PART TWO: THE ONTOLOGY OF SALVATION
CHAPTER THREE

GRACE, PREDESTINATION, AND THE ORDO SALUTIS

As an examination of Arminius’s doctrine of the assurance of salvation, this essay is primarily concerned with what we may call the epistemological question concerning soteriology, that is, how one knows whether one is saved. Such a discussion presupposes at least a cursory familiarity with Arminius’s doctrine of salvation in general, especially the ontological question, that is, what is salvation, or how one is saved. For the purpose of laying a foundation for the assurance discussion, in this chapter I shall briefly set soteriological debate in its theological and historical context, after which the broad contours of Arminius’s soteriology in its Leiden context will be surveyed. Although not an attempt to describe and analyze Arminius’s doctrine of salvation exhaustively, this chapter will reveal certain significant features of Arminius’s theology and give the reader a sense of the shape of his soteriology, especially as it relates to the topic of assurance.

I. The Importance of Soteriology in the Sixteenth Century

Controversy drives the development and codification of Christian doctrine. Not only did controversy spark the writings of the New Testament canon, but the course of church history from the subapostolic period to the present day can hardly be considered apart from the debates and debaters that mark the chapters of Christian thought. History has shown that some disputes have had a longer life than others. Whereas the doctrines of God and Christ were codified in the ecumenical church councils, the Western Church, more overtly than the Eastern Church, continually struggled with its soteriology. From the letters of Paul through the treatises of Augustine to the Canons of Dort, soteriology has played a constitutive and ongoing role in the character of the Western Church.

The Western Church of the sixteenth century was, of course, marked by the Protestant Reformation, the causes of which were as many and varied as the debates and debaters of that era. However, when we inquire