

# Tim Keller – What’s so wrong?

## Introduction

A thorough review of my issues with Tim Keller would require a large book. There are just so many problems, all of which would really need a proper evaluation, discussion and critique. Apart from being boring, no would read it as it would necessarily involve detailed rebuttal of certain philosophies, psychology, mystics, historical matters and apologetics, to say nothing of theology. Therefore, I have decided to simply summarise the key issues and try to examine these as simply and concisely as possible, giving only what background is necessary.

### Why this is necessary

Tim Keller is very influential. He is enormously important in America, but he has a growing influence in the UK. One reason for this is that he has built a church of 5,000 from scratch.<sup>1</sup> But he also endears himself to conservative Christians since he claims to be an orthodox Presbyterian. His books have also sold many copies and his sermons and talks at conferences are very popular. If his teaching is false, then a warning is very necessary.

### His background

Keller (b. 1950) is a darling of the American New Calvinists.<sup>2</sup> He gained his M.Div. in 1975 at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and his D.Min. in 1981 at Westminster Theological Seminary; then being ordained by the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). He pastored in Virginia for nine years and served as director of church planting for the PCA and on the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary, in Philadelphia, where he continues as an adjunct professor of practical theology.

In 1989 the PCA asked him to start Redeemer church in New York, which grew from 50 people to over 5,000 by 2008, becoming the 16<sup>th</sup> most influential church in the US. His evangelism deliberately targets young professionals because they have the most influence over society and culture. Most members are ‘seriously career minded’, young (average age is thirty three), 70% are single and early in their careers. There are now 150 churches in the Redeemer network, in the US and overseas. This success has endeared him to many that seek to follow his numerical accomplishment. He is also considered to be a great intellectual in the mould of CS Lewis.

Keller is a co-founder (with DA Carson) of The Gospel Coalition, which claims to be a Reformed collection of American leaders dedicated to the Biblical Gospel. This claim is disputable; in fact the coalition is very mixed. However, Keller is conservative on Gay issues and abortion, which partly explains his popularity in certain circles.

Keller has also written many books, some of which have become best sellers.<sup>3</sup> However, a book, written by several British contributors, was published to examine and critique a

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<sup>1</sup> Supposed Calvinist church leaders with large congregations in America gain a considerable reputation and authority in the church world. The large numbers appear to be ‘divine’ endorsement (to some).

<sup>2</sup> For information on these see my paper, ‘*Error and its disciples*’.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Scepticism*, which was No. 7 on The New York Times Best Seller list for non-fiction in March, 2008

number of Keller's positions (*Engaging with Keller*) and Keller has also received much criticism from conservative Reformed circles in the States.

### Summary

Keller claims to be an orthodox Protestant Christian (he prefers 'orthodox' to 'evangelical'). In theology he claims to be Reformed, that is, Calvinistic regarding the doctrines of grace. Regarding the Bible he claims to be sound in interpretation, defending the authority and authenticity of God's word. Regarding ethics he would claim to be conservative.

It is my contention that in all the above respects he is wrong.

## Problems

### Keller's influences

Keller's church denomination does not hold out much hope for theological clarity from the start. The Presbyterian churches have been deteriorating in America since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and increasingly so as time went on. They failed to uphold the essential attributes of Calvinism (the sovereignty of God in salvation) from 1924 onwards.

The PCA is more conservative on some issues than other Presbyterian denominations but less so on others.<sup>4</sup> It claims to uphold the Westminster Confession, which ordained ministers (like Keller) swear to defend. However, it embraces Federal vision (which undermines justification and the Gospel); it is weak on day-age creation and caters for varied views on evolution; it is generally accepting of light Charismatics; and caters for contemporary Christian music. Thus apologetics, worship and the Gospel are all flawed.

Keller's chief mentor is Alvin Platinga, an analytic philosopher, formerly Professor for Philosophy and Director of the Centre of Philosophy and Religion at the Catholic Notre Dame University from 1982 until 2010. In some of his works (such as the article, *'Deconstructing Defeater Beliefs: Leading the Secular to Christ'*) he takes idea after idea from Platinga.<sup>5</sup>

This reliance upon Roman Catholicism, in theology and practice, has led to increasing ecumenism in his church and the adoption, not only of Catholic doctrine, but also Catholic mystical practices [see later]. This is from a man whose church heritage was one where his ancestors gave their lives to avoid the very things he is teaching. [We discuss these items later.]

Many have noted that Keller is very enamoured of CS Lewis so that some have labelled him as a modern version. This is despite the fact that Lewis was not Reformed, or even evangelical. Lewis was confused on the Gospel, had numerous heterodox beliefs, had some very odd beliefs and was a High Anglican Church semi-Catholic.

When he was young and impressionable, Keller was highly influenced by a teacher in a Lutheran catechism school who was, *'a social activist... filled with deep doubts about traditional*

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<sup>4</sup> *'The PCA is generally less theologically conservative than the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (which split from mainline Presbyterianism much earlier), but more conservative than the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (which split from the mainline more recently), though the differences can vary from presbytery to presbytery and even congregation to congregation.'* Wikipedia, art. 'PCA'.

<sup>5</sup> Platinga states that Roman Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ and wonderful allies, something Keller endorses. [http://www.case.edu.au/images/uploads/03\\_pdfs/keller-deconstructing-defeater.pdf](http://www.case.edu.au/images/uploads/03_pdfs/keller-deconstructing-defeater.pdf) page 3.

*Christian doctrine*'. He taught a '*spirit of love in the universe, who mainly required that we work for human rights and the liberation of the oppressed*'.<sup>6</sup> This must have left a lasting impression since Keller's works are filled with these two characteristics; near hatred for traditional doctrinal conformity and an overriding agenda for Utopian social action. This comes out noticeably in his book, *Generous Justice*.

In college he was, '*heavily influenced by the neo-Marxist critical theory of the Frankfurt School*'.<sup>7</sup> This explains his later commitment to neo-Marxist social action rather than traditional evangelism. His hatred of Calvinism is due to associating it with racial segregation in the Deep South of America and apartheid in South Africa; neither of which result from Calvin's teaching at all but men's perversion of it.

In his works Keller refers to an eclectic bunch that he calls a '*band of brothers*'. These include: secular philosophers, rock stars, musicians, Catholic mystics, Jewish journalists, popular novelists, questionable (and heretical) theologians and poets. This is not necessarily a bad thing if used rightly; but Keller repeatedly relies upon very suspicious sources; as we shall see later.

### **Wrong views of God**

Keller gives us a false portrayal of God that is altered in order to suit his Marxist passion for social justice. It is given as a foundation for his social, liberation Gospel and social action strategies; but it is not Biblical.

#### *God's glory*

He claims that God, '*does not seek his own glory but the glory of others*'.<sup>8</sup> This is contrary to Scripture everywhere. God is the only perfect, infinite being and thus he must seek his own glory. There is nothing better for the universe than God being glorified. There are no others that have perfection; to seek their glory would be to diminish God. This is an elementary theological error. If a supposed Christian teacher cannot see this, one has to question his spiritual standing.

Give glory to the LORD God. Jos 7:19

You shall give glory to the God of Israel. 1 Sam 6:5

Glory in His holy name. 1 Chron 16:10

Give to the LORD the glory *due* His name. 1 Chron 16:28

Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name. Ps 29:2

There are scores of such verses. But God specifically states that he does not give his glory to another:

I *am* the LORD, that *is* My name; and My glory I will not give to another. Isa 42:8

I will not give My glory to another. Isa 48:11

To say that God seeks the glory of others is a shocking heresy and a blasphemy.

#### *God's essence*

Keller, in common with many deluded people, believes that '*God really has love as his essence*'.<sup>9</sup> This is not true at all. The phrase, '*God is love*' (1 Jn 4:8, 16) is referring to the

<sup>6</sup> *The Reason for God*, Hodder & Stoughton, (2008), pxi.

<sup>7</sup> *The Reason for God*, pxi-xii.

<sup>8</sup> *The Reason for God*, p218.

<sup>9</sup> *The Reason For God*, p216.

communal loving fellowship that exists at the heart of the Trinity. God is a Trinity of three persons that love each other perfectly. Those that know God know the love of God, which is shared from the Godhead to the elect alone.

However, the essential attribute of God is not love but holiness. Only holiness is attributed to God in a threefold proclamation.<sup>10</sup> The context of the whole Bible reveals that the essential attribute of God is his holiness. Thus God, who can only act perfectly good, can express himself in acts that are far from loving in the eyes of men; such as the genocide of the Canaanites, the death of Agag, or the creation of hell. These are not perceived as loving acts, but in the holiness of God they are perfectly good and just.

Keller has a perverted human understanding of God, which is not according to God's revealed word.

### *God's justice*

Over and over again Keller pursues his neo-Marxist Utopianism in directing people to strive for a better society. However, his expositions on this often stem from a faulty view of God's justice. Keller teaches that God is partial – he shows partiality to the poor and needy, thus believers must give preference to the poor. This is repeated many times and is even stated to be a proof of conversion.

This is contrary to clear Biblical statements that God is impartial and a just judge (Deut 10:17; Gal 2:6; Eph 6:9; 1 Pt 1:17). In fact, the Bible demands that we must do the opposite of Keller's command – we must not show partiality to the poor (or anyone).

You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute. Ex 23:3

You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty. Lev 19:15

You shall not show partiality in judgment. Deut 1:17

### *Jesus' mission*

Keller says that Jesus came to '*fulfil you completely*'.<sup>11</sup> This is nonsense. This presumes that man is lacking something special and needs filling up with it. It is part of the mystical teaching that Keller has absorbed which claims that man has God within him and needs to be fulfilled by finding him through mystical exercises [see later on mysticism]. Thus salvation in Jesus is just being fulfilled.

This is arrant nonsense and a further denial of Total Depravity. Man does not need filling up, he needs new life because he is dead in sins. Man is dead towards God and needs resurrecting, which is what happens in regeneration.

Keller says that Jesus came to '*restore justice to the oppressed and marginalised, physical wholeness to the diseased and dying, community to the isolated and lonely and spiritual joy and connection to those alienated from God*'.<sup>12</sup> We discuss this elsewhere [such as 'Utopianism']. Needless to say that this was not Jesus' mission in the human sense. The prophecies about Jesus bringing justice and healing (such as in Isaiah) are fulfilled in the salvation of the elect alone, not the world. The church is the place where these things are true, not the world, which will deteriorate unto oblivion. In fact, Jesus even said, '**You have the poor with you**

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<sup>10</sup> Isa 6:3, 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!' Rev 4:8, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!'

<sup>11</sup> *The Reason For God*, p173.

<sup>12</sup> *The Reason For God*, p224.

always,' (Matt 26:11; Mk 14:7; Jn 12:8). It was not his purpose to eradicate poverty in this world but to build a new world.

In another work he teaches a dichotomy between the work of Jesus and the works of the Spirit; *'the work of the Son...is something we can have without feeling. But the work of the Spirit consists in us being completely moved.'*<sup>13</sup> Another serious error.

### *The Spirit*

Keller says that the Spirit cultivates the face of the earth and cares for the material world.<sup>14</sup> This is never stated in Scripture. In fact God (through the Spirit) is sovereign over tsunamis, earthquakes, hurricanes, famines and so forth (Ps 107:25, 135:7, 148:8; Isa 45:7; Amos 3:6, 4:13; Lam 3:38; Jon 1:4). God's providential purposes in the earth are solely to ensure the safety of the elect.

### *The Trinity*

Keller's statements on this vital topic are odd and confusing. He says that the Trinity is a 'Divine dance'. Chapter fourteen of *The Reason for God* is entitled 'The Dance of God'; it also appears in *Kings Cross*. He says, *'The Trinity means that God is, in essence, relational. Three persons in dynamic orbit about each other, a dance of love, delight and adoration.'*<sup>15</sup> This is clearly a demeaning concept.

Keller takes this idea from a word used in the early Greek fathers, *perichoresis*,<sup>16</sup> which he claims, means 'to dance or to flow around'. However, even his mentor CS Lewis stated that when early Greek Christians spoke of *perichoresis* in God they meant that each divine person harbours the others at the centre of his being; not a literal dance.

*Perichoresis* is derived from the Greek *peri*: meaning 'around' and *chorein*, which has many meanings e.g. 'to make room for, go forward and contain'. To choose 'dance' as the best descriptive word for inter-Trinitarian relationships is trivialising the Godhead to sound modern. Theologians as usually define it: 'co-indwelling, co-inhering, and mutual interpenetration'.

Keller goes further when he says that, *'Creation is a dance with the inner life of the Trinity written all through it.'* This comes close to pantheism and fails to understand that the current creation is subjected to futility because it is separated from God by sin.

### *Summary*

Keller is confused, and in serious error, regarding the doctrines of God, the Trinity, Jesus' mission and the work of the Spirit.

### **A wrong Gospel**

Typical of the New Calvinists (many of whom are Amyraldian or worse), Keller is very confused on the Gospel itself. Actually Keller is far worse than Amyraldism.

### *Confusion on the uniqueness of salvation in Christ*

During an interview by NBC journalist Martin Bashir, as part of the Veritas Forum, Keller was asked questions about Jesus Christ being the only way to God. Far from answering in

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<sup>13</sup> *Galatians for You*, p100.

<sup>14</sup> *The Reason For God*, p223.

<sup>15</sup> *The Reason for God*, Chapter 14: The Dance of God

<sup>16</sup> The related verb 'perichoreo' is found in Gregory of Nazianzus (d.389/90) who used it to describe the relationship between the divine and human natures of Christ but he also extended it to the interpenetration of the three persons of the Trinity and it became a technical term for the latter. Wikipedia, art. Perichoresis.

an impressive intellectual way (as he is famed), he fumbled in a confused way to fudge the question, failing to give an evangelical answer and never quoting Scripture. His answer is a pile of waffle, during which he says, *'If Jesus is who he says he is.'* ... *'It seems so narrow to claim that there's only one way to God.'* ... *'If they die and they don't have Jesus Christ, I don't know [the answer to the question].'* *'It's on a need to know basis ... There's some trap-door or something like that I haven't been told about'* [i.e. that heathens can be saved without Jesus]. A video of this shocking performance is available.<sup>17</sup>

This is serious. The question as to whether Jesus is the only way to salvation is fundamental to basic faith with clear answers given in Scripture (Jn 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5). Keller either does not know this elementary doctrine or is ashamed to preach it. As a Presbyterian he should know that the Westminster Confession gives a clear answer, *'The wicked, who know not God, and obey not the gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, [Matt 25:31 to the end; Rm 2:5,6; 9:22,23; Matt 25:21; Acts 3:19; 2 Thess 1:7-10].'*<sup>18</sup>

### *Cultural sensitivity*

Keller believes that man's rejection of Christ is basically cultural, which makes the Gospel implausible. He calls these 'defeater beliefs'; such as the obvious church corruption in the USA. This is an unbiblical idea. Scripture affirms that total depravity is the cause of rejecting Christ. Men love their sin and hate God; only the elect hear the truth and these respond (Jn 8:45-47). We do not need a cultural methodology to persuade the reprobate.

This is a failure to understand basic truths about the doctrines of grace.

Developing this further, he teaches that, in sharing the Gospel, Christians need to show that human culture won't be resolved or have a happy ending without Christ. This is nonsense; the Gospel is not about culture but about personal responsibility to God. In any case, God's eternal plan is not about making society have a happy ending – in fact everything is going to get much, much worse and end in judgment.

Keller claims that Christians deal with man's cultural problem by understanding that post-modern people come to Christ through a process, through relationships, through *'trying Christianity on'*. They use practical methods rather than rational. This is contrary to the teaching and practice of the apostles.

Keller's methods in pursuing this idea rest on making the Gospel *'attractive'*, *'hooked into culture's base line cultural narratives'*, appearing to be *'wonderful'* and too good to be true. This is not an apostolic technique at all. The NT shows us that the Gospel is an offence and Christ is a stumbling block. Christ demands that converts deny themselves, count the cost and take up their cross. The NT teaches that the Gospel brings conviction of sin and godly sorrow leading to repentance. Paul even warns believers that they should expect affliction and persecution. Keller's ideas have nothing to do with the Gospel at all; indeed his ideas are totally opposite of NT teaching. This is a deception. In fact, we could mistranslate Paul's words to summarise Keller's teaching, *'My preaching is with persuasive words of human wisdom and not the demonstration of the Spirit.'*<sup>19</sup>

It worsens; Keller says that the Gospel must be presented as answers to the two main cultural concerns of people: personal freedom and unity in diversity. The Gospel does not

<sup>17</sup> Tim Keller at the Veritas Forum interviewed by Martin Bashir.

<sup>18</sup> Westminster Confession 33:2.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Cor 2:4-5 should be, *'my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God'*.

pander to this at all. It denies personal freedom stating that man's will is bound in sin; it cannot aspire to freedom. The focus of the Gospel is not to release freewill. Neither does it centre on unity. In fact Jesus himself stated that he came to divide men; nor did he come to bring peace (Matt 10:34-35). The Gospel is the answer to sin and judgment.

In another book he teaches that faith comes, comes '*mainly through relationships*' rather than through '*arguments, information and books*'.<sup>20</sup> Here Keller seeks to emphasise psychoanalytical techniques based on interpersonal behaviour. But the Bible explains that faith comes through propositional truth found in God's words applied by the Spirit.

Faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Rm 10:17

Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever. 1 Pt 1:23

These ideas of Keller are extremely superficial and fail to address the deep issue of man – his heart needs changing by God.

### *Denial of total depravity*

In his seeming avoidance of a literal interpretation of Gen 1-3 (which is why he is a theistic evolutionist), Keller downplays the role of Adam's fall from grace and original sin. Instead he talks about humanity's pride and self-centredness in general terms; pursuing things instead of God.

Man's problem is not cultural contextualisation,<sup>21</sup> it is sin and innate depravity. Man does not need a cultural engagement with God; he needs regeneration by the Spirit, conviction of sin, followed by God-given faith and repentance. These result from accepting the Gospel rationally.

### *Changing the meaning of sin*

Usually Keller does not mention the word, 'sin'; however, in an interview he gives the reason as, '*I use it with lots and lots of explanation, because the word is essentially obsolete ... They [church members] do get the idea of branding, of taking a word or term and filling it with your own content, so I have to rebrand the word 'sin. Around here it means self-centredness. ... Individually, that means "I live for myself, for my own glory and happiness, and I'll work for your happiness if it helps me." Communally, self-centredness is destroying peace and justice in the world, tearing the net of interwovenness, the fabric of humanity.*'<sup>22</sup>

This is not the Bible's explanation of sin, which is a complex word with many shades of meaning because the Bible uses many concepts that are translated by the one English word 'sin'. These concepts include: iniquity, missing the moral mark, unrighteousness, transgression of God's law and so on. Sin is defined in Scripture as not living up to God's law ('sin is lawlessness', 1 Jn 3:4). So, the chief meaning of 'sin' is transgression of the law leading to wickedness. Sin is the expression of man as a rebel against his Creator; self-centredness doesn't come close to defining it.

### *Lostness*

'*But though God lost us he determined to win us back.*' Keller uses words like this often and in *The Prodigal God*, one chapter is called 'Redefining Lostness'. Keller's Gospel claims that

<sup>20</sup> *Galatians for You*, p110.

<sup>21</sup> '*Connect the story of Jesus to the base-line cultural narratives*'. Keller; quoted by Dr Paul M Elliot; Tim Keller's False Gospel.

<sup>22</sup> Cathy Lynn Grossman, 'as the 'Notion of Sin' Been Lost?' *USA Today*, March 19, 2008, [http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2008-03-19-sin\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2008-03-19-sin_N.htm)

God lost us and wants to win us back. This is a gross perversion of the sovereignty of God and the purpose of salvation. God cannot lose anything; everything he does has a purpose. The lost have a purpose – it is glorifying God in his justice and wrath against sin in hell (Prov 16:4, Rm 9:22).

The formal word 'lost' has a specific meaning in the NT and that is the ruin and destruction (not annihilation) of spiritual death through sin. It is a terrifying word. It is the judgment of God applied to a sinner declaring him condemned. God never seeks to save or win those who are lost. God saves those, from eternity, that he called and none other. The reprobate who are lost are never loved, never saved and have the wrath of God hanging over them (Jn 3:36).

### *Man-centred*

The heart of Keller's Gospel is man-centredness. The Gospel must be in-line with man's aspirations and hopes; as these change so the Gospel changes. Jesus is the answer to cultural questions. The Gospel must be presented attractively, hooked into the cultural narrative etc. This is unbiblical.

The Biblical Gospel is God-centred. God demands that all men must repent (Acts 17:30). Failure to do this is disobedience to your Creator. John the Baptist came telling people to repent. The first Gospel message after Pentecost told people to repent.

The apostles modelled Gospel preaching that did not pander to men at all; in fact, they appear to go out of their way to confront them (as Jesus did). Paul's, Peter's and Stephen's message to the Jews was preceded by confronting them as murderers of Christ. Paul's message to the intellectual loving Greeks was apparent foolishness. The apostles never went out of their way to make the Gospel attractive to the world.

Keller's approach may be modern and attractive, but it is not Biblical. The Gospel presentation must never be peddling a product or selling an intellectual commodity like soap powder.

The command to church leaders is to preach God's word, '**Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching,**' (2 Tim 4:2). The power in the Gospel is the actual words of God passed on in witnessing to Christ, not a worldly attractive presentation pandering to felt needs.

### *False apologetics*

Biblical apologetics is defending the faith; giving a sound reason for the Christian hope (1 Pt 3:15). Keller, following a modern trend, sees apologetics as dealing with sinful man's objections to the Gospel, one by one, so that he will believe. If you can answer enough objections, a man will believe. That is not our job; our job is to testify to Christ as a witness and proclaim God's word.

Keller's method puts man in the driving seat in the Gospel. The Christian method is to explain God's demands. In any case, all the objections to the faith will only come to light when the objector repents and believes and has his eyes opened. Keller never gives us clarity that God is sovereign in saving sinners, and our job is to witness to him; the power in conversion is divine not by human wisdom (Jn 16:8-11).

### *Putting the world right*

Keller talks about the '*healing of the world*' and '*what puts the world right*'. His Gospel has a very materialistic edge.



A member of Redeemer church for many years has said,

I went to Tim Keller's church for nearly 20 years and in fact I left just last year because of my growing concern that the church and Tim were far more liberal, theologically and ideologically than I had ever imagined. ... To sum up Keller's theology most succinctly, Keller says 'the primary purpose of salvation is – cultural renewal – to make this world a better place'. That statement should alarm any true evangelical or conservative Christian. And it must be understood that this one statement is central to all of Keller's teachings.<sup>23</sup>

God has no plan to put this world right or make it a better place. The destiny of this world is to be burned to ashes and, after the Day of Judgment, rebuilt as a new world where heaven reigns. If Keller's central thesis is putting the world straight, then every doctrine he has is going to be flawed at best. This is Hyper-Postmillennialism, a triumphal Utopianism. This is a human philosophy not the Gospel.

### *Confusion about justification*

Keller (as far as I can see) does not talk about justification by faith and seems to not understand it. This is a cardinal doctrine and the teaching on which the church stands or falls (according to Luther).

However, justification, according to Keller, is revealed in love and practical works to the poor and needy, to working for social justice: '*faith without respect, love and practical concern for the poor is dead. It's not justifying gospel faith*'.<sup>24</sup> '*To work against injustice... is the real proof that you believe your sins have been atoned for... the inevitable sign of any real true gospel faith*'.<sup>25</sup> Every time he defines 'just' he defines it by human works.

Now we all agree with the apostle James that faith without works is dead; however, Keller does not talk about justification by faith at all but harps on about justification by works. Is this more evidence of his reliance upon Roman Catholic doctrines?

### *What is missing?*

In common with other New Calvinists, Emerging Church teachers and Seeker-Sensitive meetings, Keller does not use (or hardly uses) the following words in his teaching on the Gospel: sin, original sin, total depravity, conviction of sin, the wrath of God, judgment, holiness, justification by faith and repentance. These words are the essence of the Biblical Gospel and fundamental to truth.

Indeed, this suppression of the truth comes under God's condemnation:

**The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Rm 1:18**

Thus Keller teaches that repentance is, '*confessing the things besides God himself that you have been relying on for hope, significance and security*'.<sup>26</sup> No mention of sin; no mention of godly sorrow; no mourning for offending God; no apology for transgressing the law. Indeed he says that, '*God is distressed that the unity of the human family has been broken*',<sup>27</sup> which he interprets as due to social injustice, poverty and broken society – the larger

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<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Cousar; <http://freedomtorch.com/blogs/3/2762/tim-keller-and-social-justice>

<sup>24</sup> *Generous Justice*, p104.

<sup>25</sup> *Generous Justice*, p96, 99.

<sup>26</sup> *The Reason For God*, p223.

<sup>27</sup> *Generous Justice*, p121.

structural factors (not personal ones).<sup>28</sup> No mention of the fact that God is principally angry at man's sin and his wrath is directed at sinful society.

Even Keller's mention of faith and repentance is couched in terms of human action and will, part of which is joining a church to be saved. His emphasis is Arminian, man-centred, not the Calvinism he gave an oath to support.

### *Conclusion*

Keller's Gospel is full of waffle, philosophical meandering and pseudo-intellectual musings but has very little truth. It appears to be centred on human will focused on a materialistic vision of a healed world based upon liberal and Marxist doctrines.

### **Keller's lack of Biblicity**

Frequently, when teaching, Keller uses all sorts of clever intellectual and philosophic techniques but never quotes from Scripture at all. For instance, in *'Deconstructing Defeater Beliefs: Leading the Secular to Christ'*, there are no Biblical references. In his interview with Bashir, he never quoted Scripture. Indeed, he sometimes quotes support from unbelieving philosophers instead, even Karl Marx and Frederick Nietzsche.<sup>29</sup>

### **Mysticism**

Keller's endorsement of mysticism goes back decades. In a 1998 lecture<sup>30</sup> he said, *'two streams that are filled with good, helpful material on meditation—the Catholic stream and the Quaker stream.'* In fact, Catholic mystics were promoting occult methods of syncretism while the root of Quaker theology and church life is entirely mystical with no reference to Scripture and a denial of total depravity ('inner light' doctrine). Thus Keller promotes the mysticism of Quaker Richard Foster, who founded Renovaré.

Regarding Catholic mystics Keller said that their writings were filled with *'great stuff'*. The full quote is, *'The best things that have been written are by Catholics during the Counter Reformation. Great stuff!'* Has he no notion that the Counter Reformation was the persecution filled Catholic reaction to try to destroy the Reformation; the very thing he has vowed to uphold?

Thus began the promotion of mystical heresy in the Redeemer churches.

Keller's church was taught how to practise 'The Way of the Monk', a Catholic mystical method of prayer and meditation, with workshops devoted to it.<sup>31</sup> The congregation was even encouraged to create *'your own monastery'*. Some church members complained in writing but received no reply to their letters and subsequently left the church.<sup>32</sup>

Keller also endorsed and taught members to pray using the *'lectio divina'* ('Divine reading'), a mystical method of reading Scripture involving meditation.<sup>33</sup> It is based upon emptying the mind of what is known rationally about a text and accepting subjective impressions (feelings) that jump out as a result of this method. This is the opposite of objective, rational Bible study demanded by the Bible itself.

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<sup>28</sup> *Generous Justice*, p38.

<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche criticised Christianity as, *'born of weakness, failure and resentment and is the enemy of reason and honesty'* [*Encyclopaedia Britannica*]. In his essay *'The Madman'*, Nietzsche announces the death of God, and invites the reader to listen for the noise of the gravediggers burying the decaying corpse of God.

<sup>30</sup> *What is meditation?*

<sup>31</sup> <http://surphside.blogspot.com/2009/06/tim-kellers-redeemer-presbyterian.html>

<sup>32</sup> <http://surphside.blogspot.com/2009/06/tim-keller-following-in-warrens.html>

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.redeemer.com/connect/prayer/lectio\\_divina.html](http://www.redeemer.com/connect/prayer/lectio_divina.html)

Another resource used is called ‘Biblical meditation’ directed at personal transformation but is trained by Catholic inspired professor and spiritual director in the Renovaré Institute (Jan Johnson).<sup>34</sup> Her method involves Ignatius Loyola’s<sup>35</sup> ‘Spiritual Exercises’ engaging with Scripture using all five senses (including taste, touch and smell!).<sup>36</sup> Undergirding the ‘Exercises’ is belief that ‘*the Bishop of Rome is the Vicar of Truth in the world*’.<sup>37</sup> Thus Ignatius made his followers submit to an oath of obedience to the pope.

The Catholic mystical method of ‘contemplative prayer’ (or ‘centring prayer’), a favourite of New Calvinists, was also emphasised.

Keller promoted the use of a ‘prayer rope’ (a sort of simple rosary) as a method of aiding prayer. In addition he used the ‘Chaplet of the Divine Mercy,’ a particular method of using a prayer rope.

All these are Roman mystical methods that the Reformers went to great lengths to shun. Instead they taught the necessity of truly engaging with Scripture by reading rationally, assiduously and with faith, then obeying what was learned. Keller is overturning Reformation objectivity for Catholic mysticism that promotes passivity, subjectivity and mere emotionalism.

Apart from Keller’s foolishness in doing this, it is contrary to his vows as a Reformed Protestant minister.

### **False exposition**

A full evaluation of this would require a book in itself; some examples will have to do.

Keller’s exposition is frequently shocking and unbiblical. However, his novel interpretations have a freshness since they are so different from traditional interpretations. People fall for this novelty because most of his readers don’t know their Bible either.

In his book *The Prodigal God*,<sup>38</sup> Keller’s interpretations are merely the production of his own philosophising agenda that are either eisegesis<sup>39</sup> or just contrary to the actual text. Far from unlocking the true meaning of it (as claimed) he even misses the whole point of the parable of the Prodigal Son.

His chief point is an affirmation of cheap grace, easy believism, or salvation without repentance. He does this by affirming that God has a ‘reckless grace’.<sup>40</sup> In fact, even the title is close to blasphemy. The word ‘prodigal’ means: ‘spending money or resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant’. This shows a complete lack of understanding of God’s attributes in order to gain a flashy title for a book. It is impossible that God could be

<sup>34</sup> <http://youtu.be/c9hGRVYCEqs>

<sup>35</sup> Loyola founded the Jesuits, the great enemies of the church that persecuted, tortured and killed thousands of evangelical believers in the Inquisition. They also enforced the outlawing of having a personal Bible since the Bible was on the Roman Catholic *Index of Forbidden Books*.

<sup>36</sup> ‘*The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola are a month-long program of meditations, prayers, considerations, and contemplative practices that help Catholic faith become more fully alive ... It presents a formulation of Ignatius’ spirituality in a series of prayer exercises, thought experiments, and examinations of consciousness—designed to help a retreatant.*’

<http://www.nwjesuits.org/JesuitSpirituality/SpiritualExercises.html>

<sup>37</sup> *Sanctity Through the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.  
[http://www.therealpresence.org/archives/Spiritual\\_Exercises/Spiritual\\_Exercises\\_002.htm](http://www.therealpresence.org/archives/Spiritual_Exercises/Spiritual_Exercises_002.htm)

<sup>38</sup> Tim Keller, *The Prodigal God*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Reading things that are not in the text; adding to Scripture.

<sup>40</sup> *The Prodigal God*; p xv.

a reckless spendthrift since he can only do that which is perfect and good. God can never waste anything at all, especially not grace, which flows from the cross of Christ and is only directed to the elect. This does not bode well. In fact, the book nowhere articulates the Biblical Gospel at all.

To save time I will note the rest as bullet points.

- He wrongly suggests that the parable is about two major ways people try to find happiness. The elder brother signifies moral conformity – blind, narrow and self-righteous; the younger, self-discovery, the quest for self-actualisation.
- He wrongly suggests that the target of the parable is not sinners but religious conformists. [One motive for the book was to show why churches are so unpleasant; they are filled with ‘elder brothers’.] Keller has religious people in his sights.
- He wrongly suggests that the prodigal son devised a business plan for repaying his father (an impossible feat – that’s the point).
- He wrongly interprets the text regarding the son meeting the father (ignoring the son’s confession).
- He wrongly implies that repentance is grovelling, which is unnecessary and demeaning.
- He wrongly portrays the main event as taking the son back without any mention of sin or repentance, affirming a freeness in God’s grace – contrary to Jesus’ teaching about counting the cost or Biblical examples of conviction of sin and godly sorrow.
- He wrongly suggests that the elder brother (religious people) is bourgeois, seeking legitimacy through an ethic of hard work and moral rectitude (he is attacking Calvinism here). This (not selfish sin mind you) provokes the younger brother’s prodigal behaviour (and is evidenced in society in permissive social reactions)
- He wrongly suggests that the elder brother disgraced the father.
- He wrongly suggests that ‘*Jesus is redefining everything we thought we knew about connecting to God. He is redefining sin, what it means to be lost, and what it means to be saved*’.<sup>41</sup>
- He wrongly suggests that the elder brother is represented by the Pharisees.
- He wrongly suggests that the Pharisees worshipped faithfully, constantly and obeyed Scripture; ‘*who do everything the Bible requires*’.<sup>42</sup> In fact Jesus criticised the Pharisees constantly for observing the traditions of men and ignoring God’s requirements.
- He wrongly states that the teaching of Jesus, ‘*consistently attracted the irreligious while offending the Bible believing religious people of his day*’.<sup>43</sup> What about Anna, Simeon, Nathaniel, John the Baptist, Joseph of Arimethea etc?
- He wrongly denigrates those who strictly adhere to the Bible. Bible-believing Christians are as bad as Pharisees. In his book *The Reason For God*, he also labels ‘born again’ Christians as fanatics.
- He wrongly over-emphasises the meekness of Jesus while ignoring his firm words, and many harsh statements, e.g. to the Pharisees.
- He wrongly states that the elder brother’s (religious people’s) character leads to racism and ‘classism’ plus an unforgiving judgmental spirit.
- He wrongly states that religion is one of the greatest sources of misery and strife in the world and adds that Jesus agreed with this. The superiority of elder brothers leads to social injustice, violence and war.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *The Prodigal God*; p28.

<sup>42</sup> *The Prodigal God*; p10.

<sup>43</sup> *The Prodigal God*; p15.

- He wrongly associates liberal views on sex, politics and culture with kindness, reasonableness and open-heartedness. These virtues are associated with all sorts of different people types.
- He wrongly affirms that conservative Christians are hostile bigots with an unforgiving and judgmental spirit while implying that liberals are kind.
- He wrongly leans upon psychoanalytic principles to determine the character of the two sons. For example, younger brothers '*pursue their own goals and self-actualization regardless of custom and convention*'.<sup>45</sup> Elder brothers '*base their self image on being hardworking or moral... this inevitably leads to feeling superior*' ... '*[they] obey God to get things*'.<sup>46</sup>
- He wrongly claims to know what is going on in people's hearts, like a psychoanalyst.
- He wrongly describes the human race as '*a band of exiles trying to come home*', instead of sinners needing a Saviour because they can do no good.<sup>47</sup>

This is so plainly a load of hogwash; I have never seen anything so blatantly self-moralising. What he teaches has nothing to do with Biblical exposition at all but is merely pursuing a philosophical, psychoanalytical agenda and tacking it on to Scripture, making verses say whatever he wants them to say.

### Ecumenism

We have already seen Keller's reliance upon Platinga, a Catholic professor, but he also quotes from many other Catholic authors. One of these is the Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft another is Catholic author Mary Flannery O'Conner. Keller quotes this novelist to show that one way of being bad is by being very good and keeping all the rules!<sup>48</sup> This writer was a sacramentalist and a pantheist ('*the world is charged with God*');<sup>49</sup> yet he uses this woman as his chief example of the way of grace. Other Catholics Keller is enamoured with include:

- Simone Weil (a Catholic mystic).
- Czesław Miłosz (Polish poet).<sup>50</sup>
- Archbishop Oscar Romero (El Salvador martyr).
- GK Chesterton (novelist convert to Romanism).
- Malcolm Muggeridge (journalist convert to Romanism).

These are people Keller considers to be doctrinally orthodox despite the fact that Roman Catholics worship Mary, practice a blasphemous mass, support an infallible pope, and deny many Scriptural doctrines.

Keller praised the ecumenical movement for having '*contributed an emphasis on Christians using their work to further social justice in the world*'.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *The Prodigal God*; p67.

<sup>45</sup> *The Prodigal God*; p30.

<sup>46</sup> *The Prodigal God*; p53, 60.

<sup>47</sup> *The Prodigal God*; p97.

<sup>48</sup> *Reason for God*, chapter: Religion and the Gospel.

<sup>49</sup> *New World Encyclopaedia* entry.

<sup>50</sup> *Reason for God*, p75.

<sup>51</sup> *Every Good Endeavour*, p20.

He is a signatory of the *Manhattan Declaration*, which is a policy statement supporting the unification of evangelicals and Roman Catholics in charitable social works. As well as encouraging church ecumenism, Keller encourages social work in conjunction with many other secular and religious organisations and associations.<sup>52</sup> This is directly contrary to Scripture which commands us not to be in a committed association with unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14).

In his book *The Reason For God*, he states that the Roman Church is '*the largest church in the world*' and equates all Roman Catholics (and Eastern Orthodox) with Christians. Keller defines Christianity as including Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholicism:

All Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Christians assent together to the great creeds of the first thousand years of church history, such as the Apostle's, Nicene, Chalcedonian and Athanasian creeds. In these creeds the fundamental Christian view of reality is laid out... What is Christianity? For our purposes, I'll define Christianity as the body of believers who assent to these great ecumenical creeds... I am making a case in this book for the truth of Christianity in general – not for one particular strand of it.<sup>53</sup>

### Sanctification

Keller is very confused about sanctification, which is hardly surprising, as he is confused about justification also.

Essentially, Keller is vehemently opposed to formal religion, high ethical standards and law-keeping. To him, all law-keeping is legalism. He even equates Biblical ethics with pagan idolatry. Note:

Law-keeping religion is really slavery.<sup>54</sup>

Paul once more makes his radical claim that pagan idolatry and biblical moralism are basically the same thing. The Galatians had been amoral liberals, and now they were about to become very moral conservatives.<sup>55</sup>

The motivation for morality is fear-based.<sup>56</sup>

The main problem our heart has is ...our over-desires for good things.<sup>57</sup>

Keller gives no evidence for saying such things; they just sound novel and clever but are empty. Some directly contradict God's word (e.g. Gen 6:5). Indeed, he appears to have no notion that we are to keep Christ's commandments, and obey the law of Christ (Jn 15:10, 17; 1 Jn 3:22, 5:3; Gal 6:2). Over and over again Keller expresses his dislike of moral Christians.<sup>58</sup> Keller has no clue about the difference between Mosaic external law, applying morality by human strength and forms (legalism) and the eternal moral law of God, now expressed in Christ through the Spirit. As believers grow in grace and sanctification, they better obey the law of Christ by the Spirit.

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<sup>52</sup> *Generous Justice*, 160-161.

<sup>53</sup> *Reason for God*, p116-117. Technically, they don't fully agree on these creeds. For instance, the Filioque clause is disputed.

<sup>54</sup> *Galatians for You*, p132.

<sup>55</sup> *Galatians for You*, p133.

<sup>56</sup> *Galatians for You*, p145.

<sup>57</sup> *Galatians for You*, p146.

<sup>58</sup> E.g. Keller calls born again Christians fanatics, '*intense moralists or, as they were called in Jesus' time, Pharisees.*' *The Reason for God*, p57.

## Utopianism

We have already noted this strand in Keller's teaching; it appears everywhere. For instance in his book *The Prodigal God*, he says, '*the ultimate purpose of Jesus is not only individual salvation and pardon for sins, but also the renewal of this world, the end of disease, poverty, injustice, violence, suffering and death*'.<sup>59</sup> He does not frame this in Scriptural; terms regarding the resurrection and restoration of all things in a new world after the old one is destroyed in wrath, but talks about healing the current world.

In his book *Generous Justice* he states that his purpose is to, '*look to the Bible in building a more just society*'.<sup>60</sup> In *Every Good Endeavour* he says, '*our faith and work ministry has sought to explore the power and promise of the Christian story to change, redeem, and renew every aspect of ... the world we see*'.<sup>61</sup> Redeemer's 'Centre for Faith and Work' has a mission '*to renew the city's institutions of culture through the people of the congregation who were employed in vocations throughout the city*'.<sup>62</sup> [This would be like Peter being determined to change the culture of imperial Rome.]

His influences from the Frankfurt School of neo-Marxism<sup>63</sup> led him to devote himself to gaining followers to form the '*vanguard of some major new religious, social and political arrangements*'.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, he sees the mission of Jesus in Marxist terms; '*The purpose of Jesus coming is to put the whole world aright, to renew and restore the creation... not just to bring personal forgiveness and peace, but also justice and shalom*'.<sup>65</sup> And an, '*operation to restore justice to the oppressed and marginalised, physical wholeness to the diseased and dying, community to the isolated and lonely and spiritual joy and connection to those alienated from God*'.<sup>66</sup> In this we see shades of Liberation Theology, not saving the elect but saving the world. Indeed, Keller refers to Liberation theology writers, such as Gustavo Gutierrez; the founder of liberation theology and a Dominican priest.<sup>67</sup>

Keller's fundamental socialism is seen in stating that Jesus did not identify with the elect of God but, '*When Jesus suffered with us he was identifying with the oppressed of the world, not with their oppressors*'.<sup>68</sup> How odd then that one of Christ's chief early converts was the main church persecutor and oppressor (Paul). This is very similar to Roman Catholic Liberation Theology. Keller ignores all the Scriptures revealing that the purpose of Christ's mission was to seek and save sinners.

Another similar trait is the claim that the work of the Spirit is to, '*care and cultivate the face of the earth, the material world*'.<sup>69</sup> This is never mentioned in Scripture.

Keller's goal is that Christians become, '*true revolutionaries*' devoted to social justice,<sup>70</sup> and to changing the world to the extent of eliminating poverty. He believes that the idea of changing one heart at a time through evangelism is naïve.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *The Prodigal God*; p110.

<sup>60</sup> *Generous Justice*; Hodder & Stoughton, (2010), back cover.

<sup>61</sup> Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf; *Every Good Endeavour*, p243.

<sup>62</sup> *Every Good Endeavour*, p248.

<sup>63</sup> This think-tank sought to revitalise Marxism by changing culture without violence or Soviet administrative mechanisms.

<sup>64</sup> *The Reason for God*, pxix.

<sup>65</sup> *The Reason for God*, p223.

<sup>66</sup> *The Reason for God*, p224-5.

<sup>67</sup> *Generous Justice*, p7.

<sup>68</sup> *The Reason for God*, p195.

<sup>69</sup> *The Reason for God*, p223.

<sup>70</sup> *The Reason for God*, pxiii. 'Social justice' is a term derived from the Frankfurt School.

<sup>71</sup> *Generous Justice*, p127.

The mistake Keller makes is to take a Biblical theme (justice for the poor) and make it the basis of neo-Marxist Utopianism. God's commandments to care for the poor and needy and for justice to prevail in society have two outworkings. The first is that the church is to ensure that works of charity are undertaken as part of doing good to our neighbour. Keller is right to emphasise this since most churches fail in this regard. Churches must do good to all and especially to the household of faith (Gal 6:10). The second is a command to all human governments. This, of course, is a command that is disobeyed and this becomes a key basis of condemnation on the Day of Judgment.

Keller fails to take into account Biblical statements regarding the state of the world, human depravity, and eschatology. The world is never going to improve but gets worse and worse until there is a global antichristian world government devoted to evil; then the end shall come. Thus any attempt to change the world is a mere distraction from the job in hand – to glorify God and witness to Jesus.

Instead of seeking to obey God by doing good to our neighbourhood, Keller seeks to change the world and includes detailed measures, such as dealing with financial capital, fair wages, segregation, banking, schooling, community developments and so on.<sup>72</sup> He directs Christians to bring about cultural change and social reform to repair society where it has broken down and alter the environment.<sup>73</sup> This will be done, according to Keller, by empowering the weak and bringing about economic equality.

Keller absolutely fails to have any clue that the statements in the OT have a direct bearing on man's great need – to find forgiveness of sins, and that this can only happen when the Messiah comes who brings about equity and peace – in the realm of salvation (the church). In fact, Keller's neo-Marxist agenda,<sup>74</sup> based upon twisting both Biblical verses and Biblical theology, leads one to the conclusion that such a man cannot have real knowledge of God at all.

In a nutshell, Keller attributes the ills of society as being environmental (outside us) when the Scriptures teach that the problems of society are inside our own hearts. The answer to a broken society is changing hearts one by one and leaving the world to its own destruction since it is subjected to futility (Rm 8:20-21). This is the opposite of Keller's teaching. Instead of the Biblical command to look for a new heaven and earth (2 Pt 3:13-14) Keller tells people to look to a new Utopian earth now. The Scriptural command is spiritual; Keller's command is earthly.

### **Psychoheresy**

Keller accepts that churches have a high proportion of needy people and that, despite conversion, these people are weaker psychologically and morally than secular people. To deal with this Redeemer church offers '*idols of the heart*' recovery groups to help needy people '*reject your alternative gods*' through Christianised psychotherapy.

This is unbiblical and using the world's tools to apply sanctification. The Bible says that knowing God through his word and Spirit gives us everything we need:

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue. 2 Pt 1:2-3

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<sup>72</sup> Such as in his book, *Generous Justice*.

<sup>73</sup> *Generous Justice*, p162, 167.

<sup>74</sup> Which could be summarised as: The problem – exploitation of the proletariat by capitalist bourgeoisie. The solution - redistribution of wealth achieved by non-violent socio-political action.



All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:16-17

God *is* able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all *things*, may have an abundance for every good work. 2 Cor 9:8

An example of the sort of misguided waffle that passes as psychological insight is, ‘*If I am being angry and unforgiving, what is it that I think I need so much? What is being withheld that I think I must have... to be a person of worth?*’<sup>75</sup> ‘*How will you replace that false saviour with your true Saviour next time you’re tempted?*’<sup>76</sup> You don’t need something special to deal with anger and un-forgiveness, you need to confess your sin and repent. This sort of statement is (apparently) based on the concept of idol-exchange as the process of sanctification (promoted by Christian Counselling and Educational Foundation and David Powlison). Keller follows certain psychological techniques which aim to diagnose our hearts (and the heart of others), ignoring Scripture which warns against this and which explains that the heart can be desperately wicked.

In his commentary on Galatians, Keller gets bogged down in confusing, inarticulate speech in the mire of psychoanalysis. He even psychoanalyses Galatian false teachers and blames their error on their own felt-needs and empty love-tanks: ‘*they need, emotionally, to have people who emotionally need them... the false teachers simply want to be built up by building the Galatians up.*’<sup>77</sup> The Galatian Judaisers were heretics who were deluded, who preached a false Gospel and a false Christ and were cursed by Paul. Keller is in cloud-cuckoo land. How can anyone buy this?

Keller continues with odd statements such as, ‘*religious people are very touchy and nervous about their standing with God. Their insecurity makes them hostile to the Gospel ... The Lord Jesus was most bitterly opposed by the religious leaders... it was law-reliant teachers within the church undermining gospel freedom. It is the same today...*’<sup>78</sup> It is hard to see whom he means by this accusation of pharisaic behaviour: all religious people; all law-keepers; conservative Calvinists or bigots? [Actually, the Pharisees were far from nervous.] This is typical of Keller’s continual dismissal of formal religion (despite being a pastor in a formal religion).<sup>79</sup> Keller is creating an unnecessary false caricature.

His psychoanalysis is evidenced in statements as: ‘*Just to say no [to sin] without examining the motives underneath wrong behaviour can actually be part of a new form of seeking self-righteousness, as we seek to justify ourselves by saying no to ungodly attitudes and actions.*’<sup>80</sup> The Bible tells us that the heart is corrupt, the old nature is being corrupted and we must flee sin without subjective analysis. Excessive introspection will only lead to failure, frustration and spiritual damage. We simply say no to sin and put off the old man. Keller is deeply wrong.

Another example is, ‘*the gospel creates a whole new self-image which is not based on comparison with others’ ... both the superior complex and the inferior complex are, at root, born of insecurity and inferiority... How can I analyse which I am? ... Apart from the gospel, I will be forced to be superior or inferior... because of the nature of my self-image.*’<sup>81</sup> He then suggests questions

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<sup>75</sup> *Galatians for you*, p69.

<sup>76</sup> *Galatians for you*, p70.

<sup>77</sup> *Galatians for you*, p113.

<sup>78</sup> *Galatians for you*, p128.

<sup>79</sup> E.g. *Kings Cross*, p41; *Reason for God*, p58.

<sup>80</sup> *Galatians for you*, p156.

<sup>81</sup> *Galatians for you*, p159-162.

so that the reader can psychoanalyse himself. He then rambles on about self-worth, identity, self-approval and so on. The Gospel to Keller is a tool of psychoanalysis; indeed you must preach the Gospel to yourself when you feel defensive around someone.

The end of his book on Galatians is so full of self-help, psychoanalytical, clap-trap that it is hard for anyone to read. Why was this nonsense published in a commentary series devoted to Biblicity? The key to Galatians is: 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me,' (Gal 2:20). Keller fails to see this and pursues a course of trendy self-help therapies instead and presents a gospel as false as the Judaisers.

In *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, Keller says that the purpose of the booklet is to show how, 'humility means we can stop connecting every experience, every conversation with ourselves and can thus be free from self condemnation.'<sup>82</sup> Firstly, this is psychobabble nonsense but, more importantly, freedom from condemnation is only found in Christ and walking in his Spirit, putting on the new man. This is how to find true humility, not by being self-forgetting. Scripture teaches us to focus upon Christ not ourselves.

Other examples of psychobabble in this work includes:

What we are all looking for is an ultimate Self-forgetfulness verdict that we are important and valuable.<sup>83</sup>

[The problem of man is] emptiness at the centre of the human ego.<sup>84</sup>

[Man needs] self-worth and purpose big enough to give us meaning.<sup>85</sup>

The problem of man is sin, guilt and awaiting condemnation. The cause of this is heart rebellion against God and practical transgression of his moral law causing slavery to sin and Satan. Man is far from empty; he is full of sin and a target of temptation to lust by the enemy; his heart is corrupt, not empty. Man needs forgiveness and moral change inside, not filling up with purpose.

Christianity is not a therapy to be self-forgetful, to improve the old man, but a change from an old creation to a new creation in Christ. The Christian in the new nature constantly renews his mind according to the truth of Christ in order to fulfil God's will (Rm 12:1-2).

In this book he refers to CS Lewis (though altering the sense of his words), Lauren Slater (a psychologist), Kierkegaard (an existentialist philosopher), follows Freud's principles,<sup>86</sup> and shows an admiration for Madonna for her self-awareness. [Is he serious!]

In his argument he twists the apostle Paul's teaching, twists Biblical theology and even says that Paul wanted to know that he was a somebody; that Paul discovered a sense of self worth and identity. In fact Paul said, 'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me,' (Gal 2:20). This self-confidence, meant, says Keller, that Paul was never fazed; however, Scripture says, 'we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life', (2 Cor 1:8). Also, 'I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches', (2 Cor 11:28, NRSV).

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<sup>82</sup> *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness* (2012), descriptive précis.

<sup>83</sup> *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, p37.

<sup>84</sup> *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, p14.

<sup>85</sup> *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, p15.

<sup>86</sup> *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, p20.

*Examples of philosophical / psychoanalytical statements:*

- ‘Dismantle plausibility structure.’
- ‘Defeater beliefs.’
- ‘Self-actualisation.’
- ‘Branding ... taking a word or term and filling it with your own content.’
- ‘Motivation for morality is fear-based.’
- ‘Our over-desires for good things.’
- ‘The gospel creates a whole new self-image.’
- ‘Both the superior complex and the inferior complex are, at root, born of insecurity and inferiority... How can I analyse which I am.’
- ‘What we are all looking for is an ultimate Self forgetfulness verdict that we are important and valuable.’
- ‘Self-worth and purpose big enough to give us meaning.’
- ‘Wrong approach to self-regard.’
- ‘How to get that transformed sense of self.’
- ‘The human ego is empty.’

### **Theistic evolution**

Since we have seen that Keller has a loose view of Scripture, and many unbiblical notions, it should come as no surprise that he denies a literal interpretation of Genesis 1-3 and believes in evolution. To aid evangelism he seeks to support both Creationism and evolution.

Keller states that the science behind evolution is unquestionable; therefore, the Bible must be made to fit scientific truth. [This is the very opposite of what to do; God’s word cannot lie and science (which is always evolving and changing) must be studied carefully to see how it fits God’s word.] He also says that conservative Christians on this are ‘*anti-scientific religionists*’.<sup>87</sup>

Keller forces the Bible into an evolutionary theory by averring that Genesis 1 is a poem and cannot be taken literally.<sup>88</sup> However, the Hebrew is not in poetic format.

In fact Keller is confused since he says that, ‘*God guided some kind of process of natural selection, and yet I reject the concept of evolution as All-encompassing Theory*’.<sup>89</sup> In another place he says he believes in a literal Adam and Eve but there are several ways to hold that belief within an evolutionary process.<sup>90</sup> One gets the impression that he doesn’t know what he is talking about and wants his cake and eat it too. In fact Keller admitted that his position was confusing in an interview.<sup>91</sup> He then admitted that he adopted the Roman Catholic position.<sup>92</sup> He summarises this as:

So here’s what I like—the messy approach, which is I think there was an Adam and Eve. I think there was a real Fall. I think that happened. I also think that there also was

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<sup>87</sup> Article, *Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople*, published by The Bio Logos Foundation.

<sup>88</sup> *Reason for God*, p93.

<sup>89</sup> *Reason for God*, p97-98.

<sup>90</sup> Article, *Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople*, published by The Bio Logos Foundation.

<sup>91</sup> Anthony Sacramone; of *First Things*, interview with Keller in 2008. [First Things is a key American Roman Catholic journal of religion and culture.] <http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2008/02/an-interview-with-timothy-kell>

<sup>92</sup> He also states this in *The Reason for God*, p87.

a very long process probably, you know, that the earth probably is very old, and there was some kind of process of natural selection that God guided and used, and maybe intervened in. And that's just the messy part. I'm not a scientist. I'm not going to go beyond that.<sup>93</sup>

He then directly contradicts the Bible (Rm 5:12) saying, '*How could there have been death before Adam and Eve fell? The answer is, I don't know. But all I know is, didn't animals eat bugs? Didn't bugs eat plants? There must have been death.*' Thus Keller believes in a literal Adam who appeared after a long evolutionary process, involving millions of deaths, and Adam's fall is not the cause of death; neither is it the global cause of human societal suffering.

Thus, this acclaimed intellectual reveals his confusion, preferring an illogical, 'messy' approach, in an attempt to be scientific. What nonsense!

### Minor issues

- Keller supports the Harry Potter novels.
- He says that doubt is a healthy part of faith!<sup>94</sup>

## Conclusion

I don't know where to begin in summarising what we have discovered in this analysis. I have seldom seen a supposed Reformed pastor commit so many serious errors in every department of theology, Biblicity, apologetics and counselling.

The overriding purpose of Keller's ministry appears to be based on the following:

- The church is called to redeem this present world. [False.]<sup>95</sup>
- This is done by works of social justice. [False.]
- The problems of man are solved by psychoanalytical methods. [False.]<sup>96</sup>
- The problems of society are solved by neo-Marxist principles. [False.]<sup>97</sup>

So Keller's whole perspective is deeply flawed being based upon humanistic, unbiblical principles and worldly philosophy.

So, it is not surprising, therefore, that his application of these principles results in multiple theological errors, exegetical errors, and false practical analysis.

Keller's errors are so deep, so serious and so ungodly, coupled with an undergirding false purpose, that it is hard to see how he could possibly be a genuine believer in Christ. He

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<sup>93</sup> Anthony Sacramone; of *First Things*, interview with Keller in 2008.

<sup>94</sup> *Reason for God*, pxxvi-xvii.

<sup>95</sup> '*My work is a critical way in which God is... renewing his world* (*Every Good Endeavour*, p14). '*Our work further develops, maintains, or repairs the fabric of the world* (*Every Good Endeavour*, p61). '*[We] live out the gospel in all spheres of culture in a way that seeks the peace and prosperity of the city in which God has placed us,*' (*Every Good Endeavour*, p242).

<sup>96</sup> 'Keller's books are filled with terms such as self-fulfilment, self-realisation, fulfilled life, human dignity, depersonalisation, balanced life, value, sense of self, relational, idols of the heart etc. None of these terms would be defined in the same way by any two people.' Dr ES Williams, *The New Calvinists*, review of *Every Good Endeavour*.

<sup>97</sup> He approvingly quotes Karl Marx as the '*first person to speak of alienated labour...*' (*Every Good Endeavour*, p105). '*Contemporary capitalism increasingly has the power to eliminate the intimacy and accountability of human relationships*' (*Every Good Endeavour*, p224).

certainly does not understand the Christian Gospel; he dishonours God and has a false view of his attributes; he dishonours Christ in making man more prominent; and he clearly cannot properly expound Scripture.

This is important. Although Keller uses Scriptural terms and quotes Biblical texts he uses these as a springboard for his own ideas that are not found in these texts; indeed they are often opposite to them. The deceptive method is called eisegesis (reading things into Scripture) and is a prime technique of all heretics. First, get people off the defensive by referring to Scripture, or appreciating a doctrine, then twist it round to suit your own purposes, then come to an entirely false conclusion. The best way to fool people is to put a small lie in a big portion of truth; but Keller manages to put big lies in a small portion of truth and gets away with it.

What is shocking is that so many noble Reformed leaders in America support and endorse this man. I believe that imbibing his message will do a Christian deep harm. He should be avoided at all costs.

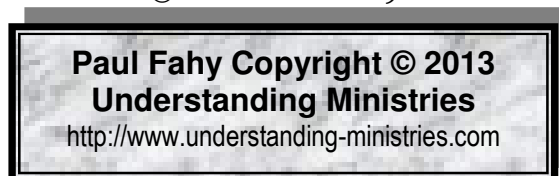
It seems to me that Keller's success is due to the fact that he can ably communicate with modern people and engage with them on a worldly basis but with an edge of seeming intellectualism. Unlike other popular false teachers who write in a popular common style, Keller will quote CS Lewis, Kierkegaard, obscure Catholics and Platinga – and this impresses intellectual careerist people; just the sort you find in New York.

This work is heavily indebted to Dr ES Williams, author of, *The New Calvinists*,<sup>98</sup> plus Dr. Paul M. Elliott, author of *Tim Keller's False Gospel: Changing Both the Method and the Message*, plus various other websites.

See also:

- Timothy Kauffman; 'Getting Sanctification Done: The Primacy of Narrative in Tim Keller's Exegetical Method', *The Trinity Review* May-June 2013. ([www.trinityfoundation.org](http://www.trinityfoundation.org))
- I.D. Campbell and W.M. Schweitzer (eds); *Engaging with Keller*, Evangelical Press & Services Ltd, (2013). A British Presbyterian critique of Keller, which is too irenic.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version  
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<sup>98</sup> <http://www.newcalvinist.com>