

Psalm 54*Henry Francis Lyte (1793–1847)*

Save me by Thy glorious name;
 Lord, that name is love,
 Help from Thee I humbly claim,
 Send it from above;
 Hear, oh hear my suppliant voice!
 Hear, and bid my heart rejoice.

Foes to Christ and every good
 Fiercely throng on me;
 Soon my soul must be subdued,
 Without aid from Thee:
 But with Thee to make me strong,
 Lord, they shall not triumph long.

Lo, He comes, He takes my part,
 All my struggles cease.
 Rise in praise, my grateful heart,
 Bless the Prince of Peace;
 God Himself has set me free,
 God my worship ever be!

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***A Confession of Faith***Kevin T. Bauder*

One might think that creedalism was a thing of the past, but what's old is new again. I recently encountered a confession of faith posted as a sign in someone's lawn. If people take the trouble to post their beliefs on their lawn, then they must think that those beliefs are important—perhaps even fundamental. And indeed, the theses on that sign do represent a new kind of fundamentalism. The sign said:

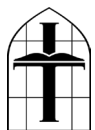
WE BELIEVE
 BLACK LIVES MATTER
 NO HUMAN IS ILLEGAL
 LOVE IS LOVE
 WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS
 SCIENCE IS REAL
 WATER IS LIFE
 INJUSTICE ANYWHERE IS A THREAT TO JUSTICE EVERYWHERE

Several observations are in order. First, this statement is a creed, a confession of faith. It is not a listing of empirical facts, but an assertion of what “we believe.” Its claims fall squarely within the orbit of prejudice.

Second, the creed offers no reasons for its prejudices. Of course, the function of creeds is to define dogmas, not to defend them. All creeds express opinions that the creeds themselves do not support. For a creed to be taken seriously, however, its adherents must provide supporting arguments and evidence. That task necessarily opens any creed to examination and criticism.

Third, the seven theses of this creed block debate by their blunt and dogmatic assertions. The document reads less like a creed and more like a manifesto. Understood functionally, it does not offer an invitation to examine evidence or to consider arguments, but it issues a call to action. For those who confess this creed, no question or hesitation will be welcomed.

Fourth, at the most facile level, every thesis in the creed is true. “Love is love” is simply tautologous. One can only deny that “women's rights are human rights” by denying that women are humans. The creed asserts that



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“science is real,” but who ever claimed that science was imaginary? And what sane person is going to proclaim that “Black lives *do not* matter?” Every thesis is true—but trivial as stated.

Fifth, and this is where things go all 1984, none of these propositions says what it means. Each provides cover for a *different* prejudice that is much more controversial and damaging. The pious who confess this creed are attempting to smuggle a sensibility into the public consciousness while sparing themselves the trouble of defending it. Each thesis is a slogan, and the confession as a whole is an attempt to sloganeer a social revolution. This tactic becomes apparent when we examine the theses individually.

Black Lives Matter. Of course they do, and the percentage of murder victims who are Black is truly alarming. For the year 2018, nearly 45 percent of all murder victims in the United States were Black, even though Blacks account for only 13.4 percent of the population. Only about 8 percent of these murders were committed by whites; almost 89 percent were committed by other Blacks. While a few highly publicized police shootings are cause for genuine concern, someone who *really* believed that Black lives mattered would be devoting most of their attention to finding out why Blacks are killing other Blacks at such an alarming rate. The truth is that something matters more to those people than Black lives.

No Human Is Illegal. I take comfort in knowing that it is never illegal to be human. Wherever people pass laws, however, other people break them. People do illegal things, and it is not wrong to note that what they are doing is illegal. People who break laws by committing murder are illegal murderers. People who break laws by stealing are illegal thieves. People who break laws against selling drugs are illegal drug dealers. People who break laws when they immigrate are illegal immigrants. The real question is whether a nation can rightfully establish lawful procedures for immigration—yet the slogan carefully avoids that question.

Love Is Love. Yes, but is every love equally deserving of respect and celebration? A love for Italian cooking is usually innocuous, but it is hardly on a par with those loves that lead mothers to sacrifice for their children or patriots to die for their countries. To say that love is love is not to establish that all loves are equal or even respectable. Might some loves be despicable, such as when love of money turns into grasping greed, or sexual desire is perverted into pedophilia? This slogan really wishes us to deny that some loves are also perversions—but they are.

Women’s Rights Are Human Rights. True enough—but the question is, which rights are those? The expression “women’s rights” has become code for “the right to abort an unborn baby.” To defend abortion-on-demand as anybody’s right is simply to beg the question of whether such a right exists.

For those who believe it does not, the attempt to smuggle abortion into this slogan is both absurd and obnoxious.

Science Is Real. Of course science is real, but what constitutes a science? Here is a hint: not every organized body of affirmations is science. The sciences employ a particular method: the observation and quantification of empirical phenomena, leading to the formulation of predictive hypotheses, the verification of which is subject to repeatable experimentation. Remarkably, current speculations about global warming and climate change do not fit that definition, but assertions about the humanity of unborn babies do.

Water Is Life. This is a metaphor: strictly speaking, water is water and life is life. Nevertheless, water is certainly *necessary* to life, which is what the slogan means. The smuggled message is that human access to potable water is being threatened. Perhaps that is true in places like the Sahara, the Gobi, and the Kalahari. Elsewhere, not so much. In fact, Western nations have made incredible progress over the past fifty years in cleaning up their water supplies. This slogan cannot be used ethically to imply that more Western governmental intrusion and regulation are necessary.

Injustice Anywhere Is a Threat to Justice Everywhere. The word *threat* is overly strong. If a petty thief in Delhi is permitted to escape, the rate of looting in Minneapolis is not likely to spike. Well, alright, it *is* likely to spike, but it would have done that anyway, whatever happens to the petty thief. The point is that there are greater and lesser injustices (as we try to teach our toddlers). Furthermore, some injustices cannot be corrected without perpetrating greater injustices. The real threat to justice everywhere is a niggling determination to pursue an unrealistic vision of justice in an imperfect world at any cost.

Humans cannot live without faith. The dogmas of this confession represent a new, secular, and in some circles, fundamentalist orthodoxy. Nevertheless, this new orthodoxy is grounded in a false vision, and when false visions are enforced by the coercive power of the state, they invariably become tyrannical. My response to this creed is, I believe what you say, but what you say is trivial. What you mean by what you say is not trivial, but it is false and profoundly dangerous.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
