

**A Critical Evaluation of Bruce Little's
Creation-Order Theodicy**

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously, in its entirety or in part, been submitted to any academic institution for a degree.

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Hampton, Virginia, 30 July 2018

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Title

A Critical Evaluation of Bruce Little's Creation-Order Theodicy

1.2 Definitions

1.2.1 Creation-Order

Creation order is “what establishes the moral and physical parameters (terms and conditions) by which God is able to have a meaningful person-to-person relationship with mankind” (Little 2010:85).

1.2.2 Gratuitous Evil

Gratuitous evil is a condition, which is not necessary in order to attain a greater good or to prevent an equal or greater evil (Peterson 1998:75).

1.2.3 Sovereignty of God

The sovereignty of God “speaks first of position, then of power” (Ryrie 1999:48). God is the preeminent being and He has supreme power in the universe. Whatever God has planned, He will do (Little 2010:62).

1.2.4 Theodicy

Theodicy is the rationale used to defend the justice and goodness of a deity while simultaneously acknowledging the existence of suffering and evil (McKim 2014:279).

1.3 Literature Review

Bruce Little is a professor of Philosophy of Religion at Southeastern Theological Seminary, USA. Little developed the Creation-Order theodicy upon interpreting deficiencies in widely accepted theistic Greater-Good theodicies. His theodicy seeks to maintain the existence of gratuitous evil

while holding to the sovereignty of God (Little 2005:156). Little rejects the major premises of Augustine and Aquinas, namely the negation of gratuitous evil (pp. 40, 45). Little disagrees with the overarching “assumption of inference” of the Greater-Good theodicies, this being that an all-powerful and good God would not allow anything evil in His creation that did not achieve a greater good (2010:28). Little utilizes Gottfried Leibniz’ “best of all possible worlds”¹ and the created order to frame his ideas. The created order “is this *modus vivendi* that makes it possible for two persons of different ontological order to have a meaningful relationship in which the relationship is volitional and not determinative or coercive” (Little 2010:85). Through libertarian freedom, man is capable of choosing to love God, yet also capable of choosing not to love God. Regarding gratuitous evil, Little argues that it is real and “God is morally justified in permitting such” (p. 103). Creation is not perfect in the same way that God is perfect. A created thing cannot possess the same perfection as that which created it, but only the perfection available to its kind (Little 2010:83).

In contrast to libertarian freedom is determinism. Hard determinism “holds that there is no human free will since God is the sufficient active cause of everything that happens in creation” (Trakakis 2006:239). Trakakis maintains that hard determinism is a valid theodical position, which accounts for God’s justification in allowing evil (p. 264). Soft determinism allows for the coexistence of determinism and a sort of human free will (Fieser n.d.:10). One is free to choose as long as there is no impediment to doing what they choose to do (Fieser n.d.:10). One may argue that if God determined all of the available choices and antecedently decided events and circumstances, then even soft determinism is truly void of free will in the libertarian sense. W. Hasker, in defence of libertarian free will, finds that if any form of determinism was true then “God with full knowledge and deliberation, intentionally creates a situation in which human beings unavoidably act in morally abhorrent ways,

¹ Leibniz says, “God, having chosen the most perfect of all possible worlds, had been prompted by his wisdom to permit the evil which was bound up with it, but which still did not prevent this world from being, all things considered, the best that could be chosen” (Leibniz 2009:30).

and then God punishes those humans for that behaviour while remaining beyond reproach himself" (2008:154). For Hasker, determinism is not an acceptable view (p. 154). Little espouses libertarian free will, finding that even soft determinism ultimately makes God the cause of evil (2010:41).

In defence of the Greater-Good theodicies, D. Howard-Snyder argues, "Our grasp of the nature of some goods we know of may not allow us to assess their value properly...and may not allow us to judge that they could have been realized without God permitting the evil in question" (1996:8). Likewise, W. P. Alston argues that with regard to what appears to be an unnecessary evil, our kin is not capable of asserting if God exists, that He would not have a reason for allowing such an evil (1991:28). S. Wykstra agrees that for any type of intense evil, there must be an associated greater good that we are just not able to comprehend or that is not available to our kin (1984:156). Howard-Snyder, Alston, and Wykstra "have persuasively argued that humans, due to their lack of data, difficulty in determining what is metaphysically possible or necessary, and other cognitive limitations, can neither logically prove nor assign any objective probabilities that any particular evil is gratuitous" (MacGregor 2012:116). M. Bergmann adds that we do not have the ability to assess if there is a real reason by which God can justify permitting what appears to be gratuitous evils (2009:26).

Contending for the goodness of God, Leibniz takes the greater good argument to the next level, namely that an all good God would by necessity create the best of all possible worlds (Little 2005:46). Leibniz advocates for a theodicy, which includes God only actualizing the best of all possible worlds (1710/2005:151). A. Plantinga, referring to "Leibniz' lapse," refutes this based on the Free-Will Defence. The Free-Will Defence "insists on the possibility that it is not within God's power to create a world containing moral good without creating one containing moral evil" (Plantinga 1974:44). God can create free people, but He cannot make them do only what is right. He must allow them to do what is evil without any type of impediment from Him (p. 30).

J. Hick developed a soul-making theodicy, partially based on Irenaean thought. For Hick, man is still in the process of creation and the purpose of

God allowing evil is the process of soul-making (1992:227). This may be completed on earth or in some sort of afterlife, akin to a reincarnation or type of purgatory (Little 2010:40). Hick focuses primarily on the freedom which man has to choose to love or not to love God. While not denying gratuitous evil, Hick states that he does “not now have an alternative theory to offer that would explain in any rational way or ethical way why men suffer as they do. The only appeal left is to mystery” (Hick 1978:333). Little sees the necessity of evil in the perfecting of man as problematic (2010:37).

Peterson comes forward with a theodicy, which allows for gratuitous evil. Regarding theodicies, Peterson suggests that “a more promising line for the critic is to say that some actual evils are intrinsically so negative and destructive that no external good could outweigh them” (1998:104). While acknowledging much evil is explained by the greater good, one would have to demonstrate that every evil obtains a greater good. Thinking this to be an impossible task results in the inevitable conclusion that some gratuitous evil may exist. If gratuitous evil does exist it is because God is not aware of the choices that His moral agents will make, hence, He cannot stop the ensuing evil. While Little agrees with the existence of gratuitous evil, he argues that for Peterson, by definition, gratuitous evil can exist only in a belief system very close to open theism, to which Little is opposed (Little 2010:50). U. Middleman comments that “openness theology makes God ignorant of the twists and turns of future history...only capable of dealing with any eventuality by his might when it surfaces” (2007:119). Hasker says that evil is gratuitous if, and only if, God exists and if He “antecedently knows it to be certain or extremely probable that he could prevent it in a way that would make the world overall better” (2010:308).

MacGregor seeks to refine Little's Creation-Order theodicy. MacGregor builds on the work of Luis de Molina's *Concordia* regarding God's actualization of the “best of all possible worlds.” God is now to actualize from an “infinite range of equally good feasible worlds,” each containing the “minimum amount of salvific, moral and natural evil” (MacGregor 2005:7). In each of these feasible worlds, each person who could be actualized would have an equal opportunity

for salvation regardless of the world in which they were actualized. W. L. Craig states, "It is possible that God has created a world having an optimal balance between saved and lost and that God has so providentially ordered the world that those who fail to hear the gospel and be saved would not have freely responded affirmatively to it even if they had heard it" (1995:9). In validating this argument for salvific-moral optimal worlds, Craig interprets Romans 2:7 with reference "to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life' I take that to be a bona fide offer of salvation" (Craig 2017:2). MacGregor sees his refinements as preserving creation-order, "sovereign and unconditional predestination," and libertarian freedom (2005:7).

R. Inman challenges the notion of existence of gratuitous evil. If God cannot create anything equal to Himself, MacGregor and Little are implying that "everything that God creates or could possibly create is intrinsically evil" (Inman 2013:12). This makes God directly responsible for the existence of evil. Inman states, "Contrary to Leibniz and MacGregor, it is the absence of being or goodness that is due a thing by nature that constitutes the nature of evil for the scholastics, not the lack or negation of being or goodness per se" (p. 12). Likewise, P. Gould concludes that if gratuitous evil is allowed by God because it is the only way in which humans have libertarian freedom then the evil is not gratuitous at all, evil has a purpose (2015:463).

Further, N. Murphy's theodicy postulates that evolution is essential to making moral choices, thus having libertarian freedom. Murphy's thought is that "virtue, moral character, cannot be instilled or implanted; by its very nature it must be acquired through a process of learning and testing" (2007:134). In defence of his position on essentialism, Little infers the possibility of a version of evolution:

The suggestion put forward here, however, is that essentialism is part of the explanation of why a being is what it is. That is, a being is not defined merely in biological or chemical terms. This being the case, it is necessary to discuss how or if evolution might work within a creation view of reality where essentialism is part of that view (2012:3).

C. Southgate also argues for evolution as a necessary component of theodicy. He concludes that evolution was the only mechanism that allowed the development of certain values: "integrity, individuality and way of flourishing" (Southgate 2008:90). M. Wahlberg insists that Southgate's argument fails and illustrates that failure by showing that heaven is not such a world where flourishing creatures had to undergo natural selection and suffering, yet "heaven is possible" even according to Southgate (Wahlberg 2015:48).

Wahlberg explains that human freedom or the existence of "creaturely selves" does not necessitate that God use evolution to achieve that state of being for humans (2015:48, 50). Clearly, any presupposition of a variety of evolution could affect the theological validity of a theodicy significantly. An evolutionary component, which negates the image of God in man's creation with Adam having full capacities, would render a theodicy untenable.

1.4 Research Problem

1.4.1 Main Research Problem

How does Bruce Little's Creation-Order theodicy attempt to offer a valid explanation for the existence of gratuitous evil while simultaneously adhering to the doctrine of the sovereignty of God?

1.4.2 Subsidiary Questions

4.2.1 What is the objective of Bruce Little's development of the Creation-Order theodicy?

4.2.2 What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Creation-Order theodicy when compared to Christian monotheists who widely accept Greater-Good theodicies?

4.2.3 In what ways is the Creation-Order theodicy theologically valid as an explanation for the coexistence of gratuitous evil and the doctrine of the sovereignty of God?

1.5 Purpose

The purpose for this research is to examine current thought on the coexistence of gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God and the essential truth claims of Little's theodicy. Understanding the development of theodicies and the significance of a biblically sound theodicy will aid academics and practitioners. The theological significance of this research is to examine Little's claims against the biblical text. Academics studying theodicy will have a concise overview of Little's theodicy with accompanying critique. Professionals in both the pulpit and classroom may be aided in their presentations on theodicy. In order to understand that Little's work is part of a growing body of knowledge on theodicy, it is imperative to grasp the strengths of the views he argues for, to identify their weaknesses, and to explore modifications thereof. While not solving all of the questions regarding God and evil, this research should allow the reader to have an informed conversation about Little's Creation-Order theodicy and to understand the basics of his views along with the most prevalent arguments against his position. This research also will reinforce the necessity of a biblically grounded worldview as the basis for one's theodicy.

1.6 Hypothesis

Given the complexities and number of variables which comprise a theodicy, I hypothesize that Little's Creation-Order theodicy will not satisfy fully every objection which has been raised against it. As previous scholars have built on the theodicies of Augustine, Aquinas, Leibniz, Hick, and others, I expect the work of Little to be a significant contribution to the field of theodicy, but not the final answer. I foresee Little contributing to a theory of the best of all worlds as justification for how our particular world came to be actualized. However, I see that Little's theodicy may qualify as a more elaborate version of a Greater-Good theodicy. He may add depth to the justification of evil, yet not render the existence of gratuitous evil sustainable.

1.7 Design and Research Methodology

1.7.1 Design

My research is a dialectical inquiry of a given theory against competitive theories and biblical standards. Little's theodicy will be analysed against several theistic Greater-Good theodicies and the biblical text. My research will be focused primarily on gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God. Evaluation will be made on how well Little overcomes perceived deficiencies in competing theodicies, answers scholastic criticism, and maintains a cohesive reconciliation to the biblical text.

1.7.2 Research Methodology

The methodology used will be a dialectical inquiry method. Dialectical inquiry examines existing theories, comparing and contrasting to illuminate areas for suggested modification and is qualitative in nature (Berniker 2006:645). The dialectic inquiry initially involves explaining the substance of, and the justification for, a given theory. Secondly, the theory will be compared to competitive theories. Finally, the initial theory will be evaluated based on the outcome of the comparative exercise. Normally, the final step of dialectic inquiry would involve revisiting the initial theory to resolve weaknesses identified in step two. This research will modify step three in that the information from steps one and two will inform the outcome of step three, allowing for evaluation of truth claims without modification of such claims. Theoretically, the outcome of step three then could inform step one cyclically and require a modified theodicy. This research methodology will require the following steps:

Step 1: Examining Bruce Little's Objective of Creation-Order Theodicy

In step one, I will explain Little's Creation-Order theodicy. Utilizing the texts of Little, I will define key terms in the sense that Little uses them and the biblical basis for his interpretation. Little's justification for his theodicy is based on his evaluation of existing Christian monotheistic Greater-Good theodicies which he deems deficient. Utilizing the texts of Little and authors of competing theodicies, I will delineate his reasoning for the new theodicy. The supposed

deficiencies of Augustine, Aquinas, Leibniz, Hick, Swinburne, and Peterson will form the historic backdrop for the formation of Little's Creation-Order theodicy objective.

For step one, some of the main resources I will be using are Little's *A Creation-Order Theodicy* (2005), *God, Why This Evil?* (2010), "Suffering for What?" in *Evidence for God: 50 Arguments for Faith from the Bible, History, Philosophy, and Science* (2010), and *Essentialism and Evolution* (2012). Augustine's *Confessions* (400) and *The City of God* (426), Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* (1485), and Leibniz' *Theodicy* (1710) will provide much of the historical background for Little's justification. I will consult the works of authors of competing theodicies to include Hick's *Evil and the God of Love* (1978), Peterson's *God and Evil* (1998), and Swinburne's *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (1998).

Step 2: An Analysis of the Creation-Order Theodicy

Little's theodicy will be compared to several Greater-Good theodicies. I will examine the work of scholars who offer counter-reactions to Little's theodicy. Among the works to be compared are those of Hick, Swinburne, and Peterson. In evaluating strengths and weaknesses, I will consider the opinions from Little on each of the above theodicies and from prominent scholars. The opinions of prominent scholars will be utilized to assess the comparative strengths and weaknesses of Little to each of the noted theodicies. Counter-reactions to Little's proposed theodicy will be highlighted, offering evaluations of strengths and weaknesses of Little's theodicy.

Among the scholarly works I will be consulting are Hasker's *The Triumph of God Over Evil* (2008), Peterson's *God and Evil* (1998), and *The Problem of Evil* (1992), as well as Plantinga's *God, Freedom, and Evil* (1974), Murphy's *Science and the Problem of Evil* (2007), MacGregor's *The Existence and Irrelevance of Gratuitous Evil* (2012), Craig's *Reasonable Faith* (2008), Einwechter's *A New Theodicy: A Philosophical Essay* (2017), and Piper and Taylor's *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* (2006).

Step 3: Evaluation of Creation-Order Theodicy's Claim

The findings from steps one and two regarding gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God will be utilized when determining the validity of Little's theodicy. The basis for the evaluation will be Little's declaration and explanation for his theodicy. Employing the scholarship of others and the strengths and weaknesses of Little's theodicy, I will seek to determine if Little has demonstrated successfully that gratuitous evil exists and if it does, what the implications are for the doctrine of God's sovereignty. The determination will be informed by the opinions of scholars, as well as offering my own commentary.

Works that I will be consulting will include Middleman's *The Innocence of God* (2007), Wahlberg's *Was Evolution the Only Possible Way for God to Make Autonomous Creatures?* (2015), Inman's *Gratuitous Evil Unmotivated* (2013), and Craig's *Politically Incorrect Salvation* (1995) and *Doctrine of Revelation* (2017).

1.8 Structure and Timeframe

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 will be an introduction to the research topic. I will provide the definitions of major terms as understood in the research. A literature review also will be provided. I will state the main research problem and subsidiary problems. The purpose of the research, hypothesis, design and research methodology, and structure will be given.

Chapter 2: Little's Objective in Development of the Creation-Order Theodicy

To substantiate Little's proposed need for a new theodicy, I will explore Little's analysis of prominent Christian monotheistic Greater-Good theodicies, including historic figures such as Augustine, Aquinas, and Leibniz. Second, Little's rationale for developing his Creation-Order theodicy will be given. Finally, the core of Little's Creation-Order theodicy will be explained.

Chapter 3: Strengths and Weaknesses of Selected Greater-Good Theodicies vs. Creation Order Theodicy

Chapter 3 will examine the strengths and weaknesses of Little's theodicy by considering its basic tenets and in light of recent scholarship on theodicy. I will conclude this chapter with my own commentary. Based on my research, I will conclude with what I have found to be tenable portions of Little's theodicy as well as those that seem unsound.

Chapter 4: Evaluation of Creation-Order Theodicy's Claim of the Coexistence of Gratuitous Evil and the Sovereignty of God

Chapter 4 explores the ways in which Little's Creation-Order theodicy is valid theologically as an explanation for the coexistence of gratuitous evil and the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. I will examine any discrepancies in validity, offering critique from scholars and concluding with my viewpoint on the success of Little's objective.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This final chapter will restate Little's objective in developing his Creation-Order theodicy. I will summarize the outcome from the analysis regarding the theological validity of his theodicy. Lastly, an overarching opinion will be stated as to the contribution of Little to the field of theodicy.

Chapter 2

Little's Objective in Development of the Creation-Order Theodicy

2.1 Introduction

Upon evaluation of several prominent Christian monotheistic Greater-Good theodicies, Little determined it necessary to develop his own theodicy. Little consistently found deficiencies in all of the examined theodicies. The overarching privation to which each Greater-Good theodicy held was that within a Trinitarian theistic worldview, gratuitous evil is not possible (Little 2010:58). I will examine briefly the chosen Greater-Good theodicies of various scholars, followed by Little's objection to each. Based on the shortcomings of the Greater-Good theodicies, I will explain Little's justification for his Creation-Order theodicy, followed by the content of the Creation-Order theodicy.

2.2 Development of Greater-Good Theodicies

The Greater-Good theodicies are prominent in the history of monotheistic Christian thought. Greater-Good theodicies maintain that there are arguments for the existence of God (Little 2005:31). Further, they are committed to a profile of God as omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. I will examine the development of the basic Greater-Good concept.

2.2.1 The Argument from Evil

The task of theodicy is to answer the argument from evil (Little 2005:15). William Rowe developed a succinct argument against the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God based on the argument from evil (1979:336). The argument is as follows:

- 1) There are evils which an omnipotent, omniscient God could have prevented without losing a greater good or without preventing an equal or worse evil.

- 2) If there is an omniscient and good God, He would prevent any evil unless He could not do that without losing a greater good or permitting a greater evil to occur.
- 3) Therefore, there is no omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God who exists.

In the language of Little, the evil in the argument would be considered gratuitous and the argument goes as follows:

- 1) If God, understood as being omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good, exists, gratuitous evil would not exist.
- 2) Gratuitous evil exists.
- 3) Therefore, God does not exist.

A theodicy must answer, "Why, if there is an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good and sovereign God, does He allow gratuitous evil?"

2.2.2 Definition of Greater-Good Theodicy

A Greater-Good theodicy is one in which God allows evil to happen. This evil will be used to bring about a greater good or to prevent an evil equal to or greater than the evil permitted (Little 2005:1). A Greater-Good theodicy "claims that the proposed good in fact justifies evil" (Peterson 1998:89). Greater-Good theodicies are based on the premise that gratuitous evil does not exist. Gratuitous evil is that evil from which God does not obtain a greater good, nor does He stop an equal or greater evil from being perpetrated by allowing the evil in question (Hasker 2008:178).

2.3 Examination of Major Greater-Good Theodicies

Little asserts that there are deficiencies in the Greater-Good theodicies of six major monotheistic Christian scholars. As these theodicies and associated deficiencies form the basis for Little's justification for his Creation-Order theodicy, I will look briefly at the theodicies of Augustine, Aquinas, Leibniz, Hick, Swinburne, and Peterson. Little's criticism of each also will be discussed.

2.3.1 Augustine

2.3.1.1 Augustine's Theodicy

Foundational to his theodicy, Augustine addresses the definition of evil. He proposes to answer the question: If a good God exists and He created everything, did He create evil? Affirming the existence of an all good God as creator, Augustine declares that God is the "supremely good Creator of good natures" (2016:§XI:7187). Denying that God created evil, Augustine defines evil as a privation of good, evil is not a positive nature but a lack of something (§XI:7043). Evil originates because of man's free will. The will itself is good but it can turn, abandoning the good (§XII:7679). It is the turning of the will to something lesser in nature that is evil. Evil, then, is the "bad use of free will" (p. 8379). God, in His foreknowledge, knew what choices would be made by His created beings. Any evil which the will produced would be used for good by God. Even the evil produced by Satan would be used for good (Augustine 2016:§XI:7187). Maintaining the greater good position, Augustine surmises that "God will make good use even of evil wills" (§XI:7187).

While evil does exist as a privation or lack of good, it is not a created thing; certainly not a creation of God and He is not responsible for it. Because God is not responsible for the creation of evil, evil does not count against the sovereignty and goodness of God. Evil is allowed as a by-product of the free will of man. God created the will, which is good. The position of Augustine is that it is the turning of the will by man which produces evil (2016:§XII:7679).

As Augustine posits that God will bring about a greater good from an evil, therefore he must conclude that gratuitous evil does not exist. Little states, "For Augustine, the good is free will (libertarian freedom); that is, man is greater because he has the freedom of the will and when the will turns wrongly, God brings a greater good from the resulting evil" (Little 2010:26).

2.3.1.2 Little's Criticism of Augustine's Theodicy

Little challenges Augustine's conclusion that there is no gratuitous evil. Little argues that there is apparent gratuitous evil, "evil that seemingly does not result in a greater good or any good at all" (Little 2010:33). Antithetical to Little's argument, Augustine fashions a deductive argument, not considerate of the evidence. Augustine bases his argument on the attributes of God, namely His goodness and providence. Building a theodicy on that basis, he concludes that the good must always obtain. The good obtained always will be of greater value than any evil from which the good resulted. This argumentation does not consider the "preponderance of the evidence" that gratuitous evil exists (Little 2005:39). Hick summarizes, "Augustine presents but does not resolve the profound mystery of evil" (1992:219).

2.3.2 Aquinas

2.3.2.1 Aquinas' Theodicy

Aquinas defines evil as a privation, an absence of good. Every evil has a cause and that cause is when a thing falls from its natural and good disposition, resulting in evil (Aquinas 2014:§1.49.1). Evil itself does not have a formal cause, but a consequential cause; it is not a positive thing but a lack of goodness. Something draws a thing away from its natural and good disposition, the resulting disposition being an evil one.

What causes the thing to move from its natural and good disposition is the will of the rational creature (Aquinas 2014:§1.49.1). The will itself is good, "and thus good is the cause of evil" (§1.49.1). Aquinas is careful not to ascribe this cause of evil to God, "hence the evil which consists in defect of action, or which is caused by defect of the agent, is not reduced to God as its cause" (§1.49.2). There is a manner in which Aquinas does hold God responsible for "the evil which consists in the corruption of some things" (§1.49.1). In making creation and causing the order of the universe, God creates the good in things. While the will itself is good, it is the turning of the will which results in evil. Therefore, if there had been no good, there could be no evil. God, in creating what is good, indirectly is responsible for allowing the possibility of

evil since evil is a privation of the good. Aquinas surmises, "God is the author of the evil which is penalty, but not of the evil which is fault" (§1.49.2).

Aquinas, resting on the premises of God's omnipotence and goodness, states that God would not allow any evil in His creation that did not result in a greater good or lesser evil (2014:§1.2.2). One of the goods which may be obtained is through the suffering of the individual (§85.5.2). The evil that causes one to suffer may result in a type of soul making in "order that we may merit the impassibility of glory, in conformity with Christ" (§85.5.2). E. Stump summarizes that Aquinas' position is that "the evil in question produces a benefit for the sufferer and one that God could not provide without the suffering" (2008:60). The implication is that all evil must result in a greater good or lesser evil, thereby nullifying the existence of gratuitous evil.

2.3.2.2 Little's Criticism of Aquinas' Theodicy

Aquinas bases his argument on the attributes of God and argues deductively. This argumentation does not consider the evidence in favour of gratuitous evil (Little 2005:45). J. R. Middleton echoes the fallibility of the argument. Recognizing that while the motivation to protect the orthodox view of God's attributes is admirable, he finds that "in the face of evident evil" the "strategy is problematic" (Middleton 1997:86). This argumentation is built on inference (Little 2005:45). Aquinas infers that based on the attributes of God, He cannot permit gratuitous evil. Little finds this inference to be invalid in light of the evidence for the existence of gratuitous evil.

Regarding necessary evil for soul making, this limits the omnipotence of God. If God cannot obtain a particular good without allowing evil and the suffering of His creation, then His omnipotence must be called into question (Little 2005:101).

If all evil must result in a greater good or lesser evil, it is incumbent upon the theodicy to supply evidence that the good always obtains (Little 2005:111). Likewise, the theodicy must be able to prove that God could not have prevented any evil, for in doing so, He would have kept some good from obtaining or would have allowed a worse evil to take place.

2.3.3 Leibniz

2.3.3.1 Leibniz' Theodicy

Leibniz' theodicy rests in large on the belief that God created the best of all possible worlds. In His wisdom, evil is a part of this world but does not negate this world being the best of all possible worlds (Leibniz 1996:29). As Little explains, since God is good, He must actualize the best of all possible worlds (2005:47). Further, Little stipulates that the best of all possible worlds is not a perfect world (p. 46). He posits, "God considered all the possibilities (counterfactuals) and chose the best, and this choice was really free for God (p. 47). Morally speaking, God was bound by His nature to create only the best of possible worlds. God has foreknowledge of all that will or might happen, which is referred to as middle knowledge. This foreknowledge of what will happen "renders all the future certain and determined" (Leibniz 1996:55). In actualizing the best of all possible worlds, miracles and prayers were taken into consideration (p. 69). God actualizing a world did not determine how that world would be, but only that it would be the one to actualize. The free will choices of man were factored in the choosing of the best of all possible worlds. Leibniz surmises, "God saw everything beforehand and this world with its sin and evil is still the best of all potential worlds" (p. 58). Therefore, if God created all and had knowledge of all, the question must be answered, "Did He create evil?" Leibniz reasons that all creation is contingent. It must be less than the creator. Only God can be perfect, therefore, man (a creation) must be less than perfect. The ontological limitation is necessitated by God being necessary and man being contingent. Leibniz refers to this as "original imperfection in the creature before sin, because the creature is limited in its essence; whence ensues that it cannot know all, and that it can deceive itself and commit other errors" (p. 61). This original imperfection and the deceiving of oneself is the source of evil. Evil itself is a privation, a lack of good. This limitation in man is what makes possible the turning away from God (Little 2005:155). While the will of man is good, it is the turning of the will which results in evil (Leibniz 1996:61).

Evil can be characterized as metaphysical, physical, or moral (Leibniz 1996:61). Leibniz states, "God wills antecedently the good and consequently the best" (p. 62). God does not will that man would commit moral evil at all, moral evil being sin. God does not absolutely will that there be physical evil or suffering. God only allows physical evil or suffering to bring about a greater good or prevent a greater evil. Therefore, when evil happens it is the permissible will of God.

Being wholly good, it is necessary that God always brings about a greater good or lesser evil from an evil. Contending for the greater good position, Leibniz states, "Even much evil does not destroy the position that good obtains" (Leibniz 1996:62). Leibniz denies the existence of gratuitous evil, insisting that the good always obtains.

2.3.3.2 Little's Criticism of Leibniz' Theodicy

Little disagrees with the premise of Leibniz' theodicy. Leibniz does not begin as Augustine and Aquinas, basing their theodicy on the goodness and omnipotence of God. Leibniz argues from the position of the perfection of God (Little 2010:33). Because God is perfect He must choose the best of all possible worlds and in the actualized world evil brings about some good. Little would argue that even in a best of all possible worlds actualization, there is apparent gratuitous evil (p. 33). Little, who disagrees with the greater good conclusion reached by Leibniz, states, "This seems to hold God hostage to evil," denying God of His omnipotence (p. 77).

Little does agree with the concept of middle knowledge and the best of all possible worlds (2010:94-95). Regarding the nature of man, Little agrees with Leibniz that man is a contingent, limited being and thus the will belongs to a limited being. This limitation is the condition which allows for the will to turn away from God (Little 2005:155).

2.3.4 Hick

2.3.4.1 Hick's Theodicy

Hick first illustrates his theodicy with "the greatest evil of all, the murder of God's son" (1992:216). Hick finds that the greatest evil resulted in the greatest good of all and for this reason, there should be no thought of wasted suffering in the Christian theodicy. This would negate the existence of gratuitous evil.

According to Hick the fall of man came subsequent to unfavourable conditions. The conditions which caused "further evils as earthquake, storm" and similar natural events were prior to the "emergence of man and prior therefore to any first human sin" (Hick 1992:220). Likewise, conditions which caused human disease and death existed prior to the emergence of man. These conditions necessitated that man hunt and labour. Hick further states that given the eventual fall of Adam and Eve, it would be morally unjust for all of human race to be punished for the sins of two persons. To explain the fall of Adam and Eve, Hick finds that there must have been some sort of "moral flaw in the creature or in his situation to set up the tension of temptation" (p. 220). To say that a creature who is in an ideal relationship with God and in a perfect environment, devoid of temptation would suddenly sin, is not coherent. The answer to this dilemma is that man was not created in a finished state (p. 223). Hick proposes that man was created in the image of God but has not yet attained the likeness of God. At creation, man consists of the "raw material" (the image of God) necessary for being further developed into the likeness of God (p. 223).

As man moves through the experiences of life, as a free and autonomous being, he moves from just being in the image of God to being in the likeness of God. This movement is the transition of ascending from being animal-like or bios, to the level of eternal life or Zoe (Hick 1992:224). Man is the result of a long evolutionary process in which the omnipotent God created a creature who is capable of existing in relationship with God. This production of an organic life can be performed by an omnipotent God. This is the creation of an organic creature who is in the image of God. However, the next step, Zoe, cannot be forced or determined by God. The attainment of Zoe, or the

likeness of God, can be obtained only through free choice and soul making of rational man. Per this line of thought, man may evolve to be the "child of God" but cannot be created "ready-made as this" (p. 224). The person who has overcome temptation and attained goodness is "good in a richer and more valuable sense" than one who has not attained these virtues, either by lack of moral fortitude or by the lack of being faced with temptation and choices (p. 224).

God, in "bringing many sons to glory" (Hebrews 2:10), must create a world that will facilitate the transition of man from bios to Zoe, one which will allow man the opportunity to realize the likeness of God in lieu of just the image of God (Hick 1992:225). The world which God must create is one where soul making is possible (p. 227). This process of soul making may extend beyond the limits of one's earthly life (p. 228). Soul making can be obtained only through suffering and the "perfected soul is the greater good that comes from human suffering" (Little 2010:36).

Theodicy then must not look to the past for an explanation but rather to the future for a goal. Hick concludes, "The good that outshines an ill is not a paradise long since lost but a kingdom which is yet to come" (Hick 1992:228).

2.3.4.2 Little's Criticism of Hick's Theodicy

Little sees the primary contribution of Hick as the acknowledgement that man is free to enter into a filial relationship with God, a freedom that Little would call libertarian freedom (Little 2010:37). There must be an "epistemic distance" between God and man for man to choose freely to enter into relationship with God (Hick 1978:281). The distance allows man to function without any pressure from God.

As Hick requires evil for the process of soul making, transitioning man from the image to the likeness of God, Little views the necessitation of evil as having serious theological problems. The soul making process makes God dependent on evil to achieve good (Little 2010:37).

Hick's position on gratuitous evil is not consistent. While he insists that God brings good out of evil, one just may not know what the good is (Hick

1975:396). Conversely, Hick comments regarding Nazis and the Holocaust that in lieu of bringing about a greater good there may have been sheer loss with this event (p. 397). If Hick admits that the good does not always obtain then gratuitous evil exists (Little 2010:38). Little argues that Hick's appeal to mystery in light of some apparent gratuitous evils is illogical and it is "theologically questionable to appeal to mystery in order to ignore blatant contradictions in our theological systems" (p. 39).

Hick subscribes to the idea that to achieve soul making, one may need to go through additional refinement after this earthly life. Ultimately, the soul making will be achieved and the greater good obtained (Hick 1975:378). The implication is that of universalism and the function of hell as a type of purgatory (Little 2010:40). To the extent that Hick is willing to redefine the doctrines of salvation and hell, Little finds that Hick is going to "extravagant lengths" to defend his theodicy (p. 40).

2.3.5 Swinburne

2.3.5.1 Swinburne's Theodicy

Swinburne finds the task of theodicy necessary if one is going to counter the argument that evil counts against the existence of God (1998:2). If the attributes of omnipotence and perfect goodness of God could be denied, evil would not be problematic (p. 36). Due to the goodness of God, the greater good must obtain no matter the evil. If there were such evils of which no greater good obtained, then those evils would count against the existence of God. This is based on the Principle of Credulity (p. 34). Swinburne's understanding of the Principle of Credulity is "the way things seem morally, mathematically, or logically. If some inference seems to be valid, I ought to believe that it is, until someone gives me good reason to believe otherwise" (p. 28). Swinburne surmises that to believe rationally in God, a theodicy must be developed that answers for all of the evil states which exist, and that seem to count against the existence of God (p. 35). Unlike Augustine and Aquinas, Swinburne does not find that pain, suffering, and evil desires are a privation of the good; they exist independent of privation (p. 37). Free will in the libertarian

sense is the causation of pain, suffering, and evil desires. If free will was in the compatibilist sense, there would be no difference between God allowing someone to do something bad and God causing them to do something bad. Free will must be in the libertarian sense where man's "intentional action is not fully caused – either through some process of natural causation or in some other way" (p. 39). The free will defence to the problem of evil only works if free will is understood in the libertarian sense (p. 40).

Suffering is beneficial to man in that he benefits from learning compassion, sympathy, and courage. This is a view strongly endorsed by Swinburne (1998:48). This learning is a type of soul making and leads to the individual becoming a good person. Atmospheres in "which creatures have an ability to learn, involve natural processes producing suffering as well as good" (p. 49). If God is to allow these times of suffering in the life of an individual, He must give to that person a life where the good outweighs the bad, the greater good obtaining (p. 56). Reacting to the suffering and temptation, man's goodness grows in proportion to the strength of his free will and the strength of the temptation (p. 93). If God failed to provide more good than bad or to provide an atmosphere in which one did not realize the good (even though it was present), then God would not be justified in giving man libertarian free will. The good must obtain and the person must be able to recognize the good; there is no appeal to mystery (p. 94).

Genetically, man inherited Adam's desires, free will, and moral awareness (Swinburne 1998:115). Sin is the improper use of choices with regard to desires, free will, and morality. Ultimately, the "greatest glory of humans consist in using libertarian free will in the right way" (p.111). By God's design, humans are limited in both their power and knowledge but their free will still allows them the choice to grow in all aspects of both power and knowledge (p. 105). God allows bad states of affair to continue as an opportunity for humans to utilize their free will, perhaps in choosing to pray, and allowing the time for more people to participate in the prayers (p. 124). Ultimately, ensuring that the greater good will obtain, in His wisdom God has placed limits on the suffering or evil that any person will endure on the earth. Death is the ultimate end of

suffering on earth and a limitation which God has put in place (p. 237). Swinburne concludes that even while the greater good must obtain, the creator of this world is conducting a very “dangerous and costly experiment” and should be expected to bring the experiment to an end one day (p. 255). This termination of the world as we know it is the final control mechanism to the amount of evil being allowed.

2.3.5.2 Little's Criticism of Swinburne's Theodicy

Little strongly objects to Swinburne's assertion that all men are not born sinners (Little 2005:74). On another issue, Swinburne qualifies God's omniscience by embracing open theism. According to Swinburne, God “will not know everything that will happen unless He predetermined it” and therefore cannot know the future choices of His moral agents (1998:9). Little, on the other hand, does not embrace open theism. “How could God know if a choice would bring about a good or evil if God did not know the future choices of His moral agents?” Little asks (Little 2005:75). If one embraces the greater good defence, how could God be sure that the good would obtain if He did not know the future choices of His moral agents? It appears that it is logically necessary for God to know the future choices of His moral agents. God's knowledge of future choices of His moral agents renders open theism incorrect² (Little 2005:75).

Swinburne argues that evils are allowed to continue in an effort to teach man and help man become good (1998:198). These evils, claims Swinburne, are permitted for the “supreme good of being of use” (p. 108). Through the perpetration of this type of evil, a lesson is learned, or someone is helped at the cost of the evil happening. Little argues that once man learns from a particular evil, then the evil would have no value in being allowed to continue or be repeated. Yet, we see the same sorts of evils continuing and repeated with no apparent good being obtained (Little 2005:78).

² Ron Highfield's, “The Function of Divine Self-Limitation in Open Theism: Great Wall or Picket Fence” and Stephen Wellum's, “The Importance of the Nature of Divine Sovereignty for Our View of Scripture” address the fallacies found in open theism.

Swinburne denies, by argument, the existence of gratuitous evil. If the good must always obtain, then there can be no gratuitous evil (Swinburne 1998:34). Little finds that it is impossible for the theist to demonstrate that the good always actualizes, leaving open the possibility of gratuitous evil (Little 2005:79). The possibility of gratuitous evil undermines the greater good defence.

Swinburne denies an everlasting punishment for the unbelievers. He favours perfecting of the soul in the afterlife or annihilation (Swinburne 1998:256). Little finds this to be contradictory to Swinburne's Greater-Good theodicy. If the good always obtained, then why would God resort to annihilation (Little 2005:80)? Was God incapable of making the good come to fruition (p. 80)? Additionally, if unbelievers are able to gain additional knowledge from God in the afterlife to bring them into a knowledge of Him, why would this knowledge not be available and adequate in the earthly life?

2.3.6 Peterson

2.3.6.1 Peterson's Theodicy

Peterson begins his theodicy by stating, "God must permit evil" (1998:34). If God empowers His moral creatures to make morally right decisions, they also must be empowered to make morally wrong decisions, thus allowing for the possibility of evil. He surmises, "It is possible that God could not have created a universe containing moral good without creating one containing moral evil" (p. 35).

God, in choosing to create a world, must actualize a certain possible world or state of affairs (Peterson 1998:38). If God chooses to have free moral creatures in His chosen world, the choices of those moral creatures cannot be determined antecedently by any means (p. 39). If God allows for free moral creatures, then God, although omnipotent, does not have the power to create a world with moral good but no moral evil. If He does not antecedently cause the actions of His free moral creatures, then He must allow for the possibility of moral evil. Peterson explains, "The power of an omnipotent God is limited by the freedom He confers upon His creatures, given that He chooses to

create free creatures at all" (p. 41). Given the existence of evil, God may choose to use the evil in one's life to bring about an element of soul making (p. 99).

God could not create just any logically possible world, nor is there a "best of all possible worlds" (Peterson 1998:49). Peterson argues that for any possible world, there always would be a world possible with at least one more good or one less evil. He concludes this topic by suggesting, "Of all the worlds God could have created, it is possible that none contains a better balance of broadly moral good and broadly moral evil than this one" (p. 50). This world, where man has true libertarian freedom, is the only kind of a world which God could create (Little 2005:86).

Peterson defines gratuitous evil as a state of affairs which is not necessary to bring about a greater good or prevent an equally bad or worse evil (Peterson 1998:74). In contrast to Peterson's stance on gratuitous evil stands is the principle of CORNEA, Condition of Reasonable Epistemic Access (p. 75). The terms of CORNEA posit that an evil only appears to be gratuitous. It is beyond the epistemic access of man to know the good which does obtain from the evil (p. 76). Upon examining and rejecting the principle of CORNEA, Peterson finds that the argument from gratuitous evil stands and must be addressed by theodicy (p. 79).

A theodicy must do more than suggest possible reasons why God might permit evil. A theodicy must support biblical truths and insight in building a valid explanation for why God permits evil (Peterson 1998:85). Due to the cognitive limitations of humans, some may argue that knowing the good which obtains is impossible, this is only for God to know. Likewise, the argument is made that theodicy is impossible, for only God has the divine wisdom to know why He allows evil. Peterson answers these objections based on it being "God's good pleasure to give us at least a dim and partial glimpse of His general purposes, including His purpose for evil" (p. 87). The answer for theodicy is not simply that God exists. Rather, it must be a whole set of interrelated claims regarding His nature and His purpose. Theodicy must be presented in light of a Christian worldview.

2.3.6.2 Little's Criticism of Peterson's Theodicy

Little agrees with Peterson on the point that theodicy should be constructed from a Christian worldview and not just answering the question of God's existence (Little 2010:46). Little feels this to be a major contribution of Peterson to the subject of theodicy. Peterson maintains internal consistency by using a total worldview. Peterson asserts a whole set of "logically and interrelated claims regarding the divine nature and purposes" (1998:87). In lieu of merely offering an explanation for why God would allow evil to happen, Peterson wants to make a truth claim, something which Little would agree is the correct approach to theodicy (Little 2010:47). Here, Peterson judges the existence of God on "how well the theistic position fares in comparison to other worldviews" (Peterson 1998:105).

Peterson states that the Greater-Good theodicies can address the argument that evil exists and it does not count against God. He does acknowledge the existence of gratuitous evil; however he employs thought which is close to open theism in order to explain gratuitous evil (Little 2010:49). Stating that God cannot know the future choices of His free moral agents and thus cannot stop gratuitous evil, Peterson stands in opposition to Little (p. 50). Peterson is defining God's omniscience with limitations, stating it is logically impossible for God to know future choices of His free moral agents. Little does not agree with this definition (p. 51). Part of Peterson's argument for gratuitous evil is his conclusion that this is the only kind of world that God could have created, one with libertarian freedom (p. 50). Libertarian freedom is what makes gratuitous evil possible (p. 49). Little agrees that a world where man has libertarian freedom is better than one where he does not, but Little does not subscribe to this being the only kind of world which God could have created (p. 50).

Both Little and Peterson agree that while gratuitous evil exists, all evil is not gratuitous. God is not the author of evil but is able to use some evils to build "moral character in voluntarily responding humans" (Little 2010:51).

2.4 Little's Justification for a New Theodicy

Little sought to develop a theodicy that would address, and perhaps resolve, the deficiencies he found to exist in the major, monotheistic Christian, Greater-Good theodicies, which he examined. His Creation-Order theodicy posits that gratuitous evil is real but that it does not count against the "moral perfection" of God (Little 2010:103). Christian Greater-Good theodicies either deny the existence of gratuitous evil or appeal to a deficiency in an attribute of God, namely His omniscience (p. 51). Creation-Order theodicy argues that not only is gratuitous evil real, but that God is "morally justified" in permitting such (p. 103). Little does not deny that some evil results in a greater good. His objection to the Greater-Good theodicies is solely that they either deny gratuitous evil and insist that all evil results in the obtainment of the greater good or that they embrace an open theism to explain gratuitous evil.

Creation-Order theodicy will, if correct, "undercut the atheist's argument and the power of emotional scepticism often experienced by believers" (Little 2010:103). Creation-Order theodicy also will eliminate the discord produced by the Greater-Good theodicies' inference that the God who is to be called on for help in time of need is the same God who wills for one to suffer in the first place.

Little finds that in discussing evil, one must first decide if there is sufficient reason to believe that God exists at all. Given the evidence for the existence of horrible evils, the theist must decide if that evidence overpowers all evidence for the existence of God (Little 2005:131). The atheist must develop an argument from evil, which renders the existence of God illogical and irrational. The theist must admit that it does "appear 'prima facie' that the presence of horrible evil is more than atheistic propaganda" (p. 133). The failure of the examined Greater-Good theodicies to address this type of evil successfully has strengthened the position of the atheist's argument from evil. Little argues, "The theist's task of developing a theodicy that avoids this difficulty while remaining true to a classical theism remains unfinished" (p. 133). Creation-Order theodicy is Little's response to this unfinished task of the theists. Little aims to counter the argument from evil, and to undercut its very

premise. I believe the Creation-Order theodicy offers not only a better answer to the argument from evil but is housed in such a manner as to offer a “stronger theological framework” from which one can minister more effectively to the suffering while maintaining internal consistency to a Christian worldview (p. 184).

2.5 Little's Creation-Order Theodicy

2.5.1 Creation-Order

The first necessary component of Little's Creation-Order theodicy is creation-order itself. Little contends that creation is ordered by God and has rules by which it must abide. Little finds that “the Bible gives commands and then assigns penalties when the commands are disobeyed,” as is demonstrated in Deuteronomy 28-30 (Little 2010:87). The choices from which the human mind can choose are limited in creation-order. The limits of the choices define the “moral framework” in which humans can operate. A human operating within this framework has an authentic mind, able to influence history while also functioning within the parameters that God has set. The authentic mind of man includes man's ability to make judgments (p. 86). Judgment includes assessing information, weighing alternatives, and foreseeing potential outcomes and possible consequences of actions. This framework allows God to achieve His overarching plan while assuring the free will of man.

Due to the creation-order, regardless of the choices of man's authentic mind, man never can go beyond the limits which God placed in His creation. This limitation is exhibited in two fashions: (1) when man attempts to “live against the moral ordering of the universe,” the providence of God allows for Him to intervene; and (2) the physical and mental capacities of man are limited. Man is a finite, contingent creature and does not assume the abilities of the necessary God (Little 2010:88). Creation-order determines all the limitations within which man may exercise his authentic mind and as such, his libertarian freedom.

The moral ordering of man is discussed in Romans 2:1-16. This passage in Romans clearly indicates that men “think and act in moral categories” (Little 2010:91). The humanity of man is reflected in his morals and this reflects the structure of morality which was ordered by God. The fact that there are adverse consequences when one goes against the moral structure indicates the presence of such an order. Likewise, when one is compliant with the moral ordering there is a benefit.

In Colossians 1:17 and Hebrews 1:3, the Bible is explicit in teaching that in Christ “all things hold together” (ESV³), and in 1 Peter 4:19, that He is a “faithful creator” (Little 2010:90). Referenced in Genesis 8:22, the physical ordering of creation manifests an “observable regularity,” instructed by the creation-order. This observable regularity is still subject to Jesus Christ. This subjection of physical ordering to Christ allows for miracles, which appear to go against the observable regularity. This allowance is built into the creation-order.

Along with the physical and moral ordering found in the creation-order, is covenant ordering. God has limited Himself in creation via covenants (Little 2010:91). Covenantal limiting is seen in both Genesis chapters three and nine. In Genesis nine, God is found to limit Himself in how He would deal with future punishment and the earth. He willingly chose to limit Himself by declaring that He never would destroy the earth again by a flood. This type of covenantal limiting demonstrates that God has certain covenants that He has made with humans or certain groups of humans. Through choosing to be in the covenant, God willingly limits Himself. The limitation is not due to a lack in His omnipotence, but rather in His express willingness to be in a covenant. This self-restraint on the part of God is for the benefit of man. The covenants “contribute to the structure within which libertarian freedom operates” while simultaneously assuring the “end will be as God promised” (p. 91).

God has decided that prayer be a part of His creation-order. The principle of prayer has been included in creation-order and “under certain circumstances” God will “respond to the requests of the righteous man” (Little 2010:92).

³ All reference to Scripture will be taken from the ESV, unless otherwise stated.

James 5:16 attests to God hearing the “effectual, fervent prayers” of a righteous man (KJV). Prayer allows for man to petition God without eliminating God’s sovereignty. God may act within time and space to respond to a prayer, thus affecting the shape of history. Prayer was constructed into the framework of creation-order and the limits set by creation-order.

Within creation-order, God has allowed man the ability to influence another person. The impact of such influence does not eliminate the libertarian free will of the subject person. God is, likewise, free to influence the minds of humans without violating their libertarian free will (Little 2010:93).

In summation, creation-order is the structure by which the creation interacts with the creator. Little’s creation-order mandates that “before God created anything, He decided how He would interact with His creation, and especially how He would interact with the moral being called man” (Little 2010:92). To be a truly free moral creature, man must possess libertarian freedom. However, there also must be limits to that freedom. Creation-order provides the structure and defines the limitations for both man and God.

2.5.2 Libertarian Freedom

Little opts to use the term libertarian freedom in lieu of free will. He suggests that the term free will is confusing. Libertarian freedom is a more restricted and specific term (Little 2010:14). Libertarian freedom means that man has the ability to make choices and consequently, cause events. Libertarian freedom realizes that a choice may be influenced by an antecedent choice or event. Antecedent choices or events also may limit the choices man has under the understanding of libertarian freedom. Libertarian freedom states that within the allotted options, which have been limited either by antecedent choices or events, the providence of God, or creation-order, man can make “authentic choices.” Little concludes that with regard to man, “his choices may be limited, but not his ability to choose” (p. 14).

Man’s ability to choose involves two criteria. The first is that there are at least two options from which to choose. The two possible choices must be equivalent in their possibility even if not equivalent in their suitability or

advantageousness (Little 2010:14). Each available choice must have associated consequences. Therefore, man in making authentic choices, picks between at least two possible scenarios and assumes the associated consequence.

Libertarian freedom is the idea that God allows man to choose between at least two or more possibilities, actualizing one and declining the other. In making the choice between available options, man must exercise moral judgment, thus making moral judgment a part of libertarian freedom (Little 2010:14). In order for man to choose what is right, he also must be allowed to choose what is wrong. The mind does not respond to "information in a predetermined" manner. If this were so, man would not be able to choose to love God (Little 2005:138). In order to be morally free and exercise libertarian freedom, man must be able to "accept or reject information and this extends to that which God has revealed" (p. 138). This right to choose between right and wrong is "necessary to humanness" (Little 2010:25). The right to choose to love God requires libertarian freedom.

While God knows the choices man will make, God does not determine the choices. If choices were determined, then libertarian freedom would not be authentic. Libertarian freedom is not contrary to God's omniscience (Little 2010:16).

The parameters of libertarian freedom are governed by creation-order. Man has limits on choices and "legitimate use of his libertarian freedom" (Little 2010:88). The covenants, which God has entered into freely, contribute to how libertarian freedom is exercised. The covenants assure that "the end will be as God promised," while libertarian freedom is maintained (p. 98). For an authentic relationship to exist between God and man, both must have freedom (Little 2005:139). God, by His nature, has freedom and man's is manifest via libertarian freedom.

The best of all possible worlds is one in which man has been given the power of moral choice, libertarian freedom. Even given its limitations, libertarian

freedom represents the best of all possible worlds, which God could actualize (Little 2005:155).

2.5.3 Best of All Possible Worlds

Little finds the concept of the best of all possible worlds critical to the development of his theodicy. In the development of theodicy, accepting the concept of the best of all possible worlds lends to internal consistency and lessens tensions that are created if one rejects the best of all possible worlds concept (Little 2005:103). Careful to qualify his definition and terms, Little finds that "affirming that this is the best of all possible worlds assures the theist that what is could not be improved upon, thereby lessening the need for some greater good premise" (p. 146).

Leibniz' concept of the best of all possible worlds is one to which Little ascribes while not adopting all of Leibniz' criteria (Little 2005:45). In Leibniz' theodicy, God is all powerful and all good and therefore, can create only that which is good. When choosing to create, God, by His nature must create that which is best (Leibniz 1996:61). Little reasons, "Logically deduced then, what God has created is not only good ontologically, it was the best of all the possible worlds" (Little 2005:45).

In speaking of the best of all possible worlds, Little qualifies the meaning of the word "possible." First, there are limitations on what type of world actually could exist, therefore, all worlds are not possible. For example, it would be impossible for God to create a world in which all free moral agents would obey God (Little 2005:151). Secondly, there are limitations on what is created. Since creation is contingent, it cannot be equal to the creator. Therefore, it is only possible for God to create a world of contingent, free moral beings. The contingent beings cannot possess the perfection of God; that is not possible. Within these understandings of the term "possible," God actualized the best of all possible worlds.

Essential to the concept of the best of all possible worlds is the middle knowledge of God. God's knowledge, or omniscience, is comprised of three types of knowledge (Little 2005:146). God's knowledge can be natural, free,

and middle. Intrinsic to God is His natural knowledge. Consequently, Little explains, "Out of God's natural knowledge of all the possible worlds, He actualized one world, the world that is" (p. 146). God's knowing of everything about the actualized world is His free knowledge. Free knowledge is "comprised of contingent truths" (Little 2005:146). Middle knowledge affirms the sovereignty of God while allowing for the libertarian freedom of man. Middle knowledge is the knowledge that God has of all counterfactuals of His free moral agents. He knows all of the undetermined choices which man could have made under any set of circumstances (Little 2005:146). This middle knowledge means that God knows all possible "contingents stemming from the free choices" of His free moral agents (p. 147). Knowing all the possible contingents allowed for God to select the best combination of contingents, thereby selecting or actualizing the best of all possible worlds (p. 147). Although middle knowledge is controversial, Little believes there are "good and sufficient reasons" to accept the concept of middle knowledge.⁴

In considering which world, or combination of choices, to actualize, God had the ability to know all undetermined acts of His free moral agents. In choosing which world to actualize, the rules of creation-order had to be considered and applied to each set of counterfactuals (Little 2005:148). Included in the counterfactuals are prayer, answers to prayer, and all other events which are permitted within the creation-order. The world which was actualized is the entire course of humanity from creation to the "realization of the Kingdom of God" (p. 150). Because God applied the rules of creation-order to each contingent world, by His middle knowledge He knew which choices man would make. His actualization of the best of the possible contingent worlds maintains His sovereignty while preserving the libertarian freedom of man. The best of all possible worlds eliminates the greater good appeal to mystery (p. 148).

⁴ *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* defines middle knowledge as "(Lat. *scientia media*) A concept developed by the Jesuit Luis de Molina (1535–1600) concerning God's conditioned and consequent knowledge of future events. God foreknows how each person will cooperate with grace."

Little discusses two main reasons why he deems this the best of all possible worlds. From Genesis 1:31, where God pronounced that all which He had made was "very good," Little finds this statement to be evaluative and reflective of the character and nature of God (Little 2005:152). If God says that something is very good, then it must be very good, for His judgment is perfect. In passing judgment, God cannot lie or be deceptive, therefore, this world was very good. The standard of God's character is used to measure goodness. God's character is perfect so when He stated that this world was "very good," it was being measured against His own perfect character. The second reason Little discusses is the limited nature of the contingent free moral agent: man. Only God is a necessary and perfect being. The created man is contingent and therefore, limited. The limitation is not a flaw but an ontological condition (p. 155). The limitation of man is not "the causal agent for turning away from God" (p. 155). The limitation is the condition which makes it possible for one to turn away from God. In maintaining the best of all possible worlds, Little finds that it is best for contingent agents to have free moral choice (libertarian freedom) rather than for them to lack this ability to choose. Although limited by the ontological nature of man, it is still better that man has libertarian freedom than it is for his choices to be determined. The best of all possible worlds is not to be measured by the fleeting happiness of man but by the "Kingdom of God itself, namely what man was created for initially" (p. 155).

2.5.4 Creation-Order Theodicy

In developing his Creation-Order theodicy, Little declares the enormity of the subject at hand, "I think it is safe to say every theodicy touches all other major Christian doctrines, so this is no small matter" (Little 2010:104). The primary difference between the Greater-Good theodicies and Little's theodicy is the treatment of gratuitous evil. In the Greater-Good theodicies, gratuitous evil is only apparent. There is always a reason or an appeal to mystery in the Greater-Good theodicies to explain or justify any apparent gratuitous evil (p. 103). Little's theodicy acknowledges that "if or when" gratuitous evils exists, the evil does not count against the "moral perfections of God" (Little 2013:39).

In the development of the Creation-Order theodicy, Little sought to answer for the weaknesses which he found in the examined Greater-Good theodicies. Little's Creation-Order theodicy does not leave one always looking for the greater good in a bad situation, hoping that his suffering has some meaning. In lieu of the greater good, Little contends that the sufferer, if he is a believer, should seek the comfort and mercy of God during such a time. This comfort and mercy will sustain a believer through suffering. One should not be burdened with trying to ascertain what good is being derived from his suffering (Little 2010:103). Second Corinthians 1:3-4 and 12:9 intimate this very idea, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Similarly, Little's Creation-Order theodicy erases an issue created by Greater-Good theodicies: the God who is called upon to ease suffering is the same God who wills the suffering to take place. The Creation-Order theodicy does not make God responsible for willing the suffering. Thus, the disunity is eliminated.

The examined Greater-Good theodicies contend that gratuitous evil does not exist as it would indicate that "God is not sovereign over His creation" (Little 2010:104). Little contends that if or when gratuitous evil does exist, and that while God does allow everything that happens on the earth, He is justified in allowing even gratuitous evil. This position maintains Little's belief in gratuitous evil and in the sovereignty of God.

Before creation, there was the reality circle of God, His circle of reality being the necessary circle of reality. When God chose to create, He created a contingent reality of creation. There are now two circles of reality: the necessary circle of God and the contingent circle of creation (Little 2010:104). Little contends that "contingent reality includes rational, personal man who has libertarian freedom" (p. 105). Since the human, and thus his mind, is contingent, it is a mind which is limited. Isaiah 55:8-9 extolls the mind of God while illustrating the limitations of the mind of man:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the

earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For God to interact with the limited, material, and created man, He must employ some "self-imposed restraint (not requiring any change in essence) in the way certain attributes of God are manifest in the material circle" (Little 2010:105). Creation-order is the structure which God built to allow this engagement with humanity. In choosing to create, God established covenants within the creation-order. In exercising His "power and prerogative," He established limits to the manifestation of His attributes within created reality. He chose to limit Himself (p. 107). In establishing the covenants and creation-order, God must abide by the parameters which He established. Creation-order allows the free moral beings in the contingent reality of creation to operate with libertarian freedom. Creation-order likewise, allows for an omniscient, sovereign God to engage with material, contingent man (p. 105). There are two conditions under which God's attributes are exhibited. He manifests His attributes in the uncreated, necessary reality. It is in this reality that His attributes are unrestrained. Within the contingent, created reality, God's attributes are restrained voluntarily. God, in the unrestrained reality, chose to create the contingent reality. In this contingent reality, God sovereignly chose to give man libertarian freedom. For man to exercise true libertarian freedom, God willingly restrains "the manifestation of sovereignty (and other attributes) in the created circle" (p. 105). It is the creation-order structure which allows for the overlap between the circles of reality. It is the creation-order structure which allows for the sovereignty of God to operate while assuring the libertarian freedom of man. In the uncreated reality, the Trinity exists in such perfection that there is no need for a stated order. In the created reality, the perfection does not exist, thus, the structure must be prescribed, the creation-order (p. 106). God prescribed an order that would maximize the potential of man while simultaneously maintaining compatibility with His attributes. The intention and plan of God is for man to love Him. Little asserts that "the glory of God is not that He determined everything, but that He created in such a way that it gives man the wonderful potential of obeying and loving God as a matter of choice" (p. 106).

The Creation-Order theodicy asserts that everything which happens has a reason. However, everything may not have a purpose (Little 2010:106).

Purpose and reason are very different. The Holocaust had a reason, even if it did not have a purpose. Creation-Order theodicy guarantees that even horrific evils, like the Holocaust, are explainable. Little believes the structure and application of the Creation- Order theodicy silences the “complaint that everything on earth must have a purpose” (p. 106).

Little suggests that Darwinian evolution and the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity have diminished the idea that man is made in the image of God (Little 2010:108). The fall changed man's relationship with God, but it did not affect man's humanness significantly. This, says Little, is what should be celebrated. The acts of man are not to be celebrated but the essential, ontological nature of man is to be celebrated. God chose man, due to the ontological nature of man, to serve as a vassal over the rest of creation. Man was given the task to oversee creation and given the opportunity to choose to love God.

While the nature of man is to be celebrated, the choices that man makes may not be worthy of celebration. The creation-order does not allow for God to sift through man's choices and only allow the good (Little 2010:109). Creation-Order theodicy allows for gratuitous evil as a consequence of libertarian freedom. The environment in which God and man can interact either must be determined wholly by God or function by a creation-order. God chose the creation-order by which to interact with man. Although given libertarian freedom, man still is limited (Little 2010:110). Man is limited in that God ultimately controls the course of history, and the types and number of choices from which man can select are limited. Creation-order also ensures that there is a law of cause and effect in place. Galatians 6:7 assures us, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” In some instances, God may choose to reverse the result or intent of an evil action. He does this in spite of the evil, not because of it. While all actions do not receive direct intervention of God, creation-order allows for intervention. Creation-order is not merely about God possessing power; it is about how

God will manifest His power within the created reality. Voluntarily, God has limited Himself covenantally, while simultaneously leaving the choice of divine intervention open. This created order allows for man's libertarian freedom to be true, for God's sovereignty to be intact, for miracles to be possible, and for the law of cause and effect to operate.

The examined Greater-Good theodicies conclude that God will bring about a greater good from all evil. If that be the case, then no one should try to stop evil, for they may in effect be trying to stop something good from happening (Little 2010:112). However, this line of thought is not consistent with the Bible. The Creation-Order theodicy is consistent with biblical teaching on this subject. Micah 6:8 instructs man to "do justice, and to love kindness." First Thessalonians 5:15 similarly instructs man to "see that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone." Creation-Order theodicy sanctions the minimization of evil and in doing so, does not impede any good from being obtained. This is a position consistent with biblical instruction. This instruction to avoid evil gives credence to the existence of gratuitous evil. If all evil resulted in a greater good, why would God instruct man to avoid evil (p. 113)? Creation-Order theodicy does not contain this internal inconsistency. Little contends, "If God wants evil stopped, then it (evil) must not be necessary for some good to obtain" (p. 114).

The Creation-Order theodicy does not assert that all evil is gratuitous. There may be some good which results from an evil (Little 2010:115). However, the argument is that the evil was not necessary for the good. God may have reversed the intent of the evil to bring about a good in spite of that evil, not because of the evil. Creation-order argues that there is no way to validate that the good which obtained could have obtained only via the evil. Concluding his argument, Little asserts, "The sad fact is that in this present age there is much suffering and a large measure of it is gratuitous, which seems to be exactly what one would expect in a place alienated from God" (p. 120).

2.6 Conclusion

The quest of a theodicy is to answer the following: "Why, if there is an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good and sovereign God, does He allow

gratuitous evil?" In examining six of the major Greater-Good theistic theodicies, the answer given is that "the good proposed justifies the evil" (Peterson 1998:89). Little disagrees with the conclusion drawn by the Greater-Good theodicians. Little proposes the Creation-Order theodicy as a better answer to the problem of evil. By integrating the concepts of creation-order, libertarian freedom, and the best of all possible worlds, Little claims to have developed a theodicy which affirms a Christian worldview that is internally consistent, provides for the existence of gratuitous evil, and maintains the sovereignty of God. According to the Creation-Order theodicy, there is an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good and sovereign God who allows gratuitous evil as a by-product of creating the best of all worlds.

Chapter 3

Strengths and Weaknesses of Major Greater-Good Theodicies Versus Creation-Order Theodicy

3.1 Introduction

The contention of Little is that selected Greater-Good theodicies are deficient in their ability to account for the evil which is seen in the world. In answering the problem from evil, Christian Greater-Good theodicies either deny the existence of gratuitous evil or appeal to a deficiency in an attribute of God, namely His omniscience (Little 2010:51). I will examine scholarship regarding the selected Greater-Good theodicies, delineating both strengths and weaknesses of the theodicies. Similarly, I will examine scholarship regarding the necessary components of Little's Creation-Order theodicy. I will conclude by summarizing my findings and explicating my response to Little's Creation-Order theodicy.

3.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of Major Greater-Good Theodicies

3.2.1 Strengths

Greater-Good theodicies attempt to maintain the "orthodox doctrine of God as both good and providentially sovereign in the face of evident evil" (Middleton 1997:86). Plantinga infers that the greater good of free will justifies the evil necessary for the good to obtain (Plantinga 1974:30). He reasons that "a world containing creatures who are significantly free is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures" (p. 30). God, although omnipotent, could not have actualized just any possible world. From His possible choices, the world which contained free will was the best. The actualization of such a world necessitates the possibility of bad choices from free moral creatures, and thus, the possibility of evil. Plantinga summarizes that "it is not within God's power to create a world containing moral good

without creating one containing moral evil" (p. 44). This moral good is exercised through the free will of moral creatures and this excising of the will is a greater good, which is worth the corollary evils. Stump agrees that "the possession of free will and the use of it do more good than evil" and the good is of such a value to outweigh the evil (Stump 1985:416).

Hick and Stump find character building as a greater good to be obtained from evil. Man, not being created as a morally mature being, has to be perfected (Hick 1975:218). This perfecting is what Hick refers to as soul-making (p. 218). Hick maintains that "within the providence of God" man will have his soul perfected by contrasting his "experience of good and evil to value the one for himself and to shun the other" (p. 220). Man must experience evil to mature moral virtues. According to Stump, Hick's theodicy suggests that the character building obtained via evil could be obtained without any moral or natural evils occurring (Stump 1985:417). While affirming the character building possibility of evil, Stump constructs her theodicy in a manner which makes the evil necessary, not optional. Stump offers that an "alteration from a destructive psychological state to a life-giving one" is a greater good to be obtained through particular evils (p. 417). She finds the changes in human beings brought on through the experience of evil as necessary to "union with God and life in Heaven" (p. 416).

Regarding the claim that the end justifies the means, Geisler argues that a distinction is necessary (Geisler 1988:379). A greater good obtaining does not justify God performing acts of evil, however, a greater good obtaining does justify God permitting acts of evil to occur. God can permit evil in order to obtain a greater good because God is omniscient and can foresee the outcome. Allowing free moral creatures to exercise their free will in committing evil acts enables God to bring about a greater good than would be realized without the free moral creatures having the ability to do evil. This type of end justifying the means is ethical for God but not always for humans. Humans do not have the same infinite foresight as God. Stump argues that humans suffer from a "spiritual equivalent of a terminal disease; they have a defect in the will which if not corrected will cost them life in Heaven and consign them to a

living death in hell" (Stump 1985:411). Stump supports the idea that God "can use suffering to cure an evil will," however, this ability cannot be applied equally to humans (p. 412). God as "parent-creator" has rights and responsibilities to His children that we as "sibling creatures" do not have (p. 413). Horrific suffering of children is justifiable under the theodicy of Stump (p. 410). Stump argues that the suffering of children should be seen in light of eternity. If a child was to suffer and die, then the child would be in heaven (p. 411). Thus, in the maintenance of the Christian view that death is not the ultimate evil, but a transition to another phase of existence, the suffering of the child, which culminates in that child going to Heaven, is justified by the end state.

3.2.2 Weaknesses

Little finds that the selected Greater-Good theodicies are circuitous in their logic (Little 2005:101). The theodicies argue that evil cannot count against God since God is good and He cannot permit evil. The premise assumes the conclusion.

The Greater-Good theodicies claim that an all-good and all-powerful God will not allow any evil from which He does not obtain a greater good or stop a greater evil. To prove this assertion, one must be able to demonstrate that in all cases of evil, God brings about a greater good. Little contends that this is an "empirically impossible task" (2005:101). In order to raise objections to any Greater-Good theodicy, all the opponent has to do is find any case where it is reasonable to conclude that a good did not obtain from a particular evil. Conversely, the Greater-Good theodacist must prove that the good obtains in all instances of evil. The burden of proof is on the party making the claim (p. 111). When good appears to come from an evil, it remains impossible to prove that in all cases the good could not have obtained without the evil transpiring. Little maintains that "there is no evidential proof that certain evil is necessary to a corollary good, or that all evil always obtains a greater good" (p. 112). MacGregor refers to the Greater-Good theodicies as absurd (MacGregor 2012:118). He states that the greater good attempts to transform the "universe into a philosophically overdetermined system, where hidden

benefits are needlessly assigned to all instances of ostensibly pointless evil therein" (p. 118). Further, Middleton claims that on the basis of the Greater-Good theodicies, evil would only be *prima facie*, since evil resulted in a greater good it would not be evil at all (Middleton 1997:86). He suggests that the crucifixion of Jesus is the ultimate example of *prima facie* evil.⁵ In lieu of what the death of Christ accomplished, how could the crucifixion be a true evil (p. 87)? Middleton finds that, per Augustine, all suffering is "justly deserved" and thus good (p. 89).

The argument for the greater good requires one to answer if the evil is necessary to the obtainment of the good or if the evil is incidental to the obtainment of the good (Little 2005:101). If the evil is necessary, then God's omnipotence is questioned. Is God incapable of bringing about a good without a particular evil predicating the good? If the evil is incidental, then on what justification does God allow the evil? If God could bring about the good without the evil, then why allow the evil? If the good is a necessary good and the evil is required to bring about the good, then "God must determine the evil in order to assure it will come to pass so that the good can obtain" (p. 112). God becomes necessarily responsible for the evil, not just in a contingent fashion. This diminishes the nature of God and destroys the free will defence. Accordingly, man did not rebel freely against God. God needed man to commit evil in order to bring about some good in the world. This destroys man's free will.

The sovereignty of God may be questioned when examined through the Greater-Good theodicies. Sovereignty is "best defined as divine autonomy. Because God is sovereign, He is the supreme ruler since all His pre-creation and creation choices were not influenced by anyone or anything outside Himself" (Little 2005:106). Using the example of adultery, does God sovereignly plan before creation for a person to commit adultery in order that God bring about a greater good? This would make God the author of sin. Further extrapolation would suggest that more sin would bring about more

⁵ Henri Blocher's, "*Evil and the Cross*" offers a study on the defeat of evil in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

good. This is antithetical to the teaching of the Bible; God would be willing the very thing which He condemns (p. 106). Little argues that this type of evil may be gratuitous. At best, not because of such evils but in spite of such evils, God still chooses to bring about a good. The evil is not the cause of the good obtaining.

Wykstra's CORNEA, the "Condition of Reasonable Epistemic Access," appeals to mystery to resolve theodicy (Wykstra 1984:152). Wykstra maintains that while the good always will obtain, in some cases it is beyond our ken. The assertion of CORNEA is that "one is entitled to claim, 'this suffering does not appear to serve any Divinely-purposed outweighing good' only if it is reasonable to believe that if such a Divinely-purposed good exists, it would be within our ken" (p. 157). Wykstra further explains that if there are Divinely-purposed goods, we should not expect to have the "needed seeability" to discern those goods. Wykstra argues that the "disparity between a creator's vision and ours" does not always allow for this seeability (1996:127). Little accepts that God sees things differently than man but questions how this applies to evil (Little 2005:108). If the good is going to obtain, then eventually the good must become evident, seeable. If the good obtained is removed by a great length of time from the necessary evil to obtain it, eventually someone would recognize the good and associate it with that evil. If the good obtained is too far removed from the necessary evil, one would have to question how it is known that the good is a consequent of that particular evil. If the good obtained is removed from the sufferer of the necessary evil, then this would go against the biblical teaching of "reward and recompense" (p. 108). If God sees things differently than man, how can man know if he is doing good? Man must have some understanding of the definition of good. Does Wykstra's argument suggest that "God sees justice or morality differently than man" (p. 109)? Stating that God sees things differently than man makes all definitions subject to interpretation.

Proof texts for the Greater-Good theodicies often are taken out of context. Romans 8:28 states, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose."

While this verse often is quoted in the context of the Greater-Good theodicies, this verse limits the good obtained to believers who love God. This is not a panacea for all evil. Little contends, "This verse does not teach the meticulous providence and should not be quoted as support for the G-G theodicy" (Little 2005:109). The context of Romans 8 would imply that the verse refers to suffering as a result of righteous living. In explaining Genesis 50:20, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today," Little argues that this verse is a narrative of the situation (p. 110). The verse is particular to a set of circumstances and does not state that God purposed the actions to take place but that He brought a good about in spite of what actions had taken place. Little cautions against building a doctrine based on a narrative text.

The Greater-Good theodicies imply that the end justifies the means. As long as a greater good is obtained, then the necessary evil is justified in being permitted by God. Friedman finds this incompatible with the "moral task which religion gives to God" (Friedman 1988:7). This line of thought also would undermine any attempt to stop a particular evil. If evil is the path by which good is obtained, then "it would seem best to let evil run its course, for in the end it will be good" (Little 2005:114). Little finds the logic to be in opposition to the Bible. He asks, "How can one reconcile the command to stop social injustice because God demands it and then suggest that God allows it because it will lead to a greater good?" (p. 116). Middleton concurs, applying this argument to "petitionary prayer and redemptive opposition to evil" (Middleton 1997:91). If one is to believe that all evil will result in a greater good, then why should one pray for the evil to be removed or modified? In opposing evil, Middleton asks, "If evil is necessary to some good, from whence would the motivation to oppose it come?" (p. 91). If a prayer asks God to stop a particular evil, the Greater-Good theodicies would imply that you may be asking God to stop a greater good from obtaining or asking that He allow a worse evil to take place (Little 2005:117). Flemming expounds, "The practice of prayer...would be pointless unless God were thought to intervene regularly in the course of events" (Flemming 1986:270). Romans 6:1-2 clarifies the biblical mandate, "What shall we say then? Are we to

continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!" Middleton concludes his opposition to the end justifies the means logic by stating that this line of thinking will result in a "paralysis rooted in a profound prospect of self-deception" (Middleton 1997:91). This self-deception is described as "living in the midst of a never-ending war, where one has continually to con oneself into accepting its justice...such self-deception leads inexorably to apathy and cuts the nerve of any possibility for opposition to evil and the transformation of the present order" (p. 93). Flemming finds that there is "no moral principle that requires us to let free agents succeed in bringing their evil designs to fruition" (Flemming 1986:267). It would be wrong for God not to intervene and stop evils if He could do so without any danger to Himself. For Hick and Stump, part of the greater good obtained is the soul-making or character building which is born of suffering from evil (Hick 1975:378; Stump 1985:416). Erlandson counters, referencing the Garden of Eden account in the Bible (Erlandson 1991:5). Erlandson finds that Adam had both faith and trust during his pre-sin time in the garden. These character traits did not require evil to obtain. Additionally, Erlandson questions the character traits which evil supposedly matures. If a trait such as courage is to be matured via evil, then the trait must have an eternal value. Erlandson states that one must be able to utilize this trait in Heaven for the trait to have enough value to justify the evil necessary for its maturation (p. 6). The end justifies the means as a rationalization for a Greater-Good theodicy is problematic for those Greater-Good theodicies which espouse open theism (Little 2005:116). For Greater-Good theodicies that hold to an openness view of God, such as those crafted by Swinburne and Peterson, the question would be how could God know that a particular evil is going to bring about a greater good, because God cannot know the future choices of His free moral agents. Openness would make God incapable of ensuring that any greater good would be obtained.

Greater-Good theodicies maintain that the greater good is obtained from evils. When one speaks of greater, the implication is a method of measurement, something must be greater than something else (Little 2005:121). It appears that the greater good is nebulous and lacks a quantitative or qualitative methodology for comparison. How is it determined that a good obtained is

greater than the evil necessary to produce the good? Little surmises, "There is no divine equation to use in order to know what good (or how much of a particular type) must obtain in order for it to be greater than the corollary evil" (p. 122).

The good obtained must be realized by the one who suffered the evil (Flemming 1986:266-267). Flemming posits that the "evil in the form of suffering must be defeated by good in the form of some benefit to individuals" (p. 267). Flemming argues that none of the available Greater-Good theodicies meet this criterion. He finds the "evil-to-benefit" relationship of the greater good argument to be very casual, and not a model for "justifying divine behaviour" (p. 267). In considering this potential failure of Greater-Good theodicies, Stump is trying to avoid building a theodicy which tells the "sufferer that God lets him suffer just for the sake of some abstract general good for mankind" (Stump 1985:411).

Flemming argues that mental evil is not addressed by Greater-Good theodicies (Flemming 1986:270). Matthew 5:28, "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart" and Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick," confirm that evil does not have to be acted out to be considered as evil. Little questions how a greater good could ever come from evils that reside only in the heart and mind of man (Little 2005:122).

Further undermining the Greater-Good argument is Middleton's assertion that the Greater-Good theodicies do not take our experience of evil seriously enough (Middleton 1997:90). Tilley would concur, arguing that evils are being disguised in academic discourse while humans are left to suffer (Tilley 1991:3). Tilley challenges the Christian church to change the "happy ending" of the greater good and until this is done, the teaching of the good which redeems evil will be "phony" and "ugly" (p. 213). Middleton examines the account of Job and finds that Job does not ignore the reality of the evil he experiences (Middleton 1997:99). Job's journey is made available to the reader as Job works through the "tortuous process" of acknowledging the evil

which is present in his life, to articulation of his lament, and finally to a position of not letting the real evil have the final word in his life. Summing up the criticism, Middleton finds that the Greater-Good theodicies cannot “account for the human experience of irreducible evil” and fail to “justify a central strand of biblical texts” (pp. 90, 99).

3.3 Strengths and Weaknesses of Little's Creation-Order Theodicy

3.3.1 Creation-Order

In this discussion, I will talk about the strengths and weaknesses of Little's Creation-Order theodicy as it relates to creation-order. Little defines creation-order as “what establishes the moral and physical parameters (terms and conditions) by which God is able to have a meaningful person-to-person relationship with mankind” (Little 2010:85). Creation-order is, likewise, what makes it possible for man to respond freely in love to God. In constructing creation-order, the “providence of God assures the fulfilment of the counsels of God,” simultaneously assuring the libertarian freedom of man (p. 86). This arrangement allows for the choices of man to influence history without overriding the counsels of God. Firstly, the strengths of such a creation-order are that it recognizes and preserves the ontological difference between God and man. MacGregor finds the concept that the uncreated God cannot transfer to His created beings the attribute of His perfection foundational to theodicy (MacGregor 2005:1). The very fact that the beings are created makes them limited. The limited beings, while not perfect, are “very good” according to Genesis 1:31, “And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” Little's creation-order recognizes this ontological difference and illustrates the means by which necessary God and contingent man can be in relationship. Olson, likewise, supports creation-order (Olson 2010:1). Creation-order holds that God is self-limiting. This self-limitation is evident particularly in the incarnation and covenant agreements. Divine determinism is avoided with the employment of creation-order and divine self-limitation. Through creation-order, God limits Himself for the “sake of our free will” (Olson 2009:44). If one is to deny that God is the author of sin, argues Olson, it is logically imperative to believe in the self-limitation of God via His

creation-order (2010:2). Creation-order also affects the doctrine of salvation. Creation-order supports a prevenient grace (Olson 2017:6). This doctrine of salvation reflects both the libertarian freedom of man and the character of God. Referring to the gift of salvation, Olson points out that "a gift received is still a gift even if it is received freely and could have been rejected" (p. 6). Creation-order attributes the good gift of salvation to God's character without attributing the "reality that some are not saved" to God's perfect will but instead to His permissive will (p. 7).

The self-limitation of God, which is essential to creation-order, is viewed as a weakness by some scholars (Fouts 1993; Hendryx 2018; Highfield 2002). Haas argues that "human decision making and divine determination" are not at the same level and should not be treated as such (Haas 2011:13). Haas finds that embracing the self-limitation of God is to deny God's sovereignty. God's sovereignty does not undermine human decisions but supports them. Additionally, Haas finds that the logical outcome of a self-limiting God to be that God's justice and holiness are threatened (p. 13).

Little rejects any form of evolutionism and his creation-order stands in opposition to evolution (Little 2017:1). Creation-order places the fall of man ahead of the natural evils in the world (Little 2005:139). Denying Little's creation-order, Dembski believes that God had to preemptively create evils in the natural world prior to the fall of man (Dembski 2007:42). Because God knew that man would sin, God created a world that was defective to accommodate the sins of man (p. 42). Embracing a form of evolution, Dembski finds that "for hundreds of millions of years, multicelled animals have been emerging, competing, fighting, killing, parasitizing, torturing, suffering, and going extinct" (p. 49). This is in direct contrast to the order of creation described in Genesis. Dembski compares the retroactive effects of the cross to his suggested retroactive effects of the sin of man. He suggests that as there was a retroactive effect of the crucifixion and subsequent resurrection of Christ, the Old Testament saints were able to attain salvation through faith in a future event. Likewise, there was a retroactive effect of the sin of man, namely the causation of natural evils (p. 50). Dembski finds that natural evil

predated the existence of man. Dembski's order of evolution stands in stark contrast to Little's creation-order. Little's creation-order does not allow for an evolutionary explanation of evil. Finding any theory of macroevolution to be invalid, including forms of theistic evolution, I would agree with Little's creation-order. Creation-order not only prescribes the intersection between necessary God and contingent man, it reflects the biblical account.

Hasker has developed a natural order in contrast to Little's creation-order. While Little's creation-order ascribes evil as the result of the fall of man, Hasker's natural order does not (Hasker 2008:139; Little 2005:139). Hasker begins by stating that it is a good thing that there is a world, the world being the total of all things which exist other than God (Hasker 2008:122). The creator, God, may incur some costs by choosing to create this world in lieu of not creating a world at all (p. 123). As we are human, understanding the cost to God for creation is beyond our knowledge. Hasker finds that the created world is a multileveled natural world. By this, he reasons that created entities exist at various levels of complexities, both in their "internal structure and, more importantly, in their causal powers" (p. 123). Natural world means that "the entities act and interact in accordance with their inherent causal powers, as opposed to being manipulated by some other, presumably 'higher,' being" (p. 123). This natural world, while making possible much good, also makes possible a considerable amount of evil. There is no reason to think that any other type of natural ordering would allow for a greater volume of good to be present versus the amount of evil experienced. Natural evil is not the result of the fall of man, sin (p. 139). Natural evil "is the result of the overall order of the cosmos, an order which, taken as a whole, is good and admirable" (p. 140). The natural world has not been flawed by the sin of man. To say that it has been would be to say that the "world of nature we know is not God's good creation" (p. 203). By contrast, Little's creation-order maintains that the fall of man predated the natural evil found in the world (2005:142). Little clearly follows the biblical text in his ordering of events. The fall predated sin and death. In Romans 5:12 we read, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." In Genesis 3, God speaks to Adam, telling him that the

ground will be cursed because of Adam's sin. Contrary to Hasker's position, Genesis 1:31 states, "And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good." I surmise that Little's creation-order fits the biblical narrative whereas, Hasker's does not.

3.3.2 Libertarian Freedom

Little opts for the term libertarian freedom will in lieu of free will (Little 2010:14). To argue that the will is absolutely free is a difficult task. One may be faced with choices, which are influenced by antecedent choices and events. One may not be free to make any choice he would like, as all options may not be available or possible. Libertarian freedom realizes that man has the ability to make free choices within the options permitted. God may limit the choices a man has but not the ability of the man to choose. This differentiation between free will and libertarian freedom and the endorsement of the latter is a strength to Little's creation-order theodicy. A libertarian understanding of freedom supports creation-order, recognizing that there is an ontological difference between God and man (p. 85). Man cannot make any choice he wants to, as he is a contingent being. God, being the necessary being, has allowed man to make free choices within a range of permitted options. This is representative of the interactive between God and man. Hasker supports this understanding of libertarian freedom, which he terms libertarian free will (Hasker 2008:150). Hasker asserts that the vast majority of Christian philosophers maintain a libertarian understanding of free will. In contrast to libertarian freedom, Hasker believes the compatibilists' view to be attractive to many modern philosophers who wish to maintain the idea that God decrees everything that happens. This is a strict interpretation of divine sovereignty. Compatibilist free will requires that "everything we do is causally determined, either by the strongest motive or by physical causes (p. 150). With this understanding of compatibilism, everything we do is "determined by immutable divine decrees" (p. 150). This definition is compatible with the theological idea of divine sovereignty and predestination, we "freely choose to do exactly what God has predestined us to do" (p. 150). By contrast, the definition of libertarian free will is when a person freely chooses to act or not

act. The choice to act or not act must be entirely within the person's ability to choose; it cannot be predetermined in any sense (p. 150). One of the major strengths of libertarian freedom is in relationship to the problem of evil. To address the problem of moral evil adequately, Hasker insists that the libertarian understanding of free will is essential (p. 152). Little would go so far as to say that without a libertarian understanding of free will, it would be impossible for man to even love God (Little 2010:86). Agreeing with Little, Hick goes so far as to say that in order to be in relationship with God, man must be "endowed with the uncontrollable gift of freedom" (1978:302). Love is a volitional decision that requires judgment and cannot be predetermined by an external source. Under the compatibilist view, a person may be held responsible for his moral actions yet in reality it was not he who chose the actions; they were predetermined for him to choose (Hasker 2008:153). Compatibilism ultimately infers that God is responsible for evil since it is God who determined the choices of man (p. 151). The libertarian sense of free will eliminates this conflict, holding the person responsible for the moral choices that he freely makes. Swinburne concurs with this understanding of libertarian free will, asserting that "the natural primitive understanding of 'free will' is as libertarian free will (1998:40). Creation-order sets the limits for the choices available to man and God knows the choices man will make via his libertarian freedom, however, God does not determine the choices for man (Little 2010:14, 87). Peterson echoes Little's thoughts on libertarian freedom, stating that this world requires the "uncoerced concurrence of significantly free creatures" (1998:41). The omnipotent God has chosen to limit Himself by bestowing upon His significantly free creatures the ability to make free choices. I agree with Little on the strength of the libertarian freedom position and see that it is necessary to theodicy because it removes God from being responsible for the decisions man makes, hence, God is not responsible for the evil man chooses to perpetrate. By eliminating God as the author of evil, man justifiably becomes morally culpable for his decisions. To hold men responsible for their choices, God must allow them to choose freely.

Unlike Little, Phillips does not embrace an absolute libertarian free will view, one in which people are free under all circumstances to decide one way or

another (Phillips 2005:72). Phillips finds Little's libertarian freedom to be a weak explanation for evil in particular cases. Phillips argues, "In individual cases, God seemed to have sent too much suffering, and freedom to choose is crushed" (p. 74). Offering the Holocaust as a prime example of a horrific evil, Phillips contends that the victims of the Holocaust did not have the freedom to make any choices; they were victims of the choices of others. Libertarian free will did not exist in that instance (p. 76). Phillips finds that theodocists, such as Little, often resort to generalizations, citing libertarian free will in lieu of explanations in particular instances. Little would argue that libertarian freedom does exist, even in the case of horrific evils (Little 2010:111-112). To ask God to eliminate horrific evils requires a judgment call on which evil is more horrific than another. Taken to its logical extension, this would result in the extermination of all evils or the consequences of evils. This violates the biblical principle of cause and effect. Genesis 6:7 states, "So the Lord said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.'" The other possible way to eliminate all horrific evils is for God to allow people to make only good choices (p. 112). This would violate any form of freedom for man. Additionally, Little would argue that God is not obligated to intervene to stop horrific evils. He may choose to do so, bringing about a good result in spite of the intended evil, but He is not obligated to do such. Contrary to Phillips, Little finds that God could not stop all horrific evils without "impinging on man's libertarian freedom" (p. 112). Little would suggest that when confronted with horrific evils due to the "brokenness of this age," man still has the ability to exercise his libertarian freedom and "respond in such a way that his testimony in suffering points people to God" (p. 117).

Christensen and Hendryx hold positions antithetical to libertarian freedom. Christensen states that if a libertarian understanding of free will is correct, "then God is limited in His sovereignty" (2016:7). Libertarian freedom is a weakness when considering God's attribute of sovereignty. Little, explaining his position on libertarian freedom, sees that God is exhibiting His sovereignty by choosing to confer libertarian freedom upon man (2005:166). In

sovereignly choosing libertarian freedom, God self-limits His exercise of power to the creation-order which He established. To defy the creation-order would be for God to go against Himself. In honouring libertarian free choices, God is honouring His Word and covenant agreements with man. Hendryx adopts a strong anti-libertarian freedom position, finding it to be a weakness that undermines the biblical understanding of salvation (2018:1). If libertarian freedom was correct, then man would not need the Holy Spirit in the salvation process. The Bible states in John 6:44, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." Libertarian freedom requires a prevenient grace where man can either "choose or reject Christ, a choice undetermined by any desires or nature" (Hendryx 2018:2). Hendryx defines true freedom not as libertarian freedom but as a compatibilist ability to be free to do what is pleasing to God. Little argues that within creation-order, God can use persuasion to influence the decision of man without violating man's libertarian freedom (2010:93). Saul of Tarsus is a prime example of the extreme persuasion God may choose to use but without violating Saul's libertarian freedom. According to Hendryx, libertarian freedom is not scriptural (Hendryx 2018:6). He asserts that there is no passage in the Bible which states that our will is independent of God's plan. Instead, Hendryx presents proof texts such as Acts 2:23, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (p. 7). While ordaining the act, God likewise holds the perpetrators guilty for their actions. Little's position is that God's foreknowledge of an event does not equal God's determination of that event (Little 2010:109). God has crafted creation-order so that "real human choices bring real consequences without negating the counsels of God" (p. 109). God can bring good out of an evil in spite of that evil. I find that Little has offered compelling arguments to overcome the objections of Christensen and Hendryx.

3.3.3 Best of All Possible Worlds

A necessary component of Little's best of all possible worlds is middle knowledge. Hasker, Phillips, and Peterson agree that theory of divine middle knowledge is a weakness for theodicy and is not a plausible theory (Hasker

2008:176; Phillips 2005:102; Peterson 1998:73). Little asserts that middle knowledge and the actualization of the best of all possible worlds is a theory which offers “harmony between divine sovereignty and true human power of moral choice without any appeal to mystery” (Little 2005:148). Prior to the actualization of any world, God can see what free choices man will make in any instance. Once God actualizes any world, the choices which man makes are set; the world becomes a playing out of the choices which God foreknew that man would make freely (p. 148). This construct protects both the doctrine of providence and of libertarian freedom. God’s middle knowledge is comprehensive and His nature good. Knowing all counterfactuals, He then is obligated by His knowledge and nature to pick the best of all possible worlds to actualize. Hasker enumerates multiple weaknesses regarding middle knowledge. He finds that the theory of divine middle knowledge is “a hindrance and an obstacle to a viable doctrine of divine providence” and to constructing a viable theodicy (Hasker 2008:176). Phillips rejects the plausibility of Little’s theory of middle knowledge and thus the best of all possible worlds theory (Phillips 2005:102). Phillips, in denying middle knowledge, asserts that the future is not something which exists, therefore, even God cannot know that which does not exist. Phillips concludes his argument by stating that the concept of middle knowledge is “itself an illusion” thus making the assertion that this is the best of all possible worlds illusive as well (Phillips 2005:105). Similarly, Peterson states that God can know only things that are logically possible for Him to know, and the future choices of free moral agents are not logically possible to know (1998:73). Little would argue that Phillips and Peterson have committed to open theism by stating that God cannot know the future choices of His free moral agents (Little 2005:116). Regarding the future choices of free moral agents, Little states, “If God does not know the outcome of the future moral choices of His moral creatures, He cannot possibly know the consequences of those choices, therefore, He will not know which choices to permit and which ones to prevent” (p. 166). If God did not know the future choices of man, then how could God know which goods and which evils to permit? Little offers as proof text the biblical account of King Saul in 1 Samuel 13:13-14, “...You have done

foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which He commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue" (Little 2010:94). The text clearly illustrates that God knew if Saul had chosen to be faithful, then Saul would have retained his kingdom. This knowledge that God had of the counterfactuals is illustrative of middle knowledge. I do agree with Little's argument for divine middle knowledge and find it to be a critical component for a cohesive theodicy because it explains how God is omnibenevolent in choosing the best world. God weighed all counterfactuals for each individual, allowing for every opportunity in which an individual may have chosen to follow Christ. Middle knowledge answers the question, "Why did God create someone whom He knew would go to hell?" Middle knowledge assures that all possible counterfactuals were considered in actualizing a world so that each person would have the best situation actualized based on their best libertarian freedom decisions. The strength of middle knowledge appears to be in the selection of which world to actualize.

Regarding the definition of the best of all possible worlds, Little states that the best cannot be measured entirely upon the "standard of human felicity" but instead upon the "moral entailments of the Kingdom of God itself" (Little 2010:99). He further qualifies his definition to include an "optimal relationship between good and evil as defined by the Kingdom of God" (p. 99). Little's position is that if God did not create the best of all possible worlds, then God's goodness would come into question (Little 2005:153). Erlandson denies that this is the best of all possible worlds based on the definition of best (Erlandson 1991:6). He finds any theodicy, to include Little's, that is based on the concept of best of all possible worlds to be fatally flawed. The flaw is the assumption that the world should be created in a manner that is best for man. Erlandson's argument suggests that Little's best of all possible worlds places too much emphasis on what is good for man. Erlandson asserts that a proper theodicy must rest on the belief that "God's purpose in creating this world is to most fully manifest His glory and that the world He created accomplishes this purpose" (p. 6). Erlandson defends his position on the basis of Romans 9:22-23:

What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of His glory for vessels of mercy, which He has prepared beforehand for glory.

Erlandson maintains that the world was actualized in a manner which best exhibits God's "righteousness, justice, mercy, and grace" (p. 6). Only a world where man falls from goodness to sin would allow the stated attributes of God to manifest fully. Righteousness and justice can be manifested only when goodness is rewarded and evil is punished. Mercy and grace can be demonstrated only when the recipients of such are unworthy to receive. Erlandson concludes, "God has ordained evil" in order to display His attributes in such a manner that would otherwise be impossible (p. 6). Little's counter to Erlandson would be that if God ordained evil to display His attributes in a most elaborate way, then a future existence in a sinless Heaven would not be feasible. If the only way God can magnify Himself is through evil, then He would need evil in Heaven (Little 2005:124). I do find that Little's definition of best is a weakness in his argument, yet not for the same reason as Erlandson. Little appeals to an optimal relationship between good and evil but does not give a quantitative or qualitative means of determining that relationship. How does one measure this relationship in order to deem a particular world the best? I believe that Little has failed to answer that question adequately.

MacGregor, Craig, Geisler, and Corduan all embrace the doctrine of *Scientia media*, middle knowledge (MacGregor 2005:5; Craig 1999:45; Geisler 1985:352). MacGregor finds Little's account of how God chooses which world to actualize and his treatment of sovereign predestination to be a weakness in his theodicy (2005:5). MacGregor offers a revised sequence and explanation of the criteria for the world which God chooses to actualize, protecting both sovereign predestination and libertarian freedom. This revised sequence and explanation seek to marry Calvinist predestination and libertarian free will. MacGregor's best of all possible worlds begins with the acknowledgement that God, through His natural knowledge, knows the "infinite range of possible worlds" (p. 5). The range of possible worlds is then narrowed to the infinite

range of lower order feasible worlds. A lower order feasible world is one in which God has, through His middle knowledge, considered what every "possible individual would freely do in every conceivable set of circumstances" (p. 3). The lower order feasible world range is narrowed further to the set of "all-gracious feasible worlds" (p. 5). An all-gracious feasible world is one in which God has granted every individual sufficient grace for salvation. MacGregor further stipulates that God must choose the set of all-gracious feasible worlds in which there is an "optimal balance between belief and unbelief, containing no more of the lost than is necessary to achieve the maximum number of the saved" (p. 5). The necessity of this criteria also is espoused by Craig (1995:9). Like MacGregor, Craig is a proponent of the middle knowledge of God (1999:45). Here is a major difference in Little's definition of best of all possible worlds. Little only requires that there be an "optimal relationship between good and evil as defined by the Kingdom of God" (2010:99). MacGregor and Craig have put stricter parameters on their definition of best, that being the "optimal balance between belief and unbelief" (MacGregor 2005:5; Craig 1995:9). Ultimately narrowing the range of potential worlds, MacGregor establishes a set of worlds called "salvific-moral optimal worlds" (2005:5). God now is choosing from an infinite range of "equally good all-gracious feasible worlds, each of which reaches the optimal balance between saved and lost and contains no more evil than is necessary to produce that balance" (MacGregor 2005:5). Upon defining the set of worlds from which God can choose, MacGregor suggests that the term "best feasible world" is more accurate than Little's "best of all possible worlds." Little argues that there is only one best of all possible worlds, for if God did not do His best then "what is created lacks some logically possible perfection" (2010:98). MacGregor finds this differentiation to be substantive for it does not limit God to having only one world which is the best and which He can actualize but instead, provides a range of feasible worlds from which God can choose to actualize (2005:5). This is essential in the task of simultaneously protecting both the Calvinist sovereign predestination doctrine and that of libertarian freedom. Within the set of salvific-moral optimal worlds, God knows that there is at least one world where each individual, "P," will freely become a believer,

a world where "P" will freely reject the gospel, and a world where "P" does not exist at all. At the juncture, MacGregor postulates that for every conceivable world in which "P" is lost and "receives only general revelation and is saved in at least one salvific-moral optimal world not on the basis of general revelation but only after receiving special revelation, God discards from the infinite range of salvific-moral optimal world every world where "P" exists" (p. 6). This leaves God with a subset of worlds from which to choose in which each "P" would exist under one of two available conditions. If "P" is lost in any world where "P" only receives general revelation, then "P" also would be lost in any world where "P" receives special revelation, for special revelation can only be appropriated via general revelation. Optionally, if "P" is saved in any world only if receiving special revelation, then "P" also would be saved in any world where "P" received only general revelation. MacGregor has built this part of his argument based on Craig's interpretation of Romans 2:7, "To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, He will give eternal life" (p. 6). Craig interprets this verse to mean that on the basis of Romans 1-2, regarding persons who are uninformed or misinformed about Christ, salvation is accessible universally (Craig 1995:7). For "God judges persons who have not heard the gospel on the basis of God's general revelation in nature and conscience. Were they to respond to the much lower demands placed on them by general revelation, God would give them eternal life (Rom. 2.7) [Craig 1995:7]. Craig interprets Romans 2:7 as a "bona fide offer of salvation" (MacGregor 1995:6). In recapitulation, for every "P," "reprobation or election can occur only in what we now denominate 'salvifically comparable worlds'" (p. 6). God now chooses one of these salvifically comparable worlds to actualize. In making His decision, God "chooses for each feasible individual in that world to be either elect, reprobate, or non-existent, without respect to how any given person would respond to grace" (MacGregor 1995:6). Based on the listed criterion, no one in the actualized world who hears and accepts salvation would have to worry about what would have happened to them if they had been actualized in a different world. Similarly, for those who reject salvation in the actualized world – either through general or special revelation – they would have rejected salvation in

any salvifically comparable world. God predestines through the vehicle of His choosing a world to actualize. Libertarian freedom is maintained because in each salvifically comparable world, "P" is freely making the decision to accept or reject general or special revelation. This structure is what MacGregor would consider to be the range of feasible worlds, particularly salvifically comparable worlds. This structure and associated terminology address weaknesses which MacGregor finds in the structure and terminology of Little's best of all possible worlds proposal (p. 7). With Little's best of all possible worlds theory, there could be an unactualized world where "P" would be saved but in the world actualized, "P" is not saved. MacGregor's stipulations eliminate this possibility. I find that Little's definition of the best of all possible worlds and the criterion which God would use to select such a world are deficient. Being an omnibenevolent God, He would want as many people to be saved as would possibly come to Him. MacGregor's criterion is in harmony with that omnibenevolence.

Little's concept of the best of all possible worlds defines the world as existing from the point of creation to the Kingdom which is to come (2010:97). While the world may have different periods of time which are considered ages, the whole existence is still one world. In contrast to Little, Geisler and Corduan advocate for the concept of this world being the best of all possible ways to achieve the best possible world (Geisler 1988:313). In addressing the best of all possible worlds question, Geisler and Corduan begin with a question: "If God will produce in the end a condition for free creatures where there will be no more sinning, why did He not make it this way from the beginning?" (Geisler 1988:307). If there be no sin in Heaven (Rev. 21-22), why did God not start the world out this way? In answering this question, the attributes of the Christian theists' God are recounted. God, being an "all-loving, all-knowing, all-powerful" God, chose to create a world in which free moral creatures ultimately would choose to bring evil upon themselves (p. 309). God, true to His attributes, still chose to create this type of world. Geisler and Corduan contend that this world we live in is not the best of all possible worlds, but it is the best way for God to bring about the best possible world (p. 333). They argue that a world with a greater number of moral virtues is better

than one with less, and a world with a greater attainment of moral virtues is better than a world with less (p. 347). Certain virtues, such as forgiveness and mercy, can be made manifest only in the presence of sin and evil, the evil being the mechanism to heighten the functioning and perfecting of such virtues. On this point, Geisler and Corduan conclude that "unless an imperfect world is permitted, the perfect world cannot become a reality" (p. 349). This argument for moral perfection is similar to Hick's soul-making (Hick 1975:290). Based on the above argument, Geisler and Corduan surmise that it is a greater good that morally free creatures learn for themselves (Geisler 1988:351). If, on the contrary, God had created free moral creatures with a mass infusion of goodness, it would have been detrimental to the free will of those creatures, using persuasion in lieu of letting one make an uncompelled choice. Little would argue that soul-making could only possibly be effective if the evil suffered brings about a good for the person who suffered the evil (2005:120). Additionally, Little poses the question, "How can one know that the good of soul-making came at the experience of a particular evil?" Little finds that the link between the evil suffered and any evaluation of soul-making cannot be "demonstrated evidentially" (2005:120). Geisler and Corduan, holding to the soul-making aspect of evil contend that this current world is one where good and evil are a necessary condition (Geisler 1988:352). The condition is the determination of who will choose good and who will choose evil. There will be a world that follows this one, that world finalizing the decisions of the will which each person makes in this world. In Heaven, there will be an inability to sin, "the loss of free choice," permanentizing the choices a person made in this world to choose to accept God. Those who choose contrary to God will, likewise, have the choices of their will permanentized in Hell. Hell will be a place where one is free from the "perturbations of love" (p. 360). Based on the soul-making value of evil, Geisler and Corduan find that this world is the "best way" for God to achieve the best world, a future when a "perfect world is achieved" (p. 356). Little defines world as "all of creation – from the day of creation to the day of the final realization of the Kingdom" (Little 2010:96). Little further stipulates that the Kingdom to come does not "constitute another world," "Christ came to redeem this world and not another"

(p. 97). All of existence, in the created world and in the future Kingdom, are considered when claiming this to be the best of all possible worlds, a collective definition. In contrast, Geisler and Corduan have compartmentalized the timeframes of existence, finding this created (actualized) world to be the best way to achieve the final world (Geisler 1988:356). This present world is not the best of all possible worlds (p. 377). God could not create a "perfect physical world" first because the type of world which we have (the present physical world), was necessary for the attainment of higher moral values. The perfectibility of such virtues is unobtainable in any other type of physical world. Any evils allowed in the world, be they metaphysical, moral or natural, are the minimum number of evils necessary for God to allow in order to obtain the final, perfect world. While the definitions are related closely and ultimately whether one chooses the world as a continuum or the world as a best way to the final world, the cumulative total represents a set of actualized counterfactuals. I find that Geisler and Corduan, in compartmentalizing the current world from the future Kingdom world, have allowed for a better definition of best. Little's definition is deficient due to the inability of qualitatively or quantitatively exhibiting criterion for what is best. A world without sin and with constant communion with God would be the best situation. Also, Geisler and Corduan have identified a mechanism effectively for obtaining the best world, which they have termed the best way. By differentiating the mechanism from the goal, I believe that Geisler and Corduan have provided a theory which is easier to understand and best describes the actual conditions. I would conclude that Little's definition of the best possible world is inferior to that of Geisler and Corduan's eschatological definition because in separating the best way to obtain the best world, Geisler and Corduan have enabled themselves to construct a qualitative definition of what the best world is. The best world is that of the future, perfect world where there is no sin.

3.3.4 Creation-Order Theodicy

Little's Creation-Order theodicy affirms the attributes of God, creation-order, libertarian freedom, middle knowledge and the best of all possible worlds, and

the existence of gratuitous evil (Little 2010:85, 94,103). MacGregor finds the structure of the Creation-Order theodicy to be of value but needing further refinement (MacGregor 2005:7). Little's use of middle knowledge and the acknowledgement of the existence of gratuitous evil are primary in MacGregor's support of the Creation-Order theodicy (p. 1). While acknowledging that man does use his power of choice to choose against God, in the creation-order, Little argues that man's uniqueness "should be celebrated as a wonderful creation of God" (2010:108). This truth has been belittled by "the present-day theological excesses of the doctrine of total depravity" (p. 108). The misuse of the gift of choice should not deter from celebrating who man is essentially. MacGregor seeks to refine the middle knowledge argument offered by Little to include not only those who embrace an Arminian libertarian free will doctrine, but also those of Calvinistic predestination doctrine (2005:1). To overcome Little's preclusion of Calvinism, MacGregor seeks to redefine the process by which God chooses which world (2005:7). While I find merit in MacGregor's criterion for which world God would actualize, I do not find that it eliminates the struggle between Calvinistic predestination and Arminian libertarian free will. MacGregor redefines predestination as God permanentizing the choices which His free moral agents would make. This is not a Calvinistic definition of predestination. That being said, MacGregor's system of actualizing a world maximizes the number of those who are saved. Little's system could potentially eliminate the actualization of the only world in which some would be saved. This potential elimination of a world in which some would be saved is an obvious shortcoming in Little's theodicy.

Little's Creation-Order theodicy embraces a belief in the existence of gratuitous evil. Borofsky agrees with some tenets of Little's Creation-Order theodicy. Little's Creation-Order theodicy allows for gratuitous evil, which addresses issues that Greater-Good theodicies are at a loss to do (Borofsky 2011:6). In the Creation-Order theodicy, God may allow some good to obtain after an associated evil, but the evil is not necessary to the good; God brings about the good in spite of the evil, not because of the evil (p. 5). Likewise, the Creation-Order theodicy allows for "a world where someone's will is so

perverse that he just wants to destroy everything” (p. 6). This acknowledgement of gratuitous evil and the associated covenant agreements regarding libertarian freedom offers answers to issues that traditional Greater-Good theodicies do not. However, Borofsky does not find that Little has developed the perfect theodicy. Borofsky holds to the belief that God allows evil for the perfecting of the soul (p. 6). Little is quick to point out that his theodicy does not preclude some sort of soul-making or character building. He only stipulates that it is not mandatory for God bring about any good from evil (2005:170). Citing the account of the cross, Borofsky insists that “God is not ultimately reliant or responsible for evil, but does rely on the evil if He chooses to actualize a world in which He displays the ultimate act of love to free will creatures” (2011:7). Borofsky contends that the most problematic weakness of the Creation-Order theodicy is that it does not allow for “God to allow the absence of His goodness in some situations where it is necessary” (p. 7). Again, citing the account of the cross, there are some goods which cannot obtain unless there is a lack of good initially; there is no “reason for the incarnation unless there is a fall of humanity” (p. 7). If Little’s theodicy requires that no evil is necessary, then how is the necessity of the cross explained? Little, regarding the cross, refers to the creation-order (2005:165). Within creation-order, God in the person of Jesus Christ, became man without “forfeiting His eternality” (p. 165). Being a man, Christ submitted to the will of men and also to the will of the Father. In Matthew 26:39 we are told that Christ prayed to the Father, “Not my will but yours be done” (p. 140). Although evil was perpetrated, God was able to bring good in spite of the evil. Little observes, “Jesus used His human will to bring about a great good” (p. 168). God the Father did not intervene when the choice was made to crucify His Son because the Father chose to honour the covenant restrictions, which He freely entered into within creation-order. The Father did not lose the power to intervene. Instead, He kept His self-restricting word and did not intervene (p. 143). Countering Borofsky’s criticism, Little reiterates that his theodicy does not deny that in some cases good can come out of evil. He maintains that if a good does obtain, it does not provide moral justification in God allowing the evil but may be indicative of the providential work of God to

reverse the evil intent (p. 170). I find that Little's counters to Borofsky's criticisms are cogent. The weaknesses which Borofsky enumerated are answered equitably. Borofsky appears to have lost sight of Little's objective to illustrate that some evil is gratuitous but does not count against the sovereignty of God.

The existence of gratuitous evil is essential to Little's Creation-Order theodicy. It is the insistence on gratuitous evil that Inman finds implausible, finding it to undermine the Creation-Order theodicy (Inman 2013:10). Inman asserts that scripturally, there is no morally sufficient justification for God allowing any gratuitous evil (p. 11). To the contrary, Little argues that the Greater-Good theodicy is in the position of not having scriptural basis for the claims that "all evil in this world as necessary to the obtaining of some greater good or to prevent some evil" (2005:125). Little's position is that there is no evidence to back up the Greater-Good theodicy claims and no way to demonstrate to the absolute nature of the greater good always obtaining. Additionally, Inman argues that in Creation-Order theodicy, God is necessary and man is contingent, and by contingent, man is therefore, less than perfect (2013:12). Inman makes an extrapolated leap by concluding that this lack of being carries the logical consequence of insisting everything that is not "identical to God is intrinsically evil" (p. 12). Further, since creation-order holds that God cannot create anything as good as Himself, then by implication, everything that God creates "or could possibly create is intrinsically evil" (p. 12). Little's counter to Inman is that "creation did not necessitate evil's existence, it only made it possible" (2005:135). Further, God and man are ontologically different, yet man's mind is patterned after God's mind (pp. 36, 138). This mind, via libertarian freedom, is not programmed in a predetermined fashion but chooses whether to accept what God reveals. It is in choosing contrary to God's will that moral evil is made possible, but it is not necessary. I find it interesting that both Inman and Little have appealed to the evidence of Scripture to question the legitimacy of the opposing theodicy. Considering the absence of definitive proof, I would submit that Little has as solid a position as Inman concerning the question of gratuitous evil. Regarding man and his

intrinsic nature, I find Little's argument to be coherent and biblical. Sin did not enter the world until man chose to reject what God had revealed.

Gould insists that Little's Creation-Order theodicy is a veiled Greater-Good theodicy (Gould 2014:461). Creation-Order theodicy rests on the assertion that God abides by His created order in allowing humans to make free choices with accompanying consequences (Little 2005:142). In allowing humans this type of free choice, humans may choose to commit evil, even gratuitous evil. Gould concludes that by the very premises of the Creation-Order theodicy, it is a Greater-Good theodicy. The value of freedom of the human is the greater good to be obtained at the cost of associated evils (Gould 2014:461). Little differentiates the Creation-Order theodicy from the Greater-Good theodicies based on the moral justification of God in permitting the evil (2005:124). For a theodicy to be a Greater-Good theodicy, two things must occur within the structure. Firstly, any evil must be the will of God, therefore, God wills sin even though He says not to sin. Secondly, the greater good must always obtain and if good is obtained via evil, then it is better to have a world with evil. These two necessary components of a Greater-Good theodicy lead Little to claim that a Greater-Good theodicy "contains difficulties at best and inconsistencies at worse...the greater good premise itself is dubious" (2005:125). I find that Gould makes an interesting point in classifying Little's Creation-Order theodicy as a Greater-Good theodicy, the overarching good being the libertarian freedom of man. However, there is a difference which I contend would keep Little's Creation-Order theodicy from being a Greater-Good theodicy. In the Creation-Order theodicy, libertarian freedom existed before the fall of man. Therefore, the existence of evil, which Gould associates with the presence of libertarian freedom, is not a necessary condition. Libertarian freedom makes evil a possibility, but obviously not a necessity. For this reason, I do not think Little's theodicy is a Greater-Good theodicy. The good obtained, libertarian freedom, was obtained before the evil of the fall.

3.4 Conclusion and Summary of Findings

Little's creation-order finds its strength in the recognition of the ontological difference between God and man, establishing the mechanism by which they can be in relationship (Little 2010:85). Further, the creation-order stipulates that God must be self-limiting (Olson 2010:1). While some scholars see this self-limitation of God as a weakness when considering His sovereignty, I find that the self-limitation of God fits the biblical account and relieves God of the responsibility of ordaining evil (Fouts 1993:21; Hendryx 2018:7; Highfield 2002:286). Creation-order negates any form of macroevolution (Little 2017:1). I consider the lack of capitulation to evolution a strength of creation-order. Contrary to Hasker's natural order, Little's creation-order parallels the biblical ordering of the fall and the consequence of sin (Hasker 2008:203; Little 2005:142).

Little's concept of libertarian freedom has considerable strengths within the theodicy framework. Supported by the creation-order, libertarian freedom recognizes that man is limited ontologically and does not have free will to do whatever he would like (Little 2010:14). Instead, man can choose freely between the options that God affords him. This understanding of libertarian freedom makes it possible for man to choose freely to love God. Libertarian freedom removes the onus of evil from God, as opposed to the compatibilist view that God has ordained evil and thus, is responsible for it (Hasker 2008:151). Moral choices become the full responsibility of man via libertarian freedom.

Objections to libertarian freedom include the inability of libertarian freedom to account for horrific evils, its assault on the sovereignty of God, and the undermining of the biblical understanding of salvation (Phillips 2005:72; Christiansen 2016:7; Hendryx 2018:1). Little effectively addresses the objections and I feel he has overcome them. Regarding horrific evils, God cannot stop them without "impinging on man's libertarian freedom" but even when confronted with horrific evils, man has the ability to choose to react in a way which points to God (Little 2010:112, 117). Little proposes that God expresses His sovereignty in conferring libertarian freedom upon man,

willingly self-limiting Himself (Little 2005:166). The biblical understanding of salvation is not compromised if one embraces libertarian freedom. God can use persuasion to influence the decisions of man without violating the libertarian freedom of man (Little 2010:93). I believe that Little has set forth a solid argument for accepting libertarian freedom.

Little's theories of the best possible world and corollary middle knowledge are strengths in that they take away the appeal to mystery of why God chose to actualize the world the way He did (2005:148). This construct protects both the doctrine of providence and of libertarian freedom. Dissenters to the best possible world and middle knowledge contend that God cannot know the future for it does not exist or that He cannot know the future choices of free moral agents (Phillips 2005:102; Peterson 1998:73). This dissention is representative of open theism, which I find to be biblically untenable (Little 2005:116).

Little's criteria for the best possible world is a weak point in his theodicy. He requires that the best be measured, not entirely upon the "standard of human felicity," but to include the "moral entailments of the Kingdom of God itself" and the "optimal relationship between good and evil as defined by the Kingdom of God" (Little 2010:99). Little's criteria are vague, lacking any qualitative or quantitative means of measurement. A proponent of the best possible world and middle knowledge, MacGregor offers some revised criteria by which God would choose which world to actualize (2005:5). MacGregor's criteria are quantifiable, stipulating that all who would be saved in any world would comprise the actualized world. Additionally, in lieu of Little's definition of best possible world, Geisler and Corduan have offered an understanding of the best possible world, which I find to be more exacting and also quantifiable (Geisler 1988:356). Geisler and Corduan propose that the current world is the best way to obtain the best future Kingdom world, the Kingdom world being without sin, quantifiably best (p. 356).

The Creation-Order theodicy offers a more robust answer to the argument from evil than the examined Greater-Good theodicies. I find that the Creation-Order theodicy structure accounts for many of the exceptions that traditional

Greater-Good theodicies can answer only by appealing to mystery, beyond our knowledge, and CORNEA. By accepting the existence of gratuitous evil, Little's theodicy is not encumbered with mystery, lack of knowledge, and CORNEA. Arguing that gratuitous evil is not scriptural, Inman concludes that the Creation-Order theodicy is implausible (Inman 2013:10). Little's reply would be that there is no biblical evidence to substantiate the claim that all evil will result in a greater good obtaining (Little 2005:125).

I would differentiate Little's theodicy from Greater-Good theodicies based on the lack of necessitation of evil. The thrust of Little's theodicy includes libertarian freedom and could be seen as an overarching good to be obtained. This good was obtained in creation, prior to the fall. Thus, the good is not dependent upon the evil for obtainment. While libertarian freedom made the existence of evil possible, it did not necessitate the presence of evil for its existence.

I believe that the Creation-Order theodicy is important for theodicians to consider. The allowance for the existence of gratuitous evil resolves many questions that traditional Greater-Good theodicies do not. I do think the Creation-Order theodicy should be amended or refined to reflect particularly the thoughts of Geisler and Corduan as well as MacGregor. A combination of the creation-order with Geisler and Corduan's understanding of the best way to the best possible world would be a valuable formation. Taking that proposed combination and reformulating the way in which middle knowledge world actualization takes place, along the lines of MacGregor, would result in a theodicy which answers more of the questions, is biblically consistent, and theologically sound.

Chapter 4

Evaluation of Creation-Order Theodicy's Claim of the Coexistence of Gratuitous Evil and the Sovereignty of God

4.1 Introduction

In applying his Creation-Order theodicy, Little finds gratuitous evil to be a by-product of the theodicy. Little claims that the existence of gratuitous evil does not count against the sovereignty of God (Little 2005:156; 2010:114). I will explore Little's argument for the coexistence of gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God. Upon delineation of Little's position, I will examine scholarship regarding the totality of the Creation-Order theodicy as a valid explanation for the concurrence of gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God. Lastly, I will offer my conclusion on whether Little successfully defended the sovereignty of God in light of Little's belief in the existence of gratuitous evil.

4.2 Little's Argument for the Existence of Gratuitous Evil and its Concurrence with the Sovereignty of God

In contrast to the Greater-Good theodicies and theodicians, Little espouses a belief in the possibility of gratuitous evil, such that if and when gratuitous evil exists, it does not count against the moral perfections of God (Little 2013:39). In examining major monotheistic Greater-Good theodicies, Little finds that the subject theodicies are susceptible to criticism based on some of their basic tenets (p. 2). The Greater-Good theodicies deny the existence of gratuitous evil. Because the Greater-Good theodicies conclude that God will bring a greater good from all evil, God is justified in allowing the evil. Because all evil, according to the greater good thought, results in a greater good, no evil is gratuitous. This line of thought is contingent on a meticulous application of the doctrine of God's sovereignty. The understanding of God's sovereignty in the Greater-Good theodicies is that "everything in this life has a purpose precisely

because God is sovereign" (p. 2). Extrapolating from the greater good position, if an evil was found to be gratuitous, then the conclusion would be that God is not sovereign; He is not in control (p. 3). If a gratuitous evil existed, then God must not be morally justified in allowing that evil. Little finds this position of the Greater-Good theodicies to be fallacious. To deny that any evil is gratuitous, Little contends that one must be able to prove evidentially that all evil results in a greater good. The greater good position becomes quite questionable. In attempting to protect the character of God, namely His sovereignty, the Greater-Good theodicies raise concerns about a God who would allow such things as the Holocaust when no observable greater good has ever obtained from that extensive evil. Furthermore, if no gratuitous evil exists, and some evils are allowed because they prevent a worse evil, then God must not be omnipotent. According to the greater good, He requires one evil in order to prevent another evil, making evil necessary for God. The Greater-Good theodicies assume that if gratuitous evil exists then "it would seriously challenge the claim that an all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing, sovereign God exist" (p. 7). Little concludes his objection to the greater good tenet of no gratuitous evil stating, "Therefore, denying gratuitous evil, which is intended to protect the character of God (particularly His sovereignty) in the end, accomplishes just the opposite and raises serious questions for the greater good theodicy as a whole" (p. 3).

Given the evidence of horrific evil, such as the Holocaust, Little concludes that the evidence for gratuitous evil is so strong that it cannot be left to a questionable explanation which cannot be proven evidentially, that explanation being a Greater-Good theodicy (Little 2005:7). At this point, the theist is left to decide whether to accept the insufficient explanation of the greater good or reconcile the existence of gratuitous evil with the sovereignty of God. It is the acceptance of the existence of gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God to which Little turns his attention. In accepting the existence of gratuitous evil, Little stands in contrast to scholars such as Augustine, Aquinas, Leibniz, Hick, and Swinburne. Augustine insists that "God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist" (Augustine 1955:§5.11). Little finds Augustine's reasoning to be illogical.

Augustine begins his argument with a view of God's providence and goodness, which prevents God from allowing any evil from which a greater good does not obtain (Little 2005:39). This is deductive reasoning and does not consider the evidence of evil. Similarly, Aquinas argues that God is omnipotent and all good and thus, cannot allow any gratuitous evil (Aquinas 2014:§1.3.1). Little contends that Aquinas' argument is "built on an assumption of inference, namely that an omnipotent and all good God cannot allow anything in His creation that does not serve a good purpose" (Little 2005:45). Leibniz argues that this is the best of all possible worlds and in being the best "not only does God derive from evils greater goods, but He finds them connected with greatest goods of all that are possible; so that it would be a fault no to permit them" (Leibniz 1996:91). Little finds Leibniz' explanation to be deductive as well (Little 2010:33). Leibniz assumes that an all good God would actualize the best of all possible worlds and that world would only have evil which served to obtain a greater good. Little asserts that these arguments do not consider the evidence from apparent gratuitous evil. Hick insists that the greater good must always obtain (Hick 1978:400). When the greater good from an evil cannot be identified obviously, Hick appeals to mystery (pp. 369-370). Even though the good cannot be shown evidentially, it must exist. The evil, according to Hick, is necessary for God. The good obtained never could have taken place unless the evil precipitated (p. 176). Little denounces this line of thinking, stating:

I think it is theologically questionable to appeal to mystery in order to ignore blatant contradictions in our theological systems. I say this because one test for truth is internal consistency; that is, different parts of our theological systems must cohere, and if they do not, it is reason to believe at some point our system has gone awry (Little 2010:39).

An appeal to mystery is an insufficient explanation for the reason we see what appears to be gratuitous evils. Swinburne also denies the existence of gratuitous evil (Swinburne 1998:33). God allows evil for the "sake of some greater good," even if we are unaware of the good obtained. Swinburne goes so far as to say, "We falsely suppose that it is logically possible for an omnipotent God to bring about the good without the bad" (p. 33). In

Swinburne's argument, the horrifically evil people will be annihilated, not spending an eternity in Hell (Swinburne 1989:181). Again, Little's response is that Swinburne cannot demonstrate that the good always obtains and his appeal to mystery is insufficient (Little 2005:79). Additionally, if evil people are annihilated then when does the good obtain from the evils they perpetrated (Little 2010:45)? Little finds Swinburne to have an inconsistent and unsustainable argument against the existence of gratuitous evil. Little does not object to inferential arguments unless there is no sufficient evidence to make the inference as in the case of the Greater-Good theodicians denying the existence of gratuitous evil (Little 2005:106). The Greater-Good theodicians have, in Little's view, committed inferential fallacies in appealing to God's sovereignty as a reason to deny the existence of gratuitous evil.

Given his objections to the arguments against the existence of gratuitous evil that major theistic, Greater-Good theodicians have posed, Little builds his own argument for the existence of gratuitous evil. Little begins his task with defining the essential terms. He posits that there is confusion regarding the definition of sovereignty as it applies to God. Little asserts that the Greater-Good theodicians have misapplied the doctrine of sovereignty as it concerns God and gratuitous evil (Little 2005:106). Greater-Good theodicians have adopted an Augustinian application of God's sovereignty (Little 2010:37). The Greater-Good theodicies rest on the idea that "God not only created all things for a purpose, but also because of His omnibenevolence and His providence, one can be assured that God will bring good from the evil He permits in His world as a result of the fall" (p. 38). Augustine argues for a deterministic operation of sovereignty, "If this divine record [the Scriptures] be looked into carefully it shows us that...those which follow the world are so entirely at the disposal of God, that He turns them whithersoever He wills, and whensoever He wills..." (Augustine 2004:461). Using the greater good application of sovereignty, where God ordains every action, if a person committed adultery it would have to be an evil which God planned (Little 2005:106). The adultery is a sin that God has, likewise, forbidden. If the sin of adultery is used to bring about a greater good, then the sin actually must have taken place. So, if God planned the adultery then the adultery must be the will of God. Yet, in Exodus

20:14, God clearly says it is sin, "You shall not commit adultery" and in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 we read, "...Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." The logical consequence of employing a greater good definition of sovereignty is detrimental to "other non-negotiable doctrines of Christianity (such as God is not the author of sin)" (Little 2005:107). In contrast, Little posits that sovereignty can be defined best as divine autonomy. God made all of His pre-creation and creation choices without the influence of anyone or anything outside of Himself. Little asserts that what God sovereignly "chooses, His omnipotence perfects" (p. 106). Furthermore, Little defines omnipotence as relating "to the extent and kind of God's power" (p. 106). He cautions that the terms sovereignty and omnipotence cannot be interchanged.

Little builds his argument for gratuitous evil based on the sovereignty of God being defined as God operating in divine autonomy, without influence from anyone or anything outside of Himself. In sovereignly choosing to create man as a moral being, God also sovereignly chose to determine how He would interact with man (Little 2005:136). God, being necessary, and man, being contingent, requires "some limitation of the expression of some of God's attributes in this relationship" (Little 2005:136). To communicate fully with man, God sovereignly chooses to limit Himself in the expression of His attributes. Citing Philippians 2:6-8, Little substantiates his understanding of God's self-limitation with the example of the incarnation of Christ:

Who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (p. 136).

By virtue of His incarnation, Christ limited the "full expression of His deity" (p. 136). Little does not infer that Jesus was less than fully divine, only that the expression of His divinity was limited. With man being at an epistemic distance from God, the limitation was necessary for God to have meaningful

relationships with man, for God to communicate with man in a time and space continuum. God chose to operate according to this type of limitation as the *modus vivendi*, making "it possible for two persons of different ontological order to have a meaningful relationship in which the relationship is volitional and not determinative or coercive" (p. 137). Little refers to this *modus vivendi* as creation-order. In designing the creation-order, God chose to set moral and physical parameters which would be binding on both God and man, assuring man's freedom to make moral choices and, through God's providence, the "actualization of the counsels of God" (p. 137). If man is to love God, then man must be given the power to make that moral choice. This ability to make moral choices also involves accepting responsibility for the choices (p. 139). The latitude for man to make moral choices, which sovereignly granted by God makes freedom for man a reality, also makes gratuitous evil a reality (p. 140). God also sovereignly chose to limit Himself via covenants (p. 143). Little offers the biblical account of the flood in Genesis 9 as an example. In Genesis 9:11 God states, "I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." God willingly chose never to cover the earth by flood again. Once God makes a covenant, a giving of His word, restricting His own actions, He must honour that covenant. In Psalm 138:2, referring to God, we are told that "you have exalted your word above all your name." Through the application of God's middle knowledge, He knew counterfactuals and knowing these, He chose to actualize the best of all possible worlds (p. 148). This actualization of the best of all possible worlds recognizes "God's sovereignty and the integrity of man's power of moral choice" (p. 145). God knew what each non-determined choice of man would be (p. 148). This knowledge was of both the good and bad choices that man would make, and the consequential reward or suffering associated with said choices. God sovereignly chose to actualize the best set of counterfactuals. In doing so, He preserved His sovereignty by not being influenced by anything or anyone outside of Himself, and He preserved the libertarian freedom of man by not determining any of man's choices. God only actualized what man already was

going to choose, and He actualized the best of all counterfactuals (p. 148). This actualization eliminates the appeal to mystery in explaining evil (p. 148).

Little claims that when God is operating in the created circle which He created, the circle in which man exists, God willingly chooses to self-limit His sovereignty (Little 2005:165). Contending for his understanding of sovereignty, Little states that God submits His "power and prerogative to the creation-order established by His wisdom and power" (p. 166). This is not a contradiction but rather a self-imposed limitation orchestrated by divine sovereignty. Furthermore, Little argues, "God must abide by that to which He voluntarily commits Himself when first choosing to create" (p. 166). In abiding by His self-limitations, which Little refers to as creation-order, God allows man to exercise authentic power of moral choice (p. 163). These choices may result in gratuitous evil. Because God commands Christians to stand against all evil, one must consider that some evil is gratuitous (p. 168). If all evil results in a greater good or prevention of a worse evil, then all evil would have to be allowed by God. However, if God commanded that believers try to stop evil, then if a believer was able to stop the evil, he also would be preventing the greater good from occurring, or he would be allowing for a greater evil to occur. Further, if all evil is allowed for the greater good or prevention of a worse evil, then Little contends that one should not pray for a sick person (p. 169). If one accepted the evil as obtaining a greater good, then one should not pray for the removal of the evil as it could thwart the obtainment of the greater good (p. 173). Applying the structure of the creation-order, Little finds that the only logical possibility is that some evil is gratuitous. Quite concisely Little states, "If God wants evil stopped (either by some external deterrent or by personal choice), then it must not be necessary for the good to obtain" (p. 169). Often, the evil is not stopped due to the free moral choices which man has been given the freedom to exercise. Thus, this evil, which results in no greater good obtaining or worse evil from being prevented, is gratuitous. In abiding by the creation-order, which gives man libertarian free choice, God's sovereignty is not in question when there is gratuitous evil (p. 169). While God may choose to bring about a good in spite of the evil, He is not constrained in

needing the evil to obtain a good. Furthermore, should God elect to bring about a good in spite of the evil, then the good was not a necessary good and could have been experienced without the evil ever taking place. Gratuitous evil does not count against the sovereignty of God. In fact, it supports the doctrine of His sovereignty, recognizing that He sovereignly constructed a creation-order which He, in a self-limiting mode, abides by.

Little finds that accepting the existence of gratuitous evil answers many of the challenges that plague major theistic, Greater-Good theodicies. Via His sovereignty, God chose to construct a creation-order whereby to interact with man (Little 2005:136). Within the creation-order, God allows gratuitous evil (p. 163). Within the creation-order, God is "morally obligated to honor the freedom He has given man that makes both kinds of choices (good and evil) possible" (p. 102). This guarantees man's libertarian freedom. Given the commission of an evil, God is not obligated to bring about a greater good nor prevent a worse evil, that would make God dependent upon evil, which is the very thing He said to avoid (p. 112). Summarizing this point, Little states, "There is no evidential proof that certain evil is necessary to a corollary good, or that all evil always obtains a greater good. To claim such is the case seems far beyond the preponderance of the evidence" (p. 113). The existence of gratuitous evil also eliminates the end-justifies-the-means argument inferred in Greater-Good theodicies. In the end-justifies-the-means argument, the theist would have no compulsion to stop any evil because the evil would bring about a greater good, leaving one to let evil be unrestrained to attain that which is good. This logic is antithetical to the command of Scripture; 1 Thessalonians 5:22 reads, "Abstain from every form of evil." Gratuitous evil does not require the burden of the greater good obtaining; there is no end-justifies-the-means for gratuitous evil. The theological tension between abstaining from evil versus letting evil continue so that the good may obtain is not an issue when accepting the existence of gratuitous evil (p. 114). The existence of gratuitous evil also answers the issues of social justice, which are created by the Greater-Good theodicies. Little asks, "If all evil leads to some good not obtainable without the evil, then at what point should God's people obey God's command to stand against evil?" (p. 115). In the book of Amos,

God holds the people of Samaria responsible for their lack of such justice and commission of "moral passivity" (p. 115). If one is not sure of what greater good is to be obtained, citing the mystery argument, then one never would want to prevent an evil thereby, preventing a greater good. Again, the existence of gratuitous evil resolves this tension. One is simply to follow the command of God and attempt to thwart all evil (p. 115). This is clearly taught in Scripture as we see in Romans 6:1-2, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" Under the Greater-Good theodicies, prayer becomes problematic (p. 117). Why should someone pray for the removal of evil, such as cancer, if God is going to use the evil to obtain a greater good? The rationale to pray is questionable. Gratuitous evil resolves this problem. Seeing the evil, such as cancer, as a gratuitous issue with no overarching obtainment of the good, the evil is addressed easily by prayer, asking God to remove it. Further, when applying the greater good argument, the good becomes relative (p. 119). Claiming that the good obtains, the argument does not address the intent. Little uses the example of Hitler in his counter argument, "Hitler thought that the good of the Arian people being freed from Jewish presence was a greater good than allowing Jews to live" (p. 119). This type of thinking leads to subjective moral judgments and embraces relativity since one always must determine what good obtained from a said evil. The existence of gratuitous evil eliminates this problem as well. If one is not restricted to looking for a greater good, then there is not a compulsion to determine what is good or evil per the situation. One can attest that something is evil without grading the severity of the evil, doing away with the situational ethics created by the greater good argument. Under the Greater-Good theodicies, when an evil takes place there must be an associated greater good obtained (p. 120). The question Little asks is, "Who received the obtainment of the good?" (p. 119). Little argues, "It is reasonable that the one suffering is the one who should receive the benefit. If there is no gratuitous suffering, there ought to be some evidence that the individual sufferer does in fact benefit from the suffering" (p. 120). Given the weight of the evidence of experienced evil, it is obvious that the sufferer quite often is not the recipient of the good obtained (if there is a

good obtained). The existence of gratuitous evil would allow for the evil to take place without the burden of proving who, if anyone, received the good obtained. The greater good argument creates a problem when trying to determine how much good is obtained from an evil (p. 121). According to the greater good, it would be better to suffer greater evils so that even greater may obtain. Little asserts that there is no "divine equation to use in order to know what good must obtain in order for it to be greater than the corollary evil" (p. 122). The existence of gratuitous evil eradicates this problem. If there is no required good to be obtained, and the evil is gratuitous, then one is not obligated to try to calculate the quality of a good which does not exist. The greater good argument does not address mental attitudes. The greater good addresses evils that take place and their corollary goods (p. 122). If there is not a manifested evil, the greater good is not applicable. Little finds this to be contrary to Scripture, citing Matthew 5:28, "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (p. 122). The existence of gratuitous evil resolves this issue. The mental commission of evil does not require an associated good under the belief of the existence of gratuitous evil. The thought would be evil in and of itself. Enumerating several of the problems associated with the Greater-Good theodicies and their arguments, Little offers that gratuitous evil resolves or eliminates those problems created by the Greater-Good theodicies. Little further argues that not only does gratuitous evil resolve the problems and logical inconsistencies of the Greater-Good theodicies, it does so while preserving the doctrine of the sovereignty of God.

4.3 The Validity of the Creation-Order Theodicy for the Coexistence of Gratuitous Evil and the Doctrine of the Sovereignty of God

Little has constructed a theodicy, which he claims acknowledges the existence of gratuitous evil while embracing the doctrine of the sovereignty of God (Little 2005:156; 2010:114). In building his theodicy, Little addressed the definition of sovereignty. The major theistic, Greater-Good theodicies utilize an understanding of sovereignty where "God is sovereign in such a way that all individual choices of men are only those which God directly permits" (Little

2005:105). Little understands sovereignty to be divine autonomy and utilizes this understanding in his theodicy (p. 106). Mitchell agrees with both Little's definition of sovereignty and the existence of gratuitous evil (Mitchell 2018:5). Scripture is replete in conveying that God is sovereign, as evidenced in Job 42:2, Psalm 135:6, Daniel 4:35, and Ephesians 1:11. In His sovereignty, He gave man free will (libertarian freedom) and He permits man to act according to his own wishes as seen in Joshua 24:15, "And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve." This provides the opportunity for gratuitous evil. What man does is his own responsibility and is not the fault of God. Mitchell finds that "the existence of gratuitous evil does not contradict the sovereignty of God (p. 5). MacGregor supports Little's Creation-Order theodicy as a valid explanation for the coexistence of gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God (MacGregor 2012:119). MacGregor contends that sovereignty, as biblically illustrated, consists of divine autonomy and governance. This is in contrast to a highly deterministic view of sovereignty, which many theistic Greater-Good theodicies maintain. Agreeing with Little, MacGregor finds that "because gratuitous evil, or evil lacking any divine purpose, undermines neither divine autonomy nor divine governance, the biblical understanding of sovereignty receives no threat from the existence of such evil" (p. 120).

Although not in full agreement with Little on the definition of sovereignty, Plantinga does embrace libertarian freedom as one of the principles employed to resolve the question of why a sovereign God would allow evil (Plantinga 1974:30). Plantinga argues, "God can create free creatures, but He can't cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all" (p. 30). He finds that humans, being free, sometimes make wrong or evil choices. These choices, however, do not count against God. In spite of the libertarian freedom humans are vested with and the associated evils they perpetrate, Plantinga holds that God still brings a good out of the evils; we just do not always recognize the good obtained, "On the theistic conception, our cognitive abilities, as opposed to God's, are a bit slim for that" (Plantinga 1996:73).

Geisler and Corduan do not agree with Little's Creation-Order theodicy. Geisler and Corduan echo Little's understanding of sovereignty (Geisler 1988:384). For humans to have true freedom in making choices, the choices cannot be "externally determined" (p. 384). God holds humans responsible for their choices and this can be done only if humans are completely free to make the choices. God knows what they will choose but He does not determine the choices for them. The design to allow man to make free choices was willed sovereignly by God. In vesting man with the ability to make free choices, God "delegated sovereignty" (p. 384). Geisler and Corduan assert that "the Sovereign made the human sovereign over his own moral choices" (p. 384). Geisler summarizes the essence of God's sovereignty as he states, "God is the 'author' of everything that happens in the indirect and ultimate sense; He is not the immediate cause of evil actions. He neither promotes them nor produces them; He permits them and controls the course of history so that it accomplishes His ultimate purposes" (Geisler 2011:24). Geisler makes an important distinction by saying that God is the author, in that God permits something to happen but He is not the producer of all things. By His sovereignty, His permissive will allows for evil choices to be made, while His perfect will does not promote evil (p. 23). Although embracing the same divine autonomy interpretation of sovereignty as Little, Geisler and Bocchino do not accept the existence of gratuitous evil, suggesting that God knows a good purpose for every evil that He allows (Geisler 2001:222). Geisler defaults to the mystery defence inferring that it is beyond the ability of man's finite mind to know the good obtained from each evil permitted. While agreeing with Little in part, Geisler and Bocchino support a Greater- Good theodicy, not Little's Creation-Order theodicy.

Borofsky argues against Little's Creation-Order theodicy as an explanation for the coexistence of gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God (Borofsky 2011:8). Creation-Order theodicy, Borofsky contends, states that God will never go against our choices in order to preserve free will. Real life, however, shows that sometimes God does in fact go against our choices. Based on real life evidence, Borofsky concludes that the Creation-Order theodicy makes God "reactionary to evil and not really sovereign" (p. 8). Gould argues against

Little's Creation-Order theodicy as an explanation for the coexistence of gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God on a different basis (Gould 2014:461). Gould argues that if God must allow evil in order to have a meaningful relationship with man, then the evil is still for a greater good, that of enabling relationship. Therefore, the evil is not gratuitous and Little's theodicy is not a valid explanation for gratuitous evil. Kraay echoes the findings of Gould, thereby finding Little's Creation-Order theodicy to be invalid (Kraay 2018:5).

Blocher contends with Little's idea of sovereignty urging that we forget the notion of divine self-limitation (Blocher 1994:61). Blocher argues, "Nowhere does Scripture suggest that God suspends the exercise of His sovereign power in respect of the slightest occurrence in the world" (p. 61). Alston finds the existence of gratuitous evil to be irreconcilable to a sovereign God (Alston 1996:§2768). Erlandson likewise finds that to be sovereign, God must be in control of the results of the "free acts" of men (Erlandson 1991:5). If God does not have complete control, then He no longer is sovereign. Based on their conclusions regarding gratuitous evil and sovereignty, Blocher, Alston, and Erlandson would not find the Creation-Order theodicy to be a valid explanation for the concurrence of gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God.

Wykstra, Alston, and Howard-Snyder⁶ dismiss the Creation-Order theodicy as a valid explanation for the coexistence of gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God on the basis of not believing that any evil can be gratuitous. Wykstra proposes CORNEA, insisting there is an epistemic difference between God and man, with man not having reasonable epistemic access to the knowledge of the good being obtained with each evil (Wykstra 1984:152). Alston likewise appeals to the inability of man to comprehend the good God may obtain via an evil (Alston 1991:26). Howard-Snyder follows the same logic, finding that man at times is unable to discern the purposes of God and thus, man does not know the good which God will obtain through some evils (Howard-Snyder 1996:§8009).

⁶ Wykstra, 1984. The humean obstacle to evidential arguments from suffering; Alston, 1991. The inductive argument from evil and the human cognitive condition; Howard-Snyder, 1996. The evidential argument from evil.

4.4 Conclusion and Summary of Findings

I find that, in spite of the opposition, Little has built a theodicy which does offer a valid explanation for the coexistence of gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God. Much of the consternation is centered on the definition of sovereignty. Wellum, in accord with Little, describes such sovereignty as God limiting Himself, with the term limitation not referring "to a weakness of imperfection in God; rather it refers to a self-imposed limitation that is part of His plan, not a violation of it" (Wellum 2000:78). This view of sovereignty, divine autonomy, is an essential building block to Little's Creation-Order theodicy. Utilizing Little's view of sovereignty, the creation-order follows, including the bestowal of libertarian freedom upon man. Little's theodicy provides for man to make genuine free choices, which may result in evil (Little 2005:155). Some of the evils may be gratuitous, having a reason, which is the evil choices of man, but not a divine purpose. The evil does not have a purpose in so far as the greater good being obtained from it or a worse evil being thwarted by the lesser evil. While God may choose to bring a good in spite of an evil, He is not obligated to bring a good out of evil, as this would make Him dependent on evil in order to do good. This is in perfect keeping with His sovereignty, as He sovereignly declared the order by which He and man would interact. This created order was part of His plan and He sovereignly abides by the order He ordained. I find Little's understanding of sovereignty to be consistent biblically and based on that understanding, I do not see any conflict with the sovereignty of God being coexistent with gratuitous evil.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1 Review of the Evaluation

The primary focus of this research was to determine how Bruce Little's Creation-Order theodicy validated a belief in gratuitous evil while simultaneously adhering to the doctrine of the sovereignty of God.

The research sought to examine the following three objectives: (1) Determine Bruce Little's objective for the development of the Creation-Order theodicy; (2) Delineate the strengths and weaknesses of the Creation-Order theodicy when compared to Christian monotheists who widely accept Greater-Good theodicies; and (3) Examine the ways in which the Creation-Order theodicy is valid theologically as an explanation for the coexistence of gratuitous evil and the doctrine of the sovereignty of God.

The purpose of this research was to examine current scholarship on the coexistence of gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God. Theodicians have been provided with a concise overview of Little's theodicy with accompanying critique. The thesis offered an informed dialogue with Little's Creation-Order theodicy and his views along with prevalent arguments against his position. I also sought to reinforce the necessity of a biblically grounded worldview as the basis for one's theodicy.

To achieve the objectives of the research, I examined a given theory against competitive theories and biblical standards using a dialectical inquiry method. The methodology consisted of three steps. The first step explained the justification for, and content of, Little's Creation-Order theodicy. The second step compared Little's theodicy to major Christian, monotheistic, Greater-Good theodicies, delineating strengths and weaknesses of each. The third

step was to evaluate the validity of the claim of Creation-Order theodicy regarding the coexistence of gratuitous evil with the sovereignty of God.

The first step explained the justification for, and content of, Little's Creation-Order theodicy. Here I presented Little's definitions of key terminology and the basics of his Creation-Order theodicy. Next, I examined existing Greater-Good theodicies, outlining deficiencies which Little found in each of them. Upon outlining the deficiencies of the Greater-Good theodicies, I presented Little's reasoning for the need of a new theodicy.

The second step compared Little's theodicy to major Christian, monotheistic, Greater-Good theodicies, delineating strengths and weaknesses of each. For each of the strengths and weaknesses of the Greater-Good theodicies, I explored Little's opinion as well as those of other scholars. For the strengths and weaknesses of Little's Creation-Order theodicy, I explored the opinions of various scholars.

The third step was to evaluate the validity of the Creation-Order theodicy and its claim regarding the coexistence of gratuitous evil with the sovereignty of God. The basis for the evaluation was Little's declaration and explanation for his theodicy. Considering the strengths and weaknesses of the Creation-Order theodicy, I sought to determine if Little successfully had demonstrated the coexistence of gratuitous evil with the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. Lastly, I considered the implications on the doctrine of the sovereignty of God if gratuitous evil was determined to exist.

5.2 Summary of Findings Regarding the Research

My research on Little's Creation-Order theodicy supports the hypothesis that Little's theodicy does not satisfy fully every objection which has been raised against it. However, the research does not support the hypothesis that Little's theodicy may be an elaborate Greater-Good theodicy, nor that he is unable to render the existence of gratuitous evil sustainable. Antithetically, the research finds that Little's theodicy is not a Greater-Good theodicy and he has justified a sustainable explanation for the existence of gratuitous evil concurrent with the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. I found that Little offered a valid

argument for the existence of gratuitous evil concurrent with the doctrine of the sovereignty of God based on: 1) the self-limitation of God via covenant agreements; 2) the logic of removing all necessity of God to bring about a greater-good or prevent a worse evil which is incumbent upon Him in the greater-good theodicies; 3) the bestowal of libertarian freedom on man, making man responsible for his own decisions; and 4) the implications gratuitous evil has regarding prayer for deliverance from evil and the mandate to try to stop all evils.

5.2.1 Conclusions Regarding the Objective of Little's Development of the Creation-Order Theodicy

By exploring several of the prominent Christian, monotheistic, Greater-Good theodicies, I delineated Little's objective in the development of his Creation-Order theodicy. I began by reviewing the task of theodicy and how the Greater-Good theodicies attempt to meet the task. The Greater-Good theodicies held that God allows evil to happen in order that He may bring about a greater good or prevent a worse evil. Greater-Good theodicies do not adhere to the existence of gratuitous evil. I examined the Greater-Good theodicies of Augustine, Aquinas, Leibniz, Hick, Swinburne, and Peterson as well as Little's objection to each of these theodicies. As Little believed there were theological problems with each of the aforementioned Greater-Good theodicies, he tasked himself with developing a theodicy which resolved the discrepancies he had identified.

In developing his theodicy, Little sought to address deficiencies he found in the Greater-Good theodicies and to argue for the existence of gratuitous evil while maintaining the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. The foundation for Little's theodicy is termed creation-order. Creation-order is the rules by which God interacts with man. Creation-order includes such things as the limitations of contingent man, libertarian freedom, physical ordering, moral ordering, covenant ordering, and prayer. Also critical to Little's theodicy is the concept of libertarian freedom, which is the ability of man to choose freely. Little embraces the concept that this is the best of all possible worlds, finding that this controversial idea allows for his theodicy to be consistent internally.

Essential to the best of all possible worlds belief is that of God's middle knowledge. Middle knowledge is vital because it affirms the sovereignty of God while preserving the libertarian freedom of man.

The synthesis of the components of Little's theodicy results in a theodicy which allows for the existence of gratuitous evil concurrent with the sovereignty of God. Little's theodicy affirms a Christian worldview that is internally consistent, provides for the existence of gratuitous evil, and maintains the sovereignty of God.

5.2.2 Conclusions Regarding the Strengths and Weaknesses of the Creation-Order Theodicy

I examined the strengths and weaknesses of major Greater-Good theodicies. The prevailing strengths were: (1) the adherence to the doctrine of the sovereignty of God; (2) character building as a consequent of experienced evil; and (3) a revised definition of the end justifying the means as ethical reasoning for God to allow evil to obtain. The weaknesses of the Greater-Good theodicies included: (1) the circuitous nature of their reasoning; (2) the impossibility to prove empirically the assertion that all evil results in a greater good or prevention of a worse evil; (3) God's omnipotence is questioned if He requires evil to bring about good; (4) God becomes the author of sin; (5) CORNEA intimates that man may not even know if he is doing good; (6) lack of contextually adhesive proof texts; (7) greater good is incompatible with stopping any evil or praying for relief from an evil; and (8) lack of quantitative or qualitative means to measure a good to a particular evil.

I then investigated the strengths and weaknesses of Little's Creation-Order theodicy. First, I looked at the concept of creation-order, which allows for two ontologically different beings to have relationship. The relationship requires the self-limitation of God, particularly in the incarnation and the use of covenant agreements. This self-limitation is problematic for some scholars, asserting that it is a stance against God's sovereignty. Little's creation-order does not allow for macroevolution nor any type of theistic evolution. The creation-order element of the Creation-Order theodicy determines the way in which all of creation interacts. Humans, made in the image of God, have a

mind and unlike any other creature, they possess the ability to respond volitionally to God and choose to love or reject Him. Further, evolution requires death in order for a new, improved creature to evolve. Death did not occur until the fall of man, which infers that man was created prior to death being in the created world. Only after exercising his libertarian freedom to choose to sin did man experience the evil of death.

Next, I explored the concept of libertarian freedom. I found that it is more concise than the term free will. Libertarian freedom is consistent with creation-order in that man cannot make any choice he wants to, but from the choices provided by a sovereign God, he may choose freely. Libertarian freedom does not align with a compatibilists' view of the sovereignty of God. Even in light of horrific evil, Little argues that man still can exercise libertarian freedom by the manner in which he responds to suffering. While some see libertarian freedom as an affront to God's sovereignty, Little finds that sovereign God freely chose to make libertarian freedom the mechanism for man's decision making. God freely and sovereignly limited Himself by allowing man to make truly free choices. Libertarian freedom takes the responsibility for evil and places it directly on man. God is not complicit in evil. It was argued that libertarian freedom is not scriptural, stating that God ordained evil actions and then held perpetrators responsible for actualizing what He ordained. Little countered with the argument that God's foreknowledge of man's choices does not equate to His ordaining of choices. Libertarian freedom is consistent with a biblical view of personal responsibility for sin.

I surveyed the concept of the best of all possible worlds and its necessary component of middle knowledge. The best of all possible worlds and middle knowledge theory give a plausible explanation for truly free choices, the sovereignty of God, and no appeal to mystery. Further, the best of all possible worlds and middle knowledge protect both the doctrine of providence and of libertarian freedom. Opponents to this theory typically embrace a form of open theism. Little's criteria for selecting the best of all possible worlds could be improved so that it protects both sovereign predestination and libertarian freedom. Additionally, Little's definition of the best of all possible worlds is

deficient and needs to incorporate the criteria that all who would be saved in any potential world are actualized in a world where they would choose salvation. Little's understanding of terms finds that the best of all possible worlds extends from creation to the Kingdom which will come. The differentiation, which labels the current actualized world as the best of all possible ways to obtain the best possible world (being the Kingdom of God), adds an important distinction to the concept. This revision of terms allows for a clear understanding of what the best possible world would be, an eschatological view of the future Kingdom world.

Next, the Creation-Order theodicy was considered as a whole. The theodicy affirmed the attributes of God, creation-order, libertarian freedom, middle knowledge and the best of all possible worlds, and the existence of gratuitous evil. The structure of Little's Creation-Order theodicy precludes it from being an elaborate Greater-Good theodicy. The Creation-Order theodicy requires the bestowal of libertarian freedom prior to the fall of man, thus rendering evil only a possibility, not a necessity. The good of libertarian freedom was obtained before the evil of the fall.

5.2.3 Conclusions Regarding the Creation-Order Theodicy as a Valid Explanation for the Coexistence of Gratuitous Evil and the Doctrine of the Sovereignty of God

Little's argument for gratuitous evil and its concurrence with the doctrine of the sovereignty of God was measured against prevailing scholarship. Little's objection to theodicies that deny gratuitous evil, was compelling and I find that Little presented a viable case for the coexistence of gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God. Employing the biblical concept of covenant agreements, which self-limits the sovereign God, Little argued that gratuitous evil does not impinge on the sovereignty of God. By honouring His created order and libertarian freedom, the existence of gratuitous evil becomes a reality. The existence of gratuitous evil removes any allegation that God is the author of evil, for He does not need evil in order to bring about a good. Gratuitous evil does not run counter to praying for deliverance from evil or from trying to stop evil. I find that Little met the burden of argument, countering his objectors to

render both a logical and biblical case for the coexistence of gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God.

5.3 The Significance of the Conclusions

The main purpose of this study was to examine current thought on the coexistence of gratuitous evil and the sovereignty of God, Little's essential truth claim enveloped in his Creation-Order theodicy. In countering deficiencies in major theistic Greater-Good theodicies, Little provided a theodicy which is more biblically coherent. The significance of the findings is: (1) God does not predetermine every action of man; man is free to choose from among the available choices. By not determining the actions, God is not responsible for them. This equates to making man morally culpable for his decision making; (2) Gratuitous evil eliminates the obligation of God to perform a greater good or prevent a worse evil. This eliminates God being dependent upon evil in order to obtain a good; (3) Creation-order and gratuitous evil are coherent with the petitions of prayer either to stop or eliminate evil. Likewise, creation-order and gratuitous evil support striving for social justice and elimination of evil; and (4) Creation-Order theodicy, with its associated gratuitous evil, offers a compelling answer to those who are experiencing evil.

It is this last idea of ministering to those who are experiencing evil where I believe the Creation-Order theodicy is most significant. Having explored the biblical soundness of the theodicy, I find it to be an honest response to suffering. If one experiences suffering and has to devise a good which is obtained from it, what if the good never obtains? How are they left to deal with consequences of God failing them? The Creation-Order theodicy eliminates this quest for the elusive greater good, finding instead that God, in His sovereignty, allows men to make choices. It was through the choice of Adam to sin that ushered death, disease, and natural calamity. God created natural laws, which resulted in natural events such as storms and earthquakes, necessary for the environment to support humankind. While the events were not designed as calamity, through the fall of man, calamity became a possibility. Humans also may exacerbate the situation of natural events by

choosing to inhabit areas known for potentially damaging natural events. While these choices sometimes result in horrific evil, He honours His Word. It is this honouring of His Word in which we find comfort. For His word says in Hebrews 13:5, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." The sufferer also can look to the future of those who are following Christ, a future guaranteed to be free of suffering. In honouring His Word regarding libertarian freedom, we also find Him honouring His Word regarding the future of those in Christ. The middle knowledge theory also answers many questions. If a person who is young dies without having made Christ his Lord, one may ask, "Why did God allow them to die so early, when perhaps they would have come to a knowledge of Him if they had lived longer?" Middle knowledge would offer that God knew this person would never, under any circumstance, elect to choose Christ as Lord and Saviour. Middle knowledge answers the questions of those who are in remote places who die without having heard the Gospel presentation. Again, per the concept of middle knowledge and the best of all possible worlds, when exposed to general revelation under any combination of counterfactuals, these individuals did not respond to God's general revelation in nature and in conscience. Thus, God knew these individuals never would come to choose Christ regardless of their circumstances and by placing them in a spiritually deprived environment, they are less culpable for their lack of choosing Christ and will be dealt with accordingly in the judgment. In the grand scheme of things, Creation-Order theodicy even answers why God would create individuals who He knew never would choose to accept Christ as Lord. The moral justification is provided via middle knowledge and the best of all possible worlds. For it is only in allowing the choice to reject Christ freely that God can allow the choice to accept Christ freely. Via middle knowledge of all counterfactuals, God's heart for mankind is revealed, not wanting any to perish. He allows free choice and actualizes the best world for all concerned based on their best choices. The Creation-Order theodicy logically addresses many of the questions which plague theodicy and it does so in a manner which is consistent biblically.

The Creation-Order theodicy, while not perfect, is a more biblically sound theodicy than the major theistic, Greater-Good theodicies, in my view. Little

has constructed a theodicy that overcomes many of the deficiencies of the Greater-Good theodicies. The Creation-Order theodicy offers a compelling argument for the existence of gratuitous evil concurrent with the doctrine of the sovereignty of God.

For further research, the cycle of dialectic inquiry could be completed. Having compared Little's Creation-Order theodicy and its associated truth claims with competing theodicies, strengths and weaknesses of the Creation-Order theodicy were delineated. Theoretically, addressing the weaknesses of Little's Creation-Order theodicy and incorporating such modifications into the original Creation-Order theodicy would result in a new theodicy, thus completing the dialectic cycle.

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