

More thoughts on Tim Keller

I reject complementarian theology—whatever the degree to which it is put into practice, and however nice the husband is about enacting his authority.

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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I feel like I've been talking about Tim Keller nonstop since I wrote my [first post](#). Many people were angered by it, because Keller is, by all accounts, a really nice man. Some people were upset that I would compare male headship and abuse. There were really thoughtful questions and discussions. And there was a good bit of nastiness.

(Note to complementarian men who want women to think you're really a good guy: Trolling women on the Internet and relentlessly attacking them is not a winning strategy to that effect.)

Overall, my inbox filled with women who cannot speak, but were thankful that I did. I mirrored their experience of being abused or working with women who had been abused by a man who believed in male headship.

I couldn't get to all the questions. The Internet is sprawling, and I was traveling and needing to spend some time with my daughter after many weeks away on a book tour. There were some thoughtful questions that I wanted to address here.

What did you think about Princeton Theological Seminary's decision?

Tim Keller was prized the Kuyper Award for Excellence in Reformed Theology. After a huge outcry from students, faculty, and alum, they rescinded the award and invited Keller to speak. This had to have been a really difficult decision for the seminary to

make, and I applaud it. It allowed for Keller to be able to present a lecture, while not awarding him for his views.

Are you happy now?

I was sent an email from Charles Hodge, asking me this question. I'm still laughing about that one... but of course I'm not happy. I can't imagine what the administration is going through, sorting all of this out. Most of all, this experience had to have been really painful for many LGBTQ and women students on campus.

I never asked for the award to be rescinded. I'm not a PTS alum, so it wouldn't make sense for me to do so. Instead, I

- 1) noted my sadness,
- 2) asked people to give money to other seminaries so our denomination wouldn't end up with only one seminary (PTS is in a solid financial position, while some other seminaries are struggling), and
- 3) asked that we look at how teaching the doctrine of male headship can lead to abuse.

Isn't your stance excluding people? Aren't you curtailing Freedom of Speech? Are you only inclusive when someone agrees with you?

When the prize was announced, I noted my sadness. Of course, Princeton can award anything to anyone they want. I have not taken away Keller's right to speak. He has a 5,000-member church and he's a bestselling author. When [Nicolas Kristof asked Tim Keller if he was a Christian](#), it got published in the *New York Times*.

I am, in comparison, a woman blogging in her pajamas, who recorded my emotional reaction in a post. Believe me, I have no power to silence Keller. He probably gets at least 10K for each keynote.

But Keller's position on women and LGBTQ people in the church would silence at least half of Princeton's student population. And that's the issue. I have not and cannot keep Keller from preaching. A PCA church can and does restrict women from preaching.

If MIT gave out a science prize to a man who consistently said that women could not be scientists, that our gender keeps us from discerning true science, [like Keller has said that women cannot discern true doctrine](#), then there would rightfully be an

uproar.

The student body and alumni had every right to protest the award. *That* is free speech.

Can't we learn from the PCA?

Yes. From what I understand, when the PCA plants a church, they support three pastors to start that new community—an evangelist, a teacher, and a musician. It's a huge investment. In comparison, the PC(USA) gives out a 7k grant for one year. As I have watched new church planters struggle, I wish that we could be more like the PCA in our efforts.

Do you really believe that complementarian theology is toxic? Why would you say that it leads to abuse? Where is the proof?

Yes. I am a feminist pastor. I reject complementarian theology—no matter what degree it is put into practice or how nice the husband is in enacting his authority. Many on the the Internet have described the degrees between 1) Mark Driscoll and 2) Tim Keller's theology of headship:

- 1) Get me a sandwich.
- 2) Get me a sandwich please.

I believe that women should have autonomy in their own homes. In my own experience, the theology was used to perpetuate abuse. [I have written about it](#) and I can point to countless other women with the same experience. There are studies that are exploring the link, taking place at this time.

Many men have read my story and then asked for “proof.” And that’s the difficult thing. My story *is* the proof. Yet, when you don’t believe a woman can discern truth, then you question the credibility of the sole witness. This sets up a climate where abuse can be perpetuated. This is the precisely what I’m speaking out against.

Keller’s beliefs on women align with most of Christianity. His views are orthodox. It’s ridiculous to think that a person would have to have the same theological beliefs to receive an award from an institution. Would you say the Pope should not get the award?

There is a historic process of discerning orthodoxy in the Presbyterian Church (USA). We followed that process and discerned that women could be elders, deacons, and pastors. In 1973, the PCA formed because they didn't agree with civil rights and women being ordained.

For the PC(USA) and its seminaries, having women ministers has been the orthodox position for decades, and the process for discerning orthodoxy has been around much longer.

So there's a lot of lingering family history.

Consider a parable: A woman is in her house and starts to speak. Her husband tells her that she is not allowed to speak. She keeps speaking, and so he leaves her. Then a brother invites the husband back for a big prize.

That's what it feels like. Maybe it wouldn't be so painful for many of the alums if it had been somebody else's house or if they hadn't been directly affected by the oppression. But it was their house and they were affected. Women and LGBTQ people face constant and sustained discrimination in our profession. Everyday sexism and homophobia doesn't even begin to describe it. We are particularly tough and resilient when it comes to our discrimination.

And, yes, I would say that the Pope should not get an award for Excellence in Reformed Theology. Since... you know... we had that Reformation.