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PREACHING TO PROVOKE A WORLDVIEW CHANGE:  
TIM KELLER'S USE OF PRESUPPOSITIONAL  
APOLOGETICS IN PREACHING

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
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by  
Travis Allen Freeman  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

PREACHING TO PROVOKE A WORLDVIEW CHANGE:  
TIM KELLER'S USE OF PRESUPPOSITIONAL  
APOLOGETICS IN PREACHING

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To my parents, who have prayed for and supported me  
through many struggles and accomplishments.  
Thank you for all you have done to assist me  
in getting to this point in my life.

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## PREFACE

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Travis Allen Freeman

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

During the second half of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century a philosophical shift began to take place in America.<sup>1</sup> People began to move away from a modernist worldview.<sup>2</sup> Modernity had one overarching theme: absolute, objective truth did exist, and it could be discovered.<sup>3</sup> Those who adopted this worldview believed that science and the scientific method could provide answers to all of life's questions.<sup>4</sup> This understanding of the world and of life, however, ultimately failed because of its detachment from the reality of human emotion and feeling. Modernity did not provide answers to the crucial questions: who am I, and why am I here?<sup>5</sup>

From the failed worldview of modernity arose a new way of viewing the world, post-modernity. Post-modernity is characterized by a shift from believing in absolute,

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<sup>1</sup>Graham Johnston, *Preaching in a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-First-Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 9.

<sup>2</sup>James Sire defines a worldview as “a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.” James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 122.

<sup>3</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 59-60.

<sup>4</sup>Michael W. Payne, “Philosophy among the Ruins: The Twentieth Century and Beyond,” in *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought*, ed. W. Andrew Hoffecker (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 344.

<sup>5</sup>Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 14.

objective truth to valuing relativistic thinking.<sup>6</sup> People who ascribe to this relativistic way of viewing the world are suspicious of authority and are unwilling to tell anyone that he or she is wrong.<sup>7</sup> Such tolerance, characteristic of postmoderns, has given rise to a pluralistic way of living and interacting in the world.<sup>8</sup>

This cultural shift in contemporary America provides a difficult task for the Christian preacher. He has the challenge of proclaiming the truth of God's Word in a pluralistic, postmodern society that rejects the very notion of the truth he desires to communicate.<sup>9</sup> When faced with such a situation he has a choice between two diametrically opposed positions—to abandon orthodox teaching or remain faithful to God's Word. He can embrace the postmodern mindset, forfeiting all of his authority to make truth claims concerning the Bible<sup>10</sup> or he can begin to think like a missionary who has

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 8. Concerning post modernity, R. Albert Mohler argues that the debate over the nature of truth has changed. People no longer argue the validity of various truth claims; instead, they debate the very existence of truth. Mohler writes, "Postmodernism rejects the very notion of truth as fixed, universal, objective, or absolute." R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He Is not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 116.

<sup>7</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Ministry in the New Global culture of City-Centers, Part 2," *E-Newsletter of the Redeemer Church Planting Network* (2005) [on-line]; accessed 6 February 2010; available from <http://www.redeemer2.com/themovement/issues2005/fall/ministryinglobalcultureIIp1.html>; Internet.

<sup>8</sup>D. A. Carson defines pluralism by presenting three different aspects of it: empirical pluralism, cherished pluralism, and philosophical/hermeneutical pluralism. Carson, *Gagging of God*, 13. First, he defines empirical pluralism as the growing cultural and religious diversity in American culture. Ibid. Second, he asserts that cherished pluralism takes the diversity present in empirical pluralism and adds to it the additional component of approval. Ibid., 16. Approving of the religious diversity present in culture, people ignore any conflicts or inconsistencies that may exist between the divergent views. Ibid., 18. Third, concerning philosophical/hermeneutical pluralism, Carson states, "Any notion that a particular ideological or religious claim is intrinsically superior to another is necessarily wrong." Ibid. This form of pluralism poses the greatest threat to the biblical worldview because it emasculates the concept of absolute, objective truth.

<sup>9</sup>Writing about post-modernity, Johnston states, "Can you see where this is going regarding biblical preaching? In the postmodern world the authority of the Bible is brought into serious question." Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 30.

<sup>10</sup>In his book *As One without Authority*, Fred Craddock declares the death of the traditional approach to preaching. Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*

been charged with the task of taking the gospel to an unreached people group.<sup>11</sup> As the culture continues to spiral further into postmodernism, people identify with Christianity less and less.<sup>12</sup> The preacher can no longer assume that his people have a biblical worldview with which to process what he says. He must reconstruct the biblical worldview for them, showing them how it applies to every area of their lives.

### **Thesis**

This dissertation examines how Tim Keller utilizes presuppositional apologetics in preaching to assist his congregation in the development of a biblical worldview. I begin by establishing the need for this type of preaching by discussing the decline and marginalization of the biblical worldview in America. Second, I summarize the preaching methodology of Tim Keller, explaining how he uses presuppositional apologetics in his preaching. Third, I will present an overview of presuppositional apologetics, showing why this apologetic approach is well-suited for dealing with worldview issues. Finally, I analyze a wide range of Keller's sermons in order to determine how he applies his methodology.

### **Decline and Marginalization of the Biblical Worldview in America**

In his book *Next Christians*, Gabe Lyons argues that Americans no longer hold Christianity as a central aspect of their lives.<sup>13</sup> Lyons contends that the suburban sprawl

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(St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), 13-15. He contends, "The very location and elevation of the pulpit imply an authority on the part of the speaker or the message that the minister is hesitant to assume and the listeners no longer recognize." Ibid., 14. See also Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Reimagined* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

<sup>11</sup>Chris Altrock, *Preaching to Pluralists: How to Proclaim Christ in a Postmodern Age* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2004), 14.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Gabe Lyons, *Next Christians: The Good News about the End of Christian America* (New York: Double Day, 2010), 24.

represents how the church has lost its central place in American life both physically and conceptually.<sup>14</sup> For people caught up in the suburban sprawl, church and church activities become one option among many. Commenting on the reduced role that the church plays in people's lives, he states, "Instead of anchoring their center, some churches have become a convenient location where Christians can drop in without interrupting their normal routines."<sup>15</sup> This decentralization of the church has resulted because fewer people operate out of a biblical worldview.<sup>16</sup> Instead of allowing biblical principles to guide and direct their lives, these people permit their busy schedules to dictate and rule every moment of their day.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid. Lyons explains the suburban sprawl: "If you want to catch a glimpse of what a post-Christian setting looks like, head out to the suburbs. Life itself has changed, as most people no longer order their world around a geographic center. Suburban sprawl represents over 90 percent of residential growth in the past decade. More important, the sociological structure of life has followed suit. Our daily patterns are structured around an eclectic mix of lifestyle choices. . . . A person may choose one neighborhood for his residence and commute to a completely different part of town for his work. That same person may choose a gym on one side of town but prefer a coffee shop on the other. . . . In the process, the church—being the least of these demands—becomes relegated to the margins." Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 10-11. Danny Akin and Bruce Ashford argue that during the mid to late twentieth century preachers could assume that their congregations had some understanding of the biblical narrative. This understanding of the Bible provided the preacher and the audience with a common language to use in discussing ethics and morals. This common understanding and language no longer exists in the twenty-first century. Danny Akin and Bruce Ashford, "Aspect 4(A) A Mission focused on this Nation (Confront the Brutal Facts)" [on-line]; accessed 2 June 2010; available from <http://www.betweentheimes.com/2009/11/05/aspect-4a-a-mission-focused-on-this-nation-confront-the-brutal-facts>; Internet. According to the Barna research group, only 9 percent of Americans have a biblical worldview. The Barna Research Group, "Barna Research Examines Changes in Worldview Among Christians over the past 13 Years" (2009) [on-line]; accessed 10 June 2001; available from <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/21-transformation/barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years>; Internet. Among born again Christians this number jumps to only 19 percent. Ibid. Only 1 out of every 5 professing Christians in America has what could be classified as a biblical worldview. The Barna group also discovered, "Biblical literacy is neither a current reality nor a goal in the US." Idem, "Barna Studies the Research, Offers a Year in Review Perspective" (2009) [on-line]; accessed 7 June 2010; available from <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/325-barna-studies-the-research-offers-a-year-in-review-perspective>; Internet.

A 2008 survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life supports the notion that the biblical worldview is declining in America.<sup>17</sup> The survey notes that the protestant majority, which has existed in America since the colonial days, now stands at a mere 51.3 percent.<sup>18</sup> If this trend continues, the number of Americans claiming to be “protestant” will soon drop below 50 percent for the first time in history.<sup>19</sup> As the protestant majority shrinks, the number of people who claim no religious affiliation at all continues to increase. The survey states that 16.1 percent claim to be atheist, agnostics, or nothing in particular.<sup>20</sup> The decreasing number of protestants combined with the increasing number of people who claim no religious affiliation supports Lyons’s understanding of the church and the role of the Christian faith in the lives of Americans.

This chapter also examines the marginalization of the biblical worldview in the American public square.<sup>21</sup> An examination of two specific areas of public life—law and education—reveals the depth of the marginalization of the biblical worldview.<sup>22</sup> People

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<sup>17</sup>The Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life, “The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey Reveals a Fluid and Diverse Pattern of Faith” [on-line]; accessed 19 October 2010; available from <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/743/united-states-religion>; Internet.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Lyons defines the public square: “The public square doesn’t refer to a physical location. . . . Rather, it is a metaphor for all the forums in which citizens can come together to deliberate, debate, and decide the implications of their common life.” Lyons, *Next Christians*, 221.

<sup>22</sup>Phillip E. Johnson, *Reason in the Balance: The Case against Naturalism in Science, Law, and Education* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 9-10. The importance of these three areas resides in their ability to form public opinion. Johnson writes, “The United States is formally a democracy, but on matters involving religion the Constitution is supreme, and the judges have the authority to say what the Constitution means. Moreover, the voters get their information about what is going on from the newspapers and television. The judges who make the legal decisions and journalists who report the news get their education at the universities, and they normally interpret events in the light of what they have been taught.” Ibid.

who allow religion to impact how they engage in law and education are often viewed as irrational and untrustworthy.<sup>23</sup> They feel the need to defend the relevance of their worldview, while the naturalistic worldview of their opponents seems to go unchallenged.<sup>24</sup> This naturalistic way of thinking is rarely questioned; it is simply assumed.<sup>25</sup>

This chapter concludes by discussing how preachers should respond when faced with the postmodern mindset of their congregations. They must be willing to walk people through the process of going from absolute unbelief and ignorance of the biblical worldview to belief and trust in the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup> Preachers need to incorporate worldview issues into their preaching to help people construct a framework through which they can properly receive the gospel. Answering worldview questions such as “who are we” and “where did we come from” provides people with further understanding of their need for the gospel. After establishing the need for preaching that focuses on worldview issues, I then explore the ministry of a preacher who strives to preach in a way that assists non-believers in this journey.

### **Tim Keller**

Chapter 3 examines the preaching methodology of Tim Keller. Keller pastors the Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City and preaches to approximately five thousand people on a weekly basis.<sup>27</sup> The congregation at Redeemer contains a unique

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 7-8. Those who hold to a naturalistic worldview believe that everything can be traced back to natural causes. These people view God as a made up part of the human psyche. Ibid., 8.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Timothy J. Keller, “Preaching to the Secular Mind,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 14 (1995): 58.

<sup>27</sup>Lisa Miller, “The Smart Shepherd: A New York Pastor Who Says He Thinks Too Much Wants to Bring His Christian Message to the World,” *News Week*, 9 February 2008 [on-line]; accessed 21 April 2009; available from <http://www.newsweek.com/id/109609>; Internet.

demographic, making his context much different than that of most preachers.<sup>28</sup> Since Redeemer is located in the heart of New York City where progressive, relativistic ideas of secular philosophy often originate, Keller understands that he preaches in a different environment.<sup>29</sup> A significant portion of Keller's audience is bombarded by and embraces this progressive ideology, making his ministry extremely difficult.<sup>30</sup>

Keller strives to provoke a worldview change among his listeners.<sup>31</sup> Keller writes, "Evangelism in a postmodern context must be much more thorough, progressive, and process-oriented. There are many stages to bring people through who know nothing at all about the gospel and Christianity."<sup>32</sup> In other words, when preaching in a postmodern context, the preacher must be willing to take his audience from a point of complete ignorance to saving faith. Keller works toward this worldview change in his listeners by incorporating presuppositional apologetics in his preaching. His apologetic method allows him to confront the existing worldviews of his listeners while pointing them to the biblical worldview as the only consistent one. This dissertation will summarize and examine Keller's approach to preaching in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how he uses apologetics to communicate to a postmodern, unchristian culture.

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<sup>28</sup>Lisa Miller captures this distinctiveness: "The crowd at Redeemer Presbyterian is overwhelmingly young, single, professional, and—for lack of a better word—sober." Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Timothy J. Keller, *Applying Christ: Getting inside Their World, Part 1*, "Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World" (lecture delivered at the Reformed Theological Seminary) [on-line]; accessed 3 February 2010; available from <http://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/preaching-christ-in-postmodern/id378879885>; Internet.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "The Gospel and the Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World," in *The Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 114.



## Presuppositional Apologetics

In her book *Total Truth*, Nancy Pearcey contends that Christians should be a redemptive force in every aspect of culture.<sup>33</sup> She challenges preachers to assist their congregations in the development of a biblical worldview through the use of apologetics.<sup>34</sup> In a similar fashion, Mohler comments on the preacher's task: "In this culture, I would argue that at this time of cultural and intellectual transition, the task of preaching must be understood as an apologetic calling."<sup>35</sup> Integrating apologetics and preaching allows the preacher to discuss more easily worldview presuppositions because one aspect of apologetics involves comparing various systems of thought.<sup>36</sup> This form of preaching prepares people to apply biblical principles in every aspect of their lives.

The task of comparing differing worldviews is best accomplished through the use of presuppositional apologetics.<sup>37</sup> A presuppositionalist views an apologetic encounter

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<sup>33</sup>Nancy R. Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 17.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 127. The necessity of this development lies in the need to prepare their congregations to face the attacks and questions of an unbelieving world. *Ibid.* Pearcey asserts, "By translating Christian theology into contemporary language, we can set it side by side other systems of thought, demonstrating that it offers a more consistent and comprehensive account of reality." *Ibid.*, 124-25.

<sup>35</sup>Mohler, *He Is not Silent*, 123.

<sup>36</sup>Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 125. Sire defines a presupposition: "That which, though we may be able to give reason for, we cannot, strictly speaking, prove. Nevertheless, we believe so profoundly that we commit ourselves to it and live in accord with it. We cannot do otherwise, for we need it in order to give our life enough meaning to keep going." Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 77. Preachers can know when to incorporate worldview presuppositions into their sermons by being mindful of Sire's seven worldview questions: (1) What is prime reality? (2) What is the nature of external reality? (3) What is a human being? (4) What happens to a person at death? (5) Why is it possible to know anything at all? (6) How do we know what is right and wrong? (7) What is the meaning of human history? *Ibid.*, 134-35.

<sup>37</sup>In his discussion on 1 Pet 3:15-17, Frame defines apologetics as "the discipline that teaches Christians how to give a reason for their hope." John M. Frame, *Apologetics for the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), 1. Later he defines an ultimate presupposition as "a basic heart commitment, an ultimate trust." *Ibid.*, 6. Presuppositional apologetics can then be defined as: a method of defending the faith that attacks the most basic beliefs of a nonbeliever, showing the

as a collision between two opposing worldviews. Cornelius Van Til writes, “It will be our business then to take the totality picture of Christianity, and compare it with the totality picture of non-Christian thought.”<sup>38</sup> Van Til did not want to adopt a piecemeal approach to defending Christianity; instead, he wanted to set the Christian worldview side-by-side with other worldviews in order to examine the consistency of each. Van Til confidently believed that the Christian worldview would prove to be the only consistent worldview.

The discussion of presuppositionalism in this dissertation focuses on three primary facets: its understanding of epistemology,<sup>39</sup> the point of contact,<sup>40</sup> and the argument from the impossibility of the contrary.<sup>41</sup> These three aspects provide a survey of presuppositional apologetics and show why Keller would choose to use a presuppositional approach in his preaching.

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inconsistencies in said beliefs, and pointing them to the consistency of the biblical worldview.

<sup>38</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955), 24.

<sup>39</sup>When discussing epistemology, Frame explains, “Human knowledge is analogous to God’s, which means it is (1) created and therefore different from God’s own knowledge, and (2) subject to God’s control and authority.” John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995), 89. In other words, all of man’s knowledge must be derived from a sovereign, self-contained God. Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Because human knowledge must be derived from God’s knowledge, no intellectually neutral ground exists between the believer and the nonbeliever. Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith*, ed. Robert R. Booth (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant, 1996), 4, 7. Due to the lack of neutral ground between the believer and the nonbeliever, a point of contact must be established. Frame reveals the problem: “The issue provoking this phrase (the point of contact) is this: granted that the unbeliever is totally depraved, what is there in him, if anything, that is capable of receiving God’s grace?” Frame, *Apologetics for the Glory of God*, 82. He argues that the knowledge of God present in all people serves as the point of contact between the believer and the nonbeliever. Ibid., 83.

<sup>41</sup>Van Til explains, “The Christian apologist must place himself upon the position of his opponent, assuming the correctness of his method merely for arguments sake, in order to show him that on such a position the facts are not facts and the laws are not laws. He must also ask the non-Christian to place himself on the Christian position for arguments sake in order that he may be shown that only upon such a basis do facts and laws appear intelligible.” Van Til, *A Defense of the Faith*, 100-01.

This dissertation fills a gap in contemporary homiletics books that deal with preaching and postmodernism. Several books strive to explain how preachers can communicate with postmoderns, but none of them combine worldview presuppositions with presuppositional apologetics.<sup>42</sup> Some of these books attempt to redefine preaching all together, rejecting any semblance of a traditional sermon.<sup>43</sup> Others provide helpful insight into reaching postmoderns, but they do not address the utilization of presuppositional apologetics.<sup>44</sup> In this dissertation, I knit together the insights gained from these books with a discussion of Keller’s preaching.

### **Background**

The Apostle Peter challenges his readers, “In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). The Apostle never wants his readers to be caught off guard. They should always be aware of their cultural context and of possible questions that could be asked about their faith. He wants his readers to have some understanding of apologetics.

While pursuing an undergraduate degree at the University of Kentucky, I developed a great interest in apologetics. As I shared the gospel with my fellow students, I wanted to be able to provide sufficient answers to the questions they posed. At this point,

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<sup>42</sup>Altrock, *Preaching to Pluralists*; Kenton C. Anderson, *Preaching with Conviction: Connecting with Postmodern Listeners* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001); Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons that Connect with Our Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*; David J. Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); John S. McClure, *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2001); Mohler, *He Is not Silent*; and Pagitt, *Preaching Reimagined*.

<sup>43</sup>Pagitt, *Preaching Reimagined*; McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching*.

<sup>44</sup>Altrock, *Preaching to Pluralists*; Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World*; Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*; and Mohler, *He Is not Silent*.

I had an evidentialist approach to apologetics. I listened to lectures, read books, and sought answers to possible questions, wanting to always be prepared to give a defense of my faith. The challenges I faced during many of those apologetic encounters forced me to become more grounded in my faith and helped me to understand Christianity better. This grounding served me well as I graduated from college and entered The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

During my time at Southern, I earned a Master of Divinity and began pursuing a Doctorate of Philosophy in the area of expository preaching. Not until my third semester of Ph.D. coursework, while writing a paper for a soteriology seminar, did I become acquainted with presuppositional apologetics. During my Ph.D. program, I wrote three papers related to the use of presuppositional apologetics in preaching. The first paper argued that Paul's speech at the Areopagus could be used as a model for postmodern preaching. Around the same time I wrote this paper, I heard a sermon by Tim Keller in which he utilized presuppositional apologetics. While writing this paper and reflecting on Keller's sermon, I noticed several similarities. These similarities led me to write two more papers on the subject. For a doctrinal preaching seminar, I wrote a paper exploring Keller's use of presuppositional apologetics in preaching doctrine. In addition, for a worldview analysis seminar, I wrote about the use of presuppositional apologetics in preaching to develop a biblical worldview. All three of these endeavors showed me the importance of writing on this topic.

As American culture continues to change, preachers face the increasingly difficult task of defending the faith. Not only do they face this task, but they also encounter the challenge of teaching their congregations how to respond to the growing number of questions they face. I am concerned that preachers do not presently have the tools to properly perform these tasks. Knowing this, I desired to write on Tim Keller's use of presuppositional apologetics in preaching.

## Types of Data

I use many different types of data for my research. First, I refer to several national surveys dealing with the state of Christianity in America. These surveys help to establish the decline and marginalization of the biblical worldview, showing that the United States is becoming a post-Christian nation. The writings of Nancy Pearcey, David Wells, D. A. Carson, and Gabe Lyons affirm this trend and help one understand how the church should respond.

Second, I cite many books and articles dealing with the topic of presuppositional apologetics. Van Til, Bahnsen, and Frame have written extensively on the topic of presuppositionalism. Their works assist in summarizing the topic and explaining its benefit for contemporary preachers.

Third, I incorporate many sources from Tim Keller. I compile material from his books, articles, blogs, lectures, and sermons to show that his preaching methodology offers a contemporary example of how a preacher can use presuppositional apologetics successfully to provoke a worldview change in his audience. His lectures on preaching offer an explanation of his preaching methodology, while his vast sermon archives provide many examples of how he applies his methodology.

Finally, I analyze three different sermon series preached by Keller in order to determine how he applies his methodology. First, I examine his series entitled *The Trouble with Christianity: Why It's so Hard to Believe It*. The six sermons Keller preached in this series demonstrate his use of presuppositional apologetics.<sup>45</sup> Next, I analyze his 2005 sermon series through the book of Acts in order to examine how he applied his methodology in Redeemer's early years. Third, I dissect his 2007 series on the book of Deuteronomy to understand how his preaching changed over the decade between the two series.

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<sup>45</sup>These sermons also served as the basis for Keller's book *The Reason for God*, which further explains his apologetic methodology. See Timothy J. Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

## **Research Technique and Methods of Treatment**

This dissertation begins with an analysis of the biblical worldview in America and contends that the number of people in America who hold to a biblical worldview continues to decline. It also discusses the marginalization of this worldview. This chapter suggests why preachers need to assist their congregations in developing a biblical worldview that congregants can then take out into their jobs and social settings. Next, the dissertation presents the preaching methodology of Tim Keller, focusing on how he uses presuppositional apologetics. It argues that by incorporating this apologetic method, Keller assists his congregation in developing a biblical worldview. Third, this dissertation discusses the concept of presuppositional apologetics. This section argues that the presuppositional apologetic method is the most successful way of communicating worldview presuppositions to postmodern listeners. It shows how presuppositionalism answers life's ultimate questions, while establishing the Christian worldview as the only consistent worldview. Finally, this dissertation concludes with a comprehensive exploration of Keller's preaching. This final section shows, by examining a wide range of Keller's sermons, how he communicates the truth of the gospel in his postmodern context.

## **Limitations of the Dissertation**

This dissertation has five primary limitations. First, the dissertation does not cover all the assertions, effects, and implications of the naturalist worldview. Chapter 2 simply provides a brief explanation of this worldview, focusing on its unchallenged view of truth and how it marginalizes Christianity. An examination of its many scientific claims, and their implications could fill many volumes. An in-depth study of this magnitude falls outside the bounds of this dissertation.

Second, Keller's preaching methodology holds that every passage in the Bible should be preached in light of Christ. This dissertation does not seek to defend the validity or legitimacy of this interpretive approach. It assumes the truthfulness of this assertion in order to advance the argument. This dissertation focuses more on how Keller uses Christ

to establish a biblical worldview than on how well Keller interprets the biblical text.

Third, the discussion of apologetics in chapter 4 does not juxtapose presuppositional apologetics with other methods. Nor does it account for the many strengths and weaknesses of various apologetic methodologies. Instead, chapter 4 provides an overview of presuppositionalism and its benefits for preaching.

Fourth, the discussion of presuppositional apologetics in this dissertation centers on only three important facets—its understanding of epistemology, the point of contact, and the argument from the impossibility of the contrary. An in-depth examination of presuppositionalism could lead one down many alternate paths. This dissertation attempts to avoid these paths, choosing instead to remain focused on the primary issues undergirding presuppositionalism.

Fifth, the analysis of how Keller applies his methodology contained within this dissertation does not summarize and critique every sermon he has ever preached. An analysis of this magnitude would continue on for many pages without providing any new insights. This dissertation, however, focuses on a select representation of his sermons, incorporating a variety of texts. This allows the reader to understand his methodology, without overwhelming him with needless information.

In a culture moving further and further away from its Christian foundation, how can preachers communicate the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ? The following chapters examine how Tim Keller has chosen to answer this question. They explain his approach to preaching, including his use of presuppositional apologetics to assist his congregation in the development of a biblical worldview.

CHAPTER 2  
DECLINE AND MARGINALIZATION OF  
THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

**Introduction**

In his April 4, 2009, *Newsweek* cover story, Jon Meacham declared “The End of Christian America.”<sup>1</sup> This declaration came in response to the 2008 American Religious Identification Survey in which the number of Americans claiming no religious affiliation had risen from 8 percent in 1990 to 15 percent in 2008.<sup>2</sup> Meacham views the end of Christian America as a positive occurrence because it “creates a calmer political environment and for many believers may open the way for a more theologically serious life.”<sup>3</sup> The following chapter discusses this decline and marginalization of the biblical worldview in America. It begins by discussing several recent statistical surveys that point to the decline of the biblical worldview. Next, it explains the rise and almost universal acceptance of scientific naturalism and how naturalism has led to the marginalization of

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<sup>1</sup>Jon Meacham, “The End of Christian America: The Percentage of Self-Identified Christians has Fallen Ten Points in the Past Two Decades. How that Statistic Explains Who We Are Now and What as a Nation We Are about to Become,” *Newsweek*, 4 April 2009 [on-line]; accessed 21 February 2011; available from <http://www.newsweek.com/2009/04/03/the-end-of-christian-america.html>; Internet.

<sup>2</sup>Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, “Catholics on the Move, Non-Religious on the Rise,” *American Religious Identification Survey* [on-line]; accessed 22 February 2011; available from [http://www.AmericanReligionSurvey-ARIS.org/2008/03/catholics\\_on\\_the\\_move\\_non-religious\\_on\\_the\\_rise.html](http://www.AmericanReligionSurvey-ARIS.org/2008/03/catholics_on_the_move_non-religious_on_the_rise.html); Internet.

<sup>3</sup>Meacham, “The End of Christian America,” 1. Meacham states, “While we remain a nation decisively shaped by religious faith, our politics and our culture are in the main, less influenced by movements and arguments of an explicitly Christian character than they were even five years ago. I think this is a good thing-good for our political culture, which as the American founders saw, is complex and charged enough without attempting to compel or coerce religious belief or observance.” *Ibid.*



the biblical worldview. Finally, the chapter concludes by presenting several ways the church can respond to the current cultural circumstances.

### **The Decline of the Biblical Worldview**

An examination of what Albert Mohler calls “a remarkable cultural shift” that has taken place in America over the past sixty years reveals that America is moving away from its Christian roots.<sup>4</sup> When discussing this shift, several issues need to be addressed: when did it begin; what is the evidence of the shift; and how has the shift impacted the church? The following section begins with an analysis of the writings of Thomas Kuhn and Michael Polanyi, who began questioning the modernist approach to truth and science. Next, this section examines several national surveys relating to the decline of Christianity and the relative youthfulness of the religiously nonaffiliated. Finally, it shows that these worldview problems also exist within the church.

#### **Kuhn and Polanyi**

The beginning of the decline of the biblical worldview can be traced back to the writings of non-Christian thinkers such as Thomas Kuhn and Michael Polanyi, who deconstructed the modernist approach to discovering truth.<sup>5</sup> Modernists believed that all truth could be uncovered through empirical research and application of the scientific method.<sup>6</sup> Those who held to modernism believed that scientists could stand apart from

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<sup>4</sup>R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Transforming Culture: Christian Truth Confronts Post-Christian America” [on-line]; accessed 22 February 2011; available from <http://www.albertmohler.com/2008/03/03/christian-truth-confronts-post-christian-america-3>; Internet.

<sup>5</sup>Timothy J. Keller, “Preaching to the Secular Mind,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 14 (1995): 54; Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); and Thomas S. Kuhn, “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

<sup>6</sup>Mary Hess, *Revolutions and Reconstructions in the Philosophy of Science* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), vii.

the world, making observations about it from an objectively neutral position.<sup>7</sup> Polanyi began questioning the whole notion of scientific detachment, stating, “Into every act of knowing there enters a passionate contribution of the person knowing what is being known, and that this coefficient is no mere imperfection but a vital component of his knowledge.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, a person cannot separate himself from the process of knowing. He cannot help but be influenced by his experiences, biases, and environment.

Building on Polanyi’s assertions, Kuhn introduces his doctrine of the paradigms.<sup>9</sup> Kuhn contends that a scientist’s worldview influences every aspect of his scientific method. He writes,

Paradigms play a decisive role in the practice of science. They determine the relevance of data, the content of observations, the significance of problems, and the acceptance of solutions. . . . In brief, each paradigm determines the way science should be practiced; it is a *Weltanschauung*.<sup>10</sup>

Kuhn’s idea attacks the very core of modern science, challenging its authority, rationality, and nature.<sup>11</sup> Polanyi and Kuhn expose the reality that scientists and theorists alike cannot perform their tasks from a position of objectivity. They all have a particular worldview or paradigm that controls the way they approach their research and even, at times, determines the results they obtain.

The idea that scientists have a worldview they cannot escape introduces the concept of relativism into the scientific process.<sup>12</sup> This relativism becomes clear when

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 8.

<sup>9</sup>Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 182.

<sup>11</sup>David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 196. Naugle reminds his reader that Kuhn’s claims would have had a dramatic impact on the scientific world because modern science was the supreme cultural authority in contemporary society.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 205.

Kuhn asserts that the scientific process is not grounded in an external, transcendent reality, but develops as “an expression of the worldview context in which reasoners think, live, and do their reasoning.”<sup>13</sup> Polanyi and Kuhn make it clear that the process of discovering truth through the application of the scientific method does not provide objective, unbiased truth. This way of reaching a conclusion has the same pitfalls and biases as any other method. Modern science could not be grounded in some transcendent reality because this approach to discovering truth does not stand up to philosophical scrutiny. The conclusions of Polanyi and Kuhn have set the current trajectory of American culture by questioning all claims of absolute truth. Truth can no longer be discovered by a mere empirical observation of the facts, but the worldview of the reasoner must also be considered.<sup>14</sup> This cultural shift away from a belief in absolute truth has significant consequences for preaching.

Prior to the writings of Thomas Kuhn, preachers could proclaim biblical truth and assume that its validity would not be called into question by the broader culture.<sup>15</sup> As the teachings of Polanyi and Kuhn trickled down through academia and into mainstream thought, American culture shifted so that this assumption can no longer be made. In a growing segment of the nation, preachers must not only assume that people do not embrace truth as real and absolute, but that they also openly reject these types of claims.<sup>16</sup> Danny Akin and Bruce Ashford contend,

Our nation is becoming increasingly post-Christian and we are not stemming the tide. Perhaps one of the reasons that we are losing the battle is that we are ‘aiming at’ a

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Naugle, *Worldview*, 205.

<sup>15</sup>Danny Akin and Bruce Ashford, “Aspect 4(a): A Mission Focused on this Nation (Confront the Brutal Facts),” *Between The Times* (2009) [on-line]; accessed 28 February 2011; available from <http://www.betweenhetimes.com/2009/11/05/aspect-4a-a-mission-focused-on-this-nation-confront-the-brutal-facts>; Internet.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

culture that no longer exists. . . . We find ourselves in a socio-cultural context that varies significantly from that of 50 years ago.<sup>17</sup>

Akin and Ashford speak specifically about the Southern Baptist Convention, suggesting that it developed many of its programs and ways of thinking in the 1950s and that those same programs and ways of thinking might not be suitable for reaching a post-Christian culture. Setting aside their particular contexts, however, their assertions that the culture continues to change while the church does not, remains true. How has the American culture shifted away from a Judeo-Christian way of thinking into a more secular-relativistic way of thinking?

### **National Surveys**

A 2008 Gallup poll measured the relative religiosity of the United States and discovered several regional trends related to this cultural shift. Gallup asked 350,000 participants: Is religion important in your everyday life? Figure 1 shows that the most religious states can all be found in the southeast and midwest, while the least religious states are all located in the northeast and northwest.<sup>18</sup>

Upon further examination of the question asked by Gallup, several limitations of this survey become clear. The question gave no definition of “religion” and did not specify what it meant by “importance.” They allowed the participants of the survey to define these terms. Still, in spite of these limitations, a wide disparity exists between the most religious state, Mississippi (85 percent), and the least religious state, Vermont (42 percent).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid. David Wells defines culture: “The set of values, the network of beliefs that are institutionalized in a people’s collective life and that govern their behavior” (David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 167).

<sup>18</sup>Frank Newport, “State of the States: Importance of Religion,” *Gallup*, 29 January 2009 [on-line]; accessed 28 February 2009; available from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/114022/State-States-Importance-Religion.aspx#1>; Internet.

<sup>19</sup>See Table 1. Newport, “State of the States: Importance of Religion,” Table 1.

Table 1. Most and least religious states

Top 10 Most Religious States Is religion an important part of your daily life?		Top 10 Least Religious States Is religion an important part of your daily life?	
State	% Yes	State	% Yes
Mississippi	85	Vermont	42
Alabama	82	New Hampshire	46
South Carolina	80	Maine	48
Tennessee	79	Massachusetts	48
Louisiana	78	Alaska	51
Arkansas	78	Washington	52
Georgia	76	Oregon	53
North Carolina	76	Rhode Island	53
Oklahoma	75	Nevada	54
Kentucky (tie)	74	Connecticut	55
Texas (tie)	74		

Commenting on this data, Mohler notes that the survey confirms several longstanding observations: the northeast and northwest are more secular than the rest of the country and a “Bible Belt” does exist.<sup>20</sup> He points to the turn of the twentieth century as the point when the northeast began turning away from its long and storied religious past.<sup>21</sup>

The Pilgrims fled England and settled in the new world, seeking a place to exercise their religion freely. In 1630, as John Winthrop’s company prepared to depart

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<sup>20</sup>R. Albert Mohler, “OK, There Really Is a Bible Belt” [on-line]; accessed 1 March 2011; available from <http://www.albertmohler.com/2009/02/03/ok-there-really-is-a-bible-belt/>; Internet.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. Commenting on this turn, Mohler gives three reasons why it occurred: (1) the rise of liberal theology, (2) the aftermath of the Second Great Awakening, and (3) being on the edge of industrialization and urbanization. See also Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians: The Good News about the End of Christian America* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 20-21.

from South Hampton, John Cotton preached a farewell sermon to them.<sup>22</sup> Cotton's sermon came from 2 Samuel 7:10: "Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them that they may dwell in a place of their own."<sup>23</sup> Cotton sent Winthrop's company out with the explicit purpose of establishing a new colony where they would be free to live out their Christian beliefs as they saw fit.<sup>24</sup> While expounding upon their purposes for coming to the New World, Cotton said, "The end is to improve our lives to do more service to the Lord . . . that we ourselves and posterity may be the better preserved from the common corruptions of this evil world."<sup>25</sup> The pilgrims wanted to leave England because of its worldly corruptions and escape to a new world full of promise and purity. They came to New England with this purpose in mind; this general mindset remained until the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup>

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, America had a large influx of European emigrants who brought with them their Catholic teachings and morals.<sup>27</sup> At this time, the demographic makeup of New England changed, but it still had Christian principles at its core. The change that took place at the turn of the twentieth century, however, brought with it a completely different cultural and moral foundation. As the

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<sup>22</sup>Eugene E. White, "Puritan Preaching and the Authority of God," in *Sermons in American History* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 30.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>24</sup>William S. Barker and Samuel T. Logan, Jr., eds., *Sermons that Shaped America: Reformed Preaching from 1630 to 2001* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 34.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.* During their long journey across the Atlantic, Winthrop preached a sermon in which he reassured the people that they were a chosen people and had a special covenant with God. Again, he set before them their purpose of establishing a new form of government where they could exercise their religious freedom. White, "Puritan Preaching and the Authority of God," 43.

<sup>26</sup>R. Albert Mohler, "The Eclipse of Christian Memory" [on-line]; accessed 1 March 2011; available from <http://www.albertmohler.com/2009/03/27/the-eclipse-of-christian-memory/>; Internet.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

region continued to advance through industrialization and urbanization, and as liberal theology moved further-and-further away from the Bible, secularism filled the void created by these changes.<sup>28</sup> According to Mohler, this trend signifies a rejection by New Englanders of the Christian worldview that so richly defined its past.<sup>29</sup>

Two other surveys conducted in 2008 confirm the results of the Gallup poll and suggest that the rest of the country may soon follow New England's path away from Christianity. The American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) has followed the growing number of those who claim to have no religious affiliation over the past twenty years. During the 1990s, 1.3 million people joined the no religion population each year.<sup>30</sup> This yearly increase led to a six percent increase in the total number of "nones" from 8.2 percent in 1990 to 14.2 percent in 2001.<sup>31</sup> From 2001 to 2008 the annual growth of the no religion population increased to 660,000, resulting in a total increase of 0.8 percent to 15 percent.<sup>32</sup> This increase of 6.8 percent in the past two decades means that the "nones"

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid. Mohler also suggests that the current trajectory of American culture mirrors that of Western Europe, meaning that the rest of the country could soon follow the patterns established in New England.

<sup>30</sup>Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, "American Nones: The Profile of the No Religion Population," *American Religious Identification Survey* (2008) [on-line]; accessed 2 March 2011; Available from [http://www.AmericanReligionSurvey-ARIS.org/2009/09/american\\_nones\\_the\\_profile\\_of\\_the\\_no\\_religion\\_population.html](http://www.AmericanReligionSurvey-ARIS.org/2009/09/american_nones_the_profile_of_the_no_religion_population.html); Internet. "Nones" is the term used by those who conducted the survey; it refers to the people who claimed to have no religious affiliation.

<sup>31</sup>Kosmin and Keysar, "Catholics on the Move, Non-Religious on the Rise."

<sup>32</sup>Kosmin and Keysar, "American Nones." Pew Research's data shows that 16.1 percent of the total population has no religious affiliation. Like many of the major religious groups, the no religion population displays a great amount of diversity. Of the 16.1 percent, one quarter of them—4 percent of the total population—claim to be either an atheist (1.4 percent) or an agnostic (2.4 percent), while the largest number of them (12.1 percent) say that their religion is has no bearing on how they live their lives. Pew Research, "The U. S. Religious Landscape Survey Reveals a Fluid and Diverse Pattern of Faith," *Pew Forum on Religion in Public Life* (2008) [on-line]; accessed 2 March 2011; available from <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/743/united-states-religion>; Internet. The ARIS survey found that only 1.6 percent of its participants classified themselves as atheists or agnostics, but when they asked people to state their beliefs, 12 percent said that they did not believe in

are growing at a faster rate than any other religious segment in America.<sup>33</sup> One factor contributing to their growth is their youthfulness.

### **Relative Youthfulness of the “Nones”**

These surveys point out the relative youthfulness of the “nones.” Sixty-two percent of adults over the age of 70 claim to be affiliated with the protestant church, but the number drops to 43 percent among Americans ages 18-29.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the younger generation has a much greater tendency than those over the age of 70 to identify themselves as “unaffiliated”—25 percent and 8 percent respectively.<sup>35</sup> If these trends persist, then the religious make up of American culture will change dramatically in the next few years. The most obvious change will happen among the religiously unaffiliated. This group will account for over one quarter of the American population, which is, by far, the largest percentage in American history. As religion, especially the biblical worldview, declines, a secularist way of thinking and conversing is taking its place.<sup>36</sup>

David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons have found in researching the mind set of this younger generation of outsiders that they have a very negative perception of Christians and the Christian faith.<sup>37</sup> A significant portion of these outsiders—38 percent—claim to

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God or were not sure. Another 12 percent of people have only a deistic understanding of God. See Kosmin and Keysar, “Catholics on the Move, Non-Religious on the Rise.”

<sup>33</sup>Pew Research, “The U. S. Religious Landscape Survey.”

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Mohler, “The Eclipse of Christian Memory.”

<sup>37</sup>David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 24. “Outsiders” is the term Kinnaman and Lyons use to refer to anyone outside the Christian community. Describing this group, they write, “[It] includes atheists, agnostics, those affiliated with a faith other than Christianity (such as Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Mormonism, and so on), and other unchurched adults who are not born again Christians.” Ibid., 17.



have a bad impression of Christianity and do not want to be associated with it.<sup>38</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons found that this negative perception arose out of what outsiders saw Christians standing against; to them, Christians are anti-homosexual, anti-choice, judgmental, angry, and violent.<sup>39</sup> They note that this group represents a small segment of the total number of outsiders, and they recognize that the group has nearly tripled in the past decade and continues to grow.<sup>40</sup> This same attitude does not stop at the church doors; it can also be seen within the church among young Christians.<sup>41</sup>

### **Worldview Issues among Christians**

The Gallup poll results also show that the number of people who claim religious affiliation is drastically greater in the southern and midwestern states.<sup>42</sup> Several factors contribute to this increase. First, Gallup's survey had two significant limitations. It did not define religion nor did it give any test of doctrinal understanding or commitment.<sup>43</sup> The absence of these clarifications meant that nominal Christians could answer in the affirmative no matter what they practice in their lives. The issue of nominal Christians leads into the second reason, which is upbringing. A person's cultural education in the south includes learning how to respond to questions like the one asked by Gallup.<sup>44</sup> This

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 26-27. They found that 91 percent of outsiders viewed Christians as anti-homosexual and that 87 percent view them as judgmental.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 24

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 33-34. Kinnaman and Lyons define a young church-goer as someone between the ages of 16 and 29. They found that 4 out of every 5 young church-goers view the church as anti-homosexual, 50 percent see it as judgmental, and one-third think that the faith is old-fashioned and out of touch with reality. Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Newport, "State of the States."

<sup>43</sup>Mohler, "OK, There Really Is a Bible Belt."

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

problem becomes clear when one observes the number of people in America who actually have a biblical worldview.<sup>45</sup> Research shows that only 9 percent of the total adult population has a worldview that would include believing in the most basic Christian doctrines.<sup>46</sup> When limiting the criteria to only those people who profess to be born again Christians, the number only climbs to around 19 percent.<sup>47</sup> In other words, over 80 percent of people who profess Christ as their Lord and Savior do not have a biblical worldview.

The research points to a general decline in American Christianity. Areas of the country that once served as the foundation of Christianity in America have since turned away from biblical principles. Even in areas of the country that still claim to be Christian, a small minority of people actually have a biblical worldview. Lamenting these shifts in American culture, Mohler states,

A remarkable culture-shift has taken place around us. The most basic contours of American culture have been radically altered. The so-called Judeo-Christian consensus of the last millennium has given way to a post-modern, post-Christian, post-Western cultural crisis which threatens the very heart of our culture.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>The Barna Group defines a biblical worldview as the belief that an absolute moral truth exists, that the Bible is totally accurate in all the principles it teaches, that Satan is a real being or force, that a person cannot earn their way into heaven by trying to be good, that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on Earth, and that God is the all-knowing, all-powerful, creator of the World. Barna Group, “Barna Survey Examines the Change in Worldview Among Christians Over the Past 13 Years” [on-line]; accessed 2 March 2011; available from <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/21-transformation/252-barna-survey-examines-the-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years>; Internet.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid. Much like the ARIS and Pew Forum surveys, Barna found that less than one-half of 1 percent of people ages 18-23 have a biblical worldview. Among older adults that number increases to 1 out of every 9.

<sup>48</sup>Mohler, “Transforming Culture.” In his April 27, 2009 *USA Today* editorial, Steven Prothero takes issue with Mohler’s use of the term “post-Christian.” Prothero argues that America today has a greater population of Christians than any other country in history, that Christians remain a powerful political force, and that the Christian Bible remains the Scripture of American politics. Prothero says that only people on the inside of America view it as a post-Christian country. Steven Prothero, “Post-Christian? Not Even Close: A High-Profile Religious Landscape Survey Is Said to Show that America Is Rapidly Losing Its Faith in Christianity,” *USA Today*, 27 April 2009, sec. A, 11. Mohler responded to Prothero: “My concern lies less with cultural influence than with the vitality and integrity of [the] Christian witness. . . . My concern is with the very trends Prothero himself

This shift in American culture does not mean that culture has moved away from a position of *de facto* religious establishment to a place of religious neutrality; culture has simply replaced one religious establishment with another religious establishment, namely that of scientific naturalism.<sup>49</sup>

### **The Rise of Scientific Naturalism**

In his book *No Place for Truth*, David Wells argues that the growth of secularism has had the effect of marginalizing God so that belief in the supernatural has no impact on a person's everyday life.<sup>50</sup> Secularism encourages a thorough examination of natural things and discourages the same level of investigation into supernatural things.<sup>51</sup> The following section further explains how secularism marginalizes God and the biblical worldview by setting forth scientific naturalism as its replacement. This section also defines scientific naturalism and shows how it impacts many areas of a person's life.

### **Scientific Naturalism**

People who hold to scientific naturalism believe that the world exists within a closed system, meaning that creation cannot be manipulated by any outside force.<sup>52</sup> Many of them also believe that the world came into existence as a result of an explosion of

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identified. The transformation of American Christianity into just a Christian branded spirituality." R. Albert Mohler, "Not Even Close? Is America becoming a Post-Christian Culture" [on-line]; accessed 28 March 2011; available from <http://www.albertmohler.com/2009/04/27/not-even-close-is-america-becoming-a-post-christian-culture/>; Internet. Mohler's concern lies not with the number of people who claim the title of "Christian," but with the underlying beliefs that define the title.

<sup>49</sup>Phillip E. Johnson, *Reason in the Balance: The Case against Naturalism in Science, Law, and Education* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 37.

<sup>50</sup>David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 7.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Phillip E. Johnson, "What Is Darwinism," in *Objections Sustained: Subversive Essays on Evolution, Law, and Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 22.

material matter and that naturalistic evolution can account for everything that has developed since that explosion.<sup>53</sup> Phillip Johnson contends that scientific naturalism must inherently consist of two features in order to function properly. First, naturalism relies upon an element of chance in order for proper evolutionary development to take place.<sup>54</sup> It removes intelligence and purpose from the equation, leaving the development of all living things up to a random act of creation. The complexity of creation, however, makes it difficult to believe that chance alone can account for the existence of all living things. Theories that rely only on chance to work cannot sufficiently explain the existence of the world and man's purpose in it.<sup>55</sup> Assigning the responsibility of creation and evolution to chance lacks the credibility of an intelligent, personally involved designer.<sup>56</sup> Second, scientific naturalism depends upon a set of laws that guides the research undertaken in the various scientific disciplines. These laws function as the paradigm or worldview of the scientists performing the research, dictating their methodology and conclusions.<sup>57</sup>

Kuhn's doctrine of the paradigms is clearly seen in scientific naturalism. Scientists who implore this paradigm for explaining the origins of the cosmos cannot arrive at any scientific conclusions that contradict their naturalistic understanding of creation. If

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 22, 24.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 23. Because creation has an appearance of intelligent design, scientists had to find a way to explain this appearance without relying on an outside force. For this reason, they developed the theory of natural selection. Describing natural selection, Johnson writes, "If we assume that random genetic mutations provided the new genetic information needed, say to give a small mammal a start toward jugs, and if we assume that each tiny step in the process of wing building gave the animal an increased chance for survival, then natural selection insured that the favored creatures would thrive and reproduce." It also explains why the weaker animals could not survive. Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 24.

the results of an experiment seem to contradict the paradigm that creation could have happened because of an intelligent designer, the scientist must find a way to explain away the contradiction. Being unwilling to adapt the paradigm to fit the evidence, scientists have intentionally deceived the public.<sup>58</sup> The paradigm functions as their god, and they blindly obey its laws, ignoring any inconsistencies in their methodology.

Why would scientists be so devoted to a faulty paradigm that they would resort to deception in order to defend it? Phillip Johnson contends that scientists, like all people, have an obsession with the “God question,” which arises out of their fear of it:<sup>59</sup>

Many scientists and philosophers think that a dedication to materialism is the defining characteristic of science. Their argument is that a priori adherence to materialism is necessary to protect the very existence of science. If design in biology is real, then the designer might also be real, and scientific materialists contemplate this possibility [if at all] with outright panic. Science will come to a screeching halt, they insist, because everybody will stop doing experiments and just attribute all phenomena to the inscrutable will of God.<sup>60</sup>

In his review of *Huxley: From Devil’s Disciple to Evolution’s High Priest*, Johnson asserts, “In reality scientists (like other people) are obsessed with the God

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid. In her book, *Total Truth*, Nancy Pearcey discusses the deception involved in the case of the peppered moths in England. She says that prior to the Industrial Revolution the moths existed in two different colors, dark grey and light grey. As the revolution progressed the soot from the factories fell on the trunks of the trees where the moths would land, making it easier for birds to see the lighter colored moths and eat them, resulting in the survival of the darker moths. Scientists used this phenomenon to support the notion that natural selection exists. Upon further investigation, however, a problem arises. Pearcey notes that these types of moths do not land on the trunks of trees; they only perch in tree canopies. In the creating of photographs and documentaries, scientists glued dead moths onto trees, assuring that they would get the results they wanted. Pearcey comments that the scientific community accepted the research because people wanted desperately to believe it. Their desperate desire to see evolution take place in nature caused them to ignore faulty research. Pearcey states, “Apparently even falsified evidence is acceptable, if it reinforces Darwinian orthodoxy.” Nancy R. Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 161-62.

<sup>59</sup>Phillip E. Johnson, “The Pope of the New Religion,” in *Objections Sustained: Subversive Essays on Evolution, Law, & Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 18.

<sup>60</sup>Phillip E. Johnson, “The Storyteller & the Scientist,” in *Objections Sustained: Subversive Essays on Evolution, Law, & Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1995), 56.

question, and the whole point of evolutionary naturalism is to keep that Divine Foot and the people gathered behind it from getting inside the door.”<sup>61</sup> This obsession with the God question arises out of the possible damaging consequences for their field if God is proven to exist.<sup>62</sup> For this reason, they implore scientific naturalism to exclude God from any discussion about creation and natural events.<sup>63</sup> They have a preconceived belief that naturalism must be correct; therefore, intelligent design must be wrong.<sup>64</sup>

A naturalistic way of thinking automatically rejects intelligent design, not because scientists have proven it wrong but because it simply assumes the existence of a supernatural creator.<sup>65</sup> Pearcey, quoting S. C. Todd, writes, “Even if all the data point to an intelligent designer, such a hypothesis is excluded from science because it is not naturalistic.”<sup>66</sup> The issue does not lie in whether or not the research proves Darwinism, natural selection, or any kind of scientific naturalism; the issue ultimately lies in a prior philosophical commitment.<sup>67</sup> For these scientists, scientific naturalism serves as their controlling worldview, and they are unable to escape it.

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<sup>61</sup>Johnson, “The Pope of the New Religion,” 18.

<sup>62</sup>Johnson, “The Storyteller and the Scientists,” 56.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid. Scientists do not realize that science cannot be done apart from a consistent God who providentially rules over creation. Only if a sustaining God exists can a scientific experiment be expected to produce the same results yesterday, today, and tomorrow. In a world completely dependent upon chance the assumption that yesterday’s results will be the same in the future cannot be made. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 317; J. P. Moreland cautions against pressing this fact too far. J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 202-03; idem, *Christianity and the Nature of Science* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989).

<sup>64</sup>S. C. Todd, “A View from Kansas on that Evolution Debate,” *Nature* 401 (September 1999): 423.

<sup>65</sup>Johnson, *Reason in the Balance*, 90.

<sup>66</sup>Todd, “A View from Kansas on that Evolution Debate,” 423, as quoted by Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 168.

<sup>67</sup>Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 168-69.

## Scientific Naturalism as a Comprehensive Worldview

Scientific naturalism should not be seen merely as a biological theory, but it should be understood as a comprehensive worldview, impacting every area of life.<sup>68</sup> Scientific naturalism can even be called a religion because it attempts to provide answers to all of life's big questions. Agreeing with this notion, Michael Ruse announced during the 1993 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science that scientific naturalism is indeed a religion.<sup>69</sup> He stated, "I must admit that in this one complaint . . . the biblical literalists are absolutely right. Evolution is a religion."<sup>70</sup> Ruse acknowledges that naturalism functions as a complete ideology and an explicit replacement for Christianity. He came to realize that naturalism functions as a worldview and is, in this one area, the same as Christianity.

Discussing the notion that naturalism functions as a comprehensive worldview, Charles Colson presents five defining characteristics of naturalism. First, a naturalistic person can be characterized by a commitment to moral relativism.<sup>71</sup> If nothing exists other than the material world, then no transcendent source of moral truth exists. The void created by this absence reduces morality to a personal preference. People have the freedom to choose for themselves what seems right or wrong. If no ultimate standard of morality exists, then people cannot be expected to live according to a particular standard. A world

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<sup>68</sup>Phillip E. Johnson, "Daniel Dennett's Dangerous Idea," in *Objections Sustained: Subversive Essays on Evolution, Law, & Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 57.

<sup>69</sup>Michael Ruse, "Saving Darwinism from Darwinians," *National Post* (May 2000): B3, cited by Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 172.

<sup>70</sup>Ruse, "Saving Darwinism from Darwinians," B3.

<sup>71</sup>Charles Colson and Nancy R. Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1999), 21.

devoid of any moral absolutes would quickly dissolve into chaos because no one could be held responsible for his or her actions.<sup>72</sup>

Second, a naturalistic worldview contains a high commitment to multi-culturalism. Due to its moral relativity, this way of viewing the world requires that all cultures be seen as equal. Naturalism provides the foundation for multi-culturalism because, if no moral absolutes exist, then a person can only find his identity in his race, gender, or ethnic group.<sup>73</sup> A person living in one culture with a specific background and set of experiences can never tell another person living in a different culture with a different background and set of experiences that anything he or she does is wrong.<sup>74</sup> The two cultures must attempt to live in harmony with one another even though cultural differences exist between them. When faced with the possibility of conflict, the two cultures must either deny it exists or contradict their own worldview by attempting to resolve it.

Third, because a naturalist rejects any absolute standard of morality, he has a pragmatic approach to life.<sup>75</sup> Having no transcendent objective basis for morality, the pragmatist says that whatever works must be right. When choosing between two different options, the pragmatist must make his choice based on utilitarian principles of right and wrong. Likewise, in a pragmatic culture the utilitarian principle guides and directs the accepted moral compass of the community. Whatever seems best for the greatest amount of people becomes the accepted moral value.<sup>76</sup>

Fourth, naturalism is characterized by a utopian understanding of the world.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.



A person who believes in utopianism asserts that if the proper societal and economic structures can be constructed, then the perfect society could be established. The perfect society would consist of people living in harmony with one another and everyone prospering equally. This society would seek to abolish all social injustices, including poverty, hunger, and government oppression.<sup>78</sup> A naturalistic worldview contends that a utopian society can be arrived at because, at its core, human nature is good and desires the best for all people.<sup>79</sup>

Finally, naturalists live with a view only to this world. They live for the present

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<sup>78</sup>For an example of this utopian understanding of the world, see Brian D. McLaren, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007). McLaren's utopian view of the world relates directly to his over-realized eschatology. He writes, "The time had come, we said, to center our lives on the essential message of Jesus, the message of the Kingdom of God-not just a message about Jesus that focused on the afterlife, but rather the core message of Jesus that focused on personal, social, and global transformation in this life." *Ibid.*, 22. McLaren rightly focuses on the kingdom of God and not just on personal salvation; however, he places too great of an emphasis on how the kingdom should come in the present life. He thinks that because the world's two largest religions, Christianity and Islam, as well as many other smaller religions have a positive view of Christ, they can all come together to solve the world's largest problems. He separates these problems into four categories: the prosperity crisis, the equity crisis, the security crisis, and the spirituality crisis. *Ibid.*, 5. He assumes that the world's religions can unify around this central cause and that by addressing these main problems the kingdom of God will come on Earth. He views these problems through the framework of a machine. He defines a machine as "[a] complex creation of human beings that harnesses energy to achieve a desire." *Ibid.*, 54. McLaren sees three different systems at work within this machine: the prosperity system, the equity system, and the security system. *Ibid.*, 56. These three systems interconnect and depend upon each other. If at any point one of these systems fail, then the entire machine disintegrates into what he calls a "suicide machine." *Ibid.*, 57. This suicide machine occurs when one of the three subsystems receives a greater amount of focus to the exclusion of the other two. According to McLaren, the framing story through which most people view the world encourages them to consume as much energy as possible so that they can become as successful as possible. *Ibid.*, 71-72. He desires to set forth a new framing story that reverses the patterns of the suicide machine and brings the kingdom of God to Earth. This new framing story rejects the second coming of Christ, which forces him into an over-realized eschatology. McLaren asserts, "If we believe that Jesus came in peace the first time, but that wasn't his real and decisive coming, then we leave the door open to envisioning a second coming that will be characterized by violence, killing, domination, and eternal torture." *Ibid.*, 144. His over-realized eschatology means that he sees the coming of the kingdom of God in the feeding of the poor and the liberation of the oppressed. McLaren believes that if the suicide machine can be reversed, then the kingdom of God can bring about a utopian society.

<sup>79</sup>Colson, *How Now Shall We Live*, 21.

moment because they do not believe anything exists after death. They do not believe that their thoughts and actions have eternal consequences; therefore, they live with no fear of judgment in the afterlife.<sup>80</sup> In sum, a person who adopts this worldview cannot declare anything to be immoral, preaches tolerance between all cultures, has a pragmatic approach to life, believes that his pragmatism leads to a utopian society, and does not see anything beyond his present circumstances.

### **Evolutionary Psychology**

This overarching, comprehensive worldview works itself out primarily through the discipline called evolutionary psychology.<sup>81</sup> This discipline strives to show how scientific naturalism applies not only to the physical world, but also to all areas of cultural and social issues. It contends that if evolutionary naturalism can account for the development of the material world (specifically the human body), then it must also account for every aspect of human belief and behavior.<sup>82</sup> Evolutionary psychology encompasses a vast assortment of issues, ranging from law and politics to literature and parenting.<sup>83</sup> Once a person accepts the basic premise of evolutionary psychology, then the implications of this theory cannot be limited.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 208.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>John H. Beckstrom, *Evolutionary Jurisprudence: Prospects and Limitations on the use of Modern Darwinism throughout the Legal Process* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Paul H. Rubin, *Darwinian Politics: The Evolutionary Origin of Freedom* (East Rutherford, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Keith Simonton, *Origins of Genius: Darwinian Perspectives on Creativity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Joseph Carroll, *Evolution and Literary Theory* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995); Robert Storey, *Nimesis and the Human Animal: On the Biogenetic Foundations of Literary Representation* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996); and Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, *The Truth about Cinderella: A Darwinian View of Parental Love* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>84</sup>Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 215.

Proponents of evolutionary psychology push this theory to its absolute extreme. They go as far as to use this theory to explain atrocious acts such as rape and infanticide. In an article titled “Why Men Rape,” Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer attempt to explain rape as a natural action undertaken by some men to fulfill their sexual desires.<sup>85</sup> They explain rape as “[a] natural, biological phenomenon that is a product of the human evolutionary heritage.”<sup>86</sup> Likewise, Steven Pinker uses the theory of evolutionary psychology to explain infanticide:

We must understand teenagers who kill their newborns because infanticide has been practiced and accepted in most cultures throughout history. Its sheer ubiquity implies that it must have been preserved by natural selection—which in turn means it must have an adaptive function.<sup>87</sup>

According to this logic, because infanticide has existed throughout history, it must provide some benefit to society or the process of natural selection would have removed it from the human psyche. These evolutionary psychologists need no empirical evidence that proves the truthfulness of their assertions. Their adherence to a naturalistic understanding of the world means that these assertions can be nothing other than true.<sup>88</sup> Commenting on the significance of the rise of evolutionary psychology, Pearcey writes, “The rise of

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<sup>85</sup>Randy Thornhill and Craig T. Palmer, “Why Men Rape,” *Sciences* 40 (2000): 30-36. Idem, *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Basis of Sexual Coercion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000). Thornhill appeared on NPR’s *Talk of the Nation* where, after taking several calls, he became extremely frustrated and exclaimed that this urge to rape women among some men was the logical outcome of evolution. He declared that everything must have an evolutionary explanation.

<sup>86</sup>Thornhill and Palmer, “Why Men Rape,” 31.

<sup>87</sup>Steven Pinker, “Why They Kill Their Babies,” *The New York Times* 2 (November 1997), 1.

<sup>88</sup>Pearcey critiques evolutionary psychology by explaining how it undercuts itself: “If all our ideas are products of evolution, then so is the idea of evolutionary psychology itself. Like all other constructs of the human mind, it is not true but only useful for survival.” Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 216. Pearcey also points out the dark nature of this doctrine. She observes that when evolutionary psychologists reach the point of removing all human dignity, they quickly reverse course and encourage people to act in a way contrary to their genetic makeup. They want people to embrace traditional understandings of love and altruism even though they have no grounding for doing so *Ibid.*, 217.

evolutionary psychology makes it clear that the debate over Darwinism is not just over scientific facts but over conflicting worldviews.”<sup>89</sup> This overarching worldview can now be seen working itself out in the everyday lives of people across America.

The rise of scientific naturalism through evolutionary psychology has had a significant influence on popular culture.<sup>90</sup> An examination of two important areas of culture, law and education, displays the depth of this influence. The Darwinian legal theorist Oliver Wendell Holmes significantly influenced the development of law in the twentieth century.<sup>91</sup> Holmes contended that laws are founded upon evolving cultural customs.<sup>92</sup> Grounding law in the evolving customs of a particular culture means that laws cannot be applied cross-culturally and that they change to meet the new demands of an evolving culture. For Holmes, a study of legal history serves only to show that legal theories do not flow from one universal source; rather, they come from a particular culture complete with its own historical influences. According to this legal theory, the collective desires of a particular society determine whether or not laws need to be changed.<sup>93</sup> As the desires of the society change, the law changes in order to conform to these desires. Commenting on the role of the state in this legal theory, Johnson writes, “The state has authority to regulate personal conduct to the extent necessary to serve the general welfare or to protect rights.”<sup>94</sup> In other words, people should be free to act in any way they desire

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 221.

<sup>90</sup>Phillip E. Johnson, “Introduction,” in *Objections Sustained: Subversive Essays on Evolution, Law, & Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 10.

<sup>91</sup>Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 237.

<sup>92</sup>Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., “Law in Science and Science in Law,” *Harvard Law Review* 12 (1899), in *The Essential Holmes*, ed. Richard A. Posner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 192.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Johnson, *Reason in the Balance*, 139.

as long as they do not infringe upon the general welfare of the society or upon the individual rights of another person. Holmes ultimately viewed the enforcing of the law as an act of coercion on behalf of the government. Johnson summarizes Holmes's legal theory:

Holmes urged law makers to put aside considerations of morality and tradition and to base law squarely on rational policy, informed by scientific disciplines such as economics and psychology. In short, to Holmes the practice of law was the prediction of outcomes, the making of law was an exercise of policy science, and the law itself basically a statement about when the state would use its overwhelming force to coerce its citizens.<sup>95</sup>

Holmes believed that laws come from one of two places. Either they develop from the ever-changing desires of a culture or governments declared something to be law in order to use it to control and manipulate its citizens. In either case, laws cannot be traced back to one universal source. Like everything else, laws change and adapt through a process of natural selection.

Evolutionary psychology has also had a significant impact on the educational system in America. John Dewey encouraged educators to approach their task in a new and different way, viewing education not as a process of intellectual inquiry but as a form of mental evolution.<sup>96</sup> The ability of a student to think and reason develops and adapts in the same way that species developed and adapted, leading to the formation of the biological world. For Dewey, this evolution comes about through allowing students to work through problematic scenarios on their own, deciding what they feel should be the right answer. The teacher cannot direct or influence the decision-making process, but must allow the students to develop in whatever fashion they desire. The teacher cannot correct the student

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 141.

<sup>96</sup>John Dewey, "Education as a Religion," *The New Republic* (August 1922), 64. As cited in Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 239. Pearcey notes that most educators have not allowed this relativistic approach to education to enter the science classrooms. Students are expected to accept evolutionary naturalism as truth without questioning its validity. Ibid., 107.

by telling him that he made a wrong decision because the student must be free to develop his moral compass in any way he deems right.

Educators desire this free thinking form of mental development because they believe that part of their job is to release their students from the authoritarian upbringing of their parents.<sup>97</sup> In almost every case, parents desire for their children to have a guided, structured, moral education, while teachers try to free these children from any restraint to their moral development.<sup>98</sup> This approach to moral education has one glaring weakness, however: teachers have no way of adjudicating between the decisions of their students.<sup>99</sup> Suppose two students have the task of formulating their own approach to conflict management. If student A decides to try and talk through the problem with the other person, while student B decides that murder is the proper way to solve conflicts, the teacher has no way to tell student B that he or she is wrong. This educational approach leaves the teacher with no means of correcting the student's faulty style of decision-making.

The pervasive influence of the universities on culture have led to the legal and educational systems of America becoming relativistic entities that refuse to tell a person that he or she is wrong. Johnson contends that this type of thinking dominates American culture because universities have promulgated it for many years:<sup>100</sup>

The domination of the intellectual world by naturalism has important consequences for popular culture, where theism remains prevalent. The United States is formally a democracy, but on matters involving 'religion' the constitution is supreme, and the judges have the authority to say what the constitution means. Moreover, the voters get their information about what is going on from the newspapers and television. The judges who make the legal decisions and the journalists who report the news get their

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<sup>97</sup>Johnson, *Reason in the Balance*, 158.

<sup>98</sup>Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 240-41.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>100</sup>Johnson, *Wedge of Truth: Splitting the Foundations of Naturalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 14.

education at the universities, and they normally interpret the events in the light of what they have been taught.<sup>101</sup>

The naturalistic worldview functions as a trickle-down effect. Scholars in the highest realms of academia first adopt it as their overarching worldview.<sup>102</sup> This adoption means that they can begin teaching their students to think in a similar fashion.<sup>103</sup> Then, as their students go out into the world, they begin interpreting reality in light of the naturalistic worldview they learned from their professors. They then have the opportunity to promulgate this secular, godless worldview throughout popular culture.<sup>104</sup> This trickle-down effect results in a culture that readily accepts a worldview of Darwinian naturalism to the exclusion of all other ways of thinking.<sup>105</sup>

### **The Marginalization of the Biblical Worldview**

According to Johnson, the rise of scientific naturalism has resulted in the marginalization of the biblical worldview.<sup>106</sup> Scholars, politicians, journalists, and the public received their education from universities where scientific naturalism was assumed to be true and went unchallenged. These people then tend to assume that people who believe in a universal, transcendent truth cannot be trusted with the responsibility of properly guiding and directing public policy.<sup>107</sup> This lack of trust, moreover, arises out of a belief that a person who believes in God is irrational and closed-minded.<sup>108</sup> The

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<sup>101</sup>Johnson, *Reason in the Balance*, 9.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.* For these people, a person can properly influence public policy only if he or she does so in a manner congruent with scientific naturalism.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*

following section further explains this marginalization by discussing the rejection of meta-narratives, the public versus private dichotomy, and the expectation of cultural conformity.

### **Rejection of Meta-Narratives**

This marginalization of the biblical worldview has come about because contemporary culture has rejected the notion of the existence of overarching meta-narratives.<sup>109</sup> These meta-narratives once allowed people to interpret life as a whole, connecting various life events in order to see its direction and purpose. Commenting on the rejection of these meta-narratives, David Wells writes, “Universal narratives about the meaning of life are shattered into micro-narratives of race, class, and gender.”<sup>110</sup> People can no longer find answers to life’s questions by resorting to a grand story that provides hope, comfort, and purpose. Instead, they must resort to finding their identity and, therefore, their answers in these micro-narratives. Everything becomes a matter of race, class, and gender. These micro-narratives cannot provide satisfactory solutions to the everyday problems people face.

This rejection of overarching meta-narratives by secular naturalists has resulted in the marginalization of the biblical worldview because it is no longer seen as a viable way of understanding all of life. This marginalization, however, has not taken the form of outright rejection but of assigning religious beliefs to a person’s private life.<sup>111</sup> People can have a biblical worldview through which they interpret their life’s events, but they cannot then bring that worldview into the public square. Writing about this phenomenon, Wells states, “What has replaced the worldviews that once sought to encompass the whole of existence in their understanding are now privatized worldviews, worldviews that are valid

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<sup>109</sup>David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 74.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, 79.



for no one but the person whose world it is and whose view it is.”<sup>112</sup> This relegating of worldviews to a person’s private life means that, in theory, a person cannot allow his or her worldview to influence social issues or public policy. The secular naturalists want people to have an unbiased approach to their public life so that they can analyze social issues from a position of objectivity. This objective position does not exist, however, because even though their worldview has been relegated to their private life, it still functions as a worldview and impacts the way they think and engage in public discourse.<sup>113</sup> People cannot remove themselves from their own personal worldviews, but the academic elites have convinced them that it is possible.

### **Public Versus Private Dichotomy**

Many churches today primarily focus on a person’s salvation and do not help prepare him or her for the intellectual attacks they will face.<sup>114</sup> This lack of preparation arises due to two reasons. First, a significant group of people see culture changing and refuse to adapt to it.<sup>115</sup> They long for the “good old days” when they could preach the Bible and everyone accepted it without question. Writing about this refusal to change, Gabe Lyons states,

They have anchored themselves to the view that America is and should stay ‘a sacred Christian nation.’ They think that God was and should remain at the center of our public square. This faction focuses its energy on resistance despite the obvious trends rising all around it.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 32.

<sup>115</sup>Lyons, *The Next Christians*, 26.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

People who think this way do not prepare their congregations to face objections to their faith. They refuse to believe that the changes taking place in culture actually are as bad as they seem.

Second, a significant number of Christians have bought into the public versus private dichotomy promulgated by secular naturalists.<sup>117</sup> These people have a sincere devotion to their faith, but they do not allow it to influence their jobs, parenting, or academic pursuits. Pearcey calls this dichotomy the “divided mind:”

Believers may be highly educated in terms of technical proficiency, and yet have no biblical worldview for interpreting the subject matter of their field. . . . There is no ‘Christian mind’—no shared, biblically based set of assumptions on subjects like law, education, politics, economics, science, or the arts. As a moral being, the Christian follows the biblical ethic. As a spiritual being, he or she prays and attends worship services. But as a thinking being, the modern Christian has succumbed to secularism, accepting a frame of reference constructed by the secular mind and a set of criteria reflecting secular evaluations. That is, when we enter the stream of discourse in our field or profession we participate mentally as non-Christians, using the current concepts and categories no matter what our private beliefs may be.<sup>118</sup>

Christians have allowed secular naturalists to establish the framework, define the terms, and dictate the conversation surrounding all subjects. These Christians have accepted an atomistic set of individual doctrines but have not learned how to use them to formulate a comprehensive worldview that they can take into their professions.

The refusal by Christians to participate in social discourse for so long, allowing the secular naturalists to dominate the conversation, has resulted in a further marginalizing of the biblical worldview.<sup>119</sup> Naturalists have forced Christians to place a barrier between their public lives and religious lives, not allowing one to influence the other.<sup>120</sup> If at any point Christians try to cross this barrier, merging their public and private lives,

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<sup>117</sup>Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 33.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

they run the risk of being labeled ignorant, uneducated, and mentally weak.<sup>121</sup> If Christians truly desire to impact their culture with the gospel, then this barrier between their public and private lives must be destroyed. In order for that to happen, they must learn how to develop a thoroughly robust biblical worldview and understand how it applies to every aspect of their lives, including their jobs, voting, parenting, and education.

### **Cultural Conformity**

The marginalization of the biblical worldview has also come about because of cultural conformity. This conformity manifests itself in both an individualistic and a corporate fashion. Christians can develop their own private understanding of Christianity and the Bible, but their public lives must be characterized by conformity to social norms. Christians feel pressure to cave in to these expectations and many of them cannot resist. When they begin to compromise on issues, the church does not maintain its cultural distinctiveness.<sup>122</sup> When outsiders look at the contemporary church, they primarily see a group of people who look like they do, talk like they do, and generally live like they do. The only difference between the outsider and the Christian is that the Christian gets up on Sunday mornings and goes to church. Because the outsider cannot see any difference in himself and the Christian, he is in danger of viewing the church, and therefore the biblical worldview, as irrelevant. As more and more Christians live as though no distinction exists between them and the more broadly accepted cultural norms, this attitude of irrelevance towards the biblical worldview continues to grow.<sup>123</sup> As this attitude grows, the biblical

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<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>122</sup>David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 56.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

worldview finds itself on the periphery of culture with little to no influence.<sup>124</sup> They may desire to engage the surrounding culture, but the culture no longer listens to them.

This conformity has also taken on a more corporate aspect that has ended in many of the same results. Wells argues that in the late 1970s evangelicals suddenly gained a great deal of power and influence in the political arena. He notes that during this time a fear existed among political insiders as to how far they would push their agenda.<sup>125</sup>

Wells then notes that their fears were unfounded:

The specter of evangelical faith organizing itself and speaking out after decades in the barren hinterlands of American life took some getting used to, but the alarm and anxiety it stirred were not justified. For no sooner had the Evangelicals begun to think like the status quo than their theological and moral distinctive began to evaporate like the morning mist.<sup>126</sup>

In other words, when evangelicals gained some power and influence, they immediately began compromising the very beliefs that distinguished them from the rest of the culture. Then, when they lost their distinctiveness, they lost their opportunity to be received as a valid player in cultural affairs.

As Christians have fallen prey to the pressures of the surrounding culture, they have begun to compromise their faith.<sup>127</sup> This compromising has resulted in the marginalization of the biblical worldview because outsiders do not see how the biblical worldview applies to social issues. Wells warns, “The church has no future if it chooses from weakness not to speak its own language, the language of truth and understanding, in the post-modern world.”<sup>128</sup> Christians must stand up and begin breaking through the

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<sup>124</sup>Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 108.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid. Wells questions, “Again and again the issue that has emerged as a result is whether evangelicals will build their churches *sola scriptura* or *sola cultura*.” David F. Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant: Truth-Lovers, Marketers, and Emergence in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 5.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid.

<sup>128</sup>Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, 223.

barriers that have marginalized them for so long. They must begin speaking with one voice from within an overarching worldview that provides answers to all of life's questions. Pastors must begin preparing their congregations to engage the culture on an intellectual level that exposes the accepted assumptions of scientific naturalism.

### **The Response of the Church**

Colson argues that part of the church's mission in the world should be to redeem the culture:<sup>129</sup>

We are to fulfill both the great commission and the cultural commission. We are commanded to both preach the good news and to bring all things in to submission to God's order, by defending and living out God's truth in the unique historical and cultural conditions of our age.<sup>130</sup>

If the church refuses to engage in cultural transformation, then it rejects one of its biblical mandates because it denies God's sovereignty over all of life.<sup>131</sup> If Christians believe that the Bible provides answers to all of life's questions, then they must be involved in showing the world how it accomplishes this task. They can no longer allow secular naturalists to define the terms and control the conversation. They must actively engage people around them who have a different understanding of the world, showing them how the Bible provides better answers to their questions. For Christians to be able to engage on this level, however, they must be prepared to face the questions they will encounter.<sup>132</sup> This preparation needs to come from the church, through the preaching of God's Word.

Preachers need to begin to view their preaching ministry as more than just the straightforward communication of propositional truth.<sup>133</sup> Propositional truth lies at the

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<sup>129</sup>Colson, *How Now Shall We Live*, x.

<sup>130</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>133</sup>Keller, "Preaching to the Secular Mind," 58.

core of their preaching, but they also need to expand it to encompass both apologetics and worldview issues.<sup>134</sup> By viewing their preaching ministry as an apologetic calling, preachers can be better prepared to assist their congregants in the development of a biblical worldview.<sup>135</sup> Worldview preaching involves showing how the Bible answers the major worldview questions, as well as showing how opposing worldviews fail in providing satisfactory answers to these questions. As preachers set forth a full-orbed biblical worldview in their sermons, their people can then be equipped to engage people better who have conflicting and contradictory worldviews.

The incorporation of worldview issues in preaching also assists pastors in what Colson calls pre-evangelism.<sup>136</sup> Pre-evangelism involves bridging the gap between a person's present worldview, which is devoid of any biblical principles, and a biblical worldview, which is needed for them to understand the gospel. In previous generations preachers could proclaim the truths of Scripture and people understood what they meant.<sup>137</sup> People knew what sin was, who Jesus was, and why he died on the cross. This reality no longer exists in the current secular culture of America.<sup>138</sup> For this reason, preachers must bridge the existing gap by incorporating these worldview issues into their preaching.

Tim Keller sets forth six stages that a person who knows nothing about the Bible

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<sup>134</sup>Pearcey, *Total Truth*, 127.

<sup>135</sup>R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 123-24.

<sup>136</sup>Colson, *How Now Shall We Live*, 30.

<sup>137</sup>Tim Keller writes, "But eventually nearly everyone in Europe (and then in North America) was born into a world that was (at least intellectually) Christian. People were educated into a basic Christian-thought framework—a Christian view of God, of soul and body, of Heaven and Hell, of rewards and punishments, of the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount." Tim Keller, "The Gospel and the Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World," in *The Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 105.

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*

goes through before a conversion takes place: (1) awareness, (2) relevance, (3) credibility, (4) trial, (5) commitment, and (6) reinforcement.<sup>139</sup> These stages can be broken into two groups: the public communication phases (1-3) and the private communication phases (4-6). The task of pre-evangelism takes place within the public communication phase. During this phase a person begins to gain an understanding of Christianity (1), sees how it is relevant to his or her life (2), and is convinced of Christianity's truthfulness (3). The private communication phase then includes a person seeing himself as a Christian (4), crossing the line into faith (5), and finally needing reinforcement from fellow believers (6).<sup>140</sup> Keller contends,

In a Christianized, less secular culture, you can jump right to 'commitment' and expect definite commitments. In other words, you can find a bit of spiritual interest and go right to a gospel presentation. . . . But secular people have many more stages to go through.<sup>141</sup>

In previous generations, preachers could assume that people had a general knowledge of the Bible and sin; today, however, they cannot make these same assumptions. Pastors and churches alike must help people walk through all of these stages on their way to conversion.

How then does Keller assist his congregation in developing a biblical worldview? How, in his preaching, does he help non-believers walk through the public communication phases of their conversion process? How does he incorporate apologetics in his preaching? The next two chapters address each of these questions.

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<sup>139</sup>Keller, "Preaching to the Secular Mind," 58.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE PREACHING METHODOLOGY OF TIM KELLER

#### Introduction

With the waning of a biblical worldview in America and the assumption of scientific naturalism as truth, preachers face a difficult task. They have the challenge of communicating with authority the truths found in Scripture to an audience that largely rejects the notions of truth and authority. To accomplish such a task, they must teach their congregants how to engage the secular ideologies around them by utilizing a biblical worldview. This chapter discusses the preaching philosophy of Tim Keller, explaining how he structures his sermons to provide a framework for doing worldview deconstruction.

#### Biography

Tim Keller serves as the senior pastor of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City.<sup>1</sup> In 1989, along with his wife and three children, he planted Redeemer at

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<sup>1</sup>Keller is also a prolific author. He has authored several books, including the following: Timothy J. Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and The Only Hope that Matters* (New York: Penguin, 2009); idem, *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith* (New York: Penguin, 2008); idem, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin, 2008); idem, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Dutton, 2010); idem, *King's Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus* (New York: Dutton Redeemer, 2011). Keller has also written many articles, including the following: Timothy J. Keller, "A Biblical Theology of the City" [on-line]; accessed 6 February 2010; available from <http://www.e-n.org.uk/1869-a-biblical-theology-of-the-city.htm>; Internet; idem, "Christians and Culture" [on-line]; accessed 8 February 2010; available from <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/bio/timkeller.htm>; Internet; idem, "Religionless Christianity," *Leadership Journal* (1999) [on-line]; accessed 20 April 2009; available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/1999/fall/914025.htm>; Internet; and idem, "The Gospel into the Twenty-First Century: Part I," *E-Newsletter of the Redeemer Church Planting Network* (2003) [on-line]; accessed 8 February 2010; available from <http://www.redeemer2.com/themovement/issues/issues/2003/advancingthegospel-I.html>; Internet.



the urging of Terry Gyger who persuaded Keller not only to leave the Westminster Theological Seminary, where he served as a professor, but also to surrender his post as the leader of the Presbyterian Church in America's mercy ministries.<sup>2</sup> Within the first year of planting Redeemer, the church had grown from 50 people to more than 500, and by 1992, it had approximately 1000 attendees.<sup>3</sup> The church has grown steadily since that time and today averages 5000 people spread out in five services at three different locations.<sup>4</sup> Prior to planting Redeemer, Keller pastored one other church in Hopewell, Virginia. While pastoring the West Hopewell Presbyterian Church for nine years he experimented with his preaching style until he found his own distinctive voice.<sup>5</sup> In short, he learned how to preach. Not until Keller arrived in New York City did he learn how to use his preaching to engage the culture and show others how to do the same.

The congregation at Redeemer is very unique. Lisa Miller captures its distinctive flavor when she writes, "The crowd at Redeemer Presbyterian is overwhelmingly young, single, professional, and—for lack of a better word—sober."<sup>6</sup> Keller understands that his ministry context has several struggles not found in the contexts of other ministries.<sup>7</sup> The relativistic ideas of secular philosophy often arrive in

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<sup>2</sup>Michael Luo, "Preaching the Word and Quoting the Voice," *New York Times*, 26 February 2006 [on-line]; accessed 21 April 2009; available from <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/26/nyregion/26evangelist.html>; Internet, 2. Terry Gyger served as the head of the Presbyterian Church in America's church planting arm.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Lisa Miller, "The Smart Shepherd: A New York Pastor Who Says He Thinks Too Much Wants to Bring His Christian Message to the World," *Newsweek*, 9 February 2009 [on-line]; accessed 21 April 2009; available from <http://www.newsweek.com/id/109609>; Internet.

<sup>5</sup>Monergism, "Tim Keller: Biographical Sketch" [on-line]; accessed 27 April 2011; available from <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/bio/timkeller.html>; Internet.

<sup>6</sup>Miller, "The Smart Shepherd."

<sup>7</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Applying Christ: Getting Inside Their World, Part 1" (lecture delivered at Reformed Theological Seminary) *Preaching Christ in a Postmodern*

New York City before being disseminated throughout the rest of the country.<sup>8</sup> A significant portion of Keller's audience faces this secular ideology daily, leading many of them to fully embrace it. This secular ideology complicates his job as pastor, making it extremely difficult to

shepherd his flock.

The Sunday after September 11, 2001, as in most churches, marks a monumental day in the life of Redeemer. Michael Luo explains, "So many people packed the church's Sunday morning service that Dr. Keller called another service on the spot, and 700 people came back to attend."<sup>9</sup> Unlike most churches, whose attendance dropped back to normal levels a few weeks later, Redeemer retained almost 800 additional attendees each week after the attacks.<sup>10</sup> Keller recognizes that young professionals and artists disproportionately influence the development of the country's culture.<sup>11</sup> Given this reality, he has learned the questions people ask and how to answer them. When people arrived at Redeemer on September 16, 2001 with their questions, Keller gave them answers. His ability to engage their worldview and give satisfying answers to their questions, led them to continue attending.<sup>12</sup> Keller views this form of worldview engagement as one of the primary goals of preaching.

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*World* [on-line]; accessed 3 February 2010; available from <http://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/preaching-christ-in-postmodern/id378879885>; Internet.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Luo, "Preaching the Word and Quoting the Voice," 2.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>"The Influentials: Religion," *New York Magazine*, 7 May 2006 [on-line]; accessed 27 April 2011; available from <http://nymag.com/news/features/influentials/16921/>; Internet.

<sup>12</sup>Keller, "Applying Christ: Getting Inside Their World, Part 1."

## Two Primary Goals

To grasp Keller's approach to preaching, one must understand Keller's two primary goals. First, he wants to lead people to worship God by stirring their affections for Christ.<sup>13</sup> Second, he wants to provoke a worldview change in his listeners.<sup>14</sup> The current chapter will focus on the first of these two goals, explaining how Keller constructs his sermons to affect the lives of his listeners.

When a person hears preaching that brings him to the point of Christ-centered worship, sanctification takes place, in part, on the spot.<sup>15</sup> He asserts, "I'd like to talk to you about a vision of preaching in which the change takes place on the spot. It happens in the sermon, because you are not just expounding biblical principles to their will or emotions. You are actually bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to bear on their hearts and changing them on the spot."<sup>16</sup> Since Keller believes that sanctification takes place during worship, his goal of stirring his listener's affections has the ultimate aim of leading them to worship. Worship, ultimately, is Keller's goal. He writes, "The purpose of preaching is to bring people face-to-face with the living God, to give people a sense of God and his presence. Therefore, the goals of evangelism and edification are subordinate to the goal of worship."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Introduction to the Christ-Centered Model of Preaching and an Introduction to Christ-Centered Exposition" (lecture delivered at Reformed Theological Seminary) *Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World* [on-line]; accessed 3 February 2010; available from <http://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/preaching-christ-in-postmodern/id378879885>; Internet.

<sup>14</sup>The use of Keller's presuppositional apologetic to cause a worldview change in the lives of his listeners is the focus of chapter 4.

<sup>15</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Preaching to the Heart without Being Legalistic," Ockenga Institute Pastor's Forum [CD] (South Hamilton, MA: Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2006).

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "A Model for Preaching: Part 1," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 12 (1994): 37.

### Three Sermon Perspectives

Keller incorporates three interrelated perspectives in each of his sermons: the biblical, the situational, and the personal.<sup>18</sup> He draws upon Paul’s writing in Colossians 1:28-29 to form the foundation for these three perspectives: “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”<sup>19</sup> Keller begins by contending that Paul had an interest in biblical accuracy and that, for Paul, meant preaching Christ.<sup>20</sup> The word Paul uses in this phrase—καταγγέλλομεν—can only be found in Acts and the writings of Paul, and it always refers to the proclamation of the gospel. Above all, Paul wanted the good news of Christ to be proclaimed in all of his sermons.<sup>21</sup>

Second, a sermon must be constructed with wisdom and discernment (v. 28b).<sup>22</sup> The preacher has the challenge and responsibility of applying the biblical text to the lives of his congregation. The word *νουθετοῦντες* carries with it the connotation of setting someone right who needs correction.<sup>23</sup> Paul wants to apply the gospel to people’s lives,

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid. Elsewhere, he calls these three perspectives the prophetic, the kingly, and the adoration. Keller, “Introduction to the Christ-Centered Model.” Explaining how these perspectives relate, Keller writes, “In a sense, these three elements are not parts of preaching. They cannot be separated. In fact, each element really includes the others. . . . In a sense then, each element is not a part of preaching. Rather, each is an aspect, a way of looking at the whole. . . . Any preacher who thoroughly works on any one of the aspects will find himself becoming good at the other two.” Keller, “A Models for Preaching: Part 1,” 36.

<sup>19</sup>All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>20</sup>Keller, “A Model for Preaching: Part 1,” 37.

<sup>21</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, The Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 87. O’Brien notes that Christ is “the sum and substance of Paul’s message.” Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Keller, “A Model for Preaching: Part 1,” 37.

<sup>23</sup>O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 88.

correcting them in order to present them mature in Christ. Likewise, Keller desires to understand the various situations faced by his congregation, helping them see how the gospel applies to their situations. He writes, “Preaching must be biblical, but also aimed artfully at the hearts of people so as to produce real life changes.”<sup>24</sup>

Third, the preacher must allow God’s Word to work powerfully within him before he stands in the pulpit to proclaim God’s Word.<sup>25</sup> Paul labors for the gospel, allowing God’s power to work in him. He desires for his message to speak to his own life as much as he wants it to change the lives of his audience. Likewise, Keller wants to allow the text to work in his own heart before he attempts to communicate it to his congregation, leading them to worship Christ. For him, a sermon can only be effective when it contains each of the three perspectives mentioned above.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Biblical Aspect**

In the biblical or prophetic aspect of the sermon, Keller focuses primarily on the meaning of the text.<sup>27</sup> He explains what the text says about the person, work, or teachings of Christ.<sup>28</sup> He believes strongly that the preacher should always preach Christ as the focal point of every passage. He states, “If you are only expounding the text, without preaching Christ, you are doing danger to your people, and you are changing the meaning of the

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<sup>24</sup>Keller, “A Model for Preaching: Part 1,” 37.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Keller further explains, “A sermon must be biblical, but it can be full of accurate exegesis and not be clear. But it is possible for a clear, biblical sermon to be boring if the material is not put in an insightful, fresh, vivid way. Even then it is possible for a biblical, clear, insightful sermon to fail to come down to Earth and deal practically and very specifically with individual sins and problems. Finally, a sermon could be biblical, clear, insightful, and practical, yet be delivered with no life.” Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Keller, “Preaching to the Heart without Being Legalistic.”

<sup>28</sup>Keller, “Introduction to the Christ-Center Model.”

Bible.”<sup>29</sup> This bold and audacious claim drives every aspect of Keller’s ministry, from preaching to counseling to serving the poor. He wants to bring the gospel to bear on people’s lives. The following discussion on the biblical aspect of Keller’s sermons reveals how he moves from a particular text to a preaching outline, which assists him in communicating the principles found in the text.

### **Text Selection**

Ministering to a young and transient congregation, Keller is faced with a unique problem not encountered by most pastors.<sup>30</sup> He aims to preach sermons that expose his people to a wide range of biblical texts. The high turnover in his congregation, however, makes this task very difficult. For this reason, Keller does not preach long series through individual books of the Bible; instead, he has a thematic macro structure, which guides his yearly preaching calendar.<sup>31</sup> Within this macro structure, he preaches individual expository sermons that address a range of topics and congregational concerns. His macro structure generally follows the lectionary so that in the fall he preaches on the doctrine of God, around Christmas he preaches on the incarnation, during the winter he discusses the person and work of Christ, and in the spring and summer he focuses on Christian living.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Timothy J. Keller, “Preaching to the Heart: Reading, Preparation, Conversation, and Preaching,” Ockenga Institute Pastor’s Forum [CD] (South Hamilton, MA: Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2006). The congregation at Redeemer averages around 29 years old and most of them only stay around two years. Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid. The preaching at Redeemer may deal with a specific book, but it rarely progresses through a book from beginning to end. For example, in 2007, the pastors at Redeemer dealt primarily with the book of Deuteronomy, but skipped large sections of the book. They preached twenty sermons in Deuteronomy, addressing the following texts: Deut 1:26-28, 34-36, 41-46; 4:15-24, 33-36; 5:6-21, 4-29; 6:4-23; 7:6-11; 8:1-16; 5:1, 6-22; 5:1-6, 8-10; 5:1-6, 11; 5:1-6, 12-15; 5:1-6, 16; 5:1-6, 17; 5:1-6, 18; 5:1-6, 19; 5:1-6, 20; 5:1-6, 21; 15:1-15; 29:2-4, 9-18; 31:10; and 30:11-20.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid. He also suggests several other factors that guide the preacher in the selection of his preaching text. Some of these factors include church life, public life—national and community events—pastoral situations—spiritual needs of individuals or of the corporate body—social issues, and the personal discernment of the pastor. Keller, “A

By scheduling his preaching in this way, Keller gives his young, transient congregation a healthy diet of Bible teaching.

During the summers, Keller sets aside one week in which he plans his preaching schedule for the next year.<sup>33</sup> Planning far in advance serves two practical purposes. First, it allows his staff to organize the services around the passages and main points of the sermons. Second, it gives him time to read for the upcoming year. After identifying some of the major topics he plans to preach on over the next year, he reads larger works on these issues that he would not be able to read during the year. As fall approaches, he focuses on preparing individual sermons and, therefore, does not have to take the time to read about doctrinal or interpretive issues.

### **Biblical Interpretation**

After selecting a text, Keller seeks to gain a proper understanding of its meaning. At this stage in the process of sermon development, he deals with the text in its original context, addressing issues such as authorial intent and how the original hearers understood the text. He wants to understand its meaning so that he can then communicate it to his audience. Keller works through a three-stage process to arrive at this central meaning.

In the first stage of interpretation, Keller gains an overview of the passage.<sup>34</sup> He reads through the passage several times in several different translations and in the original language. During this stage he seeks to grasp thoroughly the flow of the passage, identifying any issues and difficulties within it. Also, in this first stage, he paraphrases the passage, which forces him to make certain decisions about its flow and helps him begin to determine the meaning of the text. After reading through the text several times and

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Model for Preaching: Part 1,” 39.

<sup>33</sup>Keller, “Preaching to the Heart: Reading, Preparation.”

<sup>34</sup>Keller, “A Model for Preaching: Part 1,” 39.

paraphrasing it, he then tries to ascertain the original author's purpose for writing the passage. He asks the question: What is the basic point the author wants to communicate?<sup>35</sup> His understanding of the main point of the passage may change during the rest of his study, but he wants to begin with a general idea of what the author sought to communicate. This stage allows Keller to become familiar with the passage, providing a foundation for the more detailed study that follows.

Stage 2 involves a much more detailed reading of the text. Here, Keller divides the passage into its parts and formulates an outline of the text.<sup>36</sup> He gives each section a title in order to further understand the author's intent. In the more detailed reading of the text, he wants to understand the different connector words the author used and why the author used them. Only after completing this detailed reading and formulating a rough outline does he consult commentaries. He waits until this point because he does not want the information gleaned from the commentaries to influence his initial inclinations about the text's interpretation. The commentaries serve as a useful tool for affirming his interpretation or for helping him understand confusing issues in the text. He does not depend too heavily on them, however, because he wants to allow the text to speak for itself.

Third, Keller concludes the interpretation phase by discerning the core purpose of the passage.<sup>37</sup> In this stage, he returns to a previous question: what is the basic purpose of the author in writing this? He allows all of his study and meditation to refine his original answer to the question. This answer then serves as the central point of his sermon.

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 40. What Keller calls the sermon's central theme, Haddon Robinson calls the "big idea." Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 35. Hershael York calls the central theme of the sermon its "proposition." Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Engaging Approach to Biblical Exposition* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 139. In each case the main point remains the same, namely that a sermon needs to have a central theme that drives its every aspect.



Keller explains the purpose of the sermon's central point: "A sermon must be like an arrow, streamlined and clearly driving at a single point, a single message, and the theme of the passage."<sup>38</sup> He provides an example from John 16:16-23.<sup>39</sup> He understands the central theme of the passage and, therefore, of the sermon to be that Jesus comforts his disciples with teaching about his second coming. The main point of the passage serves as the central interpretive theme that he wants to communicate in his sermon.

### **Sermon Outline**

Once Keller has identified the central theme of the sermon, he then uses it to develop the sermon's outline. The development of the outline begins with taking the central point of the passage and turning it into a proposition.<sup>40</sup> The proposition should be an active and declarative sentence and should be person oriented.<sup>41</sup> Continuing with the example from John 16, he turns the central interpretive theme into the proposition: Christian, through hope in Jesus you can face anything.

After constructing the proposition, Keller then asks questions of the text that relate to it. He says that the questions asked about the proposition should "show how the need addressed in the proposition is met or satisfied in Christ."<sup>42</sup> The questions should: (1) show how the satisfaction fits the need; (2) give examples of how the satisfaction works; (3) visualize the satisfaction; and (4) urge action toward the satisfaction.<sup>43</sup> With these purposes in mind, he asks simple why and how questions about the proposition.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Keller, "A Model for Preaching: Part 1," 40.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

For the above proposition, he arrives at the following answers to the question of why believers can face anything: (1) because our hope is powerful (v. 21); (2) because our hope is grounded in Christ (v. 22); because our hope is permanent (v. 23).<sup>45</sup> As for the question of how believers can face anything, he answers as follows: (1) by remembering Christ's timing (v. 21); (2) by seeking Christ's face (v. 22); (3) by reflecting on Christ's triumph (vv. 17, 23).<sup>46</sup> These answers then function as the main points of the sermon outline. Keller walks the congregation through each of these questions, showing how the text answers them. He expands the outline by adding supporting material and personal experience.<sup>47</sup>

### **Preaching Christ from the Old Testament**

One of the more controversial parts of Keller's interpretive philosophy centers on his understanding of Old Testament interpretation. Since he understands the whole Bible to be about Christ, he strives to preach Christ from every passage, including passages in the Old Testament. He suggests four primary ways of accomplishing this task. Keller first preaches Christ from the Old Testament through theme resolution.<sup>48</sup> In this approach, the preacher looks for a theme that runs throughout the biblical canon. He then looks for questions in the text related to the theme, to which the only answer can be Christ. Second,

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 41-42.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>48</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Applying Christ: Introduction into Christ-Centered Application" (lecture delivered at Reformed Theological Seminary) *Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World* [on-line]; accessed 3 February 2010; available from <http://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/preaching-christ-in-postmodern/id378879885>; Internet. Keller recommends three books that assist in this task: J. A. Motyer, *Look to the Rock: An Old Testament Background to Our Understanding of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004); Edmund P. Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004); and G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

Keller uses law fulfillment to proclaim Christ from the Old Testament.<sup>49</sup> He asserts that the law primarily functions to point people to Christ; therefore, the preacher must lead his people to Christ when preaching from the law. If he fails to point people sufficiently to Christ then the law will crush them beneath its demands. Third, he utilizes story insertion to preach Christ from the Old Testament.<sup>50</sup> He shows how particular Old Testament stories fit into the overall storyline of redemption. As he places each story in its proper place, he shows how it points to fulfillment in Christ. Finally, Keller implores symbol fulfillment in his preaching of the Old Testament.<sup>51</sup> In this approach, he takes the main symbols of the Israelite community and displays how they point to Christ.

He provides several cautions when seeking to preach Christ from the Old Testament:<sup>52</sup> (1) do not move to Christ so soon in the sermon that the original meaning of the passage is ignored; (2) do not move to Christ so late in the sermon that it just seems that he is being added on as an afterthought; (3) do not get to Christ in an artificial way. In any sermon he may incorporate one or all four of these ways to achieve his goal of pointing people to Christ.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Keller, "Applying Christ: Introduction into Christ-Centered Application."

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Collin Hansen, ed., "TGC Asks about Cautions for Christ-Centered OT Teaching" [on-line]; accessed 1 June 2011; available from <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2011/05/11/tgc-asks-about-cautions-for-christ-centered-ot-teaching/>; Internet.

<sup>53</sup>Sinclair B. Ferguson, "Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: Developing a Christ-Centered Instinct," *PT Media Papers* (London: Proclamation Trust, 2002). In Keller's lecture "Preaching to the Heart without Being Individualistic," he discusses his desire to have what Sinclair Ferguson calls a "Christ-centered instinct" in preaching. Ferguson sums up his notion of a Christ-centered instinct: "These are general principles; they do not constitute a simple formula, an elixir to be sprinkled on our sermons to transform them into the preaching of Christ. There is no formula that will do that. We never arrive, or have it cracked, when it comes to preaching Christ. But as we come to know the Scriptures more intimately, as we see these patterns deeply imbedded in the Bible, and as we come to know Christ himself more intimately and to love him better, we shall surely develop the instinct to reason, explain, and prove from all the Scriptures the riches of grace

### **Situational Aspect**

The situational or kingly aspect of Keller's preaching seeks to apply the biblical principles explained in the first aspect to his audience. He says, "The kingly aspect is to apply and counsel people with the text so that they put on Christ."<sup>54</sup> He desires to see people conformed to the image of Christ and for them to allow the gospel to impact every area of their lives. The following section sets forth how Keller engages his audience through Christ-centered application. The section begins by discussing a proper theory of communication. Next, it displays how the preacher can better understand his audience in order to apply the text effectively. Third, the section presents the three application perspectives used by Keller in his preaching. It concludes by discussing two benefits to applying the text in this way.

### **Communication Theory**

The act of communication has two points of orientation: the sender and the receiver.<sup>55</sup> Identifying a communication act as sender-oriented means that the person attempting to communicate has a particular method of communication and will not adapt to his audience. He expects the hearers to adapt to him in order to receive the message. Many preachers feel as though they must be sender-oriented in order to communicate the message of the Bible accurately.<sup>56</sup> They do not like the notion of being receiver-oriented because they equate it with changing the message in order to get people to respond.<sup>57</sup>

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which are proclaimed in Jesus the Christ." Ibid., 19.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "A Model for Preaching: Part 2," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13 (1994): 39.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid. 40.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

Being receiver-oriented, however, does not mean that the communicator changes the biblical message.

A person who adopts a receiver-oriented approach to communication simply wants to speak the message in a language familiar to the person receiving it. To accomplish this task, he must speak using terms understood by the receiver and in a method comfortable to the receiver.<sup>58</sup> The sender does not change the content of the message; he only changes the medium through which the message is communicated. A brief survey of Scripture shows that God chose to communicate with humanity using a receiver-oriented approach.<sup>59</sup> In Deuteronomy 18:15-19, Moses tells the people of Israel that God will send them another prophet to speak to them. The people feared the voice of God, and he adapted the way in which he communicated with them. They could have spoken with him directly, but instead they preferred to have a mediator. God did not demand that they speak to him in a particular way; he adapted in order to communicate effectively with the people.

The incarnation serves as the ultimate example of how God has adopted a receiver-oriented approach to communication.<sup>60</sup> In the incarnation, God himself takes on humanity in order to relate to his people (Phil 2:6-7). Christ existed as the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15) and was the final culmination of God's promise in Deuteronomy 18:15-19. God entered the framework of his people, communicating with them using language and experiences they could understand.

### **Learning the Framework**

Making a sermon receiver-oriented requires that the preacher gains an understanding of his audience's framework.<sup>61</sup> Keller acknowledges that this process of

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Applying Christ: Getting Inside Their World, Part 1"

discovery demands discipline and intentionality. Weekly encounters with people, books, and cultural events infiltrate his sermon preparation, leading him to answer certain questions and deal with specific issues he becomes aware of during these encounters.<sup>62</sup> For Keller, these conversations materialize in three different ways: personal conversations, book and magazine readings, and pastoral counseling.<sup>63</sup> He intentionally spends time with a diverse group of people in order to assure that he interacts with a wide range of people who attend Redeemer.<sup>64</sup> These people include both believers and nonbelievers. Keller purposefully spends time with nonbelievers because he wants to make sure that he speaks to them in his sermons. He contends, “One way to get non-Christians in your church is to go ahead and preach as though they are present.”<sup>65</sup> If preachers discipline themselves to spend time with non-Christians and incorporate their questions and concerns into their sermons, then non-Christians will begin attending.

Pastoral counseling provides a second way for Keller to understand his audience better.<sup>66</sup> He attempts to reinforce concepts that he communicated through pastoral counseling during the week in his sermons on Sundays. He warns against using specific names and details of situations, but he does encourage trying to speak to some of the same issues.<sup>67</sup> If the text does not address any of the issues he faced during the week, then he will not force them into his sermon. The interaction he has with people in these situations

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(lecture delivered at Reformed Theological Seminary) *Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World* [on-line]; accessed 3 February 2010; available from <http://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/preaching-christ-in-postmodern/id378879885>; Internet.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Keller, “Preaching to the Heart: Reading, Preparation.”

<sup>64</sup>Keller, “Applying Christ: Getting Inside Their World, Part 1.”

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Keller, “Preaching to the Heart: Reading, Preparation.”

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

provides another way for him to understand the problems faced by his congregation.

Keller also gains a broader understanding of his audience's context by reading many of the same things they read.<sup>68</sup> This means that he reads primarily books and magazines that give him insight into the lives of his people. His reading comprises a wide range of topics, including people and issues with which he strongly disagrees.<sup>69</sup> These books and magazine articles not only allow him to further grasp the worldview of his audience, but they also provide him with conversation partners in his sermons. He can use the topics covered in the readings to interact with in his sermons, forming a dialogue. Developing a conversation in this way serves two purposes in Keller's preaching. First, he gains credibility with his congregation because they see him engaging many of the same authors and issues that they encounter.<sup>70</sup> Second, he no longer seems to be a distant preacher who does not understand where they are coming from; instead, he relates to them as a fellow New Yorker.

### **Three Macro Strategies**

Keller attempts to apply biblical principles by incorporating three macro strategies of application in his sermons. Each of his sermons consists of a mixture of these three strategies. He wants to critique religion as well as irreligion, aim at heart motives, and apply the text appropriately. Each of these macro strategies provide Keller with different ways of approaching his congregation with biblical principles.

**Critique religion and irreligion.** First, he critiques religion and irreligion, attacking the legalistic mindset of the religious and the relativistic mindset of the

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid.

<sup>69</sup>Keller, "Applying Christ: Getting Inside Their World, Part 1."

<sup>70</sup>Keller, "A Model for Preaching: Part 2," 44-45.

irreligious.<sup>71</sup> According to Keller, the typical preacher presents two ways of living: God's way or your own way.<sup>72</sup> When people hear a preacher call them to live God's way, they hear him calling them to a legalistic list of actions.<sup>73</sup> Keller does not think this way of preaching is helpful to his audience. Instead, he contrasts the biblical principles found in the text with both religious and irreligious ways of living.

A religious person attempts to get to God by doing good things and serving in the church. He or she tries to work hard by doing what the Bible says in order to gain a good standing before God. Keller calls this approach to God the "elder son way of thinking."<sup>74</sup> The parable of the Prodigal Son displays this idea perfectly. The elder son reveals his heart when he states, "Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends" (Luke 15:29). This statement by the elder son reveals that that he obeyed the father's commands only because he wanted his father's material possessions.<sup>75</sup> The elder son, just as the younger son in the beginning of the parable, did not have a true relationship with the father in which he could simply enjoy being in his father's presence. They both desired one thing—their father's possessions. They used their father as a means to an end and did not truly love him. Likewise, religious people want to use God, Jesus, and the Bible as a means to an end. They think that if they can live a good life and please God,

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<sup>71</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Applying Christ: Getting Down to Earth, Part 1" (lecture delivered at Reformed Theological Seminary) *Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World* [on-line]; accessed 3 February 2010; available from <http://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/preaching-christ-in-postmodern/id378879885>; Internet.

<sup>72</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Preaching to the Heart without being Pietistic," Ockenga Institute Pastor's Forum [CD] (South Hamilton, MA: Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2006).

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Keller, "Applying Christ: Getting Down to Earth, Part 1."

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.



then God will forgive their sins and let them into heaven. They have no interest in having a relationship with God. Whenever the text addresses legalistic issues such as these, the preacher must uncover them for his audience and show how the gospel contradicts this way of thinking.<sup>76</sup>

When critiquing irreligion, Keller begins by showing how no one is devoid of religion.<sup>77</sup> Everyone worships something whether it's the God of the Bible, money, sex, or power. Preachers must strive to make the irreligious person aware of his or her idolatry; however, he must avoid simply telling them to be like the religious person. He points the irreligious person to the gospel, seeking to stir his affections for Christ. When speaking of these two ways of preaching, Keller says, "If your preaching of the gospel does not turn off moralistic people and intrigue religious outsiders, then you are not preaching the gospel like Jesus preached it."<sup>78</sup> If both religion and irreligion are misguided in their assertions, the preacher should construct his sermons to preach to the heart motives of his audience.

**Aim at the heart motives as well as behavior.** Keller not only critiques religion and irreligion, but he also preaches to a person's heart motives. A preacher cannot just seek to change a person's actions; he must deal with the heart motives behind those actions.<sup>79</sup> Keller contends that the average preacher fails to preach to the heart motives because he either preaches to a person's will or to his or her emotions.<sup>80</sup> When a preacher speaks to a person's will, he tells the person how to live. The preacher might point out an

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Applying Christ: Getting Down to Earth, Part 2" (lecture delivered at Reformed Theological Seminary) *Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World* [on-line]; accessed 3 February 2010; available from <http://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/preaching-christ-in-postmodern/id378879885>; Internet.

<sup>80</sup>Keller, "Preaching to the Heart without being Legalistic."

example in the Bible of how a biblical character lived and then tell his congregation to follow the example of this character. This type of preaching has as its goal the changing of actions but does not address the motivational structure behind the actions.<sup>81</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, some preachers use emotionalism to spur people into action. In this type of a sermon the preacher manipulates the emotions of his congregation in order to get them to do what he wants or what he thinks the text demands.<sup>82</sup> For Keller, neither of these approaches to application brings about consistent sustainable change within the church.<sup>83</sup>

Keller wants to preach in such a way that he cuts across a person's will and emotions. In other words, he wants to preach to the heart.<sup>84</sup> Preaching to the heart encompasses preaching to the mind, will, and emotions. When Keller speaks about the heart, he means something more than just the seat of the emotions. For him, the heart serves as the control center for a person's whole life, dictating how an individual thinks, acts, and feels.<sup>85</sup> It forms the entire motivational framework behind a person's life, controlling the mind, the will, and the emotions. If a preacher wants to cultivate change within a person's heart motives, then he must attack the affections of the heart. Keller defines the affections as the "inclinations of the soul."<sup>86</sup> People act in a particular way because they have inclined their heart in that direction. Keller wants to invade people's lives through his preaching in order to radically alter their heart's affections. These affections of the heart change only upon the introduction of a greater and more powerful

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid.

affection.<sup>87</sup> He constructs his sermons in a way that allows him to accomplish this task.

Keller's sermons generally follow a simple plot, which is intended to bring about change in a person's heart motives.<sup>88</sup> First, he wants to show people what the text demands of them. Second, he shows his congregation that they cannot achieve the demands presented in the text. Third, he points them to Christ, who perfectly fulfilled all the text's demands. Finally, he displays for people how they can then fulfill these demands through Christ. A change in a person's motivational structure can only come about through having his affections stirred for Christ.<sup>89</sup> When an individual sees how Christ perfectly fulfills the demands for him, this reality stirs his affections for Christ, resulting in the desired change. This change does not come about because of the willingness or desire of the person, but because his heart has experienced a fundamental change in its affections.

The plot provides Keller with structure and a way of creating tension in his sermons. This tension arises out of the imperative found in the text. He argues that every passage contains some kind of imperative and that this imperative cannot be fully acted upon by anyone.<sup>90</sup> This inability to act on the imperative then furnishes the tension

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<sup>87</sup>Keller, "Preaching to the Heart without being Individualistic." Thomas Chalmers's sermon, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection," greatly impacted how Keller views a person's motivational structure. Chalmers argues that trying to merely dissipate the power and appeal of one's affections without replacing it with a greater affection will fail to satisfy the lust of the heart. Thomas Chalmers, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection" [on-line], accessed 1 June 2011, available from <http://www.vorthosforum.com/export/articles/the%20xpulsive%20Power%20of%20a%20new%20affection.pdf>; Internet. He says, "We must address to the eye of his mind with another object with a charm powerful enough to dispossess the first of its influences, and to engage him in some other prosecution as full of interest, and hope, and congenial activity, as the former." Ibid. A person's heart must be turned to another object that is more alluring than the one currently occupying his desires. Keller desires to present Christ in his sermons in such a way that love for Christ becomes the greater and more powerful affection. Keller, "Preaching to the Heart without being Legalistic."

<sup>88</sup>Keller, "Applying Christ: Getting Down to Earth, Part 2."

<sup>89</sup>Keller, "Preaching to the Heart without being Legalistic."

<sup>90</sup>Keller, "Applying Christ: Getting down to Earth, Part 2."

needed to advance the plot of the sermon. The sermon then climaxes in the declaration that Christ can and did fulfill the imperative demanded by the text. The creating and subsequent resolving of tension within the sermon allows Keller to capture the imagination and interest of his audience. With this structure he has the ability to communicate any concept in a basic narrative form, which draws people into the plot of the story. When people see themselves in the story, this stirs their affections for Christ and change takes place.<sup>91</sup>

**Three application perspectives.** Finally, Keller applies the text utilizing three application perspectives: the doctrinalist, the pietist, and the cultural transformationalist.<sup>92</sup> A preacher committed solely to the doctrinalist perspective only addresses the doctrines found in a particular text. He wants to make sure that his people understand the basic doctrines of the Christian faith, exhausting every aspect of these issues.<sup>93</sup> The doctrinalist struggles to explain how the doctrines apply to the private lives of his audience or how they impact the culture at large. The pietist, on the other hand, focuses his sermons on how the text impacts the private spiritual lives of the people in his congregation.<sup>94</sup> Preaching focused primarily on pietism appeals to hyper-spiritual people, frequently avoiding the deeper doctrines of the text and how it encourages cultural transformation. The cultural transformationalist primarily addresses how the text encourages people to engage their surrounding culture.<sup>95</sup> Preachers who focus most of their time on preaching sermons dealing with cultural transformation tend to preach more of a social gospel, resulting in the exclusion of doctrine and personal devotion. Keller

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

strives to include, on some level, each of these three aspects in all of his sermons.<sup>96</sup> When he thinks through the text, he wants to think constantly about these three areas. Thinking this way causes him to have a balance of all three perspectives in his sermons.

### **Benefits of Keller's Application Method**

This approach to application has two primary benefits. First, it allows the preacher to continually remind people that their sanctification is based on their justification and not vice versa. Keller contends that people do not know what it means to be sanctified by faith, which leads them to try and earn their sanctification.<sup>97</sup> He asserts, "Failure to live a holy life is not just a result of not trying harder, but primarily it is not living in light of your justification in Christ."<sup>98</sup> In other words, if a person wants to become sanctified, then he must view his life through the prism of Christ's work on his behalf. Using Christ-centered application allows the preacher to remind his congregation continually of the gospel and that they cannot fulfill the Bible's standards apart from Christ. Keller wants his people to know that not only their justification, but also their sanctification flows from what Christ did for them on the cross. This form of preaching enables him to achieve his application goals.

Second, this form of application opens the door for Keller to preach to both believers and nonbelievers in the same sermon.<sup>99</sup> Keller does not have to choose between preaching to Christians in one sermon and non-Christians in another. He can

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Applying Christ: Getting to Christ" (lecture delivered at Reformed Theological Seminary) *Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World* [on-line]; accessed 3 February 2010; available from <http://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/preaching-christ-in-postmodern/id378879885>; Internet.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>Keller, "Preaching to the Heart without being Pietistic." Keller says that most sermons are aimed at either Christians or non-Christians. He wants to preach in such a way that he speaks to both. Ibid.

preach to both because he attempts to critique both the religious ways of thinking and the irreligious. He continues to remind Christians that their sanctification comes from their justification while calling irreligious people to believe in the gospel. Ultimately, he wants to draw both religious and irreligious people to God by having their affections stirred for Christ. Keller recognizes that if he wants to stir people's affections for Christ, then he must first lead them to worship Christ.

### **Personal Aspect**

The personal or adoration aspect of preaching covers two primary areas. It addresses preaching's final goal of leading people to worship, and it deals with the private worship of the preacher. If the preacher wants to lead people to adore Christ, he must adore Christ in his own personal devotions. He cannot lead people to do something that he himself fails to do. This section begins by explaining how the sermon leads people to adore Christ. It then concludes by discussing the private and personal preparation of the preacher.

### **Life Change through Worship**

Keller sees one of the primary goals of preaching to be that of leading people to worship.<sup>100</sup> He states, "Christocentric preaching that says that you deal with problems by taking them to the finished work of Christ will allow you to unite Christian and non-Christian worship."<sup>101</sup> By non-Christian worship, Keller does not mean that non-Christians can worship God in the same way as Christians but that they worship as the preached Word draws them to Christ.<sup>102</sup> He recognizes that non-Christians want to "try Christianity on"

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<sup>100</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Adoring Christ: Spiritual Reality" (lecture delivered at Reformed Theological Seminary) *Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World* [on-line]; accessed 3 February 2010; available from <http://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/preaching-christ-in-postmodern/id378879885>; Internet.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

in order to see how it works.<sup>103</sup> They want to see Christianity in action, observing how Christians interact and worship. So, in his preaching, Keller desires to engage both the believer and nonbeliever in order to draw them to God.

**Doxological evangelism.** Edmund Clowney's article, "Kingdom Evangelism," influenced Keller's understanding of how nonbelievers worship. In this article, Clowney discusses a part of evangelism he calls "doxological evangelism."<sup>104</sup> Doxological evangelism has as its goal to bring the nations together to worship God. Clowney writes,

To speak of evangelism as doxological expresses the goal of evangelism, which must affect its very nature. . . . We are the redeemed of the Lord, delivered from bondage to the powers of darkness, brought to the city of God, where God himself is with us. Now we sing to his praise and call the nations to join us in glorifying the only savior in all the Earth.<sup>105</sup>

Keller assimilates Clowney's concept of doxological evangelism into his goals for the worship services at Redeemer. He desires to bring people to a point of transcendent awe and wonder at being in the presence of God.<sup>106</sup> Keller identifies two case studies in

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid. In his article, "Preaching to the Secular Mind," Keller argues that nonbelievers need to be given the opportunity to experience Christianity in its fullest form: "In many churches, most ministry jobs and settings are off limits to non-Christians and even non-members. We don't let non-Christians sing in the choir, etc. But we must allow people plenty of time to 'try on Christianity,' to be part of fellowship and ministry teams even though they have not made a definite commitment." Timothy J. Keller, "Preaching to the Secular Mind," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 14 (1995): 58.

<sup>104</sup>Edmund P. Clowney, "Kingdom Evangelism," in *The Pastor-Evangelist: Preacher, Model, and Mobilizer for Church Growth*, ed. Roger S. Greenway (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 23-24.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 23. To support his point that evangelism should have as worship one of its goals, Clowney references several Old Testament texts that speak of the nation's being called to come and worship God (Pss 117:1; 47:1; 100:1; 105:1-3; Isa 2:2-4; 56:6-8). He then points to Christ as the New Testament fulfillment of this worship. The temple and Jerusalem no longer serve as the focal point of worship for God's people. This focus shifted from a place, Jerusalem, to a person, Jesus Christ. John reminds his readers, "The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and Truth" (John 4:23). Christ reoriented people's worship to focus on him. So, to say that evangelism has as one of its goals as worship means that the nations are now called to come to Zion, the person, in order to worship him in spirit and truth. Clowney, "Kingdom Evangelism," 24.

<sup>106</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Reformed Worship in the Global City," in *Worship by*

Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 that support his understanding that nonbelievers can be evangelized through the worship of Christians.<sup>107</sup> In each of these instances nonbelievers are converted when they see and experience the corporate worship of believers. Commenting on these passages, Keller writes, “These two case studies show that nonbelievers are expected in gathered worship, which nonbelievers should find the worship comprehensible, and that nonbelievers may be convicted and converted through corporate worship.”<sup>108</sup> As the central part of the worship service, then, the sermon plays an important role in leading people to worship God. For this reason, Keller wants to stir people’s affections for Christ by preaching both to their minds and their emotions.

**Text, context, and subtext.** Keller realizes that in his particular context he has many Christians and non-Christians, and he does not want to exclude either group by overly focusing on the other. He contends that if the preacher focuses only on edification, he will lose the non-Christians. If he aims at evangelism, he will bore the Christians. But, if he aims at the cross and worship, he will reach both.<sup>109</sup> Keller seeks to lead people to worship because he believes that you change a person’s life by changing what he worships.<sup>110</sup> According to Keller, if a preacher wants to lead his people to worship, then he must be clear about his text, context, and subtext.<sup>111</sup>

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*the Book*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 211. Keller accomplishes this task in two ways. First, he focuses on excellence in worship, meaning that he wants the best singers and musicians to be leading worship. These people can draw in both the believer and the nonbeliever in ways that a lesser skilled musician could not. *Ibid.* Second, he places a great emphasis on the spiritual demeanor of those leading in worship. He knows that these people cannot lead people to have a transcendent awe and wonder if they do not have it themselves. *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup>Keller, “Adoring Christ: Spiritual Reality.”

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*



First, the preacher must be clear about the text and what it says about Christ. Second, the preacher must be clear about the context and how it applies to people's lives. Third, he must be clear on his subtext, which acts as the driving force behind his proclamation. Keller identifies four possible subtexts: reinforcement, performance, training, and worship.<sup>112</sup> With a subtext of reinforcement, the preacher focuses primarily on the greatness of the audience. He builds them up, telling them what they want to hear and never rebukes them.<sup>113</sup> In the performance subtext, the preacher wants to get the congregation to tell him how good a preacher he is. He tries each week to wow the audience with his exegesis and illustration of the text.<sup>114</sup> A preacher driven by the training subtext simply wants to teach people what they do not know. This subtext concerns itself with giving people information and does not show how it applies to their lives.<sup>115</sup> The final subtext is worship. If a preacher has as a goal to lead people to worship, then it will drive his proclamation of the Word. Keller fosters this subtext of worship in two ways: by preaching to the sin beneath the sin and by making the truth real to people's hearts.<sup>116</sup>

**The sin beneath the sin.** When explaining the sin beneath the sin, Keller begins

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid. Keller says that preachers default to this subtext when they are afraid of losing their job. They do not want to say or do anything controversial because they fear how people might respond.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid. Keller notes that most young preachers adopt this subtext because they do not have the confidence to preach and lead people to worship. They need encouragement and praise from the congregation to bolster their confidence. He argues that a preacher's first two hundred sermons will be relatively bad. For this reason, he encourages young preachers to focus less time on sermon preparation and more time on pastoral ministry. The pastoral ministry builds the foundation for his preaching ministry because in it he earns the right to be heard. Keller, "Preaching to the Heart: Reading, Preparation."

<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

<sup>116</sup>Keller, "Preaching to the Heart without being Individualistic."

by discussing the first commandment.<sup>117</sup> God tells his people, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod 20:3). Keller turns to Martin Luther for help in understanding this concept.<sup>118</sup> Luther explains what it means to have a god:

A god means that from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress, so that to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him from the whole heart. . . . That now I say, upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god. Therefore it is the intent of this commandment to require true faith and trust of the heart which settles on the only true God.<sup>119</sup>

Luther makes it clear that whoever or whatever a person places faith and trust in becomes his god. This reality means that everyone has a god that they worship because everyone places faith and trust in something outside of himself. Again, Luther writes,

You can easily see and judge how the world practices only false worship and idolatry. For no people has ever been so reprobate as not to institute and observe some kind of worship; everyone has set up as his special god whatever he looked to for blessings, help and comfort.<sup>120</sup>

Using the first commandment, Luther notes that no one exists as a neutral observer but that everyone worships something. When someone places faith and trust in something other than the one true God, that person commits idolatry. For Keller, this idolatry lies beneath every sin and must be addressed in preaching.<sup>121</sup>

The preacher needs to address the sin beneath the sin because it reveals that people on some level are failing to believe the gospel.<sup>122</sup> People forget that their justification resides in Christ, and they turn to external things to satisfy desires that can only be satisfied by him. Keller notes several indications of this reality provided in

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, trans. F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau (Hazleton, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2000), 12.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>121</sup>Keller, “Preaching to the Heart without being Individualistic.”

<sup>122</sup>Ibid.

Scripture. In Galatians 2, when Paul confronts Peter about not eating with Gentiles, he does not appeal to his racism. Instead, Paul appeals to the gospel (Gal 2:14-16).<sup>123</sup> He indicates that Peter's problem was not that he did not respect all people but that he did not believe the gospel. He did not believe that all people are justified in the same way and are therefore all equal. Likewise, in 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul wants the Corinthian church to take an offering. He does not give them a command to follow, but instead he points them to the gospel.<sup>124</sup> The only way that the Corinthian church could give an offering out of a glad heart was to realize that they had become rich in the gospel. They no longer placed their faith and trust in how much money they had; they trusted in the riches of Christ.<sup>125</sup>

These two examples from Scripture shine light on the issue of the sin beneath the sin. People struggle to worship fully because they do not direct their whole person to the proper object of worship, Jesus Christ. Keller continually attacks this underlying sin because he sees the tendency in people to constantly place their faith and trust in something other than Christ.<sup>126</sup> Preaching to the sin beneath the sin provides another way for Keller to rework the motivational structure of his people's hearts. He wants people to stop obeying God's commands out of duty and to begin obeying out of gratitude for Christ.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup>Keller, "Preaching to the Heart without being Pietistic."

<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid. Keller, like Luther, believes that if a person worshiped properly, then they would live properly. The keeping of the rest of the commands depends completely on the keeping of the first command. Luther, *The Large Catechism*, 18-19.

<sup>127</sup>Keller, "Preaching to the Heart without being Pietistic." He further explains this idea by telling a story from his college music appreciation class. He says that in this class the teacher forced him to listen to Mozart. He fulfilled the requirement for the class in order to get a good grade. He wanted the good grade so that he could graduate from college and get a good paying job. In the end, he listened to Mozart in order to get a job. Mozart served as a means to an end. Now, however, he has a much different motivation for listening to Mozart. He has gained a real appreciation for the music. He listens to Mozart for Mozart's sake and not as a means to an end. He explains that a person's relationship with God looks exactly the same. A person whom the gospel has changed loves and serves God out of gratitude and not as a means to an end.

In order to lead people to worship, the preacher must deal with the sin beneath the sin, but he must also make truth real for people.

**Make truth real.** In a sermon, people do not merely need to have the truth clarified for them; they need to have it made real to them.<sup>128</sup> In his sermon “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” Jonathan Edwards distinguished between having a mental knowledge of something and having a heart knowledge of it.<sup>129</sup> Edwards explains, “In the former is exercised merely the speculative faculty or the understanding. . . . In the latter, the will, or inclination, or heart are mainly concerned.”<sup>130</sup> He uses the sweetness of honey to illustrate his point.<sup>131</sup> He says that a person can be told that honey is sweet and can know in his mind that honey is sweet, but it is not until he tastes the honey that he truly knows its sweetness.<sup>132</sup> A difference exists between the rational judgment that honey is sweet and the experience of tasting the honey’s sweetness. A person can know with his head that honey is sweet without knowing it in his heart. He, however, cannot know it in his heart without knowing it in his head. In other words, knowing with the

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<sup>128</sup>Keller, “Preaching to the Heart without being Legalistic.”

<sup>129</sup>Jonathan Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God Shown to be Both Scriptural and Rational Doctrine” (sermon delivered in Northampton, 1734) [on-line]; accessed 12 May 2011; available from [http://www.ccel.org/e/edwards/sermons/supernatural\\_light.html](http://www.ccel.org/e/edwards/sermons/supernatural_light.html); Internet.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid. Edwards also says that in order for truth to be made clear, people need two things: to believe the truth of it and to have a sensible idea of it. Jonathan Edwards, “Warnings of Future Punishment Don’t Seem Real to the Wicked,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 201:14. In this sermon, Edwards speaks specifically about the future judgment that awaits the wicked. He says that many of these people have heard sermons on the future judgment, they have read about the punishment, but they have never truly believed that it awaits them. Ibid., 201-02. Edwards also says that a truth must appeal to a person’s senses before it can be clear to them. Ibid., 202. The idea must be brought from an abstract concept and be transformed into a concrete reality. Only when people have a genuine belief in, and a sensible idea of, a concept, will the truth of it be clear to them.

<sup>131</sup>Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light.”

<sup>132</sup>Ibid.

heart depends upon knowing with the head. Keller asserts that this latter type of knowing should consume the preacher.<sup>133</sup> Keller wants not only to make the truths of the Bible clear to his audience, but he also wants to make them real. He wants them to experience the truths of Scripture so that they can worship fully.

Keller strives to make truth real for his congregation in five different ways. First, he uses reason.<sup>134</sup> He understands that truth cannot become real for people unless they clearly understand it. He preaches to their minds with the goal of making biblical principles as clear as possible. He says that during this part of the sermon he wants people to take notes so that they can get all of the information.<sup>135</sup> The biblical aspect of the sermon concerns itself with achieving this purpose.

Second, Keller uses analogical illustrations to show the relationship of the truth to some other kind of reality.<sup>136</sup> By incorporating these metaphors in his sermons, Keller takes the abstract principles found in Scripture and makes them concrete in people's minds. In doing this, he shows how Scripture makes truth real. For example, God tells Cain, "Sin is crouching at the door" (Gen 4:7). God depicts sin as an animal lying in wait ready to pounce at its first opportunity.<sup>137</sup> God communicates to Cain the danger of sin in a very concrete and real way. In the same way, Keller wants to use analogical illustrations to make abstract truths real for his audience.

Third, Keller uses narrative in his sermons.<sup>138</sup> He tries to take the point he wants to communicate and embodies it in a story. The use of stories goes beyond analogical

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<sup>133</sup>Keller, "Preaching to the heart without being Legalistic."

<sup>134</sup>Keller, "Adoring Christ: Spiritual Reality."

<sup>135</sup>Keller, "Preaching to the Heart without being Legalistic."

<sup>136</sup>Keller, "Adoring Christ: Spiritual Reality."

<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid.

illustrations and again makes the point concrete for his listeners. This story can come from the Bible, fiction, or real life. No matter where the story comes from, the goal is to paint a picture of what the biblical principle might look like in a person's everyday life. Using stories also assists Keller in showing his people how they can personally embody biblical principles in their own lives. People relate to characters in the story and begin to see themselves as those people.

Fourth, Keller describes the inadequate affections that people already have in their hearts.<sup>139</sup> Because Keller knows his congregation well, he knows what their hearts lust and long for. He strives to build up and engage these desires. He wants people to begin longing for the things in their lives that they automatically turn to for satisfaction. He then immediately deconstructs these affections, showing how they fail to satisfy adequately the desires of their hearts. Once he has deconstructed the inadequate object of their longing, he then points them to Christ, the only one who can completely and fully satisfy their longings. He does not want to simply illustrate Christ in a general way, but as a contrast to an ineffective object. For example, Keller might begin to talk about the desire to have a friend. He builds up this desire and says that he knows everyone is looking for a friend, for someone to listen and care about them. He then shows them how everyone ultimately fails to live up to these expectations. Finally, he points his congregation to Christ, the only one who can truly and completely satisfy their desires.<sup>140</sup>

Fifth, in order for Keller to lead his people to worship, he must be a worshipping preacher.<sup>141</sup> He knows that if he wants his congregation to apply the biblical principles in a way that leads them to worship, he must also experience the truths in a way that leads him

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<sup>139</sup>Ibid.

<sup>140</sup>He notes that this playing on the desires of his congregation cannot just be a sound bite. He has to work at it and really draw it out in order to get his people where he wants them. Only then can he effectively point them to Christ as the answer.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid.

to a point of worship. This experience, however, does not begin in the pulpit on Sunday morning; it is something that he cultivates and feeds throughout the week during his study and preparation.

### **Private Study and Worship**

Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said, “The preacher’s first, and most important task is to prepare himself, not his sermon.”<sup>142</sup> Lloyd-Jones understood the reality that the preacher’s own personal spiritual life and his character is the most important part of his sermon preparation. If the preacher does not spend time feeding his own soul, then he cannot feed the souls of his congregation. Like Lloyd-Jones, Keller has grasped the importance of the preacher’s personal spiritual life on his preaching.<sup>143</sup> Keller has two specific disciplines that assist him in feeding his own soul: rapid reading of Scripture and Bible meditation. He takes two opposite approaches to his personal Bible study, which allow him to study the broad story line of the Bible and focus on the particular stories and writings that make up the Bible. In his rapid reading, Keller simply wants to gain a better grasp of how the Bible fits together.<sup>144</sup> In his meditation, however, he focuses more on what the Bible has to say about his own life and ministry. Keller views meditation as a step in his devotional life that links Bible study and prayer. He reads sections of Scripture until he comes across a passage he wants to focus on. He then asks three particular questions about the text: (1) how does the passage lead me to adore God; (2) how does the passage lead me to confess sin; and (3) how does the passage lead me to petition for grace?<sup>145</sup> The

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<sup>142</sup>David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 170.

<sup>143</sup>Keller, “Preaching to the Heart: Reading, Preparation.”

<sup>144</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup>Timothy J. Keller and Edmund P. Clowney, “Adoring Christ: Communion with God” (lecture delivered at Reformed Theological Seminary) *Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World* [on-line]; accessed 3 February 2010; available from <http://itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/preaching-christ-in-postmodern/id378879885>; Internet

goal of this personal Bible reading and meditation is to form the godly character in him that every preacher needs to have in order to be received by his people.

Keller concerns himself with having a loving boldness, which endears him to his congregation.<sup>146</sup> He wants to speak the truth of the Bible to his people, but he also wants to have a lifestyle that supports his proclamation. He knows that if his lifestyle does not match his sermon then he cannot communicate biblical principles effectively. If a pastor worships God in private, however, even what may seem to be bad preaching can be effective because people trust and admire the one preaching.

### **Conclusion**

Tim Keller constructs his sermons in a way that allows him to lead people to a point of Christ-centered worship. He begins by explaining the meaning of the biblical text in a manner easy for his listeners to understand. He provides them with a foundation grounded in the truths of the Bible. He knows that without a foundation in Scripture, his people cannot experience enduring life change. After laying a biblical foundation, Keller then applies the text to his audience. This application takes place in three primary ways: through critiquing religion and irreligion, through preaching to their heart motives, and by thinking about a text from three perspectives. He applies the text in this fashion in order to connect with the hearer and communicate his point in a manner that they can understand. He wants to make the truths of Scripture accessible.

Finally, Keller attempts to lead his people to worship Christ. This happens in several ways. First, he preaches to the sin beneath their sin, namely, idolatry. He wants people to see that their sin arises out of a lack of having God at the center of their lives. Second, he makes truth clear to his congregation by taking biblical principles and making them concrete realities. Third, he leads his audience to Christ-centered worship by being

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<sup>146</sup>Keller, "A Model for Preaching: Part 3," 53.



a worshiping preacher. This sermon structure provides Keller with a framework through which he deconstructs the unbelieving, secular worldview of many of his listeners. The next chapter discusses how he uses presuppositional apologetics to assist in this task.

CHAPTER 4  
WORLDVIEW DECONSTRUCTION THROUGH THE  
USE OF PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

**Introduction**

In a world that is becoming increasingly secular, Tim Keller stands on the brink between naturalism and orthodox Christianity. Keller desires to preach in such a way that his congregation has the tools to engage the unbelieving worldview surrounding them. Fred Craddock, however, does not believe that a preacher, including Keller, has the authority to embark on such a mission. With the publication of his book *As One without Authority*, Craddock pronounces the death of the traditional pulpit.<sup>1</sup> He writes, “The very location and elevation of the pulpit imply an authority on the part of the speaker or the message that the minister is hesitant to assume and the listeners no longer recognize.”<sup>2</sup> Craddock robs the preacher of any authority to speak confidently from the Bible concerning the needs of his congregation.

So, does any room exist in the contemporary church for traditional, authoritative preaching? Nancy Pearcey answers this question in the affirmative. She challenges preachers to assist their congregations in developing a comprehensive, biblical worldview so that they will be prepared to face the questions and attacks of an unbelieving world.<sup>3</sup> She asserts, “By translating Christian theology into contemporary

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<sup>1</sup>Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, rev. ed. (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), 13-15.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>3</sup>Nancy R. Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 123-53.

language, we can set it side by side other systems of thought, demonstrating that it offers a more consistent and comprehensive account of reality.”<sup>4</sup> She believes that apologetics best accomplishes this goal.<sup>5</sup> The following chapter argues that presuppositional apologetics provides the preacher with the appropriate tools for enabling the development of a biblical worldview among his listeners. The chapter begins by defining and explaining presuppositional apologetics, showing how it best defends the Christian faith. Then the chapter demonstrates how Keller incorporates this apologetic methodology into his sermons, assisting his congregation in the development of a consistent biblical worldview.

### **Presuppositional Apologetics**

When defending the Christian faith, an apologist has two options. He can use the traditional approach or he can use presuppositional apologetics. This section has a fourfold purpose. First, it defines the presuppositional apologetic method, briefly comparing it with the evidentialist/classical method. Second, it discusses the relationship between epistemology and presuppositionalism. Third, the section presents a significant point of contact between the believer and the nonbeliever. Finally, it concludes by explaining what it means to argue from the impossibility of the contrary.

### **History and Definition**

James Orr and Abraham Kuyper began a movement towards viewing Christianity as a holistic worldview in the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> Orr presented the Christian faith as a total worldview capable of intellectually challenging the modernist

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 124-25.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 125, 127.

<sup>6</sup>David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 5.

culture of his day.<sup>7</sup> He states, “The opposition which Christianity has to encounter is no longer confined to special doctrines or to points of supposed conflict with the natural sciences, but extends to the whole manner of conceiving of the world.”<sup>8</sup> Orr contends that people have an internal motivation to uncover the answers to the why, whence, and whither questions of life and that these answers form the foundation of a person’s worldview.<sup>9</sup> Influenced by Orr’s writings, Kuyper sought not just to present Christianity as a comprehensive worldview, but to present Calvinism as an all-encompassing worldview.<sup>10</sup> He spoke very negatively concerning traditional apologetic approaches and wanted to replace them with a more comprehensive method.<sup>11</sup> Kuyper delivered his 1898 Stone Lectures at Princeton Seminary, where he set forth his understanding that Calvinism functions as a comprehensive worldview.<sup>12</sup> In these lectures, he argues that Christians need to leave behind a piecemeal approach to apologetics, and adopt an approach that engages an all-encompassing unbelieving worldview with a comprehensive biblical worldview.<sup>13</sup>

Building on the foundation laid by Orr and Kuyper, Cornelius Van Til endeavored to defend Christianity as a holistic worldview.<sup>14</sup> Considered the father of presuppositional apologetics,<sup>15</sup> Van Til felt that all of one’s person should be involved

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 7

<sup>8</sup>James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World as Centering in the Incarnation* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1893), 4, as quoted in Naugle, *Worldview*, 8.

<sup>9</sup>Orr, *Christian View*, 370.

<sup>10</sup>Naugle, *Worldview*, 9.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>12</sup>Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931).

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>14</sup>Naugle, *Worldview*, 25.

<sup>15</sup>Bruce A. Baker, “Romans 1:18-21 and Presuppositional Apologetics,”

with defending the faith.<sup>16</sup> Christians should strive to love the Lord with all their heart, their entire minds, and with all their strength. Van Til believed that loving the Lord your God with all your mind involved an intellectual pursuit, culminating in an effective defense of the gospel.<sup>17</sup> Greg Bahnsen writes, “Apologetics involves intellectual reasoning and argumentation regarding the Christian worldview. This is more than personal testimony and autobiography. It is a matter of intellectual analysis and confrontation.”<sup>18</sup> In order for a person to develop a biblical worldview, he must be willing to think and use his mind for the glory of God. Keller contends that the development of a biblical worldview is best accomplished through employing presuppositional apologetics.<sup>19</sup>

Arriving at a working definition of presuppositional apologetics requires dissecting the term. Greg Bahnsen defines a presupposition:

An elementary assumption in one’s reasoning or in the process by which opinions are formed. In this book, a presupposition is not just any assumption in an argument, but a personal commitment that is held at the most basic level of one’s network of beliefs. Presuppositions form a wide-ranging foundational perspective in terms of which everything else is interpreted and evaluated.<sup>20</sup>

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*Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (1998): 282.

<sup>16</sup>Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998), 31. For a concise summary of Van Til’s methodology, see Scott Oliphint, “The Consistency of Van Til’s Methodology,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990): 27-49.

<sup>17</sup>Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 31.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Timothy J. Keller, “Applying Christ: Getting Inside Their World, Part 1,” *Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World* (lecture delivered at Reformed Theological Seminary) [on-line]; accessed 10 May 2011; available from <http://www.itunes.apple.com/us/itunes-u/preaching-christ-in-postmodern/id378879885>; Internet.

<sup>20</sup>Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 2. In discussing Van Til’s apologetic method, John Frame defines a presupposition when he writes, “A presupposition is a belief that takes precedence over another and therefore serves as a criterion for another. An ultimate presupposition is a belief over which no other takes precedence.” John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 45. Frame distinguishes between a basic presupposition and an ultimate presupposition,

Because of the foundational nature of a person's presuppositions, they determine how the person thinks, acts, and feels in every situation.<sup>21</sup> Presuppositions can be consciously held beliefs that dictate actions and emotions; however, they often exist at a subconscious level. The person may not even realize the impact that a particular belief has on them. Whether holding the presuppositions consciously or subconsciously, a person cannot help but act in accordance with them.

In the case of Christians, they should derive their presuppositions from the Bible. Their biblical presuppositions should then determine how they think, feel, and act. Scripture speaks to the most basic questions of reality, telling the believer how to view the world.<sup>22</sup> If a Christian determines at any point in his life that his thinking does not line up with Scripture, then he must strive to correct the inconsistency. Consistency in one's worldview should always be the goal for the believer. Again, Bahnsen writes, "The apologist must presuppose the truth of God's Word from start to finish in his apologetic witness."<sup>23</sup> In other words, if the Christian wants to defend the faith effectively, he must stand upon the truth of God's Word. The Christian apologist depends upon the revelation of God because for him it stands as the supreme authority for matters of life and death.

The word "apologetic" comes from the Greek word *ἀπολογία* found in 1 Peter 3:15, and it can be defined as, "The act of giving a defense."<sup>24</sup> Peter charges his readers

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saying that Christian's ultimate presuppositions come from the Bible. Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 2. Bahnsen also states, "As a matter of fact, no man is without presuppositional commitments. As a matter of philosophical necessity, no man can be without presuppositional commitments. And as a matter of scriptural teaching, no man ought to be without presuppositional commitments." Greg L. Bahnsen, "Inductivism, Inerrancy, and Presuppositionalism," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (1977): 301.

<sup>22</sup>Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 45.

<sup>23</sup>Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 2.

<sup>24</sup>Walter Bauer, et al., eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 117.

to “always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet 3:15). He assumes that nonbelievers will recognize the hope present in the life of a believer, and he warns them to be prepared at all times to explain why they have this hope.

John Frame defines apologetics: “The discipline that teaches Christians how to give a reason for their hope.”<sup>25</sup> Frame identifies three aspects to apologetics. First, apologetics deals with the proofs of the Bible. The apologist uses these proofs to confront unbelief in both the believer and unbeliever.<sup>26</sup> The proofs of the gospel serve to erode any existing doubts in the minds of believers and combat the doubts brought to an apologetic encounter by a nonbeliever. Apologetics not only answers nonbelievers, but it also strengthens the faith of believers. Second, apologetics deals with defending the faith. Christians must provide answers to specific questions raised by the unbeliever by pointing them to Scripture.<sup>27</sup> Third, apologetics can be used as an offensive tool. The apologist does not have to wait for the unbeliever to raise questions; he can go on the offensive by pointing out the contradictions present in the unbeliever’s basic worldview.<sup>28</sup> Frame concludes, “These three types of apologetics are prospectively related. That is to say, each one done fully and rightly includes the other two, so that each is a way of looking at the whole apologetic enterprise.”<sup>29</sup> As the apologist begins engaging nonbelievers with the truth of the gospel, he will use each of these three aspects in defending the faith.

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<sup>25</sup>John M. Frame, *Apologetics for the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), 1.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 3.

Presuppositional apologetics, therefore, can be understood as a method of defending the faith that attacks the most basic assumptions of a nonbeliever, showing their inconsistencies, and pointing them to the consistency of the biblical worldview. This approach presupposes the truth of the biblical revelation and uses evidence when necessary to answer the particular questions of the unbeliever. The apologist must challenge the inconsistencies in the unbeliever's worldview, pointing out its absurdities. The rest of this section examines what it means to use presuppositional apologetics to defend the faith.

### **Presuppositional Apologetics and Epistemology**

When examining the relationship between presuppositional apologetics and epistemology, several factors need to be considered. This section discusses three primary factors involved in this relationship. First, it presents God as the self-contained, triune, sovereign God. Second, the section summarizes analogical knowledge, pointing out its relationship to apologetics. Finally, it demonstrates that there is no epistemologically neutral ground between the believer and nonbeliever for the sake of argumentation.

**The self-contained, triune, sovereign God.** If one wants to understand the importance of knowledge and reasoning in presuppositional apologetics, one must first have a proper understanding of the doctrine of God.<sup>30</sup> Commenting on the importance of this doctrine for apologetics, Van Til writes,

Naturally in the system of theology and in apologetics, the doctrine of God is of fundamental importance. We must first ask what kind of a God Christianity believes in before we can really ask with intelligence whether such a God exists. The what precedes the that; the connotation precedes the denotation.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995), 53.

<sup>31</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955), 9. Van Til rooted his understanding of epistemology firmly in the historicity of the Christian faith and in the rubrics of systematic theology. See William



Broadly speaking, this doctrine forms the foundation of apologetics, weaving itself throughout the various aspects of the enterprise. Not only does the doctrine explain the “what” of apologetics, in many ways it explains the “how” of apologetics. The current discussion examines the relationship between the doctrine of God and the “how” of apologetics. Three specific aspects of the doctrine of God significantly impact the relationship between presuppositionalism and epistemology: the self-contained nature of God, the trinity of God, and the sovereignty of God.

First, to say that God has a self-contained nature means that God depends upon nothing outside of his own person and being.<sup>32</sup> All that he could ever want or need, he has within himself. God does not rely on creation to give him anything because he already has everything within himself (Acts 17:25).<sup>33</sup> God does not depend upon creation for love because he experiences perfect love in the Trinity (John 17:23-26). God did not create due to his loneliness because the Trinity provided him with perfect companionship (John 17:11, 21-23). God does not need creation to tell him anything because he already has perfect knowledge of everything in creation (Matt 10:29-31). Since God has a self-contained nature, he stands as the determiner of right and wrong, knowledge, and truth. Frame explains,

God is not only self-existent, but also self-attesting and self-justifying. He not only exists without receiving existence from something else, but also gains his knowledge only from himself and serves as his own criterion of truth. And his righteousness is self-justifying, based on the righteousness of his own nature and on his status as the ultimate criterion of rightness.<sup>34</sup>

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D. Denison, “Analytic Philosophy and Van Til’s Epistemology,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 57 (1994): 34.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 54. God’s self-contained nature could also be referred to as his necessary being.

<sup>33</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 160.

<sup>34</sup>John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), 602. Van Til uses the terms “self-contained” and “self-existent” interchangeably. Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 206. God’s self-contained

God exists outside of creation, depends on nothing in creation, and yet relates to creation. Since he has a self-contained nature, he receives no knowledge from an outside source; instead, he serves as the source of all knowledge. God has perfect knowledge of everything in his creation. This absolute independence of God stands in stark contrast to the utter dependence of his creation. Van Til's understanding of epistemology and its importance for apologetics lies in this distinction between the creature and the creator.<sup>35</sup> All of a human's knowledge derives from the knowledge of the self-contained God.

The doctrine of the self-contained God then leads into the doctrine of the Trinity. Since God stands as the supreme example of personhood, he must be able to express some of his attributes outwardly. For example, his attribute of love.<sup>36</sup> If God existed only as a single being, then his love would be directed at himself. This understanding of love, however, does not express the true biblical definition of love.<sup>37</sup>

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nature goes against the belief that some people for why God created humans. Some people believe that God needed to create humans because he had to have their love and to receive their glory. God's independence, however, means that this supposed need of God does not exist. Humans do give God glory, and love, but he is not in need of it. God has all of his relational needs met within the Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit relate in a way far greater than humans could ever relate to God. God did not need to create humanity; he chose to create humanity. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 161.

<sup>35</sup>Frame, *Van Til*, 54. Frame speaks of a diagram that Van Til would draw to illustrate this point. The diagram would consist of two circles, one drawn above the other. The top circle would be significantly larger than the bottom circle and represented God's perfect knowledge. The smaller, bottom circle represented man's limited knowledge. Van Til would then draw two lines between the two circles that represented God's communication with his creation through divine revelation. According to this understanding of knowledge, all non-Christian thought resulted in one circle thinking. Either God was brought down to the human level or humans were lifted up to God's level. John M. Frame, *Apologetics for the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), 43-44.

<sup>36</sup>Frame uses this example of God's love to explain how the Trinity allows God to express the ultimate standard of personhood. Frame, *Van Til*, 65.

<sup>37</sup>In John 15:12-13, the apostle records Jesus' definition of love. He writes, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." In these two sentences, Jesus expresses an understanding of love, which is sacrificial and outward focused.

The Bible explains love as being directed outward towards something else. If God were a single being, then, according to this understanding of love, he would be dependent upon his creation to express love. The existence of the Trinity allows God to express love in a biblical sense without being dependent upon something outside of his own existence. This one example of love shows how God exists as the ultimate standard of personhood. Then, since God maintains the standard of personhood, he serves as the supreme criterion for the truth of human thought and knowledge.<sup>38</sup>

The doctrine of the Trinity, as understood by Van Til, also provides a solution to the problem of the one and the many:

The problem is man's quest to find unity in the midst of the plurality of things. More specifically: the many must be brought in contact with one another. How do we know that the many can be brought into contact with one another? How do we know that the many do not simply exist as unrelated particulars? . . . On the other hand, how is it possible that we should obtain a unity that does not destroy the particulars?<sup>39</sup>

One way this problem shows itself is with the classification of things. If a person has three animals, he can know that they are all dogs by examining the characteristics they share. These characteristics speak to the essence of the animals. Dogs can then be classified in larger categories all the way up the ladder of abstraction until no distinction exists among anything. This process also works in the other direction. Things can be distinguished to the point that no relationship can be made among anything. Frame comments, "This process is called 'abstraction.' Each of these steps may be seen as

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<sup>38</sup>Frame, *Van Til*, 65. Elsewhere, when Frame speaks of this example, he points out that the Trinity allows for God to be spoken of in personalistic terms. Normally, to speak of God in personalistic terms would require speaking of him in relationship to creation. If one says that God is love, then to explain what that means it would have to be said that God loves creation. In this way, God would depend upon creation to explain and express some of his attributes. Instead, because of the Trinity, these attributes can be spoken of without reference to creation. To say that God is love means that he perfectly expresses love within the Trinity; therefore, he determines what love is. God can only be the determiner of what loves is if he can love outside of creation. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 48.

<sup>39</sup>Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 25-26.

going deeper into the reality, the essence of things.”<sup>40</sup> Moving in either direction on the ladder of abstraction brings a person one step closer to emptiness because the extreme ends of the abstraction describe everything and therefore nothing.<sup>41</sup> According to Van Til, the doctrine of the Trinity solves this problem. He concludes, “In God’s being there are no particulars not related to the universal and there is nothing universal that is not fully expressed in the particulars.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, the doctrine of the Trinity shows how something can be both the one and the many. It calls people to look to God in faith because, although man cannot know the world fully, God does fully understand everything in creation. Humans can then only gain knowledge about the world through what God has revealed to them.<sup>43</sup>

Third, a Christian apologist must have a proper view of God’s sovereignty. John Frame asserts, “A great emphasis on the sovereignty of God would be expected because if he is not in control of everything, then he is dependent upon something outside himself.”<sup>44</sup> Everything that occurs in God’s creation does so because of his foreordination. God determines that something will happen, and it happens. A Christian view of determinism differs from a traditional one because it involves a personal God.<sup>45</sup> In the traditional or deistic view the impersonal God does not care for his creation and does not want to communicate with it. The Christian view, however, involves a God who cares for his creation and seeks to communicate with them through special revelation.

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<sup>40</sup>Frame, *Van Til*, 72.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 26.

<sup>43</sup>Frame, *Van Til*, 76.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>45</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 35.

This view of determinism does not remove human responsibility, but instead functions as the grounds for it.<sup>46</sup>

In discussing God's sovereign rule over creation, Van Til notes two levels of causality.<sup>47</sup> First, there exists a primary cause, God, who has ultimate control over how things act and work. Second, there exists a human cause that reflects the divine causation. These two levels of causality work together, orchestrating the events of a person's life. For example, God is sovereign over knowledge.<sup>48</sup> He has an exhaustive knowledge of creation, one that is beyond anything that a human could ever obtain (Job 28:24; 37:16; Pss 139:1-6; 1 John 3:20; Heb 4:13). Humans, though they have a level of knowledge less than that of God, are given permission by God to obtain knowledge as he deems necessary and useful.

**Analogical knowledge.** Human knowledge is analogous to God's knowledge in two ways.<sup>49</sup> First, since God created human knowledge, it must be different from God's knowledge.<sup>50</sup> Second, God has control over human knowledge.<sup>51</sup> Everything that a person can know flows out of what God allows him to know. He can know nothing apart from the sovereign plan of God. God must open his mind and implant the

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<sup>46</sup>Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 62. The decrees of God orchestrate the events and movements in history. No one could do anything if not for the will of God allowing him or her to do it. For this reason, the sovereignty of God serves as the foundation of human freedom. Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Frame, *Van Til*, 82.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 79. Frame concludes, "This divine rulership is important to apologetics because it destroys the unbelievers pretense of autonomy. If God creates and governs all things, then he interprets all things. . . . We may not claim that our mind, or anything else in creation, is the ultimate standard for being, truth, or right." Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 46.

<sup>49</sup>Frame, *Van Til*, 89.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

knowledge in him. Frame explains,

The system of knowledge that Christians seek to obtain may be said to be analogical. By this is meant that God is the original and that man is the derivative. . . . He [man] must, to be sure, think God's thoughts after him; but this means that he must, in seeking to form his own system, constantly be subject to the authority of God's system to the extent that this is revealed to him.<sup>52</sup>

Because of God's self-contained nature, he has all knowledge contained within himself; therefore, human knowledge is derived from God's knowledge.<sup>53</sup> In order for a person to know anything, his knowledge must be viewed in light of the one who created all knowledge.<sup>54</sup> This truth does not mean that an atheistic mathematician cannot know that  $2+2=4$ , but it does mean that he cannot fully understand the implications and source of his knowledge. Without this fuller understanding, the atheistic mathematician does not truly know that  $2+2=4$ .

Man thinks God's thoughts after him in two distinct ways. First, man can think God's thoughts after him through an empirical analysis of creation.<sup>55</sup> Van Til states, "We need to explore, research, and gather details about nature and history to 'know God's mind' concerning them."<sup>56</sup> Because God functions in a consistent and coherent way within his creation, Christians should strive to think in a similar fashion. Thinking in a consistent and coherent way enables Christians to view truth and history as

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 89-90. It should be noted that the difference between God's knowledge and man's knowledge does not lie in the quantity of knowledge but in the quality of knowledge. God's knowledge exists on an ontologically different level than man's. Jim Halsey, "A Preliminary Critique of Van Til the Theologian," *Westminster Theological Journal* 39 (1976): 122.

<sup>53</sup>William D. Dennison, "Analytic Philosophy and Van Til's Epistemology," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 57 (1995): 36. Not only does man derive his knowledge from God's knowledge, but by his very nature as an analogue of God he must reveal the creator God. Joel R. Beeke and Michael D. Bell, "Van Til's Concept of Man as the Analogue of God," *Act 3 Review* 15 (2006): 109.

<sup>54</sup>Dennison, "Analytic Philosophy and Van Til's Epistemology," 40.

<sup>55</sup>Van Til, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 69.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

God views them. Only when they think God's thoughts after him can Christians have an absolute certainty of the truthfulness of their knowledge.<sup>57</sup> Second, man receives God's thoughts through his self-revelation in Scripture.<sup>58</sup> God has chosen to reveal himself through his Word; therefore, the Bible provides man with a small window into God's thoughts. A Christian's sanctification includes conforming his thoughts to those concepts and ideas revealed in Scripture (Rom 12:1-2). As a Christian succeeds in this task, he begins to think God's thoughts after him.

The notion that all human knowledge must be derived from God's self-contained knowledge holds enormous implications for presuppositional apologetics.<sup>59</sup> The nonbeliever cannot think or reason without first presupposing the God revealed in the Bible. Bahnsen summarizes this idea:

[An unbelievers] reasoning against Christianity could only be intelligible if what he were trying to disprove were instead true. This is the strongest form of argument in favor of the Christian worldview: it must be secretly presupposed even in the attempt to argue against it. The most compact and dramatic way of summarizing Van Til's apologetic that I have seen or have imagined is simply these three words: 'antitheism presupposes theism.'<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Cornelius Van Til, "Nature and Scripture," in *The Infallible Word*, ed. N. D. Stone-House and Paul Woolley (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1946), 278.

<sup>58</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974), 69. Elsewhere, Frame combines the doctrine of ultimate presuppositions with the doctrine of inerrancy and applies it to human knowledge. He asserts that because God's Word is inerrant, it must be the basis for a person's ultimate presuppositions. When humans, then, line up their thoughts with Scripture they think God's thoughts after him. Frame states, "We are merely affirming that human knowledge is servant-knowledge, that in seeking to know anything our first concern is to discover what our Lord thinks about it." Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 45.

<sup>59</sup>Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 113.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid. The phrase, "antitheism presupposes theism" comes from Cornelius Van Til, *My Credo in Jerusalem and Athens* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 21. Antitheism presupposes theism because antitheism cannot provide the criteria needed for argumentation to take place. Only theism can provide these criteria; therefore, the antitheist must subconsciously presuppose theism in order to argue against it. Don Collett, "Van Til and the Transcendental Argument," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 295. See also Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 501-03. In discussing the benefits of a personal creator compared to an impersonal one, Frame summarizes the

Since the believer must presuppose the existence of God in order to argue against the existence of God, his argument cannot stand up to intense scrutiny, resulting in its destruction.

**Arguing from neutrality.** The analogical nature of knowledge raises an important question in the discussion of apologetics: can the Christian apologist argue with a nonbeliever on a neutral ground? In other words, if all knowledge flows out of a self-contained God, can the believer and nonbeliever find neutral ground to stand on? Some apologists assert that neutral ground must exist because the Christian cannot come to an apologetic encounter with preconceived answers.<sup>61</sup> The believer and nonbeliever need to stand at a place of neutrality in order to come at the evidence with an objective mind and arrive at a mutually acceptable conclusion. The importance of this position of neutrality lies in the desire to obtain a proper hearing. For a Christian to receive a proper hearing from a nonbeliever, the Christian must assume as little as possible from the start. He must forfeit all claims of truth that find their ground in Scripture.

Bahnsen not only disagrees with this assertion, but he calls it “immoral.”<sup>62</sup> He writes that in Ephesians 4:17-18 Paul argues that Christians must be set apart from the

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epistemological argument. This argument seeks to understand how the human mind can correlate so well with the structure of the world, allowing humans to make sense of the world. In order for humans to make sense of the world, a rational structure must be present in the world that the human mind mirrors or is mirrored by. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 102-03. Frame asserts that random chance or an impersonal creator most likely would not produce a world in which humans could make sense of the world in the way that they do. Those who hold to a theory of evolution cannot explain why random chance would create a world in which evolution could be studied. *Ibid.*, 103. He concludes, “Certainly, again, the hypothesis of absolute personality explains the data far better than the hypothesis of ultimate impersonality. An absolute personality can make a rational universe because he himself is rational and his plan for creation and providence is therefore rational.” *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup>Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith* (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant, 1996), 3-4.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 4, 7.



worldly thinking that surrounds them.<sup>63</sup> They cannot seek neutral ground with the nonbeliever because they will be living in contradiction to their own worldview.

A Christian apologist cannot find a place of neutrality with a nonbeliever because of the antithetical nature of the theistic and antitheistic ways of reasoning.<sup>64</sup> Even if the believer and non-believer have the same facts set before them, they cannot objectively examine these facts. Their ultimate presuppositions cause them to have radically divergent interpretations of the facts.<sup>65</sup> If the believer and the nonbeliever have no grounds of neutrality, then the Christian apologist must find a point of contact between the nonbeliever and himself.

### **Point of Contact**

The lack of a common ground between the believer and the nonbeliever present the Christian apologist with a very difficult problem. How can he prove the truth of Christianity, defend it against the nonbeliever's attacks, and attack the inconsistencies in the nonbeliever's worldview if no neutral ground exists? In order for these three aspects of apologetics to take place, a point of contact or common ground must be established between the apologist and the nonbeliever. For a person utilizing presuppositional apologetics, this point of contact can be found in the *divinitatis sensum* engraved on the hearts and minds of all people because of the *imago dei*.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 8. Bahnsen spends the entire second chapter of his book establishing this argument.

<sup>64</sup>Greg L. Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics Stated and Defended* (Powder Springs, GA: The American Vision, 2008), 91. Van Til explains this antithetical nature when he writes, "If the theistic position be defensible it is in impossibility for any human being to be neutral. . . . When two nations are at war no citizens of either of these two nations can be neutral. It may be reasonable for citizens of a third nation to be neutral, but this cannot be the case for citizens of countries actually at war." Cornelius Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969), 19.

<sup>65</sup>Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics*, 89.

<sup>66</sup>The concept of the *divinitatis sensum* comes from John Calvin, *Institutes of*

This section provides a summary of the *divinitatis sensum*, explaining how it provides this point of contact. Next, it includes an exegesis of Romans 1:18-20, providing the biblical foundation for the *divinitatis sensum*. It concludes with a discussion of the crucial concept of self-deception, which explains how a person can know something without knowing that he or she knows it.

**The *divinitatis sensum*.** In the *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Calvin states, “There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity. . . . God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty.”<sup>67</sup> This sense of the divine shared by all people serves as a point of connection between the believer and the nonbeliever. The nonbeliever can both know God and not know God.<sup>68</sup> Bahnsen explains,

The unbeliever can come to know certain things (despite his espoused rejection of God’s truth) for the simple reason that he does have revealed presuppositions—and cannot but have them as a creature made as God’s image and living in God’s created world. Although he outwardly and vehemently denies the truth of God, no unbeliever is inwardly and sincerely devoid of knowledge of God. . . . Because they know God, they are able to attain a limited understanding of the world.<sup>69</sup>

In other words, a person may claim to know nothing of God, but because of the *divinitatis sensum* this claim does not stand.

So, how does a person obtain the *divinitatis sensum*? Bahnsen answers this question in the previous quotation when he states, “[H]e does have revealed presuppositions—and cannot but have them as a creature made as God’s image and living

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*Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 1.3.1. Building on Calvin’s conclusions, Van Til asserts that the knowledge of God found in all people serves as the point of contact for the Christian apologist. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 85,

<sup>67</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, 1.3.1.

<sup>68</sup>Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 38.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 37-38.

in God's created world." The *divinitatis sensum* resides in every person because God has created every person in his own image (Gen 1:26-28). At birth, human beings enter this world with the image of God implanted in them, which enables them to recognize God as he has revealed himself to them.<sup>70</sup>

Genesis 1:26-28 stands as the pinnacle of God's creating work.<sup>71</sup> Through its chiasmic structure, this passage draws the reader's attention to the fact that God created mankind in his own image.<sup>72</sup> Calvin explains the image of God as "[t]hat glory of God which peculiarly shines forth in human nature, where the mind, the will, and all the senses, represent the divine order."<sup>73</sup> Being created in God's image means that man reflected God in every way possible for a human, including having true knowledge, true righteousness, and true holiness.<sup>74</sup> The initial sinful act marred the image of God in man, resulting in the need for God to restore that image. This restoration takes place as the believer puts on the new self.<sup>75</sup> Paul writes of the new self as "being renewed in

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<sup>70</sup>Bahnsen, *An Introduction to Van Til's Apologetic*, 221-22. Man being created in the image of God is another way in which man's knowledge is analogous to God's knowledge. The *divinitatis sensum* resides in man as an innate knowledge, and he therefore thinks God's thoughts after him. Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1a (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 160. Mathews provides eight reasons why this event should be considered the pinnacle of creation. (1) The arrangement of the creation events point to an ascending order of significance, which would place the creation of humans at the pinnacle of creation. (2) This creation event is the only one preceded by a divine directive, "Let us make man" (v. 26). (3) This personal directive supplants the impersonal directives included in the previous events. (4) God does not create anything else in his own image, nor does he give anything else dominion. (5) The verb *bara* occurs three times in verse 27. (6) This event receives significantly more explanation and discussion. (7) The chiasmic structure of these verses emphasizes the image of God. (8) A more direct link exists between God and the creation of man than between God and the rest of creation. Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 1, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 96.

<sup>74</sup>Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 13.

<sup>75</sup>Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 165.

knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col 3:10). Due to the image of God implanted in every human, all people have an innate knowledge of God’s existence. Paul speaks more specifically about this innate knowledge elsewhere in Romans 1:18-20.

**Romans 1:18-20.** A discussion of the *divinitatis sensum* would not be complete without a brief exegesis of Romans 1:18-20. This passage fits into the larger context of Romans 1:18-3:19. In these three chapters, Paul indicts both the religious elite and secular pagans. The end of chapter 1 focuses primarily on the condemnation of the secular pagans of his day. This section breaks down into three parts: the revelation of God’s wrath (v. 18), reasons for God’s wrath (vv. 19-23), and the results of God’s wrath (vv. 24-32).<sup>76</sup> The present discussion deals with verses 18-20 and provides a biblical foundation for the *divinitatis sensum*.

The main concern for the present topic in verse 18 focuses on the word κατεχόντων Paul informs his readers that God’s wrath is revealed from heaven against the unrighteousness of those who suppress the truth. The word κατεχόντων presents an interesting question: does Paul mean that people simply possess the truth, or do they actively suppress the truth?<sup>77</sup> The word can mean, “To prevent the doing of something;

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<sup>76</sup>David L. Turner, “Cornelius Van Til and Romans 1:18-21: A Study in the Epistemology of Presuppositional Apologetics” *Grace Theological Journal* 2 (1981): 51. In Romans 1:18-32, Paul primarily addresses his Gentile audience, appealing to natural revelation as the reason why they should have known God. While Paul specifically addresses Gentiles in this section, there exists an element of universal condemnation. Moo describes Paul’s argument as a series of concentric circles: “The argument of 1:18-2:29 is best viewed as a series of concentric circles, proceeding from the general to the particular. Verse 18, the outer most circle, begins with a universal indictment. . . . Romans 1:19-32, likewise, includes in its scope all people.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 97. Paul’s discussion of man’s responsibility apart from special revelation can lead one to believe that he is not addressing the Jews in this section. Ibid. He does, however, have them in mind. That he has the Jews in mind can be seen by examining how he uses this section to move into his indictment against them. Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Turner, “Cornelius Van Til and Romans 1,” 52.

or cause to be ineffective.”<sup>78</sup> This understanding of κατεχόντων implies that the subject of the verb actively prohibits an action from taking place. In the present context, the unrighteous actively prohibits the truth from taking root in their hearts and minds. Turner supports this understanding, but states, “The two possibilities are complimentary and not contradictory.”<sup>79</sup> He continues to explain that possessing the truth in an unrighteous state equates to suppressing the truth and to say that someone suppresses the truth presupposes them possessing it.<sup>80</sup>

Paul continues in verse 19 by stating that what people can know about God is plain to them. Everyone has this knowledge of God because God has made it clear to them. This verse contains two issues that impact the current discussion.<sup>81</sup> First, does the Greek word γνωστὸν mean that the unbeliever has actual knowledge of God or only potential knowledge? Moo argues that it must mean actual knowledge based on the immediate context, where Paul attributes actual knowledge to people (vv. 20, 28, and 32).<sup>82</sup> The various New Testament uses of the word also support the understanding that γνωστὸν means actual knowledge (Luke 2:44, 23:49; John 18:15-16; Acts 1:19, 2:14, 4:10, 13:38).<sup>83</sup> Also, Paul assumes that people have actual knowledge because they are without excuse (v. 20). Why are people without excuse? Because they did not honor

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<sup>78</sup>Walter Bauer, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 532. Louw and Nida contend that in the context of Romans 1:18 this word means “to prevent someone from doing something by restraining or hindering.” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, vol. 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 13.150.

<sup>79</sup>Turner, “Cornelius Van Til and Romans 1,” 52.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 103.

<sup>83</sup>Baker, “Romans 1:18-21 and Presuppositional Apologetics,” 285. See also Turner, “Cornelius Van Til and Romans 1,” 53.

God as they should have. If people did not have actual knowledge of God, then Paul could not accuse them of not honoring God.

The second issue deals with the phrase φανερόν ἐστὶν ἐν αὐτοῖς. Turner defends the interpretation that God is manifest within each person's conscience.<sup>84</sup> He bases this interpretation on the notion that a subjective apprehension of revelation in nature can be found in Romans 1.<sup>85</sup> God has utilized nature to reveal himself to the hearts of all people.<sup>86</sup> For this reason, one can assert that all people have implanted within them an actual knowledge of God that they actively suppress.

The term καθορᾶται in verse 20 provides more insight into the *divinitatis sensum*. It can be translated as, "To perceive with the eye of reason."<sup>87</sup> The unbeliever clearly perceives God's eternal power and divine nature and simultaneously suppresses it. These three verses establish that all people stand under the wrath of God because of his revelation to them in nature. This reality explains why Paul was so eager to preach the gospel; he understood the consequences of having the truth of the knowledge of God and still suppressing it.<sup>88</sup>

Van Til comments on man's plight:

The apostle Paul lays great stress upon the fact that man is without excuse if he does not discover God in nature. . . . They have not done justice by the facts they see displayed before and within them if they say that a god exists or that God probably exists.<sup>89</sup>

In other words, the evidence for God found in nature, together with the image of God in

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<sup>84</sup>Turner, "Cornelius Van Til and Romans 1," 53.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid. For a more comprehensive discussion of the issues concerning this phrase, see Turner, "Cornelius Van Til and Romans 1," 53-54.

<sup>86</sup>Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 103.

<sup>87</sup>Walter Bauer, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 493.

<sup>88</sup>Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 105.

<sup>89</sup>Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 97-98.

every person, should be sufficient to lead people to a proper knowledge of the one true God revealed in the Bible (v. 19). While this knowledge should be the outcome of God's natural revelation, nonbelievers fail to arrive at this knowledge because they suppress the truth (v. 18). The knowledge, which should lead them to a saving knowledge of God, in the end, places them beneath the wrath of God, and they have no excuse (v. 20).

Presuppositional apologetics relies heavily on the notion that people have a suppressed knowledge of God that they do not know they possess—they are self-deceived.

**The concept of self-deception.** In his article “The Crucial Concept of Self-Deception,” Bahnsen contends that the self-deception described in Romans 1:18-20 must be true for presuppositionalism to function properly.<sup>90</sup> The problem revolves around the issue of whether or not an unbeliever can know anything without having knowledge of God in his subconscious, even if it is suppressed. Van Til argues that unbelievers depend upon the knowledge of God contained within them to know anything at all, meaning that in their subconscious the unbeliever thinks analogically to God.<sup>91</sup> Bahnsen summarizes Van Til's argument:

The intellectual achievements of the unbeliever are possible only because he is 'borrowing, without recognizing it, the Christian ideas of creation and providence.' The non-Christian thus 'makes positive contributions to science in spite of his principles' because he is inconsistent.<sup>92</sup>

If the unbeliever truly acted in accordance with his principles, then he could not obtain knowledge. He, however, has a suppressed *divinitatis sensum*, enabling him to think, analyze, and generally contribute to science. Without this point of contact, then,

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<sup>90</sup>Greg L. Bahnsen, “The Crucial Concept of Self-Deception in Presuppositional Apologetics,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 57 (1995): 2. Bahnsen states, “Without it [self-deception] presuppositional apologetics could be neither intellectually cogent nor personally appropriate as a method of defending the faith.” *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup>Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 287.

<sup>92</sup>Bahnsen, “Crucial Concept of Self-Deception,” 6.

there would be no way for the Christian and non-Christian to discuss God. The unbeliever must have a knowledge of God that he has deceived himself into believing that he does not have in order for an apologetic encounter to take place.<sup>93</sup>

In discussing Van Til's understanding of the *divinitatis sensum*, Bahnsen notes that Van Til takes his readers from one extreme to the other: the unbeliever knows God and yet he does not know God; the unbeliever is culpable for his actions and yet he is not culpable for his actions.<sup>94</sup> Bahnsen desires to bring some normality to this paradox and describes the problem:

Let us stop and analyze the situation. In a case of other-deception, Jones is aware that some proposition is false, but Jones intends to make Smith believe that it is true—and he succeeds. If we take Smith out of the picture and substitute in Jones, so as to gain self-deception, we end up saying Jones, aware that he is false, intends to make himself believe that p is true, and succeeds in making himself believe that p is true. . . . It would be easy to conclude, then, that self-deception is an incoherent project that cannot be fulfilled.<sup>95</sup>

On the surface, the act of self-deception makes no logical sense. A person cannot know something and then actively deceive himself into not believing it. This problem must be resolved in order for presuppositional apologetics to stand as a viable option for defending the faith.<sup>96</sup> Bahnsen begins to resolve the problem of self-deception by pointing out that it only seems to be a contradiction and nonsensical. He states, "I am

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 13. In this quotation, "p" stands for any proposition that is known or believed. Ibid., 13. Raphael Demos asserts that intention, results, and knowledge must all three be present in order for self-deception to take place. A person must intend to deceive himself, succeed in deceiving himself, and have factual knowledge of the deception. If any of these three things is missing, then self-deception cannot take place. Raphael Demos, "Lying to Oneself," *The Journal of Philosophy* 57 (1960): 588. Demos defines self-deception when he states, "Self-deception exists when a person lies to himself, that is to say, persuades himself to believe what he knows is not so." Ibid. See also John V. Canfield and Don E. Gustavson, "Self-Deception," *Analysis* 27 (1962): 32-36. Also, John V. Canfield and P. McNally, "Paradoxes of Self-Deception," *Analysis* 21 (1960): 140-44.

<sup>96</sup>Bahnsen, "The Crucial Concept of Self-Deception," 13.



committed to saying that at best only apparently self-contradictory. . . . We resist the conclusion that self-deception is actually impossible.”<sup>97</sup> In his attempt to answer the problem of self-deception, Bahnsen believes that the phenomenon must be protected and that one must adhere to the law of contradiction.<sup>98</sup> He wants to formulate a strong, coherent argument for how one can actively deceive oneself into believing a falsehood.

To deceive oneself concerning a particular proposition, a person must hold a positive belief in that proposition<sup>99</sup> and it must be more than just a misguided hope.<sup>100</sup> The person engaging in self-deception must be completely and totally convinced of the truthfulness of the proposition. If this absolute belief does not exist, then self-deception cannot be distinguished from a mere ignorance of, or dislike for, the proposition. This means that in the case of presuppositionalism, a nonbeliever must have a real belief in God and not just a notion that God might exist or even that God probably exists. One must actively suppress that belief, deceiving oneself into believing, wholeheartedly, another false proposition concerning God. Also, Bahnsen asserts that a person can hold a belief without a conscious and willing assent to a said belief.<sup>101</sup> The person who actively

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 15. At this point, Bahnsen appeals to human experience, arguing that at some point everyone engages in self-deception. At times these experiences can bring with them severe and long lasting consequences. Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>The law of contradiction states that a proposition cannot be both “P” and not “P” at the same time. Simon Blackburn, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 78. See also Robert Audi, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 737.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 22. Bahnsen explains the need for absolutes when he writes, “In what follows, then, the expression ‘S believes that P’ will be understood as true if and only if S relies on P sometimes, intermittently, or continuously in his theoretical inferences and/or practical actions and plans.” Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 23-24. One example of this would be a person who says, “Now, I’m not racist, but,” and then proceeds to say something racist and demeaning towards another ethnicity. Although the person says that he is not racist, his words and actions reveal his true belief. The person does not consciously or willingly ascend to the belief; nevertheless, he or she holds that belief. Bahnsen states, “People may have the best word on what they believe, but they do not logically have the last word.” Ibid., 24. Sometimes

suppresses a real belief in God while holding completely to a false belief, can do so on a subconscious level. The lack of a conscious decision does not mean that the act of self-deception cannot take place.

Another important issue in dealing with the concept of self-deception revolves around first and second level beliefs.<sup>102</sup> When one has first-level and second-level beliefs concerning a particular topic, one will always act in accordance with the first level belief.<sup>103</sup> If a man believes that dogs are dangerous—a first-level belief—and then deceives himself into believing that dogs are not dangerous—a second-level belief—he will act and react as though dogs are dangerous. Commenting on this inconsistency, Bahnsen writes, “This helps us to understand that the nature of this incompatibility of beliefs in self-deception is not logical in nature, but behavioral and practical.”<sup>104</sup> A person, at times, can become extremely defensive of his second-level belief because of the relief and comfort that it provides.<sup>105</sup> For example, if Jones finds out that he has cancer, resulting in only a few months to live, he could deceive himself into believing that the cancer does not really exist. This second-level belief, then, could provide a false sense of relief from the anxiety, stress, and depression of the first-level belief. Ultimately, however, Jones cannot escape the reality of the cancer, which will force him to act in accordance with the first-level belief. Second-level beliefs can provide a false sense of comfort and security, but they cannot change the reality of the first-level belief.

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people’s actual beliefs can only be established by outside observers who can interpret their words and actions.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 26. Demos explains this concept in terms of impulses. Jones has the impulse to believe P in spite of the presence of its contradiction because the impulse for P is greater than the impulse for not P. Jones can believe both P and not P because his impulse for P is greater than the impulse for not P. Demos, “Lying to Oneself,” 594.

<sup>105</sup>Bahnsen, “The Crucial Concept of Self-Deception,” 26.

The final issue addressed by Bahnsen focuses on the problem of purpose and awareness.<sup>106</sup> In order for self-deception to take place, a person must purposefully attempt to deceive himself and succeed in doing so.<sup>107</sup> Bahnsen describes how self-deception can take place:

While the self-deceiver is aware of the truth of p or sees it as evidenced, and while his belief that p is indicated by his behavior, he will not give assent to p but induces in himself—by controlling attention to the relevant evidence—an incompatible and false belief that s does not believe p. Accordingly, the self-deceiver is not aware that he holds incompatible beliefs; after all, he does not believe that he believes p, but believes of himself that he does not believe p, thus avowing mistakenly and only that he does not believe p. . . . Thus the self-deceiver is not personally aware that his professed and cherished belief about himself (that he does not believe that p) is false.<sup>108</sup>

In other words, he can be self-deceived because he does not really understand what is happening. He does not think that he believes the first-level belief; instead, he thinks that he only believes the second-level belief. Bahnsen contends that the intention to deceive oneself can be self-covering.<sup>109</sup> When Bahnsen defines a proposition as “self-covering,” he means that it covers up the proposition’s true nature. The self-deceiver deceives himself about deceiving himself.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>Bahnsen admits the possibility of an infinite chain of self-deceptions. To avoid this problem, he believes that the deception must be able to be self-covering. He uses the example of a person intending to go to sleep. A person can do all the things necessary to prepare for sleep, and if the person is successful in his task, then when he goes to sleep he no longer is aware of his intention to sleep. Bahnsen asserts, “So then, there are intentions that cover themselves when they are successfully performed, and there is no good reason to reframe from classifying self-deception as that kind of intension.” Ibid., 28-29.

## Arguing from the Impossibility of the Contrary

When confronting a nonbeliever with the truth of the gospel, an apologist must choose between direct and indirect argumentation.<sup>111</sup> Direct argumentation takes place between two people who have the same basic presuppositions. They rely upon mutually accepted, observable facts to resolve a confrontation between them.<sup>112</sup> Bahnsen uses the example of two friends debating the type of flower growing in a garden.<sup>113</sup> These two friends can appeal to a mutually accepted botany textbook to settle their debate. In this example, the two friends both hold to the presupposition that the particular botany textbook they agreed upon contains the final authority on this topic. Because of this shared presupposition, the friends can arrive at a mutually accepted resolution to their debate. If, however, this shared presupposition does not exist, and if a final authority cannot be agreed upon, then argumentation must take a different shape.<sup>114</sup>

The question of final authority presents a significant problem for a traditional, evidentialist approach to apologetics.<sup>115</sup> In this apologetic method, the believer attempts to build a case for the Christian faith by accumulating as much evidence for its truthfulness as possible and presenting it to the nonbeliever.<sup>116</sup> Outlining the tenets of evidentialism, Habermas contends,

First, I have said that the chief interest of this method is the postulating and developing of historical evidences (of one species of propositional data) for the Christian faith. . . . Not only is it thought that these evidences provide the best means for deciding between the theistic systems of belief, but also that they can be

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<sup>111</sup>Bahnsen, *An Introduction to Van Til's Apologetic*, 485.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup>Gary R. Habermas, "Evidential Apologetics," in *Five Views on Apologetics*, Counter Points, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 94.

utilized as an indication of God's existence.<sup>117</sup>

Habermas argues for a second tenet of evidentialism—interpretation.<sup>118</sup> The historical evidences do not exist in a vacuum but need to be placed in a proper framework.<sup>119</sup> He believes that two people can arrive at a mutually agreed upon objective understanding of these evidences. The problem with this position lies at the presuppositional level. Habermas assumes that each person can objectively evaluate the evidences presented to him, ignoring the issues of final authority. Evidentialism fails because people interpret the evidences presented to them based on their false presuppositions and not from an objective position of neutrality.<sup>120</sup> This problem of ultimate or final authority does not mean that the believer has no way of confronting the nonbeliever with the truth of the gospel because all arguments ultimately come down to the problem of final authority. It only uncovers the need for an argument from the impossibility of the contrary.

Arguing from the impossibility of the contrary or indirect argumentation involves an internal critique and evaluation of the worldviews held by the believer and nonbeliever engaging in the apologetic encounter.<sup>121</sup> In this indirect confrontation, the Christian apologist enters the worldview of the nonbeliever in order to deconstruct it, pointing out its inconsistencies and flaws. Van Til describes this methodology:

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 94-95.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 67. Bahnsen summarizes, "One submits to the authority of God's word as a matter of presuppositional commitment and one does not. Appeals to fact will be arbitrated in terms of the conflicting presuppositions held by the two philosophies; the debate between the two perspectives thus will eventually work down to the level of one's ultimate authority." Ibid., 68. Elsewhere, Bahnsen asserts, "The sinner must constantly attempt to be what he is not: autonomous and free of God," meaning that he cannot decide between the different theistic systems. Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics*, 17.

<sup>121</sup>Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 484-85.

Since on the reformed basis there is no area of neutrality between the believer and the unbeliever, the argument between them must be indirect. Christians cannot allow the legitimacy of the assumptions that underlie the non-Christian methodology. But they can place themselves upon the position of those whom they are seeking to win to a belief in Christianity for the sake of the argument. And the non-Christian, though not granting the presuppositions from which the Christian works, can nevertheless place himself on the position of the Christian for the sake of the argument.<sup>122</sup>

The apologist momentarily adopts the unbeliever's worldview to try and rescue him from his faulty and deadly presuppositions.

Van Til notes that when the believer adopts the nonbeliever's worldview, he still thinks analogically.<sup>123</sup> If he could not think this way and he had to adopt fully the unbelieving worldview, then he would be thinking like the nonbeliever and could not truly think at all.<sup>124</sup> Van Til likens it to a lifeguard swimming out to rescue a drowning person. If the lifeguard is not tethered to a place of safety, then he is hopeless to save the drowning person.<sup>125</sup> Once he reaches the drowning person, he depends on the tether to enable him to bring the person to safety. Likewise, the Christian apologist must be tethered to his Christian worldview when he enters the worldview of the nonbeliever. He adopts the nonbeliever's worldview with his feet planted firmly in the Christian worldview only to show the unbeliever how his unbelieving worldview actually functions. He then invites the nonbeliever to adopt the Christian worldview while having his feet planted in the unbelieving worldview to show him how the Christian worldview functions. In this way, the Christian apologist can argue from the impossibility of the contrary.

Proverbs 26:4-5 provides some insight into how this process works: "Answer

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<sup>122</sup>Van Til, *A Survey of Christian*, 18.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, 222-23.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.* Van Til views the lifeguard's ability to swim as equivalent to a physical rope tying the lifeguard to a place of safety.

not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.” In these two verses the two-part apologetic method described above can be seen.<sup>126</sup> First, the wise man is instructed not to answer the fool according to his folly out of a fear that he might adopt the fool’s actions habitually.<sup>127</sup> The apologist should not answer the nonbeliever according to his own faulty presuppositions. Instead, he should begin by working to defend the faith from within his own consistent presuppositions.<sup>128</sup> He needs to explain the consistency of the Christian worldview in order for the nonbeliever to see how the non-Christian worldview fails to provide a consistent understanding of the world. If, from the beginning, the apologist concedes the worldview of the nonbeliever, he will then fail to explain the hope that is in him.<sup>129</sup> This failure happens because the Christian has forfeited all of his authority by allowing the nonbeliever to stand on his own autonomous authority.

Second, verse 5 instructs the wise man to answer the fool according to his folly because sometimes his foolish language is all he understands.<sup>130</sup> In this circumstance, the only way to rebuke, correct, and instruct the fool is to speak in a way that he can comprehend.<sup>131</sup> For the apologist, this means that he shows the fool the logical outcome of his unbelieving worldview.<sup>132</sup> Bahnsen states, “Pursued to their consistent end presuppositions of unbelief render man’s reasoning vacuous and his experience

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<sup>126</sup>Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 61.

<sup>127</sup>Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, The New American Commentary, vol. 14 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 212.

<sup>128</sup>Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 61.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup>Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 212.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup>Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 62.

unintelligible; in short, they lead to the destruction of knowledge.”<sup>133</sup> On the one hand, the apologist presents the consistency of the biblical worldview; not answering the fool according to his folly. On the other, he adopts the unbelieving worldview to deconstruct it, answering the fool according to his folly.

Presuppositional apologetics thus argues from the impossibility of the contrary and seeks to reduce the opposing worldview to an absurdity based on its own propositions and assumptions.<sup>134</sup> One’s worldview must first be forced to stand on its own merits, giving a satisfactory answer to all of life’s questions. It must collapse from the inside out in order for it to be reduced to an absurdity. Second, the opposing worldview must be shown to be self-contradictory. Van Til affirms,

We must point out to them that univocal reasoning itself leads to self-contradiction, not only from a theistic point of view, but also from a non-theistic point of view as well. It is this that we ought to mean when we say that we must meet our enemy on their own ground. It is this that we ought to mean when we say that we reason from the impossibility of the contrary. The contrary is impossible only if it is self-contradictory when operating on the basis of its own assumptions.<sup>135</sup>

Most people, however, do not want to think about, address, or admit the self-contradictory nature of their worldview.<sup>136</sup> The nonbeliever must not be allowed to hold arbitrary, subjective beliefs that cannot be supported in some way by his understanding of the world.<sup>137</sup> He must be challenged to examine the problems inherent in his worldview

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<sup>133</sup>Ibid. The nonbeliever’s worldview, if held consistently and taken to its logical conclusion, makes reason, law, and science unintelligible. By rejecting the Christian worldview the nonbeliever rejects the very thing that provides consistency and stability that makes these things possible. Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 102.

<sup>134</sup>Van Til, *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 222.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid. “Univocal” is the term used by Van Til to describe non-Christian reasoning. It strives for autonomy and self-reliance. It stands in stark contrast to analogical reasoning, which means that man thinks God’s thoughts after him. Ibid., 221.

<sup>136</sup>Bahnsen, *Van Til’s Apologetic*, 262.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid. The same is true for the Christian. Every aspect of the Christian’s worldview must be supported and explained by his ultimate presuppositions. If at any point the Christian uncovers an inconsistency or self-contradiction, he must seek to correct it as soon as possible. The importance of a Christian having a consistent



and encouraged to repent and believe the gospel.

In the end, arguing from the impossibility of the contrary seeks to answer a fool according to his folly, pointing out the foolishness of his worldview. In 1 Corinthians 1:19-21, the apostle Paul notes that God has made foolish the wisdom of the world:

For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

God made foolish the wisdom of the world by choosing what it thought to be folly as the means to bring about salvation (v. 21). In the same way, the apologist should strive to make foolish the wisdom of the world.<sup>138</sup> Bahnsen notes that “[b]y demonstrating to the fool that his presuppositions can produce only falsely called knowledge, the believer answers him in such a way that he cannot be wise in his own conceits.”<sup>139</sup> Throughout an apologetic encounter, a Christian must be pointing out the foolishness of the unbeliever’s worldview, holding him accountable for every aspect of it. Only by continually pointing the unbeliever back to the gospel and to the biblical worldview, can the Christian accomplish this task. Just as Paul relied on the cross to shame the wisdom of this world, so should every Christian seek to shame the foolishness of the unbelieving culture around them.<sup>140</sup>

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worldview lies in the apologetic encounter. If the apologist wants to point out the inconsistencies and self-contradictions in other people’s worldviews, then he needs to be removing those contradictions from his own life. It is a matter of credibility.

<sup>138</sup>Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 64.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid. Ultimately, the argument from the impossibility of the contrary attempts to show how naturalism cannot provide a reason for reason. This deficiency causes it to collapse in upon itself. For a detailed explanation see Alvin Plantinga, “An Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism,” in *Naturalism Defeated?: Essays on Plantinga’s Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism*, ed. James Beilby (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 1-12. Also see chapter 3 in C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: Macmillan, 1947).

<sup>140</sup>Ibid. Frame notes that the argument from the impossibility of the contrary does not provide specific details in its argumentation. Rather, it presents a formula that

The argument from the impossibility of the contrary adequately explains how two people with completely opposing worldviews can enter into a discussion on the nature of the world. The apologist momentarily assumes the worldview of the nonbeliever and invites them to do the same with the Christian worldview. One other problem, however, still exists—the charge of circularity.<sup>141</sup> Admitting the circularity of his position, Van Til writes,

To admit one's own presuppositions and to point out the presuppositions of others is therefore to maintain that all reasoning is, in the nature of the case, circular reasoning. The starting point, the method, and the conclusion are always involved in one another.<sup>142</sup>

All arguments, especially those involving a discussion over worldview issues, originate from a person's ultimate authority; therefore, the ultimate authority dictates the terms of the argument. Thus, the arguments cannot help but be circular.

This circular argumentation does not spell the death of the presuppositional method. Instead of destroying presuppositionalism, circularity actually is accepted and embraced.<sup>143</sup> Any worldview, when held consistently, becomes circular in its nature; therefore, all worldviews should be expected to be circular.<sup>144</sup> The question then shifts from “is the worldview circular” to “which circular worldview has more authority?”<sup>145</sup>

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can fit any situation. The unbelieving worldview being engaged determines the specifics of the argumentation. After determining these specifics, the apologist then seeks to reduce the opposing worldview to an absurdity. Frame, *Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought*, 315.

<sup>141</sup>Frame, *Van Til*, 304.

<sup>142</sup>Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 101.

<sup>143</sup>Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic*, 170.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid. Bahnsen explains that consistently held worldviews are circular because the starting-point and the final conclusion cohere with each other. Ibid.

<sup>145</sup>Frame, *Apologetics for the Glory of God*, 10. Frame states, “There are distinctions to be made between ‘narrow circles’ (e.g., ‘the Bible is God’s word because it says it is God’s word’) and ‘broad circles’ (e.g., ‘evidence interpreted according to Christian criteria demonstrates the divine authority of Scripture’). . . . Not every circular argument is equally desirable.” John M. Frame, “Van Til and the Ligonier Apologetic,”

The apologist then answers this question by appealing to consistency and self-contradiction. The worldview that can be held consistently and without self-contradiction holds the most authority, demolishing the opposing worldviews because it erodes their foundational presuppositions.<sup>146</sup>

Presuppositional apologetics stands upon these three pillars: its relationship to epistemology, the point of contact, and the argument from the impossibility of the contrary. The lack of an epistemologically neutral ground upon which the believer and nonbeliever can argue requires a point of contact to be established. This point of contact lies in the knowledge of God found in every person. The point of contact, together with analogical thinking, provides the foundation for the believer and nonbeliever to argue from the impossibility of the contrary.

### **Keller's Preaching and Worldview Deconstruction**

Chapter 3 mentioned two goals that Keller has for every sermon. First, he wants to lead people to worship by stirring their affections for Christ. Second, he wants to provoke a worldview change in people through the utilization of presuppositional apologetics.<sup>147</sup> Keller incorporates the argument from the impossibility of the contrary often into his preaching. The following section explains how Keller accomplishes this goal, showing how his three macro-strategies of application lend themselves to the task of worldview deconstruction.

#### **Keller and the Argument from the Impossibility of the Contrary**

Worldview change is the primary goal of Keller's preaching. He writes,

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*Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985): 288.

<sup>146</sup>Bahnsen, *Always Ready*, 77.

<sup>147</sup>Keller, "Applying Christ: Getting Inside Their World, Part 1."

At the risk of over-simplification I'll lay out four stages that people have to go through to come from complete ignorance of the gospel and Christianity to full embrace. I'll call them (1) intelligibility, (2) credibility, (3) plausibility, and (4) intimacy. . . . The problem with virtually all modern evangelism programs is that they assume listeners come from a Christianized background, and so they very lightly summarize the gospel often jumping through stages one to three in minutes and go right to stage 'intimacy.'<sup>148</sup>

Keller strives to avoid jumping through the first three stages, ignoring the real needs of his congregation. He wants to be patient with them, walking with them through each phase until they arrive at a saving knowledge of the gospel. He views presuppositional apologetics as a tool that helps in assisting people in this journey.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>148</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "The Gospel and the Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World," in *The Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 115.

<sup>149</sup>Keller, "Applying Christ: Getting Inside Their World, Part 1." Keller sets forth his specific apologetic method in *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin, 2008). In his review of Keller's book, Jeffrey Waddington argues that Keller does not truly use presuppositional apologetics. He bases this argument on the fact that Keller does not argue specifically for a Calvinistic understanding of Christianity, but for a generic Christianity. Jeffrey C. Waddington, "The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 71 (2009): 228. Waddington equates Calvinism with Christianity. He admits that Keller's apologetic looks like presuppositionalism, functions like presuppositionalism, and that it has the same goal as presuppositionalism. Keller, however, does not argue specifically for Calvinism. This one issue does not seem to be significant enough to withhold the title of presuppositionalism from Keller. Keller admits that certain beliefs automatically place a person in a particular strand of Christianity; he just does not have the primary concern of getting people to hold to a particular strand. Keller, *The Reason for God*, 143. His primary concern lies in getting people to believe and then he helps them work through the specifics of that belief. The debate over who should be classified as the true presuppositionalists can be traced all the way back to an open letter sent from Van Til to Francis Schaeffer. Van Til told Schaeffer that Schaeffer was not a true presuppositional apologist and told him to not use the name in reference to himself. Cornelius Van Til, "An Open Letter to Francis Schaeffer," March 11 1969. An examination of Schaeffer's works, however, reveals that he did place a great emphasis on presuppositions and arguing from the impossibility of the contrary. See Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1981). Idem, *The God Who Is There: Speaking Historic Christianity into the Twentieth Century* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1968). Idem, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1972). Idem, *Escape from Reason* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1968). Idem, *How Should We Then Live?: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Old Tappan, NJ: F. H. Revell, 1976). Much like Keller and Frame, Schaeffer did not use the methodology exactly like Van Til and thus the criticism. Just because these three men do not have a pure presuppositional methodology, does not mean they should not be considered presuppositional.

In order to assist in this journey, the preacher must understand the worldviews held by the people in his audience. For this reason, Keller spends time with a variety of people in his congregation, exegeting them in order to better understand their point of view.<sup>150</sup>

Using presuppositional apologetics in preaching requires three phases. First, the preacher must enter his audience's worldview by gaining plausibility.<sup>151</sup> He gains plausibility with his audience by learning and using their language, knowing their worldview, and being sympathetic to it. Keller achieves entrance into their worldview by jettisoning traditional Christian vocabulary. He speaks to people on their own terms, and he does not expect them to adopt his terminology.<sup>152</sup> He also shows them that he understands their worldview by quoting movies, authors, and philosophers who hold the same views as his audience.<sup>153</sup>

For example, in his sermon on absolute truth, he quotes the French philosopher Foucault.<sup>154</sup> He talks about how Foucault understood claims of absolute truth to be a power play in today's world and how many people at Redeemer have this same problem with Christianity. Keller, though, does not dismiss this criticism of the Christian view of absolute truth. Keller believes that Christians need to hear the criticism of Foucault because, in many ways, truth claims can be used as misguided power plays.<sup>155</sup> He

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<sup>150</sup>Ibid.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid.

<sup>154</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Absolutism: Don't We All Have to Find Truth Ourselves?" *The Trouble with Christianity: Why It's so Hard to Believe It* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 8 October 2006) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010; available from <http://sermons.Redeemer.com/store/index.cfm>; Internet. He also quotes Foucault. Keller, *The Reason for God*, 37.

<sup>155</sup>Keller, "Absolutism."

focuses on one aspect of what Foucault has to say and affirms it: this affirmation ingratiates him to his audience. He then engages what the philosopher has to say and shows the inconsistencies.<sup>156</sup> By not automatically dismissing what Foucault says, Keller gains his audience's attention. They will listen to what he has to say because he has entered their worldview and speaks from the inside.

Once Keller procures the respect of his audience, he then begins to destabilize their worldview. He accomplishes this task by showing how they cannot consistently hold to their beliefs.<sup>157</sup> In his sermon on absolutism, he destabilizes the secular worldview very well. He gently walks his congregation through what the secularist believes and demonstrates how the worldview collapses when it faces extreme scrutiny. He says that for someone to suggest that all truth claims are power plays is itself a truth claim.<sup>158</sup> The assumption that all truth claims are power plays collapses because of its self-contradictory nature. Keller very clearly describes how the worldview collapses and uses it to generate tension in the sermon. If all these statements about truth are self-refuting, then what can a person believe? Keller acquires the respect of his audience when he enters their worldview. Now he can deconstruct it because they know he sympathizes with them. They listen to what he has to say because they respect him.

After destabilizing their worldview, Keller re-stabilizes it by pointing to Christ.<sup>159</sup> In this phase, he endeavors to help his audience understand how the questions in their worldview can be answered in Christ and the gospel. Keller points out in his sermon on absolutism that most people think that true freedom comes from the absence

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<sup>156</sup>Ibid.

<sup>157</sup>Keller, "Applying Christ: Getting Inside Their World Part 1."

<sup>158</sup>Keller, "Absolutism."

<sup>159</sup>Keller, "Applying Christ: Getting Inside Their World, Part 1."

of restrictions.<sup>160</sup> The desire for freedom leads them to reject all claims of absolute truth. They do not want anyone telling them what to do and, therefore, restricting their freedom. He helps them to see that true freedom comes through restriction. For example, he tells them that many people restrict their diet in order to live a longer life. The restriction on their diet means that they live a healthier lifestyle and hopefully a longer life.<sup>161</sup> Then he moves to Christ and discusses how through Christ, one can experience true freedom. The restriction placed on a person in Christ does not beat them down; rather, it provides true freedom. By focusing on Christ, Keller does not just give his people something else they must do. He wants to lead them to worship Christ where their hearts will be stirred and their lifestyles changed. He does not completely avoid the imperative, but reveals it in light of the gospel.

Keller's use of presuppositional apologetics allows him to preach in a unique and different way. He challenges the secular worldview of many people in his congregation while drawing mature Christians deeper in their walk. Mature believers begin to understand more about the Bible and the doctrines contained within it. They can also learn how to engage the secular worldviews of their friends, family, and coworkers by listening to the sermons at Redeemer. Keller does not shy away from preaching on the most difficult topics. He uses the questions that arise out of these topics to enter a worldview, destabilize it, and re-stabilize it in Christ.<sup>162</sup> This approach to preaching

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<sup>160</sup>Keller, "Absolutism."

<sup>161</sup>Ibid.

<sup>162</sup>Keller has preached many sermons dealing with extremely difficult topics. Some of those sermons include the following: Timothy J. Keller, "Exclusivity: How Can There Be Just One True Religion?" *The Trouble with Christianity: Why It's so Hard to Believe It* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 24 September 2006) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/index.cmf>; Internet. Idem, "Suffering: If God Is So Good Why Is There So Much Suffering in the World," *The Trouble with Christianity: Why It's so Hard to Believe It* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 1 October 2006) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/index.cmf>; Internet. Idem, "Hell: Isn't the God of

challenges both the believer and nonbeliever's way of thinking. Keller does not preach at his audience from the outside; instead, he preaches to them from a position of understanding and compassion within their particular worldview.

### **Critiquing Religion and Irreligion**

Keller's three application perspectives discussed in chapter 3 lend themselves well to the presuppositional method of apologetics. First, critiquing religion and irreligion provides him with a means of deconstructing all worldviews that do not fall in line with the Bible. When looking at how a text addresses an irreligious person, Keller shows how the things of this world (i.e., money, sex, power, and science) fail to consistently answer and satisfy the big questions of life. Likewise, when speaking to the religious person, he can show him how his rules and regulations cannot provide him with the safety and security he seeks. In both of these situations, Keller wants to indicate how the current worldview of his listeners fails to provide what they ultimately need and want.

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Christianity just an Angry Judge?" *The Trouble with Christianity: Why It's so Hard to Believe It* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 22 October 2006) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/index.cmf>; Internet. Idem, "Literalism: Isn't the Bible Historically Unreliable and Regressive?" *The Trouble with Christianity: Why It's so Hard to Believe It* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 5 November 2006) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/index.cmf>; Internet. Idem, "How to Hate Your Parents," *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 4 June 2000) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/index.cmf>; Internet. Idem, "The Sin Against the Holy Spirit," *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 18 June 2000) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/index.cmf>; Internet. Idem, "The Falling Tower," *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 13 August 2000) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/index.cmf>; Internet. Idem, "The Doctrine of God," *Who's Afraid of Doctrine* (sermon preached at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 30 May 2004) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/index.cmf>; Internet. Idem, "The Doctrine of Human Nature," *Who's Afraid of Doctrine* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 20 June 2004) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/store/index.cmf>; Internet.



After establishing a dichotomy between religion and irreligion, Keller then presents a third way of viewing the world—the gospel. He rebuilds their worldview in light of the gospel, showing people how their deepest needs can be satisfied in it.

### **Heart Motives**

Keller’s desire to preach to the heart motives of his congregation provides him with a narrative structure in his sermons, which creates a tension that must be resolved. In his sermons, he describes the demands of the text, pointing out how no one can ultimately fulfill those demands. The creation of this tension in the sermon lends itself to presuppositionalism. Keller talks about a theme in the text, showing how the secular worldview collapses under the demands of Scripture, thus creating the tension he desires. He, then, presents Christ as the solution to the tension created; reinforcing the biblical worldview he wants his audience to adopt.

### **Three Application Perspectives**

Keller’s three application perspectives—the doctrinalist, the pietist, and the cultural transformationalist—also assist Keller in the imploring of presuppositional apologetics in his preaching. Thinking through these lenses forces him to engage both spiritual and cultural issues, which provide him with entrances into the worldviews of people. The cultural transformationalist perspective especially helps him in this way. He is constantly looking at the culture around him to see how the Bible can influence change. He can then engage these cultural issues in his preaching and show how his people can work to see this change take place. By incorporating presuppositional apologetics in his preaching, Keller encourages his people to display the worldview change he desires for them.

### **Conclusion**

Presuppositional apologetics provides Tim Keller with a mechanism through which he can engage in worldview deconstruction. Three aspects of this apologetic

method form its structure: its understanding of epistemology, the point of contact, and arguing from the impossibility of the contrary. Presuppositionalism sets forth an analogical view of knowledge in which man thinks God's thoughts after him. Given this analogical knowledge, no neutral ground exists between the believer and the nonbeliever. Their worldviews, if held consistently, are antithetical to each other at every point. Due to the lack of neutral ground between the believer and nonbeliever, a point of contact must be established. The *divinitatis sensum* provides this point of contact. God has created every person in his own image, and, therefore, they have within them knowledge of God. This knowledge of God provides the apologist with a way of giving a reason for the hope that is within him. He accomplishes this task by arguing from the impossibility of the contrary. By momentarily adopting the worldview of the nonbeliever and then asking him to adopt the biblical worldview momentarily, the apologist can demonstrate the differences in the two worldviews. He shows that the nonbeliever's worldview cannot be held consistently and that it is self-contradictory, thus reducing it to an absurdity.

This chapter discussed how Keller brings to bear presuppositionalism in his sermons. He uses his three macro-strategies of application—critiquing religion and irreligion and preaching to the heart motives—and three application perspectives to deconstruct secular worldviews. These perspectives assist him in entering the opposing worldview, showing its inconsistencies, and rebuilding it around the gospel. How effectively and accurately does Keller apply this methodology? The following chapter seeks to answer this question.

## CHAPTER 5

### APPLICATION OF METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

Presuppositional apologetics provides Tim Keller with a tool to employ for worldview deconstruction. In every sermon, Keller attempts to bring his audience to a point of worship and then to assist them in developing their own biblical worldviews. This development can take the form of deconstructing secular, unbelieving worldviews or of positively reinforcing the Christian worldview. In either case, Keller encourages people through his preaching to begin thinking in worldview categories, using them to impact their own circles of influence. He wants the members at Redeemer to have a positive impact on their spheres of influence.

Leading a congregation to be passionate worshipers of Christ who strive to have a significant impact on their culture requires a preacher who consistently preaches the Word of God and articulates his vision in creative and unique ways. The following chapter evaluates how well Keller applies his methodology on a weekly basis. It begins by examining several of Keller's sermons, focusing on his incorporation of presuppositionalism. The chapter then presents the strengths of Keller's approach in order to demonstrate its benefit for contemporary preachers. Finally, it concludes by presenting four questions to consider concerning his methodology.

#### **Sermon Analysis**

The following section provides an analysis of several sermons preached by Keller over the past twenty years. It begins by looking at Keller's series *The Trouble with Christianity: Why It's So Hard to Believe It*. The next section focuses on a series

Keller preached in the 1990s on the book of Acts. This section examines his preaching during his early years at Redeemer, showing how he applied his methodology at that time. Third, the section jumps to a series Keller preached in 2005 where he worked through a significant portion of Deuteronomy. After summarizing several sermons from this series, the section compares it with the series on Acts in order to show how Keller's style and methodology changed over the span of a decade.

### **The Trouble with Christianity**

Keller's series of sermons entitled *The Trouble with Christianity: Why It's So Hard to Believe It*, contains seven sermons which directly engage the secular worldview of his audience. These sermons address topics such as exclusivity, suffering, absolutism, injustice, hell, and literalism, dealing with a wide range of criticisms that many unbelievers level against Christianity. He explains the series: "We are starting a new series tonight. Each week, for the next few weeks, we're going to select one of the main objections, one of the main problems, one of the main troubles that people in our culture have with Christianity and look at it."<sup>1</sup> In the series, Keller demonstrates Frame's third use for apologetics, which states that the apologist can go on the offensive.<sup>2</sup> He actively engages the unbelieving, secular worldview, pointing out its inconsistencies and self-contradictions. This series displays explicitly how Keller incorporates presuppositional apologetics and,

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<sup>1</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Exclusivity: How Can There be Just One True Religion?" *The Trouble with Christianity: Why It's so Hard to Believe It* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 25 September 2006) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010, available from <http://sermons.redeemer.comstore/index/cmf>; Internet. Later, Keller notes that the problems that the culture at large has with Christianity can especially be seen in New York City. See Timothy J. Keller, "Suffering: If God Is Good, Why Is There So Much Suffering in the World," *The Trouble with Christianity: Why It's so Hard to Believe It* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 1 October 2006) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010, available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/sermons/index.cmf>; Internet.

<sup>2</sup>John M. Frame, *Apologetics for the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), 1.

more specifically, the argument from the impossibility of the contrary.<sup>3</sup> In each of these sermons, he presents objections, attempting to portray them fairly and accurately. Then he deconstructs them, being both sympathetic and firm in his critique. Finally, he presents Christ as the answer to the objections, reconstructing his audience's worldview on firm, consistent, and non-contradictory grounds. The remainder of this section summarizes each of the sermons, pointing out how he achieves this worldview interaction.

**Exclusivity.** Keller defines the problem of exclusivity: "How can you possibly claim that your religion is the only true religion; that you have the one truth?"<sup>4</sup> He answers this objection by presenting two non-Christian solutions: to weaken Christianity or to relegate it to the private realm.<sup>5</sup> First, because of religion's divisive nature, people want to weaken and hopefully abolish it. Keller asserts that people view Christianity as the cause of many conflicts and arguments; therefore, they think the world would be a better place if it no longer existed. The second solution given to this problem calls for people to relegate religious activities to their private lives. People can have their religious views, but those views are not expected to influence how they interact in the public square. According to Keller, this solution has many more supporters because it seems more tolerant and inclusive.<sup>6</sup>

After presenting these two answers, he then begins to show how those who

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<sup>3</sup>This sermon series served as the foundation for Keller's book *The Reason for God*. Timothy J. Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin, 2008). In this book, Keller gives his apologetic method, using these sermons as examples.

<sup>4</sup>Keller, "Exclusivity." He notes that this problem does not just exist for Christianity but is true for all religions that claim to have the truth. He also contends that religious exclusivity is the largest barrier to world peace. Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

wish to abolish Christianity or relegate it to one's private life cannot provide a consistent and inclusive way of living in the world. First, he points out that religion cannot be weakened or abolished. He explains that all people have a need to worship something and that desire cannot be ignored or restrained.<sup>7</sup> For this reason, religion and religious ideologies will always exist. He then turns his attention to the second way that the culture at large wants to deal with the trouble of exclusivity. He responds to this idea by showing that it cannot truly be held. Asking people engaging in public discourse to constrain personal religious views to the private realm, not allowing them to influence public interaction, simply cannot happen. Keller points out that all people have a set of exclusive beliefs that dictate how they interact in the public square: "Saying that faith-based ideas should be left out of the public square is making a faith-based claim and is disqualified based on its own assertions."<sup>8</sup> For Keller, the question is not "Does everyone have a set of exclusive beliefs?" but which set of exclusive beliefs produces loving, inclusive behavior?<sup>9</sup>

Keller then concludes his sermon by providing three things from the text that produce loving, inclusive behavior: (1) the origin of Jesus' salvation, (2) the purpose of Jesus' salvation, and (3) the method of Jesus' salvation.<sup>10</sup> First, Keller discusses the origin of Jesus' salvation. Scripture states that Jesus came down. All other religions say that the founder was born except for Christianity. To say that Christ came implies that he was somewhere before. Keller makes the point that Christ was not just another man, but that he was God made flesh. Second, he notes the purpose of Jesus' salvation. Saying that Jesus came in the flesh points to one of the reasons for his coming—to redeem the world. Most

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

other religions want to escape the present world, but Christianity seeks to bring hope and redemption to the world. Third, he mentions the method of Jesus' salvation. All other religions say that salvation comes through performing the truth. Christianity says that someone has performed the truth for you. Keller claims that these three distinctions should cause a person to have a loving, inclusive attitude because only when one adopts these three distinctives can one love all people.<sup>11</sup>

**Suffering.** After dealing with the exclusivity of Christianity, Keller focuses on the problem of suffering.<sup>12</sup> In his sermon, he addresses the question of how evil and suffering can exist in a world with a loving God. One response to this issue is to deny the existence of God. Keller says that people who hold to this view believe that if God could have stopped suffering, he would have. Since suffering still exists, God must not exist. For these people, feelings of suffering have no objective basis and just exist as personal feelings. In deconstructing this position, Keller quickly denotes that suffering presents a bigger problem for people who do not believe in God because they have no basis to claim unjust treatment. If no standard of right and wrong exists, then people cannot claim to be treated unjustly. He asserts, "On what possible basis, if there is no God, could you object that the natural order of violence is unnatural?"<sup>13</sup> Keller points out this inconsistency in the existentialist solution and shows how 1 Peter 1:3-12 encourages people to deal with suffering.

Keller mentions three things that a person can do to endure suffering with a biblical attitude: (1) look back to something, (2) look ahead to something, and (3) look into something.<sup>14</sup> First, he encourages people to look back at how God walked with

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<sup>11</sup>Keller, "Exclusivity."

<sup>12</sup>Keller, "Suffering." This sermon uses 1 Pet 1:3-12 as its main text.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

people through suffering. The text likens suffering to fire. Keller reminds his audience that a situation occurred in Daniel 3 where people were placed in fire and God walked with them through it. He states that God never says that suffering will not happen, but that he will be with his people during suffering. Second, Keller tells his congregation to look ahead to something. He wants them to look forward to their physical resurrection in Christ. He claims that the present sufferings will make their final inheritance even more enjoyable. Finally, he wants people to look into something, namely, the gospel. Jesus endured his suffering because he had a living hope, his people. Keller asserts that by meditating on the reality that they are Jesus' hope should cause them to hold him as their living hope.<sup>15</sup> This living hope then strengthens them to persevere through suffering. By doing these three things, people can face the sufferings in their lives with hope and confidence.

**Absolutism.** The third sermon in this series deals with the problem of absolutism<sup>16</sup>—Christians claim to have absolute truth. Most think that people who say that restrict freedom and that people should be free to determine truth for themselves.<sup>17</sup> Keller engages the French philosopher Foucault, who stated that all truth claims are power plays. He does not dismiss what Foucault says; instead, he agrees with him on some level. Keller notes that everyone makes truth claims and the content of the claim determines whether the claim oppresses or provides freedom. Keller then discusses how true freedom comes through restriction. People frequently restrict themselves in order to

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Absolutism: Don't We All Have to Find Truth Ourselves?" *The Trouble with Christianity: Why It's so Hard to Believe It* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 8 October 2006) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/sermons/index.cmf>; Internet. This sermon focuses on Galatians 2:4-16.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.



bring about a better result. Here, Keller points out that Paul describes how to obtain freedom and that freedom, ironically, comes through restriction. According to Keller, freedom is the presence of proper restrictions. He then points his congregation to the cross, showing them that Jesus restricted his freedom so that they could be saved.<sup>18</sup> In stirring their affections for Christ, he urges them to restrict themselves in order to have the freedom that comes through him.

**Injustice.** Next, this sermon series focuses on injustices committed by Christians throughout history.<sup>19</sup> Keller contends that people who voice this objection have looked at history, see the oppression and injustices caused by Christians, and choose not to believe in Christianity based on these injustices. He openly acknowledges the historicity of these claims and does not try to explain them away. He confronts the objection by showing how the Bible itself does not support the oppression and injustices that Christians have committed. From the book of James he shows that God has chosen the poor and that anyone connected with God should do the same. He points to Christ who became poor for his people. Based on this fact, people should then reach out and minister to the poor among them.

In this sermon, Keller critiques the opposing worldview by showing how the held belief is true but how it does not line up with what Christians should do. By explaining how Christians have lived contrary to Scripture and calling them to repentance, Keller displays how this objection is no reason for unbelief. He shows what the Bible says about the poor, and how the Bible calls Christians to treat the poor. He

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Injustice: Hasn't Christianity Been an Instrument for Oppression?" *The Trouble with Christianity: Why It's so Hard to Believe It* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 15 October 2006) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/sermons/index.cfm>; Internet. This sermon comes from James 2:1-17.

contends that if Christians lived in accordance with the presuppositions taught in Scripture, then these injustices would have never occurred.<sup>20</sup>

**Hell.** In his fifth sermon, Keller answers the question of how a loving God can send people to Hell.<sup>21</sup> He begins this sermon by explaining his understanding of hell, namely that the fire spoken of in Scripture stands as a metaphor for something far worse. He says that hell is being turned over to one's own desires. In Luke 16, the rich man builds his identity on his wealth. After he dies, he loses all of it, and thus loses his identity. Keller says, "Hell is a freely chosen identity based on something other than God."<sup>22</sup> As God continues to turn people over to their desires, they continue to build an identity based on those desires until they collapse beneath them.

Next, Keller makes the point that people cannot live at peace in the world without the doctrine of hell. The necessity for hell lies in its ability to provide justice for the evil present in the world. Peace can be found in a world filled with evil because evil will one day be dealt with in a just way.

Finally, Keller points out that without the doctrine of hell, Christians cannot know the love of God. According to Keller, this doctrine displays the love of God in two ways. First, it shows what God saved sinners from. God loved the world so much that he rescued them from eternal condemnation. Second, it displays what God had to give up to provide salvation. God had to send his own son to experience hell in order to save his

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Hell: Isn't the God of Christianity an Angry Judge?" *The Trouble with Christianity: Why It's so Hard to Believe It* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 22 October 2006) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/sermons/index.cmf>; Internet. This sermon comes from Luke 16:19-32.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

people. Keller then points out that a loving God who does not send anyone to hell cannot deal justly with evil.<sup>23</sup> A God who does not punish evil cannot be a loving God.

**Literalism.** Keller's series concludes with a sermon on how literally a person should read the Bible.<sup>24</sup> He asserts that some people do not want to have to believe everything found in Scripture because some of it is regressive and outdated. In this sermon, he adopts more of an evidentialist approach to apologetics. He defends the historicity of the Bible by pointing to its self-attestation and its counter productivity.<sup>25</sup> He explains its self-attesting nature by showing how it could not be a legend due to the early date of its writing. To support this point, he discusses how Paul referenced five hundred eyewitnesses who could have disputed anything that he wrote. He also describes the ways in which the claims of the Bible are frequently counterproductive. For example, he discusses the lack of authority that a woman's witness carried.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, the amount of female testimony contained within Scripture does not help the story unless it is true. The only way a writer would include the testimony of women is if it were true.

Next, he says that the Bible can be trusted culturally. He gives three things to remember when approaching a text that can offend someone: it may not teach what one thinks it does; one may be blinded by one's own culture; and one may be blinded by the superiority of one's own cultural moment. He concludes this sermon by talking about how a person can read the Bible in light of himself or in light of Christ.<sup>27</sup> If a person reads the

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Literalism: Isn't the Bible Historically Unreliable and Regressive?" *The Trouble with Christianity: Why It's so Hard to Believe It* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian church, New York, 5 November 2006) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/sermons/index.cmf>; Internet.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

Bible in light of himself, then he will want to reject certain parts of it that contradict his own lifestyle. If, however, he reads it in light of Christ, he will begin to look at those passages in a different way. They become ways of conforming one to Christ.

### **The Book of Acts**

In Keller's series on the book of Acts, he looks at what caused the early church to grow so explosively in the first century, drawing from it implications for a contemporary revival movement.<sup>28</sup> The following section seeks to examine how Keller applied his methodology in the early days of his ministry at Redeemer. It provides a summary and critique of three sermons from the series, detailing how he typically engages the culture, deconstructs the secular worldview, and presents the biblical worldview as truth.

**Truth and Power.** The first sermon in this series comes from Acts 1:1-14. Keller says that in the book of Acts contemporary Christians can glimpse what fueled the revival which swept across the Roman Empire. He contends that a revival contains two parts; a return to the genus of Christianity and an application to the present day. He then contends that most people in America today do not truly understand what Christianity looked like at its inception. The view of Christianity held by many non-believers in America is that it exists to produce guilt in people, and God uses this guilt to motivate them to do what he wants. Keller notes that this understanding of Christianity cannot be what it looks like at the beginning. Instead of a guilt-producing entity, Christianity burst on the scene in the first century, transforming the culture around it. He draws from the first fourteen verses in Acts to show what Christianity was like at its beginning. Christians ministered to the outcasts of society as if they were their own. They provided for the poor by sacrificing their own possessions. They strove to break down social, economic, and ethnic barriers. In presenting what Christianity looked like at its

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

beginning, Keller encourages his people to engage the culture in the same manner. He tells them that because of what Christ did for them, they should strive to be a force for social and cultural change in New York City.<sup>29</sup> Since Christ gave up the riches of heaven, they should be willing to sacrifice to meet the needs of people in their lives. Since Christ left the comfort and security of heaven to live in a dirty and sinful world, Christians, likewise, should be willing to live in difficult and uncomfortable places. Keller does not just tell people what to do, but he also uses the example of Christ to apply the text to their individual lives.

Keller continues in this sermon by asking how the power of Christianity can come to his people. He gives two principles. First, people must believe that the facts of Christianity are objectively true for everyone. In this section, Keller makes the point that Christianity must be either true for everyone or true for no one. He asserts that it cannot be true for some and not true for others.<sup>30</sup> The reason for this dichotomy lies in the nature of the content of the message of Christianity. Keller states,

If what Jesus said about himself and the nature of the universe is true, then of course Christianity will work. Because to serve him will be to find your designer and your design. But what if Christianity isn't true. What if right now his bones are rotting in some grave somewhere? Then Christianity can't work, except in the short term as a placebo.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, if Christianity is true, then it will work for everyone because of the content of its message. If, however, the facts are false, then it will fail to provide the hope and purpose that it promises. In either case, it must be the same for all people. He mentions that the truth of Christianity does not bring power; it *is* power. In order to have the power of the Spirit, a person must believe the truth of Christianity. In his explanation, Keller engages and deconstructs the attitude of tolerance that characterizes many of his listeners.

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

The dichotomy he presents forces them to deal with Christianity based on its own merits. They must realize that, if true, it has powerful implications for all of culture.<sup>32</sup> This reality, then, much like the first part of the sermon, purports to lead his congregation to begin thinking outwardly and not only of their own lives. If Christianity is true for all people, then Christians must be working to engage all people with it.

**Unbelief.** One sermon in the Acts series addresses the concept of unbelief.<sup>33</sup> Keller explains unbelief: “Unbelief, opposition to the gospel message, is not a simple thing, it is a complex thing. It is not a simple lack of something; it is the presence of something else. It’s not just the lack of persuasion; it’s a spirit of deep hostility and confusion.”<sup>34</sup> He uses Acts 4:1-22 to examine the depth and structure of unbelief. The priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees did not just have a lack of belief, but they possessed a deep hostility towards Peter, John, and the rest of Christianity. Keller shows how their unbelief gives way to their hostility.

First, the depth of unbelief can be seen in the reality that those opposing Christianity have nothing in common other than their hatred of it. Keller notes that people in every century have rejected Christianity based on intellectual reasons, but those intellectual reasons continue to change. According to him, the shifting intellectual reasons for unbelief point to a deeper reason.<sup>35</sup> Something exists deep within a person that causes him or her to disdain Christianity with a passion. The problem is not with the mind but with the heart.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Timothy J. Keller, “Unbelief,” *The Book of Acts* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 22 October 1995) [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2011; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/sermons/index.cmf>; Internet.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

Second, he discusses the structure of unbelief. The unbelief that resides in people has to do with their “cornerstone.” People’s cornerstone is the one thing in their life that they view as being supremely valuable. Their cornerstone determines everything about them. It gives them security, meaning, and purpose.<sup>36</sup> Keller says that the gospel points to people’s cornerstones and tells them that the cornerstone they have grounded their entire life on is inadequate.<sup>37</sup> The gospel offends people because it tells them that they cannot earn their way into heaven. Their hostility and unbelief arises out of their offended nature.

When Keller explains how a person’s cornerstone dictates everything about his life, he utilizes presuppositional apologetics to show how an unbelieving worldview cannot support the structure of their beliefs. He mentions several things that may act as a cornerstone for the lives of those in his audience: career, family, education, or artistic ability. Keller then explains how these things do not have a sound structure and can collapse very quickly:

It’s unstable because it’s subject to your performance, to your circumstances. . . . It’s all built around, ‘I’m a family man,’ let’s say, but how do you know that your children won’t turn out to be juvenile delinquents? Or you know that you are a very sophisticated person, and you have written the very best essay in your area of cultural anthropology. But how do you know that someone will not come along and change the regnant view in your area, and then everyone will laugh at your essay. You’re afraid because if you built on anything other than Jesus, then you’re not sure.<sup>38</sup>

Keller destabilizes the worldviews of his audience by showing them that what they base their value on cannot provide them with the purpose and value they seek. He then re-stabilizes their worldviews around Christ by explaining how the biblical worldview can give them assurance in their faith. They do not need the things of the world to give them value because they gain value from the love God has for them.

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

**Encounter with God.** In the final sermon on the book of Acts, Keller exposes the ultimate secret behind Christianity's rapid growth in the first century.<sup>39</sup> He contends that Christianity took hold because it did not just have people sign up; they had conversion experiences that changed everything about them. He mentions three different types of people in his congregation: the unconverted, the converted, and those who think they are converted but are not. He states that the only way that a person can be converted is to see someone who has experienced conversion. Luke presents Paul as one such example. Keller finds four commonalities that the conversion of Paul has with present-day conversions. First, everyone needs to experience conversion. Paul was the most educated man of his day, yet he still needed a conversion experience. Second, conversions involve the intellect. In conversion a person is confronted with a set of empirical facts that he or she must decide the truthfulness of. It involves more than this, but not less. Third, conversion goes beyond reason, revealing blind spots in a person's life. The only way that a person can become aware of the blindness of his heart is to obtain sight. When a person is blind he or she cannot see the blind spots. Finally, conversion exists as a process.<sup>40</sup> God worked in Paul's life in order to bring him to the point of conversion. The circumstances and events of his life brought him to the place where Christ could reveal himself, bringing about his conversion.

In this sermon, Keller does a good job of showing how generic belief does not provide salvation. In the section discussing the need that everyone has for conversion, he tells his audience that having a sincere, all-consuming belief in something does not save. A person can have a sincere belief in something that leads them astray. He uses the example of Hitler. Hitler had a passionate belief in his cause, but his cause led him to

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<sup>39</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Encounter with God," *The Book of Acts* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 26 November 1995) [on-line], accessed 22 July 2011, available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/sermons/index.cmf>; Internet.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.



murder millions of people. In utilizing this illustration, Keller deconstructs the idea that all a person needs is to believe something passionately. He indicates that the object of a person's faith matters more than the amount or quality of their faith.<sup>41</sup>

Keller's series on the first few chapters of the book of Acts displays how during the early years of Redeemer he encouraged his people to engage their culture. He showed them how the gospel radically impacted the century following the death and resurrection of Christ and how it can still impact the culture of New York City. He models an apologetic method for them, demonstrating how they can take their Christian worldview into the public realm. This series also reveals a couple of problems in Keller's methodology. First, in his sermon "Truth and Power" he spends a great amount of time discussing the rise of Christianity and its impact on the first century. He then uses the text to support and explain what he wants to communicate in his lecture on early Christianity; instead of allowing the text to dictate what he preaches. Second, in the sermon "Unbelief" Keller takes a secondary issue in the text and makes it his primary point. The passage in Acts 4 communicates the reality that Peter, who had denied Christ three times, now could not stop speaking about him. The passage focuses on the boldness of Peter and John and not on the unbelief of the ones persecuting them. The next section shows how Keller's methodology changed over the next decade, becoming more tightly integrated and structurally sound.

## **Deuteronomy**

In Keller's series at Redeemer *Deuteronomy: Doing Justice, Preaching Grace*, he explains the purpose of the book:

It's a series of sermons delivered by Moses just as he was about to die, giving the people of Israel a comprehensive look at what having received God's law, meant for how they should live their lives. It's the most comprehensive and complete look at what it means to live distinctively because of the grace of God.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

According to Keller, Deuteronomy's goal of showing the people what it means to live distinctive lives makes it extremely practical and helpful for contemporary readers.<sup>43</sup>

The following section summarizes and critiques three sermons from this series. It focuses on how Keller uses his application perspectives to communicate his content. The sermon "The Grace of God" demonstrates how he uses the concepts of religion and irreligion to deconstruct his listener's worldview. In the next sermon Keller examines the motivational structure present in a person's heart. In this instance he wants to preach to the sin beneath the sin, helping people see what drives their thoughts and actions. The final sermon in this section incorporates presuppositionalism by using it to point out the inconsistencies in the belief that the biblical worldview is narrow-minded.

**The Grace of Law.** Keller begins this series by discussing what he calls the "paradigmatic story" at the beginning of Deuteronomy. The story relays the refusal of the Israelites to go up and take the land that God promised them. It explains something that is not just wrong with *their* hearts, but something that is wrong with the human heart in general. He asserts, "The real problem with the human heart is not that we don't believe in God, or that we don't believe in the law of God. Even those who say they don't, really do. Here's the real problem: those who say they believe in the love and grace of God, really don't."<sup>44</sup> In other words, all people know that God exists, but they do not trust his grace and goodness. This lack of trust in God occurs at birth, causing people to be self-absorbed and unable to look outside of themselves.

This innate problem at the heart of every person expresses itself in two ways. First, it can take the form of irreligion.<sup>45</sup> The Israelites wanted to give up on God and

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

return to Egypt. When people cannot trust God, they frequently ignore the reality of his existence. They seek to live as though he does not exist, ignoring the drastic implications of this rejection. Second, this lack of trust can express itself in the form of religion.<sup>46</sup> The people begin to obey God only when they see the consequences of their sin. Keller notes that this kind of obedience cannot be classified as true obedience.<sup>47</sup> In this instance, people begin to try to earn favor with God. In each case, irreligion and religion, people do not obey God out of trust and gratitude for what he has done for them.

The sermon concludes with Keller providing a solution to the problem of religion and irreligion. He goes into great detail discussing the covenants that kings would make with vassals. He then shows how God made a covenant with Abraham (Gen 15). In that covenant God said that he would bear the weight of the covenant even if it cost him his life. Keller then points to Christ, showing how through him God did die to provide a way for the covenant to be satisfied.<sup>48</sup> Throughout this sermon, Keller critiques both the religious and irreligious worldviews. He shows how they fail to provide security. He then insists that only through trusting in God by believing in the death of his son can a person truly have life.

**God's Law.** In his sermon "God's Law," Keller attacks the motivations that lie in every person's heart.<sup>49</sup> He mentions three things about the law in this sermon. First, he discusses the origin of God's law. The law of God reflects his nature. It also reflects the

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "God's Law," *Deuteronomy: Doing Justice, Preaching Grace* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 27 May 2007) [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2011; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/sermons/index.cmf>; Internet.

nature of man, who is created in the image of God. Therefore, when a person sins he violates God and himself.<sup>50</sup>

Second, Keller explains the substance of God's law.<sup>51</sup> Each of God's laws relates to the others, meaning that when a person breaks one law he breaks them all. The Ten Commandments break down into two different groups, the internal and the external. The tenth commandment addresses a person's motivational structure. God tells his people not to covet, which means that they should strive for contentment. When one has contentment one can rest in God and obey the other nine commands. He explains, "If you're content, you won't over work. Then you won't commit adultery, because if you're content you won't use sex as a means of self-fulfillment and self-realization. But only as a way of building commitment with another person."<sup>52</sup> Contentment frees a person to be able to focus outward, ministering to other people without coveting what they have.

Third, Keller concludes the sermon by showing that every culture sees the law of God and thinks, "Yes, we should live like this." Every culture tries to achieve this life, but every culture fails. He critiques the secular and traditional approaches to solving this problem. The secular approach makes people selfish and individualistic, while the traditional approach makes people tribal and judgmental. The secularist rejects God's law, living for himself. The traditionalist embraces the law, attempting to earn favor with God. Both of these approaches fail to get at the heart of the law. Keller provides a third way of dealing with the law. People should not obey God's law just because he is God. Instead, they should obey God's law because he wants to be their God. He desires a relationship with them, which can only come through Christ. Christ fulfilled the law in a way that

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

people cannot in order that God can live in relationship with them.<sup>53</sup>

**Knowing God.** Keller's sermon on knowing God examines the Shema.<sup>54</sup> In this sermon, Keller provides four things commanded by the Shema for all people to do. First, people should believe in God truly.<sup>55</sup> Keller contends that each culture of that day would have had multiple gods, all of which were competing for the attention and worship of the people. He comments that people in contemporary culture also have many gods.<sup>56</sup> The gods of today's world look different, but they still demand worship and attention. The God of Israel, however, was different. Israel did not have multiple gods; they had the one true God. People must know the one true God and how he is revealed in Scripture. In this section of his sermon, Keller incorporates presuppositionalism in order to deconstruct the belief that Christianity is narrow-minded because of its belief in one God, while the rest of the world is broad-minded. He deconstructs this concept:

You say, 'Oh my goodness, you really believe there's just one God? Isn't that narrow?' No more narrow than you. Don't you think there's just one you? If somebody comes up to you and says today, 'I'm writing a book about you.' 'Oh really,' you say, 'What's in it?' 'Well, I like to think of you as an astronaut, brilliant at math, but very abrasive and terrible at relationships.' You say, 'Well, I'm afraid of heights, I flunked math, and I think I'm a pretty nice person.' The person says, 'It doesn't matter I like to think of you like this.'<sup>57</sup>

Keller points out that the person having the book written about them would be angry because a reality exists that the author should try to communicate in the story. Keller then notes that if God is real, he is more real than anyone in the building. He says about

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Knowing God," *Deuteronomy: Doing Justice, Preaching Grace* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 3 June 2007) [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2011; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/sermons/index.cmf>; Internet.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

God, “What’s wrong with telling you ‘you’ve got to know me how I really am?’”<sup>58</sup> In telling this story, Keller shows the absurdity of the non-believing worldview. He shows his audience that they do not live in a way that is consistent with what they claim. If God claims to be a particular way, then people should get to know him as he has revealed himself. This expectation is no different from that of every person in the room.

Second, Keller tells his audience that they must love God “transformingly.”<sup>59</sup> In this section, he communicates the reality that love does not only exist as a feeling. The passage commands people to love God with all their being. A person can only truly love God if that love is life transforming. Here, Keller encourages his audience to engage their culture with a loving attitude. He wants them to ask constantly, “How does who God is and what God says impact my present situation?” If the love of God resides in their hearts, then they will love God with their whole lives. Third, he tells people to trust God unconditionally. Keller exhorts people to trust God with every area of their lives. He notes that most people think they know what is best for them, but they do not know more than God.<sup>60</sup> People must willingly trust God, following him wherever he leads.

The series on Deuteronomy demonstrates a great deal of growth in Keller’s preaching. While many of the same concepts and methodologies can be found in both the Acts and the Deuteronomy series, his presentation of his sermons changed. In Keller’s series on Acts, his sermons tended to have a weaker structure and less organization.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>For example, Timothy J. Keller, “The Spirit of God,” *The Book of Acts* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 17 September 1995) [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2011; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/sermons/index.cmf>; Internet. See also Timothy J. Keller, “Cut to the Heart,” *The Book of Acts* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 24 September 1995) [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2011; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/sermons/index.cmf>; Internet.

These sermons frequently had lengthy introductions, which meant that Keller would not get to the points of his sermon until later in the message. His points had loose connections, and he did not explain how they related to the text. The Deuteronomy series represents growth in these areas of Keller's preaching. In these sermons, he states his main point and sub-points early, which allows him to dedicate most of his time to explaining, illustrating, and applying them to his audience.

### **Strengths**

Keller's use of presuppositional apologetics in his preaching has many strengths. First, Keller's preaching methodology provides him with a tool for reinforcing the biblical worldview.<sup>62</sup> In his sermon "Made for Stewardship," he emphasizes the biblical understanding of work.<sup>63</sup> Speaking about the importance of this topic, Keller states, "It's an offly relevant subject, especially for people in this room, especially if you live and work in New York."<sup>64</sup> He discusses the reality of being overworked that many people in his audience face. According to Keller, people in New York spend most of their time working, forfeiting much of their social lives. They want to succeed in their particular discipline no matter the cost. Keller provides a reason for this mentality: "Probably the main villain is what we are going to talk about today. It's not technological. It's not sociological. It's emotional and spiritual and theological."<sup>65</sup> In setting up this sermon, Keller lays out a problem that almost everyone in his congregation deals with. He then declares that the

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<sup>62</sup>Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 2. Frame contends, "Believers themselves sometimes doubt, and at that point apologetics becomes useful for them even apart from its role in dialogue with unbelievers." Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Made for Stewardship," *Genesis: The Gospel According to God* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 22 October 2000) [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2011; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/sermons/index.cmf>; Internet.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

typical villains—technology and the new economy—have not caused the problem. The primary issue, according to Keller, lies in the human heart. He creates interest in the sermon by providing answers to challenges that most people would never have thought of before. He then presents what God commands everyone to do—work—and what they need to be able to accomplish it—rest. In talking about work, Keller shows how everyone, no matter what job they have, has a mission and a purpose. Each person’s mission and purpose comes from God’s calling on their life. God has redeemed all work. He got his hands dirty when he created the world, forming the universe and humans. While everyone has a calling to work, they also need rest to accomplish it. Keller shows his audience that only when they rest in Christ will they take time to rest in their earthly jobs. Only when they see that Christ has accomplished for them their greatest need—salvation—they will feel free to take time off to rest. In this sermon, Keller reinforces the biblical worldview by presenting a proper understanding of the balance between work and rest. He shows how God gives people a mission and a purpose and how Christ gives people the freedom to rest.

Second, Keller’s methodology enables him to teach his listeners how to engage the challenges brought against Christianity.<sup>66</sup> His sermon “Before the Beginning” provides an example of how he indirectly accomplishes this task.<sup>67</sup> He begins this sermon by reading a quote from Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Existentialism and Humanism*.<sup>68</sup> In this essay,

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<sup>66</sup>Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 2. Frame writes, “Paul describes his mission as ‘defending and confirming the gospel’ (Phil 1:7). Confirming may refer to number one above, but defending is more specifically focused on giving answers to objections.” Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Timothy J. Keller, “Before the Beginning,” *Bible: The Whole Story Creation and Fall* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 16 November 2008) [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2011; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/sermons/index.cmf>; Internet.

<sup>68</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1949).



Sartre defends the notion that if God exists, he can determine a person's purpose in life. He arrives at this conclusion by examining a paper knife. If the paper knife was created for a particular purpose, then it must be used for that purpose. In the same way, if God created people, then they must fulfill the purpose that God had for them.<sup>69</sup> According to Sartre, the absence of God means that everything is permitted and that people cannot tell anyone else what is right or wrong. Keller points out that after making this clear assertion concerning right and wrong, Sartre spent the rest of his life making such statements. Keller concludes, "It's not enough to just be brave and say 'if there is no God, then all things are permitted.' You've got to be consistent, and nobody is."<sup>70</sup> He shows people how to interact with those they face who claim the absence of moral absolutes. He shows them that these people cannot be consistent in their beliefs and that they all have something that they believe is right and something that they believe is wrong. He does not specifically say, "Here is how you interact with these types of people," but he shows how to deconstruct faulty worldviews by engaging with secularists like Sartre.

Third, by incorporating presuppositionalism into his sermons, Keller has the ability to expose the foolishness of unbelieving worldviews.<sup>71</sup> He attacks the non-Christian worldview in his sermon "Sexuality and Homosexuality."<sup>72</sup> His discussion on sex begins by expressing the widely held belief that sex and love are synonymous. After

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 2-3. Frame asserts, "God tells his people, not only to answer the objections of unbelievers, but also to go on the attack against falsehood. . . . Non-Christian thinking is foolishness according to Scripture (1 Cor 1:18-2:16; 3:18-23), and one function of apologetics is to expose that foolishness for what it is." Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Sexuality and Homosexuality," *Growth in Christ, Part 2* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 10 June 1990) [on-line]; accessed 16 November 2010; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/sermons/index.cmf>; Internet.

summarizing an AIDS prevention advertisement, which concluded with the statement “Love isn’t worth dying for,” Keller concludes, “When you just mush the two together, to say that any kind of sexual passion is love, you run into the ridiculous contradiction of saying that love is not worth dying for.”<sup>73</sup> What Keller wants to communicate is that sex is not worth dying for, but love is.

After exposing the falsehood that sex and love are synonymous, he presents the biblical view of sex. To do this, he contrasts it with two views of sex found in the ancient world. First, the Platonists believed that sex was bad and should therefore be avoided. Second, the mystery religions believed that sex was like any other desire and should be satiated and expressed. Keller notes that these two understandings of sex parallel the contemporary culture perfectly. This parallel provides him with a tool for deconstructing modern misunderstandings. Paul engages these views in 1 Corinthians 6-7. To deconstruct the first view, he shows how Paul views sex as a good thing, commanding people to abstain only for brief times within marriage. When Keller engages the mystery religions, he shows that a person’s sexual desires cannot be trusted as a guide for sexual expression. Just because a person has a desire does not mean that that desire is good or perfect or that it should be fulfilled. Paul communicates this when he tells the readers of the letter not to follow their desires when the desires lead them outside of God’s guidelines. Whether sex outside of marriage or homosexuality, a person’s desires frequently push him to act in a manner contrary to Scripture. The Bible says to harness sexual desires, putting to death the notion of unrestrained sexual expression. In this sermon, Keller engages both the prudish and pagan understandings of sexual expression. Contained in his deconstruction of these unbiblical views is a building up of the true biblical desires for sex.

Fourth, Keller, in his sermons, argues clearly. He patiently walks his congregation through the destabilization and restabilization of worldviews. He has the

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

ability to take complex concepts and communicate them in a manner that nearly anyone can comprehend. He communicates in this way because he has a deep understanding of opposing worldviews. When discussing the doctrine of election, Keller states,

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament say that if you believe, you believe because God has chosen you, and he came to you and opened your heart. . . . Jesus says to his disciples, in John 15:16, ‘You have not chosen me, I have chosen you.’ And in John 6:44, he says, ‘No one can come to me unless the father draws him.’ . . . The biblical teaching of election is this, if you believe it’s ultimately because God came to you and opened your heart by the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, if you had a hundred thousand opportunities to choose between God as savior and yourself as savior, you would always choose yourself.<sup>74</sup>

He takes this difficult doctrine and explains it in a very humble and authoritative way. He shows his congregation how the doctrine produces humility, community, and security.

Fifth, he anticipates questions and objections from his audience. Thinking through the questions and objections of his audience enables him to address many of these issues during his sermons. He uses these issues to create a hypothetical dialogue between a person with a secular worldview and himself. Keller’s formulation of the sermon around a dialogue forces him to deal with many difficult and obvious questions during his preaching. He cannot evade the questions present in the minds of his audience or the dialogue will seem forced and fake. Instead, by using dialogue he can hold the attention of his congregation because they know he will answer their questions. Engaging in a dialogue with his audience also allows him to walk them through the argument in his sermon. They feel that he understands their objections. This understanding gives Keller credibility with people who simply want to see what Christianity is all about.

Sixth, Keller treats opposing worldviews with respect. His use of presuppositional apologetics in preaching requires that he respect opposing worldviews. If he does not have this respect, then those who hold to these worldviews will not listen to

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<sup>74</sup>Timothy J. Keller, “Grace Therefore Holy,” *Deuteronomy: Doing Justice, Preaching Grace* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 10 June 2007) [on-line]; accessed 10 November 2007; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/sermons/index.cmf>; Internet.

what he has to say about their beliefs. By demonstrating an understanding and respect of an opposing worldview, Keller gains entrance into that particular worldview. He then can begin destabilizing it and pointing the person to Christ.

Finally, Keller uses every sermon as an opportunity to preach the gospel. He is convinced that a person can only be changed through repenting of his sin and placing his faith in the work of Christ. In every sermon, Keller discusses some aspect of the gospel and shows how it relates to the doctrine discussed in the sermon. When “restabilizing” a worldview, he points his congregation to the work of Christ on the cross. Keller believes that only the gospel answers the questions that arise.

### Questions

While Keller’s approach to preaching has several strengths, it also raises some important questions. Mainly methodological issues, these questions typically do not detract from his effectiveness. The following section discusses four of these questions.

First, can this approach to preaching be called expository preaching? If expository preaching is defined as verse-by-verse exposition of a book or text, then Keller’s approach cannot be called expositional.<sup>75</sup> He often begins with a theme or doctrine present in the text, allowing it to drive his sermon. If, however, expository preaching can be defined as being faithful to the text, then he does preach expositionally.<sup>76</sup> Keller may not walk through a book of the Bible verse-by-verse, but he does allow the

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<sup>75</sup>Greg Heisler includes the phrase “by means of a verse-by-verse exposition of the Spirit-inspired text.” According to Heisler’s definition, Keller’s approach to preaching would not be classified as exposition. Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit’s Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 21.

<sup>76</sup>Haddon Robinson defines expository preaching as follows: “The communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher applies to the hearers.” Keller’s preaching methodology would be considered expositional when examined in light of Robinson’s definition. Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 21.

passage to drive his sermon preparation and delivery. His topic or theme always comes from a particular text, which allows him to use the passage to assist him in restabilizing worldviews. He shows how the passage speaks to the topic and how it testifies to Christ.

Second, can this approach to preaching be replicated? God has given Keller a gift to be able to understand a worldview as well as or even better than those people who hold the worldview. This understanding enables him to communicate in a way that most people cannot. A majority of preachers do not have the time or perhaps the mental capacity to read, study, and comprehend opposing worldviews as Keller does. Preachers should, as much as possible, emulate Keller's approach to communicate biblical truth, but some may be unequipped to do so as effectively or thoroughly as Keller.

Third, can this approach work outside of New York City or a similar cosmopolitan urban setting? Keller preaches in a very specific context, dealing every week with a type of person that many preachers never have to face. Most preachers do not encounter the type of secular worldviews that Keller has represented in his audience. They do, however, encounter a postmodern mindset in many who fill their churches. Keller's specific approach will not work in every church across America, but his understanding of worldview change can be adapted to fit any context. Every preacher has people in his congregation who need to have their worldviews altered. In the southern states, the use of presuppositional apologetics in preaching might look quite different than it does in New York City. Despite these differences, it can still be used to achieve its particular goal.

Fourth, at times, does Keller drift too far from the text, focusing more on the issues in the sermon surrounding the passage than the passage itself. For example, in the sermon "God Incarnate 1," Keller does not explain where his points arise out of the text.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "God Incarnate 1," *To Know the Living God: The God Who Can Be Known* (sermon delivered at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, 12 December 2010) [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2011; available from <http://sermons.redeemer.com/sermons/index.cmf>; Internet.

The points he makes are true and can be defended, but he does not explain how the passage supports them.

While Keller's preaching does raise a few questions, it still has power and authority. This power comes from the unction present when he speaks.<sup>78</sup> He has a spirit about him that makes his audience want to listen, leading them to worship at the throne of Christ.

### **Conclusion**

Tim Keller incorporates presuppositional apologetics throughout his preaching. He constantly strives to engage and deconstruct secular worldviews, demonstrating how they fail to provide purpose and structure. His approach to preaching has several strengths: it reinforces the beliefs of Christians, it engages unbelievers, it uses a conversational style, and it focuses on the gospel. He has consistently and effectively applied his methodology for the past twenty years in New York City.

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<sup>78</sup>Lee Eclov defines unction when he writes, "Unction means the anointing of the Holy Spirit on a sermon so that something holy and powerful is added to the message that no preacher can generate, no matter how great his skills." Lee Eclov, "How Does Unction Function," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. Haddon Robinson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 81.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Tim Keller's preaching provides a good example of how a sermon can be structured to assist one's congregation in developing a biblical worldview. This dissertation looked at Keller's preaching methodology in order to gain a better understanding of how he constructs his sermons to make this development possible. It began by explaining the need for preaching that incorporates worldview issues. Next, the dissertation summarized and elucidated Keller's preaching methodology by discussing his three-part approach to sermon preparation and delivery. Third, the dissertation gave an overview of presuppositional apologetics, showing why this apologetic method is best suited for worldview preaching. Finally, it concluded with an examination of several of Keller's sermons, seeking to show how he has consistently applied his methodology over an extended period of time.

Americans have experienced a seismic shift in their culture over the past several decades that have had far-reaching implications. The rise of postmodernity brought with it the rejection of absolute truth, the assumption of the truthfulness of scientific naturalism, and the marginalization of the biblical worldview. As people began turning their backs on Christianity, which brought the first settlers to the new world, something had to fill their desire for worship. People started worshiping truth and using the scientific method to discover truth. Worshiping the scientific method ultimately failed, sending people spiraling into a philosophical system that had no place for absolute truth except in science. This rejection of absolute truth has impacted every area of American culture. Preachers have the challenge of proclaiming the truth of God's word in a culture that rejects all claims of truth, either outright or practically. For this reason, preachers need to

communicate the truth of God's word in such a way that assists their hearers to properly interpreting it.

Keller stands as an example of a preacher who has chosen to engage this shifting culture with the gospel. Pastoring a church in New York City, Keller stands on the frontlines of cultural engagement. He preaches weekly to a congregation filled with attendees who have embraced the secularism preached by the academy. In order to succeed at reaching these people, Keller incorporates worldview thinking into his preaching. His accurate and detailed presentation of the naturalistic worldview of his audience allows him to deconstruct their worldview, rebuilding it around Christ and the gospel. Under the leadership and preaching of Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church has grown from a weekly attendance of 500 to over 5,000. Keller's willingness to deal with the difficult questions his congregants are asking creates an excitement and joy among them. They, in turn, bring their lost friends to hear Keller, resulting in their worldview being challenged by the gospel. Keller has two goals in every sermon he preaches. First, he wants to lead others to worship God through having their affections stirred for Christ. Second, he wants to provoke a worldview change.

Keller accomplishes these two goals by beginning with the biblical text. He wants the Bible to drive everything he does in his sermons. His overarching theme, main points, and application of the gospel all have Scripture as their origin. Keller spends a great amount of time reading, interpreting, and summarizing the passage he wants to preach. When he arrives at an outline for his sermon, he then spends time examining how Christ and the gospel can be preached directly from the passage. For Keller, integrating the gospel into the body of the sermon—as opposed to adding it on at the end as an afterthought—is necessary. He believes that worship and worldview change can only take place if Christ is at the center of the sermon.

Second, Keller strives to apply the biblical principles gained from the text. He accomplishes this task through utilizing three types of application: critiquing religion and



irreligion, preaching to heart motives, and incorporating three application perspectives. In critiquing religion and irreligion, he presents both of these ways of living, showing how neither of them adequately fulfills the demands of the text. He then presents a third way of living—the gospel way. This third way of fulfilling the text points people away from the self-centered approaches of religion and irreligion and focuses on how the demands of the passage find their fulfillment in Christ. He shows his audience how these demands can be fulfilled only by trusting in Christ. Keller also applies the text by preaching to the heart motives of his audience. He includes a narrative structure in his sermon, which enables him to apply Christ directly to the hearts of his listeners. In this narrative structure, he presents the text, shows its demands, points out that the hearers cannot fulfill these demands, and then explains how Christ fulfills the demands. By structuring his sermon in this manner, Keller can stir the heart affections of his people for Christ. In this act of worship, sanctification takes place and worldviews change. Finally, he incorporates three application perspectives: the doctrinalist, the pietist, and the cultural transformationalist. He wants to include each of these perspectives in his preaching in order to have a balanced understanding of the passage’s implications for contemporary culture.

Third, Keller has an adoration aspect to his preaching. This aspect deals with two issues: the goal of leading people to worship and the personal worship of the preacher. Keller asserts that a preacher has at least one of the following subtexts that drive the motivation of his sermon: reinforcement, performance, training, and worship. He concludes that a preacher should have as his motivating factor the goal of leading people to worship. He leads people to worship through his preaching by addressing the sin beneath the sin and by making the truth real to people’s hearts. The adoration aspect also addresses the personal worship of the preacher. Keller knows that he can only lead people to worship if he has his own affections stirred for Christ on a daily basis. This daily time of personal worship consists of meditating on God’s Word. Keller spends time every day

reflecting on a particular passage, asking three questions: How does this passage lead me to adore God? How does the passage lead me to confess sin? How does the passage lead me to petition for grace? By asking these questions of the text, Keller has his own affections stirred for Christ, and then he is better prepared to lead his congregation to do the same. When he leads his people to worship, sanctification takes place immediately, and a person's worldview is challenged.

Keller's preaching engages worldviews by incorporating presuppositional apologetics into his audience. This apologetic approach focuses on the clash between two opposing worldviews. At its core, presuppositionalism addresses the problem of a person's final authority. What one holds as a final authority determines how one interprets the world. The Bible resides as a Christian's final authority, while scientific naturalism would be the final authority for someone who embraces Darwinism. The discussion of presuppositionalism contained within this dissertation focuses on three elements: epistemology, the point of contact, and the argument from the impossibility of the contrary.

The discussion of the relationship between presuppositional apologetics and epistemology centers on the source of all knowledge. The presuppositionalist contends that a person only obtains knowledge that is analogical to God's perfect knowledge. In other words, man thinks God's thoughts after him. The reality that man's true knowledge can be derived only from God's perfect knowledge means that God resides as the final authority over truth and knowledge for the believer. This relationship has significant implications for apologetics. Since the believer and non-believer have differing final authorities, no epistemologically neutral ground exists between them. For this reason, a point of contact must be established.

The lack of an epistemologically neutral ground between the believer and non-believer necessitates the existence of a point of contact. A person who subscribes to a presuppositional methodology holds that the image of God serves as the point of contact needed for the apologetic encounter to take place. Saying that a person is created in God's

image means that every person has within them the *divinitatus sensum*. The apologist can call upon this sense of the divine present in any non-believer. The non-believer can have this innate knowledge of God without even knowing that he has it. He has deceived himself into believing that God does not exist, freeing him to act and think based on his own autonomous authority. This knowledge of God enables the believer and non-believer to have a conversation because the non-believer ultimately acts and thinks according to the knowledge of God that resides within him. The apologist has the task of pointing out this inconsistency present in the non-believer's worldview.

By utilizing the argument from the impossibility of the contrary, the presuppositional apologist can deconstruct an opposing worldview. In this form of argumentation, the apologist temporarily adopts the worldview of the unbeliever with the specific goal of reducing it to an absurdity. He goes about this task by pointing out its inconsistencies and self-contradictions. The apologist shows the non-believer how he cannot live life and hold to his professed worldview consistently. At some point, he will set aside this worldview in order to function successfully within society. The apologist next encourages the non-believer to examine the biblical worldview. He explains that the biblical worldview exists as the only truly consistent worldview. If the non-believer attempts to suggest that inconsistencies exist within the Christian worldview, the apologist then explains that these apparent inconsistencies exist as a result of sin. The goal of this encounter should be to bring the unbeliever to a point where the apologist can call him to repent and believe in the gospel. The unbeliever needs to see that he cannot consistently hold to his present worldview, that the Christian worldview is the only consistent worldview, and that he cannot hold to the Christian worldview on his own. What is more, the apologist must clarify that only through repenting of one's sin and placing one's faith in Christ, can a person have a truly consistent worldview.

Keller frequently includes some form of the argument from the impossibility of the contrary in his preaching. He begins by accurately presenting the opposing worldview

in such a way that he gains the respect and attention of those who hold to the worldview in question. After gaining the respect and attention of his audience, he then begins to deconstruct the worldview. He shows precisely how the worldview is inconsistent. Finally, he rebuilds the worldview, centering it on Christ and the gospel. The narrative framework contained in many of Keller's sermons provides him with the perfect tool for engaging in this form of argumentation. In his narrative framework, he attempts to arrive at a point of turmoil or despair in the sermon. He then shows how the Christian worldview provides a consistent and helpful solution to the problem.

This dissertation has analyzed three sermon series in order to determine how Keller practically applies his methodology. First, it looked at his series "The Trouble with Christianity." This sermon series provides a good example of how he directly engages with the naturalist worldview ingrained in much of the culture of New York City. Keller takes several common questions posed by opponents of Christianity and answers them from Scripture. He shows the inconsistencies and self-contradictions present in the assumptions of his opponent's worldviews, juxtaposing these false assumptions with the consistency of the Christian worldview. In each of these sermons, he incorporates quotations and arguments of those who hold to these opposing positions. He does not engage in a significant amount of theoretical argumentation; instead, he chooses to engage the works of those who hold the positions. This direct engagement gives Keller credibility with his audience.

Next, the dissertation examined a series Keller preached on the book of Acts. This section demonstrates how he applied his methodology early in his ministry at Redeemer. Even in the early years of Redeemer, he had already begun to interact with the culture on a worldview level. In this series, Keller showed his audience what caused the early church to experience explosive growth in the first century and how the principles gained from that explosion could impact their ministry in New York City. Throughout this series, he encouraged his audience to use their biblical worldview to engage the

surrounding culture. He wanted his people to influence their friends and co-workers with the gospel. Even in those early years, Keller demonstrated a clear grasp of the culture present in New York City, engaging and deconstructing it at every turn. His ability to grasp the culture in this way enabled him to apply his methodology consistently and effectively in his sermons.

Finally, this dissertation summarized Keller's sermon series on the book of Deuteronomy. Again, he consistently applied his methodology, frequently critiquing religion and irreligion as well as engaging in the argument from the impossibility of the contrary. In this series, he addresses several difficult topics, including the role of the law in the Christian life and the doctrine of election. He presents, in each of these instances, the opposing view, showing why it fails to provide satisfactory answers to pressing questions. The series displays how Keller's preaching style changed over the course of a decade. The sermons in this series have a more polished delivery and structure when compared to the sermons from the Acts series. He connects points more tightly and uses a more solid framework in the latter sermons. The sermons in the Deuteronomy are also easier to follow. He states his main point early in the sermons and provides an brief preview of his message.

### **Suggestions for Further Study**

While this dissertation covers a wide range of issues, it leaves room for further research. First, it would be helpful to have a better understanding of what caused the rejection of the biblical worldview in the Northeast. Someone could examine in detail what role the church played or did not play in this decline. The study could also include a further investigation of how the movement towards liberalism in major universities present in the Northeast impacted this cultural shift. This study could provide helpful insights on how to avoid allowing this type of cultural shift to occur again.

Second, a person could examine how scholars such as Edmund Clowney and John Frame have influenced Keller's preaching methodology. This dissertation briefly

remarked on each of these individuals, pointing out their contribution to the topic at hand. It did not, however, delve deeply into the relationship between the three. This area of study could serve the purpose of further understanding how Keller arrived at his particular methodology and how others can learn from it.

Third, an examination of how other preaching methods could incorporate presuppositional apologetics would be beneficial to the preaching community. A study of this kind could move beyond Keller's preaching method and see how other approaches to preaching could adopt the focus on worldview issues present in Keller's preaching. It could explain various other frameworks and then attempt to input presuppositionalism into them. It could examine methodologies such as the traditional verse-by-verse approach, narrative preaching, or topical preaching. Further, this study could discover whether Keller's particular methodology is adaptable to other cultures.

Finally, a more in-depth analysis of how Keller's preaching has changed over the past twenty years would prove beneficial. It would serve the purpose of helping others understand how a preacher can change his preaching style. It also could reveal important issues to be mindful of when trying to change one's preaching style. If American culture continues to change along its present trajectory, preachers will face a much different world than they do today. To engage this new world properly, preachers need to begin rethinking how they communicate the truths of Scripture. Examining Tim Keller's preaching can assist in this important process because he is already engaging this new America.

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## ABSTRACT

### PREACHING TO PROVOKE A WORLDVIEW CHANGE: TIM KELLER'S USE OF PRESUPPOSITIONAL APPOLOGETICS IN PREACHING

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This dissertation examines the preaching methodology of Tim Keller. It argues that a decline has taken place in the biblical worldview in America and that preachers need to rethink how they communicate the gospel to their congregations. It contains four primary chapters that defend this argument. In Chapter 2, "Decline and Marginalization of the Biblical Worldview," sets forth the argument for the decline of Christianity in America. It examines several statistical studies and articles, which point to the reality of this decline. It also sets forth scientific naturalism as the religion that has replaced Christianity as the driving worldview in America.

Chapter 3 presents the preaching methodology of Tim Keller. Keller preaches in such a way that he engages the secular, naturalistic worldview common in America. This chapter explains Keller's basic sermon structure, and the several elements of his preaching. It builds the framework within which Keller can then do worldview deconstruction. The chapter also shows how Keller seeks to lead people to worship God through stirring their affections for Christ.

After building this framework, the dissertation then shows how Keller utilizes presuppositional apologetics in preaching to attack unbelieving worldviews. Chapter 4 provides a brief overview of presuppositional apologetics, and then explains how Keller incorporates it in his preaching.

Chapter 5 summarizes and critiques several sermons preached by Keller. This chapter examines several strengths and weaknesses of his approach, encouraging preachers to apply his principles to their own preaching ministries.

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