



# ORANGES TO HAND-GRENADES: COMPARING TGC TO ISIS DEMONSTRATES A FUNDAMENTAL MISUNDERSTANDING OF BOTH POSITIONS

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**T**hroughout my education, teachers employed analogies; they did so to help us understand difficult concepts by way of comparison. But they also required them of us to gauge our comprehension of subjects. The latter is relevant for this article because if someone does not understand a certain topic *well*, then their use of analogies will uncover their misinformation and bias.

For example, when evangelical theologians explain the Trinity, they advise against using analogies because they all break down at key theological points—usually demonstrating that the analogy in some way denies one of the key tenets of the doctrine. A similar example would be comparing oranges with hand-grenades. Although they can both fit into a person's hand, can both be thrown, one nourishes while the other kills. It is a poor analogy. A better comparison would be oranges to apples. Both are edible fruits. Unfortunately, poor analogies abound.

In a recent blog article, Tyler M. Tully posted the blog “Who Said It? The Gospel Coalition or ISIS on Gender Roles.”<sup>1</sup> Although Tully claims *not* to compare apples to oranges, I hope to demonstrate that his comparison reveals his lack of understanding of the complementarian position just as much as comparing oranges to hand-grenades. The purpose of this article, then, is to respond to his blog. Although a response might come in the form of a blog from another website, a fuller published essay is given here because Tully's argument is indicative of a larger problem of some people's understanding of complementarianism. I hope that this article facilitates clearer understanding of what complementarianism is, and what it is not, and an encouragement to clarify the conversation between both parties.

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1. Tyler M. Tully, “Who Said It? The Gospel Coalition or ISIS on Gender Roles,” *MennoNerds*, February 11, 2015, accessed October 29, 2015, <http://mennonerds.com/who-said-it-the-gospel-coalition-isis-and-gender-roles>.

## TULLY'S ARGUMENT

Tully introduces his blog by referring to the President Obama's speech at the National Prayer Breakfast where he identified violence in the history of Christianity (e.g., the Crusades, Inquisition, slavery, Jim Crow, etc.).<sup>2</sup> Obama's point was that violence is not unique to any religion. As a survey of American history easily demonstrates, presidents usually make for bad theologians. Obama presents an unfortunate, yet popular, misunderstanding of the history of Christianity because he claims that *Christians* did these things, *not* those professing to be Christians. That distinction matters because sinful humanity can misuse anything for sinful purposes. Marriage, vocation, the Bible, and the church are just a few examples.

Tully rightly recognizes this point when he writes in this same article: "I condemn 'Christian' military groups for not being Christian."<sup>3</sup> The reason why Tully introduces his article with this reference is because he believes that complementarianism is the *same* kind of violence that was seen in the Crusades.<sup>4</sup> This view is shocking in light of how complementarians themselves explain their own position. Tully, however, neglects to support this connection with any argumentation. Rather, he hyperlinks another one of his blog articles.<sup>5</sup> He fails to support his point there either. Merely stating and repeating a point does not argue or make the point true.

Tully explains his understanding of complementarianism as follows. He begins by citing the definitions of complementarianism from The Gospel Coalition including citations from Mary Kassian, Tim Keller, and John Piper. Tully correctly cites Kassian as writing:

Complementarians believe that males were designed to shine the spotlight on Christ's relationship to the church (and the LORD God's relationship to Christ) in a way that females cannot, and that females were designed to shine the spotlight on the church's relationship to Christ (and Christ's relationship to the LORD God) in a way that males cannot.<sup>6</sup>

Several points merit further explanation. First, Tully's choice of a *blog* article on The Gospel Coalition website—though an accurate representation—is surprising because complementarians have published many scholarly books and articles explaining and defending their position.<sup>7</sup> One would expect someone to go to the best resources possible for understanding a position rather than considering a blog primarily. To be clear, Kassian is one of complementarity's finest advocates. But Tully perhaps should have referenced a fuller presentation of the position to ensure he understands it properly. Although this point may sound nit-picky, it is not because this choice is indicative of a larger problem in

2. Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at National Prayer Breakfast," *The White House*, February 5, 2015, accessed May 2, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/05/remarks-president-national-prayer-breakfast>.

3. Tully, "Who Said It? The Gospel Coalition or ISIS on Gender Roles."

4. Ibid.

5. Tully, "The War on Women in Eden," *MennoNerds*, October 1, 2014, accessed October 29, 2015, <http://mennonerds.com/the-war-on-women-began-in-eden>.

6. Tyler M. Tully, "Who Said It? The Gospel Coalition or ISIS on Gender Roles," citing Mary Kassian, "Complementarianism for Dummies," *The Gospel Coalition*, September 4, 2012, accessed October 29, 2015, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/complementarianism-for-dummies>.

7. John Piper and Wayne A. Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991); Wayne A. Grudem, *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, Foundations for the Family Series (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002); Andreas J. Köstenberger, *God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014).

Tully's presentation of complementarianism.

Reflecting on what Tully chose *not* to cite also matters for understanding Kassian's presentation properly. She continues from where Tully ended his citation:

Who we are as male and female is ultimately not about us. It's about testifying to the story of Jesus. We do not get to dictate what manhood and womanhood are all about. Our Creator does. That's the basis of complementarianism. If you hear someone tell you that complementarity means you have to get married, have dozens of babies, be a stay-at-home housewife, clean toilets, completely forego a career, chuck your brain, tolerate abuse, watch *Leave It to Beaver* reruns, bury your gifts, deny your personality, and bobble-head nod "yes" to everything men say, don't believe her. That's a straw (wo)man misrepresentation. It's not complementarianism. I should know. I'm a complementarian. And I helped coin the term.<sup>8</sup>

The rest of Kassian's explanation matters because she explains the important basis of complementarianism: God, our Creator, gave us our genders and, as such, dictates what both manhood and womanhood are all about. Similarly, her explanation matters because she also clears up popular misconceptions about complementarianism. Interestingly, although complementarians have published an abundance of literature explaining their views, even directly addressing misconceptions,<sup>9</sup> many of these misconceptions surface in recent discussions of this issue. Tully's omission of this explanation, however, is troubling in light of his further explanation that reveals his misunderstanding of the position.

Describing R. Albert Mohler Jr.'s position on complementarianism, Tully writes:

For Gospel Coalition complementarians like Al Mohler, a "feminization of the church" has occurred because Christian men have failed to embrace their God-given gender roles leading to an increase of women pastors in the pulpit. It is the practice of equality that bothers him, not the theory that women are indeed equal. You see, for Mohler, women are equal to men in that both genders are in need of Salvation [*sic.*] from sin. But in practice, women can only demonstrate the Image of God in how they are submissive to God's pre-ordained male order.

Tully's misunderstanding of complementarianism surfaces again. First, Tully incorrectly explains Mohler's position. He explained the "feminization of the church" resulted from the liberal Protestants siding with "modern egalitarian feminism,"<sup>10</sup> not because men have failed to embrace their God-given gender roles. Although the latter may very well be true in some parts of the world, and a point that Mohler may even agree with, that point was not Mohler's point in that article.

Second, Tully critiques Mohler's explanation of equality by equivocating the definition of equality. Tully states that Mohler has a problem with the practice of equality when, in fact, Mohler wrote no such thing. He writes:

8. Kassian, "Complementarianism for Dummies."

9. Wayne A. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004).

10. R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Biblical Pattern of Male Leadership Limits Pastorate to Men," *AlbertMohler.com*, July 15, 2004, accessed October 29, 2015, <http://www.albertmohler.com/biblical-pattern-of-male-leadership-limits-pastorate-to-men>.

The Bible clearly reveals that both men and women are created in the image of God, stand *equal* in terms of human dignity, *equal* in sinfulness, and are *equally* in need of a Savior. Men and women alike can find redemption through the same gospel—the gospel of salvation through the atoning work of Jesus Christ, who died for our sins. This is the real meaning of Galatians 3:28, where the context is the common ground of our salvation.<sup>11</sup>

Mohler believes in equality. Tully’s critique of Mohler, however, assumes a different *definition* of equality. Mohler, like other complementarians, hold a different definition of equality than egalitarians do and, thus, a different view of how equality is practiced. Tully, however, does not consider this point when accusing Mohler of having a problem with the practice of equality. This point matters because equivocation is a logical fallacy in Tully’s explanation. This same fallacy surfaces in another more significant way in his comparisons between TGC and ISIS.

## COMPARING QUOTATIONS

Tully prefaces his comparisons as follows: “I do not wish to compare apples to oranges, but rather to show how eerily similar the rhetoric is between ISIS and TGC on gender roles.”<sup>12</sup> Tully also explains that “in no way do I think that The Gospel Coalition (or complementarians in general) are the same as ISIS.”<sup>13</sup> Tully, then, provides seven quotations for the reader to determine who wrote them; three come from the ISIS manifesto on women and four from complementarians—as Tully indicates in his blog post. Given their repetitive nature, I will refrain from commenting on all of them individually.

The first quote comes from the ISIS manifestation on women.<sup>14</sup> It reads: “The problem today is that women are not fulfilling their fundamental roles, the role that is consistent with their deepest nature, for an important reason, that women are not presented with a true picture of man and, because of the rise in the number of emasculated men who do not shoulder the responsibility allocated to them.”<sup>15</sup> The rest of the quotation continues: “towards their *ummah*, religion or people, and not even towards their houses or their sons, who are being supported by their wives.”<sup>16</sup> This manifesto claims that “woman was created to populate the Earth just as man was.”<sup>17</sup> They continue, and Tully’s sixth quote: “But, as God wanted it to be, she was made from Adam and for Adam. Beyond this, her creator ruled that there was no responsibility greater for her than that of being a wife to her husband.”<sup>18</sup>

The seventh quote comes from Owen Strachan. Tully cites only: “To be a women is to support, to nurture, and to strengthen men in order that they would flourish and fulfill their God-given role as leaders.”<sup>19</sup> Strachan continues to explain: “Men may well veer into sin from their own weakness. But

11. Ibid., emphasis added.

12. Tully, “Who Said It? The Gospel Coalition or ISIS on Gender Roles.”

13. Ibid.

14. Al-Khanssaa Brigade, *Women of the Islamic State*, trans., Charlie Winter (www.quilliamfoundation.org: The Quilliam Foundation, 2015).

15. Ibid., 17.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Owen Strachan, “The Genesis of Gender and Ecclesial Womanhood,” *9Marks*, July 1, 2010, accessed October 29, 2015, <http://9marks.org/article/genesis-gender-and-ecclesial-womanhood>.

they gain a considerable buttress when supported by godly women in the church. Women enable men to flourish and to lead others to do the same.”<sup>20</sup>

On the surface, Tully’s right; these quotes sound “eerily similar.” However, although these quotes sound similar, the fact that Tully cites them in a parallel fashion represents a clear misunderstanding of at least one of these positions for at least two reasons. First, Tully’s presentation of these citations is problematic because he does not distinguish between the theology proper of these citations. That is, when ISIS refers to “God,” they mean Allah, not the Triune God of the Bible. This difference matters significantly—to the point that the comparison loses any real theologically significant meaning. In fact, this kind of citation of these sources commits equivocation again because Tully uses the same word twice with different meanings. Yes, the original writers use the “God” in their English translation, but the Arabic from which their document was translated would have used Allah, an unmistakable reference. Tully would likely agree with this point, but the fact that he did not distinguish this point on his blog is problematic because the God of the Bible is the true God where as Allah is not.

Second, this kind of citation is problematic because it demonstrates a lack of understanding of why Strachan would write something like that. As Kassian wrote, the reason why complementarians make this kind of claim is because they believe that the Triune God of the Bible defines manhood, womanhood, and equality. If Tully wants to interact more seriously with complementarianism, then he should interact with this position at this level, not by making bad comparisons because something sounds similar. Homophones are words or phrases that sound similar; an example would be “euthanasia” versus “Youth in Asia.” The former is assisted suicide whereas the latter refers to a group of people in a specific location. Although they may sound “eerily similar,” they form no meaningful comparison because they refer to two entirely different things. Although these quotes sound similar, their meaning also forms no meaningful comparison.

## CONCLUSION: A PLEA FOR UNDERSTANDING

First, as a complementarian writing in response to at least one egalitarian, please, take the appropriate time to understand complementarianism, at the very least for avoiding bad comparisons. Jesus calls Christians to love their neighbors as themselves. If egalitarians want their complementarian neighbors to invest enough time to understand their egalitarian position well, then please do the same for us. Please stop making bad comparisons; surely egalitarians would not want complementarians to do the same to them. Mortimer J. Adler is famous for writing a book titled *How to Read a Book*; in this book, he writes: “Do not say you agree, disagree, or suspend judgment, until you can say ‘I understand.’”<sup>21</sup> The same point is true for theological positions—before someone explains how and why they disagree, they need to demonstrate understanding. Tully did not do this.

Second, when trying to understand complementarianism, please go to the best published books and articles, not merely quotes in blogs. Egalitarians would likely expect the same for complementarians who wish to understand their egalitarian position. Yes, there is certainly room for continued theological discussion for refining arguments, but if that is going to happen, let’s stop comparing oranges to hand-grenades.

20. Ibid.

21. Mortimer Jerome Adler and Charles Lincoln Van Doren, *How to Read a Book*, Rev. and updated ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 164.