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WORLDVIEW PREACHING IN THE CHURCH:  
THE PREACHING MINISTRIES OF J. GRESHAM MACHEN  
AND TIMOTHY J. KELLER

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Michael Raymond Galdamez

December 2012

**APPROVAL SHEET**

**WORLDVIEW PREACHING IN THE CHURCH:  
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## PREFACE

The experience of writing a dissertation often feels like an exercise in futility—like being told to climb a Himalayan mountain on one’s knees, all alone. At least that is how I often felt. There were days in this long process that I wanted to throw up my hands and yell, “I quit!” Well, I’m glad I didn’t. One of the biggest reasons I persevered was the constant love, prayers, and encouragement I received from family and friends. God has been tremendously gracious in surrounding me with some amazing people. There are far too many to name here, but I would be remiss not to name the following.

Let me begin with many of my former parishioners at Zion Baptist Church in Covington, Georgia. These dear saints truly know how to love and support a pastor. It is striking that although I was called by Christ to invest in these dear sheep, as my brothers and sisters they seemed more often to invest in me, their shepherd. Along with their continual prayer support, they were resolute cheerleaders always encouraging and pushing me toward the summit of completing this dissertation. One of these saints I must mention by name is Larry Lemonds. This great brother, to this very day, sends me texts filled with words of love and encouragement. I do not think he has missed a day of prayer for me—by this I am truly humbled.

My parents have always amazed me. My dad, John Galdamez, is one of the most brilliant men I know and inspires me to live life to the fullest. My mom, Sue Galdamez, seems at times to be above all others in her ability to care for and serve those

around her. Their combined input into my life from day one until today is without equal. They have supported me in every way, and they surely are my biggest fans. My mom's care and concern has been like a goose-down pillow for the weary head, while my dad's wise counsel has been a granite stone for feet sinking in sand.

Along with my parents, my wife's parents, George and Anita Brower, have been a constant source of encouragement and love. These life-long missionaries to Latin America have been a model of faith and prayer. Their prayers have continually gone up for me as I pursued this degree. They always believed God would see me through. It saddens me that my father-in-law died before he saw the completion of my degree, but I am confident he rejoices with us from heaven.

And finally without the support of these last four I would surely have long ago thrown up my hands in despair and ceased my writing. My wife and our three children can never be thanked enough. They have been resilient troopers, lovingly supporting me through over a decade of study in my M.Div. and Ph.D. Our boys, Michael and Hudson, are by God's grace becoming young men who walk in the fear of the Lord. Their numerous prayers for the completion of this dissertation have taught me about perseverance in prayer. Our four-year-old daughter, Hannah Kate, came along as I was finishing my Ph.D. coursework and about to begin my dissertation. She has been an infusion of God's joy into my heart. And without my wife, Amy, where would I be? She has been with me through some glorious peaks and some dark valleys. Whenever it got dark, she seemed to hold God's light of reason and hope before me. She never gave up believing God for all of this; when my faith began to miserably fail she held on for the two of us.

Although I felt at times all alone on this journey, God has been faithful to place these and other important people in my life—for this I am truly grateful. God’s grace has been demonstrated in so many ways and through so many people.

I offer this dissertation to those who cherish the gospel and its proclamation. For all who love to preach the gospel, may Machen’s and Keller’s wisdom and example lead toward greater clarity of the gospel in their own proclamation to the church and the world. My own life and preaching have been affected by these two men. I have learned the importance of a gospel-centered worldview and the joy that springs from it. The joy, hope, and thankfulness of knowing Christ and his work is well expressed in the final recorded words of Machen and with these words I concur: “So thankful for the active [and passive] obedience of Christ, no hope without it.”

Michael R. Galdamez

Louisville, Kentucky

December 2012

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO WORLDVIEW PREACHING

“[W]ithout the painstaking work of establishing a changed worldview, their commitment to Christianity will be only as deep as their commitment to any other helpful ‘product’.”<sup>1</sup> This emphasis upon worldviews comes from pastor and author Timothy J. Keller, as he calls for a stronger focus on worldviews, especially within the preaching ministry of the church.

The importance of preaching in the life of the church can hardly be overstated. Preaching has a rich biblical and historical priority within Christianity and the Church. The New Testament hails preaching as the magnificent instrument used to carry God’s salvific message (e.g., Mark 13:10; 1 Cor. 1:21; Rom. 10:14-17). Church history also provides ample examples of the priority of preaching. The Reformation tradition places the preaching of the gospel as the first mark of the true Church.<sup>2</sup> This tradition continues to hold sway among many evangelical theologians and preachers. R. Albert Mohler, Jr. explains this primacy of preaching:

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<sup>1</sup>Timothy Keller, “Preaching Morality in an Amoral Age,” in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 167.

<sup>2</sup>Both Martin Luther and John Calvin believed the first mark of the church to be the preaching/teaching of the gospel/Word. The first Protestant statement of faith, *The Augsburg Confession*, defined the church as “the congregation of saints [the assembly of all believers], in which the Gospel is rightly taught [purely preached] and the Sacraments rightly administered.” “The Augsburg Confession,” in *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, rev. David S. Schaff (New York: Harper and Row, 1931), 3:11-12. *The Belgic Confession* also places the preaching of the gospel as the first mark of the Church. See “The Belgic Confession,” in *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3:419-20.

A theology of preaching begins with the humble acknowledgment that preaching is not a human invention but a gracious creation of God and a central part of his revealed will for the church. Furthermore, preaching is distinctively Christian in its origin and practice. Other religions may include teaching, or even public speech and calls to prayer. However, the preaching act is *sui generis*, a function of the church established by Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>

The preaching event is primary because of its ability to gather believers into Christ and bind them together in unity. The message heralded is the power of God that brings believers together and keeps them being built together (1 Cor. 1:20-24). The local church hears and believes the gospel together as one body.

This dissertation does not focus on preaching in general or seek to defend the importance of preaching. Instead, the focus is upon the place of worldview in the preaching ministry of the church. This dissertation is also not a study on worldview preaching in general, but is a study on the worldview preaching of two evangelical preachers, J. Gresham Machen and Timothy J. Keller. The study is intended to examine certain elements in these preachers' sermons that relate to the concept of worldview preaching.

The worldview concept comes from the field of philosophy and is an attempt to organize all of one's beliefs in a comprehensive philosophical scheme.<sup>4</sup> This concept has been defined in various ways. However, the foundational definition used for this dissertation comes from James Sire:

A worldview is 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,

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<sup>3</sup>R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "A Theology of Preaching," in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duda (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 13.

<sup>4</sup>James Sire in his survey of the history of the worldview concept, declares Wilhelm Dilthey to be the first to expound his own philosophy in terms of the worldview concept. James Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 24-25.

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.<sup>5</sup>

Sire's definition is explained in more detail later in this chapter, but for now a worldview is understood to be the basic faith commitment in a person's life which affects all areas of life.

In recent years the subject of worldviews has been emphasized as a valuable concept for Christianity and the Church.<sup>6</sup> James Olthuis explains the importance of worldviews for communities:

Although a vision of life is held only by individuals, it is communal in scope and structure. Since a worldview gives the terms of reference by which the world and our place in it can be structured and illumined, a worldview binds its adherents together into community. Allegiance to a common vision promotes the integration of individuals into a group.<sup>7</sup>

Olthuis's comment helps to show the importance of worldviews to the corporate life of the church. As individuals in a local church come to share the same worldview they find unity in it. Although a church's worldview is shaped by numerous factors, the sermon provides one chief means of instructing and shaping it due to the sermon's ability to reach the largest segment of the church. As the church hears the same message together they have the opportunity to embrace it at the same time and place.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 122. This definition also appears in James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 20.

<sup>6</sup>One recent book that has traced the history of the worldview concept is David Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>7</sup>James H. Olthuis, "On Worldviews," in *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Sciences*, ed. Paul A. Marshall, Sander Griffioen, and Richard Mouw (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 20.

## Statement of Research Problem

This dissertation provides a study on the connection between the worldview concept and homiletics by means of a critical study of two preachers in their use of worldviews. J. Gresham Machen and Timothy J. Keller have been chosen as examples of worldview preaching due to their notoriety as defenders of orthodox Christianity in the face of antagonistic worldviews. Their combined apologetic ministry spans from the early twentieth century into the twenty-first. Machen has been identified as the greatest defender of the faith during the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in the early part of the twentieth century. In the words of Ned Stonehouse, Machen's New Testament assistant, "For well over a decade before his untimely death on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1937, J. Gresham Machen was recognized by many as the most valiant and eloquent spokesman for orthodox Christianity in America, if not in the entire world."<sup>8</sup> Dr. R. A. Meek, a prominent Southern Methodist, adds to Machen's accolades by declaring Machen, "the finest Protestant minister in the nation" and "the ablest exponent and defender of evangelical Christianity."<sup>9</sup> These and many other praises have been lavished upon this warrior of the historic Christian faith.

Keller too has been recognized as a leading apologist for orthodox Christianity. His active engagement with a secular pluralistic culture has led to his being labeled "a C. S. Lewis for the 21<sup>st</sup> century."<sup>10</sup> Keller's ability to speak to a pluralistic western society

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<sup>8</sup>Ned B. Stonehouse, "Introduction," in *God Transcendent: And Other Sermons*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 7.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Lisa Miller, "The Smart Shepherd," *Newsweek* (February 9, 2008) [on-line]; accessed 5 February 2009; available from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2008/02/the-smart-shepherd.html>; Internet.

through his preaching, and also more recently through his writings, has drawn much attraction from both Christians and non-Christians.<sup>11</sup> As chapters three and four of this dissertation seek to prove, both of these men's writings and preaching demonstrate a commitment to present Christianity as a coherent worldview in light of competing worldviews. Further insight into these two men's lives and ministries is presented in chapter 2.

This study is useful because there is a lack of scholarly study on preachers who model elements of worldview preaching. Along with this lack of research there is the need for an emphasis on the biblical worldview in the church. This section summarizes both the lack of research and the worldview problem in the evangelical church.

### **The Lack of Research**

This dissertation helps satisfy two areas that are lacking in research. First, no major academic study has provided a critical analysis of preachers with regard to their use of the worldview concept. A search of ProQuest, First Search, and MetaLib reveals no dissertations on this subject. Also a search of this topic on ATLA Religion Database reveals only seven results.<sup>12</sup> Only one of the seven provides a critical study of a

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<sup>11</sup>This great attraction to Keller's ministry is documented in chap. 2.

<sup>12</sup>Ronald J. Allen, "As the Worldviews Turn: Six Key Issues for Preaching in a Postmodern Ethos," *Encounter* 57 (1996): 23-35. William D. Apel, "Lost World of Billy Graham," *Review of Religious Research* 20 (1979): 138-49. A. James McAdams, "Preaching Peace in East Germany," *Worldview* 25 (1982):15-16. Charles Edward Van Engen, Nancy Thomas, and Robert Gallagher, *Footprints of God: A Narrative Theology of Mission* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1999). Mark W. Wilson, *Spirit and Renewal: Essays in Honor of J. Rodman Williams* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994). David C. Leege and Lyman A. Kellstedt, *Rediscovering the Religious Factor in American Politics* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993). Paul E. Robertson, "The Sermon on the Mount," *Theological Educator: A Journal of Theology and Ministry* 46 (1992): 83-132.

preacher.<sup>13</sup> A further search produced eight works on the subject of preaching and worldviews. Although there may be other studies that are related to the topic of worldviews, no major academic work appears to research the worldview concept as it directly affects an individual minister's preaching ministry.

Second, no dissertations have been written concerning the preaching ministries of either Machen or Keller. First Search does show sixteen dissertations dealing with Machen, but none focusing on his preaching or speaking ministry. No dissertations at all were found dealing with Keller. A further search of ATLA Religion Database for articles, books, and reviews reveals no study that combines Machen and Keller. A search of Machen on ATLA provided one hundred and eight hits, but none of the subjects dealt with his preaching. ATLA did, however, produce forty-five hits on a search for Keller. Of these forty-five resources, only three provide an evaluation of his preaching.<sup>14</sup> These three articles share insights into his preaching but none deal primarily with his use of the worldview concept.

In summary, the search for extensive scholarly discussion on this subject reveals a lack of materials. Furthermore, no critical research has been done on the preaching ministries of Machen and Keller, particularly in regard to their use of the

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<sup>13</sup>This study is an article by William D. Apel entitled "Lost World of Billy Graham." Although Apel's study analyzes a preacher, his article does not interact with the worldview as a philosophical concept. This study is also not a major academic work, but a brief ten-page article examining "the theology implicit within Billy Graham's understanding of the world." Apel, "Lost World of Billy Graham," 138.

<sup>14</sup>ATLA does reveal ten articles which list "preaching" as a subject of the article. Seven of these articles are written by Keller regarding his perspective on preaching. The other three articles are written by others providing commentary on and evaluation of Keller's preaching. Tim Stafford, "How Tim Keller found Manhattan," *Christianity Today*, 5 June 2009, 20-26. Ruth Graham, "Redeemer Presbyterian Church: New York, New York," *Perspectives* 24 (2009): 20-21. Jason B. Hood, "Christ-Centered Interpretation Only?" *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 27 (2009): 50-69.

worldview concept.

### **The Worldview Problem**

Christian philosopher Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) began the call in the late nineteenth century to understand Christianity as a comprehensive world and life system. David Naugle states that Kuyper was calling for Christianity to present itself to the world not in a piecemeal approach but in a “comprehensive Christian *Weltanschauung*.”<sup>15</sup> Kuyper, believing that a worldview ought to have a central reference point, centered his worldview on Calvinism.<sup>16</sup>

Many leading reformed Christian philosophers have followed Kuyper in his attempt to present Christianity as a worldview. This focus on worldviews has been carried on by such men as Gordon Clark, Carl Henry, Herman Dooyeweerd, and Francis Schaeffer.<sup>17</sup> Voices at the close of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first continue to sound much like Kuyper. Ronald Nash states, “Instead of thinking of Christianity as a collection of theological bits and pieces to be believed or debated, we should approach our faith as a conceptual system, as a total world-and-life view.”<sup>18</sup>

In spite of this emphasis on understanding Christianity as a worldview, there appears to be a lack of a biblical worldview among many self-professing evangelicals. The Barna Group recently stated that only 19 percent of American evangelicals hold a

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<sup>15</sup>Naugle, *Worldview*, 19.

<sup>16</sup>Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism: Six Lectures Delivered at Princeton University under Auspices of the L. P. Stone Foundation* (1931; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 12.

<sup>17</sup>Naugle, *Worldview*, 6.

<sup>18</sup>Ronald Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 19.

biblical worldview.<sup>19</sup> Barna's study consisted of four nation-wide telephone surveys among just over one thousand adults randomly selected from all forty-eight continental states, during the years 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2008.<sup>20</sup> The declared basis for a person to possess a biblical worldview was a commitment to six biblical propositions: moral truth exists, the Scriptures are completely accurate, Satan is a real being, a person cannot earn heaven based on good works, Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth, and God is the creator of the world and still rules the universe today.<sup>21</sup> Applying these six requirements, Barna demonstrated that only 19 percent of self-professing "born again Christians" hold to a biblical worldview. This finding means that 81 percent of professing "born again" (i.e., evangelical) Christians do not hold a biblical worldview.<sup>22</sup>

A further concern of Barna is that the younger generation has all but lost a biblical worldview. In 2009, the research data reported that less than one-half of 1 percent of adults in the Mosaic generation (i.e., those aged eighteen to twenty-three) had

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<sup>19</sup>Barna Group, "Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview among Christians over the Past 13 Years," The Barna Group, March 6, 2009 [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2009; available from <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/21-transformation/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years>; Internet.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>This research by Barna has been accepted and used by a number of other research groups. See the following articles: Michael Foust, "Barna: Biblical Worldview Held by Only 4% of Adults" *Baptist Press* (December 2, 2003) [on-line]; accessed 15 February 2012; available from <http://www.bpnews.net/BDFirstPerson.asp?ID=17194>; Internet; Michael Foust, "Only Half of Nation's Senior Pastors Hold Biblical Worldview," *Baptist Press* (January 14, 2004) [on-line]; accessed 15 February 2012; available from <http://www.bpnews.net/printerfriendly.asp?ID=17435>; Internet; Del Tackett, "Why Is a Christian Worldview Important?," Focus on the Family [on-line]; accessed 15 February 2012; available from [http://focusonthefamily.com/faith/Christian\\_worldview/why\\_is\\_a\\_Christian\\_worldview\\_important.asp?](http://focusonthefamily.com/faith/Christian_worldview/why_is_a_Christian_worldview_important.asp?); Internet. Other researchers such as Ed Stetzer, Britt Beemer, and Thom Rainer have also commented on and confirmed Barna's research.

a biblical worldview.<sup>23</sup> Barna suggests that with this current trend “the future Christian church is likely to be one that has even less of a connection to biblical principles than is evident today.”<sup>24</sup>

Along with Barna’s research, other studies have shown a negative trend among protestant and evangelical young people. The *2002 Report of the Southern Baptist Council on Family Life* reported that 88 percent of the children in evangelical homes leave church sometime after they graduate from high school.<sup>25</sup> The research not only documents young people’s exodus from the church, but also reveals their failure to embrace biblical truth.

In 2006, Christian Smith and his research team at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill conducted the largest study ever done on teen religion.<sup>26</sup> Smith explains the theological problem with teenagers: “It’s unbelievable the proportion of conservative Protestant teens who do not seem to grasp elementary concepts of the gospel concerning grace and justification.”<sup>27</sup> This loss of the concept of the gospel is a loss of the very heart of the Christian worldview. Smith further points out where the source of

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<sup>23</sup>Barna Group, “Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview among Christians over the Past 13 Years.”

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Jon Walker, “Family Life Council says it’s time to bring family back to life,” The Southern Baptist Convention (June 12, 2002) [on-line]; accessed 28 February 2012; available from <http://www.sbcannualmeeting.net>; Internet. This drop-out rate of evangelical young people has been documented in the books: Thom Rainer and Sam Rainer, *Essential Church?: Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville: B&H, 2008). Ken Hamm and Britt Beemer, *Already Gone: Why Your Kids will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop it* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009).

<sup>26</sup>Christian Smith is currently the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at the University of Notre Dame.

<sup>27</sup>Michael Cromartie, “What American Teenagers Believe: A Conversation with Christian Smith,” *Books & Culture* 11 (January-February 2005): 10.

the problem lies with these teens, “Interviewing teens one finds little evidence that the agents of religious socialization [e.g., parents, pastors, and teachers] in this country are being highly effective and successful with the majority of their young people.”<sup>28</sup>

Barna also places much of the blame on pastors for the lack of a Christian worldview in Protestant churches. A Barna study conducted in 2003 reports that only 51 percent of Protestant pastors possess a biblical worldview.<sup>29</sup> Barna explains this worldview problem,

The most important point is that you can’t give people what you don’t have. The low percentage of Christians who have a biblical worldview is a direct reflection of the fact that half of our primary religious teachers and leaders do not have one. In some denominations, the vast majority of clergy do not have a biblical worldview, and it shows up clearly in the data related to the theological views and moral choices of people who attend those churches.<sup>30</sup>

Barna’s research also reveals that some denominations have a greater percentage of pastors who possess a biblical worldview than other denominations. For example, a comparison of pastors in the two largest Protestant denominations, the Southern Baptist Convention and the United Methodist Church, reveals an enormous difference in worldviews. The Southern Baptist Convention had the highest percentage of pastors with a biblical worldview (71 percent), while the United Methodists had the lowest percentage (27 percent).

Barna further explains that even though a church has a pastor with a biblical

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<sup>28</sup>Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University, 2006), 27.

<sup>29</sup>This study is based on telephone interviews with 601 Senior Pastors nationwide. Barna Group, “Only Half of Protestant Pastors Have a Biblical Worldview,” The Barna Group (January 12, 2004) [on-line]; accessed 15 December 2009; available from <http://www.barna.org>; Internet.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

worldview, the church may not share his commitments. Concerning churches with pastors who have a biblical worldview, Barna states,

The research also points out that even in churches where the pastor has a biblical worldview, most of the congregants do not. More than six out of every seven congregants in the typical church do not share the biblical worldview of their pastor even when he or she has one . . . Our research among people who have a biblical worldview shows that it is a long-term process that requires a lot of purposeful activity: teaching, prayer, conversation, accountability, and so forth. Based on our correlations of worldview and moral behavior, we can confidently argue that if the 51% of pastors who have a biblical worldview were to strategically and relentlessly assist their congregants in adopting such a way of interpreting and responding to life, the impact on our churches, families and society at-large would be enormous.<sup>31</sup>

How can pastors “strategically and relentlessly assist their congregants” to embrace a biblical worldview? The first activity that Barna lists is teaching.<sup>32</sup>

Accordingly, the Sunday morning sermon provides one of the greatest opportunities to effect change in the life of the congregation.

A study conducted by Thom Rainer reveals that even within a more conservative denomination like the Southern Baptist Convention, with the highest percentage of pastors with a biblical worldview, a large segment of the membership lacks a biblical worldview. Rainer reports that nearly one-half of Southern Baptist Church members may not be Christians.<sup>33</sup> This study consisted of asking church members two “diagnostic” questions: “If you were to die today, do you know for certain that you would

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Along with Barna and Christian Smith, other cultural commentators are calling for greater doctrinal teaching in the American evangelical church. Michael Horton commenting on Christian Smith’s study writes, “Whatever churches say they believe, the incoherent answers offered by those entrusted to their ministry substantiate my argument that a moralistic religion of self-salvation is our default setting as fallen creatures. If we are not explicitly and regularly taught out of it, we will always turn the message of God’s rescue operation into a message of self-help.” Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 42.

<sup>33</sup>Thom S. Rainer, “A Resurgence Not Yet Realized: Evangelistic Effectiveness in the Southern Baptist Convention Since 1979,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9 (2005): 63.

go to heaven?” and “If God were to ask you why he should let you into heaven what would you say?”<sup>34</sup> In response to these two questions Rainer categorized these members into three groups: “Church members who are *not* Christians” (31 percent), “Church members who *may not* be Christians” (14 percent), and “Church members who *are* Christians” (55 percent).<sup>35</sup> In light of his findings Rainer writes, “If our research approximates eternal realities, nearly one-half of all church members may not be Christians.”<sup>36</sup> Through this study Rainer explains that many church members have a works based view of salvation.<sup>37</sup> These findings reveal that many Southern Baptist church members do not adhere to Barna’s fourth principle for a Christian worldview: “a person cannot earn heaven based on good works.”<sup>38</sup>

Such findings confirm Timothy Keller’s declaration that establishing a worldview in the church is “painstaking work.”<sup>39</sup> Machen and Keller provide two examples of preachers who have entered into this work. This dissertation provides a

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Another Southern Baptist Convention study also highlights this view of works salvation among its membership. In May 2007 the Kentucky Baptist Convention and LifeWay Research conducted a formal study of the spiritual maturity of Southern Baptists in Kentucky. In this study less than half of Kentucky Southern Baptists disagreed with the statement: “If a person is sincerely seeking God, he/she can obtain eternal life through religions other than Christianity.” Fifty-five percent of these Southern Baptists did not respond negatively toward this statement and therefore leave the possibility of salvation outside of explicit faith in Christ. Even 18 percent of these Baptists affirmed that they were trusting in their own works for salvation. Kentucky Baptist Convention, “Spiritual Maturity Among Southern Baptists in Kentucky: A LifeWay Research Report Commissioned by the Kentucky Baptist Convention,” Kentucky Baptist Convention [on-line]; accessed 16 April 2012; available from <http://www.kybaptist.org>; Internet.

<sup>38</sup>Barna Group, “Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview among Christians over the Past 13 Years.”

<sup>39</sup>Keller, “Preaching Morality in an Amoral Age,” 167.

critical study of their preaching in regard to equipping the church with a biblical worldview.

### **Defining “Worldview”**

The term “worldview” is a translation of the German *Weltanschauung*, first used by German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).<sup>40</sup> But not until Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) was the term used to expound one’s philosophy. From the time of Dilthey many philosophers and even theologians began to think in terms of worldviews. Within Christianity the concept caught on especially with reformed theologians and philosophers. Scottish Presbyterian theologian James Orr (1844-1913) became the first to introduce the subject of worldviews into Christian theology. In his 1890-1891 Kerr Lectures at the United Presbyterian College in Edinburgh, Orr explained the need for Christian theology to use the worldview concept: “It is the Christian view of things in general which is attacked, and it is by an exposition and vindication of the Christian view of things as a whole that the attack can be met.”<sup>41</sup> A contemporary of Orr, Abraham Kuyper, extended Orr’s approach by presenting “Calvinistic Christianity as a comprehensive worldview.”<sup>42</sup>

Although the term is relatively recent in human history, the concept is not new.

Worldview thinker David Naugle highlights its use throughout history:

Though the word ‘worldview’ is of relatively recent origin, such a grand, systematic vision of the faith is not. It has a distinguished genealogy, going all the way back, of course, to the Bible itself with its doctrine of a Trinitarian God who is

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<sup>40</sup>Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 23.

<sup>41</sup>James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 4.

<sup>42</sup>Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 33.

the creator and redeemer of heaven and earth and whose sovereignty rules over all. It was developed by many of the Church Fathers and medieval theologians-philosophers, Augustine and Aquinas in particular. It was deepened in biblical ways by the reformers Luther and Calvin, and by their successors among the English and American Puritans. Out of the stream of the Reformation tradition, this expansive interpretation of Christianity has reached the North American evangelical community, where it has been conceived as a worldview, and as such has had a notable impact.<sup>43</sup>

Due to a significant amount of attention from Christian theologians and philosophers, the concept of worldview has received a number of definitions. Orr defined a worldview as “the widest view which the mind can take of things in an effort to grasp them together as a whole from the standpoint of some particular philosophy or theology.”<sup>44</sup> James Olthuis defines it as “a framework or set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our calling and future in it.”<sup>45</sup> Ronald Nash defines it as “a set of beliefs about the most important issues in life. . . . [It] is a conceptual scheme by which we consciously or unconsciously place or fit everything we believe and by which we interpret and judge reality.”<sup>46</sup> These definitions as well as many others have the common feature of stressing the fundamental beliefs of individuals that are used as a framework to view all of reality.

In 2004, James Sire published his book *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*. His interaction with other worldview thinkers and their worldview definitions led Sire to redefine worldview as

. . . a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a

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<sup>43</sup>Naugle, *Worldview*, 5.

<sup>44</sup>Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World*, 3.

<sup>45</sup>Olthuis, “On Worldviews,” 29.

<sup>46</sup>Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict*, 16.

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.<sup>47</sup>

This revised definition, first articulated in *Naming the Elephant* and now appearing in the fourth and fifth editions of *The Universe Next Door*, functions within this dissertation as a paradigm for articulating Machen's and Keller's worldviews and as an evaluative tool for their worldview preaching. The choice of Sire's definition is based on two key factors. First, Sire and his books, particularly *The Universe Next Door*, have had a notable impact upon later twentieth and early twenty-first century evangelicals engaged in worldview thinking. *The Universe Next Door*, since its first edition in 1976, has sold over a quarter million copies, has been translated into over a dozen languages, and has been used as a text in over one hundred colleges and universities. InterVarsity Press declares it to be "the standard for a clear, readable introduction to worldviews."<sup>48</sup> Sire's book has been commented on and referred to by other leading evangelical worldview scholars.<sup>49</sup> Second, Sire's definition has developed through his own interaction with the thoughts of key worldview thinkers of the past, such as James Orr, Abraham Kuyper, and Francis Schaeffer.<sup>50</sup> His revised definition has also been

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<sup>47</sup>Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 122. Sire's former definition states, "A worldview is 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 makeup of our world." James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 16.

<sup>48</sup>See <http://www.ivpress.com>.

<sup>49</sup>See David Naugle's comments on *The Universe Next Door* in *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, 354-55. Also Ronald Nash recommends *The Universe Next Door* in his book *Worldviews in Conflict*.

<sup>50</sup>Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 12.

influenced by current worldview scholars such as Arthur Holmes and David Naugle.<sup>51</sup>

### **The Worldview Preaching Paradigm Presented**

The paradigm for articulating and evaluating Machen’s and Keller’s worldviews consists of four elements. The first three are from Sire’s definition as stated above. His definition provides three main elements: what a worldview is, how it is expressed, and what difference it makes in a person’s life. First, a worldview requires a “commitment” or a “fundamental orientation of the heart” concerning “the basic constitution of reality.”<sup>52</sup> This element answers the ontological question: What is a person’s worldview? The answer to this question reveals a person’s core belief or central reference point in regard to reality. Second, a worldview (i.e., that commitment) is expressed in the form of “a story or in a set of presuppositions.”<sup>53</sup> This element answers the question: How is the worldview explained or expressed? For example, a Christian worldview can be expressed either through the storyline of the Bible or through doctrinal truths. Third, a worldview affects the way people live their lives—it “provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.”<sup>54</sup> This third element answers the question: What are the implications of a person’s worldview?

The fourth element is contrast. This element is derived from Sires’ book *The Universe Next Door*. In this book, Sire not only articulates the Christian worldview but

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<sup>51</sup>For understanding the development of his revised definition, see the preface and chap. 7 of Sire, *Naming the Elephant*.

<sup>52</sup>Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 122. Also, Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 20.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

also provides a catalogue of eight other worldviews: deism, naturalism, nihilism, existentialism, Eastern monism, New Age philosophy, postmodernism, and Islamic theism. This catalogue of worldviews helps the believer to understand his own worldview in light of the worldviews of others. This approach helps to clarify what is and is not a Christian worldview. The use of contrast is a good pedagogical tool, providing a fourth element for worldview preaching in this study.

Thus, Sire's worldview paradigm consists of these four elements: (1) the worldview as the preacher's central commitment, (2) the expression of that commitment, (3) the commitment's implications for practical living, and (4) the contrast of the commitment with competing commitments (i.e., worldviews). This paradigm serves as a tool for identifying Machen's and Keller's worldviews as well as evaluating their worldview preaching.

### **Statement of Thesis**

Although the study of worldview preaching can be examined biblically, theologically, or philosophically, this study examines it in the preaching of two worldview preachers, J. Gresham Machen and Timothy J. Keller. This dissertation argues that Machen and Keller provide contemporary pulpits with two examples of preachers who present a consistent worldview. This thesis is demonstrated by using the four worldview elements of Sire's paradigm. However, this dissertation does not necessarily endorse all that Machen and Keller do in their approaches to worldview preaching; several cautions in following their examples will be presented. The main goal of this dissertation is to explore the use of the worldview concept in preaching through two imperfect, yet still helpful examples.

By presenting Machen and Keller as examples of worldview preaching, this dissertation provides a study on the use of the worldview concept in evangelical preaching, in order to discover what these two preachers consistently do in their preaching so as to be categorized as worldview preachers. Thus the study provides homiletic students with two examples of how the worldview concept might be applied to contemporary preaching.

### **The Research Methods**

The research methods of this dissertation are as follows: First, Sire's four worldview elements are used as a paradigm to construct Machen's and Keller's worldviews from their key writings. Second, selected sermons are evaluated to determine their consistency with these constructed worldviews. Third, the worldview preaching of Machen and Keller is compared so as to identify potential strengths and weaknesses in their approaches. In order to understand Machen's and Keller's worldview preaching requires a substantial survey of their work. Accordingly, primary source material consisting of their key writings and selected sermons serve as the basis of this study.

This study is developed in six chapters. Following this introductory chapter, chapter 2 presents a brief biographical sketch of both preachers in order to set their writings and preaching in their distinct historical and cultural contexts. In chapter 3, a number of their popular writings are examined and summarized in order to construct their worldviews using Sire's paradigm. This chapter provides the actual content of Machen's and Keller's worldviews. In chapter 4, Machen's and Keller's preaching is evaluated based on their consistency with their constructed worldviews of chapter 3. This evaluation demonstrates the level of consistency between their stated worldviews in

writing and what they in fact preach in the pulpit. In chapter 5, Machen's and Keller's worldview preaching is compared in order to reveal both potential strengths and weaknesses in their examples. The final chapter, chapter six, provides a summary and conclusion of this study on worldview preaching.

This work is not intended to be a comprehensive study on the integration of two academic fields: worldviews and homiletics. Neither is it meant to be a general study on the preaching ministries of Machen and Keller. Instead, the study is meant to present a critical study on two preachers' use of the worldview concept in their preaching ministries.

## CHAPTER 2

### INTRODUCTION TO WORLDVIEW PREACHERS

“The church is now in a period of deadly conflict. The redemptive religion known as Christianity is contending, in our own church as in all the larger churches of the world, against a totally alien type of religion.”<sup>1</sup> J. Gresham Machen delivered this warning in his final sermon preached in Miller Chapel at Princeton Theological Seminary. Machen, a man who knew this “deadly conflict” well, knew the battle was between two worldviews, a Christian one and a modernist one. He boldly engaged in this conflict on behalf of the Christian worldview.

Machen’s ministry provides an example of gospel preaching in the face of opposition to the true gospel. This ministry lives on in many pulpits today, especially those who stand in the Westminster Theological Seminary tradition. One such gospel ministry is that of Timothy J. Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. Keller’s preaching demonstrates the same passion for truth and engagement with error as did Machen’s. This chapter provides an overview of Machen’s and Keller’s lives and ministries within their historical and cultural contexts in order to provide appropriate background for a study of their worldview preaching.

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<sup>1</sup>J. Gresham Machen, “The Good Fight of Faith,” in *God Transcendent: And Other Sermons*, ed. Ned Bernard Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 121.

## **J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)**

Machen is renowned as a prominent early twentieth-century New Testament scholar and a leading conservative theologian in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1920s and 30s;<sup>2</sup> he is less well known for his prolific preaching. Although he never pastored a church, he did serve as stated supply for the historic First Presbyterian Church in Princeton from October 1923 to the summer of 1924. Throughout his ministry his schedule was filled with preaching engagements. From 1920 onward, rarely did a Sunday go by when he did not preach.<sup>3</sup> His influence as a preacher is attested, as several of his sermons were published in books of popular sermons: *American Sermons: The Pilgrims to Martin Luther King Jr.*, *Best Sermons* (1926), *Valiant for Truth*, and *Sermons that Shaped America: Reformed Preaching from 1630-2001*. In both his writing and preaching ministries, Machen demonstrated a deep desire to present a consistent Christianity.

### **Early Life and Training**

John Gresham Machen, the middle of three sons, was born July 28, 1881 to a prominent Baltimore family. His father, Arthur, was a successful lawyer who also profited from land sold in the nation's capital. His mother, Mary, was from Macon,

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<sup>2</sup>George Marsden explains Machen's aversion to being called a fundamentalist when he writes, "He did not like being called a fundamentalist, he was an intellectual, he was ill-at-ease with the emotionalism and oversimplifications of revival meetings, he opposed church involvement in politics including even the widely popular Prohibition movement, and he declined to join in the antievolution crusade." George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 182.

<sup>3</sup>Stephen J. Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 210.

Georgia and heiress to a fortune from railroads and cotton mills.<sup>4</sup> Machen never wanted for money; he inherited from both his father and his maternal grandfather. When he was twenty-one he inherited \$50,000 from his grandfather.<sup>5</sup>

Arthur and Mary's three sons gained a valuable education from both parents. Arthur, an avid reader of Greek and Latin classics, had an impact on young Gresham's love for learning, while Mary grounded her sons in the Bible, the Shorter Catechism, and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.<sup>6</sup> Although Mary had a strong taste for Victorian romanticism, especially Victorian poetry, she nurtured her sons in older forms of protestant piety. This religious nurturing acquainted the Machen boys with the intellectual and doctrinal content of Christianity, rather than the emotional and moral content.<sup>7</sup>

Along with this home education, Gresham excelled in school at Marston's University School for Boys, a private high school in Baltimore. His early report cards showed signs of his future as a brilliant scholar. He ranked first in his class in geometry,

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<sup>4</sup>For a detailed history of Machen's father and mother, see chap. 1 in Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954; reprint, Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1978).

<sup>5</sup>John Piper puts this wealth in perspective: "His first annual salary at Princeton was \$2000. So he inherited twenty-five times an annual salary when he was twenty-one. . . ." John Piper, *Contending for Our All: Defending Truth and Treasuring Christ in the Lives of Athanasius, John Owen, and J. Gresham Machen* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 122.

<sup>6</sup>Terry A. Chrisope explains Machen's early grounding in the Reformed Presbyterian faith: "At a tender age also he had committed to memory the Westminster Shorter Catechism—its 107 questions and answers embodying the heart of seventeenth-century Puritan divinity—and could repeat it perfectly." Terry A. Chrisope, *Toward a Sure Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Dilemma of Biblical Criticism, 1881-1915* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000), 59.

<sup>7</sup>D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crises of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 13.

algebra, Latin, Greek, French, natural sciences, and English.<sup>8</sup>

Following high school, Machen stayed in Baltimore and attended college at Johns Hopkins University, pursuing a degree in Greek classics. After graduating from Johns Hopkins with a B. S. degree, he stayed for another year of graduate studies. Discontent with an academic career in classics, he moved to the University of Chicago to study international law and banking. Restless after only a summer in Chicago he decided, through the advice of his Baltimore pastor, to pursue a degree in divinity at Princeton Theological Seminary, while also pursuing a graduate philosophy degree at Princeton University. In 1905, Machen graduated with an M. A. in philosophy from the University while gaining a B. D. from the Seminary.

During his student days at Princeton, Machen won the Maitland Prize for his work on the birth narratives in the Gospels. His paper was published in the *Princeton Theological Review* and he was awarded a fellowship consisting of a year of study in Germany. That year in Germany profoundly impacted Machen's life. He had professed Christ at the age of fifteen and became a full member of Franklin Street Presbyterian Church. But his profession was greatly tested during his year of study in Germany.<sup>9</sup> Terry A. Chrisope summarizes Machen's struggles, writing, "For an indefinite period beginning before his student days in Germany and continuing for some years after his return to teach at Princeton—roughly the first decade of the 1900s—young Machen was

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<sup>8</sup>Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen*, 25.

<sup>9</sup>This testing has been well document in Terry A. Chrisope's biography of Machen, *Toward a Sure Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Dilemma of Biblical Criticism, 1881-1915*.

engaged in a personal battle over the validity of historic supernatural Christianity.”<sup>10</sup> His first semester of study in Germany was at Marburg, where he studied with New Testament scholar Adolf Jülicher. But Wilhelm Herrmann, professor of theology, had a greater influence on Machen. A disciple of the liberal theologian Albrecht Ritschl, Herrmann’s teaching reinterpreted the Christian faith into a moral system, as opposed to a dogmatic system. Captured by the deep piety of Herrmann’s life and teaching, Machen opened his mind to liberal teaching.

Following this semester of instruction, Machen transferred to the University at Göttingen where he immersed himself in New Testament studies. At Göttingen, Machen experienced a crisis of faith. Through his study of New Testament higher criticism, he began to have serious doubts concerning the truthfulness of historic, supernatural Christianity. Understanding that the piety of liberal Christianity (as taught by Herrmann) did not offer any hope if this piety was not built on historical truth, Machen began to find the pietistic view of liberal Christianity completely unconvincing.

With his faith on shaky ground, Machen returned to Princeton Seminary as an instructor in September of 1906.<sup>11</sup> From the fall of 1906 to 1912 Machen continued to struggle with the truthfulness of historic Christianity.<sup>12</sup> Machen’s intellectual integrity

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<sup>10</sup>Chrisope, *Toward a Sure Faith*, 57.

<sup>11</sup>Machen was hesitant to return to Princeton to teach due to his intellectual doubts concerning the historic Christian faith. Machen felt that he could not be ordained until his mind and heart had been settled over his theological confusion. Machen’s Princeton friend and professor, William Park Armstrong, eventually talked him into coming to Princeton. In a letter to Machen, Armstrong assured him that he would not have to be “licensed, ordained, or even come under care of a presbytery . . . And in regard to your theological opinions you do not have to make any pledge.” Chrisope, *Toward a Sure Faith*, 87.

<sup>12</sup>Chrisope explains that by 1912 “Machen had largely resolved his own intellectual and spiritual difficulties and now emerged as a scholarly proponent of supernatural redemptive Christianity.” *Ibid.*, 115.

and personal honesty would not allow him to be ordained until he had worked through his theological dilemma. Chrisope writes that Machen

held that it was essentially dishonest for men who rejected the factual truthfulness of Christianity to seek for, or to continue in, the status of ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church. Machen attained his own official standing only after a long and painful ordeal—he was not ordained until 1914—and he was filled with indignation at those who formally subscribed to the Bible as the Word of God and to the Westminster Standards while rejecting the theological substance which they contained.<sup>13</sup>

After years of study and teaching, Machen came to reject the liberal teaching of German scholars and became rooted within the firm ground of historic, supernatural Christianity. His education and testing of the faith equipped Machen to combat the higher criticism as it entered into the mainline denominations in the United States, and especially into his own denomination, the northern Presbyterian Church.

### **The Battle with Modernism**

Having won his internal battle with liberalism, Machen then turned the battle outward towards the liberalism that had made its way into his own school and denomination. During the 1920s Machen emerged as a leader in the controversy between fundamentalists and modernists. The fundamentalists tenaciously held to the historic Christian faith, while modernists sought new ways of thinking about Christianity in light of higher criticism. C. Stephen Evans defines modernism as, “a movement to modify Christianity to make it relevant and acceptable to modern people, emphasizing both science and social and political teachings.”<sup>14</sup> Machen’s involvement in the controversy

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 94.

<sup>14</sup>C. Stephen Evans, *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics & Philosophy of Religion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 77.

consisted of both writing and speaking. Stephen J. Nichols writes of Machen's 1920s involvement,

No longer an obscure New Testament professor quietly laboring in his study, Machen was brought in the decade of the 1920s to the center of attention, not only in the Presbyterian circles that one might expect of a Princeton professor, but in the larger arenas of both the academic and the fundamentalist worlds. His name was appearing more and more in *The New York Times*.<sup>15</sup>

In 1921, Machen published his first book in New Testament studies, *The Origin of Paul's Religion*.<sup>16</sup> In Machen's own words, this work in New Testament criticism dealt with nothing less than "the problem of the origin of Christianity."<sup>17</sup> In the book, Machen argued for the supernatural nature of Christianity's origin, which the modernist movement had downplayed and denied. *The Origin of Paul's Religion* provided a scholarly study of Pauline literature in favor of historic and supernatural Christianity. Along with this book, Machen's *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (1930) demonstrated Machen in the 1920s and 30s as a first rate New Testament scholar and one who rejected the naturalistic presuppositions of liberal scholars.<sup>18</sup>

Of the number of books that followed, *Christianity and Liberalism* was the hardest hitting against theological modernism. Released in 1923, roughly one year after Harry Emerson Fosdick's infamous sermon, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?," this book

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<sup>15</sup>Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen*, 46.

<sup>16</sup>Machen had already by 1915 published the book *A Rapid Survey of the Literature and History of New Testament Times*. However, this book was written as a popular introduction to the New Testament, since it was initially written as Sunday School lessons for young people. For an overview of this work, see chap. 7 of Chrisope's *Toward a Sure Faith*.

<sup>17</sup>J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1921), 3.

<sup>18</sup>These two books came out of years of research and writing. In 1912 Machen published four essays three on the virgin birth of Christ and one on Paul and Jesus. These four 1912 essays reveal Machen's early interest in these two topics which came in fuller book form in 1921 and 1930.

identified and summarized the heart of the theological conflict. Fosdick's sermon became "a battle cry for liberalism" after its publication,<sup>19</sup> while Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism* became a counter-attack from the fundamentalists. In this work Machen forcefully dealt with liberalism in the church. The goal of his book was to show that by liberalism's desire to reconcile naturalism with Christianity, liberalism had become a non-Christian religion. In his introduction to *Christianity and Liberalism* Machen states,

Modern liberalism may be criticized (1) on the ground that it is un-Christian and (2) on the ground that it is unscientific. We shall concern ourselves here chiefly with the former line of criticism; we shall be interested in showing that despite the liberal use of traditional phraseology modern liberalism not only is a different religion from Christianity but belongs in a totally different class of religions . . . our principle concern just now is to show that the liberal attempt at reconciling Christianity with modern science has really relinquished everything distinctive of Christianity, so that what remains is in essentials only that same indefinite type of religious aspiration which was in the world before Christianity came upon the scene.<sup>20</sup>

The same line of argument flows from Machen's sermons. In "The Present Issue in the Church," first preached at First Presbyterian Church in Princeton, Machen covered arguments contained in *Christianity and Liberalism*.<sup>21</sup> This sermon became for conservatives what Fosdick's sermon "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" had become for liberals.<sup>22</sup> This was also the sermon that began stirring up trouble at Princeton Theological Seminary and within the Presbyterian Church. Machen had watched both of these organizations leaning away from the solid Reformed faith of the Westminster

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<sup>19</sup>Fosdick was an ordained Baptist minister who served at First Presbyterian Church in New York City when he first preached "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" on May 21, 1922. Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen*, 50.

<sup>20</sup>J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923), 7.

<sup>21</sup>Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 60.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 66.

Confession. In fact, Machen could declare that the old Princeton was dead after the death in February 1921 of his mentor and colleague, Benjamin B. Warfield.<sup>23</sup>

With the passing of B. B. Warfield, Machen became the leading scholar of the fundamentalists, yet he could not fully consider himself in the fundamentalist camp. Machen not only held to the five points of fundamentalism, but he also held firmly to the intellectual faith of five point Calvinism. Although he believed and preached the fundamentals, he did not care for the title, fundamentalist. He believed that it suggested “some strange new sect.”<sup>24</sup> He refused to fight many of the same battles as fundamentalists of his time. He was a fundamentalist in doctrine, but not in cultural issues. Nichols explains that “with Warfield’s passing, and others in the fundamentalist camp consumed with issues of eschatology or revivalism or cultural issues such as Prohibition, it fell to Machen to offer the scholarly defense of Christianity.”<sup>25</sup>

Machen’s greatest concern was not with outspoken liberals, but with moderates who refused to take a stand for truth. He found too many at Princeton and in the Presbyterian Church advocating tolerance for the liberal view. In his autobiography, Machen explains his problem with the moderate position:

I take a grave view of the present state of the church; I think that those who cry, “‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace,” constitute the greatest menace to the people of God. I am in little agreement with those who say, for example, that the Presbyterian Church, to which I belong, is “fundamentally sound.” For my part, I have two convictions regarding the Presbyterian Church. I hold (1) that it is not fundamentally sound; and I hold (2) that the Holy Spirit is able to make it sound . . . Those who form the consistently Christian remnant in the Presbyterian Church and

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<sup>23</sup>Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen*, 43.

<sup>24</sup>Hart, *Defending the Faith*, 63.

<sup>25</sup>Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen*, 49.

in other churches, instead of taking refuge in a cowardly anti-intellectualism, instead of decrying controversy, ought to be on their knees asking God to bring the visible church back from her wanderings to her Lord.<sup>26</sup>

Machen did not see his two beloved organizations, Princeton Seminary and the northern Presbyterian Church, return to the Lord. His troubles escalated until he was forced to resign from the faculty of Princeton in 1929. With his resignation, Machen immediately began to establish Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. The seminary opened its doors for classes on September 25, 1929, only months after Machen's resignation from Princeton. The seminary took its name from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the faculty's desire to build their school as a doctrinally confessional institution.<sup>27</sup>

Machen continued to minister within the northern Presbyterian Church after his break with Princeton, but his tie with that denomination ended in March 1935 when his presbytery suspended him for what they believed to be schismatic undermining of the denomination. On June 11, 1936, Machen and his supporters organized a new denomination, the Presbyterian Church of America, with Machen elected as the moderator.<sup>28</sup> The new school and denomination lost its leader shortly after they were organized; for on January 1, 1937, J. Gresham Machen died of pneumonia in North Dakota while ministering to struggling congregations within the new denomination.

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<sup>26</sup>J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity in Conflict," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 568.

<sup>27</sup>In his first convocation address at Westminster Theological Seminary, Machen declared his desire to build the new seminary on a confessional faith. J. Gresham Machen, "Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 194.

<sup>28</sup>The Presbyterian Church of America changed its name in 1939 to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The denomination continues to bear this name today.

### Timothy J. Keller (b. 1950)

New Yorkers have called Timothy J. Keller “Manhattan’s leading evangelist”<sup>29</sup> and “a Manhattan institution.”<sup>30</sup> Keller is an author, professor, and church planter; but foremost he is the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church of New York City. Drawing significant attention from both inside and outside the church for his ability to communicate the gospel in a skeptical post-modern context, he has had sermons published in two books: *Sermons that Shaped America: Reformed Preaching from 1630-2001* and *Herald’s of the King: Christ-Centered Sermons in the Tradition of Edmund P. Clowney*.<sup>31</sup> Along with these books, Keller has had several sermons published in *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*.<sup>32</sup> Dennis E. Johnson identifies Keller as an exemplary preacher.<sup>33</sup>

A brief biography helps to understand Keller’s ministry to skeptical post-moderns. An initial look at his early upbringing shows the development of this contemporary worldview preacher.

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<sup>29</sup>Michael Luo, "Preaching the Word and Quoting the Voice," *The New York Times* (February 26, 2006) [on-line]; accessed 25 October 2009; available from <http://www.newsweek.com>; Internet.

<sup>30</sup>Lisa Miller, "The Smart Shepherd," *Newsweek* (February 18, 2008) [on-line]; accessed 5 February 2009; available from <http://www.newsweek.com>; Internet.

<sup>31</sup>Timothy Keller, "Truth, Tears, Anger, and Grace: John 11:20-53," in *Sermons the Shaped America: Reformed Preaching from 1630-2001*, ed. William S. Barker and Samuel T. Logan Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003): 394-406. Timothy J. Keller, "The Girl Nobody Wanted: Genesis 29:15-35," in *Heralds of the King: Christ-Centered Sermons in the Tradition of Edmund P. Clowney*, ed. Dennis E. Johnson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009): 53-72.

<sup>32</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "Peter Meets Jesus," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 17, no. 1 (Fall 1998): 47-52. Timothy J. Keller, "Life in the Upside-Down Kingdom," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 17, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 48-53. Timothy J. Keller, "The Inside-Out Kingdom," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 19, no. 2 (Winter 2001): 42-48.

<sup>33</sup>See Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from all the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 54-61.

## Life before Redeemer

Timothy Keller was born and raised in eastern Pennsylvania in Lehigh Valley. His family belonged to a mainline Lutheran church, which Keller regularly attended. As a young teenager, Keller attended the church's confirmation course for two years in the early 1960s. Keller reports that during these two years he experienced some of his first confusion concerning Christianity, due to having two different instructors for his course. During the first year he was taught by a retired Lutheran minister who held to traditional and conservative Christianity. Under this minister, Keller learned about the reality of hell and the need for faith. During the second year of the course he was taught by a young minister newly out of seminary. This minister was theologically liberal with a strong focus on social justice, and raised doubts about the traditional Christian doctrines. Keller explains that his two years of confirmation class felt like he had been instructed in two different religions.<sup>34</sup> This assessment is precisely what Machen asserted concerning Christianity and liberalism.

During Keller's middle teenage years, his family moved to a more conservative church in the Methodist denomination. Keller explains that this church helped strengthen the "Hellfire Layer" of his religious formation.<sup>35</sup> Upon graduating from high school, Keller attended Bucknell University, which he describes as, "one of those fine, liberal, smaller universities in the Northeast."<sup>36</sup> His time at Bucknell (1968-72) proved to be a time of intellectual and spiritual searching. His liberal arts education

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<sup>34</sup>Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), xi.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

led him to question much of the traditional Christianity that he had learned as a child. He found the history and philosophy departments to be socially radical and influenced by the neo-Marxist theory of the Frankfurt School.<sup>37</sup> His attraction to the passionate social activism he found in his professors and fellow students drew him into a struggle with his conservative upbringing. Admitting he felt drawn to the social activism of liberal thinkers, he struggled with the moral relativism he found in these same thinkers. Keller explains his philosophical struggle between two options:

I seemed to see two camps before me, and there was something radically wrong with both of them. The people most passionate about social justice were moral relativists, while the morally upright didn't seem to care about the oppression going on all over the world. I was emotionally drawn to the former path. . . . But I kept asking the question, 'If morality is relative, why isn't social justice as well?' This seemed to be a blatant inconsistency in my professors and their followers.<sup>38</sup>

His battle with skepticism finally ended with his conversion to Christianity during his university days through the ministry of Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. Keller also highlights the influence of C. S. Lewis's writings at this critical time of life. During these formative college years Keller gained an interest in ministry and met Edmund P. Clowney, the president of Westminster Theological Seminary, who came to have an influential role in Keller's preaching ministry.

Following college, Keller pursued his call to ministry by moving to Boston, Massachusetts, in order to attend Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and to work on staff with Inter-Varsity Fellowship. At Gordon-Conwell Keller again came in contact with Edmund Clowney, when Clowney came to the campus to deliver the Staley

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

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

Lectures. In these lectures he spoke on the topic of preaching Christ from the Old Testament. Keller relates his impression of these lectures:

My future wife Kathy (then a student with me) and I were blown away by his teaching. We received from him one of the three or four main ingredients for our own future ministry. I had taken several courses with Richard Lovelace that had revealed the difference between moralistic religiosity (even of a doctrinally sound, biblical sort) and gospel renewal. Now, in Clowney, I realized I had discovered the application of this distinction to preaching. Moralistic sermons worked only on the will, but Christ-centered preaching clarified the gospel and changed the heart.<sup>39</sup>

Keller took Clowney's Christ-centered approach to preaching into his first pastorate at West Hopewell Presbyterian Church in Virginia. During his nine years at West Hopewell, Keller developed this christocentric method.<sup>40</sup> Following these nine years, he moved to Philadelphia to serve as a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, where he also had received his doctorate.

### **Redeemer and Beyond**

During the years of 1987 and 1988, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) chose Keller to lead a study of a potential new church plant in New York City. During Keller's field research he began to feel drawn to this work. In June of 1989 Keller moved to New York City with his wife and three young sons to pastor the group of new believers there who desired a church which they could attend, and to which they could bring their skeptical friends. By Christmas of 1989 the group of fifteen believers had grown to 250 in attendance and was now worshipping in a Seventh Day Adventist church. With new believers added weekly and skeptics thronging to the services, they outgrew

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<sup>39</sup>Keller, "The Girl Nobody Wanted," 54-55.

<sup>40</sup>"In the nine years I was there (1974-1984), I preached through most of the Bible. Wednesday nights were usually dedicated to covering the Old Testament, and that is where I was forced to grapple with Ed Clowney's challenge to 'preach Christ' from all of Scripture." Ibid., 53.

the Seventh Day Adventist church and moved to Hunter College Auditorium in March 1993. Redeemer Presbyterian Church currently has approximately 5000 in attendance.<sup>41</sup>

Keller's ethos and logos are well suited to his New York City audience. He is an intellectual who is educated and culturally savvy. He is persuasive to New Yorkers due heavily to his credibility. From his professorial tone of voice to his quotation of large amounts of literature, he embodies the persona of an intellectual who cares for the city. Along with this intellectual ethos, Keller's logos consists of tightly reasoned logic, which he often uses in sermons to demonstrate the failure of naturalism and post-modernism. In fact, Dee Pifer, a founding member of Redeemer, speaks of Keller's persuasive logic when inviting her Manhattan law firm colleagues to attend Redeemer in order "to hear a good litigator."<sup>42</sup> Keller's sermons have also been compared to "a really good college lecture."<sup>43</sup>

The success of Keller and Redeemer in New York City has piqued the interest of both the secular and religious worlds. Keller has been featured in news magazines such as *The New York Times* and *Newsweek*,<sup>44</sup> and has spoken on university campuses<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>For a more detailed history, see "Redeemer's History" on the church's website at <http://www.redeemer.com>. Also see Michael Luo's article in *The New York Times* at <http://www.nytimes.com>.

<sup>42</sup>Tim Stafford, "How Tim Keller Found Manhattan," *Christianity Today* (June 2009), 21.

<sup>43</sup>Ruth Graham, "Redeemer Presbyterian Church: New York, New York," *Perspectives* 20 (October 2009): 20.

<sup>44</sup>See Luo, "Preaching the Word and Quoting the Voice"; also Lisa Miller, "The Smart Shepherd."

<sup>45</sup>Susan Wunderink commenting on Keller's success with his book *The Reason for God* writes, "Keller's book tour, hosted by the Veritas Forum, has attracted 6,000 attendees to universities around the country." Susan Wunderink, "Tim Keller Reasons with America" *Christianity Today* (June 20, 2008) [online]; accessed 11 February 2010; available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/june/23.38.html>; Internet.

and before national dignitaries such as President George W. Bush, former New York Senator Hillary Clinton, and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani.<sup>46</sup> The Christian world has also been attracted to his ministry. According to a 2006 survey of 2000 American church leaders, he is the sixteenth most influential pastor in America.<sup>47</sup> Keller's Redeemer has been praised for becoming a model for urban ministry. Ruth Graham highlights Redeemer's reputation: "Indeed, Redeemer has become nationally known as a booming, solidly evangelical church that understands the needs of urban professionals."<sup>48</sup>

Due to these and other accolades, many pastors and church-planters have sought for the secret to Redeemer's success. This interest led Keller to write a manual for urban church planting and to begin a church-planting center out of Redeemer. This center has helped start over 100 churches in the New York City area and around the world. *Outreach Magazine* listed Keller's Redeemer as the number one church-planting church in America.<sup>49</sup> Keller and Redeemer's influence through church planting has been profound. Because of Redeemer's influence, one church review article likened Redeemer to a denomination of its own.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Keller was honored to preach a 9/11 Remembrance Message on September 10, 2006. He delivered this message at St. Paul's Chapel (Ground Zero). After the service President Bush asked for a transcript of Keller's message. To read the transcript go to <http://kellered.blogspot.com>.

<sup>47</sup>"50 Most Influential Churches," *The Church Report* (July 2006) [on-line]; accessed 4 November 2007; available from <http://www.ChurchReport.com>; Internet.

<sup>48</sup>Graham, "Redeemer Presbyterian Church: New York, New York," 20.

<sup>49</sup>See a short biography of Timothy Keller at <http://www.monergism.com>.

<sup>50</sup>Ruth Graham writes, "Redeemer remains a PCA church, but its reach is so wide that it can feel like its own denomination; it has planted many other churches in the New York area, including the Village Church in Greenwich Village and New Song Fellowship in Harlem." Graham, "Redeemer Presbyterian Church: New York, New York," 20.

Keller continues to live on Roosevelt Island in New York City with his wife. In the past six years Keller's influence has greatly expanded beyond New York City due to his joint effort with New Testament scholar D. A. Carson in The Gospel Coalition and through his recent surge of books. Keller and Carson co-founded The Gospel Coalition, which held its first conference on the campus of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in May 2006. The opening paragraph of the coalition's preamble states its substance and purpose:

We are a fellowship of evangelical churches deeply committed to renewing our faith in the gospel of Christ and to reforming our ministry practices to conform fully to the Scriptures. We have become deeply concerned about some movements within traditional evangelicalism that seem to be diminishing the church's life and leading us away from our historic beliefs and practices. On the one hand, we are troubled by the idolatry of personal consumerism and the politicization of faith; on the other hand, we are distressed by the unchallenged acceptance of theological and moral relativism. These movements have led to the easy abandonment of both biblical truth and the transformed living mandated by our historic faith. We not only hear of these influences, we see their effects. We have committed ourselves to invigorating churches with new hope and compelling joy based on the promises received by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.<sup>51</sup>

Keller's leadership in The Gospel Coalition has led to ministry opportunities to evangelical churches across the country. Through this ministry Keller helps equip evangelical leaders to center their ministries on the biblical gospel and to defend against movements within evangelicalism that distract from this gospel focus. Along with this effort to call churches to the supremacy of the gospel, Keller has also published a number of books over the past five years. In 2008 he released two books, his *New York Times* best seller *The Reason for God* and *The Prodigal God*. *The Reason for God: Belief in an*

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<sup>51</sup> "The Gospel For All Life: Preamble," The Gospel Coalition (May 22, 2007) [on-line]; accessed 20 October 2008; available from <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/about/foundation-documents/>; Internet.

*Age of Skepticism* was published by Dutton Publishers, a division of Penguin Press. Much like Lewis's *Mere Christianity*, this book is intended for a wider audience than only believers.<sup>52</sup> World Magazine named *The Reason for God* as its book of the year in 2008, emphasizing the importance of Keller's book by stating, "World has briefly reviewed about two hundred books over the past year. Many stand out, but one in particular is likely to change many lives and ways of thinking. *World's Book of the Year* is Tim Keller's *The Reason for God*."<sup>53</sup> This book provides a robust defense and rationale for the historic Christian faith in light of modern skepticism and pluralism.

In November of 2008 Keller released *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*. The book sleeve declares the premise of the book with the following: "Taking his trademark intellectual approach to understanding Christianity, Keller uncovers the essential message of Jesus, locked inside his most familiar parable. Within that parable Jesus reveals God's prodigal grace toward both the irreligious and the moralistic. This book will challenge both the devout and skeptics to see Christianity in a whole new way."<sup>54</sup>

Since publishing the above two books in 2008, Keller has produced six more works. In October of 2009, Keller published *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters*. In 2010, Keller released two works: *Gospel in Life: Grace Changes Everything* and *Generous Justice: How God's*

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<sup>52</sup>As noted in chap. 1, Keller has been dubbed "a C. S. Lewis for the 21<sup>st</sup> century." Miller, "The Smart Shepherd."

<sup>53</sup>This quote was taken from the back cover of Keller's book *The Reason for God*.

<sup>54</sup>Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God* (New York: Dutton, 2008).

*Grace Makes us Just*. In 2011, Keller again published two books: *King's Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus* and *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God*. His most recent book, published in 2012, is *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness: The Path to True Christian Joy*.

Keller's influence continues to grow. His ministry of intellectual engagement with skeptical city-dwellers continues to be felt in New York City, but has also become a model for many evangelicals who desire a serious-minded Christianity that impacts the intellectual culture of the western world.

### **Summary Findings**

These two broad biographical sketches demonstrate a number of similarities between these two ministers. First, both men struggled in their university days with skepticism concerning orthodox Christianity; but instead of giving into this skepticism, they came out as ardent defenders of historic, supernatural Christianity. Second, they are both conservative, evangelical Presbyterian ministers who have strong ties to Westminster Theological Seminary. Third, they are ministers who have embraced a historical, biblical, and intellectual view of Christianity. Along with this view, both men have taken it upon themselves to defend this type of Christianity against powerful contemporary worldviews. Although they combated two different prevailing worldviews, theological modernism and secular postmodernism, their battles have been similar in that they dealt with skepticism toward orthodox Christianity, and especially toward its biblical gospel.

These biographical sketches also reveal a number of differences. First, Machen's and Keller's early internal struggles and their later external battles were with

different worldviews. Machen dealt with a theological movement to redefine Christianity into modern terms, while Keller has dealt with a secular skepticism concerning religious and moral truth claims. Second, Machen's ministry was predominately focused within the ecclesiastical sphere, whereas the bulk of Keller's ministry has been in the realm of secular culture, although his recent ministry has begun to reach out to the American evangelical church through The Gospel Coalition. One apparent reason for this difference in ministry focus is the times in which each man has served. Machen lived in a time when his own denomination was rapidly leaving biblical Christianity, while Keller's ministry has been within a confessional and conservative denomination. Third, Machen was an intellectual academic who focused on the church and academy, whereas Keller is an intellectual pastor with a passion for cities.

With this background to the lives and ministries of Machen and Keller in mind, chapter 3 provides an analysis of their worldviews.

CHAPTER 3  
DESCRIPTION OF MACHEN'S AND KELLER'S  
WORLDVIEWS

In chapter 3, a number of Machen's and Keller's key writings are examined with the intent of constructing their worldviews using James Sire's worldview paradigm. As discussed in chapter 1, Sire's paradigm consists of four elements, three of which are from his definition of worldview:

A worldview is 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.<sup>1</sup>

The three elements in this definition are as follows: "Worldview as a commitment, . . . expressed as a story or a set of presuppositions, . . . the foundation on which we live."<sup>2</sup>

The fourth element in the paradigm comes from Sire's method of comparing and contrasting worldviews in his book, *The Universe Next Door*. Thus, the fourth element is the contrast of worldviews for the purpose of clarification. The construction of Machen's and Keller's worldviews in chapter 3 serves as the basis for evaluating their worldview preaching in chapter 4.

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<sup>1</sup>James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 20.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 20-21.

## Machen's Worldview

Although Machen was a prolific writer,<sup>3</sup> the basis of this study is limited to three of his writings: *Christianity and Liberalism*, *What Is Faith?* and *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*. While a number of his other writings may provide a basis for studying his worldview,<sup>4</sup> this dissertation has chosen to limit the study to the above three books. The rationale for this limitation is two fold. First, the goal of this dissertation is to study Machen's and Keller's worldview preaching, not to provide a comprehensive look at their worldviews from their writings. Second, since the focus of this dissertation is on the worldview concept in the ecclesiastical sphere and not the academic, these three books provide some of the best popular teaching of Machen in regard to biblical Christianity within the church. This section provides a survey of these books to provide a basis for evaluating his worldview preaching.

*Christianity and Liberalism*, published in 1923, is Machen's most popular book and was his first major response to theological modernism.<sup>5</sup> In the introduction, Machen articulates the two primary criticisms of Modernism: "that it is un-Christian" and

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<sup>3</sup>For a listing of all of Machen's published works, see James T. Dennison, Jr., and Grace Mullen, "A Bibliography of the Writings of J. Gresham Machen, 1881-1937," in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: The Committee of the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986), 461-85.

<sup>4</sup>Among Machen's three scholarly works written for the academy, two present his commitment to the exposition and defense of biblical Christianity: *The Origin of Paul's Religion* and *The Virgin Birth of Christ*. For obvious reasons, Machen's *New Testament Greek for Beginners* does not provide a clear basis for studying his worldview.

<sup>5</sup>Concerning the popularity of *Christianity and Liberalism*, see D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crises of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 3, 59; Terry A. Chrisope, *Toward a Sure Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Dilemma of Biblical Criticism, 1881-1915* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000), 172; Stephen J. Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 82.

“it is unscientific.”<sup>6</sup> However, *Christianity and Liberalism* is limited to the former critique. Stonehouse declares the book’s two-fold purpose to be “a positive exposition of Christian doctrine as well as a defense of Christianity against Liberalism.”<sup>7</sup> The former purpose is often overshadowed by the latter purpose; but Machen chiefly desired to present a positive presentation of the Christian faith. With this purpose in mind, *Christianity and Liberalism* provides useful material in understanding Machen’s view of Christianity and thus his worldview.

The second book, *What Is Faith?*, published in 1925, is “essentially a sequel to *Christianity and Liberalism*.”<sup>8</sup> This work takes up Machen’s second criticism of modern liberalism, that it is unscientific. These two books demonstrate Machen’s most thorough treatment of Christianity and modernism during the years he spent as a professor at Princeton.<sup>9</sup> Chrisope gives highest praise to this second book when he writes, “*What Is Faith?* may in some ways have a claim to be the most significant book to have been produced by Machen because of its treatment of certain broad themes.”<sup>10</sup>

The third work, *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, expresses some of Machen’s most mature thinking on the modernist controversy. Nichols claims that this anthology of Machen’s shorter writings provides some of “the best treatment” of

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<sup>6</sup>J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1921; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 7.

<sup>7</sup>Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954; reprint, Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1978), 343.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 395. Also Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen*, 240.

<sup>9</sup>Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen*, 239-40.

<sup>10</sup>Chrisope, *Toward a Sure Faith*, 177-78.

the time period after Machen's exodus from Princeton and also "the most comprehensive treatment of the entire breadth and scope of Machen's work."<sup>11</sup> This book contains forty-six articles written by Machen.<sup>12</sup>

**Element 1:  
Machen's Central Commitment**

A number of Christian worldview thinkers have stated the importance of a worldview to be a unified system, which originates from a central reference point.<sup>13</sup> Sire speaks of the central reference point as "a commitment" or "the fundamental orientation of the heart . . . about the basic constitution of reality."<sup>14</sup> The first element of Sire's paradigm is that a worldview is a commitment. He describes this element as follows: "The essence of a worldview lies deep in the inner recesses of the human self. A worldview involves the mind, but it is first of all a commitment, a matter of the soul. It is a spiritual orientation more than it is a matter of mind alone."<sup>15</sup> The search for Machen's worldview begins with a search for his central commitment.

**The central commitment in *Christianity and Liberalism*.** In *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen presents the doctrinal nature of Christianity in light of liberalism

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 240.

<sup>12</sup>Twenty-seven of these articles were first published as *What is Christianity?*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse in 1951. This work is now out of print.

<sup>13</sup>See the comments of Abraham Kuyper, James Orr, and James Sire. Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 92. James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 8. James Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 128.

<sup>14</sup>Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 20.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

(i.e., theological modernism). Machen establishes Christianity as a doctrinal religion that is based upon facts. This doctrinal approach to Christianity is witnessed in the following:

But if any one fact is clear, on the basis of this evidence, it is that the Christian movement at its inception was not just a way of life in the modern sense, but a way of life founded upon a message. It was based, not upon mere feeling, not upon a mere program of work, but upon an account of facts. In other words it was based upon doctrine.<sup>16</sup>

The layout of *Christianity and Liberalism* demonstrates the centrality of doctrine in Machen's thought. After explaining in chapter 2 the centrality of doctrine, Machen moves into the rest of the book to explain key doctrines: God, man, the Bible, Christ, salvation, and the church. Machen unified these doctrines by placing the gospel at the center of each. Throughout *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen repeatedly mentions the gospel as the center and core of Christianity.<sup>17</sup> In reference to the Apostle Paul's thinking, Machen writes, "His primary interest was in Christian doctrine, and Christian doctrine not merely in its presuppositions but at its centre."<sup>18</sup> This center was the good news of "the redeeming work of Christ."<sup>19</sup> For Machen, the gospel was the central message of both the Bible and of Christian doctrine.<sup>20</sup> He believed in the centrality of the gospel even in the ethical portions of the Scriptures. For example he writes, "The Sermon on the Mount, like all the rest of the New Testament, really leads a man straight

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<sup>16</sup>Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 21.

<sup>17</sup>For examples of Machen calling the gospel the "center," "core," or "root" of the Bible and/or Christianity, see *Christianity and Liberalism*, 26-27, 70, 75, 81, 105, 113, 127, 138, 141.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 25-26.

<sup>20</sup>For Machen's view of the centrality of the gospel to both the Bible and its doctrine, see *Christianity and Liberalism*, 25-29, 75-78.

to the foot of the Cross.”<sup>21</sup> For Machen, the preaching and teaching of the law without the gospel would “only produce despair.”<sup>22</sup>

Machen did not hold everything in the Bible to be the gospel, but he did believe the gospel to be the Bible’s center and that everything in it was to be understood in light of that center. Throughout *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen intentionally dealt with each doctrine in its association with the gospel. For example, Machen states,

It has been observed thus far that liberalism differs from Christianity with regard to the presuppositions of the gospel (the view of God and the view of man), with regard to the Book in which the gospel is contained, and with regard to the Person whose work the gospel sets forth. It is not surprising then that it differs from Christianity in its account of the gospel itself; it is not surprising that it presents an entirely different account of the way of salvation.<sup>23</sup>

Along with Machen’s emphasis upon the centrality of the gospel in his explanation of different doctrines, Machen also used a christocentric approach in defending these same doctrines. For example, in his defense of a theistic view of God and in the trustworthiness of the Bible, Machen primarily argued his case on the basis of Christ’s view of God and the Bible.<sup>24</sup> In regard to the Bible, Machen declared modernism to hold “individual experience” as authoritative, rather than Jesus.<sup>25</sup> For Machen, a right view of Scripture was to be found in a right understanding of Jesus’ view of Scripture.

In summary, Machen declared the gospel to be “the very root of the Christian

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 38.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid, 117.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 55-57, 70, 75-76.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 77-78.

religion,<sup>26</sup> because it was central within the Scriptures. Machen stated the centrality of the gospel in all of the Scriptures when he wrote, “To that one great event [i.e., the gospel] the whole Old Testament looks forward, and in that one event the whole of the New Testament finds its center and core.”<sup>27</sup>

**The central commitment in *What Is Faith?*** In a search for Machen’s commitment in *What Is Faith?*, several aspects of his worldview become apparent. First, Machen articulates a belief in a theistic worldview. He grounds his theistic view in the view of Jesus as seen in his comment, “For the real Jesus placed at the very centre, not merely of His thinking but of His life, the heavenly Father, Maker and Ruler of the world.”<sup>28</sup> Machen’s conception of a theistic worldview was not a bare belief in God as maker and ruler of all, but was chiefly focused on Christ and redemption.<sup>29</sup> He articulates this redemptive-centered worldview throughout in statements such as, “In the Bible, then, it is not merely God as Creator who is the object of faith, but also, and primarily, God as Redeemer from sin. . . . We trust Him because He has brought us by the Cross of Christ, despite all our sin, into His holy presence.”<sup>30</sup>

For Machen, the theistic worldview of Jesus was centered in God’s redemptive work. This redemptive christocentric perspective in other words is a gospel-centered

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 70.

<sup>28</sup>J. Gresham Machen, *What Is Faith?* (New York: Macmillan, 1925; reprint, Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), 62.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 84-86.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 87.

worldview. Although he uses different terms to speak of the gospel (e.g., Christ's cross, redemption, grace, Christ), in the forefront of his mind is the message of the gospel. Repeatedly throughout *What Is Faith?* Machen speaks of the "center" or "core" of Christianity and the Bible as being the message about Christ (i.e., the gospel).<sup>31</sup> Machen believed that if the Bible was not understood as centered on the gospel of redemption, then it would be misunderstood and thought to teach what is actually contrary to Christianity. Machen wrote, "The real centre of the Bible is redemption; and to create the impression that other things in the Bible contain any hope for humanity apart from that is to contradict the Bible at its root. Even the best of books, if it is presented in garbled form, may be made to say the exact opposite of what it means."<sup>32</sup> Machen's gospel-centered conviction led him to maintain the gospel as his presupposition.<sup>33</sup>

**The central commitment in *Selected Shorter Writings*.** In his collection of shorter writings, Machen presents Christianity as a consistent body of truth and not independent doctrines.<sup>34</sup> This body of truth, for Machen, was found in the reformed faith.<sup>35</sup> Machen articulated the reformed faith through three key doctrines: the

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 86, 117, 128, 148, 152, 173-74, 194-95, 228, 241.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 128.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 150.

<sup>34</sup>See J. Gresham Machen, "What Fundamentalism Stands for Now," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 118; and J. Gresham Machen, "Christian Scholarship and Evangelism," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 137.

<sup>35</sup>"The strongest Christianity, I think, is consistent Christianity; and consistent Christianity is found in the Reformed faith." J. Gresham Machen, "The Mission of the Church," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 235. Machen also states, "I have come to see with greater and greater clearness that consistent Christianity is the easiest Christianity to defend, and that consistent Christianity—the only thoroughly biblical Christianity—is found in the Reformed faith." J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity in Conflict," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 554.

transcendence of God, the sinfulness of man, and the redemption of God in Christ.<sup>36</sup>

Machen held the doctrines of God and man to be the presuppositions of the central item, redemption.<sup>37</sup> For Machen, the redemptive message of the gospel was the center and core of Christianity, as well as the foundation for the Christian life.<sup>38</sup> Machen often grounded this message in Paul's summary of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15.<sup>39</sup> Machen held this passage in highest regard: "What we have in these precious words—perhaps the most important words historically that were ever penned—is nothing less than an authentic summary of the things that were regarded by the earliest Christian church as lying at the foundation of its life."<sup>40</sup> Machen firmly held the gospel to be the foundation of the

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<sup>36</sup>Machen, "What Fundamentalism Stands for Now," 118.

<sup>37</sup>For examples of Machen's view, see J. Gresham Machen, "What the Bible Teaches about Jesus," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 27-28; J. Gresham Machen, "What Fundamentalism Stands for Now," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 118-220; J. Gresham Machen, "Christian Scholarship and the Building up of the Church," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 156-59; J. Gresham Machen, "The Christian View of Missions," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 238-41; J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity and Liberty," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 360-61.

<sup>38</sup>For Machen's view of the centrality of the redemptive message in the Scriptures, see J. Gresham Machen, "The Witness of Paul," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 36, 42-43; J. Gresham Machen, "The Necessity of the Christian School," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 170; Machen, "Christianity and Liberty," 355; J. Gresham Machen, "The Responsibility of the Church in our New Age," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 375; J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity in Conflict," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 547. For his view of redemption being the foundation of the Christian life, see J. Gresham Machen, "History and Faith," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 105; J. Gresham Machen, "The Mission of the Church," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 232; Machen, "The Christian View of Missions," 238; Machen, "The Responsibility of the Church in our New Age," 369, 372.

<sup>39</sup>To understand Machen's view of the significance of Paul's description of the gospel in 1 Cor 15:1-8, see J. Gresham Machen, "What is Christianity?," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 94-95; J. Gresham Machen, "What is the Gospel?," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 127; Machen, "The Mission of the Church," 231-32; Machen, "The Responsibility of the Church in our New Age," 369.

<sup>40</sup>Machen, "What is the Gospel?," 127.

Christian life and the center of the Christian religion.<sup>41</sup>

In his lifelong battle with theological modernism, Machen continually set the gospel of Jesus Christ at the center of the fight. He refused to place any other doctrine at the center. This is not to say that Machen believed other doctrines to be unimportant; on the contrary, he believed that they were of utmost importance, and therefore they could only be settled by beginning with the doctrines of Christ and his gospel. In “History and Faith” Machen writes,

The Bible contains a record of something that has happened, something that puts a new face upon life. What that something is is told us in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It is the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The authority of the Bible should be tested here at the central point. Is the Bible right about Jesus?<sup>42</sup>

He further writes, “Here is the real test of Bible authority. If the Bible is right here, at the decisive point, probably it is right elsewhere. If it is wrong here, then its authority is gone. The question must be faced. What shall we think of Jesus of Nazareth?”<sup>43</sup>

In June of 1927, Machen delivered three addresses before the Bible League of Great Britain.<sup>44</sup> Machen introduced his series by stating, “The subject which I have been bold enough to propose for the three addresses which I shall have the privilege of attempting to deliver is this: ‘Is the Bible Right about Jesus?’ And, after all, that is the

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<sup>41</sup>For examples of Machen’s belief in the gospel being the foundation of the Christian life, see Machen, “Christian Scholarship and Evangelism,” 141; “The Christian View of Missions,” 238; “The Responsibility of the Church in Our New Age,” 369. For examples of Machen’s claim of the gospel as the center of Christianity, see Machen, “The Mission of the Church,” 231; “The Christian View of Missions,” 241.

<sup>42</sup>Machen, “History and Faith,” 98. “The Bible, then, is right at the central point; it is right in its account of Jesus; it has validated its principle claim.” Ibid., 107.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>44</sup>The three addresses before The Bible League of Great Britain are “What the Bible Teaches about Jesus,” “The Witness of Paul,” and “The Witness of the Gospels.”

real test of the authority of the Bible. If the Bible is really right about Jesus, the probability is that it is right about other things as well.”<sup>45</sup>

Machen kept the gospel central for two reasons. First, he held the conviction that the gospel was the center of Christianity. Second, Machen believed that since the “natural” man had an aversion to the gospel, the gospel would only be maintained through a “constant struggle.”<sup>46</sup> He warned the church that the gospel would be forsaken if it was neglected.<sup>47</sup>

In summary, all three of Machen’s books maintain the gospel of redemption as the center of the Bible and Christianity. Machen’s commitment to the centrality of the gospel is witnessed to both in his articulation and defense of Christianity.

## **Element 2: Machen’s Commitment Expressed**

The second element in Sire’s paradigm is the expression of the commitment.<sup>48</sup> According to Sire, a worldview can be expressed either as a story or a set of presuppositions. He explains how Christians often express Christianity, when he writes,

Christians tell the story of creation, Fall, redemption, glorification—a story in which Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection are the centerpiece. Christians see their lives and the lives of others as tiny chapters in that master story. The meaning of those little stories cannot be divorced from the master story, and some of this meaning is propositional. When, for example, I ask myself what I am really assuming about

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<sup>45</sup>Machen, “What the Bible Teaches about Jesus,” 23.

<sup>46</sup>Machen, “Christian Scholarship and the Defense of the Faith,” 144.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 146-48. Also see Machen, “Christian Scholarship and the Defense of the Faith,” 152; “Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan,” 189.

<sup>48</sup>Sire explains the difference of a worldview and this second element by stating, “A worldview is *not* a story or a set of presuppositions, but it can be expressed in these ways.” Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 20.

God, humans and the universe, the result is a set of presuppositions that I can express in propositional form.<sup>49</sup>

Thus this section seeks to answer the question: How does Machen express his commitment (i.e., the gospel)? The answer is discovered through an examination of the same three books.

**The commitment expressed in *Christianity and Liberalism*.** In *Christianity and Liberalism* Machen highlights history and doctrine as two essential elements in the gospel:

From the beginning, the Christian gospel, as indeed the name “gospel” or “good news” implies, consisted in an account of something that had happened. And from the beginning, the meaning of the happening was set forth; and when the meaning of the happening was set forth then there was Christian doctrine. “Christ died”—that is history; “Christ died for our sins”—that is doctrine. Without these two elements, joined in an absolutely indissoluble union, there is no Christianity.<sup>50</sup>

Machen expressed the gospel both as a narrative (i.e., history) and as propositional truths (i.e., doctrines). For Machen, the historical element consisted of the narration of facts, while the doctrinal element consisted of the meaning of those facts. He expounds this view of history and doctrine when he writes, “These two elements are always combined in the Christian message. The narration of the facts is history; the narration of the facts with meaning of the facts is doctrine. ‘Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried’—that is history. ‘He loved me and gave himself for me’—that is doctrine.”<sup>51</sup>

Machen’s focus on history and doctrine was particularly centered upon the

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>50</sup>Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 27.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 29.

death of Jesus Christ upon a Roman cross.<sup>52</sup> He maintained the death of Christ as a historical event, but he explained the meaning of that event as atonement for sinners. Machen considered “the atoning blood of Christ” the central message of the Bible.<sup>53</sup> For Machen, the heart of the gospel was the penal substitutionary view of the atonement. He proclaimed a gospel that focused on Christ being a propitiatory sacrifice in place of sinners so that they might be justified by grace through faith.<sup>54</sup>

**The commitment expressed in *What Is Faith?*** In *What Is Faith?* Machen again expresses the gospel with the elements of history and doctrine. He explains Christianity’s basis to be built upon the historical events in Jesus’ life, along with the meaning of these events (i.e., doctrine). He writes,

If any one thing must be clear to the historian, it is that Christianity at the beginning was founded squarely upon an account of things that had happened, upon a piece of news, or in other words, upon a “gospel.” . . . The earliest Christian Church in Jerusalem clearly was founded not merely upon what always was true but upon things that had happened, not merely upon eternal truths of religion but upon historical facts. The historical facts upon which it was founded were, moreover, not bare facts but facts that had a meaning; it was not only said that “Christ died”—that would be (at least if the word “Christ” were taken as a mere proper name and not in the full, lofty signification of “Messiah”) a bare fact—but it was said “Christ died for our sins,” and that was a fact with the meaning of the fact—in other words it was a doctrine.<sup>55</sup>

These two elements, history and doctrine, were essential for Machen’s understanding of the gospel and therefore Christianity. The central historical fact for

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 81.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 75. In chap. 6 of *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen associates the gospel and the doctrine of penal substitution as one and the same.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 117, 121, 132, 135.

<sup>55</sup>Machen, *What Is Faith?*, 149-50.

Machen was the cross of Christ. Repeatedly throughout *What Is Faith?* Machen refers to the message of Christianity as the historical fact of Christ's cross.<sup>56</sup> Along with this central focus on the historical cross of Christ, Machen also made use of the historical resurrection in his articulation of the gospel.<sup>57</sup> Upon these two historical events Machen brought forth the doctrine of the gospel.

For Machen, the gospel was about redemption; he could thus speak of the gospel as "the message of redemption through the death and resurrection of our Lord."<sup>58</sup> This message of redemption found its basis in the substitutionary atonement of Christ.<sup>59</sup> Machen expressed the doctrine of atonement in terms of God's grace toward sinners.

The very centre and core of the whole Bible is the doctrine of the grace of God—the grace of God which depends not one whit upon anything that is in man . . . that one great central doctrine, that doctrine that gives consistency to all the rest; and Christian experience also depends for its depth and for its power upon the way in which that blessed doctrine is cherished in the depths of the heart. The centre of the Bible, and the centre of Christianity, is found in the grace of God; and the necessary corollary of the grace of God is salvation through faith alone.<sup>60</sup>

Machen was deeply committed to God's grace in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ.<sup>61</sup> He held that the redemptive nature of the Bible was expressed in terms of God's grace as opposed to man's work.

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 41, 86, 108, 142, 143, 144, 148, 153, 154, 170, 194.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 91-92, 131, 151, 154, 161.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 151. See also pp. 154 and 161.

<sup>59</sup>Machen continually uses substitutionary language in his explanation of Christ's death. He articulated the atonement as that "blessed doctrine that upon the Cross the Lord *took our place*, that He offered Himself 'a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God'" (emphasis mine). Ibid., 147.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 173-74. Also see pp. 120, 185, 191, 194-95, 228.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 194-95.

**The commitment expressed in *Selected Shorter Writings*.** In his shorter writings, Machen once again articulates the gospel as both history and doctrine. His emphasis on history is heard in the very first words of his inaugural address as assistant professor at Princeton Seminary: “The student of the New Testament should be primarily a historian. The center and core of all the Bible is history. Everything else that the Bible contains is fitted into a historical framework and leads up to a historical climax. The Bible is primarily a record of events.”<sup>62</sup> For Machen, Christianity and the Bible deserved to be treated like other historical topics: “Christianity is a historical phenomenon like the State of Pennsylvania or the United States of America or the Kingdom of Prussia or the Roman Empire, and it must be investigated by historical means.”<sup>63</sup>

At the center of biblical history, for Machen, was the gospel of Christ. He declared the historical basis of the gospel by stating, “The Christian doctrine of the cross, as it is found in the Bible, is objected to, in the first place, because it depends upon history. But of course it must depend upon history if it is to be a gospel; for ‘gospel’ means ‘good news’; and ‘news’ means an account of something that has happened.”<sup>64</sup> Or again he writes, “For ‘gospel’ means ‘good news,’ tidings, information about something that has happened. In other words, it means history. A gospel independent of history is simply a contradiction in terms.”<sup>65</sup>

Along with this emphasis upon history, Machen placed the utmost importance

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<sup>62</sup>Machen, “History and Faith,” 97.

<sup>63</sup>Machen, “What Is Christianity?,” 92.

<sup>64</sup>Machen, “What the Bible Teaches about Jesus,” in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 30.

<sup>65</sup>Machen, “History and Faith,” 98.

on doctrine. Machen claimed that Christianity was “radically doctrinal”; by this he meant that Christianity “proclaimed facts.”<sup>66</sup> These “proclaimed facts” consisted of the historical death, burial, and resurrection of Christ for sinners.<sup>67</sup>

For Machen, Christian preaching was primarily in the “indicative mood” and therefore he placed emphasis on doctrinal facts over ethical imperatives.<sup>68</sup> Machen accused theological modernists of being “non-doctrinal” and even “anti-intellectual” because of their emphasis on the subjective living of the Christian faith over and against the objective doctrine of Christianity.<sup>69</sup> The Christian life, for Machen, was based squarely upon doctrinal truths,<sup>70</sup> and therefore it had “an intellectual element” consisting of the “knowledge of Christ.”<sup>71</sup>

Machen’s conviction concerning the doctrinal nature of the gospel led him to call ministers to doctrinal preaching.<sup>72</sup> Machen believed that the gospel was being

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<sup>66</sup>Machen, “The Christian View of Missions,” 241. See also “The Responsibility of the Church in our New Age,” 368, 371, 373.

<sup>67</sup>See Machen’s discussion on the importance of the proclamation of the gospel facts in “The Responsibility of the Church in our New Age,” 369; “The Mission of the Church,” 231-32.

<sup>68</sup>Machen, “The Responsibility of the Church in our New Age,” 369.

<sup>69</sup>Machen, “Christianity in Conflict,” 564.

<sup>70</sup>For the details of his argument, see his address “What Is Christianity?,” in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*.

<sup>71</sup>Machen, “Christian Scholarship and Evangelism,” 138. Machen’s three part series on Christian scholarship highlights his view of the intellectual nature of Christianity. See Machen, “Christian Scholarship and Evangelism,” “Christian Scholarship and the Defense of the Faith,” and “Christian Scholarship and the Building up of the Church.” Also concerning the intellectualism of Christianity, Machen writes, “We refuse, therefore, to abandon to the student of natural science the entire realm of fact in order to reserve to religion merely a realm of ideals; on the contrary, theology, we hold, is just as much a science as is chemistry. The two sciences, it is true, differ widely in their subject matter, and in particular they differ widely in the qualifications required of the investigator; but they are both concerned with the acquisition and orderly arrangement of truth.” Machen, “What Fundamentalism Stands for Now,” 118.

<sup>72</sup>Machen, “Christian Scholarship and the Building up of the Church,” 154.

ignored by pulpits with an overemphasis on ethics.<sup>73</sup> He writes,

What then does the word translated “gospel” mean? The question might seem to be unnecessary (were it not apparently ignored in so many sermons and religious books); everyone knows that “gospel” means “good news.” But if “gospel” means “good news,” then many common notions about the gospel disappear at once. “Good news” is never in the imperative mood; a “gospel” cannot possibly consist in directions as to a way of life or in a complex of worthy ideals. . . . News consists always, not in exhortations or commands, but in information about facts; a “gospel” is always in the indicative mood.<sup>74</sup>

In Machen’s day, the “apparent ignoring” of the gospel had led pulpits to place exhortation over information. Machen was concerned that doctrinal preaching had “been pushed from the primary place” that it deserved.<sup>75</sup> Machen was committed to seeing doctrinal preaching return to its place of primacy.<sup>76</sup>

In summary, all three of Machen’s books express the gospel with the elements of history and doctrine. These two elements concern the person and work of Christ, with particular emphasis upon the substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross.

### **Element 3: The Commitment’s Implications for Machen**

The third element of Sire’s paradigm is the practical implications of a worldview. Sire declares a worldview to provide “the foundation on which we live.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>See Machen, “Christian Scholarship and the Building up of the Church,” 154; “What is the Gospel?,” 127; “The Responsibility of the Church in our New Age,” 369-70.

<sup>74</sup>Machen, “What is the Gospel?,” 127.

<sup>75</sup>Machen, “Christian Scholarship and the Building up of the Church,” 154.

<sup>76</sup>Machen explains what this preaching should look like: “The preacher should present to his congregation the doctrine that the Holy Scripture contains, but he should fire the presentation of that doctrine with devotion of the heart, and he should show how it can be made fruitful for Christian life.” Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 21.

This element is important in determining the actual worldview of a person, since a worldview is not only confessed but lived. Sire explains, “It is important to note that our own worldview may not be what we think it is. It is rather what we show it to be by our words and actions.”<sup>78</sup> Or again, he writes, “If we want clarity about our own worldviews, however, we must reflect and profoundly consider how we actually behave.”<sup>79</sup>

This section overviews the above three books in order to demonstrate the gospel as Machen’s foundation for life. This foundation is revealed in the way Machen applies the gospel to specific areas of Christian living.

**The commitment’s implications in *Christianity and Liberalism*.** In *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen declares the centrality of the gospel and its implications when he writes, “The same message [i.e., the gospel] with its *implications*, has been the very heart and soul of the Christian movement throughout the centuries” (emphasis mine).<sup>80</sup> Even with its heavy doctrinal focus, *Christianity and Liberalism* does provide at least two gospel implications. First, in his chapter on doctrine, Machen asserts the gospel to be the foundation of Christian morality. This morality is the product of gospel indicatives, and not moral exhortations.<sup>81</sup> At one point in this discussion, he contrasts the gospel of Christianity with the moral exhortations of ancient religions:

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>80</sup>Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 30. That “message” to which Machen refers is “the message of the redeeming work of Christ.”

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 47-48. “In the first place, we do not mean that if doctrine is sound it makes no difference about life. On the contrary, it makes all the difference in the world. From the beginning, Christianity was certainly a way of life; the salvation that it offered was a salvation from sin, and salvation from sin appeared not merely in a blessed hope but also in an immediate moral change.” Ibid., 47.

The strange thing about Christianity was that it adopted an entirely different method. It transformed the lives of men not by appealing to the human will, but by telling a story; not by exhortation, but by the narration of an event. It is no wonder that such a method seemed strange. Could anything be more impractical than the attempt to influence conduct by rehearsing events concerning the death of a religious teacher? That is what Paul called “the foolishness of the message.” It seemed foolish to the ancient world, and it seems foolish to liberal preachers to-day. But the strange thing is that it works. The effects of it appear even in this world. Where the most eloquent exhortation fails, the simple story of an event succeeds; the lives of men are transformed by a piece of news.<sup>82</sup>

The second implication is the gospel’s power to transform society. In his chapter on the church, Machen explains the gospel as the foundation for the building of genuine community and the transformation of society.<sup>83</sup> He argues for the necessity of individual transformation through the gospel before a true brotherhood of men and a biblically just society can be formed. He writes,

A solid building cannot be constructed when all the materials are faulty; a blessed society cannot be formed out of men who are still under the curse of sin. Human institutions are really to be molded, not by Christian principles accepted by the unsaved, but by Christian men; the true transformation of society will come by the influence of those who have themselves been redeemed.<sup>84</sup>

For Machen then, the gospel had powerful implications for individuals and through individuals to society as a whole. This kind of transformation was not possible through the social gospel.<sup>85</sup> The only hope for humanity was the redemptive message of the gospel with its implications for Christian living.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 47-48.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 157.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 158.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 152-53.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 21-23.

**The commitment's implications in *What Is Faith?* In *What Is Faith?***

Machen emphasizes Christian ethics as a central implication of the gospel. He believed the gospel resulted not only in the freedom from the guilt of sin but also from the power of sin.<sup>87</sup> This belief led Machen to ground ethics and morality in the gospel.<sup>88</sup>

Although Machen declared the gospel to be a message of redemption to be believed upon, he still believed the message had implications for Christian living. He primarily viewed the gospel as God's means of redemption and only secondarily did it provide an example. He explains his view by stating,

Thus the Cross of Christ is certainly a noble example of self-sacrifice; but if it be only a noble example of self-sacrifice, it has no comfort for burdened souls . . . Many things are taught us by the Cross; but the other things are taught us only if the really central meaning is preserved, the central meaning upon which all the rest depends. On the cross the penalty of our sins was paid; it is as though we ourselves had died in fulfillment of the just curse of the law; the handwriting of ordinances that was against us was wiped out; and henceforth we have an entirely new life in the full favour of God."<sup>89</sup>

So for Machen the gospel did provide implications for ethical living, but these implications were always connected to the gospel.<sup>90</sup> Machen articulates the inseparability of the gospel and ethics in his discussions on public education:

The reading, in public schools, of selected passages from the Bible, in which Jews and Catholics and Protestants and others can presumably agree, should not be encouraged, and still less should be required by law. The real centre of the Bible is redemption; and to create the impression that other things in the Bible contain any

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<sup>87</sup>Machen, *What Is Faith?*, 204.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>90</sup>For his attempt to ground Christian ethics in the gospel, see Machen, *What Is Faith?*, 111, 206-07, 211, 213, 217.

hope for humanity apart from that is to contradict the Bible at its root.<sup>91</sup>

Machen's conviction concerning Bible reading in public schools arose from his fundamental belief that ethics could not legitimately be disconnected from the gospel. For Machen, the Bible taught a message of redemption and only secondarily, by way of implication, ethics. Machen knew that schools were taking the ethical portions disconnected from the central redemptive message of the book and thereby doing damage to the cause of Christ. As for Machen, he held the central message of the Bible to be the gospel with implications being drawn from that center.

**The commitment's implications in *Selected Shorter Writings*.** Machen's shorter writings present much of the same teaching on the gospel and ethics as does *Christianity and Liberalism* and *What is Faith?*; that is, the gospel provides the basis for Christian ethics, and therefore the gospel was to be primary in biblical preaching and teaching.<sup>92</sup> However, concerning the gospel's relation to the ills of society, Machen's shorter writings provide greater detail.<sup>93</sup> One example of the gospel's ability to deal with

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 128.

<sup>92</sup>Two of Machen's articles present similar arguments as those found in *What is Faith?* against the teaching of the Bible in public schools: "The Responsibility of the Church in our New Age" and "The Necessity of the Christian School." Machen writes, "There are those who tell us that the Bible ought to be put into the public schools, and that the public schools should seek to build character by showing the children that honesty is the best policy and that good Americans do not lie or steal. With such programs a true Christian church will have nothing to do. The Bible, it will hold, is made to say the direct opposite of what it means if any hope is held out to mankind from its ethical portions apart from its great redemptive center and core; and character building on the basis of human experience may be character destruction; it is the very antithesis of that view of sin which is at the foundation of all Christian convictions and all Christian life." Machen, "The Responsibility of the Church in our New Age," 375.

<sup>93</sup>In *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, Hart groups five articles under the title "Church and Society." This group of articles relates Christianity as a worldview to Western Society. The five articles are "Christianity and Liberty," "The Responsibility of the Church in Our New Age," "The Church in the War," "Voices in the Church," and "Statement on the Eighteenth Amendment."

societal problems is in the realm of human liberty. Machen believed that under a naturalistic worldview, modern society had begun to view man as a machine living in a mechanistic world.<sup>94</sup> Thus modern culture was enslaving society through its attempt to standardize all of life. For Machen, the only solution to this enslavement was the liberating power of the gospel.<sup>95</sup> Far from understanding Christianity as binding up human thought and expression, Machen understood the gospel to set men free to know and live by the truth.<sup>96</sup> The gospel, Machen explained, liberated men in their pursuit of academic and cultural advancements. Thus the Christian school was important because of its ability to ground all of learning in Christian convictions.<sup>97</sup> In his article “The Necessity of the Christian School,” he writes,

It is this profound Christian permeation of every human activity, no matter how secular the world may regard it as being, which is brought about by the Christian school and the Christian school alone. I do not want to be guilty of exaggerations at this point. A Christian boy or girl can learn mathematics, for example, from a teacher who is not a Christian; and truth is truth however learned. But while truth is truth however learned, the bearings of truth, the meaning of truth, the purpose of truth, even in the sphere of mathematics, seem entirely different to the Christian from that which they seem to the non-Christian; and that is why a truly Christian education is possible only when Christian conviction underlies not a part, but all of the curriculum of the school. True learning and true piety go hand in

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<sup>94</sup>For details of Machen’s view, see “Christianity and Liberty,” and “The Responsibility of the Church in Our New Age.”

<sup>95</sup>Machen writes, “From such a slavery, which is already stalking through the earth in the materialistic paternalism of the modern state, from such a world of unrelieved drabness, we seek escape in the high adventure of the Christian religion. Men call us, indeed, devotees of a book. They are right. We are devotees of a book. But the book to which we are devoted is the Magna Charta of human liberty—the book which alone can make men free.” Machen, “Christianity and Liberty,” 359.

<sup>96</sup>“If liberty is to be preserved against the materialistic paternalism of the modern state, there must be something more than courts and legal guarantees; freedom must be written not merely in the constitution but in the people’s heart. And it can be written in the heart, we believe, only as a result of the redeeming work of Christ.” Machen, “Does Fundamentalism Obstruct Social Progress?,” in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 112.

<sup>97</sup>See Machen, “The Necessity of the Christian School.”

hand, and Christianity embraces the whole of life—those are great central convictions that underlie the Christian school.<sup>98</sup>

Since all truth is grounded in Christianity, Machen believed everything was to be viewed in light of a Christian worldview, particularly a gospel-centered one. In “Christianity and Culture,” Machen highlights the centrality of the gospel to all academic and cultural disciplines when he writes,

Furthermore, the field of Christianity is the world. The Christian cannot be satisfied so long as any human activity is either opposed to Christianity or out of all connection with Christianity. Christianity must pervade not merely all nations, but also all of human thought. The Christian, therefore, cannot be indifferent to any branch of earnest human endeavor. It must all be brought into some relation to the gospel.<sup>99</sup>

These words capture the supremacy of the gospel in Machen’s thought life. He believed the Christian calling to be a call to bring all things “into subjection to the obedience of Christ.”<sup>100</sup>

In summary, all three of Machen’s books present the gospel’s implications for the Christian life. These implications include both the ethical life of believers and their interaction with society and culture.

#### **Element 4: Machen’s Commitment Contrasted with Modernism**

The fourth element in Sire’s paradigm is contrast. In *The Universe Next Door*, Sire catalogs nine basic worldviews, contrasting each with the other. Machen employs the method of contrast by identifying the differences between biblical Christianity and

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 171-72.

<sup>99</sup>Machen, "Christianity and Culture," 403.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

theological modernism. Within Sire's catalog, theological modernism is related to naturalism. Machen's writings consistently present modernism as naturalistic, as Chrisope explains in discussing *Christianity and Liberalism*: "Machen also clearly identified the ideological opponent he was confronting: it was the philosophical position he termed 'modern naturalism.' Machen used the terminology 'naturalism' or 'naturalistic' at least eleven times in various combinations during the course of this book."<sup>101</sup>

Theological modernism was an attempt by ministers and theologians to modernize Christianity, to accommodate it to a modern culture under the sway of naturalism. This modern culture had begun in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and held to "a strong reliance upon science and technology as the instruments of reason and progress."<sup>102</sup> It took on greater momentum with Charles Darwin's publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859. As the belief in Darwinian evolution took root in the scientific community, a thoroughly naturalistic worldview developed among many scholars.<sup>103</sup> With the scientific community's embrace of naturalism, a struggle broke out between the old religious views of life and the new naturalist view. It was in this cultural context, dominated by a modernist worldview, that Machen sought to minister.

### **Commitments contrasted in *Christianity and Liberalism*. In *Christianity***

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<sup>101</sup>Chrisope, *Toward a Sure Faith*, 178.

<sup>102</sup>D. A. Lyon, "Modernity and Postmodernity," in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, ed. David J. Atkinson and David H. Field (Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 597.

<sup>103</sup>Philip Johnson defines naturalism as "the doctrine that nature is 'all there is.'" Phillip E. Johnson, *Reason in the Balance: The Case Against NATURALISM in Science, Law and Education* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 7.

*and Liberalism*, Machen articulates the Christian faith against the backdrop of liberalism (i.e., modernism) within the church.<sup>104</sup> One of the two purposes for Machen’s book was to provide a negative critique of liberalism. His chief criticism was that liberalism by its rejection of key doctrines was “un-Christian” and actually belonged “in a totally different class of religions.”<sup>105</sup> He distinguished Christianity and liberalism in two key ways.

First, Machen distinguished them in their approaches to history and doctrine.<sup>106</sup> According to Machen, liberalism was a non-doctrinal religion, relying on subjective experience rather than objective history; Christianity was a redemptive religion, completely dependent upon the historical person and work of Jesus Christ.<sup>107</sup> These two different views of history and doctrine resulted in two entirely different messages from the pulpit. The Christian message for Machen was grounded upon historical events that led the pulpit to preach grace; whereas liberalism, due to its focus on lifestyle and experience, preached a message of works. Machen explains this significant difference when he writes, “Here is found the most fundamental difference between liberalism and Christianity—liberalism is altogether in the imperative mode, while Christianity begins with a triumphant indicative; liberalism appeals to man’s will, while Christianity announces, first, a gracious act of God.”<sup>108</sup> For Machen, the heart of Christian preaching

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<sup>104</sup>“An examination of the teachings of liberalism in comparison with those of Christianity will show that at every point the two movements are in direct opposition.” Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 53.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, 23-27.

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

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, 47.

was the announcement of God’s salvific work in Christ, while liberal preaching made exhortations to the human will to follow the example and teachings of Jesus.

Second, Machen contrasted the supernaturalism of Christianity with the naturalism of liberalism,<sup>109</sup> here noting that naturalism had led liberal theologians to embrace a form of pantheism by reducing God to the best things of nature.<sup>110</sup> He explains his view by writing, “It [i.e., liberalism] tends everywhere to break down the separateness between God and the world, and the sharp personal distinction between God and man.”<sup>111</sup> Therefore when liberals spoke of Jesus being God they were speaking in a “pantheizing” way by simply holding Jesus to be the best of nature.<sup>112</sup> According to Machen, this view stripped Jesus of his real supernatural nature and reduced him to a mere part of creation. Machen summarized this distinction by stating, “But the central thing can be put almost in a word—liberalism regards Jesus as the fairest flower of humanity; Christianity regards Him as a supernatural person.”<sup>113</sup>

**Commitments contrasted in *What Is Faith?*** In *What Is Faith?* Machen contrasts the intellectual nature of Christianity with the anti-intellectualism of modernism.<sup>114</sup> Machen viewed Christianity to be an intellectual faith due to its emphasis

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<sup>109</sup>Machen declared liberalism to be “rooted in naturalism.” He also called it “naturalistic liberalism” and “modern naturalism.” Ibid., 2, 35.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 63, 74, 100, 110.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 63, 110-12.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 96.

<sup>114</sup>In the introduction to *What Is Faith?* Machen explains one key purpose of his book: “As over against this anti-intellectual tendency in the modern world, it will be one chief purpose of the present little book to defend the primacy of the intellect, and in particular to try to break down the false and

on empirical facts; whereas modernism was anti-intellectual by placing religion outside the realm of objective truth.<sup>115</sup> Modernists, Machen explained, had abandoned the scientific historical method in the study of Scripture because of their naturalistic presuppositions.<sup>116</sup> Because modernists placed religion and faith outside the realm of reason, they understood Christianity to be a subjective experience and therefore a pragmatic and not a dogmatic religion.<sup>117</sup>

Machen explains the modernist preacher's pragmatism by stating, "Theology in other words is not to be judged in accordance with the degree of approximation which it attains to an eternally persisting norm of truth, but it is to be regarded as good or bad according as it serves the purposes of mankind and promotes an abundance of life."<sup>118</sup> This pragmatic religion, Machen argued, resulted in a "bottomless skepticism" with its view of doctrine as "merely the symbolic expression of an experience really inexpressible."<sup>119</sup>

Machen believed this pragmatism led modernists to moralize Christianity by viewing Jesus as an example of faith and not its object.<sup>120</sup> Modernism had stripped

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disastrous opposition which has been set up between knowledge and faith." Machen, *What Is Faith?*, 26.

<sup>115</sup>Machen writes, "The retrograde, anti-intellectual movement called Modernism, a movement which really degrades the intellect by excluding it from the sphere of religion, will be overcome, and thinking will again come to its rights." *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>117</sup>For examples, *Ibid.*, 13-45, 47-51, 95, 94, 174-80, 210, 216, 249.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>120</sup>"The truth is that in great sections of the modern Church Jesus is no longer the object of faith, but has become merely an example of faith." *Ibid.*, 98. Also see pp. 108-09.

Christianity of its redemptive nature and replaced it with a morality that consisted of exhortations to follow the “Christ-life,” and the “principles of Jesus.”<sup>121</sup> In language reminiscent of *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen declared Christianity and modernism to be “two mutually exclusive religions.”<sup>122</sup> He distinguished the two by stating, “One of the two is the redemptive religion known as Christianity; the other is a religion of optimistic confidence in human nature, which at almost every conceivable point is the reverse of Christian belief.”<sup>123</sup>

**Commitments contrasted in *Selected Shorter Writings*.** Throughout Machen’s shorter writings, he contrasts biblical Christianity with theological modernism by declaring modernism to be a religion distinct from Christianity:

At the present time, the Christian church stands in the midst of another conflict. Like the previous conflicts, it is a conflict not between two forms of the Christian religion but between the Christian religion on the one hand and an alien religion on the other. Yet—again like the previous conflicts—it is carried on within the church. The non-Christian forces have made use of Christian terminology and have sought to dominate the organization of the church.<sup>124</sup>

This contrast took a number of forms, but all interrelated upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. These shorter writings present the same contrasts as *Christianity and Liberalism* and *What is Faith?* As with *What is Faith?*, a number of Machen’s articles contrast the intellectual nature of the gospel with the anti-intellectualism of

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<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 97, 113, 129, 96, 141, 152, 192.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

<sup>124</sup>Machen, “The Responsibility of the Church in our New Age,” 371.

modernism.<sup>125</sup> Machen called modernism “passionately anti-intellectual,” while declaring Christianity a “reasonable faith.”<sup>126</sup> He believed modernism ignored facts by separating faith and reason, while Christianity held the two together.<sup>127</sup>

A second common contrast in these articles is the contrast between the supernaturalism of Christianity with the naturalism of modernism.<sup>128</sup> This contrast is presented in *Christianity and Liberalism*. However, in a number of articles, Machen points out how the naturalism of the modernists had led them to embrace a works-based view of salvation.<sup>129</sup> For modernists, Jesus had become merely an example of faith and not its object.<sup>130</sup> This view of the modernists gave Machen cause to accuse them of preaching a false gospel.<sup>131</sup> Modernists preached a moralistic message of following the example of the man Jesus, while Christianity preached a gospel of redemptive events. The modernist message concerned lifestyle, while the Christian message concerned

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<sup>125</sup>Machen spoke of the early twentieth century as “days of anti-intellectualism.” Machen, “Christian Scholarship and Evangelism,” 135. A common argument for Machen concerning the intellectual nature of Christianity can be heard in his address to the Bible League of Great Britain: “Faith always contains an intellectual element. A very little knowledge is often sufficient if a man is to believe, but some knowledge there must be. So if a man is to trust Christ, he must know something about Christ; he may know only a very little, but without some knowledge he could not believe at all.” Machen, “Christian Scholarship and Evangelism,” 138.

<sup>126</sup>“Modernism regards itself as independent of science, whereas Christianity must seek to justify its place, despite all the intellectual labor which that involves, in the realm of facts.” Machen, “The Parting of the Ways,” 219.

<sup>127</sup>Machen, “History and Faith,” 114.

<sup>128</sup>For an in-depth look into Machen’s attack upon the naturalism of modernism, see “The Witness of Paul,” “The Parting of the Ways,” and “Christianity in Conflict.”

<sup>129</sup>For a thorough description of the modernist’s view of Jesus, see “The Witness of Paul,” 33-34.

<sup>130</sup>See Machen, “The Witness of Paul,” 33-34; “The Christian View of Missions,” 240-41.

<sup>131</sup>See Machen, “Christian Scholarship and the Building up of the Church,” 160; “The Church in the War,” 377.

doctrine.<sup>132</sup> Machen stated, “You may understand the difference between a religion of redemption and what is not a religion of redemption by comparing the religion of Paul with the religion of the Modernist church.”<sup>133</sup>

Machen was not only critical of the modernists’ anti-intellectual, naturalistic, and non-doctrinal preaching, but he also criticized conservative preachers who decried controversy and failed to keep the gospel central in the church.<sup>134</sup> In “The Mission of the Church” he writes,

In this time of crisis, when the question is being determined whether our church is to remain Christian or not, there are those who deplore controversy and say that all is well. Among them there are no doubt many who are not really Christian in their preaching at all. These men are not, indeed, conscious of denying the Bible and denying Christ, but the cross really fails to hold the central place in their hearts.<sup>135</sup>

In summary, all three books by Machen present him contrasting the differences between Christianity and modernism. Three interrelated contrasts have been noted: objective doctrine verses subjective experience, supernaturalism verses naturalism, and intellectualism verses anti-intellectualism.

### **Summary of Machen’s Worldview**

The above description of Machen’s writings, under Sire’s four worldview elements, provides enough detail to articulate Machen’s worldview as follows.

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<sup>132</sup>Machen writes, “At this point we find the most fundamental divergence between Modernism and the Christian faith; the Modernist assertion that doctrine springs from life, and may be translated back into life from which it came, really involves the relinquishment of all objective truth in the sphere of religion.” Machen, “The Parting of the Ways,” 219.

<sup>133</sup>Machen, “The Witness of Paul,” 36.

<sup>134</sup>Machen, “Christianity in Conflict,” 568.

<sup>135</sup>Machen, “The Mission of the Church,” 235.

First, Machen's commitment or fundamental orientation of his heart was the gospel. In all three written works, Machen articulates the gospel as the center or core of the Bible and Christianity.

Second, Machen expressed this gospel-centered worldview with two primary components: history and doctrine. For Machen, the gospel was first expressed as a historical reality. This historical reality was expressed through the biblical storyline of creation, sin, and redemption, with redemption being the central emphasis. This redemption was focused on the historical events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Along with this historical account, Machen expressed the gospel with doctrine. He understood doctrine to be the explanation or meaning of the historical events. For Machen, the key doctrines of the Bible were the transcendence of God, the sinfulness of man, and the redemption of God in Christ. He considered the first two doctrines to be presuppositions for the central doctrine, the gospel of redemption. He articulated the meaning of this gospel in terms of Christ's substitutionary atonement.

Third, Machen held the gospel to provide the foundation on which the Christian life was to be lived; that is, the gospel had implications for life. For Machen, the two main areas of life the gospel affected were ethics and the transformation of society and culture. First, Machen believed that the gospel once applied to the human heart provided the foundation for ethical living. Second, he understood the gospel to be the basis for the transformation of culture and society through the lives of transformed believers.

The fourth worldview element is discovered in Machen's continual contrast between Christianity and modernism. Machen repeatedly explains in his writings why he

makes such liberal use of contrast. He writes, “As a matter of fact, not less time, but more time, should be devoted to the defense of the gospel. Indeed, truth cannot be stated clearly at all without being set over against error.”<sup>136</sup> Or again he writes, “. . . but after all the only way to get a clear idea of what a thing is, is to place it in contrast with what it is not; all definition involves exclusion.”<sup>137</sup> The key contrasts for Machen were history and doctrine verses experience and lifestyle, supernaturalism verses naturalism, and an intellectual faith verses an anti-intellectual faith.

### **Keller’s Worldview**

Three books by Timothy Keller are surveyed in this section in order to discover his worldview. These books are chosen due to their presentation of Keller’s articulation and defense of the Christian faith.<sup>138</sup>

The first book, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*, was published in February 2008 and is intended as a rational defense of the Christian faith. In the first seven chapters, Keller defends Christianity against what he believes are the seven most used arguments against Christianity. In the final seven chapters, he provides proofs for the reasonableness of Christianity. In his defense of the faith, he challenges his readers to consider Christianity by thinking in terms of worldviews.<sup>139</sup> He writes,

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<sup>136</sup>Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 174.

<sup>137</sup>Machen, *What Is Faith?*, 40. See also Machen, “The Task of Christian Scholarship,” 148-49; “Facing the Facts Before God,” 198; Machen, “The Mission of the Church,” 233; and Machen, “Christianity and Culture,” 404.

<sup>138</sup>Besides these three, Keller has six other books: *Ministries of Mercy*, *Counterfeit Gods*, *Generous Justice*, *King’s Cross*, *The Meaning of Marriage*, and *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*.

<sup>139</sup>See Keller, *The Reason for God*, 15-17, 115, 122.

“Which account of the world has the most ‘explanatory power’ to make sense of what we see in the world and in ourselves? . . . Which worldview best accounts for these things?”<sup>140</sup>

The second book is *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*. In this book, Keller articulates the central message of the Bible and Christianity through Jesus’ parable in Luke 19:1-32, often referred to as the parable of the prodigal son. In his introduction, Keller explains the purpose of the book: “This short book is meant to lay out the essentials of the Christian message, the gospel.”<sup>141</sup> He also refers to this book as “an introduction to the Christian faith.”<sup>142</sup> This book serves to uncover Keller’s worldview by his articulation of the heart of the Christian message.

The third book in this survey is *Gospel in Life: Grace Changes Everything*. This book and DVD series highlights the centrality of the gospel and its function as a worldview. In his introduction he explains the purpose of the study: “*Gospel in Life* is an eight-session course on the gospel and how to live it out in all of life—first in our hearts, then in community, and ultimately out into the world.”<sup>143</sup>

These three books provide sufficient material for constructing Keller’s worldview. In the following pages these books are studied under Sire’s four worldview elements.

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<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>141</sup>Keller, *The Prodigal God*, xi.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid.

<sup>143</sup>Keller, *Gospel in Life*, 7.

**Element 1:  
Keller's Central Commitment**

The construction of Keller's worldview begins with a search for the first element in Sire's paradigm: the central commitment.

**The central commitment in *The Reason for God*.** Throughout *The Reason for God*, Keller provides clear statements on the centrality of the gospel in the Christian worldview. For example, he calls the gospel "Christianity's basic message,"<sup>144</sup> while also employing Sire's worldview language in declaring the gospel to be the "heart" of the early Christians' "view of reality."<sup>145</sup> Keller refers time and again to a christocentric and gospel-centered understanding of Christianity. In his defense of the Bible's trustworthiness he encourages his readers not to begin with the peripheral issues of the Bible, but to deal first with the central teaching of Jesus and the gospel. He writes,

I have one more bit of advice to people struggling with some of the Bible's teaching. We should make sure we distinguish between the major themes and message of the Bible and its less primary teachings. The Bible talks about the person and work of Christ and also about how widows should be regarded in the church. The first of these subjects is much more foundational. Without it the secondary teachings don't make sense. We should therefore consider the Bible's teachings in their proper order.<sup>146</sup>

Keller argues that the reliability of Christianity and the Bible is best established by beginning with a study of the person and work of Jesus Christ.<sup>147</sup> He

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<sup>144</sup>See *The Reason for God*, 112-13, 185.

<sup>145</sup>Keller, *The Reason for God*, 20.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>147</sup>Keller writes, "It is therefore important to consider the Bible's core claims about who Jesus is and whether he rose from the dead before you reject it for its less central and more controversial teachings." Ibid., 113.

explains that if the gospel facts are found to be reliable, then Jesus' view of the Bible should be accepted. Keller also views Jesus as being the ultimate proof for God's existence. In speaking of God as the "Playwright" who writes himself into the play of human history, Keller writes,

In the Christian view, however, the ultimate evidence for the existence of God is Jesus Christ himself. If there is a God, we characters in his play have to hope that he put some information about himself in the play. But Christians believe he did more than give us information. He wrote himself into the play as the main character in history, when Jesus was born in a manger and rose from the dead. He is the one with whom we have to do.<sup>148</sup>

Keller provides the greatest detail of the gospel in the final four chapters: "Religion and the Gospel," "The (True) Story of the Cross," "The Reality of the Resurrection," and "The Dance of God." These final chapters articulate the gospel as the Christian worldview.

**The central commitment in *The Prodigal God*.** In the introduction to *The Prodigal God*, Keller declares the gospel to be "the Christian message" and "the heart of the Christian faith."<sup>149</sup> Keller's intent for the book is to use Jesus' parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 to explain the gospel as the storyline of the Bible.<sup>150</sup> He writes, "Jesus' great Parable of the Prodigal Son retells the story of the entire Bible and the story of the human race."<sup>151</sup>

Keller outlines his book by stating, "In the first five chapters I will unlock the

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<sup>148</sup>Ibid., 123.

<sup>149</sup>Keller, *The Prodigal God*, xi-xii.

<sup>150</sup>See *The Prodigal God*, xiv, 90, 95-103, 127.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 127-28.

parable's basic meaning. In Chapter 6 I will demonstrate how the story helps us understand the Bible as a whole, and in Chapter 7 how its teaching works itself out in the way we live in the world."<sup>152</sup> In the book he defines "real Christianity" as the gospel and contrasts the gospel with two other views: religion and irreligion.<sup>153</sup> He calls for Christians to make the gospel "more and more central to everything" they "see, think, and feel."<sup>154</sup> He clearly articulates the centrality of the gospel when he writes, "The gospel is therefore not just the ABCs of the Christian life, but the A to Z of the Christian life."<sup>155</sup> By this, Keller means that the gospel is not just the beginning or the elementary principles of the Christian life, but it is the central principle that touches every part of the Christian life.

**The central commitment in *Gospel in Life*.** In *Gospel in Life*, Keller articulates the gospel as the Christian worldview.<sup>156</sup> He emphasizes the centrality of the gospel by explaining his book as "an eight-session course on the gospel and how to live it out in all of life."<sup>157</sup> This stated purpose contains two worldview elements: the central commitment and the commitment's implications for life.

Keller explains the heart of the Christian worldview to be the redemptive work

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<sup>152</sup>Ibid., xiv.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., 119. See also Timothy J. Keller, "The Centrality of the Gospel," Redeemer Presbyterian Church (June 2001) [on-line]; accessed 4 April 2012; available from [http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/centrality\\_of\\_the\\_Gospel-Keller.pdf](http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/centrality_of_the_Gospel-Keller.pdf); Internet.

<sup>156</sup>Timothy Keller, *Gospel in Life: Grace Changes Everything* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 95.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid., 7.

of Christ in the gospel. Keller uses worldview terminology when describing the gospel's ability to transform the "fundamental orientation" of the human heart.<sup>158</sup> In speaking of this ability to change the heart's orientation, Keller makes clear his conviction that the gospel has the power to uproot and replace other worldviews. He further explains this conviction when he writes, "Faith in the gospel restructures our motivations, our self-understanding and identity, and our view of the world. It changes our hearts."<sup>159</sup>

In summary, all three of Keller's books reveal Keller's commitment as the gospel. In both articulating and defending Christianity, Keller keeps the gospel as the central issue. For Keller, the gospel penetrates every aspect of Christianity and therefore must become "more and more central to everything" in the Christian's life.<sup>160</sup>

## **Element 2: Keller's Commitment Expressed**

Having identified the first element of Sire's paradigm for Keller as the gospel, this section investigates the second element for Keller: the expression of his commitment. According to Sire, a worldview can be expressed either "as a story or in a set of presuppositions."<sup>161</sup> Keller's expression of the gospel is examined below through a survey of his three books.

**The commitment expressed in *The Reason for God*.** In *The Reason for God*, Keller expresses the Christian worldview as a storyline consisting of four parts: creation,

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<sup>158</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>160</sup>Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 114.

<sup>161</sup>Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 20.

fall, redemption, and restoration.<sup>162</sup> However, the third part, redemption, receives the emphasis in his worldview thinking. This good news of redemption in Christ is expressed with the two main elements of history and grace. He first expresses the gospel as a message consisting of the historical events of Jesus' life and work.<sup>163</sup> Keller explains human history as God's play or storyline with Jesus Christ as the main character.<sup>164</sup> The two chief historical events of Jesus' life, for Keller, are the cross and the resurrection, with the cross being the "heart of the gospel."<sup>165</sup> He articulates the historical event of Jesus' death as doctrinal by referring to its atoning work.<sup>166</sup> He repeatedly states that Jesus died in the place of sinners,<sup>167</sup> and is therefore much more than an example.<sup>168</sup> He argues against the view of Jesus as a mere example when he writes, "Jesus' death was only a good example if it was more than an example, if it was something absolutely necessary to rescue us. And it was. Why did Jesus have to die in order to forgive us? There was a debt to be paid—God himself paid it. There was a penalty to be born [*sic*]*—God himself bore it.*"<sup>169</sup>

Keller also emphasizes the historicity of the resurrection. In his defense of the

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<sup>162</sup>Keller, *The Reason for God*, 123, 213-14, 219-25.

<sup>163</sup>To hear Keller's fullest expression of the historicity of Jesus, see chaps. 12 and 13 on the death and resurrection of Jesus.

<sup>164</sup>Keller, *The Reason for God*, 122-23.

<sup>165</sup>*Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>166</sup>Keller writes, "Christian theology has always recognized that Jesus bore, as the substitute in our place, the endless exclusion from God that the human race has merited." *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>167</sup>*Ibid.*, 20, 29, 49, 181, 194-95.

<sup>168</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>169</sup>*Ibid.*, 193.

Christian faith Keller uses the resurrection as evidence for the truthfulness of Christianity. He writes,

Here [in 1 Cor 15:3-6] Paul not only speaks of the empty tomb and resurrection on the “third day” (showing he is talking of a historical event, not a symbol or metaphor) but he also lists the eyewitnesses. Paul indicates that the risen Jesus not only appeared to individuals and small groups, but he also appeared to five hundred people at once, more of whom were still alive at the time of this writing and could be consulted for corroboration. Paul’s letter was to a church, and was inviting anyone who doubted that Jesus had appeared to people after his death to go and talk to the eyewitnesses if they wished. It was a bold challenge and one that could easily be taken up, since during the *pax Romana* travel around the Mediterranean was safe and easy. Paul could not have made such a challenge if those eye-witnesses didn’t exist.<sup>170</sup>

For Keller, the resurrection provides the strongest evidence for the historical reliability of Christianity, and also provides the power to transform a worldview.<sup>171</sup> In his chapter on the resurrection, Keller explains that the only explanation for the change in the views of Jews and Greeks concerning death and the afterlife is that the resurrection really took place.

A second expression of the gospel for Keller throughout *The Reason for God* is that the gospel is a message of “salvation through grace.”<sup>172</sup> The concept of grace for Keller is inherent within the gospel message since the gospel is good news concerning Christ’s substitutionary work done on behalf of sinners.<sup>173</sup> Keller points out that since the work of salvation was performed by God through Christ, the gospel is therefore

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<sup>170</sup>Ibid., 204.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid., 206-10.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid., 175.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., 19, 49-50, 192-93, 220-21.

completely a work of God and a gift to man.<sup>174</sup>

**The commitment expressed in *The Prodigal God*.** Keller expresses the Christian worldview in *The Prodigal God*, as he does in *The Reason for God*, with the four part storyline of creation, fall, redemption and restoration. He describes the parable of the prodigal son as a retelling of the entire biblical storyline. This storyline consists of humanity's life in the garden with God, humanity's exile from their home with God, God's grace to redeem through Jesus' cross and resurrection, and the future restoration of the world.<sup>175</sup> Keller's central focus, within this framework, is upon redemption through Christ's death and resurrection. He articulates the gospel of redemption as a message of Christ's atoning death on the cross and God's grace in the salvation of sinners. First, Keller expresses the gospel of Christ's death on the cross for sinners as substitutionary in nature. Throughout *The Prodigal God*, Keller explains Jesus' death as paying the debt of sinners by taking their place.<sup>176</sup> Through the parable of the prodigal son Keller portrays Jesus as the true elder brother who paid the penalty for sinners. He explains that in the parable it cost a portion of the elder brother's inheritance to have the father receive the younger brother back into the family; so Keller draws an analogy of Jesus as the selfless elder brother who came and paid the penalty for sinners to be brought into the family of God. Keller writes, "Our true elder brother paid our debt, on the cross, in our place."<sup>177</sup> He expresses the costliness of the gospel when he writes,

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<sup>174</sup>Ibid., 53, 59, 179-85.

<sup>175</sup>Ibid., 95-103.

<sup>176</sup>See Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 84-85, 87, 101-02, 107.

<sup>177</sup>Ibid., 85.

Jesus Christ, who had all the power in the world, saw us enslaved by the very things we thought would free us. So he emptied himself of his glory and became a servant (Philippians 2). He laid aside the infinities and immensities of his being and, at the cost of his life, paid the debt for our sins, purchasing us the only place our hearts can rest, in his Father's house.<sup>178</sup>

Along with this message of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross, Keller also expresses the gospel as a message of God's grace in Christ. Since the gospel is about God's work in Christ, it is therefore a message of grace. Repeatedly throughout the book Keller states that Christianity and the gospel are about grace.<sup>179</sup> In fact the very title "The Prodigal God" speaks of God's abundant grace.<sup>180</sup> Keller at times, seeking to stress grace, will add the adjective "sheer" before grace.<sup>181</sup> This understanding of the gospel of grace leads Keller to present Jesus as primarily a savior for sinners and not an example for moral improvement.<sup>182</sup>

By taking this parable and relating it to the entire sweep of the Bible, Keller places the gospel as the central storyline of the Bible. He also expresses the gospel by stating, "The Christian gospel is that I am so flawed that Jesus had to die for me, yet I am so loved and valued that Jesus was glad to die for me."<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>178</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>179</sup>For examples of Keller's emphasis on grace, see *The Prodigal God*, 24-25, 38, 44-45, 74, 98, 112, 114, 120-21.

<sup>180</sup>Keller writes, "The word 'prodigal' does not mean 'wayward' but, according to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 'recklessly spendthrift.' It means to spend till you have nothing left. This term is therefore as appropriate for describing the father in the story as his younger son. The father's welcome to the repentant son was literally reckless, because he refused to 'reckon' or count his sin against him or demand repayment." Ibid., xv.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid., 120-21.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., 37-38, 48, 78.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., 181.

**The commitment expressed in *Gospel in Life*.** In *Gospel in Life*, Keller defines worldview as “the story of the world that operates at the root of a person’s life.”<sup>184</sup> He declares the gospel as the Christian worldview, which tells the story of the purpose of man to know God, the problem of man as his sin, and the solution to the problem as Christ and his grace.<sup>185</sup> Keller describes the centrality of Christ in this storyline when he writes,

God entered history in the person of Jesus to deal with all the causes and results of our broken relationship with him. Jesus lived the life we were created to live and then died to pay the debt of sin incurred for the life we actually live. By his resurrection he showed that death is now defeated and he showed us the future—new bodies and a completely new heaven and new earth, in which the world is restored to full joy, glory, and peace.<sup>186</sup>

In this quotation Keller explains the gospel as a historical storyline (“God entered history”) consisting of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for the salvation of man and the world. The gospel is therefore not about the past or present actions of man, but is focused on the past events of Jesus Christ.<sup>187</sup> Keller explains that through the gospel, man is justified “by faith alone through the work of Christ alone.”<sup>188</sup> The key work of Christ for Keller is his atoning death as a substitute for sinners.

This emphasis upon Christ’s work leads Keller to stress the gospel as a

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<sup>184</sup>Keller, *Gospel in Life*, 91.

<sup>185</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>186</sup>Keller, *Gospel in Life*, 95.

<sup>187</sup>Keller writes, “The determining factor in our relationship with God is not our past but Christ’s past.” Ibid., 18.

<sup>188</sup>Keller explains how the gospel makes men holy in God’s sight by stating, “We are justified, made right with God, by faith alone through the work of Christ alone. That is, when we unite with Christ by faith, we are now ‘righteous in God’s sight.’ Through the gospel we are made holy and perfect in God’s eyes.” Ibid., 25.

message of grace.<sup>189</sup> He writes, “The gospel, however, is that Jesus takes the law of God so seriously that he paid the penalty of disobedience, so we can be saved by sheer grace.”<sup>190</sup> This mention of “sheer grace” is repeated throughout Keller’s exposition of the gospel.<sup>191</sup>

In summary, all three books by Keller express the gospel as the historical events of Jesus, along with the grace of God in saving sinners. For Keller, the key event in Jesus’ life is his substitutionary death for sinners.

### **Element 3: The Commitment’s Implications for Keller**

The third element of Keller’s worldview is his articulation of the gospel as the foundation for living the Christian life. This third element of Sire’s paradigm is taken from the final part of his worldview definition: “. . . that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.”<sup>192</sup> Keller’s three books demonstrate his commitment to applying the gospel to all of life.

**The commitment’s implications in *The Reason for God*.** In *The Reason for God* Keller presents the gospel as the foundation for living a morally upright life. The gospel provides this foundation by establishing a pattern for Christian living.<sup>193</sup> This

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<sup>189</sup>Ibid., 107.

<sup>190</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>191</sup>For other examples of his emphasis on the grace of the gospel, see *Gospel in Life*, 107, 110, 112, 128.

<sup>192</sup>Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 20.

<sup>193</sup>“To understand why Jesus had to die it is important to remember both the result of the Cross (costly forgiveness of sins) and the pattern of the Cross (reversal of the world’s values).” Keller, *The Reason for God*, 197.

pattern operates on the gospel principle: “I am accepted by God through what Christ has done—therefore I obey.”<sup>194</sup> This principle for Keller serves as the pattern for all moral living and obedience. One example of this pattern is the way believers learn to forgive as their Lord has forgiven them. Keller explains that the grace of the gospel empowers believers to absorb the sins committed against them by extending forgiveness and not seeking retribution. This gospel of grace also establishes a pattern in other areas, such as suffering, justice, money, and power.<sup>195</sup>

The gospel provides the believer with the resource needed to live out the Christian life. Keller writes,

The story of the gospel makes sense of moral obligations and our belief in the reality of justice, so Christians do restorative and redistributive justice wherever they can. The story of the gospel makes sense of our indelible religiousness, so Christians do evangelism, pointing the way to forgiveness and reconciliation with God through Jesus. The gospel makes sense of our profoundly relational character, so Christians work sacrificially to strengthen human communities around them as well as the Christian community, the church. The gospel story also makes sense of our delight in the presence of beauty, so Christians become stewards of the material world, from those who cultivate the natural creation through science and gardening to those who give themselves to artistic endeavors, all knowing why these things are necessary for human flourishing.<sup>196</sup>

**The commitment’s implications in *The Prodigal God*.** In *The Prodigal God*, Keller explains the gospel as the foundation by which the believer’s life is changed in relation “to God, self, others, the world, work, sin, and virtue.”<sup>197</sup> All of the Christian

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<sup>194</sup>Ibid., 179-80.

<sup>195</sup>For Keller’s discussion on suffering, see *The Reason for God*, 30-33. For his discussion on justice, see p. 67, on forgiveness, see p. 192, on money and power, see p. 196.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid., 225.

<sup>197</sup>Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 78.

life, for Keller, is to be lived on the foundation of the gospel.<sup>198</sup> He explains his view by writing, “Rather, all change comes from deepening your understanding of the salvation of Christ and living out of the changes that understanding creates in your heart. Faith in the gospel restructures our motivations, our self-understanding, our identity, and our view of the world.”<sup>199</sup> This quotation demonstrates Keller’s view that progressive sanctification takes place as the believer embraces the gospel by faith and grows in a deeper understanding of the gospel.<sup>200</sup>

By dwelling on the gospel, believers learn how to handle issues such as shame, anxiety, injustice, violence, suffering, death, money, and marriage.<sup>201</sup> With regard to money, Keller explains generosity as produced not from focusing on the emotions or the will, but through active contemplation on the gospel, as described in 2 Corinthians 8:9. He writes, “Paul is taking them [i.e., the Corinthians] back to the gospel. He is saying, ‘Think on his costly grace—until you want to give like he did.’”<sup>202</sup> Also with regard to marriage, Keller explains that the way to strengthen one’s marriage is not based on trying harder to live out moral principles but instead to dwell on Christ’s sacrificial love for his bride. He writes, “The solution to a bad marriage is a reorientation to the radical spousal

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<sup>198</sup>“The gospel is therefore not just the ABCs of the Christian life. Our problems arise largely because we don’t continually return to the gospel to work it in and live it out.” Ibid., 119.

<sup>199</sup>Ibid., 118-19.

<sup>200</sup>“That’s what we must do with the gospel of grace of God. We must personally appropriate it, making it more and more central to everything we see, think, and feel. That is how we grow spiritually in wisdom, love, joy, and peace.” Ibid., 114. “We can only change permanently as we take the gospel more deeply into our understanding and into our hearts. We must feed on the gospel, as it were, digesting it and making it part of ourselves. That is how we grow.” Ibid., 115. For other quotations of Keller’s view of sanctification by faith in the gospel, see pp. 118, 119, 124.

<sup>201</sup>Ibid., 112-13, 110-13, 115-17.

<sup>202</sup>Ibid., 116.

love of Christ in the gospel.”<sup>203</sup>

**The commitment’s implications in *Gospel in Life*.** The very purpose of Keller’s book *Gospel in Life* is to explain how the gospel affects all of life: “[W]e will look at how the gospel changes our hearts (Sessions 2 and 3), changes our community (Sessions 4 and 5), and changes how we live in the world (sessions 6 and 7).”<sup>204</sup> For Keller, the gospel serves as the motivation for every area of life. He explains the gospel’s effect on the following areas: money, poverty, mercy, marriage and family, self-control, godly living, repentance, pride, anxiety, indifference, the church’s community life, racism, and classism.<sup>205</sup>

Keller begins his discussion on the centrality of the gospel for Christian living by establishing the relationship between justification and sanctification.<sup>206</sup> This relationship consists of justification providing a new status out of which believers live a life of sanctification. Therefore, faith in the gospel serves as the grounds for sanctification.<sup>207</sup>

On the subjects of money and marriage, Keller provides similar teaching as he

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<sup>203</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>204</sup>Keller, *Gospel in Life*, 7.

<sup>205</sup>For Keller’s discussion on the gospel and money/poverty, see p. 25, on the gospel and mercy, see pp. 107-10, on the gospel and marriage/family, see p. 26, on the gospel and self-control/godly living, see pp. 26 and 30, on the gospel and repentance, see pp. 28-29, on the gospel and pride, see p. 29, on the gospel and anxiety, see p. 29, on the gospel and indifference, see p. 30, on the gospel and the church’s community life, see pp. 57 and 65-66, on the gospel and racism/classism, see pp. 60-61.

<sup>206</sup>Keller, *Gospel in Life*, 25.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid., 26.

does in *The Prodigal God*.<sup>208</sup> With regard to the subject of self-control, Keller writes, “How does Paul tell them to get this self-control? Remarkably, he says it is the ‘grace of God that brings salvation,’ which ‘teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness.’ He explains what he means by the ‘grace of God’ in Titus 3:5: ‘he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. This is how we say ‘no’ to temptation.”<sup>209</sup> Keller continues by explaining how believers must continually rehearse the gospel in order to overcome their vices: “Paul is saying that if you want to really change, you must let the gospel teach you—that is to train, discipline, coach you—over a period of time. You must let the gospel argue with you. You must let the gospel sink down deeply into your heart, until it changes your motivation and views and attitudes.”<sup>210</sup>

Throughout *Gospel in Life*, Keller calls his readers to understand the gospel to be the foundation for living.<sup>211</sup> The gospel therefore is not just a message to be believed at the beginning of the Christian life, but it is the message that is to be reinforced daily so as to live out all of its implications. The Christian life, for Keller, is the continual discipline of understanding all of life in relation to the truth of the gospel.<sup>212</sup>

In summary, all three books reveal the gospel as the foundation for Christian

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<sup>208</sup>In both *The Prodigal God* and *Gospel in Life*, Keller bases his teaching on money on Paul’s teaching in 2 Cor 8:9. Keller writes, “So the solution to stinginess is a reorientation to the generosity of Christ in the gospel, where he poured out his wealth for you.” *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>209</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>210</sup>*Ibid.*, 26-27.

<sup>211</sup>“What makes you a sexually faithful spouse, a generous—not avaricious—person, a good parent and/or child is not just redoubled effort to follow the example of Christ. Rather, it is deepening your understanding of the salvation of Christ and living out of the changes that understanding makes in your heart—the seat of your mind, will, and emotions. Faith in the gospel restructures our motivations, our self-understanding and identity, and our view of the world. It changes our hearts.” *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>212</sup>*Ibid.*, 117.

living. Keller views the gospel as the instrument used to sanctify believers. Believers are progressively sanctified, according to Keller, by continual reflection on the gospel.

**Element 4:  
Keller's Commitment Contrasted with  
Competing Commitments**

The final element in Sire's paradigm is the contrasting of competing worldviews. This element is derived from Sire's method of comparing and contrasting worldviews in *The Universe Next Door*. This section completes the articulation of Keller's worldview by identifying this fourth element in his writings. Unlike Machen, Keller does not address a competing worldview by name, but instead attempts to undermine key presuppositions in postmodern thought, namely, naturalism and pluralism.

Sire declares postmodernism as a difficult worldview to define and categorize.<sup>213</sup> Some of these difficulties lie in postmodernism's close connection with naturalism. He writes,

Postmodernism is, of course, not a full-blown worldview. But it is such a pervasive perspective that it has modified several worldviews, most notably naturalism. In fact, the best way to think about most of postmodernism is to see it as the most recent phase of the 'modern,' the most recent form of naturalism. In postmodernism the essence of modernism has not been left behind. Both rest on two key notions: (1) that the cosmos is all there is—no God of any kind exists—and (2) the autonomy of human reason.<sup>214</sup>

Postmodernism's absolutizing of human reason, Sire explains, has led to the relativizing of truth.<sup>215</sup> Truth is now understood as being bound up with individual

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<sup>213</sup>Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 215-17.

<sup>214</sup>Ibid., 242.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid., 215-16.

perspectives and thus postmodernism has declared the death of all metanarratives.<sup>216</sup>

This emphasis on human perspectives has resulted in a kind of pluralism which evaluates truth claims based on their pragmatic value. Sire explains postmodernism's pragmatism in regard to religion when he writes,

It is easy to see how this notion, when applied to religious claims, triggers a radical relativism. No one's story is truer than anyone else's story. Does the story work? That is, does it satisfy the teller? Does it get you what you want—say, a sense of belonging, a peace with yourself, a hope for the future, a way to order your life? It's all one can ask.<sup>217</sup>

Postmodernism's naturalistic and pluralistic presuppositions have affected the way Timothy Keller presents Christianity and the gospel. Keller consistently challenges these presuppositions in his writing and preaching by contrasting biblical Christianity with what he calls irreligion and religion. In this contrast, Keller indirectly counters postmodernism by identifying weaknesses in its naturalistic presuppositions, while also revealing the error of pluralism by pointing out Christianity's differences with other religions. Throughout his writings, Keller contrasts biblical Christianity with religion and secularism in order to reveal the exclusive nature of Christianity, thus subtly challenging the pluralism of postmodernism while also revealing the problems with the naturalistic view inherent in postmodernism.

**Commitments contrasted in *The Reason for God*.** In *The Reason for God*,

Keller contrasts the gospel with religion and irreligion. He first explains the religious

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<sup>216</sup>Metanarratives are single stories or comprehensive worldviews. A metanarrative claims exclusive truth over the philosophical questions of life. "With postmodernism no story can have any more credibility than any other. All stories are equally valid, being so validated by the community that lives by them." Ibid., 216-17.

<sup>217</sup>Ibid., 224.

perspective as that which builds lives on “moral achievements,” while the irreligious perspective builds “on some other secular pursuit or relationship.”<sup>218</sup> Both perspectives, according to Keller, are man-centered and avoid Jesus as Lord and Savior. The main contrast for Keller is with religion. He clarifies the difference between the gospel and religion by stating,

There is a profound and fundamental difference between the way that other religions tell us to seek salvation and the way described in the gospel of Jesus. All other major faiths have founders who are teachers that show the way to salvation. Only Jesus claimed to actually be the way of salvation himself. This difference is so great that, even though Christianity can certainly be called a religion in the broader sense, for the purpose of discussion we will use the term “religion” in this chapter to refer to “salvation through moral effort” and “gospel” to refer to “salvation through grace.”<sup>219</sup>

Here, Keller differentiates between all other religions and Christianity, thus revealing the error of religious pluralism. The key difference, for Keller, between religion and Christianity is the difference between works and grace.<sup>220</sup> Keller understands religion to be self-salvation through obedience, while the gospel is Christ’s salvation offered to sinners through grace.<sup>221</sup> Keller warns against a false form of Christianity that teaches Jesus primarily as a moral example and, therefore, teaches

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<sup>218</sup>Keller, *The Reason for God*, 177.

<sup>219</sup>*Ibid.*, 174-75.

<sup>220</sup>“Most people in our culture believe that, if there is a God, we can relate to him and go to heaven through leading a good life. Let’s call this the ‘moral improvement’ view. Christianity teaches the very opposite. In the Christian understanding, Jesus does not tell us how to live so we can merit salvation. Rather, he comes to forgive and save us through his life and death in our place. God’s grace does not come to people who morally outperform others, but to those who admit their failure to perform and who acknowledge their need for a Savior.” *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>221</sup>“There is, then, a great gulf between the understanding that God accepts us because of our efforts and the understanding that God accepts us because of what Jesus has done. Religion operates on the principle ‘I obey—therefore I am accepted by God.’ But the operating principle of the gospel is ‘I am accepted by God through what Christ has done—therefore I obey.’” *Ibid.*, 179-80.

moralism rather than grace.<sup>222</sup>

Another key difference between Christianity and the other views, for Keller, is the implications each have on life. One example of this distinction is how these views provide resources for dealing with the world's ills. Keller declares the supremacy of the gospel over other views in his discussion on the resurrection:

Each year at Easter I get to preach on the Resurrection. In my sermon I always say to my skeptical, secular friends that, even if they can't believe in the resurrection, they should want it to be true. Most of them care deeply about justice for the poor, alleviating hunger and disease, and caring for the environment. Yet many of them believe that the material world was caused by accident and that the world and everything in it will eventually simply burn up in the death of the sun. They find it discouraging that so few people care about justice without realizing that their own worldview undermines any motivation to make the world a better place. Why sacrifice for the needs of others if in the end nothing we do will make any difference? If the resurrection of Jesus happened, however, that means there's infinite hope and reason to pour ourselves out for the needs of the world.<sup>223</sup>

Along with Keller's attack on secularism's failure to answer the world's problems, he also speaks of the failure of religion in dealing with these same problems.<sup>224</sup>

**Commitments contrasted in *The Prodigal God*.** In *The Prodigal God*, Keller uses the parable of the prodigal son to contrast the gospel with religion and irreligion.<sup>225</sup> He makes this contrast by first explaining the younger brother as the irreligious and the

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<sup>222</sup>“It is critical for anyone reading this book to recognize this fundamental difference between the gospel and religion. Christianity's basic message differs at root with the assumptions of traditional religion. The founders of every other major religion essentially came as teachers, not as saviors. They came to say: ‘Do this and you will find the divine.’ But Jesus came essentially as a savior rather than a teacher (though he was that as well). . . . The Christian message is that we are saved not by our record, but by Christ's record. So Christianity is not religion or irreligion. It is something else altogether.” Ibid., 185.

<sup>223</sup>Ibid., 212.

<sup>224</sup>“Outside of the Bible, no other major religious faith holds out any hope or even interest in the restoration of perfect *shalom*, justice, and wholeness in this material world.” Ibid., 223.

<sup>225</sup>Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 71.

older brother as the religious.<sup>226</sup> Keller declares both groups to be “spiritually lost” and that all human thought concerning how to relate to God “has been wrong.”<sup>227</sup> He describes the elder brother’s religious view as “the way of *moral conformity*” and the younger brother’s irreligious view to be “the way of *self-discovery*.”<sup>228</sup> He explains western society to be so divided over these approaches to life that most people cannot conceive of any other approach.<sup>229</sup> He then explains the gospel as a third approach. He writes,

This means that Jesus’ message, which is “the gospel,” is a completely different spirituality. The gospel of Jesus is not religion or irreligion, morality or immorality, moralism or relativism, conservatism or liberalism. Nor is it something halfway along a spectrum between two poles—it is something else altogether.<sup>230</sup>

Therefore, for Keller, biblical Christianity provides the gospel as a third way of living.<sup>231</sup> As with *The Reason for God*, Keller again draws his major contrast with religion. He draws this contrast because of society’s confusion: “To most people in our society, Christianity *is* religion and moralism.”<sup>232</sup> Keller draws out two main distinctions between the gospel and religion. First, he explains the gospel as a message of grace while religion is a message of works.<sup>233</sup> Keller articulates this distinction by stating that

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<sup>226</sup>Ibid., 7-10.

<sup>227</sup>Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>228</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>229</sup>Ibid., 31-34.

<sup>230</sup>Ibid., 44-45.

<sup>231</sup>Ibid., 132.

<sup>232</sup>Ibid., 14. Keller again states this confusion when he writes, “They say, ‘Christianity is just another religion.’ But Jesus says, no, that is not true.” Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 67.

<sup>233</sup>Ibid., 37-38, 44.

the gospel and religion have different operating principles. He writes, “Religion operates on the principle of ‘I obey—therefore I am accepted by God.’ The basic operating principle of the gospel is “I am accepted by God through the work of Jesus Christ—therefore I obey.”<sup>234</sup>

Keller also contrasts Christianity and other views by revealing Christianity to provide superior resources for believing in and taking part in the restoration of the world.<sup>235</sup> In light of Christianity’s belief in a renewed heaven and earth, Keller declares, “Jesus, unlike the founder of any other major faith, holds out hope for ordinary human life.”<sup>236</sup> This hope is contrasted with other religions which either view the world as simply an illusion or as a realm that is to be discarded in order to enter a spiritual realm.

**Commitments contrasted in *Gospel in Life*.** In *Gospel in Life*, Keller presents what he calls “three ways to live”; he also refers to these as three approaches to God. These three approaches, already mentioned in the above two books, are religion, irreligion, and the gospel.<sup>237</sup> The majority of the book contrasts the gospel with religion, due to the common error of misunderstanding Christianity as religion.<sup>238</sup> Keller provides

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<sup>234</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>235</sup>See pp. 104, and 111.

<sup>236</sup>Ibid., 104.

<sup>237</sup>Keller, *Gospel in Life*, 15. Also on pp. 90-96 Keller briefly categorizes six alternative worldviews: Platonism, traditional religions, scientific naturalism, psychodynamism (“a catch-all phrase for contemporary individualistic psychology growing out of Freud”), existentialism, and post-modernism. After articulating these alternative worldviews, Keller declares the gospel to have a powerful effect in transforming these worldviews: “When the gospel ‘enters’ a culture or worldview, it therefore both challenges and affirms; it both retains and rejects. When it enters any culture it resolves and completes its partly-true story through the gospel.” Ibid., 96.

<sup>238</sup>Ibid.

a helpful chart with two columns that summarizes the differences between religion and the gospel.<sup>239</sup> This chart reveals Keller’s chief contrast between religion and the gospel to be religion’s focus on moral performance and the gospel’s on God’s grace in Christ.<sup>240</sup> This difference is seen in Keller’s discussion on repentance. He contrasts “religious repentance” with “gospel repentance” by writing, “In ‘religion,’ the purpose of repentance is basically to keep God happy so he will continue to bless us and answer our prayers.”<sup>241</sup> “Gospel repentance” is different: “The gospel, however, tells us that as Christians sin can’t ultimately bring us into condemnation (Rom. 8:1). Its heinousness is therefore what it does to God: it displeases him.”<sup>242</sup> Keller concludes by summarizing the differences: “Thus in religion, repentance is self-centered; the gospel makes it God-centered. In religion we are mainly sorry for the consequences of sin, but in the gospel we are sorry for the sin itself.”<sup>243</sup>

Religion is therefore moralistic, because it is man-centered.<sup>244</sup> This moralistic approach according to Keller focuses on behavior and turns man into his own savior; whereas the gospel’s approach to life maintains Christ as the only Savior. This difference is between a works salvation and a grace salvation.<sup>245</sup> Keller explains this difference

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<sup>239</sup>Ibid., 16. This chart is reproduced in Appendix 1.

<sup>240</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>241</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>242</sup>Ibid.

<sup>243</sup>Ibid.

<sup>244</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>245</sup>Ibid., 45-46.

further when he writes,

A merely religious person, who believes God will favor him because of his morality and respectability, will ordinarily have contempt for the outcast. “I worked hard to get where I am, and so can anyone else!” That is the language of the moralist’s heart. “I am only where I am by the sheer and unmerited mercy of God. I am completely equal with all other people.” That is the language of the Christian’s heart.<sup>246</sup>

In summary, all three books contrast the gospel with religion and irreligion, with the greater emphasis upon religion. The key contrast between the two is the gospel’s salvation by grace and religion’s salvation by works. These contrasts provide Keller with an indirect attack on postmodernism by raising arguments against its presuppositions of naturalism and religious pluralism.

### **Summary of Keller’s Worldview**

In a lecture given at Redeemer Presbyterian, Keller succinctly states what has been demonstrated in this study: the gospel is Keller’s worldview.

The gospel is not just a set of beliefs that you have to agree to in order to get into the club—in a sense that is true. The gospel is not just a set of beliefs. It is a grid, a whole distinct worldview. A worldview is a set of beliefs so basic that they determine how you look at everything else. The gospel is a grid, a way of looking at everything differently.<sup>247</sup>

In all three books, Keller presents the gospel as his worldview, while expressing it as both a historical storyline of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ for sinners, and the message of God’s grace in Christ. At the heart of the storyline is the death of Christ as a substitutionary sacrifice for sinners.

This study has also revealed Keller’s conviction regarding the gospel’s

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<sup>246</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>247</sup>Timothy J. Keller, lecture “What is the Gospel?,” taught August 12, 2003 [CD]; available from <http://www.redeemer3.com/store>; Internet.

function as the foundation for the Christian life. The gospel, for Keller, provides the motivation and the pattern for living the Christian life. As the gospel is contemplated, the life of the believer is transformed. Keller, throughout these three books, reveals specific areas of this gospel transformation (e.g., suffering, forgiveness, money, power, self-control, repentance, pride, anxiety, marriage and family, racism and classism).

Concerning the final worldview element, this chapter has documented Keller's use of contrasting the gospel with the views of religion and irreligion. These contrasts provide Keller with an indirect method of challenging postmodernism, by revealing weaknesses in two of its presuppositions: naturalism and pluralism. The main contrast, for Keller, in all three books is with religion; this is due to Keller's belief that western pluralism has often associated Christianity with all other religions. Keller's two main contrasts are (1) the gospel as a message of grace verses religion as a message of human works, and (2) Christianity's rational basis for living a meaningful life in this world verses the irrational basis of religion and irreligion.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE WORLDVIEW PREACHING OF MACHEN AND KELLER EVALUATED

The previous chapter provided a description of Machen's and Keller's worldviews discovered in their writings. Their worldviews were articulated according to Sire's paradigm. This chapter turns to their preaching ministries to discover whether or not their sermons reflect these worldviews. This evaluation seeks to identify and summarize the four worldview elements in the preaching of Machen and Keller and compare these elements with what was articulated in chapter 3. Machen's sermons are evaluated first.

#### **Machen's Worldview Preaching Evaluated**

Along with being an academic, Machen was an avid preacher. His New Testament assistant Ned Stonehouse testifies to his influence: "As a preacher and speaker on conference platforms his services were in constant demand."<sup>1</sup> However, due to his itinerant preaching schedule Machen preached the majority of his sermons many times over.<sup>2</sup> Machen's itinerant preaching ministry, together with his early death at age 54, has left a limited number of sermon manuscripts. The J. Gresham Machen Archives at

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<sup>1</sup>Ned Stonehouse, "Introduction," in *God Transcendent*, ed. Ned Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 8.

<sup>2</sup>Stephen J. Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 210.

Westminster Theological Seminary contain forty-three usable sermon manuscripts.<sup>3</sup>

Fifteen of these sermons have been compiled and published in the book *God Transcendent and Other Sermons*.

This section evaluates these fifteen sermons along with twenty-three unpublished sermons from the Machen archives at Westminster Theological Seminary. These sermons are divided into two groups: the fifteen in the book *God Transcendent*, and the twenty-three from the Machen archives at Westminster.<sup>4</sup>

### **Evaluation of Elements 1 and 2: Machen's Commitment and Its Expression**

This section evaluates Machen's worldview preaching within the first two categories of Sire's paradigm: "Worldview as a commitment," and "expressed as a story or a set of presuppositions." Thirty-eight of Machen's sermons are evaluated in order to determine whether the gospel is presented as Machen's central commitment, and whether they identify the gospel with the two elements of history and doctrine, particularly the historical event of Christ's death on the cross and the doctrine of penal substitution.

**Machen's commitment articulated and expressed in *God Transcendent*.** A careful evaluation of Machen's fifteen sermons in *God Transcendent* reveals the gospel to be Machen's central commitment in two primary ways. First, Machen outright declares the gospel's centrality to Christianity and the Bible. In various places within his

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<sup>3</sup>By "usable" I am referring to sermon manuscripts that are complete, and not fragments or outlines of sermons. Also, this dissertation does not use five sermons from his days as a student at Princeton, due to these sermons being preached as a student in a classroom and not as a minister in the church.

<sup>4</sup>See Appendix 2 for a list of the sermon titles and Scripture passages.

sermons, Machen calls the gospel “the centre and core of the Christian life,”<sup>5</sup> “the very breath of our lives,”<sup>6</sup> “the foundation of the Christian edifice,”<sup>7</sup> and “the great central teaching of the Word of God.”<sup>8</sup> These four phrases from four different sermons reveal the centrality of the gospel in Machen’s view of the Bible and Christianity. In fact, Machen declares in his sermon “The Gospel and Modern Substitutes” that the Bible would “disappear” if the gospel were removed from it.<sup>9</sup>

The second way Machen presents the centrality of the gospel in these sermons is by asserting the gospel to be the “center”<sup>10</sup> and “fulfillment”<sup>11</sup> of each sermon passage and topic. Even among the seven sermons that are preached from passages not explicitly referring to the gospel,<sup>12</sup> Machen reveals his gospel-centered worldview by interpreting each passage in the light of the gospel. Whether dealing with the topic of God’s

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<sup>5</sup>J. Gresham Machen, “The Claims of Love: Mark 4:3-8,” in *God Transcendent: And Other Sermons*, ed. Ned Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 66.

<sup>6</sup>Machen, “The Living Saviour: Matthew 4:23; 28:20,” in *God Transcendent*, 79.

<sup>7</sup>Machen, “The Separateness of the Church: Matthew 5:13,” in *God Transcendent*, 102.

<sup>8</sup>Machen, “Constraining Love: 2 Corinthians 5:14,” in *God Transcendent*, 133.

<sup>9</sup>Machen, “The Gospel and Modern Substitutes: Romans 1:16,” in *God Transcendent*, 91.

<sup>10</sup>“There [the death of Christ] is the centre of the incident, and the centre here as well as elsewhere is found at Calvary.” Machen, “The Claims of Love: Mark 4:3-8,” 67.

<sup>11</sup>“There is in the Bible a grand continuity in the economy of grace. God’s gracious dealings with His people of old were an anticipation of the coming of the Lord. ‘Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God’—these words with which our chapter begins are *fulfilled and completed* in Christ” (emphasis mine). Machen, “God Transcendent: Isaiah 40:22,” in *God Transcendent*, 21-22.

<sup>12</sup>See “God Transcendent: Isaiah 40:22”; “Isaiah’s Scorn of Idolatry: Isaiah 44:16-17”; “The Fear of God: Matthew 10:28”; “The Claims of Love: Mark 14:3-8”; “The Separateness of the Church: Matthew 5:13”; “Prophets False and True: 1 Kings 22:14”; “The Good Fight of Faith: Philippians 4:7; 1 Timothy 6:12.”

transcendence,<sup>13</sup> idolatry,<sup>14</sup> fear,<sup>15</sup> the law of God,<sup>16</sup> or devotion to God,<sup>17</sup> Machen demonstrates how these topics are related to and fulfilled in the person and work of Christ. For example in his sermon “The Fear of God,” Machen explains how understanding the gospel overcomes fear in the lives of believers and provides them with the proper understanding of the fear of God:

Even the Christian must fear God. But it is another kind of fear. It is a fear rather of what might have been than of what is; it is a fear of what would come were we not in Christ. Without such fear there can be no true love; for love of the Saviour is proportioned to one’s horror of that from which man has been saved. And how strong are the lives that are suffused with such a love! They are lives brave, not because the realities of life have been ignored, but because they have first been faced—lives that are founded upon the solid foundation of God’s grace. May such lives be ours!<sup>18</sup>

Along with the centrality of the gospel in his sermons, Machen also expresses the gospel as the message of God’s redemption in Christ. He sets this redemptive message into the larger framework of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man.<sup>19</sup> In his sermon “Prophets False and True,” Machen highlights the importance of this framework within the Christian worldview when he states, “We have in the Bible an account of the great presuppositions that should underlie all our thinking—the

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<sup>13</sup>Machen, “God Transcendent: Isaiah 40:22,” 21-22.

<sup>14</sup>Machen, “Isaiah’s Scorn of Idolatry: Isaiah 44:16-17,” in *God Transcendent*, 27.

<sup>15</sup>Machen, “The Fear of God: Matthew 10:28,” in *God Transcendent*, 33.

<sup>16</sup>Machen, “The Letter and the Spirit: 2 Corinthians 3:6,” in *God Transcendent*, 55.

<sup>17</sup>Machen, “The Claims of Love: Mark 4:3-8,” 67.

<sup>18</sup>Machen, “The Fear of God: Matthew 10:28,” 33.

<sup>19</sup>In “Sin’s Wages and God’s Gift,” Machen develops the dreadful sinfulness of all men before he provides the gospel as the solution. He describes the necessity of understanding man’s fallenness when he writes, “It is quite useless to ask a man to adopt the Christian view of the gospel unless he first has the Christian view of sin.” Machen, “Sin’s Wages and God’s Gift: Romans 6:23,” in *God Transcendent*, 34.

righteousness and holiness of God and the sinfulness of man. And then we have an account of the way in which God saved man once for all by the redeeming work of Christ.”<sup>20</sup> Machen describes Christ’s redeeming work with the same two elements that were identified in his writings: history and doctrine. First, Machen expresses the gospel in these sermons as a historical message. In “Sin’s Wages and God’s Gift,” Machen clearly expresses the gospel with the element of history:

The free gift of God is an absolutely unaccountable event in the life of every man who accepts it. It is not the natural working out of a principle, but it is a thing that happens. But that happening in the soul is the result of a happening in the sphere of external history. The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. There we have the central characteristic of our religion; the central characteristic of Christianity is that it is not founded merely upon what always was true but primarily upon something that happened—something that took place near Jerusalem at a definite time in the world’s history. In other words, it is founded not merely upon permanent truths of religion, but upon a “gospel,” a piece of news.<sup>21</sup>

Also in “God Transcendent,” Machen stresses the historical element of the gospel when he declares the time and place of God’s saving activity as “outside the walls of Jerusalem nineteen hundred years ago.”<sup>22</sup> The centrality of history in Machen’s thought led him in his preaching to emphasize what God had done in history rather than what man was to do in his Christian life.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Machen, “Prophets False and True: 1 Kings 22:14,” in *God Transcendent*, 111.

<sup>21</sup>Machen, “Sin’s Wages and God’s Gift: Romans 6:23,” 38-39. Also on p. 38 he states, “They [i.e., modernists] regard Christianity as founded upon permanent principles of religion instead of being founded upon *an unexpected piece of news*. . . . Salvation is nothing, or it is a free gift; it is not a principle that has been discovered but *an event that has happened*” (emphasis mine).

<sup>22</sup>Machen, “God Transcendent: Isaiah 40:22,” 18. Also in his sermon “Constraining Love,” Machen refers to the historical location of the gospel as “on the cross outside the walls of Jerusalem.” Machen, “Constraining Love: 2 Corinthians 5:14,” 133.

<sup>23</sup>“[W]e shall think no longer of what we do but of what our Saviour has done, and we shall pour out upon Him, with an abandon like that of the woman at Bethany, our gratitude and love and praise.” Machen, “The Claims of Love: Mark 4:3-8,” 66-67.

The primary historical event in each of Machen's sermons is the death of Christ on the cross. Stephen J. Nichols accurately describes Machen's preaching when he writes, "His sermons were also attended by conviction and healing because of his consistent reference to the cross and to the gospel of Christ. One has to try hard not to notice the cross somewhere lifted up for his hearers to see."<sup>24</sup> Machen so identified the gospel with the cross of Christ that he often used the term "cross" as a synonym for the gospel message.<sup>25</sup> At various times in his preaching, Machen called the gospel "the gospel of the cross," "the message of the cross," and "the story of the cross."<sup>26</sup>

Only one sermon, "Isaiah's Scorn of Idolatry," lacks a clear presentation of Christ's death. However, this sermon does allude to Christ's death when Machen states, "And we have been told that act of God's grace by which at *infinite cost to God Himself*—we have a right to utter these stupendous words—mercy was extended to us who deserve it not" (emphasis mine).<sup>27</sup> This statement appears to refer to Christ's death, but lacks clarity.

Along with Christ's historical death, Machen spoke of the importance of Christ's resurrection in a number of sermons;<sup>28</sup> however, this event was much more

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<sup>24</sup>Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen*, 212.

<sup>25</sup>In 12 of the 15 sermons, Machen used the phrase "the cross" to speak of the gospel. The only 3 sermons not to use the phrase are "God Transcendent," "Isaiah's Scorn of Idolatry," and "The Brotherhood in Christ."

<sup>26</sup>See "The Issue in the Church: 2 Corinthians 5:17," 41, 48; "The Claims of Love: Mark 14:3-8," 69; "Prophets False and True: 1 Kings 22:14," 115; "The Good Fight of Faith: Philippians 4:7; 1 Timothy 6:12," 125; "Constraining Love: 2 Corinthians 5:14," 142.

<sup>27</sup>Machen, "Isaiah's Scorn of Idolatry," 27.

<sup>28</sup>In at least 4 sermons Machen declares the historicity of the resurrection: "The Issue in the Church: 2 Corinthians 5:17," "The Living Saviour: Matthew 4:23; 28:20," "The Separateness of the Church: Matthew 5:13," "Constraining Love: 2 Corinthians 5:14."

assumed in his preaching than explicitly stated. For Machen, the historical death of Christ on the cross was kept center stage.<sup>29</sup> Machen sought to keep his audience looking back to the historical event of the cross: “In our days we look back to what has already been done; our joy is in salvation already attained; our boasting is in the Cross.”<sup>30</sup>

Machen’s sermons also present the second element of his expressed worldview: doctrine. For Machen, doctrine was a fundamental element of the Christian message.<sup>31</sup> Even within the “practical” portions of Scripture, Machen declared the doctrinal nature of Christianity:

You discover when you look a little deeper into these practical parts of the New Testament that they are founded upon what people call *theology* and the new life that comes when a man dies with Christ in order to rise with him. . . . So the ‘practical’ part of the Epistle is founded altogether upon the *doctrine* that has been set forth in the first eight chapters (emphasis mine).<sup>32</sup>

As chapter 3 documents, Machen understood the doctrine of the gospel to be the meaning of the historical event of Christ’s death on a Roman cross. In the majority of these sermons, Machen articulates the doctrinal nature of the gospel in terms of the penal substitutionary death of Christ. Repeatedly, Machen declares Christ’s death to be a death for sin or sinners.<sup>33</sup> In a number of sermons, Machen declares that Christ was bearing the

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<sup>29</sup>“In the New Testament, a strange fact stares us in the face—the New Testament seems far more concerned with the death of Jesus than with the details of His life. Learned men have tried in vain to explain that curious fact; in long and weary treatises they have sought the explanation. But the explanation is really so simple that a child can understand it. The New Testament emphasizes the death of Jesus because that is what Jesus did for us.” Machen, “The Living Saviour,” 76.

<sup>30</sup>Machen, “The Fear of God: Matthew 10:28,” 33.

<sup>31</sup>“At the center of the message was the doctrine of justification by faith.” Machen, “Justified by Faith: Romans 5:1,” in *God Transcendent*, 83.

<sup>32</sup>Machen, “The Gospel and Modern Substitutes: Romans 1:16,” 95.

<sup>33</sup>For reference to Christ dying for sins and/or sinners, see Machen, *God Transcendent*, 33, 39, 55, 67, 76, 85, 91, 101, 117, 126, 131. On a number of occasions, Machen takes up Paul’s words from

sin of others on the cross as he died.<sup>34</sup> His sermon, “The Living Saviour,” provides an example of Machen expressing the death of Christ in terms of sin-bearing:

For us, He did a greater thing; for us, He died. That mysterious thing that was wrought on Calvary, that was His work for us. The cross of Christ is a mystery. In the presence of it theology walks, after all, with but trembling, halting footsteps. Learning alone will never unlock its meaning. But to the penitent sinner, though mysterious, though full of baffling riddles, it is plain *enough*. On the cross Jesus dealt with our sin. Our dreadful guilt, the condemnation of God’s law—it is wiped out by an act of grace. It seemed absolutely inseparable from us; it was a burden no earthly friend could bear. But Christ is master of the innermost secrets of the moral world; with Him all things are possible; He has accomplished the impossible; He has borne our sin!”<sup>35</sup>

Machen also spoke often of Christ taking the place of sinners. Machen declares Christ to be the Christian’s “representative” and “substitute,” and that he died “instead” or “in the stead” of the believer.<sup>36</sup> For example, in “The Good Fight of Faith,” Machen declares, “We deserved eternal death because of sin; the eternal Son of God, because He loved us, and because He was sent by the Father who loved us too, *died in our stead*, for our sins, upon the cross” (emphasis mine).<sup>37</sup>

Although the majority of Machen’s sermons provide clear expressions of the gospel, three sermons do lack full expression. Only one of these sermons is void of any

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Galatians 2:20, declaring: “he loved me and gave himself for me.” See Machen, “The Claims of Love,” 67; “Prophets False and True,” 117; “The Good Fight of Faith,” 126; “Constraining Love,” 136.

<sup>34</sup>For examples of his clear teaching of Christ’s sin-bearing death, see Machen, “God Transcendent,” 21; “Sin’s Wages and God’s Gift,” 39; “The Letter and the Spirit,” 55; “The Living Saviour,” 76; “Justified by Faith,” 85.

<sup>35</sup>Machen, “The Living Saviour: Matthew 4:23; 28:20,” 76.

<sup>36</sup>For examples of Machen expressing the gospel as Christ giving himself on the cross to take the place of sinners, see Machen, “Sin’s Wages and God’s Gift,” 39; “The Letter and the Spirit,” 55; “The Brotherhood in Christ,” 61; “Justified by Faith,” 85; “The Gospel and Modern Substitutes,” 91; “Prophets False and True,” 114-17; “The Good Fight of Faith,” 125; “Constraining Love,” 133-34.

<sup>37</sup>Machen, “The Good Fight of Faith: Philippians 4:7; 1 Timothy 6:12,” in *God Transcendent*, 125.

mention of the term “gospel” or the death of Christ on the cross.<sup>38</sup> The other two sermons, “The Issue in the Church: 2 Cor. 5:17” and “The Brotherhood in Christ: Gal. 3:26-28,” do speak of the “gospel” and the death of Christ on the cross, but they do not provide a clear presentation of the meaning (i.e., the doctrinal aspect) of Christ’s death. In “The Brotherhood in Christ,” Machen comes close to expressing the cross as substitutionary atonement when he states, “. . . when God looks upon Christians what He sees is not their own unworthiness and sinfulness but the glorious Person of Christ their representative and advocate and Saviour.”<sup>39</sup> The context of this quotation does reveal that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to the believer and that Christ is the believer’s representative, but the context only implies and does not explicate Christ’s death as the means of this imputation and representative work of Christ.

In summary, these fifteen sermons do overwhelmingly present the gospel as Machen’s central commitment. The only questionable sermon is “Isaiah’s Scorn of Idolatry,” which never directly articulates the gospel. The majority of the other fourteen sermons express the gospel according to Machen’s two elements of history and doctrine. Overall the gospel is expressed in terms of the historical death of Christ on the cross and the doctrine of substitutionary atonement.

### **Machen’s commitment articulated and expressed in archived**

**manuscripts.** As with the sermons evaluated above, these next twenty-three reveal Machen’s commitment to the gospel first by his self-professed adherence to the centrality

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<sup>38</sup>This sermon, as previously mentioned, is “Isaiah’s Scorn of Idolatry.”

<sup>39</sup>Machen, “The Brotherhood in Christ: Galatians 3:26-28,” in *God Transcendent*, 61.

of the gospel and second by his application of the gospel to each sermon text and topic.

First, in a number of his sermons Machen professes the centrality of the gospel to the Bible and Christianity. In his sermon “Hebrews 11:1,” Machen declares the gospel to be “[a]t the very centre of the Bible.”<sup>40</sup> Along with this emphasis upon the central place of the gospel in the Scriptures, Machen also expresses the centrality of the gospel to Christianity. In “The Meaning of Christmas,” Machen states, “We were under the bondage of sin; but the Son of Man gave His life upon the Cross as the price of our release. We are not left here at the periphery of the Christian faith; but are taken to the *mysterious centre* of the whole” (emphasis mine).<sup>41</sup> Elsewhere, Machen declares the centrality of the gospel by calling it “the core of Paulism,”<sup>42</sup> “the center and core of our religion,”<sup>43</sup> “the sum and marrow of Christianity,”<sup>44</sup> and “the very breath of life.”<sup>45</sup> Along with these declarations, Machen also refers to the gospel’s power to cause a “Copernican revolution” in the life of the believer.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>J. Gresham Machen, “Hebrews 11:1,” 13 January 1924, The J. Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 8.

<sup>41</sup>J. Gresham Machen, “The Meaning of Christmas: Mark 10:45,” 23 December 1924, The J. Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 14.

<sup>42</sup>J. Gresham Machen, “Jesus and Paul: 1 Corinthians 15:10, 14,” 20 April 1924, The J. Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 12.

<sup>43</sup>J. Gresham Machen, “The Cross of Christ: 2 Corinthians 5:21,” 23 October 1927, The J. Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 2.

<sup>44</sup>J. Gresham Machen, “The Message of Easter: Galatians 2:20,” 1915, The J. Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 1.

<sup>45</sup>J. Gresham Machen, “Seeing the Invisible: Hebrews 11:27,” 13 March 1927, The J. Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 2.

<sup>46</sup>J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity an Escape from the World: Galatians 1:3-4,” 9 April 1916, The J. Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 12. Machen also declares Christ’s resurrection to create “a Copernican revelation—a different way of looking at the world.” Machen, “Resurrection: Romans 6:8,” 27 May 1921, The J. Gresham Machen

The second way Machen presents the centrality of the gospel in these sermons is by revealing the gospel to be the center and fulfillment of each sermon passage and topic. Even from Scripture passages not directly articulating the gospel, Machen presents the gospel as the answer or fulfillment of the message.<sup>47</sup> For example, in several sermons Machen takes up the theme of knowing God or having faith in God and then demonstrates how the gospel relates to this theme.<sup>48</sup> In “Worshipping Jesus,” Machen explains the connection between the gospel and knowing God:

But that awful, transcendent, holy God is seen in Jesus living a life here in the very midst of us. And why did He come to dwell among us? The answer of the Word of God is plain. He came to dwell among us and to die upon the Cross in order to save us from our sins. There is the revelation. It is a revelation which is also an act of love. Jesus is Revealer of God not in exclusion of His expiatory work, but because of it. He is Revealer primarily because He is Redeemer.<sup>49</sup>

Even with his three Old Testament sermons, Machen reveals a connection between his passage and the gospel. For example, in his sermon from Numbers 13-14, Machen explains that Israel had the exodus event to give them faith in God, which should have produced bravery in the face of fear; yet Machen declares Christians to have a greater reason for faith in God, since they have the redemptive work of Christ on the

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Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 9.

<sup>47</sup>Eleven of his sermons are taken from texts not directly referring to the death of Christ: “Numbers 13-14,” “Jesus Only: 2 Kings 4:30,” “Rejoice with Trembling: Psalm 2:11,” “With God all things are Possible: Mark 10:27”; “Faith in Jesus: Luke 7:9,” “Prayer: Luke 11:1; Romans 8:26”; “Worshipping Jesus: John 14:9,” “Christian Friendship: Romans 1:11-12”; “Bearing Each Others Burdens: Galatians 6:1-5”; “Hebrews 11:1,” “Seeing the Invisible: Hebrews 11:27.”

<sup>48</sup>See his sermons “Faith in Jesus: Luke 7:9,” “Worshipping Jesus: John 14:9,” “Hebrews 11:1,” and “Seeing the Invisible: Hebrews 11:27.”

<sup>49</sup>J. Gresham Machen, “Worshipping Jesus: John 14:9,” 27 April 1924, The J. Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 6.

cross.<sup>50</sup>

Along with the centrality of the gospel, Machen also expresses the gospel as God's message of redemption. He presents God's redemption, in these sermons, within the framework of God as creator and man as sinner. For example, in "The Meaning of Christmas," he describes the biblical storyline of creation, fall, and redemption:

God, according to the Christian view, existed from all eternity prior to the world. The universe was created by the fiat of His will. The most wondrous of His creatures is man—man with the strange endowment of reason, man capable of knowing the One who made Him. . . . God revealed Himself to the creatures that were capable of knowing Him. But the revelation was darkened by sin. The knowledge of God was clouded; man was separated from the One who made him for Himself. But God's grace triumphed over sin. He gave first the promise of redemption. Prophets moved by the Spirit of God reinforced the voices of nature and conscience, and revealed to sinful man anew the being of God. At last the promised Redeemer came, and lived here in the very midst of us—not an archangel but God Himself. He lived here in the midst of us and washed away the guilt of sin by dying for us on the cross. He rose from the dead and ever liveth to make intercession for us.<sup>51</sup>

The heart of the biblical storyline for Machen is the good news of redemption through Christ, which he describes with the two elements of history and doctrine.

Concerning the first element, these sermons reveal Machen's interest in the historical person and work of Jesus Christ. In "The Lord's Supper," Machen emphasizes the historicity of the gospel by declaring,

But one thing at least ought to be noted—this sacrament grounds the Christian religion upon an event. "Ye do show the Lord's death till he come"—these words surely set forth aright the original significance of what our Lord, at the Last Supper, said and did. The sacrament is intended to commemorate a thing that happened in the external world, and at a definite time in history; it commemorates what

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<sup>50</sup>In each of his three Old Testament sermons, Machen reveals how the gospel provides the resource for facing certain life issues. In his sermon from Num 13-14, the gospel meets the need for bravery. In his sermon from 2 Kgs 4:30, the gospel fulfills the need for meeting with God. In his sermon from Ps 2:11, the gospel meets the need for joy.

<sup>51</sup>Machen, "The Meaning of Christmas: Mark 10:45," 7.

happened one day outside the walls of Jerusalem when Jesus died upon a cross.<sup>52</sup>

All of Machen's preaching reveals this commitment to expressing the gospel as history, and therefore "sober fact."<sup>53</sup> The central historical event in these sermons is the death of Christ upon the cross. Only three sermons lack any mention to this event: "Christian Friendship: Romans 1:11-12," "A Sadly Neglected Schoolmaster: Galatians 3:24," and "Hebrews 11:1." These three sermons refer to Jesus and the gospel, but do not explicitly express the gospel as the death of Christ. However, "A Sadly Neglected Schoolmaster" most likely refers to the gospel when Machen states, "It [the law] brought men to the very last extremity of despair that they might not hope for salvation from education, from evolution, but from an absolutely free, sovereign, catastrophic, act of God's grace."<sup>54</sup>

Along with Christ's death, Machen also emphasizes the centrality of Christ's resurrection. In almost half of these sermons, Machen expresses the gospel in terms of the historical resurrection of Christ.<sup>55</sup> In "Resurrection," Machen declares Christianity to

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<sup>52</sup>J. Gresham Machen, "The Lord's Supper: 1 Corinthians 11:23-25," 27 January 1924, The J. Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 9-10. Also, in the "Meaning of Christmas," Machen describes the centrality of history within Christianity: ". . . but we celebrate the entrance into our sinful world of a divine Redeemer, that entrance into the world was *an event*. Here as everywhere else in the New Testament our religion is rooted altogether in things that happened. The world was dark according to Christian belief; then came an entrance of the creative power of God; and a new face was put upon life. Christianity is founded not merely upon permanent truth but upon *history* (emphasis mine). Machen, "The Meaning of Christmas: Mark 10:45," 5.

<sup>53</sup>Machen, "Faith in Jesus: Luke 7:9," 11 November 1923, The J. Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 6.

<sup>54</sup>Machen, "A Sadly Neglected Schoolmaster: Galatians 3:24," 1907, The J. Gresham Machen Archives, 10.

<sup>55</sup>See Machen, "Jesus Only: 2 Kings 4:30," "Faith in Jesus: Luke 7:9," "Worshipping Jesus: John 14:9," "Resurrection: Romans 6:8," "The Lord's Supper: 1 Corinthians 11:23-25"; "Jesus' Resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15:3-4"; "Jesus and Paul: 1 Corinthians 15:10, 14," "The Message of Easter: Galatians 2:20," "Seeing the Invisible: Hebrews 11:27."

be founded upon Christ's resurrection and calls it "that world-defying, sin-defying act of God's power" which substantiates "Jesus' claims," and also provides eternal life for the believer.<sup>56</sup> Also in "Jesus' Resurrection," Machen stresses the centrality of the resurrection to Christianity when he declares, "The Christian religion then is firmly founded upon the message of Jesus' disciples: 'He has risen from the dead.'"<sup>57</sup> Although the resurrection is explicitly mentioned in nearly half of these sermons, the chief historical event for Machen was the death of Christ on the cross.

Along with the element of history, Machen often expressed the gospel with the element of doctrine. In seven sermons Machen calls the gospel a doctrine.<sup>58</sup> In his sermon from 2 Corinthians 5:21, Machen repeatedly calls the gospel "the doctrine of the cross."<sup>59</sup> In "Seeing the Invisible," Machen declares the centrality of doctrine:

No longer will the redeemed man treat as rubbish the blessed doctrines with which God has filled His Word; no longer will he despise the teaching which, on the basis of Scripture, *sets forth the meaning of the Cross of Christ*. For the redeemed man doctrine is the very breath of life. Now as always the gospel, which its opponents call doctrine; is to them that perish foolishness; but now as always it is to them that are saved the power of God (emphasis mine).<sup>60</sup>

In this quotation Machen not only refers to the gospel as a doctrine, but he declares doctrine to be the setting forth of "the meaning of the Cross of Christ."<sup>61</sup> As

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<sup>56</sup>Machen, "Resurrection: Romans 6:8," 3, 9.

<sup>57</sup>Machen, "Jesus' Resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15:3-4," 20 April n.d., The J. Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 7.

<sup>58</sup>For examples of Machen's emphasis on the gospel as a doctrine, see "Rejoice with Trembling," 10-11; "Faith in Jesus," 4; "Jesus and Paul," 5-9; "The Cross of Christ," 16; "The Message of Easter," 5; "Seeing the Invisible," 5; "Bearing Each Others Burdens: Galatians 6:1-5."

<sup>59</sup>Machen, "The Cross of Christ: 2 Corinthians 5:21," 2, 12, 16.

<sup>60</sup>Machen, "Seeing the Invisible: Hebrews 11:27," 2.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

shown in chapter 3, Machen understood the doctrinal nature of the gospel to be the meaning of the historical event of Christ's death.

In the majority of these sermons, Machen expresses the doctrinal nature of the death of Christ in terms of substitutionary atonement.<sup>62</sup> Machen understood the death of Christ as an offering paid by Christ on behalf of sinners so as to satisfy God's law.<sup>63</sup> This payment of Christ was costly and resulted in the forgiveness of all believers: "Jesus forgives sin not because He is complacent toward sin, but because He has paid the penalty of it."<sup>64</sup>

Machen also expresses the doctrinal nature of the cross by explaining that Christ "bore" sin and died in the "stead" of the believer.<sup>65</sup> In "The Message of Easter," Machen clearly articulates the cross in terms of Christ's sin bearing:

There would be no peace were it not for Christ. The burden of life is greater than we can bear; it is too great for us. But it is not too great for Christ. And for our sakes *he bore it—that is the heart of the Gospel*—neglected and despised and vilified in a thousand pulpits today. Christ entered into the full humiliation of life; he knew its sorrows and its perplexities. He knew above all, the burden of its sin. It was not his own sin; but the full guilt of it, by a mysterious act of God's grace, rested upon

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<sup>62</sup>In nine sermons Machen states one of his favorite phrases to express the death of Christ: "He loved us and gave himself for us." Machen, "Numbers 13-14," 6; "The Meaning of Christmas," 15; "If God Be For Us," 8; "The Cross of Christ," 8; "The Message of Easter," 6; "Seeing the Invisible," 5; "Lord Teach Us to Pray," 9; "The Church of God," 8; "Jesus' Resurrection," 28.

<sup>63</sup>"His death means the satisfaction of the law's demands." Machen, "Resurrection: Romans 6:8," 9. "No, we belong to Christ not because we gave ourselves to Him, but because He bought us with His own most precious blood." J. Gresham Machen, "The Church of God: Acts 20:28," 14 June 1936, The J. Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 8.

<sup>64</sup>Machen, "Christianity an Escape from the World: Galatians 1:3-4," 10-11. "He bought us with a far greater price. He bought us with His own precious blood." J. Gresham Machen, "Servants of God or Servants of Men: 1 Corinthians 7:23," n.d., The J. Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 17.

<sup>65</sup>See Machen, "The Cross of Christ: 2 Corinthians 5:21," 11-12.

him, and by his union with his people he knew its terrible power (emphasis mine).<sup>66</sup>

Although seventeen sermons provide a clear expression of the gospel as Christ's substitutionary atonement for sinners, six do not provide any doctrinal expression. These six sermons are "Jesus Only: 2 Kings 4:30," "Faith in Jesus: Luke 7:9," "Christian Friendship: Romans 1:11-12," "Jesus and Paul: 1 Cor 15:10, 14," "A Sadly Neglected Schoolmaster: Gal 3:24," and "Hebrews 11:1." Of these sermons only three do not express the historical element of the death of Christ.<sup>67</sup>

In summary, these twenty-three archived sermons demonstrate Machen's commitment to the gospel through his explicit declaration of the centrality of the gospel and his application of the gospel to the theme of each sermon. Machen also repeatedly expresses the gospel with the elements of history and doctrine. In the majority of these sermons Machen does express the historical element of Christ's death, but a number of sermons do fail to provide the doctrinal element. However, each sermon providing the doctrinal element expresses it in terms of penal substitution.

### **Evaluation of Element 3: Machen's Worldview Implications**

Machen understood the gospel as having a number of implications for Christian living. Even though Machen refused to associate the gospel with man's work of self-improvement, he did believe the message had power to produce a changed life. Two primary gospel implications were identified in Machen's writings: personal ethics and social/cultural renewal. This section evaluates Machen's preaching to determine

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<sup>66</sup>Machen, "The Message of Easter: Galatians 2:20," 4.

<sup>67</sup>Machen, "Christian Friendship: Romans 1:11-12," "A Sadly Neglected Schoolmaster:

whether or not he presents these two implications.

**Machen’s worldview implications from *God Transcendent*.** Within all but two of the sermons in *God Transcendent*, Machen presents the gospel as the foundation for Christian ethics.<sup>68</sup> In these sermons, Machen states his general belief that Christian doctrine precedes ethics and therefore serves as the basis for Christian morality.<sup>69</sup> For example, in “The Separateness of the Church” Machen states,

That was the secret of their [the Thessalonians] Christian lives; their Christian lives were founded upon Christian doctrine—upon theism (“the living and true God), upon Christology (“his son . . . whom he raised from the dead”), and upon soteriology (“which delivered us from the wrath to come”). They kept the message intact, and hence they lived the life. So it will always be. Lives apparently and superficially Christian can perhaps sometimes be lived by force of habit, without being based upon Christian truth; but that will never do when Christian living, as in pagan Thessalonica, goes against the grain. But in the case of the Thessalonian converts the message was kept intact, and with it the Christian life.<sup>70</sup>

Machen’s sermons reveal not only his general conviction that doctrine precedes Christian ethics, but more specifically his sermons reveal the gospel as the foundation for two broad categories of Christian ethics: the mortification of sin and the growth in practical righteousness. In regard to the first category, Machen’s sermons present the gospel as the power over sin.<sup>71</sup> In “Constraining Love,” Machen explains the

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Galatians 3:24,” and “Hebrews 11:1.”

<sup>68</sup>See Machen, “Isaiah’s Scorn of Idolatry” and “The Brotherhood in Christ.”

<sup>69</sup>For examples of Machen’s view of the doctrine of the gospel as the basis of ethics, see “The Fear of God,” 30; “The Issue in the Church,” 48; “The Living Saviour,” 71; “The Gospel and Modern Substitutes,” 92; “The Separateness of the Church,” 101, 104.

<sup>70</sup>Machen, “The Separateness of the Church: Matthew 5:13,” 101.

<sup>71</sup>Machen states his view of the gospel’s victory over the guilt and power of sin: “But at the decisive point Christ has taken the wages [i.e., sin’s guilt] upon Himself—that is the gospel. . . . We deserved eternal death; but Christ died instead of us on the cross. Shall we accept the gift? The result will be a fresh start in God’s favor and then a winning battle against sin.” Machen, “Sin’s Wages and God’s Gift: Romans 6:23,” 39.

power of the gospel to mortify sin: “Once they are convinced that Christ’s death was a death for them, their gratitude to the one who died hems them in, restrains them from evil, more effectively than they could have been restrained by prison bars.”<sup>72</sup> Here Machen identifies the gospel as the greatest motivation and power in the restraint of sin. Along with this victory over sin, Machen’s sermons also present the gospel as the resource for victory over fear.<sup>73</sup> For example, in “The Good Fight of Faith,” Machen details how the gospel dismantles the fear of man by providing believers with a peace with God.<sup>74</sup> He also explains in “The Fear of God” how the gospel releases man from a servile fear of God and produces a godly fear and confidence before God.<sup>75</sup>

In regard to the second category of Christian ethics, Machen’s sermons make repeated references to the gospel as the believer’s basis for growth in practical righteousness. Machen declares the gospel to be the power and motivation for the believer’s increasing love and obedience to God, Christ, and the Law.<sup>76</sup> Concerning the Christian’s love for God’s law, Machen states, “There is the glorious freedom of the gospel. The gospel does not abrogate God’s law, but it makes men love it with all their

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<sup>72</sup>Machen, “Constraining Love: 2 Corinthians 5:14,” 132.

<sup>73</sup>See “God Transcendent,” 21; “The Fear of God,” 31-33; “Justified by Faith,” 84-86; “The Good Fight of Faith,” 123-26.

<sup>74</sup>Machen, “The Good Fight of Faith: Philippians 4:7; I Timothy 6:12,” 124. Later in the sermon, Machen declares the courage the gospel provides: “Those who have been at the foot of the Cross will not be afraid to go forth under the banner of the Cross to a holy war of love.” *Ibid.*, 126

<sup>75</sup>Machen, “The Fear of God: Matthew 10:28,” 33.

<sup>76</sup>For examples of the gospel’s ability to produce love and obedience in the believer, see “The Fear of God,” 33; “The Issue in the Church,” 48; “The Letter and the Spirit,” 54-55; “Prophets False and True,” 67; “Constraining Love,” 137.

heart.”<sup>77</sup> Machen explains elsewhere that this love for God and his law, produced by the gospel, results in a life of obedience and service.<sup>78</sup> Also in “The Issue in the Church,”

Machen declares genuine love for God to be a response to the gospel:

Christian prayer and Christian piety, we believe are based only upon faithfulness to the Christian message [i.e., the gospel] and to Him who is the substance of it. We are grieved, therefore, when those who in the councils of the church have just (though we hope unwittingly) denied their Lord, think that they have made all well by reading the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians before the assembled church. The apostle who wrote that chapter would have been surprised indeed to discover that Christian love is being set in opposition to “the truth of the gospel.” Very different is *the deeper love that is only a response of the love of God in the cross of Jesus Christ* (emphasis mine).<sup>79</sup>

The rationale behind Machen’s insistence upon the gospel’s primacy in Christian living was the high importance he placed upon one’s thought life. Machen held thought to precede conduct and therefore doctrine to precede lifestyle.<sup>80</sup> Machen believed that contemplation on the gospel provided the soil in which Christian ethics grew. In “Constraining Love,” Machen tells his listeners that it is by “thinking on His death” that they will be changed to no longer live for themselves, but for Christ.<sup>81</sup> Also in “The Claims of Love,” Machen reveals service to God to be “the response of the

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<sup>77</sup>Machen, “The Letter and the Spirit: 2 Corinthians 3:6,” 55.

<sup>78</sup>“Let us not through overmuch serving forget the better part; let us rather bring service forth from the contemplation of the Cross.” Machen, “The Claims of Love: Mark 4:3-8,” 67.

<sup>79</sup>Machen, “The Issue in the Church: 2 Corinthians 5:17,” 48.

<sup>80</sup>In reference to conflicts within the church of Corinth, Machen states, “But the conflict was not merely in the sphere of conduct. More fundamentally it was in the sphere of thought.” Machen, “The Separateness of the Church: Matthew 5:13,” 102.

<sup>81</sup>Machen, “Constraining Love: 2 Corinthians 5:14,” 138. Also on p. 139 of this sermon Machen states, “In all that life of high endeavor the Christian thinks always of the One to whom he owes it all, the One who died. Ever does he remember that one died for all and that therefore all died. What depth of love in the Christian’s heart is called forth by that story of the dying love of Christ!”

human heart to His redeeming love.”<sup>82</sup> He states,

Let us take the example to our hearts; let us not be so engrossed in our service that we forget our Saviour’s love; let us not forget to pour out upon Him, in the secret place of prayer, the vials of our gratitude and praise. The woman anointed Him aforehand for the burial; we look back upon His completed work in which He loved us and gave Himself for us. Let us not through overmuch serving forget the better part; let us rather bring service forth from *the contemplation of the Cross* (emphasis mine).<sup>83</sup>

Along with Machen’s teaching of the moral implications of the gospel, he also set forth in his sermons the benefit of the gospel in social and cultural transformation. Machen was convinced that social transformation would only take place through gospel-transformed men and women. In “The Brotherhood in Christ,” Machen declares a true united brotherhood to be found only in the gospel:

Paul’s method was to seek the attainment of this ideal of solidarity of man with man not by the contemplation of human relations as they are but only by the stupendous work of the Spirit of God by which men were brought into a common union with Christ. In the world these distinctions of man from man still persist in all their divisions and destructive power, but in Christ they are done away.<sup>84</sup>

Machen also highlighted in several sermons the gospel’s ability to set modern culture free from a mechanistic view of the world.<sup>85</sup> He describes the culture of his time as a “day of cold efficiency,” and as a “mechanistic age.”<sup>86</sup> In “The Gospel and Modern Substitutes,” Machen declares the gospel as the only hope for true liberation:

We have less excuse for being ashamed of that gospel today than we had fifty or

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<sup>82</sup>Machen, “The Claims of Love: Mark 14:3-8,” 67.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Machen, “The Brotherhood in Christ: Galatians 3:26-28,” 61-62.

<sup>85</sup>See “The Claims of Love,” 64-65; “Justified by Faith,” 86-87; “The Gospel and Modern Substitutes,” 96-97.

<sup>86</sup>See “The Claims of Love,” 65; “The Gospel and Modern Substitutes,” 96.

twenty-five years ago; for the emptiness of a world without that gospel is becoming increasingly plain. . . . What a drab thing, as well as what an alarming thing, is this modern mechanistic age! Well may we turn from such slavery to the glorious liberty of the gospel of Christ.<sup>87</sup>

Or again, Machen declares, “Let us not throw our liberty away; let us not descend into the bondage of dependence upon ourselves, let us not descend into the hard bondage of agnostic Modernism. But having received the gospel—this great Magna Charta of Christian liberty—let us stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has set us free.”<sup>88</sup>

Along with liberating believers from the bondage of modern culture, Machen also believed the gospel to provide the path toward a positive pursuit of various cultural activities. In “Constraining Love” Machen declares the gospel as the rationale for involvement in cultural endeavors such as art and science: “In all that life of high endeavor the Christian thinks always of the One to whom he owes it all, the One who died.”<sup>89</sup>

In summary, thirteen of these sermons provide a clear gospel implication within the realm of Christian ethics, while five sermons reveal the gospel as a resource for social/cultural renewal. Only one sermon fails to provide any gospel implication.<sup>90</sup> In a number of sermons, Machen describes active contemplation on the gospel as the means of activating the gospel in one’s life.<sup>91</sup> This contemplation aids believers by

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<sup>87</sup>Machen, “The Gospel and Modern Substitutes: Romans 1:16,” 96.

<sup>88</sup>Machen, “Justified by Faith: Romans 5:1,” 87.

<sup>89</sup>Machen, “Constraining Love: 2 Corinthians 5:14,” 139.

<sup>90</sup>See Machen, “Isaiah’s Scorn of Idolatry: Isaiah 44:16-17.”

<sup>91</sup>For examples, see Machen, “Constraining Love,” 135; “The Claims of Love,” 67.

motivating them toward various gospel implications.

**Machen’s worldview implications from archived manuscripts.** Machen’s twenty-three archived sermons also reveal his use of gospel implications in his preaching ministry. Only one sermon lacks a clear gospel implication;<sup>92</sup> the others reveal the gospel as the foundation for Christian ethics and for social/cultural transformation.

Within the majority of these sermons, Machen presents the gospel as the basis for Christian ethics. Two categories of ethical implications appear in these sermons: overcoming the sins of fear, doubt, and pride; and growth in love, joy, and service.

First, Machen presents the gospel as the basis for dealing with the power of sin in the believer’s life.<sup>93</sup> In “The Message of Easter,” Machen reveals Christ’s death as the freedom from both the guilt and power of sin.<sup>94</sup> This freedom is also mentioned in “The Lord’s Supper”: “When men are oppressed by the hard burden of sin, weighed down by its *guilt*, and in bondage to its *power*, the New Testament comes with a plain piece of news; the Lord Jesus, it says, died instead of you upon the cross, so that you have a fresh start in *the full power of God*” (emphasis mine).<sup>95</sup> The believer’s release from sin’s power, according to Machen, is a release from fear, doubt, and pride. In at least four

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<sup>92</sup>See Machen, “Hebrews 11:1.”

<sup>93</sup>Machen also relates the person and work of Christ to Christian trials: “Ah, but cannot Jesus sympathize! What says the Scriptures? ‘We have not a high priest which cannot be touched without the feeling of our infirmities,’ it says. I tell you, my friends, Jesus is no far-off God, Jesus can sympathize with all of humanity in a way that no mere man and no mere woman ever can sympathize.” Machen, “Jesus Only: 2 Kings 4:30,” 10.

<sup>94</sup>Machen, “The Message of Easter: Galatians 2:20,” 5. Machen also in “A Sadly Neglected Schoolmaster: Galatians 3:24” claims the prevention of sin to come through the gospel and not the law.

<sup>95</sup>Machen, “The Lord’s Supper: 1 Corinthians 11:23-25,” 12.

sermons Machen declares the gospel as the antidote for fears and doubts.<sup>96</sup> For example, in “If God Be for Us,” he describes how the gospel of God’s grace relieves believers of their fear of man:

Appeal to God’s act alone can enable us to face every adversary. It can enable us to face the unjust condemnation of men. What care we if God approves us? But it can do vastly more than that. It can enable us to face the just condemnation of men, and nothing else in earth or in heaven can enable us to do that. There are some things that the world never forgives. Peter could never have been received into the society of the gentlemen after flinching under fire. But God chose to receive him, and upon that rock the Church was built. There may be some foul spot in your life; the kind of thing that the world never forgives, the kind of thing that puts you beyond the pale. But what care you if God has received you—received you by the death of His Son.<sup>97</sup>

Along with this ability to deal with doubt and fear, the gospel also provides resources for dealing with pride. In at least three sermons Machen declares the gospel’s power over pride.<sup>98</sup> In “Christianity an Escape from the World,” he applies the gospel to moral pride by stating, “In the presence of Jesus the pride which we had felt in our worldly morality turns to unspeakable disgust.”<sup>99</sup> Also, in “The Cross of Christ,” he exhorts his hearers in light of the gospel to put away “all pride” and “thoughts of salvation by character or by obedience to Christ’s commands.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>See “Numbers 13-14,” “The Message of Easter: Galatians 2:20,” “If God Be For Us: Romans 8:31,” “Seeing the Invisible: Hebrews 11:27.”

<sup>97</sup>Machen, “If God Be For Us: Romans 8:31,” 7. At the end of this sermon Machen talks directly to his enemies and states, “One thing I know; Christ loved me and gave himself for me. Come on ye moralists of the world; come on ye hosts of demons with your whisperings of hell. We fear you not. We take our stand under the shadow of the cross, and standing we are safe. No fear of challenge now.”

<sup>98</sup>For examples of the gospel’s ability to deal with human pride, see “If God Be for Us: Romans 8:31,” “The Cross of Christ: 2 Corinthians 5:21,” and “Christianity an Escape from the World: Galatians 1:3-4.”

<sup>99</sup>Machen, “Christianity an Escape from the World: Galatians 1:3-4,” 8.

<sup>100</sup>Machen, “The Cross of Christ: 2 Corinthians 5:21.”

Along with the gospel's ability to diminish the power of sin, Machen also claims its ability to increase love for and obedience to God, and service to others. In "Rejoice with Trembling," Machen declares the gospel as the grounds for developing a love for God and joyful obedience to his laws.<sup>101</sup>

In his sermon "The Church of God," Machen appeals to the gospel as he calls for believers to obey God and withdraw from the northern Presbyterian Church:

What constrains us to obey Christ's commands as we go from this place; what constrains us to face a world of enemies; what constrains us to separate ourselves from old and precious friends? Well, no doubt the almighty power of Christ our King; He is God; He is our Maker; we are His creatures. It is His right to rule. Yes, He constrains us by His mighty power. But He also constrains us by something else. He also constrains us by His love. "The love of Christ constraineth us." He "loved us and gave Himself for us." He bought us with His own blood. What shall we give for Him?<sup>102</sup>

Also, in "Christianity an Escape from the World," Machen presents the gospel as an example of service to the world: "Our escape from the world, accomplished already in principle, is not fully realized until after a lifetime of service in imitation of the service of Christ."<sup>103</sup> This language of "imitation" is not common in Machen's preaching, but within this sermon Machen explains it as a result of conversion and motivated by grace. Machen's attack upon the moralism of modernism led him to downgrade the imitation of Christ.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>In reference to the gospel Machen states, "Surely this and this alone is joy." Machen, "Rejoice with Trembling: Psalm 2:11," 1, 11.

<sup>102</sup>Machen, "The Church of God: Acts 20:28."

<sup>103</sup>Machen, "Christianity an Escape from the World: Galatians 1:3-4," 13. In "Bearing Each Other's Burdens," Machen grounds the command to bear one another's burdens in the sin-bearing death of Christ. See J. Gresham Machen, "Bearing Each Other's Burdens: Galatians 6:1-5," n.d., The J. Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 10, 21-22.

<sup>104</sup>For example, Machen states, "A simple program and one that seems full of promise! But

The final category, the gospel's power to transform society and culture, is emphasized in three sermons.<sup>105</sup> In these sermons, Machen explains the tyranny which modernism had been exercising over culture and how modernism had entered into the church and was taking away freedom.<sup>106</sup> The gospel, for Machen, was the only thing that could set men free from enslavement and tyranny.<sup>107</sup> In "Christianity an Escape from the World," Machen documents modern man's desire for a new society, with some men suggesting socialism; Machen however declares the gospel as the only hope for a truly new society of free men. Christianity alone provided Machen with a basis to evaluate and restore the world:

Far from making men indifferent to the world, Christianity alone can point out its eternal significance. The world yields its secrets only to those who have a standard by which to judge it; its movement can be conducted only by those who have a place to stand. The movement of the race in literature, in art, in learning, otherwise an aimless groping in the dark, becomes for the Christian a victorious progress toward a far-off goal, an ascent to the final resting-place in God.<sup>108</sup>

In summary, Machen's archived sermons reveal his commitment to display the gospel as the foundation for Christian living. All but one sermon presents a gospel implication. These implications fall into one of two categories: Christian ethics and the transformation of culture and society.

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there is one trouble with it—it does not work. The imitation of Jesus has never yet been carried out. As a mere ideal, Jesus is a failure." Machen, "The Living Saviour: Matthew 4:23; 28:20," 70.

<sup>105</sup>Machen, "Jesus Only: 2 Kings 4:30," "Servants of God or Servants of Men: 1 Corinthians 7:23," "Christianity an Escape from the World: Galatians 1:3-4."

<sup>106</sup>"One might at first sight think that Modernism and tyranny would be opposed to each other. Modernists love to talk of liberty. In reality Modernism and tyranny are connected in the closest possible way." Machen, "Servants of God or Servants of Men: 1 Corinthians 7:23," 14.

<sup>107</sup>Machen, "Jesus Only: 2 Kings 4:30," 12-13. Also in "Christianity an Escape from the World," Machen declares modernism to have turned man into a "mere machine," enslaving him.

<sup>108</sup>Machen, "Christianity an Escape from the World: Galatians 1:3-4," 13-14.

#### **Evaluation of Element 4: Machen's Contrast with Other Worldviews**

As chapter 3 demonstrated, Machen's writings convey a strong polemic against theological modernism. He contrasted biblical Christianity with theological modernism in three ways: (1) Christianity's emphasis on objective doctrine against modernism's emphasis on subjective moralism (i.e., experience and lifestyle); (2) Christianity's supernatural worldview (i.e., God's transcendence) and modernism's naturalistic worldview (i.e., a form of pantheism); (3) Christianity's intellectual faith and modernism's anti-intellectualism. For Machen, Christianity was a faith in a supernatural God who had revealed himself in objective history in the person and work of Christ, while modernism was a naturalistic belief that consigned religion to the subjective realm of experience and lifestyle. These contrasts are also revealed in Machen's preaching.

**Worldviews Contrasted in *God Transcendent*.** Machen's fifteen sermons in *God Transcendent*, are replete with references to modernism. In the majority of these sermons Machen explicitly mentions modernism with references to "modern men," "modern religion," "the modernist preacher," "the modern theologian," "the modern culture," "the modern leader," and "the modern church."<sup>109</sup> Even within sermons lacking the terms "modern" and "modernism," Machen still describes the views of modernism.<sup>110</sup>

The chief contrast in these sermons is between Christianity's emphasis on

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<sup>109</sup>These examples come from the following sermons: "God Transcendent," 19; "Isaiah's Scorn of Idolatry," 25; "The Issue in the Church," 43; "The Living Saviour," 74, 77; "The Gospel and Modern Substitutes," 88-89; "Prophets False and True," 116.

<sup>110</sup>Machen refers to modernists without stating them by name when he declares: "They persist in regarding salvation as proceeding by some natural process from faith or from some other quality of men. They regard Christianity as founded upon permanent principles of religion instead of being founded upon an unexpected piece of news." Machen, "Sin's Wages and God's Gift: Romans 6:23," 38.

doctrine and modernism's non-doctrinal emphasis on experience and lifestyle.<sup>111</sup>

Machen's preaching often emphasized the doctrinal nature of Christianity by contrasting it with the "non-doctrinal," "non-redemptive," and "anti-historical" modernism.<sup>112</sup>

Machen held the death of Christ to be primarily theological, while modernism believed it to be a principle of self-sacrifice.<sup>113</sup> He believed the church needed to firmly understand the radical difference between these two views; thus he took up the topic in much of his preaching. For instance, in three sermons prepared for and first preached in Miller Chapel at Princeton Seminary, Machen encouraged the students to actively oppose modernism in the church.<sup>114</sup> In one of these sermons he states, "You will have a battle, too, when you go forth as ministers into the church. The church is now in a period of deadly conflict. The redemptive religion known as Christianity is contending, in our own church and in all the larger churches of the world, against a totally alien type of religion."<sup>115</sup> He declares this "alien" religion to be the "agnostic Modernism," which he calls "the deadliest enemy of the Christian religion today."<sup>116</sup>

One sermon which particularly draws out the doctrinal differences between

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<sup>111</sup>For examples, see "Sin's Wages and God's Gift," 38-39; "The Issue in the Church," 47-48; "The Claims of Love," 66-69; "The Living Saviour," 70-71; "Justified by Faith," 84-85; "The Gospel and Modern Substitutes," 95-96; "The Separateness of the Church," 105-07; "Prophets False and True," 116-17; "The Good Fight of Faith," 121-25.

<sup>112</sup>See the following sermons: "The Issue in the Church," 47; "The Letter and the Spirit," 51, 54; "Justified by Faith," 82; "The Gospel and Modern Substitutes," 96; "Prophets False and True," 116.

<sup>113</sup>Machen, "The Good Fight of Faith: Philippians 4:5; 1 Timothy 6:12," 125.

<sup>114</sup>See "The Separateness of the Church," "Prophet's False and True," and "The Good Fight of Faith."

<sup>115</sup>Machen, "The Good Fight of Faith: Philippians 4:5; 1 Timothy 6:12," 121.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

biblical Christianity and theological modernism is “The Gospel and Modern Substitutes.”

In this sermon, Machen goes chapter by chapter through the book of Romans showing how modernists attempt to rewrite it. Near the end of the sermon Machen summarizes his argument:

Thus when the Epistle to the Romans is re-written in this modern, concessive, non-controversial, non-doctrinal fashion the actual Epistle to the Romans that we have here in our Bibles disappears from beginning to end. But what is the difference between these two Epistles to the Romans—this modern concessive, non-doctrinal, ‘tolerant’ Epistle on the one hand, and the Epistle that we have in our Bibles on the other. I will tell you in a word what the difference is. The modern, non-controversial Epistle is just the expression of an abysmal skepticism; for if all creeds, despite the fact that they are contradictory to one another, are all equally good, then it follows that they are all equally false or at least all equally uncertain; and if we hold that the doctrine that we now enunciate is merely the setting forth in the thought-forms of this generation of a religious experience that must be set forth in another generation in thought-forms contradictory to these, then it follows that we do not hold the creed that we now set up to be true even here and now. While a thing that is useful now may cease to be useful in another generation, a thing that is true now will remain true beyond the end of time. What is really meant by this non-doctrinal, non-controversial religion is that we have given up the search for truth altogether; we have given up the grounding of our life upon anything that is permanently and objectively true. Such is the modern Epistle to the Romans. It is the expression of a bottomless skepticism.<sup>117</sup>

Along with this attack on the “non-doctrinal” nature of modernism, Machen also contrasts the supernaturalism of Christianity with the naturalism of modern theology. In four sermons Machen uses this contrast by accusing modern theology of advocating a naturalistic view of God, thus rejecting his transcendency.<sup>118</sup> In his highly polemical sermon “The Issue in the Church,” Machen declares the distinction between modernism and Christianity by stating,

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<sup>117</sup>Machen, “The Gospel and Modern Substitutes: Romans 1:16,” 95-96.

<sup>118</sup>See Machen, “God Transcendent,” 19; “The Issue in the Church,” 43, 47; “The Letter and the Spirit,” 50; “The Brotherhood in Christ,” 58-59.

The plain fact is, disguised though it be by the use of traditional language, that two mutually exclusive religions are contending for the control of the Church today. One is the great redemptive religion known as Christianity; the other is the *naturalistic or agnostic Modernism*, essentially the same, I suppose, as the religion of the Positivists or of Professor Ellwood, which is opposed, not at one point, but at every point to the Christian faith (emphasis mine).<sup>119</sup>

Machen's strong use of contrast in this sermon led to charges that his preaching was schismatic and detrimental to the church.<sup>120</sup> His forceful attacks on the naturalistic presupposition of modernists, led him to accuse modernists of pantheism.<sup>121</sup> According to Machen, the naturalism of modernists had caused them to break down all of the distinctions between God and man, the divine and the natural. The deity of Christ therefore became merely an expression for the best qualities of humanity.<sup>122</sup>

Machen's sermons also present examples of the third contrast: intellectualism verses anti-intellectualism.<sup>123</sup> For Machen, biblical Christianity consisted of facts that required rigorous study, while modernism had "dethroned" the intellect by placing religion in the realm of subjectivity.<sup>124</sup> Machen even called this anti-intellectualism "one

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<sup>119</sup>Machen, "The Issue in the Church: 2 Corinthians 5:17," 47.

<sup>120</sup>After Machen preached this sermon at First Presbyterian Church of Princeton, former Presbyterian minister and professor of English literature at Princeton University Henry Van Dyke informed the elders at First Presbyterian that he was giving up his pew as long as Machen filled the pulpit. Van Dyke claimed that Machen had "spoiled" too many Sundays with what he called "bitter, schismatic and unscriptural preaching." D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 60.

<sup>121</sup>For examples of Machen declaring modernism to be pantheistic, see "The Letter and the Spirit," 50-52; "The Issue in the Church," 43; "The Brotherhood in Christ," 62.

<sup>122</sup>See "The Issue in the Church," 43; "The Letter and the Spirit," 50.

<sup>123</sup>Three sermons provide this contrast: "The Gospel and Modern Substitutes," 91; "Isaiah's Scorn of Idolatry," 27; "The Separateness of the Church," 105.

<sup>124</sup>Machen, "Isaiah's Scorn of Idolatry: Isaiah 44:16-17," 91.

of the cardinal principles of modern religion.”<sup>125</sup> In “The Separateness of the Church,” Machen describes the failure of modernists in biblical interpretation: “The Bible, with a complete abandonment of all scientific historical method, and of all common sense, is made to say the exact opposite of what it means; no Gnostic, no medieval monk with his fourfold sense of Scripture, ever produced more absurd Biblical interpretation than can be heard every Sunday in the pulpits of New York.”<sup>126</sup>

In summary, Machen’s sermons do reveal the same contrasts as those described in chapter 3. These sermons present the objective and redemptive nature of Christianity with doctrine as its basis and salvation by grace as its message, over against the subjective and moralistic religion of modernism with experience as its basis and social improvement through human works as its message.

**Worldviews contrasted in archived manuscripts.** In the majority of these sermons, Machen refers to modernism either implicitly or explicitly by contrasting it with biblical Christianity.<sup>127</sup> Machen often explicitly refers to modernism by speaking of “the modern church,” “the modern preacher,” “modern preaching,” “modern Christianity,” “modern pragmatism,” “modern skepticism,” “modern pantheism,” “modern religion,” “modern men,” “modern propaganda,” “the modern concept of Christianity,” “modern liberalism,” “the modern mind,” and “the modern age.”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>Machen, “The Gospel and Modern Substitutes: Romans 1:16,” 91.

<sup>126</sup>Machen, “The Separateness of the Church: Matthew 5:13,” 105.

<sup>127</sup>All three categories of contrast are discovered in these sermons. Only “Numbers 13-14” lacks an example from one of these three categories.

<sup>128</sup>All but four sermons explicitly refer to modernism.

In seventeen sermons, Machen contrasts Christianity's objective doctrine with modernism's subjective moralism.<sup>129</sup> Machen presents modernists as those who view Christianity merely as timeless principles, without historical and doctrinal meaning. In "The Meaning of Christmas," Machen states,

The historical character of the Christian message has always been the object of attack; it has always been exposed to a disintegrating process which would change basic facts into mere symbols of permanent truths. The process is nothing new, but it is particularly active at the present time. Christian terminology today is being used, but it has become often a mere screen behind which destructive forces are at work. Men speak of the Cross of Christ, but they make of it merely a great symbolic representation of the general principle of self-sacrifice; they speak of the vicarious atonement but they mean by it merely the culmination in Jesus of that suffering of one being for another which runs all through the course of nature. So also when they speak of the incarnation, by which the Word became flesh, they mean merely a representation in symbolic concrete form of a general truth that God and man are one. It's strange indeed that this representation should be regarded as Christian. In reality it is almost the direct opposite of Christianity. It is of course opposed to Christianity in that it substitutes permanent truths for historical facts; it is opposed to Christianity in being no longer a redemptive religion but a philosophy.<sup>130</sup>

This passage provides an example of the way Machen describes modernism's view of Christianity. Modernism was simply a religion of general principles completely divorced of historical and doctrinal truths. Similar descriptions of modernism are repeatedly heard in a number of Machen's sermons.<sup>131</sup>

The natural outworking of modernism's emphasis on timeless principles

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<sup>129</sup>See "Jesus Only," 11; "Rejoice with Trembling," 5; "Meaning of Christmas," 3-5; "Faith in Jesus," 1, 3-4; "If God Be for Us," 6-8; "Jesus and Paul," 8-9, 12-14; "The Cross of Christ," 9; "Christianity an Escape from the World," 7-9, 11; "The Message of Easter," 2, 5; "A Sadly Neglected Schoolmaster," 7; "Hebrews 11:1," 8; "Seeing the Invisible," 4; "Theism vs. Agnosticism," 10; "The Lord's Supper," 9-11; "Servants of God or Servants of Men," 8, 13; "Bearing Each Other's Burdens," 1-3; "Prayer," 11-12.

<sup>130</sup>Machen, "The Meaning of Christmas: Mark 10:45," 5-6.

<sup>131</sup>See also "Jesus and Paul," 8-9; "Hebrews 11:1," 8; "Seeing the Invisible," 4; "Bearing Each Other's Burdens," 1-3.

resulted in Christianity being viewed as a lifestyle built upon the teaching and example of Jesus.<sup>132</sup> Machen's preaching draws a contrast between Jesus as Savior and Jesus as teacher.<sup>133</sup> Modernists, Machen maintained, presented Jesus as "merely a pattern for human life."<sup>134</sup> Thus, Christianity became merely a lifestyle of personal and social improvement.<sup>135</sup> Machen described the modernist religion as "a non-doctrinal, practical Christianity that consents to be silent about the mysteries of God, and that presents instead a program of self-help and social betterment."<sup>136</sup>

This emphasis on lifestyle over doctrine led Machen to see modernism as a works-based religion in opposition to grace-based Christianity. In a number of sermons Machen contrasts a salvation of works with a salvation of grace. For example, in "The Cross of Christ" after describing Christ's death as primarily substitutional in nature and arguing against the moralism of modernism, Machen states,

Away with all pride, away with all our confidence in human resources, away with all our elaborate plans for commending ourselves to God, away with all thoughts of salvation by character or by obedience to Christ's commands or by imitation of Christ's example or by willing activity in menial service. These activities will come; the Christian is saved to serve; but at the beginning salvation is nothing but a gift.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>For modernism's view of Jesus as teacher and example see "The Meaning of Christmas," 3-4; "Faith in Jesus," 5-6; "Christianity an Escape from the World," 7-9; "The Message of Easter," 2.

<sup>133</sup>After developing the distinction between Christianity's view of Jesus as Savior and modernism's view of Jesus as example, Machen concludes his sermon with the question: "Shall we accept only His teaching, or shall we trust Him as our Saviour and Lord?" Machen, "Faith in Jesus: Luke 7:9," 6.

<sup>134</sup>Machen, "The Message of Easter: Galatians 2:20," 2.

<sup>135</sup>See "Christianity an Escape from the World," 11; "The Message of Easter," 5; "Seeing the Invisible," 1-2; "Jesus and Paul," 16; "The Cross of Christ," 7.

<sup>136</sup>Machen, "Seeing the Invisible," 1.

<sup>137</sup>Machen, "The Cross of Christ," 9.

The second most used category of contrast in Machen's sermons is his contrast between the supernaturalism of Christianity and the naturalism of modernism.<sup>138</sup> Machen accused modernists of a thoroughgoing naturalism because of their rejection of God's transcendence and their association of God with the world. He designated modernism as "the new theology" that teaches an indissoluble union between God and the world.<sup>139</sup> This union between God and the world serves as Machen's basis for describing modernism as a form of "pantheism."<sup>140</sup> Modernism's naturalistic presupposition led modernists to describe Christ's deity as "the fairest flower of humanity" and not the "Lord of Glory," declared Machen.<sup>141</sup>

Machen also employed the contrast of intellectualism verses anti-intellectualism in two sermons. In "Faith in Jesus," he refers to a modernist sermon he had heard, commenting, "It [i.e., the sermon] was characteristic of the religious teaching of our time in the crassly erroneous opposition which it set up between faith and knowledge."<sup>142</sup> Also in "Hebrews 11:1," Machen accuses modernists of divorcing faith and knowledge and declares that "a reemphasis upon the intellectual aspect of faith is one

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<sup>138</sup>In eight messages Machen highlights this naturalism. For example in "Resurrection," Machen speaks for the modernist by stating, "Miracles do not happen. There is some evidence for the resurrection of Jesus—very strong evidence indeed—but not sufficient to support a miracle, not sufficient to make me change my whole view of the uniformity of nature." Machen, "Resurrection: Romans 6:8," 4. See also "Rejoice with Trembling," "Faith in Jesus," "Worshipping Jesus," "If God Be for Us," "The Cross of Christ"; "Theism vs. Agnosticism," "Jesus' Resurrection."

<sup>139</sup>Machen, "Rejoice with Trembling: Psalm 2:11," 9.

<sup>140</sup>See "If God Be for Us," 2; "The Cross of Christ," 4; "Theism vs. Agnosticism," 3, 13.

<sup>141</sup>Machen, "Faith in Jesus: Luke 7:9," 6.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 2.

of the crying needs of the hour.”<sup>143</sup> He also argues that faith is always “a way of obtaining knowledge,” and that it “should never be contrasted with science.”<sup>144</sup> In both of these sermons, Machen makes the case for an intellectual Christian faith that studies facts, with the central fact consisting of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In summary, all but three sermons present one of Machen’s contrasts between Christianity and modernism.<sup>145</sup> Machen contended that “[t]wo great conceptions of Christianity” were struggling in his day for ascendancy in the church.<sup>146</sup> He distinguished these “conceptions of Christianity” in his preaching with the same contrasts presented in chapter 3.

### **Summary Evaluation of All Four Elements**

This descriptive evaluation of Machen’s worldview preaching reveals his preaching to contain Sire’s four worldview elements, while also demonstrating a consistency with his worldview as described in chapter 3.<sup>147</sup> To begin with, Machen’s preaching reveals his central commitment to be the gospel. Whether from an Old Testament or New Testament passage, Machen explicitly relates the topic of his sermon to the gospel, while also at times declaring the gospel to be the central focus of the Bible

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<sup>143</sup>Machen, “Hebrews 11:1,” 2.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>145</sup>“Numbers 13-14,” “The Church of God: Acts 20:28,” “Christian Friendship: Romans 1:11-12.”

<sup>146</sup>Machen, “Christianity an Escape from the World: Galatians 1:3-4,” 14.

<sup>147</sup>Machen’s worldview was the *gospel*. He expressed the gospel as the *historical events* concerning Jesus along with the *doctrinal meaning* of those events as redemption for sinners. This worldview provides the foundation for personal ethics and social transformation. Machen also continually clarified his worldview by contrasting it with modernism.

and Christianity. Machen also regularly expresses this gospel with the two elements of history and doctrine. The central historical element for Machen was the death of Christ on the cross, along with the meaning of Christ's death in terms of penal substitution. Although Machen's sermons demonstrate the gospel as his worldview and express the gospel with the element of Christ's historical death, there are a number of sermons which do not clearly express the doctrinal element.

In his sermons, Machen shows a consistency with his formulated worldview of chapter 3 in regard to the gospel serving as the proper foundation for the Christian life. Only two sermons, "Isaiah's Scorn of Idolatry" and "Hebrews 11:1," do not provide a clear reference to the gospel as the grounds for some area of living. The majority of his sermons present the gospel's relation to Christian morality, particularly the mortification of sin and the growth in Christian virtues. In a few of his sermons, Machen also points to the gospel as the foundation for social and cultural transformation. He lays the gospel as the foundation for Christian living through calling believers to contemplate the gospel so as to make the gospel their motivating factor.

Concerning the final element, Machen's preaching consistently draws a contrast between biblical Christianity and theological modernism. The majority of his sermons reveal examples of the three main contrasts described in chapter 3.

### **Keller's Worldview Preaching Evaluated**

Keller has spent his ministry primarily as a preaching pastor. He has pastored Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City from its inception in 1988. Due to Keller's long tenure as pastor of Redeemer there is an extensive archive of his sermons on the church's website. Over twenty years of sermons provides a daunting task for an

evaluation of his worldview preaching. This study has chosen to narrow the number of sermons, seeking a faithful representation of his preaching ministry. This preaching material is taken from six sermon series in various genres of Scripture between the years 2001 and 2010. This sermon material is chosen for three reasons. First, the evaluation of an entire sermon series helps to confirm whether or not the four worldview elements run through a series and not just individual sermons. Second, the sermons are chosen from different genres of Scripture in order to determine whether Keller demonstrates consistency in his preaching throughout the biblical canon.<sup>148</sup> Third, Keller’s preaching material is limited to sermons from the twenty-first century, to feature his most mature preaching and also to relate these sermons to the previously treated three books, which were all written after 2000.

The six parts of the canon used for the study of Keller’s sermons are the Law of Moses, Old Testament History, the Prophets, the Writings (or Psalms), the Gospels, and the Epistles.<sup>149</sup> The six selected sermon series are (1) the five-part series “The Gospel According to Jacob” from Genesis 27-48 preached in 2001; (2) the four-part series, “Esther and the Hiddenness of God,” preached in 2007; (3) the five-part series preached in 2009 from Habakkuk entitled, “Living by Faith in Troubled Times”; (4) the

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<sup>148</sup>The traditional categories of the Old Testament are the Law of Moses (Torah), the Prophets, and the Writings (or Psalms). This breakdown is witnessed in Jesus’ comment in Luke 24:44. Also see William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic Wm. Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996). The New Testament has ordinarily been divided into two parts the Gospels and the Epistles. This five part division of the Law, the Prophets, the Psalms, the Gospels, and the Epistles is the categories used in Dennis E. Johnson, *Heralds of the King: Christ-Centered Sermons in the Tradition of Edmund P. Clowney* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009). This dissertation adds one more category, Old Testament History, in order to provide an even fuller study on Keller’s worldview preaching.

<sup>149</sup>In *Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible*, the editors present the Old Testament in these same four categories. See *Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible: A Guide to Reading the Bible Well*, ed. Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins, Thomas R. Shreiner (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

four-part series from the Psalms preached in 2004, “Who’s Afraid of Doctrine?” (5) the 2008 seven-part series “St. John’s Passion”; (6) the 2009-10 six-part series, “The Gospel in Community: The Book of James.”

These six series comprise a total of thirty-one sermons: eighteen from the Old Testament and thirteen from the New.<sup>150</sup> These sermons are evaluated to determine their consistency with Keller’s worldview as described in chapter 3.

### **Evaluation of First Two Elements: Keller’s Commitment and its Expression**

This first section identifies and summarizes the first two elements of Sire’s paradigm in Keller’s sermons, seeking to evaluate these elements. These first two elements were presented in chapter 3 as the gospel as Keller’s commitment, and the gospel expressed as the substitutionary death of Christ and a message of grace. This section evaluates the above mentioned sermon series to determine whether Keller’s sermons present these same elements.

**Keller’s commitment articulated and expressed from the Law.** In his five part series from the life of Jacob, Keller consistently presents the gospel as his worldview. In “The Meaning of Free Grace,” he states, “The gospel of grace is a set of lenses, as it were, through which everything looks different. . . . It’s a worldview, not just an experience, and not just a doctrine.”<sup>151</sup> The gospel as a “worldview” and “set of lenses” leads Keller to interpret each passage in this series in light of the person and work

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<sup>150</sup>I transcribed these sermons from audio recordings.

<sup>151</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, “The Meaning of Free Grace: Genesis 48:8-20,” preached November 25, 2001 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

of Christ. He arrives at the gospel from these passages in Genesis either by comparing and contrasting Old Testament people and events with the person and work of Christ, or by revealing the gospel as the fulfillment of certain themes in redemptive history.

In the first and fourth sermons, Keller expounds the gospel by comparing and contrasting Jacob with Christ. In “The Problem of Blessing,” Keller contrasts Jacob and his pursuit of the firstborn blessing with Jesus’ willingness to lay aside the blessings that belonged to him as God’s Son in order to take the curse for sinners.<sup>152</sup> Also in “The Fight of Your Life,” Keller compares Jacob’s experience of wrestling with God to Jesus’ suffering on the cross.<sup>153</sup> He relates Jacob and Jesus by describing how both overcame and received God’s blessing through pain and weakness.

In the other three sermons, Keller presents the gospel as the fulfillment of the sermon theme in redemptive history. In “The Openness of Heaven,” he relates the gospel to Jacob’s vision of a ladder by linking it to both past redemptive history of the tower of Babel and future redemptive history with Jesus as the stairway in John 1:51.<sup>154</sup> In “The Struggle for Love,” Keller describes God’s redemptive plan of using Leah, the unloved wife of Jacob, to be the mother of the messianic line.<sup>155</sup> Also, in “The Meaning of Free Grace,” Keller takes Jacob’s statement about God being his shepherd, and traces the

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<sup>152</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, “The Problem of Blessing: Genesis 27:18-34,” preached October 28, 2001 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer3.com>; Internet.

<sup>153</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, “The Fight of Your Life: Genesis 32:22-32,” preached November 18, 2001 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer3.com>; Internet.

<sup>154</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, “The Openness of Heaven: Genesis 28:10-22,” preached November 4, 2001 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer3.com>; Internet. This passage from John states, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

<sup>155</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, “The Struggle for Love: Genesis 29:15-35,” preached November 11, 2001 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer3.com>; Internet.

biblical theme of God as shepherd to its fulfillment in the person and work of Christ.<sup>156</sup>

Keller also expresses the gospel in each sermon with the two elements of substitutionary atonement and God's grace in Christ. These gospel elements serve as the fulfillment of God's redemptive work in restoring the fallen creation. In each sermon on Jacob's life, Keller sets the gospel of Christ's substitutionary death as the centerpiece of the biblical storyline. For example, in his first sermon, Keller explains the creation of mankind, their fall into sin, and how Jacob's life plays into God's redemptive plan to redeem and restore creation through Christ.<sup>157</sup> Keller describes God's redemption as Christ's substitutionary atonement by stating, "But on the cross, Jesus Christ went into our place and took the penalty we deserved. In other words, he got the full weight of omnipotence. He got the full weight of justice . . . he was taking the curse of the law, which we break, in order to get the blessing for us."<sup>158</sup> Similar expressions of the gospel are heard elsewhere in this series. The expression of the gospel as Christ's atoning work also leads Keller to emphasize God's grace. The grace of God, for Keller, is the "overall theme" of Jacob's life.<sup>159</sup> This grace is ultimately revealed in the gospel which Keller describes as a message of "sheer grace."<sup>160</sup> The message of the gospel is all of grace, according to Keller, because it is all God's work: "God is a shepherd, he's got to do everything for us. He does this by sending Jesus Christ to live the life we should have

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<sup>156</sup>Keller, sermon, "The Meaning of Free Grace: Genesis 48:8-20."

<sup>157</sup>Keller, sermon, "The Fight of Your Life: Genesis 32:22-32."

<sup>158</sup>Ibid.

<sup>159</sup>Keller, sermon, "The Meaning of Free Grace: Genesis 48:8-20."

<sup>160</sup>Keller, sermon, "The Struggle for Love: Genesis 29:15-35."

lived and die the death we should have died and take the penalty for our sin.”<sup>161</sup>

### **Keller’s commitment articulated and expressed from Old Testament**

**History.** From the very first sermon in his four-part series from Esther, Keller reveals his gospel centered interpretation of Scripture by arguing against a moralistic method of interpretation and advocating a more grace oriented interpretation: “The message of the Bible is that God persistently and continuously gives his grace to people who don’t ask for it, don’t deserve it, and don’t even fully appreciate it after they get it over and over and over again.”<sup>162</sup> Along with this focus on grace, Keller also declares Esther to be one who points to Jesus as the Savior of his people and not primarily an example to follow.<sup>163</sup>

In this series, Keller connects each sermon to the gospel in the same ways he did in the previous series: by comparing and contrasting Old Testament figures with Christ, and by revealing the gospel as the fulfillment of redemptive history. In the first three sermons, Keller arrives at the gospel through comparison and contrast. In “The Silent Sovereignty of God,” he contrasts the relationship between the king and Esther, with the perfect love of Christ for his bride;<sup>164</sup> and in “The Man the King Delights to Honor,”<sup>165</sup> Haman’s prideful quest for significance is contrasted with Christ’s humility in giving his life for others. Also in “If I Perish, I Perish,” he compares Esther’s willingness

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<sup>161</sup>Keller, sermon, “The Meaning of Free Grace: Genesis 48:8-20.”

<sup>162</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, “The Silent Sovereignty of God: Esther 2:5-10, 16-23,” preached April 15, 2007 [CD]; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

<sup>163</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, “The Man the King Delights to Honor: Esther 3:1-6; 6:1-10,” preached April 29, 2007 [CD]; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

<sup>164</sup>Keller, “The Silent Sovereignty of God: Esther 2:5-10, 16-23.”

<sup>165</sup>Keller, “The Man the King Delights to Honor: Esther 3:1-6; 6:1-10.”

to give her life to rescue her people with Jesus' substitutional death.<sup>166</sup>

In the final sermon, Keller uses redemptive history to arrive at the gospel. He describes Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament "messiah figures" by bringing permanent rest from sin, death, and the devil, which was only foreshadowed in the Old Testament figures.<sup>167</sup>

As with his series in the life of Jacob, Keller takes this series in Esther's life and expounds the gospel within the biblical metanarrative. The metanarrative of the fall, redemption, and restoration of humanity is heard in his first sermon, "The Silent Sovereignty of God." In this sermon he describes the control the fallen world system has over everyone, and the promise of God to "heal the world" through Abraham's family. He then draws a contrast between the union of king Ahasuerus with Esther and the union of Christ with his church, and describes how Jesus has sacrificially redeemed his bride and will one day bring her full restoration: "When I see Esther's banquet, that is nothing compared with the wedding feast of the Lamb, which will be the climax of history in which the ultimate king, Jesus Christ, takes all of us up into his arms and in which we are going to be so beautiful because of what he has done for us."<sup>168</sup>

Keller, throughout this series, expresses the gospel of redemption with the

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<sup>166</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, "If I Perish, I Perish: Esther 4:5-17," preached April 22, 2007 [CD]; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

<sup>167</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, "Rest from our Enemies: Esther 7:1-10; 9:20-23," preached May 6, 2007 [CD]; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

<sup>168</sup>Keller, "The Silent Sovereignty of God: Esther 2:5-10, 16-23." Also in "If I Perish, I Perish," Keller sets the redemption found in Christ's death within the framework of creation, fall, and the restoration of the world. He refers to God's creation of all things, yet points out man's failure to give God the glory he deserves. However through the redemptive ministry of Christ, God achieves his goal of restoring humanity and all of creation. Keller, "If I Perish, I Perish: Esther 4:5-17."

elements of substitutionary atonement and God's work of grace. In each sermon, Keller speaks of Christ's work on the cross as his receiving what sinners deserve so that sinners might receive the blessing of God as a gift. In "Rest from Our Enemies," he describes the gospel as Christ becoming a curse on the cross, so that his people might be freed from divine wrath in order to experience peace with God.<sup>169</sup> Also, in "The Man the King Delights to Honor," he declares,

And when he [Jesus] went to the cross he was stripped of his Father's love, approval, respect; he was reversing places with us. There's the ultimate king. Jesus is the king that you can go to because at infinite cost he reversed places with us. Jesus Christ exchanges places with us, takes what we deserve so we can get what he deserves.<sup>170</sup>

**Keller's commitment articulated and expressed from the Prophets.** In his five part series in Habakkuk, "Living by Faith in Troubled Times," Keller's gospel-centered worldview is demonstrated by his christocentric interpretation of these Old Testament passages. In his final sermon, Keller articulates his christocentric approach:

But if you look to the one to whom Habakkuk points, that will change your heart. Now, who's the one to whom Habakkuk points? Remember Jesus said in Luke chapter 24 to his disciples on the road to Emmaus and to his disciples after he was raised from the dead, he said, "You know one of your big problems (and they had a lot of problems), but one of your big problems is that you don't know how to read the Old Testament, it's all about me."<sup>171</sup>

Keller grounds his christocentric interpretation of the Old Testament in the example of Jesus in Luke 24. With this christocentric perspective as his starting point, Keller uses three methods to arrive at the gospel from Habakkuk. In his first two

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<sup>169</sup>Keller, "Rest from our Enemies: Esther 7:1-10; 9:20-23."

<sup>170</sup>Keller, "The Man the King Delights to Honor: Esther 3:1-6; 6:1-10."

<sup>171</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, "Generosity in Scarcity: Habakkuk 3:17-19," preached May 31, 2009 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

sermons, he presents the gospel by commenting on various New Testament authors uses of verses from Habakkuk.<sup>172</sup> The New Testament authors, according to Keller, interpreted these verses in light of Christ's redeeming death on the cross.<sup>173</sup> In the next two sermons, Keller arrives at the gospel by either comparing or contrasting Jesus with certain Old Testament figures.<sup>174</sup> In "The Culture of Pride," he contrasts the pride of the Babylonians in their quest to conquer the nations, with the humility of Christ in his incarnation and death.<sup>175</sup> In "Generosity in Scarcity," he compares Habakkuk's joy and generosity during a time of economic scarcity, with the grace of Jesus in pouring out his life unto death for others. In the final sermon, Keller relates Habakkuk's prayer concerning God's judgment of the nations and his salvation of his people, to the exodus theme in the Old Testament, ultimately pointing to the work of Christ as its fulfillment.<sup>176</sup>

Throughout this series, Keller describes all of humanity's problems to be caused by humanity's fall into pride, self-centeredness, and idolatry. He then declares the solution to be God's grace expressed in Christ's atoning death. All five sermons use the

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<sup>172</sup>In "Why Does God Do Nothing?: Habakkuk 1:1-17," Keller refers to Paul's use of Hab 1:5b in Acts 13:41b. ". . . for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you" (Acts 13:41b). Also in "Waiting and Living by Faith: Habakkuk 2:1-4," Keller refers to the way that various New Testament authors used Hab 2:4b, "but the righteous shall live by faith." For the New Testament quotations of this verse, see Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38.

<sup>173</sup>In "Why Does God Do Nothing?," Keller describes Paul in Acts 13 as identifying God's "work" of bringing salvation out of judgment in Hab 1:5b to be fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ. Also in "Waiting and Living by Faith," he declares the "faith" mentioned in Hab 2:4b to be identified by Paul as a specific faith in God's redemptive purpose, ultimately fulfilled in the gospel.

<sup>174</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, "The Culture of Pride: Habakkuk 2:5-20," preached May 17, 2009 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet. Timothy J. Keller, sermon, "Generosity in Scarcity: Habakkuk 3:17-19."

<sup>175</sup>Keller, "The Culture of Pride: Habakkuk 2:5-20."

<sup>176</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, "Rejoicing in Tribulation: Habakkuk 3:1-19," preached June 7, 2009 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

language of penal substitution to express the gospel. Each sermon declares the death of Christ as paying for sins by his bearing the guilt of sinners.<sup>177</sup> For example, Keller expresses the gospel by saying, “He [Jesus] experienced judgment on the cross. He paid our penalty. He took the judgment himself.”<sup>178</sup> This emphasis on Christ’s sin-bearing death also naturally leads Keller to emphasize the gospel as a work of “costly grace.”<sup>179</sup> It is this grace, for Keller, which provides the ultimate hope for the restoration of the world.<sup>180</sup>

**Keller’s commitment articulated and expressed from the Writings.** In the series “Who’s Afraid of Doctrine,” Keller expounds four Psalms all in light of the gospel. As with his series from the Prophets, Keller in this series reveals his christocentric hermeneutic by referencing Luke 24 and declaring the Old Testament to be “all about Jesus.”<sup>181</sup> He also challenges his congregation in his first sermon to “read Psalm 139 through Jesus.”<sup>182</sup> This approach of reading a passage “through Jesus” is seen in each sermon as Keller reveals how the doctrines of God, Scripture, human nature, and salvation cannot be properly understood apart from the gospel. He arrives at the gospel

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<sup>177</sup>Keller expresses the gospel in “The Culture of Pride” by stating, “Jesus emptied himself of his glory, lived a life of serving others, not using others, but at the end of his life, he took our shame, he took the shame we deserved, so that when you believe in Jesus Christ, the Father clothes you in the honor that Jesus deserved.” Keller, “The Culture of Pride: Habakkuk 2:5-20.”

<sup>178</sup>Keller, “Why Does God Do Nothing: Habakkuk 1:1-7.”

<sup>179</sup>Keller, “Generosity in Scarcity: Habakkuk 3:17-19.”

<sup>180</sup>Keller, “The Culture of Pride: Habakkuk 2:5-20.”

<sup>181</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, “The Doctrine of the Word: Psalm 19:1-14,” preached June 6, 2004 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

<sup>182</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, “The Doctrine of God: Psalm 139:1-24,” preached May 30, 2004 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

by asserting the gospel to be the fulfillment of redemptive history and Old Testament prophecy.

In the first three sermons, Keller places the doctrine of the passage in the context of redemptive history and then shows how Christ fulfills that doctrine. In “The Doctrine of God,” Keller describes the substitutionary death of Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament’s revelation of God as both loving and holy.<sup>183</sup> In “The Doctrine of the Word,” Keller connects the doctrine of Scripture to Jesus by referring to Jesus as a “greater David” who delighted in God’s law and yet took its curse for sinners.<sup>184</sup> In “The Doctrine of Human Nature,” Keller explains how the person and work of Christ is the fulfillment of the doctrine of man by way of Christ perfectly displaying the *imago dei* and then bearing the sinful nature of man so as to “bring many sons to glory.”<sup>185</sup> In “The Doctrine of Salvation,” Keller preaches the gospel as the fulfillment of prophecy by explaining Psalm 22 to be a prophetic insight by David into the crucifixion of Jesus.<sup>186</sup>

Keller places each of these four doctrines into the metanarrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. He posits the gospel as the message of redemption which solves the brokenness of the world. For example, in his sermon “The Doctrine of Man,” he describes the creation of man in the image of God, the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, and the redemption of God in Christ. Keller declares this redemption as God’s

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<sup>183</sup>Keller, “The Doctrine of God: Psalm 139:1-24.”

<sup>184</sup>Keller, “The Doctrine of the Word: Psalm 19:1-14.”

<sup>185</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, “The Doctrine of Human Nature: Psalm 8:1-9; 14:1-7,” preached June 20, 2004 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

<sup>186</sup>Keller refers to Acts 2:31 to justify his claim that David was a prophet who foretold of Christ. Timothy J. Keller, sermon, “The Doctrine of Salvation: Psalm 22:1-31,” preached July 4, 2004 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

ultimate victory in restoring the world. He concludes the sermon, stating, “Do you believe in the doctrine of human nature: That you’re radically exalted, radically fallen, and through Jesus Christ, who though he was exalted came low, though he was life at the highest came low, became hideous for you. If you see that, that wins the war, that will change the way you deal with yourself and other people.”<sup>187</sup>

In all four sermons, Keller expresses this gospel of redemption as Christ’s substitutionary death and as a message of God’s grace. For example in “The Doctrine of the Word,” Keller clearly describes the gospel with these two elements: “Jesus died on the cross and took the punishment for disobedience so that when we accept him and love him and believe in him then his reward comes to us. Because you see, the reward for his perfect law keeping comes to us, so that the punishment for our imperfect law keeping has gone to him. That’s what it says, that’s the gospel.”<sup>188</sup>

**Keller’s commitment articulated and expressed from the Gospels.** In his series “St. John’s Passion,” Keller expounds seven pericopes within the passion narrative. In each exposition, Keller presents the centrality of the gospel by revealing how certain elements in the passage are understood in light of Christ’s death. For example, from the passage narrating Jesus’ arrest, Keller uses the incident of the crowds falling down at Jesus’ statement “I am he,” and explains humanity’s inability to handle the power and holiness of God. He then explains Christ’s death to be the only means for entering back

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<sup>187</sup>Keller, “The Doctrine of Human Nature: Psalm 8:1-9; 14:1-7.”

<sup>188</sup>Ibid.

into a right standing with God.<sup>189</sup> Also, from the narrative of Jesus' trial before Pontius Pilate, Keller contrasts Pilate's self-serving use of power with Jesus' selfless release of power to accomplish God's redemptive purposes.<sup>190</sup> In the two sermons on Jesus' resurrection, Keller again explains a detail within the passage to highlight the death of Christ. For example, from the detail of Jesus revealing himself to Mary Magdalene at the tomb, Keller explains how God graciously pursues sinners by sending his Son to die.<sup>191</sup> Also, in the final sermon, Keller highlights the centrality of Christ's death by describing the resurrected Jesus pointing out his scars to his disciples. These scars on Jesus' resurrected body highlight the redemption accomplished in his atoning death, and the certain hope of the restoration of the fallen cosmos in the kingdom of God.<sup>192</sup>

In these seven sermons, Keller reveals the message of the gospel as God's work of redemption through Christ. In each sermon he highlights the problem of man's fallen nature and the redeeming death of Christ as the solution. For example, in "You—Have No Power," he explains that everyone was created by God and for God, but sin has corrupted everyone so that they don't live lives based on him. Christ, therefore, came into the world to bring man back to God, thus restoring man to his created purpose.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>189</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, "I Am He: John 18:1-11," preached February 17, 2008 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

<sup>190</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, "You—Have No Power: John 18:33-38; 19:8-11," preached February 24, 2008 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

<sup>191</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, "Mary! John 20:1-3, 10-18," preached March 23, 2008 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

<sup>192</sup>Keller, sermon, "I Am Sending You: John 20:9-22; Luke 24:36-49," preached March 30, 2008 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

<sup>193</sup>Keller, "You—Have No Power: John 18:33-38; 19:8-11."

Keller expresses the redemptive work of Christ, throughout this series, with the gospel elements of penal substitution and God's grace in the salvation of sinners.<sup>194</sup>

Fundamental to Keller's explanation of the gospel is that it is God's work, his grace, which saves: "The gospel is you are a sinner saved by grace, you're more evil than you ever dared believe and you're more loved than you ever dared hope."<sup>195</sup> Elsewhere, Keller again refers to the centrality of grace: "Not by our works; it's by his works. It's not by what we do; it's by what he did on the cross . . . it's resting in his sheer unmerited grace . . . my salvation is by absolute sheer grace."<sup>196</sup>

In his final sermon, Keller reveals his hermeneutical method through an exposition of Luke 24.<sup>197</sup> He states,

You see, the Bible had three parts: the law, the prophets, and the wisdom literature. Now if Jesus would have said "the prophets are about me," you could say: "Yes, I understand that the prophets were about the Messiah." But when Jesus has the audacity to say: "The law is about me." Now, wait a minute, how can "the law be about me?" The Law of Moses is a set of rules: "You must do this, you must do this, you must do this, to please God." Isn't that about me and you? It's not about Jesus; it's about us, right? But he says: "No, the law, the prophets, the wisdom literature, everything in the Bible is fulfilled in me. Everything in the Bible is pointing to me." Do you know what that means? When Jesus Christ says: "The Law of Moses is really not about you, it's about me, Jesus Christ." What he is saying is: "I have fulfilled that, I have obeyed the Ten Commandants." What about the ceremonies of Moses, the sacrifices for sin, the tabernacle, and the clean laws? He says, "I'm the ultimate sacrifice," says Jesus, "I'm the ultimate priest, I'm the

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<sup>194</sup>"Salvation is always by grace." Keller, sermon, "Mary! John 20:1-3, 10-18."

<sup>195</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, "I Thirst: John 19:28-37," preached March 9, 2008 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009;; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet. Keller uses an almost identical statement for the gospel in his sermon "You Must Be Born Again," when he states, "The gospel is, you're more loved than you ever dared believe, and at the same time, you're more sinful than you ever dared believe." Timothy J. Keller, sermon, "You Must Be Born Again: John 19:38-42; 3:1-8," preached March 16, 2008 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009;; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid.

<sup>197</sup>Luke 24 has been presented in Keller's series from the Prophets and the Writings as the basis for his Christ-centered hermeneutic.

ultimate temple, I'm the ultimate way you are clean before God." What about all the stories, Abraham and Isaac? Jesus says, "I am the true seed of Abraham who was offered up, Isaac. I am the true Jonah who was thrown into the deeps to appease the wrath of God. I am the true David, who stood before the great giants of evil and sin and didn't just save his people at the risk of his life, like David, but at the cost of my life . . . There are two ways to read the Bible, and one way to read the Bible is to read it as basically about you, what you have to do to be right with God, in which case you will never have a sure and certain hope, because you'll always know that you are never quite living up. And you'll never be sure about that future. Or you can read it as all about Jesus. Not what you must do in order to make yourself right with God, but what he has done to make you absolutely right with God."<sup>198</sup>

This passage sheds significant light on Keller's hermeneutic. The reason why the gospel is so clearly presented in all of the Old Testament sermons evaluated in this dissertation is that Keller's central presupposition is the gospel.

**Keller's commitment articulated and expressed from the Epistles.** In his six part series from James, Keller approaches the book with the question, "How does belief in Christ make a difference in real life?"<sup>199</sup> He uses this question throughout the series to explain how the practical material of James is related to the gospel. In each sermon, Keller reveals how the gospel serves as the foundation for all of James' practical instructions.<sup>200</sup>

Keller also describes his homiletical method in this series when he states,

And that is what I do every week, have you ever noticed that, I make you think about the text, I make you feel convicted about the text, and somehow I always get

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<sup>198</sup>Keller, "I Am Sending You: John 20:9-22; Luke 24:36-49."

<sup>199</sup> Timothy J. Keller, sermon, "A Society of Suffering: James 1:1-18," preached November 22, 2009 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009;; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

<sup>200</sup> "James, unlike Paul, doesn't so much break the gospel apart to show you what it is; James assumes the gospel and shows you what your life will look like if you believe it." Timothy J. Keller, sermon, "A Community of Justice: James 2:1-17," preached December 6, 2009 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

to Jesus. Kathy [i.e., his wife] says, “You are like a magician, you put your hand into the hat and out comes Jesus.”<sup>201</sup>

This comment describes Keller’s homiletic in three steps: the explanation of the text, the application of the text, and the fulfillment of the text in the person and work of Christ.

Elsewhere, Keller again declares his christocentric hermeneutic by challenging his hearers to understand God’s law as fulfilled in Christ: “Don’t just see yourself, you must see the only man who did all the law. . . . Everything in the Bible is about me [i.e., Jesus].”<sup>202</sup>

Keller employs two means within this series of arriving at the gospel. First, he compares or contrasts the theme of the passage with the gospel. In “A Society of Suffering,” Keller compares the “steadfastness” of believers in trials with the “endurance” of Jesus in his trial of the cross.<sup>203</sup> Also, in “A Counter-Culture of Grace,” Keller contrasts the pride and spiritual adultery of sinners to the humility and faithfulness of Christ as displayed in his sacrificial death.<sup>204</sup>

Second, Keller arrives at the gospel by describing it as the fulfillment of certain passage themes. For example, in “A People Under the Word,” he explains how Christ’s fulfillment of God’s law transforms it into a “law of liberty” for the believer.<sup>205</sup> Along with the fulfillment of God’s law, Keller reveals other themes, such as social

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<sup>201</sup> Timothy J. Keller, sermon, “A People Under the Word: James 1:18-27,” preached November 29, 2009 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009;; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Keller, “A Society of Suffering: James 1:1-18.”

<sup>204</sup> Timothy J. Keller, sermon, “A Counter-Culture of Grace: James 4:1-12,” preached January 10, 2010 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009;; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

<sup>205</sup> Keller, “A People Under the Word: James 1:18-27.”

standings, human speech, and God’s providential will, to be fulfilled in the gospel.<sup>206</sup>

How Keller relates these themes to the gospel is explained below, under “Keller’s worldview implications from the Epistles.”

Throughout this series, Keller describes the gospel as the message of redemption for a fallen world. He expresses the gospel within the biblical storyline of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. For example, in “A Society of Suffering,” he describes the suffering in the world as a result of the fall, but the redemption in Christ as the assurance that God will in the end “make the whole world right.”<sup>207</sup> He describes this redemption in terms of substitutionary atonement by stating, “All the weight of eternal justice came down on him on the cross and while it did, in the greatest act of love, he stayed and because of that God can forgive us and receive us.”<sup>208</sup> Elsewhere, he explains the meaning of Christ’s life and death by declaring, “Jesus came and lived a perfect life and fulfilled the law once and then went to the cross and died and paid the penalty to fulfill the law again. He took cursing, so we could get blessing.”<sup>209</sup> This emphasis on Christ’s atoning death leads Keller to preach of the grace of God in Christ’s work: “[T]he gospel is this, that in yourself you deserve nothing but rejection but you can be saved not by your performance and your works but by Jesus’ works.”<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup>For examples of Keller’s explanation of the gospel to these themes, see the following sermons: “A Community of Justice, James 2:1-17”; “A Community of Peace-Making, James 3:1-18”; and “The Community of Justice II, James 4:13-5:6.”

<sup>207</sup>Keller, “A Society of Suffering: James 1:1-18.”

<sup>208</sup>Ibid.

<sup>209</sup>Keller, “A People Under the Word: James 1:18-27.”

<sup>210</sup>Keller, “A Community of Justice: James 2:1-17.”

In summary, this evaluation reveals Keller's preaching to possess a commitment to the gospel. In all thirty-one sermons, Keller relates the preaching passage and its topic to the gospel by presenting the gospel as the answer to the problem of sin and suffering. He expresses the redemptive message of the gospel in terms of the person and work of Christ, particularly Christ's work on the cross which he describes in the language of substitutionary atonement and God's grace.

### **Evaluation of Element 3: Keller's Worldview Implications**

Having evaluated Keller's worldview preaching according to the first two elements of Sire's paradigm, this section evaluates his sermons according to the third element: the worldview's implications. These sermons are evaluated to determine whether or not they consistently present the gospel as the foundation for practical living. In his writings, Keller presents the gospel as his worldview from which all of life is to be understood and lived. He explains the gospel to be the foundation for dealing with all manners of life, including: suffering, forgiveness, money, power, self-control, repentance, pride, anxiety, marriage and family, racism, and classism.

**Keller's worldview implications from the Law.** All five of Keller's sermons from "The Gospel According to Jacob," apply the gospel to various issues in life. These issues include: meeting basic human needs (e.g., approval, love and experiencing God), handling suffering, and understanding a right view of social standings. These sermons reveal Keller's commitment to present the gospel as the answer to all of life's trials and

“disillusionments.”<sup>211</sup>

In four sermons Keller describes the gospel as the resource for meeting various needs, such as approval and success, love, and relating to God.<sup>212</sup> In “The Problem of Blessing,” he explains Jacob’s desire for approval and love to be a universal human desire that can only be met through a relationship with God. This desire is fulfilled in an experiential knowledge of God’s grace in the gospel.<sup>213</sup> The gospel, Keller explains, meets these human desires by putting sinners into a right relationship with God and affirming them of this position so that these longings are satisfied. This new relationship with God leads to a life that seeks to bless others, rather than being blessed.

In three sermons Keller describes the gospel as the proper means for dealing with suffering.<sup>214</sup> In “The Openness of Heaven,”<sup>215</sup> he describes how God graciously gave Jacob the vision of a ladder to heaven, thus revealing to Jacob that he would be with Jacob as he left his home in Canaan. Keller then relates the gospel to Jacob’s ladder, demonstrating the comfort the gospel brings to those who are suffering. He calls believers to focus on the unjust suffering of Christ on the cross.<sup>216</sup> This contemplation on

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<sup>211</sup>Keller, “The Struggle for Love: Genesis 29:15-35.”

<sup>212</sup>First, in “The Problem of Blessing: Genesis 27:18-35,” Keller articulates how the human need for approval and success is satisfied in the gospel by providing believers with a new identity in Christ. Second, in “The Struggle for Love: Genesis 29:15-35,” he describes the human need for love to be satisfied in the gospel. Third, in both “The Openness of heaven: Genesis 28:10-22” and “The Fight of Your Life: Genesis 32:22-32,” he describes the gospel as the only means of genuinely meeting the need for experiencing God.

<sup>213</sup>Keller, “The Problem of Blessing: Genesis 27:18-35.”

<sup>214</sup>These three sermons are “The Openness of Heaven: Genesis 28:10-22,” “The Fight of Your Life: Genesis 32:22-32,” and “The Meaning of Free Grace: Genesis 48:8-20.”

<sup>215</sup>Keller, “The Openness of Heaven: Genesis 28:10-22.”

<sup>216</sup>“In tough times we hold on to God, because Christ held on in his suffering.” Keller, “The

the gospel provides believers with the assurance of God's presence in their own times of suffering.

In his final sermon, "The Meaning of Free Grace," Keller articulates the gospel as a means of dealing with social class differences.<sup>217</sup> The gospel, Keller argues, presents a reversal of the world's values by the way God extends blessings to those who are undeserving. As believers contemplate Christ's willingness to be despised by his enemies, they will begin to let go of the animosity between social classes.

**Keller's worldview implications from Old Testament History.** In his four part series "Esther and the Hiddenness of God," Keller articulates the gospel in response to the question: "How do you follow God in morally and spiritually and culturally ambiguous situations?"<sup>218</sup> Keller's repeated answer to this question is that believers must live out the truth of the gospel. He describes the gospel as the foundation for handling suffering, growing as a servant, relieving pride, and coping with enemies.

First, in "The Silent Sovereignty of God," Keller describes the gospel as providing a new perspective (a reversal of the world's values) on the topics of beauty and suffering.<sup>219</sup> Through contemplating the self-giving of Christ in the gospel, believers gain a new perspective on what constitutes beauty and why God allows times of suffering in the lives of believers. Second, in "If I Perish, I Perish," he explains how the gospel of God's grace equips believers for sacrificial service, causing them to identify with the

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Meaning of Free Grace: Genesis 48:8-20."

<sup>217</sup>Keller, "The Meaning of Free Grace: Genesis 48:8-20."

<sup>218</sup>Keller, "The Silent Sovereignty of God: Esther 2:5-10, 16-23."

<sup>219</sup>Ibid.

weak and marginalized of society.<sup>220</sup> Third, in “The Man the King Delights to Honor,” he explains how the gospel relieves human pride by humbling individuals in light of Christ’s death for them as sinners.<sup>221</sup> Fourth, in his final sermon, Keller declares the gospel to be the greatest resource for dealing with enemies by reminding believers that they are no better than their enemies since they have been saved by “sheer grace,” while also affirming believers of their worth in Christ.<sup>222</sup>

**Keller’s worldview implications from the Prophets.** In his series from Habakkuk, “Living by Faith in Troubled Times,” Keller provides the gospel as the foundation for overcoming life’s troubles. In all five sermons, Keller presents the subject of the passage in the form of a problem and then reveals the gospel as the solution.<sup>223</sup>

Three of Keller’s sermons identify the gospel as the resource for dealing with suffering and trials. In these sermons, Keller instructs believers to consider Christ’s sacrificial suffering as they face their own times of suffering. He explains how a deep understanding of Christ’s death provides confidence,<sup>224</sup> patience,<sup>225</sup> and joy<sup>226</sup> during

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<sup>220</sup> Keller, “If I Perish, I Perish: Esther 4:5-17.” Keller describes the gospel’s ability to transform believers from “needy” people to people who help the needy.

<sup>221</sup> Keller, “The Man the King Delights to Honor: Esther 3:1-6, 6:1-10.” In this sermon, Keller also explains how the gospel provides confidence by revealing God’s love in Christ’s death.

<sup>222</sup> Keller, “Rest from Our Enemies: Esther 7:1-10, 9:20-24.”

<sup>223</sup> The five problems are: how to live during bad or evil times, how to wait on the Lord in difficult times, how to deal with pride and shame, how to face economic scarcity, and how to rejoice in troubled times.

<sup>224</sup> Keller, “Why Does God Do Nothing? Habakkuk 1:1-17.”

<sup>225</sup> Keller, “Waiting and Living by Faith: Habakkuk 2:1-4.” In this sermon, Keller points believers to Christ’s patience on the cross, which resulted in their salvation and the guarantee of their future deliverance at Christ’s second coming. Keller claims that this truth helps relieve the impatience of believers by assuring them of the temporality of their trials.

trials. Concerning joy in trials, Keller describes believers as growing less overwhelmed and more joyful in trials as they contemplate their salvation in Christ. Toward the end of the message, Keller exhorts believers to live in light of their union with Christ by stating, “Live on who you are in Christ, until you can handle anything.”<sup>227</sup>

Keller also reveals the gospel as the means of removing pride and shame by revealing the humility of Christ. In “The Culture of Pride,” he tells his listeners that the same pride and evil found in the Babylonians can also be found in “seed” form in every human heart. The only way this pride can be removed is through grasping the “radical grace” of Christ in “laying aside his glory, taking up shame, and drinking God’s cup of wrath.”<sup>228</sup> As believers contemplate this gospel, they see more clearly their own sin and pride as well as God’s holiness and love. Concerning this view of the gospel, Keller states, “The gospel humbles us out of our pride, but in such a way that we have more confidence than before.”<sup>229</sup>

The final gospel implication is the believer’s attitude and use of money. In “Generosity in Scarcity,” Keller articulates the gospel as both an encouragement and a model for financial giving in times of scarcity: “Jesus gave not to the point that he changed his life, but to the point of losing his life. When you see that, it will make him your treasure. When he becomes your treasure it won’t be a problem to give.”<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>226</sup>Keller, “Rejoicing in Tribulation: Habakkuk 3:1-19.”

<sup>227</sup>Ibid.

<sup>228</sup>Keller, “The Culture of Pride: Habakkuk 2:5-20.”

<sup>229</sup>Ibid.

<sup>230</sup>Keller, “Generosity in Scarcity: Habakkuk 3:17-19.”

**Keller's worldview implications from the Writings.** Keller's four part series from the Psalms demonstrates his commitment to the gospel as the foundation for the Christian life. In his final sermon, he declares all "personal transformation" (i.e., progressive sanctification) to be produced by the "costly grace" of the gospel.<sup>231</sup> He also highlights specific areas the gospel transforms, such as the believer's responses to suffering, God's commands, and the sin nature.

First, Keller presents the gospel as the greatest resource for dealing with suffering. In two sermons, Keller challenges his listeners to contemplate Christ's death so as to be aware of God's presence in times of suffering.<sup>232</sup> In "The Doctrine of God," Keller articulates the gospel as the means of relieving the pain of failure by reassuring believers of God's gracious acceptance of them in Christ.<sup>233</sup> Also in "The Doctrine of Salvation," he explains how the gospel reminds believers that God has purposes for their suffering. He reassures believers that their feelings of abandonment will begin to subside as they contemplate the reality that Jesus was abandoned on the cross for them.<sup>234</sup>

Second, Keller reveals the gospel as the means of changing a person's perspective on obedience to God's laws.<sup>235</sup> In "The Doctrine of the Word," he explains this change by stating, "Only through Jesus who fulfilled the law, the incarnate law

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<sup>231</sup>Keller, "The Doctrine of Salvation: Psalm 22:1-31."

<sup>232</sup>See "The Doctrine of God: Psalm 139:1-24" and "The Doctrine of Salvation: Psalm 22:1-31."

<sup>233</sup>Keller, "The Doctrine of God: Psalm 139:1-24."

<sup>234</sup>Keller, "The Doctrine of Salvation, Psalm 22:1-31."

<sup>235</sup>Keller, "The Doctrine of the Word: Psalm 19:1-14."

makes the written law become a delight to you.”<sup>236</sup> The gospel thus, according to Keller, turns God’s law to a delight, instead of a mere duty. This sermon also provides two examples of laws that become a delight through the gospel: the law of financial giving and of forgiving others. At the conclusion of the sermon, Keller declares the centrality of the gospel by stating that it alone “will rewire the way you think and do everything.”<sup>237</sup>

Third, Keller reveals the gospel as a resource for battling the sin nature. In “The Doctrine of Human Nature,” he explains the sin nature to be progressively put to death by the believer’s contemplation on the gospel and the new identity it brings.<sup>238</sup>

**Keller’s worldview implications from the Gospels.** In his seven part series, “St. John’s Passion,” Keller reveals a number of gospel implications for the believer. These implications can be group into three categories: the believer’s interpersonal relationships, the believer’s view of himself, and the believer’s growth in various virtues.

The first three sermons provide examples of Keller applying the gospel to interpersonal relationships. In “I Am He,” he explains how the gospel provides a resource powerful enough to take criticism from others and not seek revenge. As believers understand that Jesus, the divine judge, came to earth and was judged in their place in order that they might stand uncondemned before God on the final judgment day, they will now, here on earth, be able to handle the unjust judgments of others and not retaliate but rather forgive as they have been forgiven.<sup>239</sup> Along these same lines, Keller

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<sup>236</sup>Ibid.

<sup>237</sup>Ibid.

<sup>238</sup>Keller, “The Doctrine of Human Nature: Psalm 8:1-9; 14:1-7.”

<sup>239</sup>Keller, “I Am He: John 18:1-11.”

in “They Divided My Garments,” declares the gospel to end bigotry by relieving the animosity between the social classes. He explains how the gospel ends the division between social classes by referring to Jesus speaking from the cross to his mother and John, describing them as mother and son. Through Christ’s death, Keller explains, Christ is uniting believers into a family by bringing them into God’s kingdom. As believers contemplate what Christ has done for them, they will begin to see every believer, no matter the social, economic, or racial background, as part of the same family.<sup>240</sup> Keller also explains how the gospel affects relationships by changing the way believers use power. In “You—Have No Power,” he describes Jesus’ servanthood of laying aside his power before Pontius Pilate, as the motivation and pattern for believers in their relationship with others. As believers apply the truth that Jesus used his power to serve them, so they will be motivated to use whatever power they have to serve others, particularly those with less social and economic standing.<sup>241</sup>

Regarding the second category, the believer’s view of himself, Keller explains the feelings of self-condemnation and self-righteousness to be relieved by the gospel.<sup>242</sup> In light of both feelings, he calls believers to consider their new identity in Christ. This new identity provides self-condemning believers with confidence due to Christ’s imputed righteousness, while it also provides humility to proud believers by reminding them that they are saved by grace alone.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>240</sup>Keller, “They Divided My Garments: John 19:23-27.”

<sup>241</sup>Keller, “You-Have No Power: John 18:33-38; 19:8-11.”

<sup>242</sup>See “I Thirst, John 19:28-37” and “You Must Be Born Again, John 19:38-42; 3:1-8.”

<sup>243</sup>Also, in “You Must Be Born Again,” Keller expresses the gospel as transforming believers from both pride and insecurity to humility and confidence. Keller, “You Must Be Born Again: John 19:38-

The final two sermons provide examples within the third category (i.e., Christian virtues). The virtue of love is highlighted in “Mary!” In this sermon, Keller explains the gospel as the basis for growing in love toward God and others.<sup>244</sup> Also in “I am Sending You,” he explains how the gospel provides the grounds for Christian joy and peace.<sup>245</sup> Keller exhorts believers to grow in these virtues by reflecting upon the gospel of grace. He declares the source of Christian love to be the costly love of Christ,<sup>246</sup> while the source of Christian joy and peace to be the grace of God in salvation.<sup>247</sup>

**Keller’s worldview implications from the Epistles.** Keller regards James’ epistle as a book on the practical nature of the gospel.<sup>248</sup> In each sermon, he reveals how the gospel serves as the basis for living out the practical material of James. He highlights a number of areas the gospel effects: trials and temptations, love for God and service to others, and the problem of self-absorption.

In his first sermon, “A Society of Suffering,” Keller deals with suffering in trials and the temptation of spiritual adultery.<sup>249</sup> He explains the way to ward off the temptation of turning from God during times of trails, is to contemplate the costly love of Christ. This contemplation of Christ’s love preserves believers through trials.

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42; 3:1-8.”

<sup>244</sup>Keller, “Mary! John 20:1-3, 10-18.”

<sup>245</sup>Keller, “I am Sending You: John 20:19-22; Luke 24:36-49.”

<sup>246</sup>Keller, “Mary! John 20:1-3, 10-18.” “To the degree you understand your need for grace, to that degree faith explodes in your life in the form of love.”

<sup>247</sup>Keller, “I am Sending You: John 20:19-22; Luke 24:36-49.”

<sup>248</sup>See Keller, “A Society of Suffering: James 1:1-18.”

<sup>249</sup>Ibid.

In the next three sermons, Keller relates the gospel to the believer's obedience to God and service to others. In relation to God, Keller calls believers to obey God's commands in light of Christ's active and passive obedience on their behalf.<sup>250</sup> He explains that Christians will want to obey God's laws, in order "to delight the one" [i.e., Jesus] who kept the law for them. In relation to others, Keller reveals the gospel as the basis for serving others, particularly those in different social classes by reminding believers of God's grace in their own salvation.<sup>251</sup> Also, he explains how the gospel transforms the speech of believers by reminding them of their new status before God. This new status enables them to receive the negative speech of others without becoming bitter and angry.<sup>252</sup>

In the final two sermons, Keller highlights the gospel as the means of relieving self-absorption. In "A Counter-Culture of Grace" he explains the role of the gospel in humbling believers, thus freeing them from self-centeredness. He encourages his audience to apply the gospel so that they are no longer "needy for self-recognition."<sup>253</sup> Also in "The Community of Justice II," he describes how the gospel frees believers from the self-consuming bondage of worry by assuring them of God's providential control.<sup>254</sup> The gospel, he explains, replaces worry with confidence by reminding believers of Christ's willingness to lose his life on the cross so that they might know his gracious

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<sup>250</sup>Keller, "A People Under the Word: James 1:18-27."

<sup>251</sup>Keller, "A Community of Justice: James 2:1-17."

<sup>252</sup>Keller, "A Community of Peacemaking: James 3:1-18."

<sup>253</sup>Keller, "A Counter-Culture of Grace: James 4:1-12."

<sup>254</sup> Keller, "A Community of Justice II: James 4:13-5:6."

control over their lives. This confidence in God's providence also helps believers become generous with their resources knowing that God will take care of them.

In summary, this evaluation of the third element in Keller's sermons reveals a consistency in his preaching. In each sermon Keller articulates the gospel as the basis for all Christian transformation. He continually calls his hearers to contemplate the gospel so as to work out the implications in regard to their internal lives (issues such as pride, shame, human desires, suffering), their external lives (matters such as obedience to God and service to others), and their growth in virtues (such as love, joy, and peace). For Keller, faith in the gospel provides the resource for dealing with every issue of life.

#### **Evaluation of Element 4: Contrasting Worldviews**

The final element to evaluate in Keller's worldview preaching is his use of contrast. As documented in chapter 3, Keller's typical contrast is between the gospel and the views of religion and irreligion (with a greater emphasis on religion). Two key contrasts were described: the grace of the gospel with the works of other religions, and Christianity's rational basis for living a meaningful life in the world with the irrational basis of both religion and secularism. This section evaluates Keller's preaching to determine whether this fourth element is consistently presented.

**Worldviews contrasted in the Law.** In all five sermons from "The Gospel According to Jacob," Keller contrasts the gospel with religion. As with his writings, Keller's sermons also demonstrate his desire to refute the pluralistic belief of western

culture by declaring Christianity to be “exactly opposite”<sup>255</sup> and “absolutely different from every other religion.”<sup>256</sup>

In two sermons, Keller highlights the differences between the grace of Christianity and the works of other religions by describing the content of their books.<sup>257</sup> He explains the books of ancient cultures and world religions to provide stories of heroes to emulate, while the Bible provides stories of God’s grace in the midst of human failures.<sup>258</sup> This distinction is articulated in “The Fight of Your Life”:

The stories of the Bible are really not like the stories of other cultures and the stories of other religions. Because other religions and cultures put together compendiums of these ancient stories and narratives, the purpose of them is to show us stories of heroes of virtue that we are supposed to emulate . . . And it is because the Bible is not so much here to show you how to live a good life as it is to show us how to meet God whose grace we need, and live a new life.<sup>259</sup>

All five sermons present a contrast between grace and works. For example, in describing the merit-based religions of Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism, Keller declares, “Every other religion has a god the angels ascend and descend to, and there are steps and you’ve got to do it; but this is the only religion that tells you that God himself came and fulfilled all the requirements for you so that he can come into your life by sheer grace, just by asking.”<sup>260</sup>

Along with the repeated emphasis on grace and works, Keller contrasts the

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<sup>255</sup>Keller, “The Meaning of Free Grace: Genesis 28:8-20.”

<sup>256</sup>Keller, “The Openness of Heaven: Genesis 28:10-22.”

<sup>257</sup>See sermons three and four: “The Struggle for Love” and “The Fight of Your Life.”

<sup>258</sup>Keller, “The Struggle for Love: Genesis 29:15-35.”

<sup>259</sup>Keller, “The Fight of Your Life: Genesis 32:22-32.”

<sup>260</sup>Keller, “The Openness of Heaven: Genesis 28:10-22.”

Christian view of God with alternative views.<sup>261</sup> He describes the liberal view of God as love with no wrath, and the conservative view as justice without grace. These views are then contrasted with the gospel's view of a God of perfect justice and perfect love.

**Worldviews contrasted in Old Testament History.** In his series from Esther, Keller contrasts the grace of the gospel with the works of other religions. Only "Rest from Our Enemies" fails to produce this contrast. However, it does provide a contrast between a view of God as "blood-thirsty" in the Old Testament but loving in the New Testament, with the gospel's perspective of a God who is both perfectly just and loving.<sup>262</sup>

In the other three sermons, Keller provides a clear distinction between the grace of God in the gospel and the works of man in religion. He draws out this contrast in "The Silent Sovereignty of God," by describing the religious view of salvation as "God blesses and saves those who live morally exemplary lives," and the view of the gospel as "God persistently, continuously gives his grace to people who don't ask for it, don't deserve it, and don't even appreciate it once they get it."<sup>263</sup> He also describes religion as building pride and guilt into people's lives, whereas the gospel builds humility and confidence.<sup>264</sup>

This contrast between grace and works is further explained by Keller when he accuses some people of treating the Bible as a moralistic book filled with examples to

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<sup>261</sup>Keller, "The Fight of Your Life, Genesis 32:22-32."

<sup>262</sup>Keller, "Rest from Our Enemies: Esther 7:1-10; 9:20-24."

<sup>263</sup>Keller, "The Silent Sovereignty of God: Esther 2:5-10, 16-23."

<sup>264</sup>Keller, "The Man the King Delights to Honor: Esther 3:-6; 6:1-10."

emulate. Instead, he argues the biblical stories should be primarily read in light of God's redemption; thus Jesus should be understood primarily as a savior.<sup>265</sup>

**Worldviews contrasted in the Prophets.** This series from Habakkuk is the only one in this study of Keller's sermons not to provide a contrast in each sermon. Only two of the five sermons present a contrast: "Why Does God Do Nothing?"<sup>266</sup> and "The Culture of Pride."<sup>267</sup>

In "Why Does God Do Nothing?," Keller contrasts the improper responses to suffering of both religious and secular people with Habakkuk's proper response of "unconditionally and faithfully wrestling with God" which, according to Keller, takes "gospel grace to produce."<sup>268</sup> In "The Culture of Pride," he contrasts the type of culture the gospel produces with the type religion and secularism produce.<sup>269</sup> He first explains how traditional religious people produce a culture where the family and morality become idols, while liberal secular people produce a culture where the individual is the idol. These idolatrous cultures, according to Keller, are seeking power and control, while gospel-informed people produce a culture of humility and sacrifice for others.

**Worldviews contrasted in the Writings.** In each sermon from ""Who's

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<sup>265</sup>Keller, "If I Perish, I Perish: Esther 4:5-17."

<sup>266</sup>Keller, "Why Does God Do Nothing? Habakkuk 1:1-17."

<sup>267</sup>Keller, "The Culture of Pride Habakkuk 2:5-20."

<sup>268</sup>Keller, "Why Does God Do Nothing? Habakkuk 1:1-17." Keller explains the religious approach to suffering to be a refusal to question God so as to appease him through self-righteousness, while the secular approach arrogantly refuses to believe in God because of the problem of evil.

<sup>269</sup>Keller, "The Culture of Pride, Habakkuk 2:5-20."

Afraid of Doctrine?” Keller contrasts Christianity and the views of religion and secularism. Keller’s dominant contrast is between the grace of the gospel and the works of religion. He also contrasts a faulty understanding of the world presented by some worldviews with the consistency of Christianity.

All four sermons develop the contrast between the grace of the gospel with the works of religion. Keller declares the basis of Christianity to be the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, while other religions are based on justification by works.<sup>270</sup> In light of this contrast, Keller declares love and gratitude to be the Christian motivation for good deeds, whereas religion is motivated by fear and pride.<sup>271</sup>

In two sermons, Keller contrasts Christianity with religion and secularism in their views of the material world and the dignity of human life.<sup>272</sup> He declares the Christian view of reality to be superior to all others because of its belief in the restoration of the cosmos.<sup>273</sup> He supports this claim by describing the inadequacy of the views of eastern religions and western secularism. Eastern religions, Keller states, view the world as an illusion, while western secularism views it as an unguided process destined for destruction. Keller asserts that the Christian view of a restored cosmos provides the only rational grounds for valuing the world. He also contrasts Christianity with other views by

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<sup>270</sup>Keller, “The Doctrine of God: Psalm 139:1-24.” In his second sermon, “The Doctrine of the Word,” Keller also contrasts Christianity’s emphasis on doctrinal precision against the anti-doctrinal stance of other views.

<sup>271</sup>Keller, “The Doctrine of the Word: Psalm 19:1-14.” Keller gives the reason for why Christians should delight in God’s law by stating, “I delight because obeying God’s law delights the one who delighted in me so much that he died for me.” Keller, “The Doctrine of Human Nature.”

<sup>272</sup>See Keller, “The Doctrine of the Word: Psalm 19:1-14” and “The Doctrine of Human Nature: Psalm 8:1-9; 14:1-7.”

<sup>273</sup>Keller, “The Doctrine of the Word: Psalm 19:1-14.” Keller states, “I do not know of another view of reality that can give you a higher view of the natural world.”

declaring the biblical view of human nature to be “markedly different from any other view.”<sup>274</sup> This difference is grounded in Christianity’s doctrine of the *imago dei*, which provides a greater rationale for belief in human dignity.

One last point of contrast for Keller is the difference between the Christian view of God as perfectly holy and loving and other views of God as either holy or loving, but not both. He claims that the gospel provides a God of more love than the liberal god because the gospel says that it cost God something to love his people, and more holiness than the conservative god because the gospel informs sinners that their good works cannot atone for sin.<sup>275</sup>

**Worldviews contrasted in the Gospels.** In his series “St. John’s Passion,” Keller uses contrast in each sermon to distinguish the gospel from religion and secularism. This contrast consist of two types: the grace of God in the gospel with the works of men in religion, and the gospel’s view of specific life issues with religion’s and secularism’s view.

In three sermons Keller contrasts the grace of the gospel with works of religion and secularism.<sup>276</sup> Concerning the contrast with religion, Keller states, “Religion is, you give God a performance and God blesses you; but the gospel is God blesses you in Jesus Christ and then you do your best to love and serve the one who’s already given you the

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<sup>274</sup>Keller, “The Doctrine of Human Nature: Psalm 8:1-9; 14:1-7.”

<sup>275</sup>Keller calls these gods the “relativistic god” and the “moralist god.” Keller, “The Doctrine of Salvation: Psalm 22:1-31.”

<sup>276</sup>See Keller, “I Thirst: John 19:28-37,” “You Must be Born Again: John 19:38-42; 3:1-8,” and “I am Sending You: John 20:19-22; Luke 24:36-49.”

welcome.”<sup>277</sup> Keller also accuses secularism of being works based due to its emphasis on being successful.<sup>278</sup> This contrast between grace and works is also heard in Keller’s explanation of two ways of reading the Bible: the religious way of focusing on man and his morality, and the gospel way of focusing on Christ and his salvific work.<sup>279</sup>

In five sermons Keller contrasts the way Christianity and other views deal with various topics (divine judgment, culture, diversity, and the value of the material world).<sup>280</sup> Regarding divine judgment, Keller declares the Christian view to be the most satisfying in that it assures humanity that all injustice will be dealt with and that all of God’s people will be saved from judgment by Christ’s death.<sup>281</sup> Also in two sermons, Keller declares, Christianity to provide a superior understanding of culture (particularly in regard to race, gender, finances, and family).<sup>282</sup> The gospel, he argues, rebukes western individualism by confronting it with the call of Christ to serve family and neighbor; the gospel rebukes eastern traditionalism by stressing the importance of commitment to Christ and God’s family over one’s biological family. Keller also contrasts Christianity with religion and irreligion in regard to their view and treatment of

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<sup>277</sup>Keller, “I Thirst: John 19:28-37.” Keller further illustrates this contrast by comparing the final words of Buddha, “Strive without ceasing,” with Jesus’ words, “It is finished.”

<sup>278</sup>Keller, “You Must Be Born Again: John 19:38-42; 3:1-8.”

<sup>279</sup>Keller, “I am Sending You: John 20:19-22; Luke 24:36-49.”

<sup>280</sup>See Keller, “I Am He: John 18:1-11,” “You-Have No Power: John 18:33-38; 19:8-11,” “They Divided My Garments: John 19:23-27,” “Mary! John 20:1-3, 10-18,” and “I Am Sending You: John 20:19-22; Luke 24:36-49.”

<sup>281</sup>Keller, “I Am He: John 18:1-11.”

<sup>282</sup>See Keller, “You-Have No Power: John 18:33-38; 19:8-11” and “They Divided My Garments: John 19:23-27.”

humanity and the world.<sup>283</sup> In “Mary!” he reveals the failures of both liberals and conservatives in dealing with the problem of animosity between different social groups, and then describes the gospel as the only antidote to remove this animosity.<sup>284</sup> He also describes the views of religion and secularism as failing to provide a rational basis for caring for the material world. Religion, Keller explains, informs adherents of their eventual departure from the physical world to a spiritual reality, while secularism teaches that the world came from nothing and will return to nothing. Keller then explains how Christianity provides the highest view of both the physical and spiritual realm, while also providing believers with a rational basis for working toward the world’s renewal because of the creative and “re-creative work of God.”<sup>285</sup> This re-creative work of God will reach its consummation in God’s kingdom, which is expressed in a new heaven and earth.

**Worldviews contrasted in the Epistles.** In his series “The Gospel in Community: The Book of James,” Keller contrasts Christianity with religion and secularism by drawing out the differences between the way these views handle various life issues (suffering, morality, social justice and human rights, criticism and failure, individualism, humility, and life management).

In his first sermon, Keller contrasts the gospel’s view of suffering with the

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<sup>283</sup>See Keller, “Mary! John 20:1-3, 10-18” and “I Am Sending You: John 20:19-22; Luke 24:36-49.”

<sup>284</sup>Keller, “Mary! John 20:1-3, 10-18.” “If we feel like we are open-minded people than we hate the bigots and the traditional people. And if we feel like we are virtuous and we’re kind of traditional and we’re kind of moral, than we don’t like the licentious and immoral people. But Jesus Christ is promiscuous in his love and his calls to repentance and his offer of grace.”

<sup>285</sup>Keller, “I Am Sending You: John 20:19-22; Luke 24:36-49.”

view of both religion and secularism.<sup>286</sup> He describes “pagan religions” and secularism as providing no concept of a benevolent purpose for suffering, whereas Christianity finds hope in the gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection in the midst of suffering.

The next two sermons contrast Christianity’s comprehensive and consistent view of individual morality and corporate social justice with the failing views of religion and secularism.<sup>287</sup> In “A People Under the Word,” Keller contrasts Christianity’s balanced approach to moral purity and social justice with religion’s one-sided focus on moral purity and secularism’s one-sided focus on social justice.<sup>288</sup> In “A Community of Justice,” Keller grounds the Christian view of human rights in the doctrine of the *imago dei*, while revealing secularism’s lack of basis for believing in these rights.<sup>289</sup>

In his final three sermons, Keller describes the gospel as a superior perspective on specific life issues. First, in “A Community of Peacemaking,” Keller describes the gospel as the greatest means of handling criticism and failure by supplying believers with security in their new identity in Christ.<sup>290</sup> Second, in “A Counter-Culture of Grace,” he contrasts the perspectives of Christianity and western secularism on the subject of individualism. Secularism, he explains, views individualism from a self-serving perspective while Christianity views it from a self-sacrificing perspective.<sup>291</sup> Third, in “A

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<sup>286</sup>Keller, “A Society of Suffering: James 1:1-18.”

<sup>287</sup>See Keller, “A People Under the Word: James 1:18-27” and “A Community of Justice: James 2:1-17.”

<sup>288</sup>Keller, “A People Under the Word: James 1:18-27.”

<sup>289</sup>Keller, “A Community of Justice: James 2:1-17.”

<sup>290</sup>Keller, “A Community of Peacemaking: James 3:1-18.”

<sup>291</sup>Keller, “A Counter-Culture of Grace: James 4:1-12.”

Community of Justice II,” Keller contrasts the views of secularism and Christianity in regard to the topic of humility.<sup>292</sup> He also contrasts the individualism and pride of secularism in its erroneous belief in the sovereignty of the self with the Christian teaching of God’s providential control over the world.<sup>293</sup>

In summary, all but three of these thirty-one sermons reveal Keller contrasting the Christian gospel with the perspective of other views. The contrast between grace and works is presented in nearly half these sermons. Also, the contrast between the rationality and irrationality of life is often presented. Keller also in several sermons contrasts the biblical view of God with alternative views.

### **Summary Evaluation of All Four Elements**

This descriptive evaluation reveals a consistency between Keller’s preaching ministry and his declared worldview from chapter 3. In all thirty-one sermons, Keller reveals the gospel as his central commitment. The gospel as Keller’s worldview affects both his hermeneutical and homiletical method. Throughout his sermons, Keller declares the importance of interpreting the Scriptures in light of Christ. Keller grounds his christocentric hermeneutic in Luke chapter 24. In half of the sermon series, he refers to this passage as his basis for interpreting the Bible.<sup>294</sup> Along with this hermeneutic, Keller’s *modus operandi* in homiletics is also christocentric. All of his sermons follow the three step method laid out in “A People Under the Word:” step one, the explanation

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<sup>292</sup>Keller articulates the Christian view as providing the basis for people to think less of themselves and thus provides real freedom. Keller, “A Community of Justice II: James 4:13-5:6.”

<sup>293</sup>Ibid.

<sup>294</sup>See Keller, “Why Does God Do Nothing? Habakkuk 1:1-17,” “The Doctrine of the Word: Psalm 19:1-14,” and “I Am Sending You: John 20:19-22; Luke 24:36-49.”

of the text; step two, the application of the text to his hearers; step three, the presentation of the gospel in fulfilling the sermon topic, which provides believers with the motivation and pattern for living out the truth of the text.<sup>295</sup>

From this gospel-centered perspective, Keller arrives at the gospel in each sermon through various means. Four main methods were identified in Keller's sermons. First, Keller compares or contrasts the people, events, or themes of a passage with the person and work of Christ.<sup>296</sup> Second, Keller reveals the gospel as the fulfillment of certain themes in redemptive history.<sup>297</sup> Third, Keller explains the New Testament's gospel-centered use of Old Testament verses.<sup>298</sup> Fourth, Keller demonstrates how the gospel sheds light on specific elements in a passage or the main theme of the passage.<sup>299</sup> In arriving at the gospel by one of these ways, Keller also consistently presents the gospel with the two elements discovered in his writings: the substitutionary death of Christ and the grace of God. All thirty-one sermons reveal both of these elements. These two gospel elements are the means God uses to redeem his fallen creation.

Keller's preaching also demonstrates a consistency in regard to the gospel as the foundation for Christian living. In each sermon Keller reveals the gospel as both the

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<sup>295</sup>Keller, "A People Under the Word: James 1:18-27."

<sup>296</sup>This method is used in four sermon series: "The Gospel According to Jacob," "Esther and the Hiddenness of God," "Living by Faith in Troubled Times," and "The Gospel in Community: The Book of James."

<sup>297</sup>This method is used within sermons from all four of the Old Testament series: "The Gospel According to Jacob," "Esther and the Hiddenness of God," "Living by Faith in Troubled Times," and "Who's Afraid of Doctrine?"

<sup>298</sup>This method is used in only one sermon series: "Living by Faith in Troubled Times."

<sup>299</sup>For this method, see selected sermon in "St. John's Passion" and "The Gospel in Community: The Book of James."

motivation and the pattern for living. As the motivation, Keller calls his hearers to actively contemplate the gospel so as to find both the desire and ability to live life for God's glory. As the pattern, Keller explains the grace of God in Christ's substitutionary death as a type of paradigm for Christian living.

With regard to the final element, Keller's preaching demonstrates a commitment to contrasting Christianity with the views of religion and secularism. Only three sermons, all from the series in Habakkuk, lack examples of contrast. Keller's preaching is consistent with what was discovered in chapter 3: He contrasts grace with works, and the rational basis of Christianity with the irrationality of both religion and secularism in regard to understanding the world and living consistently in it.<sup>300</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This chapter's evaluation of Machen's and Keller's preaching according to Sire's paradigm provides enough description to identify both men as worldview preachers. Sire's four elements were discovered in the majority of their preaching. The following chapter provides a further evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of Machen's and Keller's approaches. Their approaches are compared and contrasted with each other, for the purpose of better understanding what might be avoided and what might be emulated in their worldview preaching.

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<sup>300</sup>Fifteen sermons present the contrast between grace and works: five from his series in Genesis, three from Esther, four from the Psalms, and three from the Gospel of John. Sixteen sermons present the contrast between the rational and irrational basis for living: two from Habakkuk, two from Psalms, five from the Gospel of John, and six from James.

## CHAPTER 5

### WORLDVIEW PREACHERS COMPARED

Although Keller was born over a decade after Machen's death, with Machen's ministry spanning the first several decades of the twentieth century and Keller's now firmly established in the twenty-first, the two men display a number of similarities. They are conservative Presbyterian ministers with ties to Westminster Theological Seminary, and they have sought to engage two dominant worldviews in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In chapter 3 their worldviews were constructed around Sire's four worldview elements through a description of these elements in their writings. This chapter provided a basis for understanding what precisely both men believe concerning the Christian worldview and competing worldviews. In chapter 4 their preaching was evaluated to determine whether they display consistency with their declared worldviews of chapter 3. Here in chapter 5, their preaching is compared with one another's in each of the worldview categories, with some key similarities and differences noted.

As their worldview preaching is compared, several insights are developed. First, this comparison reveals areas of strengths and weaknesses in their worldview preaching. Second, it identifies some of the reasons for the choices they make in their worldview preaching. Third, it provides some words of encouragement and caution for contemporary preachers in following their approaches.

## First Two Elements Compared

Machen and Keller share strong similarities in the first two elements of Sire's paradigm. In regard to the first element, both preachers demonstrate the gospel in their sermons as their central commitment. In his battle with theological modernism, Machen encouraged Christians to ask the following questions of the preaching they heard in churches: "But what is the content of his preaching? Is his preaching full of the gospel of Christ?"<sup>1</sup> If this second question is used as a litmus test for the preaching of Machen and Keller then both would surely pass. In their preaching they often declare the centrality of the gospel, encouraging their audience to understand the Bible and Christianity from the perspective of the gospel. Their sermons also implicitly reveal the centrality of the gospel by relating the sermon passage and its topic to it. Their preaching demonstrates an attempt to present and defend Christianity as a coherent unified whole by centering each sermon on the gospel. In Keller's words, the gospel "is like the 'hub' in a 'wheel' of truth."<sup>2</sup> By keeping the gospel at the center of their preaching and not presenting a collection of doctrines or morals, both men present Christianity as a unified worldview.

Along with the centrality of the gospel, both preachers express the gospel with the historical element of Christ's death.<sup>3</sup> However, when it comes to expressing the

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<sup>1</sup>J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1921; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 175. Machen encourages Christians to ask themselves this question in regard to preachers they hear, and not simply judge preachers on their style and delivery.

<sup>2</sup>Timothy J. Keller, "The Centrality of the Gospel," Redeemer Presbyterian Church (June 2001) [on-line]; accessed 4 April 2012; available from [http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/centrality\\_of\\_the\\_Gospel-Keller.pdf](http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/centrality_of_the_Gospel-Keller.pdf); Internet.

<sup>3</sup>Four of Machen's sermons do not clearly express the historical element of Christ's death. J. Gresham Machen, "Isaiah's Scorn of Idolatry: Isaiah 44:16-17," in *God Transcendent: And Other Sermons*, ed. Ned Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948). J. Gresham Machen, "A Sadly Neglected Schoolmaster: Gal. 3:24," 31 October 1915, The J. Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. Machen, "Hebrews 11:1," 13 January 1924, The J.

doctrinal element of the gospel, Keller demonstrates a greater consistency. All of Keller's sermons provide a clear exposition of the meaning of Christ's death—the doctrine of penal substitution. Machen's sermons, on the other hand, at times lack this expression. In roughly one-quarter of his sermons, Machen fails to express this doctrinal element.<sup>4</sup>

It might be argued that Machen did not always have to provide the meaning of the gospel since its meaning would be understood by a culture steeped in a Christian worldview. However, this explanation does not faithfully represent Machen's view of his culture. Machen viewed western culture to have long departed from a biblical worldview to an embrace of what he called "paganism."<sup>5</sup> In *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen explains,

Nevertheless, despite all superficial continuity, a remarkable change has come about within the last seventy-five years. The change is nothing less than the substitution of *paganism* for Christianity as *the dominant view of life*. Seventy-five years ago, Western civilization, despite inconsistencies, was still predominantly Christian; today it is *predominantly pagan* (emphasis mine).<sup>6</sup>

This comment reveals Machen's belief that western culture had, for the most part, already abandoned Christianity by his own lifetime. In light of this conviction, it can be assumed that Machen would be under compulsion not merely to speak of the

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Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. Machen, "Christian Friendship: Romans 1:11-12," n.d., The J. Gresham Machen Archives, Montgomery Library, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia.

<sup>4</sup>Nine of Machen's thirty-eight sermons (three from *God Transcendent* and six from the archived sermons) fail to clearly articulate the meaning of Christ's death (i.e., the atonement): "Isaiah's Scorn of Idolatry," "The Issue in the Church," "The Brotherhood in Christ," "Jesus Only," "Faith in Jesus," "Jesus and Paul," "A Sadly Neglected Schoolmaster," "Hebrews 11:1," "Christian Friendship."

<sup>5</sup>Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 65.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. Machen described paganism as "that view of life which finds the highest goal of human existence in the healthy and harmonious and joyous development of existing human faculties."

gospel and express it as Christ's death, but also to make the meaning of that death explicit.

Another possible reason for the absence of the doctrinal element in some of his sermons is that Machen's focus was on the edification of church members and not the evangelism of unbelievers. Machen's ministry does diverge from Keller's in this regard. Keller's preaching does have a greater focus on evangelism than did Machen's ministry. Keller and others at Redeemer have intentionally sought to be a church where skeptics desire to come. Joseph Hooper, writing for *New York Magazine*, highlights Redeemer's draw on secular New Yorkers: "With its [i.e., Redeemer's] message that you can be a thinking person and a believer simultaneously, Redeemer became, in a phrase one hears with almost eerie frequency from parishioners, *the ideal place for a believer to bring a nonbelieving friend* (emphasis mine)."<sup>7</sup> Keller also, in articles such as "Evangelistic Worship" and "The Missional Church," encourages churches to plan worship services with some thought of having unbelievers in attendance.<sup>8</sup>

However, even though Machen was not specifically targeting those outside the church, his worldview preaching still fails to be as clear as Keller's in regard to the second element of Sire's paradigm—the expression of the commitment as a story or a set of presuppositions. A worldview, Sire explains, is often expressed as a story, but that

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<sup>7</sup>Joseph Hooper, "Tim Keller Wants to Save Your Yuppie Soul," *New York Magazine* (November 29, 2009), sec. 2 [on-line]; accessed 17 April 2012; available from [http://nymag.com, print/?/news/features/62374/](http://nymag.com/print/?/news/features/62374/); Internet.

<sup>8</sup>See Timothy J. Keller, "The Missional Church," Redeemer Presbyterian Church (June 2001), [on-line]; accessed 4 April 2012; available from [http://download.redeemer.com, pdf/learn/resources/Missional\\_Church-Keller.pdf](http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Missional_Church-Keller.pdf); Internet. Also Timothy Keller, "Evangelistic Worship," Redeemer Presbyterian Church (June 2001), [on-line]; accessed 4 April 2012; available from [http://download.redeemer.com, pdf/learn/resources/Evangelistic\\_Worship-Keller.pdf](http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Evangelistic_Worship-Keller.pdf); Internet.

story is also given meaning in propositional form.<sup>9</sup> This explanation of a worldview fits well with the way Machen consistently presents the gospel in his writings. He expresses the gospel in story form through narrating the historical death of Christ and also in propositional form through providing the doctrinal meaning—penal substitution.<sup>10</sup> The gospel, according to Machen, could not be expressed by simply rehearsing the bare fact of Jesus’ death, but the meaning of that death was also essential. In *What Is Faith?*, he articulates this need of going beyond just the historical fact of Christ’s death and getting to its doctrinal meaning:

So the atonement wrought by Christ can never be a bare fact, in the sense with which we are now dealing. The bare fact is simply the death of a Jew upon a cross in the first century of our era, and that bare fact is entirely without value to anyone; *what gives it its value is the explanation of it as a means by which sinful man was brought into the presence of God.* It is impossible for us to obtain the slightest benefit from a mere contemplation of the death of Christ; *all the benefit comes from our knowledge of the meaning of that death*, or in other words (if the term be used in a high sense) from our ‘theory’ of it. If, therefore, we speak of the bare “fact” of the atonement, as distinguished from the “theory” of it, we are indulging in a misleading use of words; the bare fact is the death, and the moment we say “atonement” we have committed ourselves to a theory. The important thing, then, is, since we must have some theory, that the particular theory that we hold shall be correct (emphasis mine).<sup>11</sup>

Machen’s clear and resounding teaching in his writings on the importance of

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<sup>9</sup>James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 21.

<sup>10</sup>See J. Gresham Machen, “The Responsibility of the Church in our New Age,” in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 368, 371. See also Machen’s presentation in chap. 6 of *Christianity and Liberalism*. In this chapter he so associates the doctrine of substitutionary atonement with the gospel that he makes no distinction between the two.

<sup>11</sup>J. Gresham Machen, *What Is Faith?* (New York: Macmillan, 1925; reprint, Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), 146. Machen goes on to present the substitutionary view of the atonement by stating, “That richness of meaning is found only in the blessed doctrine that upon the Cross the Lord took our place, that he offered Himself ‘a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God.’” *Ibid.*, 147.

the doctrinal element presents an inconsistency in regard to his worldview preaching.<sup>12</sup> If Machen was merely assuming the doctrinal expression in the nine sermons missing this element, then he clearly did not heed his own warnings. For Machen warned preachers that ignoring the gospel was “almost a worse thing” than actually denying it.<sup>13</sup> Modern preaching, Machen explained, did not necessarily deny the gospel outright, but instead it failed to clearly expound and emphasize the doctrine of the gospel.<sup>14</sup> Concerning modernist preachers, he wrote, “These men are not, indeed, conscious of denying the Bible and denying Christ, but the cross really fails to hold the central place in their hearts.”<sup>15</sup> Machen describes modern preachers as saying true things, even speaking of Christ and his death; however they presented his life and death merely as an example to follow, not a Savior to trust.<sup>16</sup>

This said, Machen’s sermons still demonstrate a high degree of consistency with his worldview, with twenty-nine of thirty-eight sermons expressing the gospel’s doctrinal meaning. Keller however, demonstrates a complete consistency in all thirty-one of his sermons. Even Joseph Hooper testifies to Keller’s consistency in preaching the

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<sup>12</sup>Machen lamented the absence of doctrinal teaching and preaching, declaring it to be “one of the causes for the present lamentable ignorance in the Church.” Machen, *What Is Faith?*, 21.

<sup>13</sup>Machen, “What is the Gospel?,” in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 125.

<sup>14</sup>Machen, “The Parting of the Ways,” in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 218.

<sup>15</sup>Machen, “The Mission of the Church,” in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 235.

<sup>16</sup>Machen explains this view of modern preaching when he writes, “Modern liberal preachers do indeed sometimes speak of the ‘atonement.’ But they speak of it just as seldom as they possibly can, and one can see plainly that their hearts are elsewhere than at the foot of the cross. . . . The essence of it is that the death of Christ had an affect not upon God but only upon man. Sometimes the effect upon man is conceived of in a very simple way, Christ’s death being regarded merely as an example of self-sacrifice for us to emulate.” Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 100.

substitutionary atonement when he writes, “And for all their modern urban sparkle, his sermons unfailingly resolve into the same Evangelical endgame: Jesus died *for our sins*” (emphasis mine).<sup>17</sup>

By centering their sermons on the gospel, Machen and Keller provide contemporary evangelical preachers with two examples of preaching that presents Christianity not as a mere collection of various doctrines or moral tidbits, but as “a conceptual system, as a total world-and-life view.”<sup>18</sup> As documented in chapter 1, worldview thinkers have argued for the presentation and defense of Christianity from a unified perspective.<sup>19</sup> Abraham Kuyper called for all Christian thought to proceed from a single principle, a “fixed point of departure.”<sup>20</sup> Machen and Keller have demonstrated this type of worldview thinking in their preaching by choosing the gospel as their “fixed point of departure.”<sup>21</sup>

Today’s evangelical pastors can be tempted with the busyness of schedule and multitudes of church programs not to do the hard work of thinking through their worldview and centering it on the gospel. Their preaching and teaching can become a piecemeal approach to the Scriptures, with no clear unifying principle. New Testament scholar D. A. Carson speaks of this potential danger: “It is commonplace to confess that

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<sup>17</sup>Hooper, “Tim Keller Wants to Save Your Yuppie Soul,” sec. 3.

<sup>18</sup>Ronald Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 19.

<sup>19</sup>See comments from sections “The Worldview Problem” and “Defining ‘Worldview’” in chap. 1 of this dissertation.

<sup>20</sup>See Peter Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper’s Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 92.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

evangelicalism is fragmenting. To the extent that this is true, it is utterly imperative that we self-consciously focus on what is central—on the gospel of Jesus Christ.”<sup>22</sup> Carson further explains his fear for the church:

Rather, I fear that the cross [i.e., the gospel], *without ever being disowned, is constantly in danger of being dismissed from the central place it must enjoy*, by relatively peripheral insights that take on far too much weight. Whenever the periphery is in danger of displacing the center, we are not far removed from idolatry (emphasis mine).<sup>23</sup>

Carson’s comments provide a word of warning to evangelical preachers. Even conservative preachers who hold to the gospel of God’s grace in Christ’s penal sacrifice may in fact preach like the liberals of Machen’s day by simply not making explicit the centrality of the gospel. Through merely assuming that their congregations understand the gospel and thus moving right into exhortations to right living, these preachers may be completely unaware of how similar their preaching has become to that of liberal preachers.<sup>24</sup> William H. Willimon, a self-professed liberal Methodist, has accused some conservative preachers of preaching like liberals. He writes,

Do you know how disillusioning it has been for me to realize that many of these self-proclaimed biblical preachers now sound more like liberal mainliners than

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<sup>22</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 10.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 26. Concerning the centrality of the gospel in preaching, Carson writes, “Done properly, preaching is simply the re-presentation of God’s gospel, God’s good news, by which men and women come to know him.” Ibid., 37.

<sup>24</sup>See David Prince’s discussion on moralism within conservative evangelical preaching. David Edward Prince, “The Necessity of a Christocentric Kingdom-Focused Model of Expository Preaching” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 133-36. See also Michael Horton, *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 88; and Stephen J. Nichols, *Jesus Made in America: A Cultural History from the Puritans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 119-21. Referring to the moralistic and therapeutic preaching of Harry Emerson Fosdick, R. Albert Mohler Jr. writes, “Shocking, this approach is now evident in many evangelical pulpits.” R. Albert Mohler Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 20.

liberal mainliners? At the very time those of us in the mainline, old-line, sidelined were repenting of our pop psychological pap and rediscovering the joy of disciplined biblical preaching, these “biblical preachers” were becoming “user friendly” and “inclusive,” taking their homiletical cues from the “felt needs” of us “boomers” and “busters” rather than the excruciating demands of the Bible.<sup>25</sup>

Following the approach of Machen and Keller in centering preaching on the gospel and expressing both its historical and doctrinal elements provides one of the best ways of guarding the evangelical preacher against sounding like a liberal preacher. Their approach also serves as an antidote to the worldview problem presented in chapter 1 of this dissertation. Chapter 1 documented the decline of a biblical worldview among evangelicals.<sup>26</sup> This decline is noted in Christian Smith’s study on teen religion which reveals a large proportion of conservative teens who do not understand the “elementary concepts of the gospel concerning grace and justification.”<sup>27</sup> Thom Rainer also documents this decline among evangelicals by reporting that “nearly one-half of all church members [in Southern Baptist Churches] may not be Christians” based upon their works-based understanding of salvation.<sup>28</sup> By God’s grace, evangelical pastors can begin to stem and reverse this tide by learning the method of Machen and Keller in regard to worldview preaching. This type of preaching that centers on the gospel and its clear

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<sup>25</sup>William H. Willimon, “Been There, Preached That: Today’s Conservatives Sound Like Yesterday’s Liberals,” *Leadership Magazine* (Fall 1995) [on-line]; accessed 25 July 2012; available from <http://expositorythoughts.files.wordpress.com/2007/09/been-there-preached-that-william-willimon.pdf>; Internet.

<sup>26</sup>The Barna Group reports that only 19 percent of American evangelicals hold a biblical worldview. See Barna Group, “Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview among Christians over the Past 13 Years” *The Barna Group* (March 6, 2009), [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2009; available from <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/21-transformation/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years>; Internet.

<sup>27</sup>Michael Cromartie, “What American Teenagers Believe: A Conversation with Christian Smith,” *Books & Culture* 11 (January-February 2005), 10.

<sup>28</sup>Thom S. Rainer, “A Resurgence Not Yet Realized: Evangelistic Effectiveness in the

expression will help to clarify the gospel in evangelical churches.

The approaches of Machen and Keller may prove challenging to follow. As Willimon mentions above—the evangelical preacher will have to take his “homiletical cues” from “the excruciating demands of the Bible.”<sup>29</sup> Gospel-centered worldview preaching requires the preacher to be a student of the Scriptures, who not only understands its parts but also its whole. In his sermon preparation the preacher cannot be satisfied with merely interacting with the passage in its immediate context and the context of the particular book, but he must think redemptively across the canon, being able to trace theological themes with the goal of centering his text and sermon on the gospel. This requires the preacher to study biblical theology and to apply it to his preaching.<sup>30</sup> Machen advocated the study of biblical theology for the students of Westminster Theological Seminary when he wrote, “When we have learned to read the book aright, we can trace the history of the revelation that it sets forth. When we do so, we are engaging in an important part of the theological curriculum. ‘Biblical Theology,’ it is called.”<sup>31</sup> This call for biblical theology rested on Machen’s conviction that the

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Southern Baptist Convention Since 1970,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9 (2005), 63.

<sup>29</sup>Willimon, “Been There, Preached That.”

<sup>30</sup>Edmund Clowney, who served as president of Westminster Theological Seminary from 1952 to 1984, strongly advocated the application of biblical theology to preaching. He taught that “the wealth of biblical theology ought not to be buried on the study desk.” Edmund Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (1961; reissued, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 5. Clowney explained his opinion of the importance of biblical theology on preaching by writing: “Nothing is so essential for the preacher as that he should grasp, and be grasped by, the truth. Gaining a deeper insight into the meaning and the structure of God’s revealed Word equips the man of God anew for every good work. In all the wealth of fresh approaches to preaching there is none which has the significance or usefulness of that development in biblical studies which is generally called biblical theology.” *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>31</sup>J. Gresham Machen, “Westminster Theological Seminary,” in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 190.

Bible was to be treated as a unified system of thought, he writes,

The rest of the Bible is the unfolding of that promise [i.e., the promise of redemption]. And when I think of that unfolding, when I take the Bible not in part, but as a whole, when I contemplate not this doctrine or that, but the marvelous system of doctrine that the Bible contains, I am amazed that in the presence of such riches men can be content with that other gospel which now dominates the preaching in the church.<sup>32</sup>

### **Third Element Compared**

In regard to Sire's third worldview element, Machen and Keller both demonstrate consistency in displaying the gospel as the foundation for living out the Christian life. In their sermons, they motivate believers toward godliness with the grace of God in the gospel. As Machen and Keller expound God's grace in the gospel, they exhort their hearers to contemplate this gospel until they come to desire to live out its various implications. This contemplation of the gospel serves as the basis for growth in the Christian life.

One of the reasons that Machen and Keller ground Christian behavior in the truth of the gospel is their conviction that the gospel alone can change the sinner's heart and thus transform his life. Exhortations to the will or emotions have no effect without the gospel changing the heart.<sup>33</sup> As Keller states,

Therefore, any failure in Christian behavior is due to unbelief. The antidote to unbelief is a fresh retelling of the gospel. So, if a sermon is Christ-centered in its *exposition and application*, and if it is oriented toward a) dismantling the unbelief systems of the human heart, and b) reexplaining and using the gospel on the unbelief—then it will be highly illuminating to non-Christians even when it is aimed primarily to Christians. Preaching that cannot both edify and evangelize at once is

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<sup>32</sup>J. Gresham Machen, "The Building of the Church," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 159.

<sup>33</sup>"Where the most eloquent exhortation fails, the simple story of an even succeeds; the lives of men are transformed by a piece of news." Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 48.

choosing behavior over belief or belief over behavior (emphasis mine).<sup>34</sup>

The gospel therefore serves as the means not only for conversion but also for sanctification. Both preachers understand sanctification and Christian morality as grounded in objective truth which must be embraced with the mind in order to transform a person's worldview. Their preaching thus refuses to apply direct pressure to the human will or emotions without first applying the truth of the gospel to the mind.

Machen explains in his writings his aversion to preaching and teaching that exalts the feelings and the will.<sup>35</sup> He speaks of the centrality of the “indicative mood” to the gospel message and to gospel preaching.<sup>36</sup> For example in *Christianity and Liberalism* he writes,

Here is found the most fundamental difference between liberalism and Christianity—liberalism is altogether in the imperative mood, while Christianity begins with the triumphant indicative; liberalism appeals to man's will, while Christianity announces, first, a gracious act of God.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Timothy Keller, “Preaching in a Post-Modern City: Part 2,” Resurgence (2004) [on-line]; accessed 4 April 2012; available from [http://theresurgence.com/files/pdf/tim\\_keller\\_2004\\_preaching\\_in\\_a\\_post-modern\\_city\\_part\\_2.pdf](http://theresurgence.com/files/pdf/tim_keller_2004_preaching_in_a_post-modern_city_part_2.pdf); Internet.

<sup>35</sup>“The depreciation of the intellect, with the exaltation in the place of it of the *feelings or of the will*, is, we think, a basic fact in modern life, which is rapidly leading to a condition in which men neither know anything nor care anything about the doctrinal content of the Christian religion, and in which there is in general a lamentable intellectual decline” (emphasis mine). Machen, *What Is Faith?*, 23.

<sup>36</sup>Commenting on Machen's use of the indicative and imperative moods, John Carrick explains the meaning of these moods: “The OED defines the word ‘indicative’ as a grammatical term ‘that points out, states, or declares.’ It describes ‘that mood of a verb which the essential function is to state a relation of objective fact between the subject and predicate.’ Thus the indicative mood stands in contrast to the imperative mood, which signifies a command or a request, and to the subjunctive mood, which signifies that which is contingent or hypothetical. The indicative mood is, as the OED emphasizes, ‘assertive of objective fact.’ The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar substantiates this definition when it states that the indicative mood ‘denotes fact.’” John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: A Theology of Sacred Rhetoric* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 8.

<sup>37</sup>Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 47. Machen adds, “The strange thing about Christianity was that it adopted an entirely different method. It transformed the lives of men not by appealing to the human will, but by telling a story; not by exhortation, but by the narration of an event.” *Ibid.*, 47-48.

Elsewhere Machen again speaks of the importance of the “indicative mood” to Christianity:

What then does the word translated ‘gospel’ mean? The question might seem to be unnecessary (were it not apparently ignored in so many sermons and religious books); everyone knows that ‘gospel’ mean ‘good news.’ But if ‘gospel’ means ‘good news,’ then many common notions about the gospel disappear at once. ‘Good news’ is never in the imperative mood; a ‘gospel’ cannot possibly consist in direction as to a way of life or in a complex of worthy ideals. If a man comes running in and says in a tone of great eagerness, ‘I have news for you,’ and you ask him what it is, he does not say: ‘Here is the piece of news I have for you: Keep the commandments of God; love God and your neighbor.’ Such exhortations are indeed exceedingly important and valuable, but they are certainly not news. News consists always, not in exhortations or commands, but in information about facts; a ‘gospel’ is always in the indicative mood.<sup>38</sup>

Likewise, Keller also grounds all calls to morality in the truth of the gospel.

He warns against ethical preaching and teaching that is devoid of the grace of the gospel.

For example he writes,

Many sermons tell people to say no to immorality. Often the reasons are “it is against the Bible” or “it will hurt your self-esteem” or “it’s against our Christian principles,” or “your sins will find you out.” Those are true, but they are inadequate and secondary motives. Only the grace of God, Titus says, “teaches” us to say no. It argues with us: “You are not living as though you are loved! As his child! It is not because he will abandon you that you should be holy, but because at inestimable cost he has said he won’t ever abandon you! How can you live in the very sin that he was ripped to pieces to deliver you from?”<sup>39</sup>

The gospel for both preachers is the foundation for the doctrine of sanctification. Their sermons regard sanctification to be necessarily tied to the gospel.

Keller explains this conviction in his article “The Centrality of the Gospel”:

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<sup>38</sup>Machen, “What is the Gospel?” 127.

<sup>39</sup>Timothy Keller, “Preaching Morality in an Amoral Age,” in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 169. The Titus passage Keller mentions in this quote is 2:11-15. Keller refers to this passage elsewhere to support his claim that morals are grounded in God’s grace in Christ. For examples, see Timothy Keller, *Gospel in Life: Grace Changes Everything* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 26; Keller, “The Centrality of the Gospel.”

We are not justified by the gospel and then sanctified by obedience, but the gospel is the way we grow (Gal. 3:1-3) and are renewed (Col. 1:6). It is the solution to each problem, the key to each closed door, the power through every barrier (Rom. 1:16-17). It is very common in the church to think as follows. “The gospel is for non-Christians. One needs it to be saved. But once saved, you grow through hard work and obedience.” But Col. 1:6 shows that this is a mistake. Both confession and “hard work” that is not arising from and “in line” with the gospel will not sanctify you—it will strangle you. All our problems come from a failure to apply the gospel. Thus when Paul left Ephesians he committed them “to the word of his grace, which can build you up” (Acts 20:32).

The main problem, then, in the Christian life is that we have not thought out the deep implications of the gospel, we have not “used” the gospel in and on all parts of our life. . . . So the key to continual and deeper spiritual renewal and revival is the continual re-discovery of the gospel.<sup>40</sup>

Another reason Machen and Keller ground morality in the objective truth of the gospel is their desire to correct pragmatic thinking. Both preachers identify pragmatism as an element in the belief structure of their cultures. In light of this pragmatism, they have chosen to emphasize the objective truth of the gospel so as to keep their hearers from merely taking what they consider to be helpful without embracing the exclusive truth claims of Christianity. Machen held the naturalistic worldview of modernism to place religion and ethics in the sphere of the practical.<sup>41</sup> Christianity therefore was to be accepted for its practicality, not for its objective truthfulness. In “Isaiah’s Scorn of Idolatry,” Machen attacks the pragmatism of modernists by stating, “Religious conceptions which are merely useful and not eternally true are not useful at all. But as it is, a deadly blight of pragmatism has fallen upon the world.”<sup>42</sup> Machen knew this pragmatism had to be confronted in his preaching. In *Christianity and*

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<sup>40</sup>Keller, “The Centrality of the Gospel.”

<sup>41</sup>See Machen’s comments on the pragmatism of modernism in *Christianity and Liberalism*, 23, 78. Also see *What Is Faith?*, 29, 31-32.

<sup>42</sup>J. Gresham Machen, “Isaiah’s Scorn of Idolatry: Isaiah 44:16, 17,” in *God Transcendent: And Other Sermons*, ed. Ned Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 27.

*Liberalism* he writes,

The real authority, for liberalism, can only be “the Christian consciousness” or “Christian experience.” . . . The only authority, then, can be individual experience; truth can only be that which “helps” the individual man. Such an authority is obviously no authority at all; for individual experience is endlessly diverse, and when once truth is regarded only as that which works at any particular time, it ceases to be truth. The result is an abysmal skepticism.<sup>43</sup>

As Machen sought to dismantle this type of pragmatism, he also sought to reveal the true usefulness of Christianity. In fact, he held the doctrinal preaching of the gospel to be “far more practical” than the pragmatic preaching of the modernists, because it was based on absolute truth and thus provided a real object for faith.<sup>44</sup>

Keller also identifies in postmodernism a pragmatism in the sphere of religion and ethics. For this reason, he articulates the truthfulness of Christianity and grounds all of his appeals to morality in the truth of the gospel. In his article “Preaching Morality in an Amoral Age,” Keller encourages preachers to preach in such a way that argues against “the self-serving pragmatism of postmodernity.”<sup>45</sup> He does, however, still call preachers to show the relevance of Christianity but always in the context of its exclusive truth claims, for he writes,

Though Christian communicators to post-modern people must lead with a theme of relevance, they must very quickly make a case for truth. The post-modern person can enjoy teaching that shows how practical Christian ethics are. But unless there is a confrontation about the whole idea of objective truth, *the real basis of Christian morality*, the hearer will just pick and choose whatever appears to work at the time. He or she may appear to be very receptive and even converted, but at a profound level, the self is still judging the good instead of the good judging the self

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<sup>43</sup>Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 78.

<sup>44</sup>Machen, *What Is Faith?*, 43. In light of modernism’s pragmatism, Machen raised the question: “It [i.e., Christianity] may be useful, but is it true?” Machen, “Christianity and Culture,” 406.

<sup>45</sup>Keller, “Preaching Morality in an Amoral Age,” 168.

(emphasis mine).<sup>46</sup>

Thus Machen and Keller ground exhortation in the gospel because of their common conviction of the power of the gospel to produce genuine transformation of life (i.e., sanctification), as well as their desire to confront the pragmatism of their cultures. They also preach in such a way as to motivate their hearers toward good works out of love for God and his grace. This kind of motivation leads them to make repeated calls for their hearers to contemplate the gospel.

When it comes to the details of how the gospel works in the life of the believer, Keller demonstrates a more developed method. Machen, at times, merely tells his hearers that the acceptance of Christ's death will result in victory over sin's power, but he does not provide an explanation of how this will happen.<sup>47</sup> Keller's sermons, on the other hand, tend to draw out how the gospel produces change. He does this in his preaching by first assuring believers of their right standing with God because of his grace in the gospel. This assurance serves to motivate the believer to love and obey God. He then sets Christ's self-giving death as a paradigm for the believer to follow.<sup>48</sup> Keller's sermons are also more specific in their application. Machen often keeps his application at the level of generalities such as overcoming sin and loving and obeying God, whereas Keller reveals specific gospel implications such as becoming a faithful marital partner or becoming

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<sup>46</sup>Timothy Keller, "Preaching to the Secular Mind," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 14, no. 1 (Fall 1995), 57.

<sup>47</sup>In "Sin's Wages and God's Gift," Machen leaves the application of the gospel to the very end of the sermon and simple states, "We deserved eternal death; but Christ died instead of us on the cross. Shall we accept the gift? The result will be a fresh start in God's favor and then a winning battle against sin." J. Gresham Machen, "Sin's Wages and God's Gift: Romans 6:23," in *God Transcendent*, 39.

<sup>48</sup>Keller's method is explained in chap. 4.

generous with money.

This type of worldview preaching which grounds ethics and sanctification in the gospel provides evangelical preachers with a number of benefits. First, grounding exhortation in gospel indicatives provides believers with the needed power to grow in grace and be sanctified. This view of the gospel and sanctification is presented by Daniel Doriani when he writes, “That is, he [i.e., God] sanctifies us by grace as surely as he justifies us by grace through faith.”<sup>49</sup> Bruce Ware also supports the centrality of the gospel of grace in the sanctification of believers. In detailing the role of the Holy Spirit within the economy of the Trinity, Ware explains the means the Spirit uses to sanctify believers:

What does the Spirit do to cause us to be more like Christ? According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, the Spirit *focuses our attention on the beauty of the glory of Christ*, and by this we are compelled to become more and more like him. Over time, “from one degree of glory to another,” the Spirit conforms us increasingly into the likeness of Christ. And of course, this process of becoming like Christ by *beholding the glory of Christ* began when the Spirit initially opened our eyes in conversion. . . . From our initial conversion to our ultimate glorification, the Spirit *constantly commends to us the wonder and glory of the Son*. As we see him, aided by the Spirit’s illuminating work, we become like him. The Spirit sanctifies us by *pointing us to Jesus*. The Spirit focuses *our attention on Jesus* (emphasis mine).<sup>50</sup>

If the Holy Spirit’s means of sanctifying believers is “pointing” them to Jesus, then it is reasonable to assume that the preacher ought to follow this same means by grounding all ethical imperatives and exhortation in the indicatives of the person and work of Christ. The preaching ministries of Machen and Keller provide two examples of

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<sup>49</sup>Daniel Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 281. Doriani further states, “In theological language, we are beginning to understand that God’s grace in sanctification is as sweet and necessary as his grace in justification.” Ibid., 283.

<sup>50</sup>Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 123-24.

preachers who call their hearers to contemplate the person and work of Christ so as to grow in sanctification.

As the evangelical preacher keeps the *evangel* as the foundation for all of life, he will also protect himself and his congregation from moralistic and legalistic ways of thinking. John Carrick, picking up on Machen's teaching on gospel indicatives, warns of this danger, stating, "The preaching which neglects the crucial priority of the indicative mood and which focuses largely or exclusively on the imperative mood will inevitably tend toward moralism or legalism."<sup>51</sup> To guard against this result, Carrick advises preachers to "never issue an appeal without first making the proclamation."<sup>52</sup> Machen and Keller have demonstrated in their preaching ministries what it is to ground all of Christian living in the indicatives of the gospel.

Also, if the evangelical preacher, who claims to be gospel-centered, does not preach in such a way as to make clear how other doctrines and morality relate to the gospel, then his preaching will fail to present a consistent worldview. He may state the gospel to be the fundamental orientation of his heart, but what he preaches will not demonstrate it. James Sire explains the difference of simply stating a worldview and actually living it out:

The point is, our worldview is not precisely what we may state it to be. It is what is actualized in our behavior. We live our worldviews or it isn't our worldview. What we actually hold, for example, about the nature of fundamental reality may not be what we say. Here is a simple test. On one side of a sheet of paper, write what you believe about prayer. Now turn over the sheet and write down how much and how

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<sup>51</sup>Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching*, 28.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 26. The proclamation consists of the good news "of what God has done in Christ on the cross for their [i.e., believers'] salvation." Ibid.

often you pray.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, Christians can run the risk of professing an evangelical worldview while living out another—a works-based one. Christians who fall into this trap need to be rebuked as Peter was by Paul in Galatians 2:11-14. In this passage Peter is rebuked for his hypocrisy in believing the gospel, yet not eating with Gentiles. Paul claims that Peter and other Jewish Christians were not living “in step with the truth of the gospel” (Gal 2:14a). That is, Peter and other Christians were not living out their declared worldview. Because of the strong current seeking to sweep Christians back into other commitments, the preacher must center his preaching in the gospel and draw out ethical implications from there. His preaching must proclaim Christ, “warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that [he] may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:28).

#### **Fourth Element Compared**

The consistent use of contrast in the preaching of Machen and Keller reveals their commitment to Sire’s fourth worldview element. As for Machen, he is predominantly remembered for his polemic against modernism in the church. The influence of his writings on the theological controversy of his day has been duly noted by students of Machen. However this dissertation has also revealed his sermons to be a significant contribution to his polemic. Only two of the thirty-eight sermons did not provide a clear contrast between Christianity and theological modernism.<sup>54</sup> Machen

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<sup>53</sup>James Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 133. In Sire’s definition of a worldview, he states in parentheses that a worldview can be held consistently or inconsistently.” See Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 20.

<sup>54</sup>See “Numbers 13-14” and “Christian Friendship: Romans 1:11-12” from Machen’s archived sermons. Also, Machen’s sermon “The Church of God: Acts 20:28” does not provide clear contrasts, but it does criticize modernists for their rejection of the gospel.

advocated using contrast in preaching in order to clarify Christianity. Christianity, Machen held, could only be clearly communicated if contrasted with opposing points of view. For example he writes,

As a matter of fact, not less time, but more time should be devoted to the defense of the gospel. Indeed, *truth cannot be stated clearly at all without being set over against error*. Thus a large part of the New Testament is polemic; the enunciation of evangelical truth was occasioned by the errors which had arisen in the churches” (emphasis mine).<sup>55</sup>

Machen knew that this type of contrast in preaching would cause controversy, but he declared himself to “believe in controversy.”<sup>56</sup> In the introduction to *What Is Faith?* he describes the necessity of controversy in the Christian ministry:

Let us not fear the opposition of men; every great movement in the Church from Paul down to modern times has been criticized on the ground that it promoted censoriousness and intolerance and disputing. *Of course the gospel of Christ, in a world of sin and doubt, will cause disputing; and if it does not cause disputing and arouse bitter opposition, that is a fairly sure sign that it is not being faithfully proclaimed*. As for me, I believe that a great opportunity has been opened to Christian people by the “controversy” that is so much decried. . . . Controversy, in other words, has resulted in a striking intellectual and spiritual advance. Some of us discern in all this the work of the Spirit of God. . . . Controversy of the right sort is good; for out of such controversy, as Church history and Scripture alike teach, there comes the salvation of souls (emphasis mine).<sup>57</sup>

In this statement Machen shares his opinion that all gospel preaching will cause “disputing and arouse bitter opposition.”<sup>58</sup> In fact, he declares that preaching which does not produce these results cannot be considered faithful preaching.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 174.

<sup>56</sup>J. Gresham Machen, “The Defense of the Faith,” in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 149.

<sup>57</sup>Machen, *What Is Faith?*, 41-43.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup>Machen believed that this type of contrasting and confrontation was necessary and had been

Keller's preaching reveals the same commitment to contrast. His contrast however differs from Machen's in two distinct ways. First, Keller does not directly deal with the postmodern worldview by name. Instead, he indirectly confronts postmodernism by undermining two of its presuppositions, naturalism and pluralism.<sup>60</sup> He does this not by calling out naturalism and pluralism but by challenging what he calls irreligion (i.e., secularism) and religion.<sup>61</sup> He contrasts Christianity with irreligion by revealing the weakness of a naturalistic worldview in providing a rational basis for understanding and living life in the material world. In his contrast with religion Keller confronts the pluralism of postmodernists by refusing to allow them to place Christianity in the same category as all other religions. In his article "Preaching Amid Pluralism," he describes his intentional interaction with pluralism in his preaching: "About every other week, I confront popular pluralist notions, not with an entire sermon but with a point here and there."<sup>62</sup> The main contrast Keller draws out of this comparison is the centrality of

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practiced from New Testament times. "The New Testament writers and our Lord himself presented truth in sharp contrast with error, and indeed this is the only way in which truth can be presented in any clear and ringing way." J. Gresham Machen, "Facing the Facts Before God," in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 198. "The New Testament (gospels as well as epistles) is a controversial book almost from beginning to end; truth in it is always set forth in contrast with error." Machen, "The Mission of the Church," 233.

<sup>60</sup>Today there is a strong movement to spread naturalism. Darwinian evolutionists such as Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins have sought to spread naturalism to the masses through lectures and books. Keller does interact at times with this movement in both his books and sermons.

<sup>61</sup>Concerning the importance of contrasting the gospel with religion and irreligion, Keller writes, "One of the most important ways to get a hearing from post-modern people and to wake up nominal or sleepy Christians is to preach the gospel as a 'third' distinct way from both irreligion and religion. Religion is 'if I obey I will be accepted.' Irreligion is 'I don't really have to obey anyone but myself.' The gospel is 'since I am accepted, I will obey.'" Timothy Keller, "Preaching in a Post-Modern City," Scribd [on-line]; accessed 4 April 2012; available from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/13385894/Preaching-in-a-PostModern-city>; Internet.

<sup>62</sup>Timothy Keller, "Preaching Amid Pluralism: Elevating Christ in a culture that sees all religions as equal" in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 167.

God's grace in salvation with the moralism of the religious view.<sup>63</sup> This contrast between grace and works is a key contrast for Machen as well.

The second difference between the way Machen and Keller use contrast is the style in which they oppose the alternative view. Machen's style is much more forceful and at times resorts to heavy-handed ridicule, while Keller seeks always to be respectful of other views.<sup>64</sup> One example of Machen's use of ridicule is heard in his highly polemical sermon "The Issue in the Church." In this sermon Machen accuses modern preachers of lying by their use of "traditional language" in a "double sense."<sup>65</sup> He states that past generations of preachers were at least honest in their simple acceptance or rejection of the Apostle's Creed, the Westminster Confession, and the New Testament, whereas the modern preacher chooses to "interpret" these texts in his own way. He then moves to illustrate his point by describing an imaginary dialogue between him and a group of modernists:

I am, let us say, in a company of modern men. They begin to test my intelligence. And first they test me on the subject of mathematics. "What does six times nine make?" I am asked. I breathe a sigh of relief; many questions might place me very low in the scale of intelligence, but that question I think I can answer. I raise my hand hopefully. "I know that one," I say. "Six nines are fifty-four." But my complacency is short-lived. My modern examiner puts on a grave look. "Where have you been living?" he says. "Six nines are fifty-four—that is the old answer to the question." In my ignorance I am somewhat surprised. "Why," I say, "everybody knows that. That stands in the multiplication table; do you not accept

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<sup>63</sup>Keller uses this contrast in his preaching because of his fear of being misunderstood as teaching a form of moralistic religion. "Non-Christians will always automatically hear gospel presentations as just appeals to become moral and religious—unless in your preaching you use the good news of grace against legalism." Keller, "Preaching in a Post-Modern City."

<sup>64</sup>See Keller's articles: "The Missional Church," "Evangelistic Worship," and "Preaching to the Secular Mind."

<sup>65</sup>J. Gresham Machen, "The Issue in the Church: 2 Corinthians 5:17," in *God Transcendent*, 43.

the multiplication table?” “Oh, yes,” says my modern friend “of course I accept the multiplication table. But then I do not take a static view of the multiplication table; every generation must interpret the multiplication table in its own way. And so of course I accept the proposition that six nines are fifty-four, but I interpret that to mean that six nines are a hundred and twenty-eight.” And then the examination gets into the sphere of history. The examiner asks me where the Declaration of Independence was adopted. That one, also, I think I know. “The Declaration of Independence,” I say, “was adopted at Philadelphia.” But again I meet with a swift rebuke. “That is the old answer to the question,” I am told. “But” I say, “everyone knows that the Declaration of Independence was adopted at Philadelphia; that stands in all the history books; do you not accept what stands in the history books?” “Oh, yes,” says my modern friend, “we accept everything that stands in the history books—hundred percent Americans we are. But then, you see, we have to interpret the history books in our own way. And so of course we accept the proposition that the Declaration of Independence was adopted at Philadelphia, but we interpret that to mean that it was adopted at San Francisco.”<sup>66</sup>

Machen concludes this imaginary dialogue by describing the way modern theologians and pastors treat Christ’s resurrection. He speaks for the modernist by stating, “[W]e accept the proposition that ‘the third day He rose again from the dead.’ But we interpret that to mean, ‘The third day He did not rise from the dead.’”<sup>67</sup>

Machen’s preaching provides other examples of this type of spirited criticism of modernism.<sup>68</sup> He was not hesitant to use ridicule in his preaching; in fact, he claimed it to be good and beneficial. In his sermon “Isaiah’s Scorn of Idolatry,” he highlights the importance of ridicule: “The prophet’s scorn for what is false is a generous thing because it springs from a profound love of what is true.”<sup>69</sup> His bold and ample use of ridicule in

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>For an entire sermon that employs ridicule of the modernist method of scriptural interpretation, see J. Gresham Machen, “The Gospel and Modern Substitutes: Romans 1:16,” in *God Transcendent*. In this sermon, Machen uses sarcasm to explain the modernists’ rewriting of the Epistle to the Romans.

<sup>69</sup>Machen, “Isaiah’s Scorn of Idolatry,” 25.

his preaching contributed to the modernists' animosity toward him and their successful attempt to drive him from the institutions they had come to control.

As highlighted in chapter 4, the preaching of Keller is just as filled with contrasting of worldviews; however the spirit of this contrasting is not as strong.<sup>70</sup> In an article on worship, Keller exhorts preachers to “speak respectfully and sympathetically to people who have difficulty with Christianity.”<sup>71</sup> Also in his article “Preaching Amid Pluralism,” Keller states, “I don’t directly make the naked claim that ‘Christianity is a superior religion,’ and I certainly don’t malign other faiths. Instead, I stress Christianity’s distinctiveness.”<sup>72</sup> This comment reveals Keller’s distinct difference from Machen. Machen often belittled theological modernism in order to reveal its errors, while Keller respectfully reasons with postmodernists with the desire to get them to consider the exclusive claims of Christianity. Keller even stresses the need for tolerance in dealing with opposing worldviews:

Finally, Christians will have to use the gospel to demonstrate true, Biblical love and “tolerance” in the “public square” toward those with whom we deeply differ. This tolerance should equal or exceed that which opposing views show toward Christians. The charge of intolerance is perhaps the main “defeater” of the gospel in the non-Christian west.<sup>73</sup>

However, in light of Keller’s call for tolerance, he still does hold his ground on issues that are considered intolerant to postmodern people—most clearly the exclusivity

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<sup>70</sup>In advising preachers on dealing with skeptics, Keller often encourages them to show respect and a “continual willingness to address the question that the unbelieving heart will ask.” Keller, “Evangelistic Worship,” “Three Practical Tasks.”

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Keller, “Preaching Amid Pluralism,” 177.

<sup>73</sup>Keller, “The Missional Church.”

of Christ and the doctrine of penal substitution. Joseph Hooper points out other areas as well:

But when it comes to sexual morality and gender issues, Keller takes a strict, traditional Christian line. That is to say, he believes things that enlightened urban Americans generally do not: that women should not be ordained as ministers (Kathy Keller opted out of becoming a pastor when she decided that female ministers were unbiblical); that abortion is unequivocally wrong; that sex out of wedlock and homosexuality are sins. Keller treads this ground cautiously.<sup>74</sup>

Many of these controversial issues however are not emphasized in Keller's preaching. He provides an explanation for this lack of emphasis:

For example, a sermon on abortion will generally assume the listener believes in the authority of the word and the authority of Jesus, and does not believe in individual moral autonomy. In other words, abortion is "doctrine D," and it is based on "doctrines A, B, and C." Therefore, people who don't believe or understand doctrines ABC will find such a sermon un-convincing and even alienating. This does not mean we should not preach the whole counsel of God, but we must major on the "ABCs" of the Christian faith.<sup>75</sup>

The use of contrast in worldview preaching has the benefit of providing preachers with the ability to clarify Christianity by helping their parishioners to distinguish the truth of Christianity from false notions advocated by the worldview of their culture. Also, the contrast between the grace of the gospel with the works of other religions helps the preacher to reveal the errors of pluralism. The clear contrast between grace and works in the preaching of Machen and Keller helps believers and unbelievers alike to distinguish Christianity from the moralism of other religions. The preacher who follows this method of contrasting grace and works will provide clarity for his hearers as they live in a pluralistic postmodern world.

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<sup>74</sup>Hooper, "Tim Keller Wants to Save Your Yuppie Soul," sec. 3.

<sup>75</sup>Keller, "Evangelistic Worship."

In adopting the approaches of Machen and Keller, the preacher has a choice between two ways of contrasting. Will he chose the more direct and aggressive method of Machen or the indirect and gentle approach of Keller? The preacher should think through both approaches and consider their strengths and weakness. Whenever a preacher attempts to impact the culture he runs a risk. He can begin to take on such a strong stance against the opposing worldview that he can find himself cut off from the opposition, or he can be so sensitive to the opposition that he begins to soften his message to stay in good standing with them. Machen’s ministry surely did alienate him from his former school and denomination, while Keller’s ministry thus far has shown great receptivity among secular New Yorkers.<sup>76</sup>

Both approaches appear to have a degree of biblical support. The prophets of the Old Testament, as well as Jesus and the apostles of the New Testament, do present occasions of scorn and sarcasm in their proclamation.<sup>77</sup> The scorn is typically employed against those who are at least outwardly in the covenant community, like the example of the prophets in their confrontation with apostate Israel or the apostle Paul in his battle with false teachers in the church. The use of gentle reasoning is employed with unbelievers outside the covenant community, as in the case of Paul with the Athenians (Acts 18:16-34). This difference between dealing with insiders and outsiders may provide the answer to the difference between the approaches of Machen and Keller.

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<sup>76</sup>For examples of his reception among secular New Yorkers, see articles such as: “A New Kind of Urban Christian” in *Christianity Today*, “Tim Keller: The Influential Pastor to Skeptics,” in *Servant Magazine*, “Tim Keller Wants to Save Your Yuppie Soul,” in *New York Magazine*, “How Tim Keller Found Manhattan,” in *Christianity Today*.

<sup>77</sup>For examples, see the following passages: Isa 40:19-20; Jer 46:11; 1 Kgs 18:27; Matt 7:5; 1 Cor 4:8-13.

Machen was battling modernists who were visibly in the church and claimed to be Christians, whereas Keller is confronting self-confessing non-Christians. For now the preacher must take these two approaches and consider his own context and prayerfully apply the use of contrast to his own preaching.

No matter which approach he chooses, the evangelical preacher still has a calling to defend the faith.<sup>78</sup> Through contrasting the Christian worldview with alternative views, he will clarify for his hearers the heart of Christianity, thus removing the confusion that appears to have affected so many self-professed evangelicals.<sup>79</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Worldview preaching has been examined throughout this dissertation based on the four elements of Sire's paradigm: (1) a worldview is a commitment or the fundamental orientation of the heart, (2) expressed as a story or a set of presuppositions, (3) serving as the foundation for Christian living, and (4) contrasted with alternative worldviews for the purpose of providing clarity. This chapter has compared the preaching of Machen and Keller under these four categories. Through this comparison, a number of similarities and differences were identified, as well as several suggestions in following their example. Their sermons share similarities in commending the gospel as the central reference point in the Christian worldview (element 1), as well as applying the gospel to the lives of their hearers (element 3). Their preaching also helps to clarify Christianity through the use of contrast (element 4). Although Machen does not always

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<sup>78</sup>“He [i.e., the overseer] must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and *also to rebuke those who contradict it*” (emphasis mine, Titus 1:9).

<sup>79</sup>For the confusion of a biblical worldview, see the section “Worldview Problem” in chap. 1.

express the doctrinal element as strongly as Keller, his preaching still provides evangelical preachers with an effective model.

In a day when a truly biblical worldview is failing to find a home among evangelicals, the *evangel*-centered preaching of Machen and Keller offers a remedy. As preachers take this method to heart, their congregations should begin to understand and embrace a genuinely evangelical worldview.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This dissertation has argued that the preaching of Machen and Keller provides contemporary evangelical pulpits with two examples of preachers who present a consistent worldview. Now more than ever, with 81 percent of professing evangelicals failing to embrace a biblical worldview, evangelical churches need an emphasis on what constitutes a truly biblical worldview.<sup>1</sup> Chapter 1 of this dissertation presented the worldview problem existing within evangelicalism. The deep misunderstanding of foundational biblical truths among twenty-first century evangelicals ought to raise concerns for evangelical pastors. Why are so many self-professed evangelicals failing to embrace a solidly evangelical worldview? Researchers such as The Barna Group and Christian Smith and his research team have laid at least some of the blame upon pastors.<sup>2</sup>

If preaching serves as a fundamental and foundational element in the formative development of Christians, then it must also play a key role in the development of a Christian worldview.<sup>3</sup> The importance of preaching to Christianity is captured in the

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<sup>1</sup>Barna Group, "Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview among Christians over the Past 13 Years," The Barna Group, March 6, 2009 [on-line]; accessed 22 July 2009; available from <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/21-transformation/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past13-years>; Internet. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 20.

<sup>2</sup>See Barna Group, "Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview among Christians over the Past 13 Years." Also see Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University, 2006), 27.

<sup>3</sup>In his article "Spiritual Formation through Preaching," Robertson McQuilken argues that the greatest means of spiritual formation in the life of the believer is the preaching ministry of the church. Robertson McQuilken, "Spiritual Formation through Preaching," in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching*:

words of John Stott: “Preaching is indispensable to Christianity.”<sup>4</sup> If Stott is correct, then it must be asked—what kind of preaching best establishes and maintains a genuine Christianity?

R. Albert Mohler Jr. describes the kind of preaching that establishes believers in a Christian worldview when he writes, “Genuine exposition takes place when the preacher sets forth the meaning and message of the biblical text and makes clear how the Word of God *establishes the identity and worldview of the church as the people of God*” (emphasis mine).<sup>5</sup> Mohler’s comment provides encouragement for preachers to use their preaching in a manner that helps establish the worldview of the church. Along with words of encouragement and instruction, preachers also need models of this type of preaching.<sup>6</sup> This dissertation has provided Machen and Keller as two such examples.

The worldview preaching of Machen and Keller has been described and evaluated throughout this dissertation by the means of four elements in James Sire’s worldview paradigm. The first three elements are from his definition:

A worldview is 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

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*A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 48.

<sup>4</sup>John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 15.

<sup>5</sup>R. Albert Mohler Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 65.

<sup>6</sup>Collections of sermons are abundant today with the purpose of providing encouragement and instruction for preachers. This dissertation has mentioned a few different sermon collections, such as, *Heralds of the King: Christ-Centered Sermons in the Tradition of Edmund Clowney*, *Sermons that Shaped America: Reformed Preaching from 1630 to 2001*, and *God Transcendent and Other Sermons*.

provides the foundation on which we live and more and have our being.<sup>7</sup>

The three elements are as follows: the worldview as a person's commitment or the fundamental orientation of the heart, the worldview expressed as a story or a set of presuppositions, and the worldview as the foundation for living. These three elements describe what the worldview is, how it is expressed, and what difference it makes in a person's life. The fourth element in the paradigm is the use of contrasting worldviews for the sake of clarity. This fourth element is derived from Sire's catalog of worldviews in *The Universe Next Door*. This paradigm provided a basis for studying the worldview preaching of Machen and Keller.

Chapter 2 provided a brief biographical sketch of Machen and Keller to demonstrate their qualifications to be studied as worldview preachers. One of their qualifications, which might not seem readily apparent, is their own grounding in the Reformed tradition. The importance of this tradition to their qualification as worldview preachers lies in the fact that the worldview concept was first applied to Christianity by two Reformed theologians, James Orr and Abraham Kuyper, while also being carried on by their Reformed disciples.<sup>8</sup> The preaching of Machen and Keller has been recognized in Reformed circles as exemplary, as noted in the book *Sermons That Shaped America*:

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<sup>7</sup>Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 20.

<sup>8</sup>David Naugle explains the importance of these two reformed theologians in the application of the worldview concept to Christianity: "The headwaters of the worldview tradition among evangelical Protestants can be traced to two primary sources, both of which flow from the theology wellsprings of the reformer from Geneva, John Calvin (1509-64). The first is the Scottish Presbyterian theologian, apologist, minister, and educator James Orr (1844-1913). The second is the Dutch neo-Calvinist theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920). Appropriating the concept from the broader intellectual milieu on the European continent in the middle to late nineteenth century, these two seminal thinkers introduced the vocabulary of worldview into the current of Reformed Christian thought." David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 6.

*Reformed Preaching from 1630 to 2001.*<sup>9</sup>

Along with being recognized as influential Reformed preachers, Machen and Keller have had a significant impact on the worldview struggle between Christianity and the competing worldviews of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Machen's ministry in the 1920s and 30s provided one of the clearest expositions and defenses of evangelical Christianity.<sup>10</sup> His apologetic against modernism is in line with the worldview approach of both Orr and Kuyper. David Naugle explains their approach when he writes, "Hence, as Orr proposed in his own lectures, Kuyper argues that a piecemeal apologetic approach must be replaced with a strategy that countered an all-encompassing modernism with a comprehensive Christian *Weltanschauung*."<sup>11</sup> This worldview approach to apologetics is demonstrated in Machen's exposition of Christianity and polemic against modernism. Machen was not concerned with the peripheral issues in the fight, but with the heart of both worldviews.<sup>12</sup> He sought to expound and defend Christianity in a consistent

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<sup>9</sup>In *Sermons That Shaped America*, Machen's sermon "Constraining Love" (2 Cor. 5:14-15) and Keller's sermon "Truth, Tears, Anger, and Grace" (John 11:20-53) are presented as two Reformed sermons that have had a significant impact between the years 1630 and 2001. The book provides eighteen sermons. See J. Gresham Machen, "Constraining Love," in *Sermons That Shaped America*, ed. William S. Barker and Samuel T. Logan Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), 344-361. Also Timothy J. Keller, "Truth, Tears, Anger, and Grace," in *Sermons That Shaped America*, 391-406.

<sup>10</sup>Ned Stonehouse records the following comments by a reporter concerning Machen: "No man today is contributing more to the cause of evangelical religion than Dr. Machen. His trenchant utterances rouse the loyalists to great enthusiasm and are the despair of those who would like to see the Presbyterian Church turned into a Total Toleration Society. For inexorable logic, mastery of the Scriptures, and fervent appeal Dr. Machen has few equals. In him, Princeton again speaks with a mighty voice." Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954; reprint, Philadelphia: Westminster Theological Seminary, 1978), 355.

<sup>11</sup>Naugle, *Worldview*, 18.

<sup>12</sup>Concerning Machen's focused and scholarly defense of the faith, Nichols writes, "With Warfield's passing, and others in the fundamentalist camp consumed with issues of eschatology and revivalism or cultural issues such as Prohibition, it fell to Machen to offer the scholarly defense of Christianity." Stephan J. Nichols, *J. Gresham Machen: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 49.

manner. He often stated that the easiest Christianity to defend was a consistent one, found in the Reformed faith: “I have come to see with greater and greater clearness that consistent Christianity is the easiest Christianity to defend, and that consistent Christianity—the only thoroughly biblical Christianity—is found in the Reformed faith.”<sup>13</sup>

Keller’s ministry, at the end of the twentieth century and the first part of the twenty-first, has had a strong influence on evangelicalism’s engagement with skepticism. Keller’s success through Redeemer Presbyterian has been well documented by the numeric growth of the congregation as well as their avid church planting in urban areas. This success in reaching skeptical New Yorkers has drawn both secular and Christian attention. From his Manhattan pulpit, he has arisen as “a C. S. Lewis for the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” because of his ability to speak persuasively to the skeptical western mind.<sup>14</sup> His success in speaking to skeptical New Yorkers has spilled over into his writing ministry, which commends Christianity to the twenty-first century western world. Numerous evangelical preachers have sought to learn from Keller in his ministry as is evident in the great numbers that have flocked to hear him preach and teach at The Gospel Coalition’s national conferences.<sup>15</sup> Keller and others involved in The Gospel Coalition (TGC) have

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<sup>13</sup>J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity in Conflict,” in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 118. Machen also writes, “The strongest Christianity, I think, is consistent Christianity; and consistent Christianity is found in the Reformed faith.” Machen, “The Mission of the Church,” in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, 235.

<sup>14</sup>Lisa Miller, “The Smart Shepherd,” *Newsweek* (February 18, 2008) [on-line]; accessed 5 February 2009; available from <http://www.newsweek.com>; Internet.

<sup>15</sup>For information on this nation-wide conference and movement see The Gospel Coalition website at <http://thegospelcoalition.org>.

become leaders in a powerful movement, dubbed the “New Calvinism.”<sup>16</sup> This “New Calvinism” has been recognized by *Time* magazine as the third most important idea changing the world.<sup>17</sup> Keller’s influence, particularly among those of Reformed persuasion, has continued to grow. Even homiletics professor Dennis E. Johnson has identified Keller as a model for contemporary preachers.<sup>18</sup> Keller has intentionally sought to deal with skeptics in his sermons even when he preaches to his own people. Dennis Johnson describes Keller’s approach as follows: “His intention is to hold together the evangelistic and edificatory purposes of preaching, anchoring both directly in a Christ-centered, grace-grounded proclamation of God’s Word in words that engage the postmodern mission field confronting the church in the West.”<sup>19</sup> This gospel-centered approach to worldview preaching has allowed him to speak both to believers for their edification as well as unbelievers for their conversion. His intentional engagement with the skeptical mindset also helps to equip his congregation for their own interaction in the worldview struggle. Keller also seeks to equip preachers by providing them with practical advice on how to engage skeptics in their sermons: “As you write the sermon, imagine a particular skeptical non-Christian in the chair listening to you. Add the asides, the extra explanations necessary. Listen to everything said in the worship service with

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<sup>16</sup>For the growth in popularity of Keller and the New Calvinism see Mark Bergin, “Reformed ‘City,” *World*, 20 June 2009, 60.

<sup>17</sup> See David Van Biema, “3. The New Calvinism,” *Time*, 12 March 2009, [on-line]; accessed 9 August 2012; available from [http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/printout/0,29239,1884779\\_1884782\\_1884760.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/printout/0,29239,1884779_1884782_1884760.html); Internet.

<sup>18</sup>For Johnson’s comments concerning Keller’s preaching see Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 54-61.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 61. Johnson declares his approval of Keller’s method by stating, “Those who appreciate the attempt, as I do, must not underestimate the difficulty of maintaining this unity and balance.”

the ears of someone who has doubts or troubles with belief.”<sup>20</sup> He also warns evangelical preachers of a type of preaching that does not engage the skeptical mind: “It is hard to overstate how ghetto-ized our preaching is. It is normal to make all kinds of statements that appear persuasive to us but are based upon all sorts of premises that the secular person does not hold.”<sup>21</sup>

Chapter 3 provided a survey of some key writings of Machen and Keller in order to construct their worldviews around the four elements of Sire’s paradigm. From the books *Christianity and Liberalism*, *What is Faith?*, and *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, Machen’s worldview was constructed in the following four parts: (1) the gospel as his commitment (i.e., worldview), (2) the gospel expressed as the historical death of Christ and the doctrinal meaning of that death in terms of penal substitution, (3) the gospel serving as the foundation for morality and social transformation, (4) Christianity contrasted with theological modernism in three ways—objective doctrine verses subjective experience, supernaturalism verses naturalism, and intellectualism verse anti-intellectualism.

The three books surveyed for Keller’s worldview were *The Reason for God*, *The Prodigal God*, and *Gospel in Life*. These books reveal Keller’s worldview in the following four parts: (1) his worldview is the gospel, (2) the gospel is expressed as Christ’s substitutional death and a message of grace, (3) the gospel serves as the foundation for various areas of Christian living, (4) Christianity is contrasted with

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<sup>20</sup>Timothy Keller, “Evangelistic Worship,” Redeemer Presbyterian Church (June 2001), [online]; accessed 4 April 2012; available from [http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Evangelistic\\_Worship-Keller.pdf](http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/Evangelistic_Worship-Keller.pdf); Internet.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

religion and irreligion in two ways—grace verses works and a rational basis for life verses an irrational basis.

These constructed worldviews demonstrate consistency with the way other Christian worldview thinkers have envisioned the presentation and defense of the faith. These thinkers have argued for a clear reference point within the Christian worldview. As Sire states, “a worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart.”<sup>22</sup> Ronald Nash explains the importance of a reference point to a worldview when he writes,

At the center of every world-view is what might be called the “touchstone proposition” of that world-view, a proposition that is held to be the fundamental truth about reality and serves as a criterion to determine which other propositions may or may not count as candidates for belief. If a given proposition P is seen to be inconsistent with the touchstone proposition or one’s world-view, then so long as one holds that worldview, proposition P may be regarded as false.”<sup>23</sup>

In response to Nash’s call for a “touchstone proposition,” the natural question arises: What should that touchstone be for the Christian worldview? A number of worldview thinkers have identified the “touchstone proposition” or central “commitment” as the person and work of Christ. David Naugle describes the worldviews of both Orr and Kuyper as christocentric.<sup>24</sup> Concerning Orr’s worldview Naugle writes,

Furthermore, according to Orr, this Christian vision of reality had a focus: it was *rooted in the person of Jesus Christ*. This is indicated in the second part of his title: *As Centering in the Incarnation*. An entire worldview was bound up in an *historic, orthodox Christology*. Indeed, believing the biblical presentation of Jesus entailed a host of additional convictions, forming an overall view of things. “He who with his whole heart believes in Jesus as the Son of God is thereby committed

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<sup>22</sup>Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 20.

<sup>23</sup>Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1988), 46.

<sup>24</sup>For a concise presentation of the centrality of Christ in the worldviews of Orr and Kuyper see Naugle, *Worldview*, 11-13, 16-25. Also see James Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 32-34.

to much else besides. He is committed to a view of God, to a view of man, to a view of sin, to a view of Redemption, to a view of human destiny, found only in Christianity. This forms a ‘Weltanschauung,’ or a ‘Christian view of the world,’ which stands in marked contrast with theories wrought out from a purely philosophical or scientific standpoint.”

Indeed, Orr rightly asserts that Jesus held to a particular conception of the universe, one grounded in the Old Testament, fulfilled in himself, and distinguished fully from contemporary humanistic perspectives. Biblical belief in Jesus Christ logically entailed a commitment to his *Weltanschauung*. For the Scottish theologian, then, Christianity was a *christocentric worldview*, a revolutionary and apologetically expedient approach to the faith necessitated by the challenges of modernity at its apex (emphasis mine).<sup>25</sup>

Orr’s christocentric perspective is also presented in the writings of Machen and Keller. Their writings demonstrate the person and work of Christ as the touchstone of their worldviews. For example, Machen describes the Christian vocation in the world as bringing everything “into some relation to the gospel.”<sup>26</sup> This meant, for Machen, not only capturing every man for Christ, “but also the whole of man.”<sup>27</sup> This comprehensive rule of Christ is highlighted in Machen’s description of the great consummation of the world at the coming of Christ:

That will also be a time when doubts have disappeared, when every contradiction has been removed, when all of science converges to one great conviction, when all of art is devoted to one great end, when all of human thinking is permeated by *the refining, ennobling influence of Jesus, when every thought has been brought into subjection to the obedience of Christ* (emphasis mine).<sup>28</sup>

Machen’s comment resonates with Kuyper’s christocentric declaration: “there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who

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<sup>25</sup>Naugle, *Worldview*, 8.

<sup>26</sup>J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity and Culture,” in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004), 403.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

is Sovereign over all, does not cry: Mine!”<sup>29</sup> Keller’s writings also present the kingship of Christ over all.<sup>30</sup> He reveals the connection between the gospel and Christ’s rule when he writes, “A true king will come back to put everything right and renew the entire world. The good news of the Kingdom of God is this: Jesus is the true king.”<sup>31</sup>

Along with Christ’s sovereignty over all, the worldview concept encourages believers to begin their apologetic with Christ. Ronald Nash explains how beginning with Christ helps to solve the other issues in a worldview:

Furthermore, consider all the other things we can settle once we know that Jesus is God and that his words are God’s words. We then have an authoritative answer to all of our most important questions: Is there a personal God who loves us? What is our duty in life? How do we become children of God? Why did Jesus die? Is there life after death?<sup>32</sup>

Nash’s comment is echoed by Machen and Keller. Machen defended the authority of the Bible and the transcendence of God against modernists by focusing on Christ’s view of the Bible and God.<sup>33</sup> Keller also defends Christianity from a christocentric perspective in *The Reason for God*. He writes, “In the Christian view,

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<sup>29</sup>Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488. Although Machen shared Kuyper’s conviction of Christ’s sovereignty over all things, he did not agree with Kuyper concerning how that sovereignty was to be applied to contemporary culture and society.

<sup>30</sup>For some of Keller’s clearest teaching of Christ’s kingship see, Timothy Keller, *King’s Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus* (New York: Dutton, 2011).

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>32</sup>Ronald Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1992), 154.

<sup>33</sup>For examples of Machen’s christocentric defense of other doctrines see, J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1921; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 55-57, 75-76; J. Gresham Machen, *What is Faith?* (New York: Macmillan, 1925; reprint, Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), 62; J. Gresham Machen, “History and Faith,” in *J. Gresham Machen: Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 98.

however, the ultimate evidence for the existence of God is Jesus Christ himself.”<sup>34</sup> He advises those considering Christianity to begin by dealing with Christ rather than other issues when he writes,

I have one more bit of advice to people struggling with some of the Bible’s teaching. We should make sure we distinguish between the major themes and message of the Bible and its less primary teachings. The Bible talks about the person and work of Christ and also about how widows should be regarded in the church. The first of these subjects is much more foundational. Without it the secondary teachings don’t make sense. We should therefore consider the Bible’s teachings in their proper order.<sup>35</sup>

Keller’s apologetic focus on the foundational beliefs of Christianity follows the worldview approach of Abraham Kuyper. Concerning Kuyper’s approach to apologetics Naugle writes,

Kuyper takes a dim view of the role of traditional apologetics in this single most important battle for the soul of the Western world. He notes that such an approach to defending the faith does not advance the Christian cause “one single step,” and later in his volume refers to it as “useless,” likening it to a man trying to adjust a crooked window frame when the entire building is tottering on its foundations. Apologists, in other words, must occupy themselves with more fundamental and extensive matters, and this is precisely what Kuyper intends to do.<sup>36</sup>

By revealing the exalted status of Christ within the Christian worldview and by defending the truth of Christianity on the basis of the person and work of Christ, Machen and Keller present and defend Christianity in a “worldviewish” manner.

Chapter 4 revealed the preaching of Machen and Keller to contain Sire’s four

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<sup>34</sup>Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in the Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 123.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 112. Keller also writes, “It is therefore important to consider the Bible’s core claims about who Jesus is and whether he rose from the dead before you reject it for its less central and more controversial teachings.” Ibid., 113.

<sup>36</sup>Naugle, *Worldview*, 18.

worldview elements, while also demonstrating a consistency with their worldviews as described in chapter three. In Machen's thirty-eight evaluated sermons, he consistently presents Christianity as a worldview centered on the person and work of Christ. Machen relates the topic of each sermon to the gospel of Christ, while expressing it as the historical death of Christ along with the doctrine of penal substitution. However, he does not always make clear the doctrinal meaning. Besides revealing the centrality of the gospel, Machen also demonstrates the gospel as the foundation for Christian living. His sermons attempt to motivate believers with the gospel. Finally, Machen demonstrates the fourth element by consistently contrasting Christianity as a worldview with the view of theological modernism.

Keller's preaching also demonstrates a commitment to the four worldview elements of chapter 3. His thirty-one evaluated sermons reveal his commitment to a christocentric and gospel centered worldview. The gospel as Keller's worldview affects both his hermeneutic and homiletical methods. He often declares the importance of interpreting the Scriptures in light of Christ, while grounding his christocentric hermeneutic in Luke chapter 24. His homiletical method follows three steps: he explains the text, applies the text by allowing his hearers to feel the weight of the text, and finally reveals Christ as the fulfillment or the answer of the text.<sup>37</sup> In this final step, Keller consistently expounds the meaning of the gospel as the substitutional and gracious death of Christ on the cross. While expressing the grace of God in the cross, he reveals how this gospel serves as the foundation for Christian living by motivating believers toward

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<sup>37</sup>Timothy J. Keller, sermon, "A People Under the Word: James 1:18-27," preached 11-29-09 [MP3]; accessed 20 January 2009;; available from <http://www.redeemer.com>; Internet.

holiness. Along with being a motivation, Keller reveals the gospel as the pattern for Christian living in every area of life. He also demonstrates a commitment to contrasting the Christian worldview with the views of religion and secularism. In presenting Christianity in contrast with these views, Keller seeks to deconstruct both the pluralistic perspective of postmoderns and the naturalistic perspective of secularists.<sup>38</sup>

Chapter 5 compared the worldview preaching of Machen and Keller in order to revealing some of their strengths and weaknesses as well as offering suggestions in following their approaches. Although their preaching varies in some respects, their similarities provide a few key insights into worldview preaching. From their similarities it can be argued that worldview preaching is preaching that is centered in the person and work of Christ, presents the gospel as the foundation for faith and practice, and contrasts a comprehensive Christianity with competing views of reality. These elements are consistent with Sire's worldview paradigm as well as the insights of various worldview thinkers, but the question should be asked: Is this model of worldview preaching supported by the field of homiletics?

First, should preaching have a central focus and should that focus be christocentric and gospel-centered? Peter Adam in his theology of preaching answers in the affirmative when he writes,

We need to define the connection between the content of Scripture and preaching very carefully. For Luke *the first Christian preachers made use of Scripture in order to teach or preach the good news of God, or the gospel of Christ, or the kingdom.* That is to say, Scripture was a means to an end. I believe this is so for Christian preaching today. We must be absolutely committed to teaching and preaching the Bible, but to describe our ministry as 'teaching and preaching the

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<sup>38</sup>Keller's apologetic often deals with the naturalism of the New Atheists, such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens. See Keller, *The Reason for God*, 117.

Bible' is to describe it in terms of its means, not its end. *The purpose of our teaching and preaching the Bible is to explain and commend the good news of God, the gospel of God's grace, the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ* (emphasis mine).<sup>39</sup>

Adam's comment that the purpose of preaching is "to explain and commend" the gospel, provides clear support for the model of worldview preaching demonstrated by Machen and Keller. R. Albert Mohler Jr. provides further support for this method by explaining the etymology of *kerusso*: "The primary Greek form of the word 'preach' (*kerusso*) reveals its intrinsic rootage in the *kerygma*—the gospel itself."<sup>40</sup> He also advocates the same preaching method of Machen and Keller when he writes, "Our ambition—our obsession as preachers—should be nothing less than to preach so that the congregation sees the big story of the gospel, the grand narrative of the gospel, through every text we preach."<sup>41</sup> Mohler makes clear the christocentric nature of Scripture and preaching when he writes,

Every single text of Scripture points to Jesus Christ. He is the Lord of all, and therefore He is the Lord of the Scriptures too. From Moses to the prophets, He is the focus of every single word of the Bible. Every verse of Scripture finds its fulfillment in Him, and every story in the Bible ends with Him. That is what our people need to understand—that the Bible is not just a compendium of good short stories, but a grand, life-encompassing metanarrative of God's work of redemption in the world.<sup>42</sup>

The centrality and supremacy of Christ within the preaching ministry is also

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<sup>39</sup>Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 2004), 89.

<sup>40</sup>R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "A Theology of Preaching," in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Dudit (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 14.

<sup>41</sup>R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *He is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 103.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 96. Mohler also refers to the gospel as a worldview by stating, "Indeed, the Christian gospel is nothing less than the Metanarrative of all metanarratives." *Ibid.*, 118.

presented by a number of other homileticians. Edmund Clowney, Sidney Greidanus, Graeme Goldsworthy, Dennis Johnson, as well as a number of others provide strong support for a christocentric view of Scripture and preaching.<sup>43</sup> This support for the centrality of Christ in preaching also provides support for what this dissertation calls worldview preaching.

Second, should preaching follow the method of grounding all Christian belief and practice in the person and work of Christ? This focus on grounding moral exhortations in the redemptive message of Christ has been advocated by a number of homileticians.<sup>44</sup> These homiletic authors and practitioners have issued this call due to their conviction that the preaching of morals without the gospel will result in legalism and/or liberalism. For example, Bryan Chapell writes, “By making our efforts *the means and the cause of godliness* evangelicals fall victim to the twin assaults of legalism and liberalism, which make our relationship with God dependent on human goodness” (emphasis mine).<sup>45</sup> Chapell refers to sermons that lead toward legalism as “deadly be”

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<sup>43</sup>For a gospel-centered understanding of preaching see Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 81-96. Goldsworthy clearly gives support to gospel-centered preaching when he writes, “I conclude by stating again the principle that expository, biblical, preaching is always an exposition of the gospel and its implications.” *Ibid.*, 96. Also see Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 62-97.

<sup>44</sup>John Stott reveals his conviction concerning the inseparability of the gospel and ethics when he writes, “When we proclaim the gospel, we must go on to unfold its ethical implications, and when we teach Christian behavior we must lay its gospel foundations.” Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 157.

<sup>45</sup>Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 281. Machen understood liberalism to be a form of legalism: “From another point of view, modern liberalism is like the legalism of the middle ages, with its dependence upon the merit of man. And another Reformation in God’s good time will come.” Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 178.

sermons. These sermons “exhort believers to ‘be’ something in order to be blessed.”<sup>46</sup> He identifies the real problem of these sermons to be the failure to present God’s grace in Christ as the grounds for all exhortation. In words reminiscent of Machen’s attack on liberal preachers, Chapell writes, “Again the problem lies not in what the preacher says, but in what the sermon may fail to present.”<sup>47</sup> Daniel Doriani also writes of legalistic preaching and teaching that consists of exhortation void of God’s grace and love:

Class-four legalists can preach sermons in which every sentence is true, while the whole is oppressive. It is oppressive to proclaim Christ as the Lawgiver to whom we owe a vast debt, as if we must somehow repay him—repay God!—for his gifts to us. I count myself a member of the legion of recovering class-four legalists. We slide into a “Just Do It” mentality occasionally, dispensing commands just because they are right.<sup>48</sup>

Both Chapell and Doriani locate the problem with legalistic preaching in the failure to communicate the redemptive basis for every call to Christian living. Mohler also tries to steer preachers away from this type of legalistic preaching when he writes, “If we as preachers want to see our people grow to maturity in Christ, we must give them more than a diet of wee little morality sermons. We must place every text we preach firmly within the grand, sweeping story of the Bible.”<sup>49</sup> These “wee little morality sermons” filled with “moralistic fables” must be replaced in evangelical pulpits with preaching that is intentionally grounded in the truth of the gospel, the redeeming story of

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<sup>46</sup>Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 281.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>48</sup>Daniel Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 280.

<sup>49</sup>Mohler, *He is Not Silent*, 90.

God's grace.<sup>50</sup>

Third, should preaching have a clear apologetic element? Since preaching is directed to people who are already steeped in a worldview, the preacher must work to understand and engage that worldview as best he can. This engagement with a congregation's worldview is similar to John Stott's "bridge-building."<sup>51</sup> Stott believes that a fundamental part of preaching is the "building of a bridge" from the world of Scripture to the world of today. As the truth of God's kingdom is brought to bear on people's lives, a worldview struggle is inescapable. The inescapability of this struggle is heard in Mohler's comment: "This [i.e., the way the Bible directs thinking and living] brings the task of expository preaching into direct confrontation with the postmodern worldview."<sup>52</sup> In this confrontation with postmodernism, Mohler highlights the contrast between Christianity and western secularism in regard to the four big movements in the Christian metanarrative—creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.<sup>53</sup> He stresses the importance of apologetics to the pulpit when he writes, "I would argue that at this critical time of cultural and intellectual transition, the task of preaching must be understood as an apologetic calling."<sup>54</sup> Later in the chapter he again stresses the need for apologetics and polemics in preaching: "Christian proclamation in a postmodern culture confronts error (Acts 17:29). In this sense, preaching, apologetics, and polemics are all related. Error

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<sup>50</sup>See Mohler, *He is Not Silent*, 20-21, 95-97.

<sup>51</sup>Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 137-44.

<sup>52</sup>Mohler, *He is Not Silent*, 68.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 97-102.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 123.

must be confronted, heresy must be opposed, and false teaching must be corrected.”<sup>55</sup>

Mohler concludes by describing the kind of preacher that is needed today: “What is needed is a generation of bold and courageous preacher-apologists for the twenty-first century—men who will be witnesses to the whole world of the power of the gospel and who will proclaim the whole counsel of God.”<sup>56</sup> Michael Quicke articulates similar sentiments when he writes, “In today’s relativism and spiritual diversity, preachers need to respond to rival opinion formers with clear apologetics for exclusive Christian claims.”<sup>57</sup>

These insights support the apologetic nature of worldview preaching. In this pluralistic culture, antagonistic to the exclusivity of Christianity, the evangelical pulpit must not remain silent. A clear and comprehensive apologetic is needed. This approach to preaching follows the advice of Ronald Nash: “The most effective way to wage the battle in the world of ideas is to do it on the level of worldviews.”<sup>58</sup> This type of apologetic engagement is presented in the preaching of both Machen and Keller.

This dissertation has attempted to apply the worldview concept to preaching through the example of Machen and Keller. James Sire’s question: “How do worldviews relate to other disciplines?” has been a driving force behind this study.<sup>59</sup> However, this

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 131.

<sup>57</sup>Michael Quicke, “History of Preaching,” in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 68.

<sup>58</sup>Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict*, 167.

<sup>59</sup>Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 156. Sire raises this question due to his conviction that every “academic discipline, including the sciences, is undergirded by a set of assumptions that may not even be conscious.”

dissertation has not intended to be a comprehensive study on the integration of two academic fields. Rather it has sought to provide insight into how the worldview concept might be applied to preaching through the example of Machen and Keller. The study of these preachers has revealed a number of elements within worldview preaching. It has provided clarity on the subject of worldview preaching, yet without being the final word. More study on this subject should be undertaken. A work detailing a biblical and theological study of worldview preaching would benefit the fields of homiletics and worldviews.

This dissertation has also been a broad and general study. There are a number of elements in this work that could be studied in more detail. For example, further study could be done solely on one of these worldview preachers. The disadvantage of studying two preachers has been the inability to focus squarely on one preacher; the benefit has been the ability to compare them so as to identify some of their strengths and weaknesses. Another area of this work that could be studied in more detail is Sire's four worldview elements. Much more time could be spent on any one of these elements.

This dissertation is far from an end in the study of worldview preaching. This study presented one means of thinking about the topic. Sire's paradigm offered a helpful tool of describing and evaluating their worldviews. Other means might be devised in order to study worldview preaching.

By way of summarizing, the worldview preaching approach of Machen and Keller might be presented in the following four propositions:

1. Worldview preaching is centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It expresses the gospel both as the story of Christ and as the doctrinal meaning of that

story.

3. It grounds all exhortations in the good news of God's grace.
4. It contrasts Christianity as a comprehensive worldview with alternative views of reality.

These four propositions provide evangelical preachers with a solution to the worldview problem presented in chapter 1. By the grace of God<sup>60</sup> and “the painstaking work”<sup>61</sup> of worldview preaching, evangelical churches have the opportunity to awake from the darkness of false views of reality to the light of a consistent Christian *Weltanschauung*.

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<sup>60</sup>“How, then, is a worldview formed? From a Christian perspective, there is a source that is not subordinate to either nature or nurture, and in fact can overcome the impact of both if they have been detrimental in the shaping of a person's life. No matter who one is, or how one has been raised, or what one has experience, and no matter how deeply a person has been entangled in sin, or been blinded by satanic deception, God can break into an individual's life, establish a beachhead in the heart, soften it to the truth of his Word, and save him or her by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ through faith in him. . . . From a biblical perspective, therefore, the formation of a Christian worldview is ultimately a function of God's grace and redemption.” Naugle, *Worldviews*, 9.

<sup>61</sup>Timothy J. Keller, “Preaching Morality in an Amoral Age,” in *The Art & Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 167.

## APPENDIX 1

### CHART FROM *GOSPEL IN LIFE*

Religion	Gospel
"I obey; therefore, I'm accepted."	"I'm accepted; therefore, I obey."
Motivation is based on fear and insecurity.	Motivation is based on grateful joy.
I obey God in order to get things from God.	I obey God to get God—to delight in and resemble him.
When circumstances in my life go wrong, I am angry at God or myself, since I believe that anyone who is good deserves a comfortable life.	When circumstances in my life go wrong, I struggle, but I know all my punishment fell on Jesus and that while God may allow this for my training, he will exercise his Fatherly love within my trial.
When I am criticized, I am furious or devastated, because it is critical that I think of myself as a "good person." Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all costs.	When I am criticized, I struggle, but it is not essential for me to think of myself as a "good person." My identity is not built on my record or my performance but on God's love for me in Christ.
My prayer life consists largely of petition, and it only heats up when I am in a time of need. My main purpose in prayer is control of the environment.	My prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is fellowship with God.
My self-view swings between two poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel humble but not confident—I feel like a failure.	My self-view is not based on my moral achievement. In Christ I am <i>simul iustus et peccator</i> —simultaneously sinful and lost, yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad that he had to die for me, and I am so loved that he was glad to die for me. This leads me to deep humility and confidence at the same time.
My identity and self-worth are based mainly on how hard I work, or how moral I am—and so I must look down on those I perceive as lazy or immoral.	My identity and self-worth are centered on the one who died for me. I am saved by sheer grace, so I can't look down on those who believe or practice something different from me. Only by grace am I what I am.

## APPENDIX 2

### SERMONS OF J. GRESHAM MACHEN

#### God Transcendent and Other Sermons

- “God Transcendent” (Isa 40:22)
- “Isaiah’s Scorn of Idolatry” (Isa 44:16-17)
- “The Fear of God” (Matt 10:28)
- “Sin’s Wages and God’s Gift” (Rom 6:23)
- “The Issue in the Church” (2 Cor 5:17)
- “The Letter and the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:6)
- “The Brotherhood in Christ” (Gal 3:26-28)
- “The Claims of Love” (Mark 14:3-8)
- “The Living Saviour” (Matt 4:23; 28:20)
- “Justified by Faith” (Rom 5:1)
- “The Gospel and Modern Substitutes” (Rom 1:16)
- “The Separateness of the Church” (Matt 5:13)
- “Prophets False and True” (1 Kings 22:14)
- “The Good Fight of Faith” (Phil 4:7; 1 Tim 6:12)
- “Constraining Love” (2 Cor 5:14)

#### J. Gresham Machen Archives at Westminster Theological Seminary

- “Numbers 13-14”
- “Jesus Only” (2 Kings 4:30)
- “Rejoice with Trembling” (Psalm 2:11)
- “Theism vs. Agnosticism” (Mark 10:27)
- “The Meaning of Christmas” (Mark 10:45)
- “Faith in Jesus” (Luke 7:9)
- “Prayer” (Luke 11:1; Romans 8:26)
- “Worshiping Jesus” (John 14:9)
- “The Church of God” (Acts 20:28)
- “Christian Friendship” (Romans 1:11-12)
- “Resurrection” (Romans 6:8)
- “If God Be for Us” (Romans 8:31)
- “Servants of God or Servants of Men” (1 Corinthians 7:23)
- “The Lord’s Supper” (1 Corinthians 11:23-25)
- “Jesus’ Resurrection” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

“Jesus and Paul” (1 Corinthians 15: 10, 14)  
“The Cross of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:21)  
“Christianity an Escape from the World” (Galatians 1:1-5)  
“The Message of Easter” (Galatians 2:20)  
“A Sadly Neglected Schoolmaster” (Galatians 3:24)  
“Bearing Each Others Burdens” (Galatians 6:1-5)  
“Hebrews 11:1”  
“Seeing the Invisible” (Hebrews 11:27)

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## ABSTRACT

### WORLDVIEW PREACHING IN THE CHURCH: THE PREACHING MINISTRIES OF J. GRESHAM MACHAN AND TIMOTHY J. KELLER

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012  
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The thesis of this dissertation is that J. Gresham Machen and Timothy J. Keller provide contemporary pulpits with two examples of preachers who present a consistent worldview. This thesis is demonstrated through a description and evaluation of their preaching based on four elements of a worldview in James Sire's book *The Universe Next Door*. By presenting Machen and Keller as examples of worldview preaching, this dissertation provides a study on the use of the worldview concept in evangelical preaching, in order to discover what these two preachers consistently do in their preaching so as to be categorized as worldview preachers. Thus the study provides homiletic students with two examples of how the worldview concept might be applied to contemporary preaching.

Chapter 2 presents a brief biographical sketch of Machen and Keller in order to set their writings and preaching in their distinct historical and cultural contexts. Specific focus is upon Machen's battle with theological modernism and Keller's ministry to skeptical New Yorkers through Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

Chapter 3 provides descriptions of Machen's and Keller's worldviews. These descriptions are organized around Sire's four worldview elements. A number of their

popular writings are examined and summarized in order to construct their worldviews from Sire's paradigm. This chapter provides the basis for the evaluation of their preaching in chapter 4.

Chapter 4 evaluates Machen's and Keller's preaching based on their consistency with their constructed worldviews of chapter 3. This evaluation provides enough description to demonstrate the level of consistency between their stated worldviews and what they in fact preach in the pulpit.

Chapter 5 compares and contrasts Machen's and Keller's worldview preaching in order to specify areas of strengths and weaknesses in their worldview preaching. This comparison of their preaching also provides some reflection on the application of Machen's and Keller's approach for contemporary preachers.

Chapter 6 provides a summary and conclusion of this dissertation. Worldview preaching is essential in the preaching ministry of the evangelical church. Machen's and Keller's preaching provides a clear understanding of the application of the worldview concept to preaching.

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