

The Sovereignty of God and the Soul Dynamic: God-Centered Thinking and the Black Experience in America, Past and Future

John Piper

John Piper has been the senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, since 1980. He has the Dr. Theol. in New Testament from the University of Munich and taught for six years at Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota. He is the author of a number of books and articles, including *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Multnomah, 1987), *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Baker, 1993), and *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Crossway, 1998).

Introduction

(Editor's Note: The following message was delivered at the 2002 Bethlehem Baptist Church Conference for Pastors.)

My task tonight is to answer the question: Why This Theme?—*The Sovereignty of God and the Soul Dynamic¹: God-Centered Thinking and the Black Experience in America, Past and Future*. And, if God would give me the grace to do it, my aim is to light a fire in you that would forge a link between the sovereignty of God and God-centered thinking on the one hand, and the soul dynamic and Black experience in America on the other hand. There is, I believe, an explosively powerful coming together of these that I want to advance and be a part of.

But the very terms are in tension from the outset. The metals out of which I dream of forging such a link seem to be so different they could never be welded together. The term *soul dynamic* points to a personal energy and life and deeply-felt suffering and human kinship, while the term *sovereignty of God*, in contrast, points to a divine, objective power outside ourselves imposing itself down from above, not up from within.

The term *Black experience in America* points to the weight of history, tradi-

tion, suffering, passion, people, culture, and warmth, but the term *God-centered thinking*, in contrast, points to the burden of rationality, reflection, concepts, and ideas. So from the outset the prospect of forging a link between the sovereignty of God and God-centered thinking on the one hand, and the soul dynamic and Black experience in America on the other hand, looks dim.

But there is a very powerful reason why I dream in this direction and why I have strong hope that such a link is not only possible but, in fact, natural and crucial. And the reason is this: the vision of God's sovereignty and God-centered thinking that drives the Bethlehem Conference for Pastors, and hundreds of the pastors who come here, is not what many people—White or Black—have in mind when they think of God-centeredness or the sovereignty of God, or Calvinism, or Reformed theology. There is a difference. A very significant difference that I think virtually demands a link between the soul dynamic and the Black experience and the sovereignty of God and God-centered thinking.

And here is the difference: we see the Reformed tradition—with its massive vision of the glory of God—through the

lens of Christian Hedonism; that is, we see it through the filter that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.² We see it through the almost overwhelming experience of suffering and sin in this world—an experience, however, that does not drive us *away* from God but *toward* God, who says to all our enemies (including ourselves), “You meant it for evil, but I meant it for good” (Gen 50:20). We see the sovereignty of God through the humanly impossible experience of the apostle Paul whose wounds made him say, “[We are] sorrowful yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor 6:10). Is there any biblical phrase better suited to express the essence of the soul dynamic, or the taste of the triumphant spirit of Black history in America, than “sorrowful yet always rejoicing”? And we see the sovereignty of God through the cross of Jesus, where God’s love stoops down to give us all that we can know and enjoy of God at the infinite cost of God’s own human life.

Now this is different from what most people feel when they hear the term “Calvinism.” But this is who we are, and what a whole stream of Christian history is. And this is what, I believe—what I pray—will forge a link between the sovereignty of God and the soul dynamic, God-centered thinking and the Black experience. These are ways of looking at the sovereignty of God, the centrality of God, the supremacy of God, the so-called Reformed tradition, and Calvinism that transpose the key of the music of God’s sovereignty into something that begins to sound like a Negro spiritual, or a freedom song, or dirge from the Underground Railroad, or a lullaby for the babies after daddy’s lynching, or the misery and joy of the Delta Blues.³

Therefore, I am not willing for the

greatness of God and the supremacy of God and the centrality of God and “the preeminence of the glory of God” (which is the essence of the Reformed tradition)⁴ to be hijacked by a White, western, over-rationalized, cool tradition that alienates the Black experience, which has drunk so deeply at the wells of suffering and scorn. These great realities are not meant to be like planks in a party platform, or like colors of competing teams, or like hostile signals between warring gangs. They are meant to be like the air we breathe and the earth we stand on and the galaxies we stare into.

So here’s my thesis for this conference and for its theme:

Even though there are thousands of Whites and thousands of Blacks who stumble over the theological systems of dead White men from Geneva and Northampton and Princeton; and even though there are Whites and Blacks who ridicule the God-rooted soul dynamic of the Black experience in America, nevertheless there is an untried vision to see the mountain streams of God’s supremacy and sovereignty and centrality and glory, flowing from the Reformed tradition, on one side, together with the soul dynamic, flowing from the Black experience in America, on the other side, to make a river—a single river—that runs deep with life and hope and joy through the valley of pain and death—a river of love that causes all who drink, not to make much of themselves, and not even to make much of others, but to lay down their lives to help others enjoy making much of our God, Jesus Christ. That’s what I am pursuing in this conference.

Personal History

Now let me back up and give you some history and move toward a biblical foundation and explanation. I begin with some of the roots of my concern. I grew up in Greenville, South Carolina, and was

manifestly racist in my assumptions and attitudes, and actions as a child and a teenager. That is, I assumed the superiority of my race in almost every way without knowing or wanting to know anybody who was Black, except Lucy, who came over on Saturdays to help my mother clean. I liked Lucy, but the whole structure of the relationship was demeaning. My attitude was not mainly my parents' fault. In fact, in some ways, it was in spite of my parents that I was guilty of racism. It was the air we breathed in Greenville, South Carolina.

In 1963 my home church voted not to allow Blacks into the services. As I recall, my mother (who happened to grow up in Pennsylvania) was the lone voice on that Wednesday night to vote no on this motion. That December my sister was married in the church, and my mother invited Lucy's whole family to come. And they came. And when the ushers balked, my mother herself took them by the arm and seated them on the main floor of the sanctuary. So the seeds were sown in my conscience—as I watched that drama—that my attitudes were an offense to my mother and to her God.

I went to school in Illinois and then in Pasadena, California, and then in West Germany; and I have lived here in Minneapolis since 1974. It has been a long journey and my burdens today are 180 degrees from what they were in the early sixties growing up across town from Jesse Jackson whose mother listened to the same Christian radio station my mother did, but could not go to that school, which forbade Blacks.

Several years ago our church here wrote six fresh initiatives that still function to guide us. One of them read, "Against the rising spirit of indifference, alienation

and hostility in our land, we will embrace the supremacy of God's love to take new steps personally and corporately toward racial reconciliation, expressed visibly in our community and in our church." That has had a very significant effect on us. We have a long way to go. But we have not let go of the vision.

Six years ago, as a part of a larger movement of transracial adoption and pro-life commitment, Noël and I, at age 50, adopted Talitha Ruth, who is African American and now six years old. This was a huge thing for me to do, not only because I was fifty and would basically be starting my parenting life all over again, after the four boys were grown, but also because I have southern relatives who looked on this with incredulity at best, and because the personal and cultural identity for Talitha and us will soon be critical no matter what I do to prepare for it.

Then came last summer on a porch in Asheville, North Carolina, while I was reading Carl Ellis's book, first published under the title *Beyond Liberation*, and now expanded and reissued as *Free at Last: The Gospel in the African-American Experience*. It was like one of those little magnetic sticks, and as you lower it slowly onto a table where there are thousands of tiny metal filings, the filings begin to turn and vibrate and orient in the same direction; and then you touch the table where they are and all of them come together and cling to that little stick and dangle from it if you lift it up.

I felt, in reading this book about the soul dynamic and the Black experience in America, that everything I had ever seen and savored of the sovereignty of God, the centrality of God, and the supremacy of God was a preparation to be a part of this reality—that is, a God-centered, Christ-

exalting, Bible-saturated rebuilding of Black (and I would add White) evangelical culture—not primarily around color but around the triumphant, sovereign glory of the all-knowing, all-governing, crucified, suffering, and living Christ.

There are sentences in this book—so many of them I could not tell you—that made me feel like Ellis’s vision for the rebuilding of a God-centered Black culture was profoundly relevant for the rebuilding of a God-centered White American evangelicalism. For example, a sentence like this, “White historians had sold us a bill of goods by leaving Black folks out; Black secularists sold us a bill of goods by leaving God out.”⁵ The reason that sentence cuts deeply both ways is not mainly because it criticizes White historians as bad historians, or Black secularists as bad theologians, but mainly because it makes us focus on that particular weakness of the Black community, which it had taken over straight from the dominant White culture, namely, secular humanism, in contradiction to the deeper, more authentic, God-soaked roots of the Black culture in America—and, I would add, also in contradiction to the deeper, more authentic, God-soaked roots of the White evangelical culture in America.

And, yes, I know that those White, Reformed, Puritan roots are contaminated with the poison of slavery and inconsistent racism; and I know that the deeper roots of Black culture are contaminated by African paganism. But if we are willing to cut each other some slack here and see the working of God’s providence in and through the imperfections of our histories, then the ax of Carl Ellis falls not only against the modern Black tree of godlessness, but also against the modern White tree of godlessness. And

the trumpet that Carl Ellis is sounding in this book for the rebuilding of a God-centered African-American culture is really at root the call for something even bigger and deeper—namely, the rebuilding of a God-centered Christianity—not “Christianity-ism”⁶—but authentic, God-centered, Christ-exalting, Bible-saturated Christianity out of White and Black and every other color.

You feel the two-edged sword of Carl Ellis again in sentences like this—(keep in mind, I am still on the porch in Asheville, North Carolina, last summer experiencing what brought this conference and this message about tonight):

Black is truly beautiful, but it is not beautiful as a god. As a god it is too small. Afrocentrism is truly magnificent, but it is not magnificent as an absolute. As an absolute, it will infect us with the kind of bigotry we’ve struggled against in others for centuries. . . . Whenever we seek to understand our situation without [the] transcendent reference point [of the Word of God] we fail to find the answer to our crisis. The white man’s religion has failed us [namely, Christianity-ism]. The Arab ethnic religion has failed us and will fail us again.⁷

Yes, the trumpet is sounding to the Black community in these words: We need a bigger vision than “Black is beautiful.” We need a bigger vision than “Afrocentrism.” We need a transcendent reference point! We need the supremacy of God! The centrality of God! The Word of God! And I am a White man listening in on this on a porch in July in Asheville, North Carolina, and finding everything in me not crying “Amen” about the *Black* Community, but about my own puny-god, market-driven, materialistic, middle-class, comfort-seeking, truth-compromising, wishy-washy, White, evangelical, American church.

And I had to ask there on that porch, “Does not the burning of my heart beckon me to call Carl Ellis on the phone and say, ‘Would you come help me create a conference where God just might make it plain that what the Black community needs and what the White community needs is a transcendent reference point in the sovereignty of God and the supremacy of God and the centrality of God in all things?’” So I called him, and he was willing to come. That is how this conference came to be.

Biblical Foundations

Now let me take a few minutes to put some biblical foundations underneath what I mean by God-centeredness and God’s supremacy, and add biblical fire to the furnace that I pray will forge the link between the great realities of God-centeredness and God’s supremacy, on the one hand, and the soul dynamic and the Black experience, on the other hand, for the sake of rebuilding White and Black Christian communities interlocked by the transcendent reference point of God’s God-centered Word.

Here is where I am going in the time we have left. I want to exult with you in the God-centeredness of God: first in his providence over all history; second, in the love of God for his people; third, in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross; then fourth, in our suffering and death with Jesus in this world of sin and pain. And at every point where I stress the radical God-centeredness of God, I want to show that this is the best news in all the world. This is what we were made for. This is our hope and salvation and everlasting joy.

The God-Centeredness of God in His Providence over All History

All of God’s providence over history starts with creation, and we learn what that providential rule is about from what creation is about. Isaiah 43:6-7 tells us, “I will say to the north, ‘Give up,’ and to the south, ‘Do not withhold;’ bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I *created for my glory*.”⁸ God created the world to display his glory. God’s work in creation was about making God the center of creation.

Now we could do some logic here and say, *therefore*, it must be that God governs the world for the same reason. But let’s not do the logic; let’s just read the answer in the Bible. For what purpose does God rule the world he has made? Paul tells us in one of the most sweeping statements in the Bible about the God-centeredness of God. Ephesians 1:11-12. “[He] works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might *be to the praise of his glory*.” Why does he work all things according to his will? So that his glory will be praised. He is absolutely God-centered in his providence.

This is good news if you are God-centered person and love God’s commitment to make himself the central reality in the universe where he will be enjoyed forever and ever with ever-increasing joy.

But it is disappointing news to man-centered White and Black communities that are controlled by White supremacy or the beauty of blackness. God does not rule the world to make us central—not as White, not as Black, not as brown, and not as human beings period. We are not absolute. We are not ultimate. He is absolute and he is ultimate. He is central. Has

been. Is now. Always will be.

If this sounds White to you, then play it on your own instrument. Here is Carl Ellis playing what may sound like White, Reformed God-centeredness (maybe even Van Tilian presuppositionalism⁹) on his Black instrument:

[God's] existence is the most obvious and fundamental thing in human experience. There can be no *is* without God's *is*: and since *is* is, God is, because God is *is*. . . The only way anyone can declare that God "ain't" is to declare that *is* ain't. And if *is* ain't, there never was a "God ain't" declaration in the first place. Without God even the atheist could not say "God ain't." He would not exist to say it.¹⁰

My Black brothers, I beg of you, don't be hoodwinked into thinking that the supremacy of God in all things is a White man's vision. It is God's vision. And it must be played on both our instruments. As Carl Ellis explains in Chapter 12, it must be played by the Black Jazz preacher, and it must be played by the White classical preacher. And I would add, these preachers better learn from each other, because there are more White people longing for the soul of Jazz preaching and more Black people longing for the content of classical preaching than we ever dreamed. The point is this: in God's providence over all history, man is not at the top, man is not at the bottom, man is not at the center—God is. And he means to be. And I dream of standing on that granite foundation with you together.

The God-Centeredness of God in the Love of God for His People

Sometimes people who are saturated with the centrality of man—whether their own selves (which Ellis calls "me-ism") or their own kind (ethnocentrism)—do

not feel that God's God-centeredness is a loving thing. How can God be loving if he does everything to display his own glory?

Well, what I have come to see is that God's commitment to the exaltation of his own glory is the essence of his love. Here is one place to see it:

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he *whom you love* is ill." But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is *for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.*" Now *Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.* So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was (John 11:1-6).

Notice three amazing things:

1. Jesus chose to let Lazarus die: "When he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was" (v. 6). There was no hurry. His intention was not to spare the family grief, but to raise Lazarus from the dead.
2. He was motivated by a passion for the glory of God displayed in his own glorious power: "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (v. 4).
3. Nevertheless both the decision to let Lazarus die and the motivation to magnify God were expressions of *love* for Mary and Martha and Lazarus: "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus . . . so . . . he stayed . . . where he was" (v. 5).

O how many people today—even Christians—would murmur at Jesus for callously letting Lazarus die and putting him and Mary and Martha and others through the pain and misery of

those days. And if they saw that this was motivated by Jesus' desire to magnify the glory of God, many would call this harsh or unloving. What this shows is how far above the glory of God most people value pain-free lives. For most people love is whatever puts human value and human well-being at the center. So Jesus' behavior is unintelligible to them.

But let us not tell Jesus what love is. Let us not instruct him how he should love us and make us central. Let us learn from Jesus what love is and what our true well-being is. Love is doing whatever you need to do to help people see and savor the glory of God forever and ever. Love keeps God central. Because the soul was made for God. We were not made to make much of blackness. We were not made to make much of whiteness. We were not made to make much of self or humanity in general. We were made to make much of God. And when God pursues this, he pursues what is best for us—what will satisfy us forever. And therefore God's self-exaltation is the essence of his love. He loves us not by making much of us, but by freeing us from the bondage of self to enjoy making much of him forever.

Jesus confirms that we are on the right track here by praying in John 17:24, "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world." The love of Jesus drives him to pray for us and then die for us, not that *our* value may be central, but that *his* glory may be central, and we may see it and savor it for all eternity. "That they may see My glory!"—for that he let Lazarus die, and for that he went to the cross. And that, brothers, is a massive foundation for a great new vision of our

common life—Black and White, under God's loving God-centeredness.

The God-Centeredness of God in the Suffering and Death of Jesus Christ on the Cross

The center of history and the center of salvation is the death of Jesus Christ. Why did he die? The Bible gives more than one answer. One is this "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor 15:3). In other words, "the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:6). Or you can say it another way: He died for *us*. Romans 5:8, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." He died in our place (2 Cor 5:14; 1 Thess 5:10). "He bore our sins in his body" (1 Pet 2:24).

But there is something deeper that explains the cross. If the only thing at stake were our lives, then he might have just said, "Let's let bygones be bygones." He might have forgiven us without the blood-shedding of his Son. He might have just declared us innocent and righteousness without the climactic act of perfect obedience and sin-bearing pardon. But Paul explains in Romans 3:25-26 why it could not be. The reason it could not happen that way is because God's own glory, his righteous commitment to uphold his name and worth and holiness, were at stake in passing over God-belittling sins.

God put [Christ] forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Our forgiveness and acceptance though the blood of Jesus hangs on God's commit-

ment to be vindicated. God's zeal to be exalted as a righteous God is the foundation of his willingness to put his Son to death (Isa 53:10). So the cross is a cry for us to make God central in our preaching of salvation. Yes, O glorious yes, we are forgiven, and we are justified, and we will be glorified. But how do you speak of this? Do you not speak with the words of Psalm 25:11, "*For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great.*" Are we pardoned to parade our worth and our glory? Or are we pardoned so that we might be freed to join the happiest parade that ever was—to spend eternity celebrating his worth and his glory? I say, let us speak the way God speaks in Isaiah 43:25, "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions *for my own sake*, and I will not remember your sins."

The suffering and death of Jesus are not meant to make much of us. They are meant to free us from the bondage to mirrors, so we might enjoy making much of Christ forever. He died "to bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18) so that we might see and savor his glory forever (John 17:24).

The God-Centeredness of God in our Suffering and Death with Jesus in This World of Sin and Pain

What does the pain of the Black experience in America mean? What does the pain of White Christian martyrs in the reign of Bloody Mary mean? What does the suffering and death of thousands of Christians in China mean? None of these things has taken the all-seeing, all-knowing, risen, sovereign Christ off-guard. In fact, he told us they would come.

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. . . . they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake. . . . Brother will deliver brother over to

death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. . . . A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. . . . If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household (Matt 10:16-25).

Do you see what this means? It means that when we suffer for righteousness' sake, Jesus is shown to be a truth-teller. Paradoxically, his word is vindicated in the very experience that threatens our trust in him most deeply.

Paul picked up the theme and promised that the pain would come. "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12). "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). And James: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds" (James 1:2). And Peter: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Pet 4:12).

Now what does all this have to do with the supremacy of God and the centrality of God and the sovereignty of God? Let Paul answer from 2 Corinthians 12. After receiving indescribable visions Paul said, "To keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!" (2 Cor 12:7). He pleaded three times that the Lord would take it away. But the answer he received from Christ was this: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

The point of Paul's pain was to magnify the perfection of Christ's power. Here is

a test, brothers, a hard test. How many in our White Christian community or in our Black Christian community would hear this explanation of our pain and say, "I am glad that Christ's power will be magnified in my pain. That is enough for me." Or how many will rather say, "I don't care about this self-exalting, glory-seeking, Christ-centered Christ, I just want to be free from my pain!"?

What did Paul say when Christ said, "No, I will not take away your pain, but I will display the perfection of my power in it"? What did Paul say? He said (in 2 Cor 12:9), "Therefore I will exult (*kauchēsomai*) all the more gladly (*hēdistā*) in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." How do you explain this man? He did not merely say, "I will endure this because Christ has appointed it for my good." He said, "I will exult with gladness in it because Christ will be made much of through it."

Conclusion

Is this not our aim brothers? Is this not the passion of our lives? To become so God-centered and so Christ-exalting and so consumed with a passion for the supremacy of God that anything that will show him to be the supreme treasure of our lives—above health, above wealth, above family, above success, above fame—any pain, any trial, any trouble, any loss, any grief, anything that will show him to be infinitely precious, we will embrace with joy. Because the love of God is not, at root, his making much of us, but his freeing us to enjoy making much of him for ever?

"Sorrowful yet always rejoicing—in Him!" Is not this seed at the root of the soul dynamic? Is not this confidence, and this indomitable joy at the root of the

Black spiritual experience in America? Is not this the crying need of weightless, White evangelical Christianity with its man-centered God and flight from risk and suffering? And if so, might it be—may it be—that the link between the sovereignty of God and the soul dynamic, and between God-centered thinking and the Black experience, could become the awakening and the empowering not just of a new Black culture, and not just a new White culture, but a new culturally-interwoven culture, welded most deeply by a common passion for the centrality of God and the supremacy of God and the sovereignty of God and the glory of Christ, that frees us and carries us toward need and not comfort, ready to suffer, not running to safety, until we bring the neighborhoods and the nations into the joy of seeing and savoring the all-satisfying Christ forever.

ENDNOTES

¹The term "Soul Dynamic" is taken from Carl Ellis's book *Free at Last: The Gospel in the African-American Experience* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996). He defines it like this: "The core of the African-American culture that developed in the context of White oppression and Black resistance to oppression. This dynamic is a combination of two main components: A theological dynamic—an oral tradition that emerged from historic African-American church experience. It captures nuggets of biblical truth in forceful, effective phrases and mental images out of life experience. A cultural dynamic—deeply moving expressions of African-American consciousness that emerged from the very roots of their humanity and experience, from levels where the image of God cannot be

suppressed. Because these expressions are aligned with the power of God's Word, they have the power to deeply affect others who encounter them" (266; see 48).

²For a full exposition of the concept of "Christian Hedonism" and the expression "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him," see John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1987).

³"Anyone who has spent any time at all listening to the Blues knows it is not necessarily 'down' or 'depressing' or sad. It is soulful, without a doubt, and the lyrics are frequently concerned with misfortune and loss, but the Blues is really a complex combination of misery and high spirits. Often the musical accompaniment is joyous and arrogant, in apparent contradiction to the unhappiness of the lyrics. This fascinating ambiguity has more than anything else to do with the universal appeal of the Blues" (Stephen Green, "The Blues." Online: <http://afgen.com/aboutblu.html>).

⁴One of the great spokesmen in America for the traditional Reformed theology was Geerhardus Vos, who said that the "root idea [of Reformed theology] which served as the key to unlock the rich treasures of the Scriptures was the preeminence of God's glory in the consideration of all that has been created" ("The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. by Richard Gaffin, Jr. [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed,

1980] 241-242).

⁵Ellis, 23.

⁶The term is carefully chosen and defined by Ellis, "This ugly term is most fitting because of its ugliness, to refer to the negative or unchristian religious practices expressed in the language of Christianity" (Ibid., 214).

⁷Ibid., 154.

⁸All Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version* (all italics added).

⁹See Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955). For further on Van Til, see John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995).

¹⁰Ellis, 158.