

Princeton Theological Seminary Writes Its Own Epitaph

Although Princeton Theological Seminary departed from biblical Orthodoxy many decades ago, this once venerable institution has crossed a new, shameful line, thereby writing its own epitaph. It may still have brilliant scholars on its faculty and some truly Christian students in its midst, and it may continue to function for years to come. But by revoking its decision to honor Rev. Tim Keller with a special award, it has announced to the world that it worships at the altar of political correctness, showing more allegiance to the prevailing culture than to the timeless Word of God.

First, a short history of the school.

The seminary was founded in 1812 and was led by Dr. Archibald Alexander, who would hardly recognize the institution today, so far has it departed from its roots.

Through the rest of the 19th century and into the early 20th century, Princeton was graced with the presence of top biblical scholars and theologians such as Charles Hodge, J. A. Alexander, B.B. Warfield, J. Gresham Machen and Geerhardus Vos. But in 1929, when the seminary went in an anti-fundamentalist (anti-evangelical) direction, embracing “modernism” instead, Machen resigned, along with Oswald T. Allis, Robert Dick Wilson and Cornelius Van Til—all great luminaries in evangelical Christian scholarship—and together they founded Westminster Theological Seminary.

So, as stated, the seminary has not been a bastion of orthodoxy for nearly a century, but it has never before stooped this low in exalting the opinions of people over the truth of Scripture (or, to be charitable, over historic

Christian positions), and in the name of progressive Christianity, it has further announced its departure from the faith.

Rev. Timothy Keller, longtime leader of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, and one of the most respected and irenic pastors in America, was scheduled to speak at the seminary and receive the Kuyper Prize, named after Dutch Christian leader Abraham Kuyper (more on Kuyper at the end of the article).

However, the announcement that Keller would be receiving this award created an uproar at the school, prompting the school's president, Prof. Craig Barnes, to write a letter to the seminary community on March 10. He explained, "The focus of the concerns that have come to me is that Rev. Keller is a leader of the Presbyterian Church in America, which prevents women and LGBTQ+ persons from full participation in the ordained ministry to Word and Sacrament."

He continued, "Our seminary embraces full inclusion for ordained leadership of the church. We clearly stand in prophetic opposition to the PCA and many other Christian denominations that do not extend the full exercise of Spirit filled gifts for women or those of various sexual orientations. We know that many have been hurt by being excluded from ministry, and we have worked hard to be an affirming place of preparation for service to the church."

So, it is not just an issue of the PCA not ordaining women (where there have been different views among Christian conservatives, who can point to women serving in various leadership capacities in the Church from New Testament times until today); it is an issue of the PCA not ordaining practicing gays, lesbians and others (where there have been virtually no differences among Christian conservatives from New Testament times until today in light of the categorical teaching of Scripture and the unanimous verdict of Church

history until recent years). And note that the seminary stands in “prophetic opposition” to these positions, finding the battle to be a “critical issue of justice.”

Nonetheless, Barnes wrote, because it is a “a core conviction of our seminary to be a serious academic institution that will sometimes bring controversial speakers to campus because we refuse to exclude voices within the church,” he hoped that Keller would be welcomed in “a spirit of grace and academic freedom” when he received his award and gave a lecture to the school.

Twelve days later, on March 22, Barnes wrote again. The outcry was too great. Keller would not receive the award (although, remarkably, Keller agreed to deliver his lecture as planned; I question if he will be received in “a spirit of grace and academic freedom”).

Yes, Barnes explained, “In order to communicate that the invitation to speak at the upcoming conference does not imply an endorsement of the Presbyterian Church in America’s views about ordination, we have agreed not to award the Kuyper Prize this year.”

Ironically (really, that is too weak a description), Barnes stated that, “We are a community that does not silence voices in the church. [You might want to pause for a moment and read that again. He actually wrote they do “not silence voices in the church.”] In this spirit, we are a school that can welcome a church leader to address one of its centers about his subject, even if we strongly disagree with his theology on ordination to ministry. Reverend Keller will be lecturing on Lesslie Newbigin and the mission of the church—not on ordination”

Is this not outright professorial double-talk? We don’t silence other voices; no, we welcome leaders with other views. We just dishonor them by revoking a promised award, and we

effectively muzzle them by having them speak on a non-controversial subject.

No wonder Rod Dreher said that, “If I were Tim Keller, I would let the dying Mainline bury the dying Mainline, and not bother with them. Mainline Protestantism in most places has become a suicide cult.”

Dreher has not overstated his case.

In a further stroke of irony, Barnes closed his letter saying, “In the grace and love of Jesus Christ, we strive to be a community that can engage with generosity and respect those with whom we disagree about important issues.”

Generosity and respect indeed.

And who is this Abraham Kuyper after whom the award is named? He was a Dutch theologian, journalist and political leader, serving as Holland’s Prime Minister from 1901-1905. And Kuyper was a staunch opponent of theological liberalism who believed in the absolute lordship of Christ, famously writing, “Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”

That applies to Princeton Theological Seminary as well, and if this school does not fully reverse its course, repent, and go back to its foundations, it will become increasingly irrelevant and impotent—again, despite some of the brilliant scholars who teach there and despite the presence of some fine Christians who attend there.

And what would Kuyper say to each of us today?

I leave you with his resounding words. May we take them to heart and put them into practice: “When principles that run against your deepest convictions begin to win the day, then

battle is your calling, and peace has become sin; you must, at the price of dearest peace, lay your convictions bare before friend and enemy, with all the fire of your faith.”

The time is now. {eoa}