therefore, the "now" of eternity is not the same as the "now of time." The eternal "now" is unchanging, but the "now" of time is ever changing. Thus, they cannot be the same. There is only an analogy between time and eternity, not an identity. God's "now" has no past or future.
5. [W]hen there is a change in the creature there is no change in God. Just as when the man changes his position from one side of the pillar to the other, the pillar does not change; only the man changes in relation to the pillar.
6. God's knowledge is identical with his essence. For if God's acts of knowledge were distinct from his essence, then they would be related as actuality to potentiality. But there can be no potentiality in God; he is pure actuality. Therefore, God's knowledge and essence are identical.
7. God knows the same things we do, but he does not know them the same way we know them.... Our knowledge is discursive or inferential, moving from premises to conclusions.... But God cannot know things sequentially, since he is timeless and knows all things eternally at once. Nor can God know things inferentially, for he is simple and knows all things through the oneness of himself.

These quotes help to explain how Geisler can say with equal emphasis that God elects and people choose salvation. He places equal weight in both statements because of his view that no serial or sequenced activity exists in God's one, single, simple, eternal cognition of all. This non-serial (timeless view) has, however, led to some criticism of him.

7.3.4 Theological Criticisms of Geisler's Strict Eternal Now View of Election

James R. White has criticized Geisler for his "one eternal now" perspective. White, a five-point Calvinist, stated that Geisler's view of election within an "eternal now" model hinders one from being able to ask and answer how God foreknows something. White stated the question in the following manner: "Does God's foreknowledge determine what he decrees or does God's decree determine what he foreknows?" (White, 2000:53). White (2000:53) thought that Geisler's model avoided the question and gave no substantive answer.

Furthermore, White addressed the non-sequenced decree view in Geisler's scheme. Of this aspect from Geisler's theology White (2000:56) stated: "here we run directly into the most problematic element of Geisler's paradigm" where he presented God's decree without a "chronological or logical priority of election and foreknowledge." Those views and White's admission would seem to suggest that White could only logically say that Geisler's theology does not declare a position. That would mean White ought to have identified Geisler's view as neutral on this matter or as a mystery.

Another theologian has stated similar ideas as did James White in relation to Geisler's view. John Feinberg, a former student of Norman Geisler, examined Geisler's view of foreknowledge and election in a related book. Feinberg (1986:85) noted that he thought Geisler's view had roots in the ideology of Boethius. Carl R. Trueman (2006) has stated that Boethius was "one of the least known but most significant Christian thinkers of antiquity." The ideas of Boethius on God's knowledge in relation to time were utilized by Thomas Aquinas (2004). Consequently, with Geisler being an admirer of Aquinas a connection does exist between Geisler and Boethius.

Feinberg noted that he believed Geisler's view (the supposed Boethian solution) gives no answer to the problem but for the most part avoids the question. As Feinberg (1986:86) wrote of Geisler:

Rather than saying God foreordains what he foreknows (as many Arminians say) or that God foreknows because he foreordains (as many Calvinists say) Geisler chooses neither option. He argues on the basis of God's simplicity that foreknowledge and foreordination are simultaneous, equally timeless, because God is eternal. Neither is temporally or even logically prior to the other.

This analysis of Geisler's view, the timeless aspect of it, seems to properly grasp the view Geisler has attempted to present. Geisler has explained a view that emphasizes no logical or chronological order to the knowledge of God. He presents an "eternal now" view of God in his knowledge.

7.4 THE APPLICATION AND ELEMENTS OF GOD'S DECREE: REGENERATION AND CONVERSION (REPENTANCE AND FAITH)

Supralapsarians and limited atonement infralapsarians have much continuity in their view of the atonement and how its design (only for the elect) impacts the experiential elements of grace in application causing repentance and faith. Sublapsarian (moderate) Calvinists not only place the atonement in a different location in the decree order, but they have a wider focus with more

attention to a dual aspect of the atonement's impact on the world instead of a limited design element related only to the elect. Sublapsarians also align with the Arminian/Wesleyan stream in that they agree with the placement of atonement prior to election and share some unity in that the atonement benefits more than only the elect, the believers. The following sections will examine the three models of Calvinistic thought and the Arminian/Wesleyan thought in the specific application of the eternal plan (decree/election) to sinners in time and history (regeneration, repentance, and faith). It will highlight in greater specificity how much continuity or discontinuity Geisler has with each system of soteriology.

7.4.1 Provision of Grace in Application in the Calvinists & Arminian/Wesleyan Doctrine

The key concept among the three streams of Calvinistic thought in relation to the atonement concerns the definite purchase of a particular people that secures or provides grace that leads to the results of actual repentance and faith. The atonement in all three streams of Calvinistic thought works by the Spirit's application in some way to efficaciously secure the eternal redemption of the elect by definitively or certainly bringing them to faith in Christ for salvation. The atonement price bought or provides the basis for the gifts of grace, faith, and repentance that the Spirit applies in history to people.

In the sublapsarian Amyraldian stream there remains the dual focus of the gospel (2007:13). Yet even inside of that dual focus the atonement is "for the elect efficaciously" (Clifford, 2007:15). In an infralapsarian Calvinistic view, Jesus executed his covenant with the Father through his atonement work to redeem the elected ones. As Charles Hodge (1995:2:552) stated it, "the righteousness of Christ did not make the salvation of men merely possible, it secured the actual salvation of those for whom he wrought." This same thought of an efficacious atonement that secures the salvation of the elect has been affirmed also by the supralapsarians. The gifts of faith and repentance were purchased only for the elect, as taught by Robert Reymond (1998:679). This work of Christ is applied to the elect and it guarantees that those given to Christ would be drawn and enabled to certainly and necessarily come to Christ for salvation (Reymond, 1998:678).

In contrast, the Arminian/Wesleyan view of the atonement does not effectually guarantee that certain ones will come to faith and repentance. The atonement in this model of soteriology does not emphasize or even assert that Christ actually purchased the gifts of repentance and faith for certain people. H. Orton Wiley and Paul T. Culbertson explained this stream of thought with succinctness and clarity: "the atonement is universal" (Wiley and Culbertson, 1969:234). They noted too that the atonement produced unconditional benefits that apply to all (ongoing

existence of humanity; making all people saveable; infant salvation) and conditional benefits (justification; regeneration; adoption; indwelling Holy Spirit; and sanctification) that apply only to believers (Wiley and Culbertson, 1969:236-237).

The sublapsarian Amyraldian stream and the Arminian/Wesleyan stream concur on one key point. They both affirm that the death of Christ has some type of impact upon all of humanity. Some (but not all) infralapsarians like Charles Hodge and John MacArthur also concur that some benefit of the atonement extends to all people. So some unity exists there. Therefore, even with other differences in how the atonement works, some common ground exists in the recognition that Christ's death impacts each person in the world in some aspect apart from regeneration to repentance and faith.

7.4.2 Provision of Grace in Application in Norman Geisler's Theology

Geisler's view of the atonement emphasized the "provision for all" aspect. He embraced the penal substitution theory. He did, however, reject the idea that the atonement had only one design or intention in it (Geisler, 2010:256). This has continuity with Amyraut's stream of thought. That leaves room for the idea that the atonement could accomplish certain effects prior to the conversion of a sinner. One could develop that from his ideas. However, Geisler did not express any extensive views as to what else beyond provision the atonement did in actual history prior to a sinner's conversion. Pre-conversion atonement applications surface briefly in Geisler's thought with infant salvation, but beyond that do not take a prominent place in his theology.

He did affirm common grace. He also affirmed God's goodness to all. However, he did not make a direct and explicit link of these concepts back to the atonement of Christ. Geisler developed a fairly extensive and elaborate view of how common grace works in the world (see section 7.4.4), but the direct link to these graces being purchased by Christ's work on the cross does not substantively materialize in Geisler's writing. Other than his view of the atonement securing salvation for infants who die prior to the age they could respond in faith, he does not develop in specificity this idea of grace for all from the atonement. Only in a few places did he hint at the idea of how grace from the atonement could benefit those in pre-conversion. He mentioned that "even before we are saved, God is at work in prevenient grace and conviction" (2011:869). Also, in explaining why all who die in infancy are eternally saved and not condemned in Adamic guilt Geisler (2004:3:449) stated:

The original sin brought about by Adam's choice is canceled by the work of Christ. If this is the case, humans are no longer hell-bound solely due to inherited depravity; they must commit

their own personal sins to eventuate in condemnation ... consequently, since infants have not committed actual sins, they could all be saved even though not yet able to believe. According to this argument, the judicial condemnation brought by Adam upon all humanity (Rom. 5:12) was reversed by Christ, and thus God, no longer bound to condemn, need not condemn any infant ... Infants have committed no morally accountable sinful deeds; therefore, God can save all infants because they have been made savable through Christ's finished work.

That teaching from Geisler has some continuity with the Amyraldian ideology that atonement impacts the universe and in particular people (infants in this case) prior to conversion. It does not shed direct light on whether Geisler believed that atonement delayed or purchased a reprieve from God's wrath on adults who have personally sinned. If asked directly, Geisler may have affirmed this idea. Logically it would work in his model. His death during this research precluded this author from being able to ask this specific question of Geisler. Other Amyraldian moderate Calvinists have expressed this idea of delayed judgment due to common grace that Christ purchased for all.

The structure or foundation for the connection between atonement and pre-conversion grace exists in Geisler's framework of the atonement. The way he applied it to infants highlighted one way he applied grace from the atonement to humanity prior to conversion in faith. So there is to a degree some continuity here with the sublapsarian Amyraldian stream of thought on how the atonement actually secures some benefits to humanity prior to regeneration. One may wish more had been developed by him on this issue. Some seeds of continuity do exist in his model with the Amyraldian stream here, but these ideas were not fully developed by a link back to the work of Christ on the cross.

7.4.3 Common and Prevenient Grace in Calvinists and Arminian/Wesleyans

Some high Calvinists, or what Geisler called extreme Calvinists (normally supralapsarians), have denied grace to anyone other than the elect (no common or prevenient grace). Two theologians that have taught this in this century have been David Engelsma and Sonny Hernandez, both supralapsarians. Prevenient or general common grace does not exist in their theology models. Many theologians believe that common or prior-to-conversion grace (prevenient grace) sustains the lives of people prior to conversion or even if they never convert. In contrast to that idea David Engelsma (2003:61) has stated, "the continued existence of the world after man's fall, as of reprobate, ungodly humans, is providence, not grace." In Engelsma's (2003:91) view scripture gives no witness to the idea of common grace.

Likewise, Sonny Hernandez, a young and contemporary supralapsarian Calvinist, teaches this idea that common grace does not exist. This author had the honor to engage in a public debate with Hernandez on the doctrine of the atonement. In that debate and in his writings Hernandez rejected the idea of common grace. Hernandez (2020:52, 59) in directly addressing this author's description of Amyraldian views on grace stated that even though "God gives providence to all his creation" such a reality does not mean God has given "love, grace, or mercy to the reprobates." In his view all grace is "soteriological" and "reserved exclusively for the elect of God" (Hernandez, 2020:60). When Hernandez uses the term soteriological he means salvation in relation to eternal salvation. No temporal or common salvation exists. The idea of a delayed judgment or a grace that preserves one from immediate condemnation or hell does not exist in his perspective.

With similar ideas found in Engelsma's thought, Hernandez (2020:61) also as a supralapsarian teaches that no idea of common grace arises from the text of scripture and that those who find it in scripture do so through "injecting their own" ideas and "presuppositions into the text". For Hernandez (2020:61) the idea of a form of universal grace or love from God to all, a "prevenient grace," is a "myth". The concept of grace relates only to the elect and no one else.

Infralapsarians and sublapsarian Calvinists, however, have historically embraced the idea that some grace of the Lord extends to all people in the world. This grace has some impact and prefatory blessings to all people (including the non-elect) and to those who will eventually come to faith (the elect). For example, the infralapsarian and highly respected Princeton theologian Charles Hodge (1995:2:545) stated that the death of Christ "moreover secures to the whole race at large, and to all classes of men, innumerable blessings, both providential and religious . . . it was designed to produce these effects; and, therefore, [Christ] died to secure them."

Sublapsarian E.Y. Mullins, who studied under one of Hodge's students, J.P. Boyce, recognized God's universal common and prevenient grace to all of humanity. Of God's providence Mullins (1917:273) noted that the "methods of his providence" are the "means for realizing a gracious end." Furthermore, he said, "all men do not share equally in the benefits of the atonement of Christ. Those who remain in unbelief are not saved. Yet even they share many of the common blessings of life through the work of Christ. God's anger against human sin is restrained" (Mullins, 1917:336).

Moise Amyraut also taught this concept of prevenient and common grace for all. As the forefather of the view that carries his name, Amyraldianism, his views tied together the work of providence and grace in history with the cross of Christ. He linked the compassion of the Lord for fallen sinners to the purchased blessing of Christ in his work of redemption (Amyraut,

2017:99). He thought that God's grace in providence preserved their lives as he maintained their faculties and as he gave each person some degree of strength (Amyraut, 2017:99).

As for Arminians/Wesleyans, this idea of common grace, working as the blessings of prevenient grace, has been a common theme from their stream of thought. H. Orton Wiley and Paul T. Culbertson (1946:235) from this tradition taught that every "blessing known to man is the result of the purchase price of our Lord Jesus Christ, and comes down from the Father of lights." R. Larry Shelton described with more specificity how this purchased grace doctrine works in the Arminian/Wesleyan thought. He mentioned that in their tradition they do make distinctions in various "kinds of grace—such as prevenient grace, enabling grace, and saving grace," yet even in this they still affirm that this is all the "same grace that is being expressed" (Shelton, 1983:485).

7.4.4 Norman Geisler's View of Common and Prevenient Grace

One of Geisler's close friends in the faith and ministry, Paige Patterson, has noted that almost all evangelical theologians unite and agree that Christ's death benefits the entire world. As Patterson (2007:585) stated, "virtually all evangelical theologians on both sides would agree that there are some benefits from the cross that accrue to all the world." Geisler's ideology aligns with that statement by Patterson.

Geisler offered twelve specific ways in which grace works prior to salvation in common and prevenient ways. These benefits of grace apply to the world at large beyond Christ's provision for sinners. The twelve graces that occur for humanity in general were according to Geisler (2004:3:130-131):

1. It prevents people from constantly experiencing an overwhelming emotion of guilt.
2. This grace keeps people from experiencing blindness to sin in such extreme ways that sin goes unrecognized.
3. Without common grace rational thought would be almost impossible, if not actually so.
4. Greater levels of destruction would exist without this form of grace.
5. Moral decay would dominate all areas of society without this grace.
6. Without it performance of social good would not occur.
7. Natural revelation exists as a manifestation of this grace.

8. Human hearts carry a moral law written within them because of this grace.
9. Humans retain the image of God in them from this grace.
10. Marriage serves as a blessing of this grace to humanity.
11. Family structure manifests this grace.
12. Human government offers a path for this grace.

Geisler did not limit it to those areas. He left room for more areas to fall into this category. He summarized these graces saying that “many other nonredemptive means” of this grace exist (Geisler, 2004:3:131). However, in these common grace benefits he still did not make the *direct link* of these graces to the *cross of Christ*. Nowhere does he seem to specifically say that Christ purchased these benefits through his work on the cross. It may be implied by his position. One could develop it from the ideas he has offered. But an explicit assertion linking these to Christ’s purchase of these on the cross does not formally materialize in Geisler’s writings.

When speaking more narrowly about prevenient grace, a more focused type of common grace related to preparing one for salvation, Geisler noted that it does exist. However, he did not elaborate very much on how it works. Of this type of grace he noted that God exercised his “unmerited work in the human heart prior to salvation, which directs people to this end through Christ” (Geisler, 2011:843). This statement does reveal his idea that God directs and leads the person towards salvation. God is not reactive and passive. Geisler supported his views textually by citing Titus 2:11, 2 Corinthians 8:9, and Romans 2:4 (Geisler, 2011:843-844). God administers this grace, according to Geisler (2011:844), “on our behalf before he bestows salvation.”

7.4.5 Monergism: An Effectual Conviction and Calling to a Passive Regeneration Causing Conversion to Repentance and Faith

A central issue that has historically been a main difference between higher forms of Calvinistic thought and the Arminian/Wesleyan schools of thought has related to the concept of monergism. Supralapsarian and infralapsarian forms of Calvinistic thought have affirmed some form of monergism. Sublapsarians have emphasized God’s initiation of grace (monergistic beginning) with conversion happening from human will (synergism). Arminian/Wesleyans have placed more weight on human ability to cooperate with grace, an elective grace based upon a person’s faith that when exercised become effectual. The key issue relates to what is the cause of faith.

Even those who do not call themselves Calvinistic have recognized the idea of grace alone functioning as the cause to the effect of belief. Even Paige Patterson, who has refused to classify himself as a Calvinist, has affirmed that people contribute nothing to their own election. In a sermon on election at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Patterson described election as an act “of God from beginning to end, from the Alpha to the Omega, from eternity past to eternity future, and there is not one single solitary contribution that man can make to that” (Moore, 1998:37).

Historically all versions of Calvinistic thought would agree with the broad view that people do not contribute to their own election or regeneration. All three forms of Calvinistic thought have affirmed some form of election that lost mankind does not contribute towards and some form of monergism that has a root in God’s sovereign elective purposes. Supralapsarians and infralapsarians place more weight on monergism and necessary effects from that. Sublapsarians (Amyraldians and Lutherans who are closely aligned with the sublapsarian order) have emphasized initial monergism but not defined the effects as always of necessity (Warfield, 1942:90-92). God’s action effectually moving someone to faith has been an emphatic and consistent view held within the Augustinian/Calvinistic tradition. Theologian C.G. Fry (2001:786-787) has pointed out that the idea of monergism has “been consistently upheld by the Augustinian tradition within Christianity.” People do not contribute towards their own election or create their own new birth into grace. God’s choice to move on a person is not based on that person’s choice of God.

All Calvinists have taught that God convicts the elect to such a degree that God operates on the heart, moving in it by an effectual calling that produces a monergistic act of the new birth that in turn effects conversion in repentance and faith. Some have placed effectual grace leading to faith and then regeneration. Others place effectual grace causing regeneration and then faith. And still others say these occur at the same time. R.C. Sproul (1997a:184) described this work in this way:

Monergism is the opposite of synergism ... When the term monergism is linked with the word regeneration, the phrase describes an action by which God the Holy Spirit works on a human being without this person’s assistance or cooperation. This grace of regeneration may be called operative grace ... Monergistic regeneration is exclusively a divine act ... In regeneration the soul of the man is utterly passive until it has been made alive. It offers no help in reviving itself, though once revived it is empowered to act and respond.

In the Calvinistic scheme God convicts the sinner and works inwardly on that person by a drawing power of grace, often called effectual grace (sometimes the word “irresistible” is used

but not always), and the elect person is drawn by God to life and faith (Spencer, 1979:45-49). Higher forms of Calvinists often use the term “irresistible”. Lower forms often use the term “effectual”. Moise Amyraut (2017:139) even described human belief as occurring from “a persuasion.” In all forms, even with some variation in nomenclature, mankind responds to God’s acts. God is not reactive; he does not base his actions to move on the heart of lost mankind because of mankind’s will or choices. Supralapsarians and most infralapsarians use the term “irresistible grace” that causes faith. Sublapsarians have sometimes used that language, but often they use the language of grace working through effectual persuasion that leads one to faith.

Yet even in this form of effectual persuasion, Amyraut (2017:139) affirmed that “the Spirit efficaciously exercises his will in us” yet God does so accordingly in a way that his work does not “constrain us nor violate us.” For Amyraut, God worked this grace in us in a way compatible with our nature. He stated that “God moves our emotions and our will through the agency of our understanding, and in accord with our nature” (Amyraut, 2017:139). This conviction, calling, and operation on us may encounter some initial resistance, says Amyraut (2017:140), but the work of efficacious grace will lead the elect person to yield to the grace. In all forms of Calvinistic thought, even the sublapsarian Amyraldian form, God elects and the elect come to faith. As Amyraut (2017:145) affirmed, “all those who do believe have been previously predestined by the mercy of God to believe, no one being able to believe except by the gift of God”.

John Walvoord, a moderate Calvinist, also spoke in this way about conviction, calling, and regeneration. He was the president of Dallas Seminary when Geisler taught there for all but Geisler’s last two years. Walvoord (1954:119-125) described this effectual work of grace as a type of grace that certainly and inevitably leads to regeneration in God’s elected ones. He saw the order as grace effectually leading to faith that resulted in regeneration. Sublapsarian Calvinists have not insisted that regeneration has to occur prior to faith so long as grace in the power of the Spirit (efficacious grace) draws one into the conversion. Walvoord (1954:133), a moderate Amyraldian Calvinist, taught that when under the operation of efficacious grace the “human will is entirely passive.” He strengthened his position by adding that “there is no cooperation possible ... the human will is entirely passive” (Walvoord, 1954:133).

Geisler has made the claim that his views are along the same lines as those of Walvoord. He cited Walvoord four times in his book *Chosen But Free* (Geisler, 2010:338). Geisler (2010:147-148) noted that what he taught and described as a balanced view, a moderate sublapsarian Calvinist view, was taught by John Walvoord and Charles Ryrie, two scholars who were colleagues with Geisler when he taught with them at Dallas Seminary.

Therefore, a brief examination also of Ryrie's soteriology will establish further specificity for a very precise analysis of Geisler's view. One must keep in mind that the analyses of Geisler's view have often been from supralapsarian or infralapsarian Calvinists. But Geisler does not claim to align or have strong continuity with those models. More precise analysis occurs when he is examined by the model that he claimed to affirm. To properly understand and place Geisler on a soteriology continuum the analysis has to include a proper comparison group. Using the ideas from supralapsarians or infralapsarians as the base for comparison establishes an improper control group for the research. A proper analysis has to include the stream most closely aligned with the confession of Geisler. Therefore, sublapsarian Amyraldian or moderate Calvinist ideas have to be used if the goal is for the most precise analysis.

Charles C. Ryrie differed from his teacher Lewis Sperry Chafer on the decree orders and their importance. Lewis Sperry Chafer affirmed a sublapsarian decree order and thought it constituted an important aspect of theology, but Charles Ryrie (1996:319), who was a four-point Calvinist, did not think the lapsarian "schemes" could really resolve or confirm anything. Nonetheless he did affirm unconditional election while affirming an unlimited atonement view that was more common in the sublapsarian Amyraldian stream of thought (Ryrie, 1996:310-314).

When speaking of efficacious grace and the idea of monergism in his work, *The Holy Spirit*, Ryrie offered some further light into how he thought God brought those unconditionally elected people to saving faith. He spoke of this grace as special grace in contrast to common or general grace (Ryrie, 1997:85-88). The world experiences general conviction, yet there is a conviction of the Spirit that works on the elect in such a way that it calls them and effects in them faith and life. Of this doctrine Ryrie (1997:85-86) taught,

Special grace is the work of the Holy Spirit that effectively moves men to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior.... it contrasts well with general grace. It involves election, calling, and our salvation.... Special grace is effective. This is in contrast to aspects of general grace, which can be resisted or at least not acknowledged as from God.... it guarantees effective action upon that will, which action moves it without forcing it.... the act making the decision is the work of efficacious grace.

In Ryrie's thought the Holy Spirit moved on the elect, bringing them to saving faith that resulted in regeneration. In Ryrie's thought faith and regeneration occurred together and were not separated by time or sequence. The person's will did not produce this experience of salvation. His summary of the events helps give a sufficient view of how he saw all of these works of God working in a person and accomplishing salvation. Ryrie (1997:91) stated:

One may put it all together this way. God regenerates (John 1:13) according to his will (James 1:18) through the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5) when a person believes (John 1:12) the gospel as revealed in the Word of God (1 Peter 1:23).

Walvoord and Ryrie both retained a very close affiliation to the soteriology taught by their teacher Lewis Sperry Chafer. Even though Ryrie did not adopt the decree order idea, he retained the basic concepts of election, calling, efficacious grace, and conversion. Their teacher Chafer stood within the “Reformed or Calvinistic” heritage (Hannah, 1996:70). Both Walvoord and Ryrie seem to have remained in the same sphere of soteriology as did Chafer.

7.4.6 Synergism: Irresistible Prevenient Grace, Awakening, and Regeneration through Repentance and Faith for Salvation that Can Be Resisted

In contrast to monergism, an opposite soteriology theory has been synergism. Synergism is the view of soteriology that affirms God and humans cooperate in the work of regeneration and conversion from death to life. It has historically been seen as the opposite view of those in the Augustinian and Reformed Calvinistic tradition. Van A. Harvey (1964:233) defined synergism as “working together” and a term that applies to theologians who “stress the cooperation of the human will with divine grace in contrast to those, who, like Augustine (354-430), Luther (1483-1546), and Calvin (1509-1564), insist that man can do nothing unaided toward his own salvation, not even to accept grace.”

Writing as an Arminian, Roger E. Olson has also defined evangelical synergism. He has noted that synergism as defined in the conservative evangelical forms, as originally taught by Arminius and Wesley, means the “belief in free human participation in salvation” (Olson, 2006:17). He distinguished this conservative form of human participation from heretical forms. As he noted, “Arminianism is evangelical synergism as opposed to heretical, humanistic synergism” (Olson, 2006:18).

Olson made a key point in his argument that evangelical synergism has an element of irresistible grace in it. Olson taught (2006:175) that a form of common grace, the prevenient grace aspect, touches lost mankind and is “irresistible in its initial arrival”. Wesley even recognized in some cases that may at various times upon specific persons indeed work in them faith unto salvation by an irresistible act of God’s providence (Oden, 2012:2:172). But for Wesley he did not think one could infer or develop an idea that God always acts in this ways upon all people (Oden, 2012:2:172). Furthermore, In Wesleya’s teaching the work of grace could be so powerful and so strong that it would make one feel and think the grace upon them constituted an irresistible act of calling from God. In such cases Wesley taught that this made it

“understandable that” such an experience leads some to “leap to the inference that grace makes us completely inert rather than cooperating agents working out our own salvation in fear and trembling in order to receive the grace given” (Oden, 2012:2:172).

This form of grace, in both the prevenient and regenerative forms, does some type of renewal in human souls, enabling them. Lost people do nothing to experience this awareness or new life that enables them to believe or resist after the initial experience. Olson (2006:170) noted that Wesley taught this in his sermon “*Working Out Our Own Salvation.*” In Olson’s view (2006:170) of synergism as taught by Wesley and Arminius, “prevenient grace is regenerative”. The difference from that point rests upon the process of that regeneration. The awakening is irresistible but the confirmation or sealing of it transpires with one not working against it and resting in faith in the renewed condition. Olson (2006:170) noted that when the awakening takes place in the person (by prevenient grace) the consequent salvation aspect “necessarily involves the person’s free and willing cooperation with it by not resisting its saving work.”

One could possibly summarize this evangelical Arminian/Wesleyan view in this way: Lost people, helpless in sin, can experience an inward work of grace by the Lord that prepares them and enables them for belief. This prior work of grace is irresistible in the awakening aspect (a type of regeneration, monergistic in this moment), and it becomes a synergistic work for the confirmation or sealing aspect of salvation when a person does not resist the new life in him or her by resting in faith in the work of Christ from the divine awakening. This acceptance of grace in faith is, however, the basis of the person’s election. Therefore, it truly remains a full synergistic view as both election and the application of grace in faith occur through human decision.

7.4.7 A Drawing Serial Grace (Ambulatory Model): A Modern Low Calvinism Synthesis of Monergism and then Synergism that Culminates in Regeneration with Repentance and Faith

The two models of how the mechanics of grace work, monergism and synergism, rarely find a home in a single theology model. But sublapsarian Calvinism with unlimited atonement, a form of unconditional election (rooted in eternity and not in time), and evangelistic synergism from conservative Arminians have some close affinity in how they describe the process of salvation. When theologians see regeneration and conversion as a process under the superintendence of the Lord’s providence, greater harmony occurs in their models. Differences do exist and remain. How they define election remains starkly different. It remains a dividing point. But close affinity does exist in the application of grace in time. A hybrid model in evangelicalism has apparently emerged that utilizes some of the concepts from the two systems.

Therefore, to provide further context for a precise comparison to Geisler, we can investigate a few models of soteriology that attempt to synthesize these two ideas of monergism and synergism. These moderate Calvinistic views have a unique nuance that distinguishes them from both strict monergism (higher Calvinistic models) and strict synergism (Arminian/Wesleyan model). They do not have continuity with higher forms of Calvinism, but they do not have continuity with Arminian/Wesleyan views of salvation either. The moderate Calvinist view, as expressed by some of its leading teachers, has charted a unique course in explaining its version of soteriology.

This moderate Calvinist or Amyraldian stream has proposed a *drawing process of regeneration and salvation* where grace leads, persuades, and certainly in some people leads to conversion. It retains the idea that election does not occur on the basis of any act or effort (including faith) from the lost person. So in that fundamental sense it still rejects the strict or full synergism models of Arminius and Wesley (foresight election; election rooted in historical faith; corporate election). But in this model people may actively reject grace and condemn themselves. The person is passive in contributing to his own salvation. One does nothing to actively contribute towards his or her election, regeneration, and salvation, but may do something to exit the process of grace with a negative contribution. A person may establish himself or herself as one of the non-elect.

7.4.7.1 Five 19th and 20th Century Moderate Calvinists and Their Process Grace Models

Amyraut, from the 1600s, popularized the dual grace model of atonement that when applied did not, in his view, violate human will. Others have developed his views in that area further. Of the numerous sublapsarian theologians noted in history, some already mentioned in this work, five theologians from the 19th to 20th century have articulated views that this chapter will examine. This will help reveal how they have distinguished this moderate view of a dual serial grace soteriology model that views God as applying the unlimited-in-provision atonement in its common graces to the world and its particular graces to the elect. Kenneth Keathley, Billy Graham, B.H. Carroll, Oliver Crisp, and E.Y. Mullins have, in various degrees, articulated ideas that reflect some type of model affirming universal grace, serial grace, and/or libertarian views of mankind in the experience of redemptive grace within a moderate Calvinistic soteriology. According to these models, as they and others see it, their model of God's election and effectual grace remain in place while affirming some type of universal grace that impacts mankind.

However, even though human will in their models contributes nothing to elective grace or regeneration, the formulation does not in their perspective relieve or diminish human moral

accountability and responsibility as an agent with a will in the image of God. They make sincere efforts to affirm the dual truths (often a key part of Amyraldian thought) of God's sovereign election and mankind's moral liberty with responsibility and accountability. The ideas of these respective theologians will be covered in the following sections with analysis and contextualization. Arminian/Wesleyan forms of soteriology have stressed choice of faith as the basis for one's election and one's ability to grasp God's eternal grace (a decision to receive it and appropriate it). The moderate Calvinist stream has stressed one's unwillingness to accept God's grace, God's everlasting work to elect (not based on one's faith), and the need for divine intervention by grace to move, awaken, and enable a person to experience grace, to such a degree that he or she remains in that grace by faith and does not exit that grace through an exercised liberty of resistance. It has carved out a position in between the classical streams of Calvinism and Arminianism.

It appears that these various theologians in the moderate Calvinist stream have utilized key concepts as established and taught by Amyraut. A key element of the Amyraldian soteriology has always been its dual focus on grace from the atonement. Common graces apply to everyone (impacting them) and particular graces apply to the elect (1 Tim. 4:10) that uniquely impacts them (Clifford, 2007:172). God's grace actively touches the world (accomplishing some effects) and yet also particularly draws in the elect while not violating their will and moral accountability (accomplishing conversion). These truths form the heart of an Amyraldian system. Grace is dualistic, yet definite, solitarily initiated by God, yet permitting for synergy of choice to exit. This stream of grace has a flow of direction (like a river downstream) while recognizing congruency of the participants in the river (souls and their sacred freedom to exit the river).

7.4.7.2 *Kenneth Keathley: A Low Calvinistic Serial Model of Grace*

One of the most modern representatives of a theology that has key elements affirmed in the sublapsarian and Amyraldian stream has been Kenneth Keathley. He does not classify himself as being from this Amyraldian stream of thought, but his model and view of an unlimited atonement, a real permission decree for sin, and his affirmation of a clear and strong view of election with meticulous providence governing history and applications of grace, place his theology and soteriology within the realm of moderate Calvinism (Keathley, 2010:7, 145-149).

As a type of moderate or low Calvinist, Keathley has served as a professor at the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Keathley (2010:1-15) affirms mankind's full depravity, universal atonement, and a form of unconditional election. He signs as a professor of his seminary the Abstract of Principles designed by the Calvinistic theologian J.P. Boyce. That confession affirms

key points of the Calvinistic view of anthropology, hamartiology, and soteriology. In essence the Abstract confession, after going through various revisions and drafts, adopted “four-point Calvinism” (Wills, 2009:38). It also protected the view that God permitted sin and neither his sovereignty nor sin eradicated the free will and responsibility of God’s sacred creation (Wills, 2009:35). In short, this document would have continuity with a form of moderate Calvinism.

Keathley’s description of salvation offers much to this field of discussion as a representative of this moderate Calvinistic soteriology. He describes the awakening moment in the salvation of a sinner as a moment of ambulatory grace. This concept has a serial process or flow to it. Keathley (2010:88) has noted that this event of grace should be seen as a “unique process.” He described that process of God’s work of regeneration as simultaneously “monergistic and yet resistible” (Keathley, 2010:88). One does nothing to initiate and produce life in himself or herself (rejecting all Pelagian forms/variations of thought), yet prior to the culmination of regeneration one can actively do something to leave the process of grace. God actively leads and effects (monergism), and the person rests in passive receptive faith (synergism). God accomplishes with certainty (what he knows he decreed so it certainly will occur) while the person remains responsible for any resistance and negative actions that cause him or her to miss redemptive grace. God effects the good and belief. Yet God permits evil and unbelief.

Keathley’s model of a process in the new birth has some similarity to the way the evangelist Billy Graham explained election, calling, and regeneration of people. Graham’s view will be covered in the next section. Keathley (2010:104) termed this idea of grace at work the “ambulatory model.” In his view grace works prior to faith to rescue a sinner (monergistic grace), yet it can be resisted after the initial experience of it, but if no contribution from the sinner is made as the sinner relaxes in faith (the effect of the grace) and the person does not opt out of grace (the ambulance of salvation), then the sinner is carried into redemption and salvation (Keathley, 2010:104). His full illustration is helpful to explain his view of this regeneration/salvation process.

Imagine waking up to find you are being transported by an ambulance to the emergency room. It is clearly evident that your condition requires serious medical help. If you do nothing you will be delivered to the hospital. However, if for whatever reason you demand to be let out, the driver will comply. He may express regret and give warnings, but he will still let you go. You receive no credit for being taken to the hospital, but you incur the blame for refusing the services of the ambulance. In this illustration you do not do anything to arrive at the hospital. The only thing you have the ability to do is resist. Any contribution made by you is hurtful. Now let the ambulance serve as a metaphor for the work of the Spirit in conversion. If you believe, it is because (and only because) the Holy Spirit brought you to

faith. If you do not believe, it is only because you resisted. The only thing you are able to 'do' is negative. Thus the ambulatory model provides for a monergistic work of grace that leaves room for the sinner to refuse to accept (Keathley, 2010:104).

7.4.7.3 Billy Graham: A Low Calvinistic Serial Model of Grace

As noted in the prior section, what Keathley described has been preached and taught in some ways by the famous evangelist Billy Graham. The evangelist used a concrete illustration to explain his view. Graham taught that regeneration and salvation in the spirit world functioned in the way human conception, gestation, and birth works in the biological processes of human life. Though Graham thought there existed a divine instantaneous moment of conversion when one passed from death into eternal life (Johnston, 2003:192-195), Graham also taught that the spiritual new birth occurs like that of the natural human birth as noted by Jesus in John 3 with Nicodemus. From the natural world illustrations one can see a visible analogy of how God conceives and births a person into life. Graham (1988:69) stated, "I am convinced that the new birth is often like natural birth; the moment of conception, nine months of gestation, and then the birth. Sometimes it takes weeks of conviction by the Holy Spirit."

Graham, who was born and raised in the Associate Reformed Calvinistic Presbyterian environment, according to Lewis Drummond (2001:56), retained the idea that God "does elect and predestine to salvation" while rejecting "double predestination" (Dorsett, 2003:259). Thomas Johnston's dissertation also noted this dual aspect in Graham's soteriology model: a person cannot exercise freedom in choosing grace, but can refuse the grace acting upon him or her (Johnston, 2003:206). Additionally, in Graham's mind, how one's will and God's sovereignty relate constitute a mystery. In Johnston's analysis (Johnston, 2003:207) Graham's soteriology had continuity with the broad Reformed stream, and continuity with the views of a "Lutheran or modified Calvinist".

Drummond (2001:56) noted that at evangelistic crusades Graham would pray, "Our Father and our God, we pray that the Holy Spirit will draw those to Thyself whom Thou hast chosen in Christ." Johnston also noted that Graham prayed this way acknowledging that the elect existed prior to conversion (Johnston, 2003:208). Graham would sometimes say, "I know there are people that God has prepared their hearts, and in that sense they are chosen by God.... I know something is going to happen that God has planned" (Drummond, 2001:53). He would sometimes use the illustration that when people enter heaven they would see the external sign "Whosoever will may come" and then after entering they see the other side of the door in heaven saying "Chosen from the foundation of the world" (Drummond, 2001:53).

7.4.7.4 B.H. Carroll and Oliver Crisp: Serial Grace and Libertarian Forms of Calvinism

B.H. Carroll, a Calvinist (Nettles, 2002:223-231), did not restrict grace to just the elect. He also did not restrict God's actual will to a focus on saving just the elect. A real, actual, and true love of God existed for all. He embraced a form of atonement that touched all (Nettles, 2002:231) and from that recognized dual truths in scripture in relation to particular election and also universal love. In commenting on these matters of 1 Timothy 2:6 where the text teaches that Christ died for all, Carroll (1948:30) said, "let us not squirm at that, but for a little while let us forget about election and predestination, and just look this scripture squarely in the face: God desires the salvation of all men." In his view this text required him to affirm that Christ actually "gave his life" as a "ransom for all. That all is as big here as elsewhere. He would have all men to be saved" (Carroll, 1948:31). This truth of universal grace and desire for all to be saved constituted two lines of truth in scripture that harmonized in God's mind (Carroll, 1948:31).

Additionally, Carroll had a view of how grace worked on a person that reflected something similar to what Keathley and others have proposed in this current era. Keathley has proposed a process form of grace that leads to regeneration, faith, and conversion (repentance and faith). That ambulatory model of Keathley, or something close to it, seems to have been taught by this unlimited atonement Calvinist B.H. Carroll (1957:38, 95) who wrote that regeneration was a solitary serial movement with an "appreciable time element between several exercises".

Keathley's process or serial view, Billy Graham's human gestation view, and B.H. Carroll's several exercises of grace view all unite and affirm that a universal grace and particular grace occur in some type of sequenced flow of grace. Keathley's (2010:128, 129) view has also articulated the idea that "God must graciously invade the darkness of a person's heart" because a lost person in "their natural state" abides in a condition where the person "does not want God". So in a sense, on an anthropological level, the one experiencing this drawing or overflowing process of grace finds it to be or feels it to be irresistible (Keathley, 2010:126). Keathley's model, Graham's model, and Carroll's model reveal theologians making an effort to preserve both a universal focus of real grace and a particular focus of real grace with some type of serial process for various facets of God's providence to work on lost humanity to draw sinners into conversion (repentance, faith, and justification).

This ideology of a combination of monergism from God's providence working through the will in a process that produces a passive synergistic concurring response (no active resistance that would occur) seems to be a historic strand of Calvinistic thought. Sometimes this thought among the Calvinists has been termed a "natural liberty" view, or a "libertarian Calvinism" in

which God ordains events rooted in his full omniscience and from his full realm of intelligence (omniscience; God uses all of his knowledge in wisdom to orchestrate an intended/decreed result) that he purposes in a decree that “renders” some events’ “occurrence certain” while the human retains natural liberty in various areas with the “ability to do otherwise at the moment of choice” (Crisp, 2014:73, 72, 75).

Oliver Crisp (2014:73) noted that the Westminster Confession allows for the idea that God “ordains all things yet without offering violence to the will of the creature.” In that light Crisp (2014:73) noted that this historic Calvinist confession presents the case that “the human will has ‘natural liberty’ that is not determined to good or evil by any ‘absolute necessity’”. The term “absolute”, used to qualify a certain type of necessity, coupled with a view that providence does no violence to a person’s will, seems to suggest the idea that certainly effects will occur (choices and actions leading to an outcome) without that meaning the effects occur by a mechanical (absolute) cause and effect (necessity) as seen in a molecular model paradigm. Crisp’s view seems to also present a distinct form of low or moderate Calvinism.

7.4.7.5 E.Y. Mullins: A Relational and Libertarian Monergism Model of Grace

E.Y. Mullins, a moderate Calvinist who taught a sequenced or serial form of unconditional election, taught that God’s grace works in some type of fluid and relational drawing process. Mullins taught in the early 1900s and served as the president of a Calvinist confessional seminary founded by the five-point Calvinist James Pettigree Boyce, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Wills, 2009:90-97). In Mullins’ view as a moderate Calvinist, God worked effectively (efficaciously) through powerful persuasion that moved someone to faith. His idea of effectual persuasion resembles the ideas of Amyraut on belief emerging in the elect from effectual persuasion. The movement of grace is not mechanical, like a gear turning another gear in a cause and effect material process, but personal and moral in relationship. Mullins (1917:344) described it this way:

Does God’s election coerce man’s will, or does it leave it free? The answer is emphatically that the will of man is not coerced, but is left free. In his free act of accepting Christ and his salvation man is self-determined. He would not have made the choice if left to himself without the aid of God’s grace. But when he chooses, it is his own free act. God’s grace is not irresistible as a physical force is irresistible. Grace does not act as a physical force. It is a moral and spiritual and personal power.

7.4.7.6 Amyraldian Libertarian View of Man and Grace

Moderate Calvinism in the Amyraldian stream has historically made an effort, with of course some variation even among themselves, to steer a course in between an omni-causality (all in the universe is active and causally determined by God) form of monergism (an absolute necessity system in which people cannot determine their own actions; they must necessarily act) and the solitary synergistic system in which people can actively contribute towards their own regeneration and redemption. This idea of a form of natural liberty that functions within the overall providence of God seems to have existed in Moise Amyraut's theology as well as many others who align with a moderate Calvinistic view through history in this modern era. In Amyraut's view depravity did not eradicate mankind's natural ability and will, making him totally passive in every way (Clifford, 2007:15). Human will has been corrupted by the fall, but grace has preserved his "psychological and physical aptitudes, i.e., we can think, feel and act" (Clifford, 2007:15).

Clifford (2007:15) has asserted that in the moderate Calvinist Amyraldian view, depravity does not mean the person has been "deprived of freewill," but rather the person has been corrupted or deprived by sin of "goodwill." People consequently may not contribute towards their own experience of grace (they have no good will to do so). However, they have not lost accountability and moral responsibility as agents that can determine for themselves, i.e., they do not merely exist in an absolute system of necessity where their will remains totally passive in all matters.

Amyraut's concept of a type of liberty that exists with an abandoned good will, which rejects mechanical causal determinism (often known as omni-causation), has been a stream in the Calvinist heritage. Numerous Calvinists have warned against and have taught against the idea of a mechanistic causal determination model (Keathley, 2010:128, 93-100). Keathley warned of these dangers as well.

Keathley (2010:82) highlighted that when mechanistic omni-causal determinism is embraced one arrives at conclusions like that of R.C. Sproul Jr., who specifically stated that God created sin. R.C. Sproul Jr. (1999:46-47), following ideas sometimes expressed by Jonathan Edwards on the will being mechanically moved in a strict cause-effect relationship that links everything directly back to God, examined the options as to how sin developed in Adam and Eve. After eliminating all of the options as to who may have been the responsible party for sin's entrance into the world Sproul Jr. asked a question and answered it. "Who are we left with? The case against God." Sproul Jr. noted that God "must be the one who introduced evil into his world" (Sproul, 1999:51). His conclusion as to "Who Dunit" (the title of his chapter) rests with God. He

wrote, “I am suggesting that he [God] created sin” (Sproul, 1999:43-59, 54). Sproul Jr. still asserted that God did not sin, but simultaneously affirmed that God created (an active term) sin. His view at the minimum poses some logical problems and at the worst his view could implicate God as the author of sin. He could have stated that God created the option for sin to occur through another, but he did not describe it in that way. Moderate Calvinists or Amyraldians have made sincere efforts to avoid those conundrums. Geisler sought to create a model in between what he saw as extremes on the continuum.

7.4.8 Moderate Calvinists Have Sought to Avoid Mechanical and Molecular Determinism Models

Moderate or low Calvinists have made efforts to distinguish their model of soteriology from models that they believe can harm God’s holiness and justice as well as the human dignity and volition that represents the image of God. Both God in his sovereign and providential rule and mankind as a mirror of God’s image with honor and dignity, even while depraved, have been a focus for moderate Calvinist voices that have sought to balance these truths in their soteriology. Part of Geisler’s concerns relate to this matter. As he noted, if God’s creatures and their choices are always actively determined by God so that people or Satan did not act with self-determination then it would logically mean that God created sin and is “working against himself” (Geisler, 2010:272). Such models could undermine some key truths of Christianity.

The moderate Calvinist stream has, therefore, sought to use the idea of permission so as not to violate the holiness and justice of God as presented in the pages of scripture. Lewis Sperry Chafer (1993:1:236-243), a sublapsarian Calvinist, made this point, that God’s decree of sin occurs through permission. William G.T. Shedd (2003:318), an infralapsarian Calvinist, taught that a permissive decree of God exists and relates to “moral evil.” Kenneth Keathley (2010:140-142) has also recognized the importance of permission in relation to sin and reprobation. Though Keathley has classified himself as a Molinist, his views are tightly related to the ideas taught in the moderate or Amyraldian stream of Calvinism. Molinism and moderate Calvinism have much similarity.

Keathley’s teaching and perspective on contingency and permission seem to align very closely with sublapsarian models of God’s decree. The type of model he presents with a serial flow in God’s knowledge has been found in seed form in sublapsarian forms of Calvinism. The idea of actual logical sequenced decrees (as sublapsarians affirm) and Keathley’s layered form of God’s knowledge work like a hand-in-glove combination. Sublapsarians and Keathley both realize the need for contingency and sequence in God’s decree order to properly identify sin’s origin in the universe. Their views present the creation of Satan and mankind as the beings that

produced or authored sin; sin is not something God created. Sequenced and logical decrees or layered knowledge in God's mind helps to accomplish that proper identification. Keathley (2010:140) stated:

The real problem is, as always, the problem of evil. As it relates to the issue of election, the question is how humans came to be viewed in the eternal mind of God as sinners in the first place. The debate concerning predestination is over the role that permission plays in God's decrees.

Most moderate Calvinists have tried at the same time to exclude mankind as being active agents in their own election and experience of grace. They prefer to make creation (Lucifer and mankind) the active agents of sin and mankind as the passive recipient of election and grace. Walking that theological tightrope has placed their theology in a position in between strict monergism (God as the active determiner of all) and strict synergism (people can contribute to their election and salvation). This view can also be contrasted with some ideologies external to the Christian realm of theology.

This idea of a mechanical or molecular determinism has been promoted by some outside the circles of Christianity. The idea of omni-causation (every event happens by necessity) has advocates characterized by ideologies in stark contrast to Christianity. The author and teacher Sam Harris, trained in secular neuroscience, has promoted a molecular form of determinism. In Harris' view every choice a person makes is of absolute necessity the only choice that could have occurred. Harris taught that "in physical terms, we know that every human action can be reduced to a series of impersonal events" (Harris, 2012:27). In his mechanical, molecular-based, omni-causality view, defined as an absolute necessity system by which mankind cannot determine his own actions, free will is nothing more than "an illusion" (Harris, 2010:64). In his words:

Free will is an illusion. Our wills are simply not our own making. Thoughts and intentions emerge from background causes of which we are unaware and over which we exert no conscious control. We do not have the freedom we think we have.... Either our wills are determined by prior causes and we are not responsible for them, or they are the product of chance and we are not responsible for them (Harris, 2010:5).

This view has been found in some religious circles outside of Christianity. For example, the Islamic view of Allah is a type of omni-causality view in which Allah may act coercively and forcefully to convert people into their faith. Arthur Jeffrey (1958:147-148) described the fatalistic view of Islam in this way:

Orthodox Islam teaches the absolute predestination of both good and evil, that all our thoughts, words and deeds, whether good or evil, were foreseen, foreordained, determined and decreed from all eternity, and that everything that happens takes place according to what has been written for it.

The theologians of the Muslim worldview interpret the Qur'an and doctrines of Islam in an omni-causality type of system. Andrew Rippin and Jan Knappert (1986:133) explained that in Islam Allah "can create sin" in a person. In the Islamic doctrines "God creates all things, good and evil. God creates people as well as their actions: he created you as well as what you do (Qur'an 37:94)" (Rippin and Knappert, 1986:133). Mankind cannot do anything but experience the sovereign immutable decree of Allah. Gerhard Nehls stated (1987:21),

Not only can he (God) do anything, he actually is the only One Who does anything. When a man writes, it is Allah who has created in his mind the will to write. Allah at the same time gives power to write, then brings about the motion of the hand and the pen and the appearance upon paper. All other things are passive, Allah alone is active.

7.4.9 Concerns of Compromise in Irresistible Monergism Models of Grace

As shown in this chapter, a substantial and significant stream of Calvinists in the Reformed heritage find the idea of an exclusive monergism by God's irresistible willing of all matters troubling. To create is to author. To author is to create. Keathley spoke of this major error with R.C. Sproul Jr. by reminding readers that "to say that God created sin is astounding. Sproul Jr.'s position flies in the face of the teaching of Scripture, historical Christian doctrine, the major Reformed confessions, other Calvinist theologians, and notably, the statements of his father" (Keathley, 2010:83). A strict irresistible monergism view of providence that describes everything in materialistic cause and effect language (omni-causality) creates something similar to a materialistic model that fails to rightly see that "we are not machines," but instead "we are persons created in the image of God" (Keathley, 2010:83). In Keathley's (2010:95) summary, "moderate Calvinists" (as Keathley is) are those who "reject a mechanistic understanding of human choice."

7.4.10 Summarizing a Moderate Calvinist Applied Grace View as Historically Rooted in Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, and Amyraut

There seems to be in the Calvinistic heritage a view that rejects the rigid dichotomy that the grace of God works in only a solitary moment through a monergistic irresistible manner (mankind cannot resist God) or in a merely resistible synergistic manner that leaves mankind as contributor to his or her own election and regeneration. This moderate Calvinist stream rejects

Pelagian and semi-Pelagian views, ideas that teach that human will initiates and accomplishes regeneration or salvation by its own ability or growth (Harvey, 1964:218-219). But it also seems to oppose the model that would link sin back to God as the creator and cause of it (as seen and expressed by R.C. Sproul Jr.).

This view seems to have historical precedent with the Council of Orange in 529. That council, led by Caesarius of Arles, affirmed the idea of prevenient grace and rejected the idea of predestination to evil (Thorne, 1978:731). He and his representatives in that Council opposed the semi-Pelagians (Rogers, 1978:173). As Gregg R. Allison noted of this synod, “on many issues the synod sided with Augustinian theology and took a decidedly anti-Pelagian stance.” However, it sought to clarify what they thought was a wrong representation or understanding of Augustine’s theology. In particular it pronounced a curse on those who taught that God actively predestined or foreordained evil (Allison, 2011:458). Allison (2011:459) says this Council defined “what could be called semi-Augustinianism.”

The ideas that emerged from that Council were further defined and expressed through Anselm, who articulated further the passive idea of reprobation by emphasizing that God may leave a person to their own desires (Allison, 2011:459). He also promoted the idea that God’s providence in election and predestination did not exclude free will nor did human will oppose it, but the two worked in concert with each other (Allison, 2011:461).

Thomas Aquinas also made efforts to retain the stream of thought Anselm had advanced by teaching an active and passive nature of God’s work in election and predestination. Aquinas (1948:126) connected predestination to God’s providence. In his mind God did not base predestination on anything in the recipient—a rejection of foresight election (Aquinas, 1948:1:126). In Aquinas’ (1948:1:126) own words, “predestination is a kind of type of the ordering of some persons towards eternal salvation, existing in the divine mind.”

However, Aquinas (1948:1:127) rejected the idea that God ordered or actively reprobated people to damnation. Aquinas taught that a part of God’s providence permits “some to fall away from that end”. A person experiences damnation by their own choice and free will. Describing this idea further Aquinas (1948:1:127) stated, “when it is said that the reprobated cannot obtain grace, this must not be understood as implying an absolute impossibility; but only a conditional impossibility”. In his view, necessity does not eradicate “the liberty of choice” (Aquinas, 1948:1:127). Providence arranged for active predestination and God allowed for some to remove themselves from that end goal of grace by their liberty of choice.

Lastly, Moise Amyraut serves as a link between the historic pre-Reformation church to the Reformation and post-Reformation church. The moderate Calvinist ideas that Amyraut taught seem to have existed in some form with semi-Augustinians (maybe moderate Augustinianism) from the Council of Orange, in Anselm, and in Aquinas. Alan Clifford explained (2007:11) that Amyraut claimed what he taught “was in fact a reaffirmation of the balanced biblical insights of John Calvin himself!” Amyraut affirmed election and predestination and rejected the idea that people contributed towards their own election. Yet he also made definite and clear efforts to reject the idea that God worked sin or unbelief into those who never came to repentance and faith. Amyraut (2017:124) explicitly stated, “If, as I say, God does not engender faith in them, it does not follow that he engenders the contrary.”

In Amyraut’s view, a sinner can progress further and further into sin and remove themselves from the sphere of grace. As they digress further into darkness this “sadly extinguishes the small remnant of natural light that God has allowed since man’s fall to keep the conservation of human society in the human conscious” (Amyraut, 2017:125). When speaking of his view of efficacious grace he was careful to distinguish this model from a view in which force is used against or on the will. He stated, “belief is persuasion. And one does not persuade a person by force” (Amyraut, 2017:139). In the work of persuasion, God’s grace in and with human works (evangelism, missions) help some to become convinced of the need for Christ and grace. Amyraut (2017:139) stated, “it is rational arguments that induce men to receive some truth, not constraint or violence. More so, love is a movement of both the emotion and will.”

Those statements seem very close to the ideas that E.Y. Mullins would later teach in the 1900s. Efficacious grace is not an irresistible force, but instead a love relationship in which God and his people persuade someone to faith. As Amyraut (2017:139) stated, “God moves our emotions and our will through the agency of our understanding, and this is in accord with our nature.”

It seems that these ancient theologians (semi-Augustinians, or Augustinianism as defined by the Council of Orange, Anselm, Aquinas, and Amyraut) sought to establish a type of soteriology that affirmed some type of election and predestination where lost mankind contributed nothing to his own election and calling. However, they seemed to try and make serious efforts to reject the idea of grace functioning as an irresistible force. Furthermore, they seem to have sought to retain some form of human liberty and permission within the logical or eternally sequenced decree of God that made mankind’s actual choice and liberty the basis for sin and subsequent condemnation. Variations and inconsistencies may exist through the various representatives, but the general theme and nuances seem to have a long strand of historical precedent connecting modern theologians back to theologians of antiquity.

In the more modern models of this stream (E.Y. Mullins, B.H. Carroll, Billy Graham, Oliver Crisp, and Kenneth Keathley, all mentioned in this chapter) God actively acts upon the mind/heart of people; he does so in a relational form of effectual persuasion, and that action awakens people to the process or event of regeneration/salvation, which, for those who do nothing to reject (no action to oppose), carries them on to the culminating point of faith in a completed state of regeneration and salvation. The overflowing river of grace washes them downstream and over the edge in the secure arms of the Savior. A person may opt out of grace in the process (exiting the river). But, when acted upon and enlivened by grace (monergism) one only experiences this through passive cooperation with what has already been wrought by the Spirit. The sinner drawn into grace does not actively initiate, obtain, or contribute to the process. The sinner rests in faith trusting the river of grace to deliver them to everlasting safety. Cooperation (synergy) occurs only after an initial monergistic work.

7.4.11 Effectual Serial and Libertarian Grace Model Illustrations: Love Lavished Leads to Libertarian Loyalty to the Lord

An illustration might help explain what constitutes a sublapsarian Amyraldian soteriology. Charles Ryrie (2005:48) emphasized how illustrations can help teach biblical doctrine and theological ideas. Maybe these two illustrations will illuminate the concepts several moderate Calvinists have taught.

Suppose the Lord has moved on the hearts of a medical team to take a spiritual retreat into the mountains. On their way in the hike through the mountains one of the surgeons, who has gone ahead of the team on the hike, finds a man lifeless on the side of a river bank. His partners are still camped back downstream where they have all of their medical tools in their medical bag with them in a tent next to the river. This surgeon inspects the person on the ground and sees he is not breathing and is without a heartbeat. He strikes the chest of the person with his fist and the heart restarts in the person, but the person is still severely injured and bleeding. The surgeon calls out to his team downstream and asks them to step out into the river as he has a plan to get this man moved to them quickly by using the flow of the river. He explains his plan to the man. The man, startled and in pain at first, complains of the idea and yells at the surgeon to leave him alone. The surgeon tells the man that he must move him to where he can receive some medical care or he will die. The man still complains. The surgeon chooses not to relent. He explains with greater intensity the seriousness of the situation. He then places the severely injured person in the river. The man does nothing to oppose the surgeon. Consequently, the person now in the river with a life vest strapped to him floats downstream as the flowing river carries him to ultimate rescue where the medical team with their medical kits rescue him from the water and provide medical care to seal up his wounds to save his life.

The man being placed in the river agreed with the flow (being carried not by his own strength) by not acting to leave the stream and flow. He contemplated grabbing on to a tree he passed by in the river to pull himself over and out of the water. But he did not act on the idea. He knew if he were to act to move out of the river, opting to leave the river's flow and resist its current, by that action he would leave the flowing water that was leading him to his salvation and therefore he would suffer the consequences of the negative choice, the consequence of death.

Another illustration that may paint a helpful picture of this serial grace model might be one related to courtship and marriage. In scripture the love relationship between the Lord to his people has often been pictured as a metaphor of the husband (the Lord) to the bride (the collective people of God, Israel in the OT and the church in the NT). A courtship illustration to describe this model of soteriology might work in this way.

The lover has his eye on a lady. He plans, purposes, and orchestrates meetings with this lady, often even using his family to organize the meetings. In each meeting the lover pursues the lady and incrementally speaks to her heart and mind. His actions awaken her to his interest and care. At first she continues to pursue other men. The lover, however, chooses not to end his pursuit. Incrementally her desires for other men decrease as the lover continues to pursue and communicate his love and care to her. From this she experiences inwardly new sensations and a strong inward attraction to this lover pursuing her. She recognizes the inward attraction to the lover and the draw towards him is strong. She considers the option of walking away from his communication but does not choose to leave his presence in the moments he pursues her.

Progressively she finds herself being drawn to him until his communication with her places her in a condition that she has been won over to his love and companionship. The lover takes the woman to himself, declaring his everlasting love for her and she, being enlivened and energized by his love, offers no resistance to his effort to join her. She willingly moves in concert to his advances, responding and receiving his initiation and actions and in doing so entrusts herself to him and his love.

In both of these illustrations the active agents, the surgeon and medical team (representing the Lord) and the lover (representing Christ) with his family (representing the body of Christ engaged in evangelism), elect a particular person. In their active effort to elect, the agents could have chosen not to elect or not to engage and to release the person with minimal pursuit (leaving the man by the river and the lady to their initial desires). At any point the active agents could have halted their efforts because of the initial resistance of the persons. The surgeon did not have to make the effort to start the lifeless man's heart. Furthermore, when the man received some temporal life by the surgeon's action (awakened in a chest thump) he

complained against the surgeon, even asking to be left alone. The surgeon could have left the man alone there to die and honored the man's wishes. Likewise, the lover pursuing the lady could have stopped the pursuit, knowing of her desire and efforts to love other men. After the initial pursuit and her unwillingness to respond, the man had a just reason to leave her and allow her to pursue those other men. In both illustrations the active agents elected to continue in the pursuit (drawing in efforts) of the recipients they had placed their sights upon.

Furthermore, in both illustrations the efforts of the active agents did not eliminate the reality of the will of the people being pursued. The active efforts overshadowed the resistance and took precedence in the work to bring those two people into their care. The recipients had mental awareness, cognition, and natural ability to leave the efforts of care being exercised by the active agents. They did not do anything to contribute towards their own rescue (man on the river) or love union (woman won over by lover). Both the man by the river and the pursued woman experienced a love that awakened them and through persuasive influence it changed their hearts and minds towards the active agents. The relational affinity from the love and care from the active agents gave them knowledge and ability to trust the active agents. It was effectual through persuasion. Their trust flowed from the lavished love placed upon them from the active agents. They did not seek it, discover it, or gain it by their efforts or choices. Love came to them and found them. Love awakened them to a new reality and they were sealed in it (saved) not by active efforts to obtain it, but by the knowledge and power of the active agents (monergism) winning them over to their way of thinking. The recipients of that gracious pursuit trusted the active agents (synergism in response to prior enabling) and did not actively reject (libertarian freedom that existed but was not exercised).

7.4.12 Norman Geisler's View on Grace: Is Grace Irresistible or Resistible?

Some Reformed critics of Norman Geisler have made some really strong assertions that Geisler did not embrace a true form of moderate Calvinism. For example, James R. White (White, 2000:312) charged Geisler with a redefining of terms in relation to irresistible grace. What did he mean by this?

Geisler offered a description of how God's grace works in bringing people to faith. In both the 1999 edition and the latest 2010 edition of Geisler's book *Chosen But Free*, he addressed the matter of irresistible grace. He devoted fourteen to fifteen pages throughout the book to interact with this idea. Two phrases surfaced in all of the editions of this book that capture his position. In the latest edition Geisler (2010:101,103) described his view of monergism and synergism in these two sentences: (1) "grace is irresistible on the willing," and (2) "grace is not irresistible on

the unwilling.” It is best to let him speak in his own words here on what he meant by those sentences.

As to sentence number one Geisler (2010:104) explained his view this way:

Moderate Calvinists affirm that God can be as persuasive as he desires to be, short of coercion. In theological terms, this means God can use irresistible grace on the willing. But such divine persuasion will be like that of courtship. God will woo and court so persuasively that those willing to respond will be overwhelmed by his love.

As to sentence number two Geisler (2010:101-102) explained his view this way:

Those who insist that God’s will cannot be resisted confuse what God wills unconditionally with what he wills conditionally. God wills the salvation of all persons conditionally—conditioned on their repentance (2 Peter 3:9)—and his will in this sense can be resisted by an unrepentant heart. Of course, God’s will to save those who believe (i.e. the elect) is unconditional, so that this is not a repudiation of unconditional election. Election is unconditional from the standpoint of the Giver (God), but it is conditional from the standpoint of the receiver. Since God foreknows who will receive salvation, the result is certain; thus, in this sense, God’s grace on the elect is irresistible.

These passages seem to suggest that Geisler made a sincere effort to truly embrace the moderate Calvinist ideology. Whether or not he has been consistent or successful overall will be examined in Chapter 8. However, several ideas here have been expressed in the Amyraldian stream of thought, i.e., moderate Calvinism. Geisler here connects effectual persuasion back to unconditional election. This makes sense when one recalls that Geisler often says election is not based on foreknowledge (Arminian/Wesleyan view of foresight election) or is independent of foreknowledge (higher forms of Calvinism, voluntarism or supralapsarian models). If Geisler’s language seems odd, one should recall that Jonathan Edwards also spoke of election being determined by the result of effectual grace. Edwards stated (Edwards, 2000b:2:541), “effectual calling, being the proper execution of election, is sometimes in Scripture called election”.

Furthermore, Geisler does speak in terms of effectual persuasion and those terms were specifically used by not only Amyraut but also by many modern moderate Calvinists. This divine influence leads to people being moved into the experience of conversion. This concept emphasizes the moral influence of God working on people in a relational way. This effectual moral influence was also used by Jonathan Edwards. Though Edwards often spoke of irresistible grace and in terms of absolute necessity, he did in some places qualify this and make an effort to describe this grace as relational influence. In explaining his view of efficacious

grace Edwards stated (Edwards, 2000b:2:549) that “the Scriptures show that God’s influence in the case is such that he is the cause of the effect; he causes it to be, which shows that his influence determines the matter, whether it shall be or not.” These statements even by the higher Calvinist Edwards highlights that theologians realize that God’s grace working on humans drawing them to salvation can be understood as divine influence.

7.4.13 Norman Geisler’s View of Monergism and Synergism

When Geisler addressed the issue of monergism and synergism he certainly took a different route than supralapsarian and infralapsarian Calvinism. However, Geisler displayed some continuity with moderate Calvinism, though not as neatly as one may expect. Part of the issue is that within sublapsarian streams some variations have existed, and some development since the time of Amyraut has added more refined concepts to the soteriology models, creating various strands or types within one heritage. What makes the analysis even more difficult is that Geisler seems to have equated monergism with irresistible grace (Geisler, 2004:192). This identification of the two concepts as basically being the same does not align with all of the moderate Calvinists. E.Y. Mullins, Billy Graham, Kenneth Keathley, and reasonably Oliver Crisp with his libertarian Calvinism, see grace as effectual in some form of persuasion while allowing for the idea that it could be resisted in some sense because people retain some form of liberty. Geisler (2004:192) said that he rejects monergism as an unbiblical idea. He cited several texts of scripture where people resist the work of the Lord (Matt. 23:37; Acts 7:51; and Mark 3:28-29) to make his case that grace can be and has been resisted (Geisler, 2004:192). For some that seals the deal and he receives the label of being an Arminian/Wesleyan.

However, there remains some ambiguity in what he meant by synergism. Since he mostly equated irresistible grace with monergism and rejected the idea of a process in regeneration, unlike some other moderate Calvinists who taught a process leading to regeneration/conversion, it is hard to know whether he thought the “willing” disposition of a person existed in that pliable condition because of human self-determination or because of God’s prior prevenient grace that prepared the person for the irresistible grace that would produce regeneration, repentance, and faith. When answering criticisms of his synergistic view he seems to have spoken of some type of prior monergistic work on a person that prepared the person for conversion. He stated, “in synergistic salvation the ... origin and initiative of justification is solely from God” (Geisler, 2004:198). When that idea connects to and couples with the idea that “God’s persuasive but resistible love goes hand in glove with God-given human free choice” proper analysis remains difficult because he has some elements that show continuity with Amyraldian streams of soteriology. He does seem to embrace a unique vivifying

influence of the Spirit that leads one to conversion. But the continuity has some glitches or inconsistencies in it.

The one dangling question that might shed some extra light on how to define his view seems not to have been explored or definitively answered by Geisler. What causes or places mankind in a position of willingness? Geisler (2010:268-273) clearly rejected the definition of free will offered by the higher Calvinist Jonathan Edwards. Of this issue Geisler (2010:268-273) adopted the theology of self-determinism while rejecting determinism and indeterminism as theories on human will.

Geisler stated that he embraced self-determinism for five reasons. (1) Free actions cannot be caused by another if people are held responsible for their choices and actions. Geisler (2010:271) adopts the self-determination view of Thomas Aquinas. (2) Geisler (2010:271) believed that a moral obligation or responsibility demands that mankind has the disposition of liberty to choose in response to the demand. (3) God gives commands in the Bible and this “ought” (an obligation, a should) implies one can choose the “ought” (obligation) commanded (Geisler, 2010:271). (4) Since people can be praised for “heroism” and blamed for “cruelty” if a person has no free will or liberty to choose those acts one could not really be praised or blamed (Geisler, 2010:272). (5) if God actively “determines all acts, then he, not Satan, is responsible for the origin of sin” (Geisler, 2010:272). He explained even further why this fifth point would cause so much harm to the Christian faith. “For if free choice is the doing what one desires, and if God gives the desire, then God must have given Lucifer the desire to rebel against him (Rev. 12). But this is morally absurd, since it would be God working against himself” (Geisler, 2010:272).

7.5 CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

Geisler’s views on atonement, election, and the application of grace to sinners yields some continuity and discontinuity with moderate Calvinism, often known as Amyraldianism. Some aspects of his theology have clear connections of continuity to the ideas as set forth in the writings of prior and contemporary moderate Calvinists. However, clearly some statements by Geisler reflect discontinuity with prior and contemporary Amyraldians in the moderate Calvinist stream. Furthermore, because moderate Calvinists in the Amyraldian stream have developed further some of the earlier ideas of prior theologians, it makes the task of analysis with Geisler a little more technical and complicated because Geisler did not interact with some forms of moderate Amyraldian theology where the idea of a drawing process in grace occurs. However, Geisler did state that his moderate Calvinist views were also taught by Walvoord and Ryrie. But

those moderate Calvinists seem to have expressed their versions of election and effectual grace in stronger terms than did Geisler.

7.5.1 Norman Geisler Compared to the Reformed/Calvinistic Positions of Election and Grace

The Calvinists James R. White and John Gerstner have made some extremely strong allegations against Geisler. White (2000:336) alleges that Geisler “presents Arminianism under the guise of moderate Calvinism.” Gerstner also alleges that with Geisler his “Arminianism ... has become explicit.... No Arminian has ever been more specific in his denial of Calvinistic doctrine” (Gerstner, 2000:128). Those are strong assertions.

Those statements, however, seem extreme when subjected to careful and close scrutiny. It may be that the higher Calvinists (limited atonement Calvinists) already have a fairly strong stance against any Calvinistic soteriology that rejects their five-point model. For example, John Gerstner does not seem to recognize any room for any type of moderate Calvinism. A rejection of limited atonement, even if all other points have been affirmed, means that the one “anti-Calvinistic” idea (unlimited atonement) equals a system that is really a “thoroughgoing departure from Calvinism” (Gerstner, 2000:115-116). For Gerstner (2000:117), five-point Calvinism “is just another name for Christianity.” Consequently, such strong views cause one to question whether Gerstner could recognize any form of moderate Calvinism if it exists and give a proper critique of it. The idea of a moderate Calvinist does not seem to exist in his range of theological options.

Therefore, a critique from someone in Geisler’s own tradition probably could offer a more objective and properly suited analysis to help decipher where various points of his views on election and the application of grace for conversion land on the scale of continuity and discontinuity. His student John Feinberg, who later became a colleague and co-author with Geisler, gave some helpful insights on how to properly interpret Geisler’s doctrines of election and grace.

Feinberg’s analysis of Geisler highlighted some areas that do seem to reveal a sphere of discontinuity with common moderate Calvinist views. Feinberg (1986:86) stated that “Geisler’s fundamental problem stems from his understanding of God’s attributes as they relate to his actions.” Classical theism and divine simplicity has been interpreted and applied by Geisler (2011:814) in such a way that God has no sequence or temporality in his thoughts or decrees. In Geisler’s mind God as a simple being has no sequence of thought or serial flow, at least as he articulated in his later years. That point will be addressed more in Chapter 8 on final conclusions.

Feinberg highlighted that Geisler rejected the logical or chronological order to the decrees of God and opted only for a historical operational model. This issue has major ramifications on how to view and understand Geisler's soteriology. Even the more extreme criticism from James White against Geisler highlighted this issue. White (2000:56) called this issue the "most problematic element of Geisler's paradigm." Both White and Feinberg see this as an issue that impacts Geisler's model the most. Feinberg (1986:86) stated extensively the problems raised by this position:

To say that God is simple means that his being is not divisible into parts. But God's thoughts and mental acts such as decreeing, foreknowing and so on are not part of his essence or attributes any more than his acts in the world, such as creating or preserving the universe, are part of his essence or attributes. Geisler treats God's thoughts as part of his essence and/or attributes, and since God's essence is simple, Geisler concludes that God's thoughts must not be distinguishable into sequential parts. That is a mistake of the first order!

This issue touches every issue related to the doctrines of election, the application of grace, monergism, synergism, and how God draws one to repentance and faith. All of these doctrines relate to sequential concepts in history that connect back to God's essence and nature. Alvin Plantinga spoke to this issue as well, noting the coherency issues that arise if one affirms that God in his essence is so intricately related to his attributes that no distinction exists between his being and his attributes. Is God the sum total of all of his attributes or are his attributes his essence that he as a being manifests? Plantinga (1980:47) emphasized the issue that if God is his sum total of properties (attributes) then would not this make God some type of solitary attribute or property with no action to his being, as he would just be an "is" so to speak?

Clearly, in Geisler's theology these aspects related to salvation (election and repentance and faith) all occur in one simultaneous intuition with God. In his words, God "knows all things immediately and intuitively in himself, since he is simple, eternal, and immutable in his Being. As such, all that he knows and chooses is known and performed immediately and intuitively, from all eternity" (Geisler, 2011:814).

With this concept every aspect of salvation (even history in general) occurs in one single simultaneous thought of God. This idea makes the identification of what comes first, election or faith, very difficult to define or articulate in Geisler's model. Even an analysis of the order of salvation (*ordo salutis*) in Geisler's model, sometimes (but not always) an indicator of where one aligns in the Calvinist/Arminian debate, will not provide a clear indication of Geisler's degree of continuity or discontinuity. The real question in his model would be: what placed the ideas into God's mind? How did the idea of human belief in Christ or unbelief in Christ arise in God's

mind? It seems to be why even the strong critic James R. White (2000:71) stated that Geisler's model "seems to promote both the idea that God is absolutely sovereign and man is absolutely free."

It may be possible to decipher Geisler's position on this by piecing together various assertions in his theology and soteriology to craft an answer that seems congruent with Geisler's heart in these matters. However, that route has more subjectivity to it than if absolute, definitive, and unmistakable statements by Geisler existed to address the specific questions. In such an effort it seems that a case of more continuity exists than discontinuity with moderate Calvinism in these matters. Geisler's admiration and heavy reliance upon Thomas Aquinas and the idea that God knows all from within himself actively seem to tilt the scale slightly more towards the moderate Calvinist stream of thought.

Nonetheless, the places of discontinuity and places where no definitive answer seems to exist pose some ambiguity. Maybe this ambiguity was Geisler's goal and plan. If so, he may have accomplished his goal. Whether or not it aligns with the biblical data is another matter. But if this was his goal then he has written a work that has continuity and discontinuity with moderate Calvinism, depending on one's presuppositions used to read the words of Geisler. It would largely depend upon the perspective of the one reading his work as to which side the reader thinks Geisler aligns with most, something that would largely rest upon one's own convictions that influence perspective as one reads.

Feinberg stated that he thought Geisler had indeed produced a model that avoided answers to the questions that generally lead people to identify with one side or the other in the debate. In Feinberg's view, Geisler adopted the "Boethian answer" (Feinberg, 1986:85). This theologian, Anicius Manlius Torquatus Severinus Boethius (480-524 AD), promoted ideas that were the "logical forerunner of Thomas Aquinas" (Walter, 2001:180). The solution Boethius proposed left the issue a mystery as to what thought or act of God produced what in relation to election and faith (2001). As Zagzebski (2021) recognized, "Aquinas adopted the Boethian solution as one of his ways out of theological fatalism, using some of the same metaphors as Boethius." It appears that Geisler followed Aquinas in this as well to some degree.

Interestingly, Geisler's perspective of mystery also has a connection to another aspect of his theological heritage. He taught for many years at Dallas Seminary. This seminary's affiliation with discontinuity theology in the area of God's progress of revelation with Israel and the Church has been consistent from its founding. In the heritage of the discontinuity system of theology one of its early advocates, Cyrus Ingerson Scofield, promoted a view that also taught that the issues of election and foreknowledge and the application of grace contain deep mysteries.

Scotfield stated (1907:3:443) that “election, like predestination ... is declared to be according to the foreknowledge of God (1 Peter 1:2), but Scripture nowhere declares what it is in the divine foreknowledge which determines the divine choice.” Those words used by Scotfield, “according to the foreknowledge of God,” have been at the heart of how Geisler defined his own view.

Furthermore, the schools that Geisler first attended (Emmaus Bible School and William Tyndale College) were affiliated with the Bible Conference Movement, a heritage that utilized Scotfield and his writings (Roach, 2020:178). It is possible, maybe even probable, that Geisler interacted with these ideas of Scotfield early on in his initial educational endeavors as he studied in the Bible Conference affiliated schools. In Scotfield’s mind and teaching two truths have never been successfully explained. He stated,

In all the Christian centuries men have endeavored to account, philosophically, for the apparent paradox of God’s sovereign election and man’s free will, but none have ever succeeded. Both are wholly true, but the connecting and reconciling truth has not been revealed (Scotfield, 1907:3:444-445).

Geisler (2011:530) has stated that he prefers to use the term mystery instead of paradox because of the idea that a paradox usually means a violation of the law of noncontradiction, but he did use the term paradox within an extended discussion where he asserted that this issue remains a mystery (Geisler, 2011:1-72). That may have been an inadvertent use of the term or an editorial oversight.

Additionally, the forceful criticism by James White (2000:70) that Geisler’s term “determination” really means observation or a passive determination, and consequently the labeling of Geisler teaching an Arminian soteriology lacks merit. White has overstated his case and missed the distinction Geisler has made. White even vacillates on his own assertions. In another section of the book White (2000:123) admitted that “Geisler lives on both sides” of election and free will. Yet in stating that he still presses the single judgment that Geisler holds to the Arminian view in these matters of election and free will to faith (White, 2000:123). It seems that White by his own admission could only logically say that Geisler lacked consistency.

The next section will explain further why that criticism lacks merit when examining Geisler’s thought with more surrounding context. Geisler does seem to stand in a model that is not Arminian/Wesleyan. He seems to be more in line with a Calvinistic model than not, but his model has a very distinct framework to it that borrows concepts from the various models while subscribing to none of the three Calvinistic models in totality. His hybrid model makes it harder to define. In his model a person does not create, initiate, or achieve salvation from his own

repentance and faith or merits. God is actively involved in the work of redemption and moves (persuades) people to faith. However, specific hardened categories of cause and effect do not have a prominent place in the details of Geisler's model. God initiates, leads, and works on mankind through various forms of gracious activity, mankind retains liberty and free will through God's active work in and on him, and faith is self-determined as a result of God's grace actively empowering and leading a person to see one's own need for Christ.

In one of Geisler's classes, this writer asked him for clarification on his statement that grace is irresistible on the willing. Specifically, the following question was asked in class. "What makes them (sinners) have the desire to be willing?" Geisler (2019b) responded by saying: "A combination of God and their response makes them willing. God works on them and they respond to him ... there is a concurrence of God's power and our free will. Our free will is not sovereign. God's will works through us to accomplish his purposes." His response seems to suggest he applied some type of monergistic initiation and that led to a synergistic outworking of faith, something apparently related to what Philippians 2:13 has stated. This provided some clarity for how it worked in historical time. But Geisler (2019b) maintained that there was no order in the eternal decrees. So this maintained the mystery element that seems consistent with all of his writings on this matter.

7.5.2 Norman Geisler Compared to the Arminian/Wesleyan Positions

One of the avenues to see more clearly the Calvinistic elements of Geisler's soteriology is to compare it to Arminian/Wesleyan soteriology. The criticisms of his model, as set forth by Gerstner, Sproul, and White do not give a full and proper comparative model for precise analysis. This dilutes the accuracy of their findings and conclusions. Geisler certainly did not align with supralapsarian and infralapsarian Calvinists (as Gerstner, Sproul, and White affirm), but Geisler did not identify himself as a Calvinist in that stream either. He has made no claims to their heritage.

In fact, he decisively opposed their (Gerstner, Sproul, and White) particular stream of Calvinism. His self-described status as a moderate Calvinist means he will differ from their models. But their criticisms often focused on how Geisler differed from the traditional models of Calvinism that they affirmed. Therefore, their criticisms have often been made by comparing his ideas to their form of Calvinism and not to forms that he claimed to align with as a moderate Calvinist and to the forms of Arminian/Wesleyan thought that he claimed to reject. Their conclusions therefore seem hasty and not with as much precision as one may have if comparing Geisler to the theological stream he claims to have affirmed.

Geisler made two points that help give some clarity as to his distinct position that differed from Arminian/Wesleyan views. First, Geisler made definite assertions that he rejected foresight models of election. God does not elect based on what mankind will do. Faith is not the cause or root of a person's election in Geisler's soteriology. People cannot obey God in Geisler's model of theology to obtain grace or election as within Pelagian forms of theology; they can only cooperate with God when God effects and initiates a vivifying influence or gracious relations with them (Geisler, 2004:145). He rejected the idea of God "foreseeing anything" (Geisler, 2011:72). Election does not occur based upon God "looking down or ahead" (Geisler, 2011:72). In his words as a self-identified sublapsarian, God in his decree model elects "those who believe and" God passes "by those who do not" (Geisler, 2011:184). This position differs from the Arminian/Wesleyan view that teaches that God elects "based on the foreseen faith of believers" (Geisler, 2011:184).

Second, the accusation made by White that Geisler believed God determined in a passive sense does not seem to fit Geisler's view either. The Arminian view does place God in a reactive status in which he determines or knows because of what a person does or will do. But this does not fit with Geisler's view. God knows from seeing "inside of himself in the same way that effects pre-exist in their Cause.... He simply sees, within the infinity of his own nature, all that will proceed from it and participate in it" (Geisler, 2011:200). In this way Geisler rejects the passive decree or foresight election model.

Election, regeneration, drawing grace, and repentance and faith do not occur in mankind because mankind is leading it. These occur in mankind because God sees it occurring from within himself and his works from his nature. As Geisler (2011:200) said, "God is proactive, not reactive, in what he" wills or determines "in accord with what he knows." Whatever one may say about Geisler's view not aligning or having consistent continuity with the Calvinist streams, even sometimes moderate Calvinism, he definitely does not have continuity with the Arminian/Wesleyan stream on the way God elects and draws mankind to faith. Consequently, these statements seem to suggest he does have more continuity with some form of the Calvinistic stream of thought.

God is not reacting to mankind and just confirming mankind's decisions. God is not in a passive mode of merely observing and approving what a person chooses. As Geisler (2010:200) stated of election and its application to lost sinners, "Salvation was not decided or gained in time, and it cannot be dissolved or lost in time." The origination and permanency of salvation in Geisler's soteriology differs markedly from Arminian/Wesleyan thought in how it begins and that it can never end. Quoting Ephesians 1:4 on God's choice of people before the creation of the world, Geisler (2010:200) stated, "salvation was effected in eternity and for eternity." To effect

salvation in eternity seems to suggest more continuity with a type of Calvinistic thought. If one links that idea with his idea that God knows from within himself in a proactive sense, this supplies some theological puzzle pieces that seem to paint some type of Calvinistic thought. Certainly, these ideas establish that Geisler has significant discontinuity with Arminian/Wesleyan soteriology.

7.5.3 Concluding Statement

The original question of this chapter was the following: “Does Geisler tilt his mind and teaching more towards the way of the moderate or sublapsarian Calvinist or the Arminian/Wesleyan in the way he defines election and the application of grace?” It seems evident that Geisler cannot fit within the Arminian/Wesleyan stream. His views seem to slightly tilt more towards some type of Calvinistic side or paradigm. His election view has some significant continuity with the Calvinistic stream of thought. His application of it in time and history is not as strongly Calvinistic as one might expect in light of his view of election. He in some places suggests he adopted synergism. As he stated (Geisler, 2010:284), “God’s grace works synergistically on free will.”

But this idea, which at first would appear to place him in the Arminian/Wesleyan stream of thought, is mitigated and qualified by his affirmation (Geisler, 2010:103) that “grace is irresistible on the willing”. God’s grace can persuasively effect (move/lead) one to exercise faith by the person being “overwhelmed by his grace” (Geisler, 2010:295). Some type of vivifying, persuasive influence of the Lord awakens lost man in the divine moment of conversion. In his view (Geisler, 2010:136), God knew from within himself that he would use “preordained” methods or “means (persuasion)” that would lead to the “end (eternal life).” So in that sense it sounds as if he believed God’s methods were what made one initially “willing” so that, when such encounters with grace transpired, God would irresistibly effect that prepared one to experience faith, something God knew he would accomplish within his eternal mind. This is one way to read and understand his words. However, his model and the way he has chosen to describe it left him open to some criticism. It has some ambiguity to it for sure.

Maybe it is more accurate or precise to say Geisler had major discontinuity with Arminian/Wesleyan views of election and the application of it for repentance and faith (election and the results of it originate outside of time, never end and cannot be lost), some definite key areas of continuity with moderate Calvinism (election is actively framed in the mind of God and leads elected individuals to willingly repent in faith; rejection of foresight election), and more than all else Geisler has substantive and overall continuity with Scofield (Bible Conference heritage), Thomas Aquinas (classical medieval era heritage), and Boethius (late early church era) with his mystery soteriology model (logical sequences and order of eternal decrees cannot

be known). What is not clear is why Geisler chose the term “moderate Calvinist” to describe his view.

What remains is one question this writer had hoped to personally ask Geisler, but because of his death during this research that could not occur. It would seem that he could have chosen some term to identify more with Aquinas than with Calvin, especially since he is known for his Thomism as a philosopher and theologian. He could have possibly labeled himself as a Thomistic Amyraldian and with that classification had more continuity with the ideology of both streams that seem to feed his beneficent river of soteriology. But, then again, he has always sought to be understandable to masses, and would the term Thomistic Amyraldian have resonated and been quickly grasped? Certainly due to the popularity of the term “Calvinism,” which generally in popular realms has been equated with God’s sovereign work of predestination, maybe the term “moderate Calvinist” resonated and brought to mind a kinder and more beneficent balanced view of Calvin’s ideas. Whether his choice of terminology was practical or in his mind definitional precision, or a combination of both, a certain answer to that dangling question will have to remain on the table until the reunion in glory and a new conversation can continue about the great things God has done in his witnesses on earth.

CHAPTER 8:

FINAL OBSERVATIONS ON NORMAN GEISLER'S SOTERIOLOGY

8.1 CONCLUSIONS

Norman Geisler has significantly shaped not only American evangelicalism, but he has influenced the world at large through his conservative ministry, teaching, and legacy of literature. As a theologian he devoted himself to the essentials, allowed for liberty in secondary matters, and sought to practice charity with all (Geisler, 2008:5). With at least 100 monographs in print circulating around the world, many theological articles (over 200), two educational institutions that he established, and the ministerial organizations he established or led in one way or another (Evangelical Theological Society, International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, Evangelical Philosophical Society, International Society of Christian Apologetics, to name just four) his impact has spanned the globe. Geisler's ministry for Christ has impacted the nation and beyond for over 60 years (Geisler, 2021:3).

In his ministry as a systematic theologian and as an evangelist-apologist for Christ and Scripture, he naturally interacted with two twin themes that run through the pages of scripture from Genesis to Revelation: (1) God's sovereignty and full providence over his universe, and (2) mankind as image-bearer of God. He taught that mankind possesses dignity, can exercise freedom, ought to act responsibly, and stands before God in accountability. These issues surfaced often before him and were regularly communicated by him. Geisler (1999a:5) noted in 1999 that in 35 years of ministry his students had "asked more questions about this topic than any other topic." Years later he stated again that this question still remained in that spot at 51 years into his ministry (Geisler, 2010:5).

In this writer's experience both as a student and teacher, Geisler's experience makes sense. Three-time college/seminary president Paige Patterson once jovially stated to this writer that seminary cafeterias are built for students to meet and debate election and free will because it surely is not for the food. Humor aside, his point remains true: this theological topic captivates serious minds. Erwin Lutzer has noted that "to the greatest theological minds in the history of the church" how one understands these issues greatly impacts one's understanding of the gospel (Lutzer, 1998:153). People, especially theological students and ministers who love scripture and people, develop deep interests in how God administers his grace and dispenses his justice. Justice is the "proper administration of laws" (Garner, 1999:461) and in the Judeo-Christian world the Triune Lord administers his laws in his "universal kingdom" where he "judges" and "rules over all" through "all time and eternity" (Ryrie, 1999:461). As Ryrie

(1999:460-461) succinctly stated, God is “ruler of the whole world” and he “exercises his jurisdiction over the nations of the world”. The fabric of society revolves around those two concepts of grace and justice. How the two concepts relate in God’s mind and how his people ought to view them naturally captures the attention of those pursuing the Lord.

Geisler over the years developed a reputation as a modified or moderate Calvinist (White, 2000:20). He used those terms to describe his own theological system. In such a mediating view, he certainly received criticism from theologians in other streams of the soteriology river that thought he did not have consistency. Arminian/Wesleyan advocates will disagree with his views on election and the everlasting nature of it in origin and permanence. In their view Geisler would promote too much of a Calvinist view. On the other end of the continuum, two other streams within the Calvinistic river (supralapsarians and infralapsarians with their limited atonement models) will disagree with Geisler’s extent of grace from the cross of Christ, and they will (and have) leveled numerous allegations that his doctrine of election from God’s decree is weak and still equals Arminianism, or at least is too closely aligned with the Arminian/Wesleyan model.

However, this research has sought to analyze Geisler’s own claims of identity as a moderate Calvinist by using other moderate Calvinists as one key and basis for examination, while using other Calvinist models and an Arminian/Wesleyan model as a contextual backdrop for more precise analysis. Tracing out moderate Calvinism and establishing at least a historical model broad enough and specific enough to enable proper comparisons necessitates not only some extensive historical analysis, but it has also required an effort to systematize the systematic theologies from the various thinkers through history. One of the dilemmas in tracing the heritage of the moderate Calvinist soteriology has been that they are often underrepresented in the academy. They exist more in the popular streams of Christian ministries than in the technical monographs by the leading thinkers of academic institutions. The moderate Calvinist Lewis Sperry Chafer (1993:3:184) recognized this ministerial sociological phenomenon in the 1900s and stated that moderate Calvinism has been “more the belief of Bible expositors than of the theologians.”

The literature from the Reformed Calvinist stream remains massive and well known. The literature from the Arminian/Wesleyan stream, though probably not as massive in volume as the Reformed Calvinist counterparts, also remains well known. Each version of theology has denominations, churches, and academies to reflect their respective views. The theological gravity generally pulls people into one camp or the other amounting to what Olson (2002:2) described as “polarized camps.” Many, therefore, remain unaware of the Amyraldian (moderate Calvinism) stream of thought. C. Gordon Olson (2002:31), a student of the moderate Calvinist

Lewis Sperry Chafer, even noted this and sadly recognized “there is great ignorance about the Amyraldian movement.”

Furthermore, because of the intellectual teaching models and chunking techniques used by the Calvinists in their mnemonic devices such as TULIP (total depravity; unconditional election; limited atonement; irresistible grace; and perseverance of the saints) and ROSES (radical corruption; overcoming grace; sovereign election; eternal life; singular redemption), which have been scientifically proven to help people learn and retain the information (Wolfe, 2001: 99, 178), the Calvinist stream has produced models easy to remember and defend. As Paige Patterson noted, “The Reformed tradition has been nothing if not superb in the breadth of literature produced favoring its position” (Patterson, 2010:ix). Coupling that educational efficiency with the well-known notoriety of major names in the 1900s and into the 2000s like J.I. Packer, John Piper, John Gerstner, James R. White, and R.C. Sproul, five well-known leading Reformed Calvinist theologians, one can understand why the higher forms of Calvinism have dominated the theological spectrum. Furthermore, three of those (Gerstner, Sproul, and White) have questioned whether a moderate form of Calvinism could justifiably even exist if one truly remains faithful to Scripture and historic theology. Consequently, it makes sense that masses generally think or assume that only two viable options (five-point Calvinism or Arminianism) exist in this conversation.

However, Norman Geisler has never been one to tote norms for the sake of mere fraternity (Roach, 2020:176). In spite of the criticisms of his view, notwithstanding the possible ranges of accuracy, he retained a long-term ministry advocating for a moderate form of Calvinism while leveling criticism against the two mainstream soteriology models in the theological market, Calvinism and Arminianism. In this journey he became a target for both.

To date, little to no substantive analysis has examined Geisler’s claim as a moderate or Amyraldian Calvinist. He does not claim to travel in substantive continuity with supralapsarian or infralapsarian Calvinists. Criticisms of Geisler from those streams are understandable. He does not claim to travel in continuity with the Arminian/Wesleyans. Criticisms from that stream are also understandable. But he did claim to have a balanced soteriology as a type of Amyraldian (moderate) Calvinist. Does his claim have merit? Does he have more continuity or discontinuity with the model of theology with which he self-identified? The results from this research will be summarized for the reader to contemplate. Students who admire Geisler and those desiring to express a moderate form of Calvinistic thought can benefit by understanding Geisler’s soteriology in a more holistic fashion. Understanding his views, his strengths, his weaknesses, or even areas where one may build upon can benefit the body of Christ.

8.2 SUCCINCTLY SUMMARIZING WHAT IS AN AMYRALDIAN SOTERIOLOGY: MNEMONIC TERM S.A.V.I.O.R.

One reason that few analyze moderate or sublapsarian Calvinism relates to the difficulty in defining the specifics of that soteriology model. Mnemonic aids like TULIP (Spencer, 1979:9) and ROSES (George, 2000:71-83) used by Calvinists give simple, succinct, and stable foundations for people in all levels of theological maturity to use as a source for comparison. Even theologians in the academy use those mnemonic aids when teaching on the subject. These formulations provide a standard to use in measuring other models of theology and an aid for efficient teaching of these models.

Amyraldians generally, however, experienced second-hand identification, meaning they become secondarily identified as those who just redefine the “L” (limited atonement) in the TULIP soteriology model. Therefore, they are known as modified or moderate Calvinists who reject the “L” part of TULIP. In many cases they are simply known as four-point Calvinists (Olson, 2002:30). The nomenclature has been lacking for how to succinctly define the Amyraldian stream of thought.

Though a monolithic definition for Amyraldianism may not totally exist or easily be agreed upon by those of that stream, some verifiable elements from key voices have historically constituted the Amyraldian soteriology stream and continue to do so. Harnessing the plethora of concepts, elements, and nuances from this stream and perspicaciously presenting those in a harmonized and holistic model offers at least a theological roof over the heads of those still working for a collective codification and more particular consensus within the moderate Calvinist heritage. Having a similar mnemonic device will also at least provide a theological house, so to speak, with enough rooms for the collective company to dwell under while the theological construction of Amyraldian sublapsarianism continues. No doubt, more work can be and ought to be done in this field to develop a more holistic Amyraldian soteriology model. Maybe this research will help foster that to a degree.

Yet, even with that recognition of some ongoing development, some key positions do exist in the moderate Calvinist stream of thought. Without a doubt, one of those cardinal keys, the atonement concept, remains central and fundamentally a functional point of proper distinction for Amyraldian forms of theology, maybe even the *ultimate axiom* from which all else in Amyraldianism flows. Consequently, the orientation of TULIP does not properly reflect the foundational frame and direction of the decrees for Amyraldians.

An illustration may aid the reader in understanding the difficulty in lacking a standard measuring model in the Amyraldian stream. For 500 or so years the Amyraldians have been like the Jewish

people with the tabernacle, dwelling in a mobile unit away from a home Temple. As Erich Sauer (1954:36) said, the tabernacle was the “traveling tent of God in the wilderness”—the Temple was the abiding stationary model. The Amyraldian model of theology has too often been utilizing the traveling mobile unit from the Reformation, mainly the TULIP model. Keathley noted this about Amyraldians being labeled as “four-point Calvinists” because the “L” in the TULIP has been “dropped” (2010:191). “Four-point Calvinism is often labeled Amyraldianism” as it argues for a type of Calvinism with “unlimited atonement” (Keathley, 2010:191).

Kenneth Stewart (2008) has even made a case that the acronym TULIP is possibly of modern origin from the 20th century. If so, then the utilization of that acronym should not be seen as the precise way to measure a Calvinistic soteriology. Consequently, if TULIP as an acronym is of recent origin, there should not be any harm in creating or systematizing another acronym to help describe the Amyraldian view of soteriology. In that context it may rightly be stated, as Olson did (2002:413), that Amyraldianism “as a distinct theological school of thought has been seriously blurred.” It has been blurred because some have tried to use the TULIP acronym as the measuring standard for an Amyraldian theology. A Temple model (full structure), instead of a tabernacle model, so to speak, with a more stable foundation exists in this stream of thought. Amyraldian soteriology has a more precise structure than merely the way some describe it as TULIP with the “L” revised to an unlimited atonement position.

The foundation for the Amyraldian structure centers on Christ and his atonement. Of all of the elements in an Amyraldian Temple structure (to use the metaphor again), one feature stands out as bright and central in all Amyraldian soteriology models. In this model the atonement, which is in some degree for all, precedes election in God’s order of decrees. Although some may be moderate Calvinists and not Amyraldian in decree framework (as a few infralapsarians have been by extending the atonement benefits to more than just the elect), all full or true forms of Amyraldian theology place election after the decree for atonement and view it as an outworking of atonement. So the idea of TULIP with election being decreed and examined prior to atonement will not properly function or form a precise paradigm in an Amyraldian model. The concept of ROSES does not resolve the matter either, as in that mnemonic election still occurs prior to atonement in the sequence of examination. Neither a TULIP model nor a ROSES model properly reflects the Amyraldian model of soteriology.

Consequently, through this research the standard for analysis has been from a different angle. Another mnemonic term can be used to help summarize Amyraldian soteriology, and then that tool can be used in examining Geisler’s identification with Amyraldian ideas as an evangelical Protestant theologian. The mnemonic S.A.V.I.O.R. seems to capture the key concepts of an Amyraldian form of soteriology, sometimes known as sublapsarian moderate Calvinism. Each

letter represents a key concept from the moderate Calvinist stream. In pulling together the various ideas, points of unanimity in the sublapsarian stream of thought, and unique ideas of those in that stream that maybe others in the same stream have not recognized or adopted, a fuller picture of historic and current Amyrldian ideas reveals an overarching umbrella that houses the general ideology. From that general stream with its own identification a better summary and analysis can occur in the effort to compare Geisler's soteriology with moderate Calvinism in light of the context of Calvinism in general.

8.3 OVERVIEW AND DEFINITIONS OF S.A.V.I.O.R.

The operational model that Geisler used for the historical outworking of the decree of God establishes a major and heavily weighted slant towards the Amyrldian viewpoint. Though Geisler did reject the idea of logical or sequential decrees in eternity, and did not really substantively develop the idea of aeviternity to create a functional model that would fit within a Thomistic structure of three realities (eternity, aeviternity, and chronological time), he did still embrace the sublapsarian model that distinguishes his view from all higher forms of Calvinism (supralapsarian and infralapsarian models). He had some substantive and definite continuity with the moderate Calvinist model.

The lack of logical sequence in his view of the decree in eternity, and the Boethian, Aquinas, and Scofield "eternal now" viewpoint, has its own set of difficulties or nuances that cannot be exhaustively examined in this research, as it ventures into a realm beyond the primary focus of this dissertation. What brief examination is done will be to help highlight Geisler's actual views in contrast to what could have made his model more consistent. That will at least give better clarity to Geisler's views. Yet even with concerns and difficulties, Geisler's operational model with the unlimited atonement view highlights to a degree a strong sense of continuity with probably the most essential element in an Amyrldian stream of thought. One may still not be Amyrldian in the fullest sense of the term because of other elements (example, if one embraced foresight election), but no matter what else exists, if a theologian has discontinuity here one cannot rightly be classified as Amyrldian or a moderate Calvinist. Rejecting the unlimited atonement view and the placement of atonement prior to the concept of election categorically rules one out of the Amyrldian stream.

Acceptance of it alone does not totally or necessarily make one Amyrldian (Arminian/Wesleyans are sublapsarian), but a rejection of it certainly by itself separates one from this stream of soteriology. One cannot be Amyrldian without these two elements in place (unlimited atonement and that it precedes election). Geisler qualifies, though partially with an apparent inconsistency or modification, by accepting the unlimited atonement view with the

decree working out in history in a sublapsarian manner with election and conversion following atonement. However, this again does not mean his “eternal now” view lacks some concerning features.

He probably could have obtained more consistency in this area had he developed the idea of aeviternity found in Aquinas’ writings. More will be said on this in the discussion on election. Only some brief comments will be made there as the focus of this dissertation does not extend into a full treatise on resolving the inconsistencies of Geisler’s confessed views. But highlighting those routes and ideas can help contextualize ranges of thought surrounding where to place Geisler’s soteriology model, and how one might use his model to develop further a sublapsarian model that Geisler clearly attempted.

Additionally, for those wishing to explore more in this area, some possible solutions, or at least routes towards a solution, seem to exist. Geisler rejected the idea of movement or process in God (though he hinted at the idea in the 1970s) because God is a simple being. That is an idea held with great strength in classical theism circles. However, other moderate Calvinists (even Aquinas himself) seemingly have some concepts that Geisler could have used to bolster the consistency (at most) or ease of communication on these concepts (at the least).

8.3.1 “S” for Sacred Image of God in Mankind

First, the “S” stands for the “sacred image of God” he created in “mankind.” In the Amyraldian stream of thought God’s sacred image created in mankind remains a functional component in their soteriology model. Amyraut and the moderate Calvinists believed that God created mankind in his image so that God’s image would be established as mankind manifested the sanctity and goodness of God (Amyraut, 2017:70, 72). This element constitutes the first decree in the sublapsarian order. Moderate Calvinism has kept this doctrine in focus within all interactions between God and mankind in their system of soteriology.

When examining the numerous Amyraldian or moderate Calvinist theologies, one will discover the emphasis that the human will reflects the sacred image of God. The will is not sovereign over God, but God reveals himself through the will of mankind as it reflects God in some sense. People have dignity, honor, and value intrinsically because God designed them as image-bearers of himself. This basic intrinsic sacredness and dignity does not disappear. It retains a functional place within God’s interactive relations with mankind, even lost mankind. God is not pictured as an overpowering brute who forces his way onto each person, making that person a member of his bride (family). The Lord’s interactions with us (metaphorically his bride for the

believers in scripture analogy) display a relational model, a family model form of soteriology. The family motif permeates scripture from Genesis to Revelation (Patterson, 1986:21).

In Amyraldian forms of theology the sacred image of God in mankind explains how sin entered into the universe (distinguishing it from supralapsarianism that emphasizes God's active determination for the fall). God caused his creation. He created them. By creating them in his image they have the power to also create. God created the means for sin to occur. The agents, however, father or author or create sin by the misuse of their God-given wills. Mankind has the power of self-determination.

Furthermore, the sacred image in mankind has not been eradicated by the fall. The will remains sacred, though fallen and dysfunctional, and in this stream of thought God honors the sacred image he has created. One way he honors his own creation is by allowing his creation to interact with him in limited avenues per his sovereign grace that preserves God's image in mankind through all aspects of the various decrees and historical developments. God sees mankind at all times as special or sacred to him because creation, even fallen creation, has dignity as it bears the divine stamp of God's image.

8.3.2 "A" for Abandoned Goodwill

Second, the "A" stands for abandoned goodwill. In Amyraut's view mankind fell into sin. He was not tripped and made to fall into sin. God permitted sin to occur and for mankind to exercise the liberty of will that cost humanity the loss of goodwill. As Amyraut taught, "God permitted the fall" (Amyraut, 2017:75). This occurred through God giving "man a certain freedom of will" (Amyraut, 2017:75). Human will remains in place as God's image cannot be eradicated any more than God himself can be eradicated. However, in the second decree of the Amyraldian sublapsarian stream mankind has exercised his liberty wrongly and has fathered sin. This sin has now enslaved us and caused us to experience mental, moral, and physical dysfunction. We lack the willing moral nature to properly relate to God, our creator and head. In Amyraut's words, "the first effect of sin is to lay such a thick darkness upon the understanding that thereafter it cannot be removed except by supernatural light" (Amyraut, 2017:83).

In this stream of thought some have described Amyraut's view as one by which mankind will not come to Christ even though he has the resources (mind, brain, will) that God provided for the means of interaction with the Lord (Amyraut, 2017:75). Mankind in this perspective is like a runner on a track who chooses to go somewhere else and run his race. He will not run on the assigned track with the resources the Lord has given him (Clifford, 2007:15). Due to his sinful nature he chooses to follow the sinful inclinations to run away from God and not towards God.

God has infallibly declared that mankind will not come to him (Rom. 3). God knows from within himself and foresees (from his omniscience) that mankind will not naturally come to him (Amyraut, 2017:148). In sin people have lost their goodwill nature. With a freely chosen decision people have abandoned a union with the Lord and have plunged themselves into a corrupted condition of sin. Every aspect of the human being now has become tainted, tarnished, and torn from harmonious relations with the Lord. Humanity stands separated (dead) from the Lord and in need of divine redemption (Amyraut, 2017:108-112).

Mankind is lost, hopeless, dead in sin, and enslaved by corruption. The offers of grace and general goodness of the Lord in common grace, which preserves lost mankind, are used wrongly. Amyraut taught that, if one continues in sin and defiance to the grace that all experience, this common grace that “preserves their lives” can be “sadly extinguished” (Amyraut, 2017:124, 125). Mankind has experienced a full fall into depravity and will do nothing to resolve this sinful condition unless the Lord intervenes.

8.3.3 “V” for Victorious in Substitutionary Atonement

Third, the “V” stands for victorious atonement. Mankind’s fall into sin meant God had to immediately act in order to justify not immediately condemning the entire family of humanity. God as a holy being cannot look upon or tolerate sin. Consequently, the atonement of Christ had to immediately follow mankind’s creation of sin. Historically the atonement was pictured through the bloodshed of animals with Adam and Eve just after their sin and God’s confrontation with them transpired (Gen. 3:21). In Amyraut’s view “God ordained to send his Son into the world and caused him to put on human nature” so that by this he could “satisfy the justice of God by the suffering of the penalties which we alone deserved” and also to establish our victory or “guarantee” (Amyraut, 2017:96-97). Amyraut taught (2017:97) that in and by the atonement sinners find restoration back to “holiness” as they experience the victory of Christ by partaking “in his wealth and in his inheritance”.

The atonement has a dual nature and it accomplishes dual purposes. As a substitute for humanity Christ purchased both common graces for the entire universe and particular graces for those that would become his everlasting family members (Clifford, 2007:15). Christ’s atonement establishes the foundation for all other gracious actions and means unto the holy ends within God’s mind. As Amyraldian scholar Alan Clifford stated, “The gospel is revealed by God to mankind as a conditional covenant” and the “death of Christ was designed for all mankind sufficiently, but for the elect efficaciously (or effectively). No person remains lost in sin for a lack of atonement” (Clifford, 2007:15). The atonement even suffices for each sinner having some life and in common grace that extends to all.

The atonement of Christ stands as the central foundation for all forms of life, blessings, and interactions between God and mankind in history and even in subsequent periods post human history in the everlasting ages. The atonement becomes the standard for blessing and the standard for final and ultimate judgment. The Amyraldian Calvinist Lewis Sperry Chafer (1993:3:8.187) described this concept in this way: “both salvation and condemnation are conditioned on the individual’s reaction to one and the same thing, namely the saving grace of God made possible through the death of Christ.”

8.3.4 “I” for An Intellectual Immutable Election

Fourth, the “I” stands for an intellectual immutable election. A feature of Amyraldian thought has been the idea that God’s election flows from his purposeful atonement as orchestrated and ordered by God’s wisdom. Amyraut stressed the wisdom of God as the key to his decrees. In Amyraut’s words, God is “able to dispense his goodness with a sovereign freedom. More so, it appears still” that God “does so with wisdom” (Amyraut, 2017:78). God elects in harmony with his own nature (essentialism), it occurs from his mind (not merely based on his power and will in what he can do), and is immutable (sovereign), i.e., it cannot be altered or rescinded when the choice has been made. His election of some and not of others occurs with God’s “freedom of his good pleasure” that flows from “his ordinary wisdom” (Amyraut, 2017:120).

Instead of asserting that those elected *must come* to faith (necessity, as described by Jonathan Edwards) the modern Amyraldian or moderate Calvinist stream as expressed by Millard J. Erickson (1985:358-359) says that the elect *will come* to faith. God’s omnipotence flows out of his intelligent omniscience and wisdom, all a part of his foreknowledge, as he knows how to orchestrate all facets of his providence with created beings to accomplish the right result.

This stream has also allowed for mystery in the way God elects. As the sublapsarian Calvinist E.Y. Mullins (1917:355) taught, this doctrine presents to us an “insoluble mystery.” Mullins wrote that “all the relations between the infinite and the finite run back into mystery” (Mullins, 1917:355). Amyraut also noted that this doctrine has an element of mystery in it (2017:113-114).

This model also clearly rejects foresight election models that place election inside of history. It retains a sovereign or providential view that election happened prior to history. But it roots election in the nature of God (essentialism), and it asserts in some form that election occurs from God’s omniscient mind and wisdom in how he can best manifest this glory in the proper administration of his grace by saving many people. Amyraut believed that God’s election is

within his “counsel” and from this counsel he gives faith to “those whom he has elected and predestined” while “he has abandoned” others “to themselves” (2017:113-114).

Additionally, Amyraut’s stream of thought rejects election to damnation. It holds with clarity that God’s intelligence and ordered decrees permits sin to occur. God does not actively cause it. In God’s decrees humans retain enough liberty that they can destroy themselves. They will not, without divine effectual influence, use their will towards aiding themselves in grace or salvation. They will only, outside of gracious intervention, use their depraved will for destruction of themselves in unbelief. They own their own unbelief and non-election, but God determines and establishes their election in his own mind. Amyraut described it saying that God does not carry out election and predestination to damnation. God “is not the cause of unbelief and subsequent damnation in others” (Amyraut, 2017:116). In Amyraut’s view election only worked for the good. He stated, “unbelief of the others does not come from reprobation, as the cause which activates it by its own efficacy, but from their own blindness and moral perversity” (Amyraut, 2017:116).

8.3.5 “O” for Overflowing or Overwhelming Drawing Grace

Fifth, the “O” stands for either “overflowing grace” or “overwhelming grace.” The idea here is that God extends the mercies of Christ’s atonement into history and his grace overflows and overwhelms all of creation in various degrees. Any life a person experiences occurs from the graces of the Lord Jesus that sustains the person. Furthermore, the ones that God has so elected from his omniscience (which includes a holistic means within it to accomplish the end) are sequentially and effectually persuaded to enter into covenant relations with the Lord Jesus. It makes certain that some will come, but God allows for some to refuse and in their sins reject grace too. Amyraut spoke of these two twin truths: God’s gracious action to make certain faith emerged in mankind, and mankind’s own ability to refuse grace. Of certain grace and faith he said, “God, who ordained to give faith to his elect, executes this decree in a fashion which in no way makes its outcome doubtful and assures by this means the salvation of those who are part of this eternal election” (Amyraut, 2017:134). Yet, equally as clear, Amyraut sought to preserve human will and freedom in the processes of God’s providence. God does not exercise his actions in a “brute fashion” (Amyraut, 2017:138). God does not in the exercise of his efficacious will “constrain us nor violate us” as our belief arises from “persuasion” (Amyraut, 2017:139).

The overflowing graces of the Lord, mediated directly by the Lord and indirectly through his redeemed community, awaken sinners and like a river flowing downstream these graces lift and carry the sinners to the experience of regeneration and salvation as they rest in faith. It allows for people to exercise the will of libertarian resistance (free choice to reject; ability to exit the river of grace), and those that do reject in resistance (that the Lord permits) establish

themselves as non-elect, bringing demise and destruction onto themselves when they exercise that libertarian will or resistance, a negative free choice contribution. As theologian Robert L. Thomas, a moderate Calvinist, stated, "if a person experiences physical death, never having trusted Christ for forgiveness, his name is erased from the book of life. It is only those who receive Christ by faith that have their place in the book of life confirmed" (Thomas, 1992:1:263).

However, a person's will does not contribute to the flow or activity of grace. The sinner is passive in the initial experience of it. The river of flowing graces as administered by the Lord and his people communicating it draws the sinner into covenant relations with the Lord for everlasting redemption. No person uses one's liberty to get into the river of grace. Additionally, once grace draws one into the overflowing river of grace the Lord works through persuasion to lead the person to rest in faith which confirms the energy of grace that is already at work.

In this model a person cannot do anything to initiate, aid, or complete this serial process of regeneration culminating in faith and salvation. One actualizes no energy towards the work of grace. But because God honors his image as sacred in mankind he will allow one to negatively contribute by the freedom to exit. People are free to exit grace. A person may reject and exit the sphere of grace and by doing so have his or her name blotted out of the book representing atonement and life for all (Thomas, 1992:2:165). But the person will not exercise freedom to aid grace (Keathley, 2010:126-137).

8.3.6 "R" for Regenerated Eternally/Forever

Sixth, the "R" stands for regenerated eternally or forever. Since election is immutable and rooted in God's everlasting omniscience, God's overflowing river of grace runs only in one direction. When an elected person (outside of time) experiences the everlasting graces of Christ (in time), as verified in the culminating process of the new birth and evidenced by faith, the person cannot become unborn. Nothing can separate the union that God has established. The union remains an everlasting union where God's redemptive graces continue to overflow in the heart and mind of the person forever with no end. The graces of Christ create an everlasting river of life for the child of God.

Amyraut described the great joy that one experiences in knowing his life and faith will endure if elected to salvation. He noted that "we will never degenerate from this state of holiness to which it has pleased God to begin in us by giving us saving faith in Jesus Christ" (Amyraut, 2017:155). Because of God's election, Amyraut taught that believers will be preserved to "persevere in it until the end" where the elect will "attain to perfection in the heavenly places" (2017:155). Each

person elected “will never fall again into the peril of death” because God will orchestrate events through providence so they “certainly gain true life and eternal glory” (Amyraut, 2017:155).

8.3.7 Sublapsarian Amyraldian Soteriology Described in S.A.V.I.O.R. Forms a Basic Model

These concepts arise from the collective voice of the sublapsarian moderate Calvinists. They have often been known in one degree or another as Amyraldians. No one voice has stated these points in exactly this mnemonic format, but this is more an arrangement of the ideas already present in Amyraldian thought. This is a systematization of the various positions from the various Amyraldian theologians.

Alan C. Clifford (2007:15-16) explained Amyraldianism in five points. However, he began his model at the first point with depravity. This S.A.V.I.O.R. model uses the lapsarian decree order (usually five points) as a reference and in doing so begins with the point of creation while retaining the other key aspects to the ideas offered by Clifford, who is an Amyraldian. It adds to it the role of the Spirit in preserving the elect forever in grace, as that is usually a concept presented in the T.U.L.I.P. models of Calvinism. But the S.A.V.I.O.R. mnemonic begins prior to the “T” of the T.U.L.I.P. model to emphasize the sacred aspect of creation, a point commonly noted in moderate Calvinism. Beginning in the pre-fall category of creation provides a more holistic model, as the lapsarian decree models have a strong relation to the order in which sin and election occur. Consequently, if one adds that and the concepts emphasized by Amyraldians through history to the mixture (eternal salvation of the elect) one has six points instead of five as commonly presented in the T.U.L.I.P. and R.O.S.E.S. Calvinistic models.

Furthermore, when one collectively examines the voices of this stream of historical thought, the voices together offer these puzzle pieces that can align in this manner. These concepts have existed in the moderate Calvinist stream. The acronym S.A.V.I.O.R. provides a substantive and objective basis for theological analysis and measurement. One can use this general umbrella guide as a basis to determine how much continuity or discontinuity exists with a particular theologian in comparison to the collective voice of an Amyraldian stream of theology. That standard will now be used to finalize and summarize how much continuity or discontinuity existed in Geisler’s soteriology to the stream he claimed as his own.

8.4 A SUMMARY OF GEISLER’S CONTINUITY WITH AMYRALDIAN CALVINISM (MODERATE CALVINISM): HIS VIEWS IN RELATION TO S.A.V.I.O.R.

Norman Geisler has some unique features to his soteriology. His dedication to classical theism and Thomism, with his particular emphases from that tradition, impacted his soteriology model.

As stated in Chapter 7, one may wonder why Geisler did not classify himself as a Thomist in his view of salvation instead of as a moderate Calvinist, or Amyraldian. Or, why did he not classify himself as a Thomist Amyraldian? These were questions that could not be asked because of Geisler's death during the process of this research. These were some of the questions, among several others, that had been planned for review with Geisler in person towards the end of this research. He was eager to discuss these matters over dinner at the conclusion of this research. His untimely death during the process of this research took away that opportunity.

Even so, do the literature and teachings left from Geisler support the idea that he had significant continuity with Amyraldian theology, moderate Calvinism? The answer seems to suggest he would fit into some form of Amyraldian theology. C. Gordon Olson examined Geisler's soteriology in a massive monograph that traced the ideas of Calvin and Arminius as taught by many theologians in the body of Christ. In doing so he naturally interacted with Amyraldian theology. According to his analysis, Geisler taught an Amyraldian soteriology. Olson placed Geisler in the same heritage as Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Walvoord, Millard J. Erickson, and Charles C. Ryrie (Olson, 2002:31). Two of those four, Walvoord and Ryrie, Geisler knew and worked with in ministry at Dallas Seminary. Geisler has claimed that his views and the views of Ryrie and Walvoord aligned.

This conclusion will summarize briefly key points of Geisler's theology and soteriology. With the S.A.V.I.O.R. mnemonic that succinctly summarizes the key points in an Amyraldian soteriology, Geisler's ideas will be summarized and compared to this stream of thought as final conclusions are made. The evidence suggests a substantive degree of continuity in Geisler's soteriology with Amyraldian ideology, and it offers substantive merit to Geisler's claims as well as to others like Olson, who thought Geisler seemed to align in some way with that stream of thought. Olson's work was not substantively wrong as much as it was just extremely brief and did not provide an extensive basis for that conclusion to be drawn. But the purpose of his book did not lead him to do a comprehensive examination on Geisler as is the purpose of this research. Geisler's classification as some type of Amyraldian does not seem to be in error, even though some inconsistencies do exist.

Some of Geisler's inconsistencies, or places he lacked clarity, have given critics some room for forming weighty allegations that he did not have any continuity in the Calvinistic stream but held to Arminianism. A little over twenty years ago, this researcher participated in a senior seminar project at North Greenville University where the class interacted with Geisler's first edition of *Chosen But Free*. Criticisms and concerns then from that class, and additional ones through the years by Sproul and White, had even impacted the ideology of this writer, causing doubt in the beginning whether Geisler could truly claim any sufficient degree of continuity with any

Calvinistic soteriology. The hypothesis noted then was that he did not or may not truly have any substantive or sufficient continuity with Amyraldian soteriology, or with any form of Calvinism.

But these critics, specifically White and Sproul, often present their view as if anything other than standard five-point Calvinism makes one something other than a Calvinist and more Arminian/Wesleyan. Those in that perspective do not make for a good control group for accurate comparisons as their analyses leave no real room for any type of moderate Calvinism. Anything less than five-point Calvinism in those streams of thought often automatically discredits any claim to true Calvinism. Therefore, a more holistic study has been needed for years to accurately understand, assess, compare, and place Geisler and his soteriology in the context of other models of soteriology. This work has sought to offer a more holistic examination without the standard five-point Calvinism model being the primary or dominant controlling model for comparison. Higher forms of Calvinism help to see how Geisler differed from those models, but those do not help solidify where on the continuum of options Geisler landed. With those higher models, a sublapsarian model, and the Arminian/Wesleyan models used throughout this entire research, one can more easily identify where Geisler falls in the range of options. It offers a more comprehensive analysis that has not existed to date.

8.4.1 Geisler Had Clear Continuity with Amyraldianism on the Sacred Image of Mankind

First, as to the “S” in the moderate Calvinist model (sacred image of God in creation), Geisler has made an effort to maintain the sacred status of mankind’s essence, the human will (in the image of God), through pre-fall and post-fall historical moments. This does not mean that he thought the will is always functioning in goodness. Having a sacred will (image), bearing the image of God, does not mean the image always reflects the goodness of God in the way it expresses itself. God created mankind as a special creation that manifests or reflects God and consequently maintains some dignity. Mankind has been created in God’s image and part of that means that people have liberty of choice. Mankind as a reflection of God’s image has dignity and value. This sanctity and dignity exist before and after the fall (Geisler, 2003:2:450). In Geisler’s view (2010:34) God “made free creatures” and because God only does good it must mean that it “is good to be free”. The image of God continues from Adam onward even after the fall into sin (Geisler, 2003:2:450).

The sacred image of mankind means that God has endowed mankind with “volitional likeness to God” (Geisler, 2003:2:451). Because God has assigned to mankind moral responsibility, mankind has the divinely-designed “ability to respond, if not on our own, at least by God’s

grace” (Geisler, 2003:2:451). Humans, made in the sacred image of God, have liberty of choice like God. As Geisler (2003:2:451) stated, “like God, humans have free choice.”

8.4.2 Geisler Had Clear Continuity with Amyraldianism in the Abandoned Goodwill (Depravity) of Mankind

Second, as to the “A” in a moderate Calvinist model (abandoned good will), Geisler (2004:3:17) has argued that God created mankind innocent of sin and that they “had no evil in their nature or their environment.” Yet they freely sinned against God. The root of all sin in Geisler’s view (2004:17) “is pride.” He based this idea on the sin of Satan and then in consequence the means of Satan in tempting Adam and Eve to sin. Mankind, enticed to sin through pride, acted in liberty by a misuse of freedom, and in that violated the law of God that reflected the character of God.

Unlike the high Calvinist R.C. Sproul Jr. (1999:54) who examined the range of options for how sin emerged in Adam’s heart and taught in conclusion that “God created sin,” Geisler rejected the idea that God created sin in Lucifer or Adam and Eve. Though God is “in control of the universe of free creatures,” including even the “human decisions” of “both those for him and against him,” mankind created in the sacred image of God, has “free choice” that Geisler (2010:19, 29, 21) defined as “the ability to do otherwise.” How God can be both sovereign over creation and the creator of all while not being the creator of sin has, according to Geisler (2004:3:106), been seen by some as an “unsolvable” issue. But Geisler (2004:3:106) offered an explanation, arguing that God “did create everything (substance), but sin is not a thing or substance: Sin is a privation or lack of good substance, a distortion of something pure.”

Furthermore, in Geisler’s view the human will is not eradicated, which would mean or imply the doctrine of total inability (as often taught in higher forms of Calvinism). The will is dead in the sense that it is cut off and separated from God (Geisler, 2004:3:126). Mankind is totally depraved but is not in a condition of total inability if influenced, awakened, and moved by God’s grace (Geisler, 2004:3:126). In this sense Geisler does affirm a type of monergism to the extent that God must initiate the work of grace in mankind. It would be incorrect to say Geisler is a pure synergist. He is not, however, a strict exclusive monergist either. He seems to have embraced a synthetic or hybrid model. That will come to light more clearly in the section on overflowing or overcoming grace.

Geisler (2004:3:145) distinguished his view from the higher forms of Calvinist thought by highlighting that in his view the human will is depraved “extensively” whereas higher Calvinist models teach that the human will is totally depraved “intensively.” He elaborated on what that meant by stating, “the image of God in humans is effaced but not erased” (Geisler, 2004:3:146).

Humans in depravity still exist “in the image of God,” however that image is “damaged but not destroyed by sin.” This damage touches and “extends to every dimension of human nature,” but it does “not destroy either human nature or any of its essential powers” (Geisler, 2004:3:147). The will or image of God in mankind is dead but not annihilated or dissolved.

The sinful person still manifests the sacred image as he or she can “still think, feel, and choose,” meaning these sinners “have not, because of sin, lost” the essence and functions that constitute what it means to exist as a person (Geisler, 2004:3:147). In short, mankind has abandoned goodwill, not lost his will. God’s grace has preserved mankind and the image of God in mankind remains. This view has a high degree of continuity with the thought of Amyraut and the stream of moderate Calvinists.

8.4.3 Geisler Had Some Continuity on the Victorious Substitution Atonement for All of Mankind

Third, as to the “V” in the moderate Calvinist model (victorious in substitution atonement), Geisler has argued that the atonement provided a basis for grace and salvation for all people. It is in this point where Geisler has only limited continuity with much of the Amyraldian stream of thought. He agreed with this stream that Christ died for all and that Christ offered himself as a substitute for mankind (vicarious substitution). Geisler (2011:838, 840) even admitted that he thought some truth existed in all of the atonement theories. Modern sublapsarians in the Amyraldian stream, such as Michael F. Bird (2013:393, 414), have placed more weight and emphasis on this “victory over death” model of atonement (Christus Victor) than did Geisler. Yet many sublapsarian Calvinists have embraced and emphasized the substitution theory of Christ’s atonement. Augustus H. Strong (1907:715), Lewis Sperry Chafer (1993:3:127-130), and Millard J. Erickson (1985:812-823) all affirmed and emphasized the substitution theory of atonement, as did Geisler. Bird has in that area developed the Amyraldian thought further as this system continues to sprout further and blossom from its seminal phases.

Furthermore, the idea that God delays or limits his application of wrath on a sinner because of the atonement for all, as seen in theologians like E.Y. Mullins and Augustus H. Strong (both sublapsarian Amyraldians), does not have a direct link in Geisler’s theological construct. One could reasonably build it from his views and do so logically with what he has established through the ideas of common grace and prevenient grace that he has taught. But this requires some development upon the foundations Geisler has laid. It was not an emphatic point to his teaching.

Geisler (2011:840-841) has stressed the vicarious penal substitution theory as the primary theory of scripture. In his words, “the substitution view—meaning that Christ’s death brought substitutionary satisfaction to God—fully explains the necessary objective basis (in God) for the atonement: without Christ, the God-man, paying the price for our sins, God could not be just and yet also the Justifier of the unjust, as Paul declared him to be (Rom. 3:21-25).” This substitution for Geisler is not limited in its provision or extent. It is, however, limited in application. Of this idea Geisler (2011:952) stated:

Indeed, the Bible is emphatic that God loved the whole fallen world and that Christ died for the same. The theological arguments springing from God’s omnibenevolence are powerfully in favor of unlimited atonement—that Christ died for the sins of all human beings. Any denial of this truth arbitrarily limits God’s love to only some and is based on an indefensible form of voluntarism.

Lastly, one hallmark in Amyraut’s thought on the atonement pertained to the conditional and unconditional nature in Christ’s offer of himself to the world. In Amyraldian thought a universal offer of Christ exists for all upon the condition of the people meeting Christ with faith. This thought in Amyraut established a basis for contingency in the will of God with redemption. God extended Christ’s graces in one will with a contingent will following the antecedent will. Geisler did not directly speak of this idea in the same way as did Amyraut (especially in the covenant terminology used by Amyraut) who spoke of the first offer of grace through a universal atonement and then another act that secured faith in the gospel. But Geisler did affirm the principle that Amyraut taught. Geisler (1997:42) in following Aquinas recognized an antecedent will and consequent will in God’s order of salvation. Specifically, Geisler (1997:42) stated:

Aquinas distinguishes ... between the antecedent and consequent will of God, not with regard to his will in itself but regarding the thing willed. God wills antecedently that all should be saved. But God wills consequentially that some will be lost, namely those whom justice demands. But what is willed antecedently is not willed absolutely but only conditionally. Only the consequent is willed absolutely in view of all the circumstances.

This concept Geisler taught aligns to a substantive degree with Amyraut’s thought on the conditional decree in which God offered Christ to all universally while having a consequent and absolute predestination decree following that in an unconditional sense. Geisler does not develop his antecedent and consequent will in the covenant of redemption structure that Amyraut did, but the essential principle exists in seed form with Geisler’s two wills view. A conditional will (antecedent will) and unconditional will (consequent will) recognizes a multi-

faceted will of God at work in history. That aspect has continuity and alignment with Amyraut's stream of thought.

8.4.4 Geisler Has Some Continuity with Election being Rooted in God's Mind and Not in a Foresight Election Model of the Arminians/Wesleyans

Fourth, as to the "I" in the moderate Calvinist model (intelligent immutable election), Geisler has some continuity here in that he rejected the models of election that place human faith as the determinative basis for God's election. He rejected the idea that people contribute to their own election by faith or efforts to merit the election of God. Geisler (2010:182) specifically stated, "God does not choose us based on his knowing we would choose him." Where some Calvinists (usually higher level ones) place election in God's will or power of decree (omnipotence emphasis), Geisler placed election in God's mind as an outworking of his omniscience. This type of view of election has been expressed in the thought of other Calvinists too. Even Jonathan Edwards, a higher form of Calvinist, recognized that God's will flows from his wisdom. Edwards stated (Edwards, 2000a:1:71) that it is God's "wisdom" that "determines his will" and that this is "supreme, perfect, underived, self-sufficient, and independent". According to Edwards (2000a:1:71), every choice of God is "determined by his own infinite, all-sufficient wisdom in everything". Geisler held to a view close to that of Edwards concerning God's wisdom. In Geisler's teaching, God's providence follows from God's omniscience. Geisler (2011:693) explained that God "not only knows all things, general and particular, but in his omniscience he knows the best way to utilize them in accomplishing his overall purpose."

Additionally, moderate Calvinist Millard J. Erickson described his view of election in a way that shows similarity to how Geisler has explained his view. Erickson even described his view in a way that resembles the way the moderate Molinist Calvinist Keathley describes God's knowledge at work to elect and secure one's faith. Erickson (1985:358-359) stated of his view as a moderate Calvinist:

God knows all of the infinite possibilities. He chooses which of these he will actualize. And by meticulously selecting the very individuals who will respond to specific stimuli exactly as he intends, and by making sure these specific factors are present, he renders certain the free decisions and actions of those individuals....this means that God does not begin by regenerating those he has chosen, transforming their souls so that they believe; rather, he works in an appealing, persuading fashion so that they freely choose to believe, and then he regenerates them.... God has from eternity decided that the potential individual who comes into actual existence is the one who will respond to this set of circumstances precisely as God intends.

Furthermore, Geisler responded to some critics that alleged he embraced a passive view of God's work in election. He replied by explaining how he believed God's intelligence (infallible omniscience) operated in an *active way* to frame or orchestrate the election of people to salvation. Of God's active role in election Geisler (2010:183) stated:

I made it very clear from the wording used that God was active, not passive, in bringing about the event when I said: "God then is totally sovereign in the sense of actually determining what occurs." Further, we argued that God is "Pure Actuality," with no potentiality whatsoever in his Being. As such, nothing can act upon him; he can only act on all other things since they alone have potentiality in their being. He is immutable, and nothing can change him. Finally, as we argued against this kind of "Arminianism," God is totally and simply an independent Being. As such, he cannot have "middle knowledge" because it is dependent knowledge. So God sovereignly and actively decrees that our salvation would take place through the instrumentality of our free choice, along with whatever persuasive (but noncoercive) influence of his grace upon us as he knows will be necessary to get us to make the decision to accept his totally gracious offer of salvation. In other words, God actively predetermines what will take place through his perfect knowledge of himself and all creatures, which flow from him.

The Amyraldian stream of thought as a form of moderate Calvinism has retained the idea that people do not contribute towards their own election. Some variation has existed in the way one defines this election. For example, E.Y. Mullins (1917:345-348) even spoke of a holistic model or serial process of election. In that view God elected in sequences. God also used the good works that he knew he as God would produce in those believers (see Eph 2:10) after conversion of those already elected as the means in his serial structure of electing others to salvation (1917:345-348). Albert Mohler has confirmed this interpretation of Mullins' view of a serial election (Mohler, 1997:14). Mohler also still saw Mullins within a type of Calvinist model. Mohler stated: "Mullins was no Arminian ... Mullins explicitly denied that election is based on God's foreknowledge of an individual's response of faith" (Mohler, 1997:14-15).

Others in this stream have spoken of God electing some to receive faith while passing by others. Amyraut spoke of God offering himself in Christ first to all and then from the universal rejection of mankind working in another means to ensure some, the elect, do come to faith. All in this model reject double election (God elects and predestines both to salvation and damnation). Active election and predestination in the Amyraldian stream has consistently been singular, only to salvation.

Geisler does root election in the mind of God and not in the person in historical time. When examining the Synod of Dort Canons Geisler (2010:297) agreed that Article VI “rightly avoids double-predestination, which would attribute eternal condemnation directly to God.” Furthermore, Geisler also agreed that God moves to save the elect but with the non-elect God leaves them to their own unbelief so that condemnation rests upon them and not God. He stated, “God does graciously soften the hearts of the elect, and the non-elect are left to condemnation in their own unbelief” (Geisler, 2010:297). In this Geisler has made an effort to avoid Arminian/Wesleyan views of election rooted in or based on human will. This again reveals some substantive continuity with Geisler with a moderate Calvinist view.

However, the dilemma for Geisler here rests again in his simultaneous view of God’s one single thought. Geisler (2004:3:184) does say that the Arminian/Wesleyan model affirms election “based on foreseen faith of believers.” He notes that they affirm this within a model of a “conditional” decree “instead of” an “unconditional” decree that is “maintained by the three Calvinistic views” (Geisler, 2004:3:184). His claim that he is a moderate Calvinist seems to suggest that he agrees with the idea as taught within the Calvinistic stream. Coupling that with his view of God being pure actuality and the active agent in the root or cause of a person’s election, it appears to give more evidence of his continuity with Calvinistic thought.

Some additional comments in that section suggest this interpretation of Geisler has merit. Geisler added a thought on the atonement as well to bolster this interpretation. “Sublapsarians (Amyraldians) are moderate Calvinists, holding to unlimited atonement” (2004:3:184). Immediately following that sentence (Geisler, 2004:3:184) he affirmed again that the Wesleyan/Arminian stream insists that “election is conditional, not unconditional.” He seemed to identify here with the Calvinist Amyraldian stream while rejecting the Arminian/Wesleyan stream.

These comments give the appearance that Geisler, who identified as a moderate Calvinist, tried to affirm some form of unconditional election that did not hinge upon a person’s foreseen faith as the ground (basis) for it. One way to interpret Geisler is that he thought unconditional election (the decree to give grace) had to occur when God created in his own mind the thought (an actively created thought because God cannot be acted upon) of the sinner freely believing by the power of the Holy Spirit to persuasively move one to faith. Geisler’s form and structure of election seems very close to how the moderate Calvinist E.Y. Mullins taught God elected people to freely believe in Christ. Mullins maintained a strong emphasis on both sovereignty and free will while also rejecting election being based on human faith. Geisler seems to have close affinity to how Mullins explained election, and Mullins has been recognized as within the Calvinist stream of thought.

Geisler (1997:28-43) seemingly affirmed that God is responsible for his own thoughts (he did not think God can be moved by anyone as he is the unmoved mover). If so, that means God grounded election in himself and what he would righteously accomplish without eradicating human will in the process. In other words, God grounded election in what he knew he would accomplish from himself in and through all of his work with sinners. In Geisler's mind God actively knew; he was not reactive in his knowledge. This idea expressed by Geisler has also existed in the moderate Calvinist Millard J. Erickson (1985:358-59) and the Molinist moderate Calvinist Kenneth Keathley (2010:40). Strong continuity of thought exists in these ideas.

One sentence from Geisler that would further suggest this as a plausible reading relates to how God knows and sees all of history before history occurs. Geisler stated that God "simply sees, within the infinity of his own nature, all that will proceed from it and participate in it. God, in everlasting perspective, sees in himself the entire course of time, God is proactive, not reactive, in what he" wills "in accord with what he knows" (Geisler, 2004:3:200). If God is the unmoved mover, and God is impassable and cannot be moved by anything outside of himself, then how else would a thought come forth or occur in God's mind if he as a simple independent being is pro-active and not reactive? As Keathley (2010:40) described it, God "conceives their choices within himself... he innately knows all free choices due to his omniscience." It seems logical to think Geisler's view is one where God thinks (created thought) of the idea of a person believing when in the right circumstances and under a certain amount of effectual persuasion by the power of the Spirit arranged by his providence.

If one tries to find a way to understand Geisler differently it may be possible. But Geisler (Geisler, 2004:3:200) did state that God is "proactive, not reactive." Therefore, if election is not rooted in people's faith (reactive, based upon people's faith as Geisler often denied), and if God *persuasively* brings people to faith (his definition of effectual grace), and all of this is known in God's mind as to what he will do (who he will save and who he will allow to remain in unbelief and pass by), then the proactive mind of God working to produce those who will be elected and brought to faith could be a proper description of Geisler's view. It would show substantive continuity with a type of Calvinistic thought. Geisler placed a primary factor into his model by God electing in his own mind (creating a thought) through his own works (knowing what he will do from his nature) that he would carry forth in providence that consequently would accomplish the divine purpose through the secondary means of the human will. But his view, which might be properly labeled a classical transcendence view, makes the matter more complex and more difficult to decipher and understand. This highly transcendental view without any sequence or serial flow in God or God's thoughts (in an effort to retain a classical view of God in his

simplicity) almost makes the idea impossible to explain, because language occurs through sequences of logic encapsulated in words conveying thought.

Even as difficult as it may be to understand, this reading or interpretation would place him in more alignment with the moderate Calvinist view that he claimed to affirm. His rejection of foresight election within historical time helps to corroborate this interpretation. However, his timeless view with no workable way to explain any serial sequence or flow of any kind poses some problems, at least from the communications perspective. It makes it extremely hard to understand. But that is only a minor problem. A more concerning issue could arise from those who have a concern that his view could unintentionally harm God's justice and holiness in a similar way as would a supralapsarian view.

The more troubling issue arises in how Geisler's non-sequenced view might run the risk of equating God's knowledge and attributes as equal to God himself. One could make the case that his model allows for equal symmetry in placing God just as much the author of salvation as God is the author of damnation, since God saw both events occurring all at the *same eternal moment*. God proactively thought up the elect and non-elect in his own mind as always being a set of believers and unbelievers. This poses problems because without any sequence or serial flow (allowing for contingency) everything just is. The elect and non-elect just are that way from eternity because God created (pro-active creative thought) that in his own mind. It leaves one asking the question of how sin occurred in God's mind to begin with if no sequence or contingency existed in God's mind. Keathley (2010:140) stated it this way: "the real problem is, as always, the problem of evil. As it relates to the issue of election, the question is how humans came to be viewed in the eternal mind of God as sinners in the first place."

Geisler's devotion to simplicity, impassibility, and immutability place him in a hard theological conundrum. Without some type of sequence in the thought process of God one could easily accuse Geisler's idea of having the same problem as many have seen within the supralapsarian model, i.e., that God actively thought out the sin of unbelief in a sinner and therefore sin rests upon the active creative thought of God, especially since Geisler said God's mind is pro-active and not reactive. The same issue would arise with the first original sin in Lucifer. If only an active creative thought took place, did God actively create the sin in Lucifer? Geisler certainly opposed this idea. No one can doubt his effort to oppose that idea. But his wording leaves an open door to this problem. It constitutes a consistency issue. Even R.C. Sproul Sr. (1997b:29) urged people not to embrace any theological view of God's will or human will that implicated God's character.

There may be a plausible way to read Geisler holistically to avoid the interpretation that his idea would logically mean God actively created sin by creative thought. He certainly opposed these ideas in his works beyond this one area of question. One way is that he may have just left it as a mystery. Geisler certainly rejected the idea of God originating sin in history and he opposed the high forms of Calvinism which he said led to this issue. So in his head and heart as expressed in his writings he clearly wanted to avoid this. But his uniquely structured model could be interpreted as possibly having a problem in this area.

It makes students of his thought curious to understand how he might have articulated a view with greater clarity and consistency. Some possibilities exist. A brief examination of what those possibilities might look like will provide further analysis of Geisler's theology in comparison to other models that have contextual connections to his ideology. What would a more consistent model do or how might a more consistent structure look if one were to build from Geisler's model? How does current Amyraldian theology slightly differ from Geisler's model?

8.4.4.1 *Excursus #1: Merging Geisler's Eternal Flow and Kenny Rhodes' Dynamic Immutability*

These issues naturally lead a reader to ponder how Geisler could have avoided some of these problems noted in the prior section on election framed in an "eternal now" model. How could Geisler's model be clearer, more understandable, and not open to the criticism that he has created a model that could potentially undermine God's holiness and justice? Clearly, he wrote with sincerity and vigor against the idea of high Calvinism models that made God appear to be the author of sin.

This research will not explore this matter in depth, as doing so would develop into realms beyond the scope of this work's purpose. But a short synopsis of how Geisler's view could be tweaked may help future researchers as they explore the topic further. It will also help to highlight how other options that existed in the stream of theology Geisler embraced could have been used by Geisler to possibly make his view more consistent. Furthermore, examination of these other options in the moderate Calvinist stream will also show some differences with Geisler and other moderate Calvinists, which has direct relation to the purpose of this research. His lack of continuity in some areas with some in his own stream of thought left him with some ambiguity that hinders his model's consistency to a degree.

Lastly, it will also highlight how Geisler's own thought seems to have shifted, or at the least how he left behind one thought he apparently held early on in his ministry. An early thought of Geisler from the 1970s seems to be the exact type of idea he needed to retain and/or develop

for better harmony in his theological model of soteriology. Tracing the development of a theologian's journey aids readers of this research to see how to better understand the mind and thought of Geisler as to what he once thought and where he ended in his thought. Historiography of a theologian's mind and thought aids all readers in understanding a person's theology from a holistic perspective.

Had Geisler embraced the idea of moderate Calvinist E.Y. Mullins (there seems to be a close match with the two in how they viewed election and free will) and taught that God exercised election in a serial flow of eternal or everlasting activity, with some logical contingency in a process of God's own knowledge, then Geisler would have had greater clarity in this matter. The idea that God elects in sequence and that his decree has sequence to it allows for sin to occur by a contingency through a passive act of God instead of from an active creative thought of God. Geisler seems to have thought he could not verbalize it this way because God is a simple, and immutable being. But Geisler did mention this concept of a process with God in eternity once early on in his writings.

It truly seems to have been said only once, as it does not seem to surface anywhere else in his writings that this research discovered. Had he retained this and developed it further, greater clarity and maybe more consistency could have been produced. He may have held even more continuity with some of his more contemporary moderate Calvinists had he developed this idea further from the 1970s. Geisler (2019a:1:264) stated in 1976, "even in eternity there flowed the ceaseless and changeless activity of eternal love among the members of the Trinity." What is meant by "flow"? Is flow not a type of movement? What is meant by "activity"? Does not activity have a movement and/or a process to it? How do those concepts relate in the relational structure of the Trinity? Geisler seems never to have substantively developed these concepts in later writings. It is also unclear whether he realized these thoughts existed in other sublapsarian Calvinists.

Sublapsarians in the Amyraldian stream, even those who embrace impassibility, immutability, and divine simplicity, realize the importance of some type of serial flow, with God passively decreeing for sin to enter based on the creature as the mediator through which it arises. One of Geisler's students and admirers, Kenny Rhodes, has explained an idea that seems to be what Geisler was trying to say in the idea of an eternal flow of love with God. What Geisler may have initially thought, but left undeveloped, has been constructed a little further by one of his disciples. Rhodes (2015:169), also in the Thomist stream as was Geisler, described God not as a static immutable being, but instead as a being with "dynamic immutability". Rhodes seems to have realized that how one defines the concepts of immutability, impassibility, and simplicity could leave one with the idea that God is immobile and static. Rhodes (2015:169) countered

this by stating that God has “dynamic immutability” and that this “is simply the extrinsic change that accompanies relationships.” Geisler even endorsed this book and wrote that this book by Rhodes (2015:v) was the “best handbook” he had seen “on the existence and nature of the Triune God.” However, Geisler did not use the “dynamic immutable” language himself. That may have been something he could have used to aid his own model of soteriology.

Geisler’s statement of love being some type of flow with the Trinity in eternity seems to be a basis for the idea that his disciple Rhodes has developed. It might be proper to describe the idea of God having intrinsic stability (unchanging character/essence) and extrinsic or relational fluidity (character in action). Could what Geisler said in the 1970s be what Rhodes has developed under the words “dynamic immutability”? Would these words by Geisler, “in eternity there flowed the ceaseless and changeless activity of eternal love among the members of the Trinity,” qualify as dynamic immutability?

It seems this could be a possible development from Geisler’s disciple that traveled in the wake of his stream of thought. Dynamic immutability may have been left undeveloped by Geisler. His strenuous opposition to open theism (neotheism) may have meant that he so strongly emphasized classical theistic views of God that he never worked to develop these thoughts from the 1970s. Other moderate Calvinists, such as Mullins and Rhodes, seem to have developed the sublapsarian view further beyond Geisler. But the seeds were thought of and asserted by Geisler in the 1970s, even though he did not develop it.

Dynamic immutability may be one way some of Geisler’s own disciples are trying to develop thoughts that Geisler briefly mentioned earlier in his writings. Dynamic immutability means that God does not change in his essence (his character/nature, his being), but God does decree and will to act and relate. Rhodes (2015:167) described it this way: “God is absolutely unchangeable in his essence.” But this does not mean he is immobile (Rhodes, 2015:168). To define the difference Rhodes (2015:169) stated, “intrinsic change can never happen in God.” But extrinsic dynamic immutability means God has chosen to act relationally. As Rhodes (2015:168) defined it, “God as infinite can be related to a changing world without it changing him. God is truly related to the world, so the dynamic in his immutability is the real change happening in the world.” It would appear that God, in relational acts (extrinsic or relational activity), is the visualization of God portraying himself in a way that humans can understand and respond to while the acts of God in this relational movement do not alter anything about him in his essence/nature. Such a model does not imply that God has potentiality. In this model classic theism would not be compromised.

8.4.4.2 *Excursus #2: Geisler Could Have Emphasized More of Aquinas' Aeviternity Model*

Greater clarity and maybe more consistency possibly could have been gained had Geisler emphasized the idea of aeviternity that Thomas Aquinas used. For Geisler's model to avoid some of the concerns as noted earlier, and possibly have greater continuity with modern sublapsarian thought, another theologian's ideas that Geisler admired might aid the cause. What may have resolved some of the tensions for Geisler's "eternal now" model apparently resided in a concept utilized more by Aquinas than with Geisler. Aquinas spoke of a sphere known as aeviternity. Thomas Aquinas' words on the difference between eternity, aeviternity, and time offer some additional light that might aid interpreters in finding or developing a greater harmony in Geisler's model of moderate Calvinism. Aquinas (1948:1:43,44) stated:

I answer that, Aeviternity differs from time, and from eternity, as the mean between them both. This difference is explained by some to consist in the fact that eternity has neither beginning nor end, aeviternity, a beginning but no end, and time both beginning and end.... Aeviternity is simultaneously whole; yet it is not eternity, because before and after are compatible with it.... Aeviternity is a more simple thing than time, and is nearer to eternity. But time is one only.

These three spheres of reality (eternity, aeviternity, and time) are not a significant systematic part of Geisler's theology of soteriology because of his prominent focus on the "eternal now" with no sequences in that sphere of reality. Yet Aquinas' view of how unchangeable beings and choices made in aeviternity brings this matter into sharper focus to the issue of God and his choices. Aquinas (1948:1:44) noted that angels in the sphere of aeviternity are "unchangeable in being" concerning their essence or "nature," but they do have a degree of changeableness in regards to "choice" and in "affections."

Could it be that God, who is eternal and unchanging in essence, condescends into aeviternity to manifest his solitary thought in a relational sequenced flow of thoughts and actions? Could the texts of scripture that speak of God having thoughts in the plural (Isa. 55:8-9), choosing, electing, foreknowing, ordaining, and the related themes (Eph 1:4; Rom. 8:28-29; 1 Peter 1:1-2) be spoken of in scripture in a congruent fashion so as to display for his people the flow in which God manifested these serial actions or decree in the aeviternity sphere? Is it possible to have a God displaying himself in a thought manifest form in a logical sequence in that realm? Might this be God accommodating finite mankind through the analogy or analogical language he manifested through serial flow or in a sequenced realm? Could it be in this realm where the

covenant of redemption was relationally acted out between Father, Son, and Spirit setting forth the logical structure to the plan of redemption?

It seems that some theologians have recognized this serial flow realm, but they have not always defined it so precisely as Aquinas. Some lump this idea into the word “eternal” but when examining it one can clearly see they mean a type of eternity that has sequence and serial flow to it. For example, Erich Sauer, a famous educator and theologian from Germany, described this realm as God revealing himself in the plan of redemption “beginning in the eternal ages before time” (Sauer, 1954:19). It seems that Sauer described aeviternity because he placed a sequence of ages into the realm of eternity. True eternity does not seem to have before and after in it. So sometimes some theologians use the terms “eternal” or “eternity” when they really seem to be describing the realm of everlasting ages, a realm that had a beginning but has no end.

Could Geisler’s words from 1976 possibly be referring to the sphere of reality where a Trinitarian eternal/everlasting covenant (Heb. 13:20) was sequentially created in aeviternity, as there “flowed the ceaseless and changeless activity of eternal love among the members of the Trinity” (Geisler, 2019a:1:264)? Aeviternity would allow for a sequence or a type of serial flow with God planning, the Son agreeing to die and atone, the Lord choosing many in that atonement (Eph. 1:4), and the Spirit agreeing to secure the salvation of those drawn into the Triune covenant of redemption graces. Could this everlasting covenant have been made at the beginning of the ages, and be what Paul meant when he said “we were chosen before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4)? Would this allow serial flow in the Trinitarian relations with a sequence of creation, the fall into sin, and the atonement in their covenant relations? Without a sequence, it remains hard to understand the idea of a covenant agreement that has activity and choices in it. It also remains hard to place sin into the equation for the need of atonement unless sequence exists (sin had to occur for there to be a need and decision for atonement of sin). Without sequence or serial flow of some form in God’s thought or thoughts, sin in the mind of God becomes a very problematic issue.

If, as Rhodes asserted, following Geisler and Aquinas, God acts relationally (dynamic immutability) and did so by condescending, a thought manifest of God (extrinsic relational fluidity), then this relational flow may have been best described and placed in aeviternity before the creation of the world but technically distinct from eternity. This idea may be one way to help give more harmony, or at least more clarity, to Geisler’s model. Aeviternity has sequence in it, a beginning but no end. It also seems to be the sphere mostly related to God’s beginning of interaction with his creation and his ongoing relations with it as the Triune Lord. Aquinas noted that an unchanging being in aeviternity has a degree of change by choices made. This would be

so because there would be a serial nature to it, the moment that existed prior to a choice, the moment of the choice, and the moment after the choice (Aquinas, 1948:1:43-45).

Actions of God related to salvation have a beginning but no end, as salvation is technically everlasting (with a beginning but no end) but not technically eternal (without beginning and without end, timeless). God's relations to creatures have a beginning point and, unless one embraces annihilation, humans have everlasting duration somewhere in relation to the Lord in his grace or in his justice. Therefore, a theological basis exists for the idea that God's interactive relational dynamics with the world of his creatures has a root in the sphere of aeviternity.

If so, then it may be that God elected in a logical structure (what almost all theologians affirm by the lapsarian logical order), yet still not in time and history as taught by the Arminian/Wesleyan foresight model (election based in time). Consequently, that could mean God in aeviternity, by his extrinsic fluidity (relational actions by choice), made distinct decrees in his serial flow of covenant relations (each having logical sequence), but these decrees were still prior to chronological history (from or before the foundation of the world). In such a model, those decrees (multiple thoughts), being logically decreed in aeviternity as a manifestation of the eternal mind in thought (God in eternity with one single thought/intuition), were still before the foundation of the world where creation exists and humans live (time and space, Eph 1:4). They may even exist as the very first act of God that forms the beginning point or foundation to the universe he created. If so, everything would flow onward from the point of the everlasting Trinitarian covenant. If these elements of dynamic immutability (extrinsic fluidity in God's relations) with intrinsic immutability (God as the unmoved mover in eternity) have merit, then the apparent inconsistencies and dangling problems in Geisler's view might have a harmonious solution. It would keep his model from denying God's simplicity and immutability (eternity just is God) while avoiding process theology (God grows and changes), yet would allow for sequence so that sin enters the mind of God on a consequent sequence of permission from knowledge of what the creation would do.

In such a model God exists in three realities: (1) The "I am" of eternity (no serial flow, just God is; intrinsic eternal stability, unchanging essence; single holistic omniscient intuition); (2) God in serial flow (everlasting serial flow with no end; aeviternity; God in relational extrinsic fluidity; God's thoughts manifested in serial display; he accommodates creation to display his logical mind); and (3) God in chronological history (time and space; earthly history). In such a model Geisler could have retained God's simplicity in eternity, structured a logical serial form of election in aeviternity, and rejected a historical foresight of election model rooted in human faith in chronological history.

It would have also shown some Trinitarian harmony as well by affirming that all three members of the Trinity condescended in a way to help mankind understand his works. The Trinity condescended into aeviternity to do his work of planning salvation (with sequenced steps, logical decrees with serial logical flow), the Son condescended into time and space to provide salvation (the incarnation, death, and resurrection), and the Spirit condescended into time and space to indwell the elect to secure salvation. Without this model it is extremely difficult to understand God's actions in eternity with no sequence or logical structure to his plan of redemption. The absence of some type of serial or sequenced model may also jeopardize Geisler's diligent defense of God's justice and holiness. Geisler opposed higher forms of Calvinism that he labeled as extreme, as he believed it discredited the love and goodness of God.

A logical sequence of permission and contingency remains an important concept to one's overall theology, as it relates not only to soteriology but also to paterology and theodicy. Even the higher Calvinist Jonathan Edwards, who has been criticized for some of his concepts that could give the appearance that God actively created, caused, or authored sin, realized the need for the concept of permission in one's view of the divine decrees (Keathley, 2010:96). Edwards (2000a:1:76) tried to make it clear that he rejected the idea that God created or authored sin. His philosophy of occasionalism may have hindered his efforts. But he clearly knew that the decree or permission in a logical sequence aided his cause to avoid making God the author of sin. He stated:

It is manifest, that God sometimes permits sin to be committed, and at the same time orders things so, that if he permits the fact, it will come to pass....God permits sin; and at the same time, so orders things, in his providence, that it certainly and infallibly will come to pass, in consequence of his permission.... there is a great difference between God being concerned thus, by his permission, in an event and act, which, in the inherent subject and agent of it, is sin, (though the event will certainly follow on his permission) and his being concerned in it by producing it and exerting the act of sin... (Edwards, 2000a:1:77).

Edwards' theology had to retain some form of logical sequence with a permissive decree so as not to undermine the nature and character of God. As he stated of the decree order, "God's decree of the eternal damnation of the reprobate is not to be conceived of as prior to the fall" (Edwards, 2000b:2:541). He explained further the importance of this concept, stating that God's decree in relation to evil "is to be considered as consequent on the decree of their creation, and permission of their fall" (Edwards, 2000b:2:541).

8.4.4.3 *Excursus #3: A Lutheran View on God's Condescension to Aid our Understanding*

The idea of an eternal flow that Geisler apparently mentioned only once, the idea of a sequenced election in eternity as taught by Mullins, Aquinas' aeviternity ideology, and the developed idea of dynamic immutability as noted by Geisler's disciple Kenny Rhodes, seem to harness some concepts that if systematized together could possibly make Geisler's view of election more understandable and harmonious. Lutheran theologian Francis Pieper noted that God chose to act and speak to humanity in his word through condescension. Criticizing the "eternal now" idea (the type Geisler and other Calvinists have taught) with no sequence to it, Pieper stated firmly, "The argument advanced by the Calvinists that in God there is no before and after is futile" (Pieper, 1951:2:36-37). Pieper did not say this because he denied the simplicity of God or the immutability of God. He affirmed it stating the following: "While it is true that in God there is no time, but solely 'pure presence,' it would be utterly wrong to build up our knowledge of God on this fact" (Pieper, 1951:2:37). Pieper agrees with the classical view of God that Geisler embraced, but he thought it created a communication problem.

Pieper was not in the Arminian/Wesleyan stream of thought, nor was he an open theist (what Geisler called neotheism). Pieper as a conservative Lutheran held to a soteriology that reflects what many would call a moderate Calvinism. Pieper's soteriology affirmed unlimited atonement, monergism in grace but still synergistically resistible, and single positive election, no election to damnation (1951:2:49-55, 397-497). Those are themes consistent with moderate Calvinism. In his view God chose to manifest himself by choosing to reveal himself to us in a relational way, a sequenced way, through an act of condescension to creation. Pieper (1951:2:37) explained his view in detail saying:

We are utterly unable to know God in his absolute being, for God in his essence is for us "the Light which no man can approach unto" (1 Tim. 6:16). We can know God only in so far as he has, in merciful condescension to our limited human comprehension, revealed himself to us in Holy Scripture. And according to the revelation given us in Scripture we must conceive of the divine acts preceding or following each other.... We must maintain: There is in God no time; God is the changeless eternal One.... There are no parts in God; He is absolute simplicity.... But God in his unchangeable eternity and in his absolute simplicity is God in his majesty, far beyond human understanding. Our human conceptions are bound by time and space. But God would be known by us; He therefore steps out of his unapproachable majesty, and in his Word he has become man, speaking to us in a human manner, so that we can understand it.

These ideas from Pieper relay concepts that seem to make God's decree structure more understandable at the minimum, maybe even more harmonious at the most. Even Jonathan Edwards noted that God's decrees and manifestations remain exceedingly high and difficult to understand if one views them only from an "eternal now" perspective. Edwards (2000a:1:38) thought this idea was technically "true, that there is no succession in God's knowledge". However, he added that to think of God in this way "is to us inconceivable" (Edwards, 2000a:1:38).

Therefore, Pieper's words remain helpful. When God presents himself to us he condescends to humanity to help us understand. God desires for humanity to know him. But to do this he acts and expresses himself in and through accommodation. As Pieper stated, "we cannot conceive of timelessness, of God's eternal 'today,' of an ever-present moment. We think only in terms of the past, the present, the future, and therefore God condescends to our concepts of time" (Pieper, 1950:1:451).

8.4.4.4 *Excursus #4: E.Y. Mullins' View of Election Combined with the Views of Aquinas, Pieper, Rhodes, and Geisler May Harmonize the Most*

In summarizing how Geisler may have been clearer, or possibly more consistent, if he had fleshed out more of his eternal serial flow relational model from the 1970s, one may possibly utilize the concepts from Aquinas (aeviternity), Pieper (God condescends to humanity to present himself in a way people can understand), Rhodes (dynamic relational immutability; extrinsic actions), and E.Y. Mullins (sequenced or serial flow election model) to formulate a model that reflects a more consistent moderate form of Calvinism, or Amyraldianism. In the view of this writer, Mullins' soteriology and Geisler's soteriology have the closest forms of similarity. Geisler, however, seems not to have developed his serial flow idea from the 1970s and he did not seem to focus on it from these other sublapsarian theologians. One might rightly say that Geisler had the most continuity with prior sublapsarians while having some continuity, but not the most, with the more developed sublapsarians. Even so, he and E.Y. Mullins were still very close in how they articulated their soteriology. The key difference between Mullins and Geisler pertained to how Mullins embraced a sequential or serial form of sovereign election.

Other than that one difference, Geisler's form of soteriology had many concepts that were very close to Mullins's view. They shared several expressions that were very close in how they described election and the effectual persuasion of grace. They both sought to explain how God could influence one to come to faith while rejecting mechanical and molecular explanations like that of a gear turning and causing another gear to turn by mechanical necessity. They both

thought mankind could act with self-determination when aided by God's overflowing or overwhelming grace.

Mullins taught that human faith is not the ground of salvation. He examined the question, Does a person's faith contribute to that person's own election? Mullins (1917:343) said the scriptures "answer this question in the negative." Geisler's comments were in line with this as well. He did not think God based election on a person's faith. Mullins (1917:343) explained the reason why some have faith: it was because the "gospel" is "efficacious with some and not efficacious with others because God's grace is operative in one case beyond the degree of action in the other." Geisler believed that God could act persuasively and efficaciously on others with various degrees of persuasion so long as it stopped short of coercion. In short, Mullins (1917:347) believed "God elects man to respond freely."

So in those areas Geisler's view aligned with the moderate Calvinist E.Y. Mullins. But one feature that Mullins had, that Geisler probably could have adopted had he developed his 1970s serial flow idea, related to the sequenced view of election. Mullins explained election by a serial flow model. This idea could probably have fit well in Geisler's model. Had Geisler utilized the relational dynamic immutability concept in the realm of aeternity, where God manifested his being by condescension in a serial flow realm, then humans could more easily understand God's work of redemption.

To understand Mullins' view of a more holistic form of election (that included a serial means) some quotes from Mullins can set the theological scene. In a similar fashion as Geisler, Mullins thought that God's work of election was not independent of human instrumentality (arbitrary choice, often as described in voluntarism), but certainly not based on it. Geisler (2010:145) stated it this way: "God's election is neither based on his foreknowledge of man's free choices nor exercised independent of it. As the scriptures declare, we are 'elect according to the foreknowledge of God' (1 Peter 1:2 NKJV)." Mullins seems to have made an effort to explain how that idea may look when the two truths function together in harmony. Mullins stated (1917:343, 347):

The election included in its scope the good works which were to follow the faith.... Election is not to be thought of as a bare choice of so many human units by God's action independently of man's free choice and the human means employed. God elects men to respond freely. He elects men to preach persuasively and to witness convincingly. He elects to reach men through their native faculties and through the church, through evangelism and educational and missionary endeavor. We must include all these elements in election. Otherwise we split the decree of God into parts and leave out an essential part.

Mullins and Geisler would seemingly have some strong continuity with one another in those concepts. Geisler would agree with Mullins that God did not elect by mere choice alone (voluntarism). Geisler would also agree that God works through humans to accomplish his plan of election. He viewed Acts 14:1 as a means of fulfilling Acts 13:48. In his words, “salvation” occurs by both “divine ordination and human persuasion” (2010:135). Geisler would also agree that effectual persuasion is included in the work of God to bring people into his graces.

However, unlike Geisler, Mullins’ model makes all of those means harmonize in election. This had to be incorporated into a divine serial or sequenced view of election. In other words, God elected in sequence and each time God elected he used the outworking of faith in the one elected as the means to the end of electing another because God knew how his providence would work in each one in sequence. As Mullins (1917:347) described it,

God’s grace in saving A. means the love, the sympathy, the prayers, the efforts, and strivings of A. to save B. Grace does not fully work itself out in saving A. unless A. permits grace to awaken in him a desire, yearning, prayer, effort for B. This desire, yearning, prayer, effort is an essential part of the salvation of A. God’s purpose in A. comes short unless grace reappears in A. as tender love for the lost, for B. The salvation God brings to men is a far richer gift than men sometimes imagine. It is not a mere plucking of a human unit here and there.... It is a salvation which works through human agents and agencies and which involves a great series of human relationships and influences.

For Mullins, election included a series of providential works of God that flowed through human instruments. This, occurring in God’s mind before time and history (by his omniscience), had sequence to it and God used each person and how he knew they would function in his grace as a means to the next sequences of providence in electing and converting sinners. Geisler did *not* embrace this form.

However, to be fair, Mullins’ view is one of the more refined and developed forms of moderate Calvinism. He synthesized the ideas often found in sublapsarian forms of Calvinism (unlimited atonement, election, divine permission for sin, means to the end in sovereign purposes, and persuasive effectual graces) in one of the more holistic models to date. Geisler possibly could have used Mullins’ idea for a little more consistency as they shared so much similarity in how they expressed their ideas. Geisler’s serial flow in eternity statement from 1976 could have been interwoven into something like what Mullins described with a serial flow of election.

Geisler did realize that election took place in heaven (which seems technically not true eternity). And he placed heaven as within the aeviternity sphere. So Geisler held or affirmed some of the

theological puzzle pieces that could make this position possible. His 1976 idea of serial flow could have easily been incorporated into a model that utilized these concepts as noted in Aquinas, Rhodes, Piper, and Mullins. It is as if the theological puzzle pieces were on Geisler's soteriology table, but the pieces were not yet connected in place with each other. Maybe the 1976 idea was a missing link. Possibly the 1976 serial flow puzzle piece had fallen off of Geisler's theological table as he did not mention that concept much, if at all, after the single 1976 comment. Without that puzzle piece it appears it would have been hard to harmoniously link the concepts from Aquinas, Rhodes, Pieper, and Mullins together in the soteriology puzzle. In this way Geisler lacked some continuity with some of the more modern sublapsarian expressions of thought.

8.4.4.5 Two Calvinists Who Placed the Plan of Redemption in Aeviternity: Donald Grey Barnhouse & James Robinson Graves

Are the prior stated ideas represented by any within the Calvinistic heritage? Yes, some have incorporated these ideas into a soteriology model within the Calvinistic stream of thought. Two Calvinists, both in the tradition of Geisler (Bible Conference Movement), expressed these ideas of rooting the plan of redemption in the Lord Jesus within a covenant of redemption that occurred in a world in between this world (time) and eternity (reality with no time or serial activity measurable from the human perspective). So it is not altogether novel to suggest this option existed for Geisler.

The famous Donald Grey Barnhouse (1895-1960), who from 1927 until his death in 1960 pastored the famous Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, recognized that there was a period prior to this world. It was in that period of reality where he placed the death of Christ being slain in the mind of God. This view of Barnhouse, as a Calvinist (even a five-point Calvinist), would reflect in his mind this aeviternity period. Barnhouse believed it was in this period (the angelic world related to Genesis 1:1 prior to Genesis 1:2) where the "Lamb" of God "hath been slain from the disruption of the world" (Barnhouse, 1971:239). In his view there was a world prior to this world (Barnhouse, 1965:9-20). Consequently, if Christ is the Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8, 1:11, 21:6, 22:13) it may mean that Christ being slain from the foundation or before the foundation of the world, and the elect being chosen from the foundation or before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4) relates to Christ as the Alpha, the very beginning point to all serial points of all history where Christ in and with the Trinity made this eternal covenant of redemption (see Heb. 13:20; the everlasting or eternal covenant). One could possibly say that the manifestation of the eternal love relations of the Trinity stands as the beginning point of all else that occurs.

Also the famous and earlier 1800s Calvinist James Robinson Graves (1820-1893) expressed a view that placed the covenant relations of Christ in the plan of redemption in between the reality of eternity but prior to this world of history. That would appear to be the reality of the everlasting ages, the aspect of reality that has a beginning but has no end. The eternal mind of God came forth to display his “glory of omnipotence and wisdom, as redemption is of the glory of his grace and love” (Graves, 1928:62-63). In his view (Graves, 1928:62), the functions of “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” developed or “originated with the conception of the Covenant of Redemption and the work of Christ”. Graves seems to have adopted the idea that in eternity everything to God is an eternal now, “a present now with him” (Graves, 1928:35). Yet the functional actions of the Father, Son, and Spirit manifested themselves in another period through the Covenant of Redemption.

According to Graves’ view (1928:35), God’s actions to reveal himself as one Being in three Persons to creation took place *not* in the technical period of eternity (God just is the great I Am in eternity, with no measurable sequence or time; a one-in-three being), but the actions of God (what Geisler in 1976 stated as the love activity of the Trinity in eternity) were “from the beginning of the ages—‘before the world was’”. These serial relations were according to Graves (1928:35) “ever in the mind of the Godhead”. In Grave’s view (1928:35), God as God revealed himself as the three divine Persons in the “Covenant of Redemption” that continues to manifest the one God in three Persons through all of the ages (everlasting ages; a beginning but no end; aeviternity) and through historical time (a beginning and ending). The beginning point of the covenant relations with the Godhead established the foundation for all that occurred in history that flowed outwardly from this in seven dispensations that consummated the divine work of Christ (Graves, 1928:159-243).

Geisler’s view would seemingly find the most consistency (or at least be more understandable) if he utilized these concepts. One could easily use the ideas from Graves to form this picture. It would eliminate any concerns about how sin developed in God’s mind as it would have a place for the serial flow of this to have an expression in some analogy or process that displays the placement of it through divine permission. It would seemingly preserve the timeless or non-sequential status of God as the great “I Am” (he just is; eternity) with no time in that reality. God just is eternity. God as reality is eternal. However, it would allow for a serial flow of God’s activity to manifest himself in a way within aeviternity, a manifestation of God in his work as three divine Persons. The plan of redemption would serially begin here with the covenant of redemption with the Lord who is the beginning (Alpha; everlasting beginning point; aeviternity) and the end (the Omega; the summation point of all chronological history). In such a model humanity can probably understand a little more the thoughts and works of God with a Christ-centered focus.

8.4.5 Geisler's Overflowing or Overwhelming Persuasive Effectual Grace Model

Fifth, as to the "O" in the moderate Calvinist model, overflowing or overwhelming, efficacious grace, Geisler seems to have embraced some of the key terms and language that Amyraut and other moderate Calvinists used in describing how God worked with his people that in his mind he knew as his elect. Geisler rejected the ideas and terms of irresistible grace. Many moderate Calvinists and even some higher forms of Calvinists have noted that they do not prefer those terms. For example, R.C. Sproul (1986:120-121) stated that he preferred the term "effectual grace" over that of irresistible grace because "God's grace is resistible in the sense that we can and do resist it."

Geisler also rejected voluntarism and believed instead that God effectually draws people to faith persuasively through providence and applications of grace to the sinner that flow from God's good nature (divine essentialism view). As an essentialist Geisler believed God works on the sinner in accordance with his nature and not primarily from his omnipotence or will. In his view, "at the root of extreme Calvinism is a strong form of philosophical voluntarism. Ethical voluntarism affirms that something is right simply because God willed it, rather than God willing it because it is right in accordance with his ... nature (a view called essentialism)" (Geisler, 2010:285).

This seems to be where Geisler's view of omniscience lends a helping hand, so to speak, to his soteriology model. Though Geisler rejected Molinism, he spoke of this in such a way that it could easily align with some facets as presented in a Molinist paradigm. A key to the Molinist idea connects to God setting the person in a set of circumstances that will lead the sinner to freely accept Christ. Of course, Millard J. Erickson, a moderate Calvinist (and not identified as a Molinist) has also expressed views that have close similarities with Molinist ideology. Moderate Calvinism and some forms of Molinism seem to have common explanations in how election and grace function (Erickson, 1998:387). Geisler's description of omniscience works in this manner with sinners. God in his wisdom can arrange the best world or set of circumstances to place the sinner in order to achieve that sinner's salvation. God uses the setting and circumstances as the means to work persuasively in convincing the sinner to come to faith in Christ for redemption. Moderate Calvinist Millard J. Erickson (1985:358) used this type of concept in his view of how God effectually brings people into faith by their free choice. In his 1985 edition he did not explain the similarity to Molinism. In the updated 1998 edition of his theology Erickson noted that this view is similar to that expressed in Molinism (Erickson, 1998:386-387). A sublapsarian moderate Calvinism and a form of Calvinistic Molinism have very similar features. The Molinist (Keathley's type), Amyraut (E.Y. Mullins' and Millard J. Erickson's type), and Lutheran (Francis Pieper's type) models have significant and substantive continuity within key areas.

Geisler highlighted these aspects of his theology on providence and effectual persuasive grace, stating, “God is in control of the universe of free creatures by his foreknowledge. He does not force anyone’s freedom, but he knows in advance from all eternity exactly what everyone is going to freely do and how much persuasion will be needed for them to do it” (Geisler, 2010:19). Geisler added to this the idea of possible worlds that God could have created and yet he in his omniscience chose to create this one. He stated, “God was free to create or not to create, to create free creatures or not create them. Knowing exactly what would happen in every possible world, he freely chose to create this one to achieve the greatest good” (Geisler, 2010:19).

Those ideas by Geisler have close similarity to how the Calvinistic Molinist Kenneth Keathley described these issues. Keathley, like Geisler, rejected the idea that God merely looks into the future to see who would believe and then he elects that person (foresight election). Keathley described it this way: “God does not perceive what free creatures would do, but rather he conceives their choices within himself. That is, God does not look forward in time to ascertain what decisions we would make; instead he innately knows all free choices due to his omniscience” (Keathley, 2010:40). From this base of omniscience God orders a plan of placement for people. As Keathley (2010:39) said, “God knows all the possible worlds he could create, with all possible individuals, and all possible circumstances in which they could be placed.” In the Molinist ideology this plays into how God works to bring about the choices in the creatures he has created.

As the scholar Kirk MacGregor (2015:92) noted, in Molina’s view “God knows all counterfactual truths, including that which every possible individual would freely do in any set of circumstances in which that individual found himself or herself and that which every possible stochastic process would randomly do in any set of circumstances where it existed.” Geisler, even though he claims to have rejected Molinism as a system (that seems correct because of his insistence on simultaneous coordinate knowledge without sequence), did utilize some of the concepts taught from a Molinist view to structure how God effectively brings people to faith (Geisler, 2010:19). Moderate Calvinists and Molinists seem to have many similar features in how they describe election and the application of grace.

When a person has been placed in this world that God chose to create, and under the providence of drawing grace in a particular set of circumstances, God’s grace in Geisler’s model can be overwhelming to the sinner. In Geisler’s words he stated,

Moderate Calvinists affirm that God can be as persuasive as he desires to be, short of coercion. In theological terms, this means God can use irresistible grace on the willing. But

such divine persuasion will be like that of courtship. God will woo and court so persuasively that those willing to respond will be overwhelmed by his love (Geisler, 2010:104).

Geisler used a relational model to describe efficacious grace. He does not describe it exactly as monergism and he rejected the classical form of it offered by higher forms of Calvinism. His form would be a type of monergism in drawing grace that leads to a synergistic response. Some type of vivifying grace works on the person's heart and mind during the moment of conversion. In his model Geisler made an effort here to avoid mechanical or molecular types of hard deterministic views. Again, his views are very close to views as described by the moderate Calvinist E.Y. Mullins (1917:344) who stated of efficacious grace:

Does God's election coerce man's will, or does it leave it free? The answer is emphatically that will of man is not coerced, but is left free. In his free act of accepting Christ and salvation man is self-determined. He would not have made the choice if left to himself without the aid of God's grace. But when he chooses, it is his own free act. God's grace is not 'irresistible' as a physical force is irresistible. Grace does not act as a physical force. It is a moral and spiritual and personal power.... Men have been ever prone to think of electing grace as if it were dynamite or some other kind of material force compelling men instead of a moral force persuading them.

Millard J. Erickson, a moderate Calvinist, also described a view of persuasive grace that made certain someone would respond in faith while not making it necessary that one would respond in faith. He also acknowledged that the conversion of a person could occur in a process (Erickson, 1985:934). In his view this view preserved both the sovereign providence of God and human responsibility. Erickson (1985:359) stated that "God works in such a suasive way with the will of the individual that he freely makes the choice God intends.... he works in an appealing, persuading fashion so that" the person will "freely choose to believe". This seems to be a hybrid form of grace in application. Here Geisler seems to have significant continuity to even modern moderate Calvinistic expressions.

The standard monergism versus synergism paradigm does not seem to properly measure the ideas of moderate Calvinism. Some higher forms of Calvinism emphasize a strict monergism. Arminians/Wesleyans emphasize human ability to obtain God's elective grace, a strong synergism model where foreseen human faith initiates the actualizations of redemption. But moderate Calvinists seem to recognize some type of initial grace (monergism) that makes people willing to believe and then a drawing or vivifying grace that persuades and moves and leads them to actual belief (synergism that occurs after a monergistic work in the drawing grace process). This hybrid model can exist because of the process or drawing grace model that has

some sequences in it. It appears to be some type of a hybrid monergistic work that has synergistic effects in congruence to the monergistic work initiated by God in his providence. It also allows for people to establish themselves as the non-elect by resistance, a negative synergistic work. One may not do anything to establish themselves in grace (monergism establishes the flow to salvation), but one may synergistically act and remove themselves from grace and establish their own demise and damnation (God's passive act to allow the person to sin in and through unbelief).

The view of Mullins, Erickson, and Keathley, three moderate Calvinists (Keathley being a Molinist Calvinist), seems very close in ideology to the way Geisler described grace as the work of effectual persuasion. It has close continuity as well with Amyraut's (2017:139) original view that belief is due to persuasion. Therefore, it seems that substantive continuity exists here in Geisler's effectual persuasion view and that of other moderate Calvinists. B.B. Warfield (1942:90-91) seems to have recognized this effectual persuasion model of grace as some form of Calvinistic soteriology even if in a weaker or more diluted form.

8.4.6 Geisler's Regenerated Forever Grace Model

Sixth, as to the "R" in the moderate Calvinist model (regenerated forever), Geisler has continuity with this concept of the Amyraldian or moderate Calvinist stream of thought. Historically all of the Calvinistic streams differed from the Arminian/Wesleyan stream on eternal security or preservation of the saints and they did so because all forms of Calvinistic soteriology root election in some realm of eternity and not in human in historical time. Therefore, if God rooted election in himself and draws one to faith, that person cannot lose that which God has accomplished unless God is unfaithful to himself. Wherever one places election (in eternity or in history) that placement has tremendous ramifications on the doctrine of grace as to the duration of it.

If a theologian grounds election in history based on human will as the contributing factor, then logically a person's will could stop contributing and grace could cease in that person's life. However, if election is rooted in God himself and in his providence then when the person comes to experience grace that grace will not cease as it will endure forever. Geisler rooted election in God and not in mankind. Therefore, he stated this about God's eternal preservation of elected sinners:

Moderate Calvinists hold that they are eternally secure.... there are many arguments in favor of eternal security ... for all believers.... salvation does not depend on our efforts but only on God, our security is as eternal as he is.... We can no more lose our salvation than God can

cease being God. Election was from eternity. Salvation was not decided or gained in time, and it cannot be dissolved or lost in time. '[God] chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight' (Eph. 1:4). Christ was the 'Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world' (Rev. 13:8). 'This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time' (2 Tim. 1:9). Salvation was effected in eternity and for eternity (Geisler, 2004:302, 305, 315).

These points from Geisler place him in the Amyraldian or moderate Calvinist stream of thought. He rejected the idea that one can lose salvation. Grace never ends for the one God has elected to everlasting salvation.

8.5 FINAL ASSESSMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The main research question focused on whether Norman Geisler's soteriology displayed sufficient continuity with any of the three major Reformed Calvinistic soteriology models. Geisler identified himself as a moderate Calvinist (2004:3:144-145). He also placed himself in the sublapsarian or Amyraldian stream of moderate Calvinism (2004:3:185). He openly stated that he rejected higher forms of Calvinism. He taught that supralapsarian forms of Calvinism equalled extreme Calvinism and were in error. He taught that infralapsarian models of Calvinism equalled strong Calvinism and were in error (2004:3:185). He described his view as a balanced moderate Calvinism.

The six points in the mnemonic S.A.V.I.O.R. have been used as a basic guide to measure how much continuity Geisler had with the Amyraldian moderate Calvinism stream of thought. Of the six points, Geisler seemed to have strong continuity with the "S", "A", and "R" points. He also had some continuity with the V. point in that he embraced unlimited atonement. But he did not directly or clearly emphasize that all grace stems from the death of Christ that purchased all common graces. One might then say he had a half-point affirmation on this element. Since he placed atonement as prior to election (though in what he called an operational order) it would suggest a little more continuity to this point as well, so maybe one could classify this as three-fourths of an affirmation.

As to the "I" Geisler rooted election in eternity so it would seem accurate to say he affirmed this point and had continuity with it. Election took place in eternity and was not based on human faith. One could not lose election either. However, since he did not use some of the standard language here (because of his Thomist view and non-sequenced model) it might be correct to say he had a half-point or three-fourths point affirmation in this element also. That is a conservative measurement. With his outright rejection of foresight election one could argue that

he clearly affirmed this point in fullness. But because of his non-sequenced view and other statements about mystery it seems proper to keep a reserved and conservative estimation here and place him somewhere around a half to three-fourths point of affirmation.

As to the “O”, Geisler seemed to have fairly significant continuity that God could and would use effectual persuasion to lead one to faith. He did not clearly define what made a person willing prior to the moment of irresistible grace that led the one willing to actual belief. This lack of clarity subtracts somewhat from being able to say robustly that he held to this point in fullness. But even so, some continuity existed here. It would seem he had at least a three-fourths or a full one-point affirmation of this element.

Therefore, if numerical points were used, it would seem correct to say Geisler affirmed approximately 5 to 5.25 of the Amyraldian points if a person uses the 6 point S.A.V.I.O.R. model to compare Geisler to moderate Calvinism. In either number, this suggests he has more continuity than not with the soteriology of moderate sublapsarian Calvinism. The points where some ambiguity and possible inconsistencies occur seem to relate to the unique issues that emerge from his formulations of God’s simplicity and immutability in a timeless eternity. The lack of serial or sequenced forms in the decree model creates some areas in Geisler’s soteriology that open him up to criticism that he did not properly express ideas in a sufficient or clear way consistent with moderate Calvinism. However, often those criticisms use infralapsarian or even supralapsarian forms of Calvinism for the measurement. So the ruler used to measure is not the most proper tool if one wants the most precision.

8.5.1 Geisler in Relation to Supralapsarianism

Interestingly, and with some surprise, Geisler’s “eternal now” perspective has some continuity with supralapsarians in that both stress that God has no sequence or logical construct in the decrees. In that sense Geisler has continuity with the supralapsarians that stress this aspect of God with the decree being one single solitary thought in God. Geisler’s emphasis that God is pro-active in the decree and not reactive would also align well with a supralapsarian view.

Geisler’s view of election does have in a sense some continuity with the supralapsarians too, in that in Geisler’s “eternal now” model the sinner has always been known as an unbeliever. Geisler and supralapsarians would both agree that the sinner does nothing to contribute to his or her own election. They both also agree that election cannot be altered or dissolved. Salvation remains forever in both of these soteriology perspectives. But the similarity ends there.

Geisler strongly rejected the voluntarism view of God. Geisler instead adopted essentialism. Therefore, Geisler taught that God did not elect merely by sovereign will. God elected in and

through his knowledge, wisdom, and from his nature. Furthermore, Geisler rejected the idea of limited atonement and irresistible grace as taught from the supralapsarian stream. Geisler's model of grace, a hybrid model that utilized some aspects of monergism and synergism, has radical discontinuity with supralapsarians. Supralapsarians view of human will after the fall and Geisler's view have little in common. Consequently, there seems to be very little continuity with supralapsarians. Geisler, of course, did not present himself as one having much continuity with that stream of thought.

8.5.2 Geisler in Relation to Infralapsarianism

As to infralapsarian Calvinists, what Geisler labeled strong Calvinism, some continuity existed here with them as well. Geisler agreed with this model of theology that sin occurs by permission. Sin does not occur by God actively causing it or by some active ordination. He would also agree with the placement of the fall in the decree order after the decree to create. Of course, Geisler used a unique model that he labeled as an operational order because he rejected the logical or sequenced structure of thought in God's eternal mind. Nonetheless, even so, Geisler agreed that the fall took place before election.

Geisler's view of election has some continuity with the infralapsarians in that he rejected foresight election models. Infralapsarians, who are more willing to discuss logical sequence in the decrees, reject the Arminian/Wesleyan foresight model of election. Geisler rooted election in God and not in mankind. Furthermore, some infralapsarians have used the term "effectual grace" instead of "irresistible grace". In that sense Geisler has a little more continuity with their terminology and maybe their effort to preserve human will as still existing in some sense. But even so, Geisler took a fairly strong stance against the idea of irresistible grace.

As to atonement, infralapsarians generally held to a limited form of atonement. However, some did teach that some benefit of Christ's death extended to and touched the non-elect. Geisler agreed with those who allowed for some atonement beyond the elect, as in Geisler's model Christ's death constituted a provision for all people. Geisler would also agree that this atonement cured the Adamic sin and made a way for sinners to enter heaven if they died as infants. Some infralapsarians would agree with this thought as well. Additionally, Geisler and the infralapsarians would agree on the preservation of the elected saints and that salvation never ends.

However, Geisler still had significant discontinuity with the infralapsarians. Geisler's placement of the atonement prior to the act of election highlights his different view that contrasts with infralapsarians. Even his operational model of the decrees unfolding in history, an unusual

construct, followed the general order of the sublapsarian model. Geisler rejected the idea of irresistible grace as commonly, but not always, taught in infralapsarian models. The views of human will in sin differ too. Geisler seems to have retained a view that people experienced total depravity while not experiencing total inability. Infralapsarians still for the most part worked with a view of human will in a condition of such inability or such a form of depravity that regeneration had to occur first to make people alive in order that they would place faith in Christ. Geisler rejected those ideas. Geisler taught a view that God's grace could enliven a depraved sinner through an effectual act of God that would lead a person to regeneration and faith.

8.5.3 Geisler in Relation to Sublapsarianism, Moderate Calvinism

Of the three Calvinistic streams Geisler did have more continuity with the sublapsarian stream. From some of the criticisms from R.C. Sproul and James R White, it seemed as if Geisler may not really have landed in a moderate Calvinist perspective. Their allegations against him made Geisler appear to have more continuity with Arminian/Wesleyan views than with the Amyraldian or moderate Calvinist perspective. However, with closer examination it seems that their criticisms were too strong and overly exaggerated. Geisler cannot be categorized properly in the broad Arminian/Wesleyan view of soteriology. Geisler cannot be classified in particular with the Arminian/Wesleyan view of election. Since how one defines election is almost always determinative of one's identification within the Calvinistic stream or not, it seems reasonable to conclude that Geisler is within a type of Calvinistic stream.

Geisler agreed with the moderate Calvinists that mankind fell into sin by permission and not by divine causation. He also taught that human will retained a sacred status even while totally depraved. In his view depravity meant that mankind was thoroughly corrupted, not that his will was totally disabled or eradicated.

Additionally, Geisler, like other moderate Calvinists in the sublapsarian stream, placed atonement prior to election. This is fundamental to all sublapsarian models of theology. Geisler's operational order (no eternal logical order) makes his view unique and somewhat difficult to place because of that element. But even so, with Geisler also adopting unlimited atonement, another key mark of the Amyraldian or moderate Calvinist stream, this position bolsters his continuity with the sublapsarian Amyraldian stream.

Geisler, however, did not make strong associations with common grace and prevenient grace as elements of what Christ purchased on the cross. The seed forms of that idea exist in Geisler's thought, especially in relation to infant salvation, because of Christ's atonement curing the Adamic sin passed on to infants, but he failed to develop this idea. Sublapsarian Calvinists

have commonly taught that all forms of grace stem from the death of Christ. In this element Geisler did not have as much continuity as one might expect, since Geisler held to an unlimited atonement view, as do all sublapsarians.

As to effectual grace, Geisler has continuity here with the moderate Calvinist view in the Amyraldian stream. Geisler defined this as effectual persuasion. He rejected the idea of coercion. He also rejected the idea of calling it irresistible grace. He also penned a unique phrase. He labeled it “irresistible on the willing.” In this way he formed a hybrid model of monergism that led to a synergistic conversion. One might even be able to make the case that Geisler’s model allows for a process type of conversion as articulated by Billy Graham and others who have recognized a sequence in conversion. It seems possible to see Geisler as explaining God having no sequence while mankind in time experiences grace in a sequence.

However, Geisler did not explain with extensive detail what factors made a person willing in order that the grace would be effectual. That undeveloped aspect of his soteriology has left him open to more severe criticisms from teachers in the more rigid and higher forms of Calvinism who question his continuity with any form of Calvinism. Nonetheless, his effectual persuasion model, that had some elements of monergism and synergism in it (a hybrid model), has some interesting connections to some other moderate Calvinists. Geisler seems to have affirmed some type of drawing grace process that has been articulated by other moderate Calvinists.

Additionally, as with the other two forms of Calvinism, Geisler agreed that people do not contribute to their own election. This again clearly means he cannot rightly be categorized as an Arminian/Wesleyan in his view of election. All moderate Calvinists agree with this point. Mankind does nothing to obtain election, or to lose it. God elects and people freely receive Christ. That emphasis on God’s sovereign will and human responsibility points to twin truths in moderate Calvinism. Though not always explained in precision, moderate Calvinists have made a serious effort to preserve both truths. Geisler has made that effort as well. He has continuity here with moderate Calvinists and discontinuity with Arminian/Wesleyan views of election.

At times, however, Geisler seems to have left the matter totally unresolved, even a mystery. Maybe that was his goal. If so, he came very close to accomplishing that purpose, if not actually doing so. One may see this effort to affirm both truths in a logical yet mysterious model from Geisler’s own words. Though a longer quote, it captures the essence of what Geisler seems to have tried to do with his soteriology model:

Finally, the harmony between predestination and free choice can be demonstrated from God’s omniscience alone. Consider the following argument:

- (1) God is all-knowing.
- (2) An all-knowing being knows everything, including the future.
- (3) What an all-knowing being knows will come to pass—must come to pass (if it did not, then God would have been wrong about what he foreknew. But an all-knowing God cannot be wrong about anything he knows).
- (4) God knows all future free acts.
- (5) Therefore, these free acts must come to pass. (If they didn't, then an all-knowing God would have been wrong.)
- (6) But what must come to pass is determined.
- (7) Therefore, our free acts are predetermined by God.

While the logic of this argument is tight, many believe that it proves we aren't free. That is not the case. What it demonstrates is that God can know for sure (has determined) what we will freely do. So one and the same event is determined from the standpoint of God's knowledge and free from the vantage point of our choice. Again, this may be a mystery, but the great mystery of predestination and free will, whatever else it is, is not a logical contradiction (Geisler, 2011:72).

8.5.4 A Mysterious Sublapsarian: A Final Statement

It seems proper to say that Geisler did have more continuity with moderate Calvinism than not. It also seems proper to say that he did not have as much continuity as one might expect because of his unique features and some undeveloped ideas. Also, a few of the more modern sublapsarian expressions of soteriology had a little more development to their models than did Geisler's model.

Furthermore, Geisler's view that rejected logical sequence in the decrees, his partially undefined status of what makes the will willing prior to drawing grace (effectual persuasion), and his undeveloped connection of the atonement to common and prevenient grace has left him open to onerous criticisms that he embraced Arminian/Wesleyan views and did not really affirm a moderate Calvinism. If B.B. Warfield (1942:90-91) called "congruism" a watered-down form of Calvinism, then maybe the Calvinistic stream Geisler traveled within had the most water in it among the options. C. Gordon Olson (2002:517) seemed to suggest this of Geisler when he said that Norman Geisler was not just a moderate Calvinist but a "very moderate Calvinist". This research suggests that may be an accurate understanding of Geisler. He was not fully in line with Amyraut's model or even the standard sublapsarian expressions of modern moderate Calvinists. However, even with that lack of full or exact continuity, it seems accurate that he did have more continuity than not in his soteriology with moderate Calvinists in the Amyraldian sublapsarian stream.

If one pays close attention to Geisler's (2011:72) own words, he may have preferred to leave some of these issues and questions that theologians so strongly seek to resolve merely unanswered by viewing this matter as "the great mystery of predestination and free will". Geisler (2010:132) affirmed that both "divine sovereignty and human freedom" are "true," but "we do not know exactly how they fit together." He seemed content to say that "they are a mystery." With his ministry, teachings, and writings ending because of his departure for glory in 2019, this astute scholar, conservative legend, brilliant philosopher, orthodox theologian, and prolific author will contribute nothing further to these issues and conversations. Disciples of Geisler, scholars, and interlocutors will for sure continue to examine his words and formulations to use for various theological and ministerial purposes. What he left behind in teachings remains plentiful.

But questions do remain, and those questions could not be asked directly to Geisler as he had hoped and delightfully offered to entertain when this writer discussed the dissertation topic with him. Whatever he may have said had that meeting transpired, Geisler now has more answers than ever before (certainly to his curious mind's delight) with his face-to-face presence with Christ. Those remaining here continue to wrestle with these issues, even to a degree with how Geisler explained the issues. Maybe Geisler will have an updated lecture and session awaiting those who wrestle with this and later join him in glory where he will then share his new and more enlightened version.

However, until that glorious reunion, even as interlocutors interact with the material left by Geisler, most will agree with Paige Patterson's assessment of Geisler concerning his life, ministry, and theology. Geisler retained "orthodoxy" and "intensity" in "his love for Christ" as an "incisive and impassioned thinker" (Patterson, 2016:424, 425). Patterson's proper words for Geisler stand true because of Geisler's contribution to the field of soteriology as a philosopher, evangelist, apologist, and theologian. Those words highlight Geisler's diligence in trying to find a harmonious way to teach others about God's love in grace and justice from a balanced model that reflected God's glory in salvation that occurred through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus.

Whatever else one may say or think of his views in these areas, it would be very difficult for most not to agree with at least that analysis of Geisler's effort in these theological themes. Few have made the same strenuous effort to honor both truths in Scripture as did Geisler. Theologians can rightly admire, appreciate, and appropriate that rigor and resilience regardless of any differences, uncertainties, or questions they may have with some of the finer particulars in Geisler's soteriology. In at least that sense most could agree, as Paige Patterson (2016: 424, 425) noted of Geisler, "may his tribe increase."

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