



SPARKLE CREED????

“Let us confess our faith today in the words of the Sparkle Creed.” Thus “Pastor” Anna Helgen led the congregants of Edina Community Lutheran Church, an ELCA member in a Minneapolis suburb, which has been “LGBTQIA+ inclusive” since 1985.

While historic creeds distil the Christian faith to clarify truth and error, the “Sparkle Creed” is neither historic nor Christian. It is, however, clarifying.

The Sparkle Creed was drafted in June 2021 by Rachel Small-Stokes, a queer-identifying minister of the United Church of Christ (which, despite bearing Christ’s name, now has little to do with Him). Small-Stokes explained its backstory, “I was voice-to-texting ‘the Apostles’ Creed’ to a colleague, and it translated as ‘The Sparkle Creed.’ I decided that’s exactly what we need for Pride Month. So here’s my first jab at it. Feel free to share if it moves you.” Since then, it has evidently exploded in popularity among progressive congregations.

While many creeds were drafted and approved by church councils after considerable deliberation, a single woman, prompted by a voice-to-text error, drafted the Sparkle Creed for no other reason except she decided it would go well with Pride Month. What an honourable origin story!

But what does the Sparkle Creed confess? Get ready to tear your clothes:

“I believe in the non-binary God whose pronouns are plural.

“I believe in Jesus Christ, their child, who wore a fabulous tunic and had two dads and saw everyone as a sibling-child of God.

“I believe in the rainbow Spirit, who shatters our image of one white light and refracts it into a rainbow of gorgeous diversity.

“I believe in the church of everyday saints as numerous, creative, and resilient as patches on the AIDS quilt, whose feet are grounded in mud and whose eyes gaze at the stars in wonder.

“I believe in the calling to each of us that love is love is love, so beloved, let us love.

“I believe, glorious God. Help my unbelief.

“Amen.”

Compare this diabolical monstrosity to the Apostles’ Creed, which purportedly inspired it:

“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and

buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”

The Sparkle Creed avows “the non-binary God whose pronouns are plural” and “Jesus Christ, their child.” By contrast, the Apostles’ Creed calls God “the Father” and Jesus Christ “His only Son.” In deviating from the Apostles’ Creed formulation, the Sparkle Creed not only rebels against the authority of Scripture but even errs on the terms of gender ideology, which demands that we accept everyone’s self-identification and preferred pronouns. Throughout Scripture, God reveals Himself with masculine pronouns. Why won’t the Sparkle Creed acknowledge this?

The Sparkle Creed formulation also throws the Christian Trinity and Great Commission into utter confusion. Jesus said, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”* (Matthew 28:19). These heretics deny the Father and omit the Son. How can they evangelise, and who are they evangelising for?

The Sparkle Creed adds that Jesus Christ “wore a fabulous tunic and had two dads.” This is deliberately phrased to imply that Jesus was a cross-dresser raised by a gay couple, which could not be further from the truth. The Bible mentions Jesus’ tunic exactly once (John 19:23), where the point is not the unusualness of His dress (it was standard male attire) but the unusualness of His death (fulfilling David’s prophecy from Psalm 22:18). The Apostle’s Creed mentions Jesus’ miraculous conception and virgin birth; the Sparkle Creed implicitly denies them.

The Sparkle Creed claims that Jesus “saw everyone as a sibling-child of God.” At one point, Jesus said to the Jews, *“If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I came from God and I am here... You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him”* (John 8:42, 44). Jesus also foretold the final judgment (of which the Sparkle Creed makes no mention), in which He would *“separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats”* (Matthew 25:32).

Next, the Sparkle Creed gets downright weird. What is “our image of one white light,” and how does the iconoclastic, prism-like “rainbow Spirit” shatter it and refract it? What does it have in common with the Holy Spirit, who will *“convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment”* and *“guide you into all the truth”* (John 16:8, 13)? Why are saints compared to “patches on the AIDS quilt” with mud-bound feet and star-

gazing eyes? In a reversal of the Apostles' Creed, why is more focus placed on individual saints than on the infinitely more important God?

The Sparkle Creed proceeds to declare that "love is love is love, so beloved, let us love." Once again, the plain text of Scripture refutes this directly. *"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"* (1 John 2:15). The Bible condemns the love of evil (Psalm 52:3, Micah 3:2, John 3:19), idolatry (Isaiah 57:8, Jeremiah 2:25, 8:2, Hosea 9:15), sexual immorality (Proverbs 7:18), lies (Psalm 4:2, Zechariah 8:17, Revelation 22:15), cursing (Psalm 109:17), violence (Psalm 11:5), oppression (Hosea 12:7), bribes (Isaiah 1:23), glory from man (John 12:43), rejecting wisdom (Proverbs 1:22), money (Ecclesiastes 5:10, Luke 16:13, 1 Timothy 3:3, 6:10, 2 Timothy 3:2, Hebrews 13:5, 2 Peter 2:15), pleasure (Proverbs 21:17, Isaiah 47:8, 2 Timothy 3:4), sleep (Proverbs 20:13), and even one's own life (John 12:25, 2 Timothy 3:2, Revelation 12:11). Scripture does not teach that "love is love is love," but that we should be highly discriminating in what we love; we should love God foremost and absolutely and love other people made in His image.

The Sparkle Creed is just as noteworthy for what it omits. It does not mention God's almighty power or His role as Creator. It does not confess Jesus as "our Lord," nor does it mention things "of first importance" to the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:3), such as Jesus's death, resurrection, ascension, and reigning in glory. It omits any mention of "the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting." This is not orthodox Christianity, but a people who have lost their way.

Jesus Himself has affirmed the Bible's binary immutable definition of human sexuality. He says, *"Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female?"* (Matthew 19:4).

When Christian denominations reject the Word of God, you can end up anywhere. This is the extreme, but it is the logical conclusion of those who reject God as the Creator, making boys and girls, boys and girls, and creating us in His image. It is blasphemous and modern idolatry, where we create God in our own image rather than seeking a relationship with the One who created us in His image.

The Apostle Paul writes, *"Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions"* - and Paul goes on to describe homosexual

behaviour (Romans 1:22-27).

The only positive aspect of the Sparkle Creed is that it serves to clarify who belongs to God and who does not. Just after warning his readers not to love the world, the Apostle John warned them about the danger of antichrists. *"This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son,"* he wrote (1 John 2:22). Those who have set themselves up against (or "anti") Christ are knowable because they depart from *"the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints,"* as Jude (1:3) puts it. John says, *"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us."* If these heretics had continued to recite the words of the historic creeds falsely, it would have been more difficult to identify their error, but now that they have adopted their own creed that contradicts the historic confessions of Christianity, we can know them for who they really are.

WHAT OF THE 'CONSERVATIVES' IN THE LCA?

"Pastor, do you think there is a possibility that some pastors and members of LCA congregations will finally leave and perhaps seek us out when women are ordained into the ministry in that church?"

The above question, and others like it, are often asked of me. If I had the gift of looking into the future, I could give you a definite answer, but I can't. We can only pray that the Lord will ultimately guide His people in the truth. But I think if any seek us out, we must be careful. Why so?

I am a member of a closed email chat group of pastors and members of the LCA that was established many years ago. These members consider themselves to be the 'conservatives' from the LCA. Many issues have been discussed over the years, but lately, as expected, the most recent debate on this forum concerns WO (women's ordination) and the LCA's plan to have "one church, two practices."

Sadly, however, all this talking, for now, has led to nothing. Even though they know the LCA as a proper, confessional Lutheran Church is finished and will travel the path of women's ordination, these conservatives hesitate to act for various reasons. Still, perhaps the number one reason is that they are afraid of the thought of leaving and starting again. I have gently reminded them that faithfulness to God is far more important than faithfulness to any man-made synod. But alas, when I do speak up, there is deafening silence. Perhaps such people know in their hearts what is the right thing to do, but their family ties to the LCA are so strong that this stops them from acting.

Anyhow, I think the whole WO debate is simply a symptom of much deeper problems within that church that has arisen over the years and shows what happens when *"a little leaven leavens the whole lump"* (Gal. 5:9). Luther once

said, "In theology, a tiny error overthrows the whole teaching." Over the years, many doctrinal errors have been allowed to take root and grow, so much so that the whole lump has now been leavened.

Over the past couple of months, apart from the discussion on WO, I have witnessed debates on the forum over the length of a day in Creation, whether the Flood was a worldwide event or simply something local, and if having women lay readers is different to having women pastors. Despite the Word of God giving a clear answer to these questions (yes, they were 6 x 24hr days of creation [Gen. 1:1; Gen. 1:31; compare with Exodus 20:11, where the six days include heaven and earth], yes, it was a worldwide flood [Gen. 7:6, 2 Peter 2:5], and no, women cannot be lay readers [1 Tim. 2:11-12, 1 Cor. 14:34]); in all these debates, a consensus has not been reached, and they have been left as open questions! What this means, then, is that you *already* have clergy utilising the "one church, two practice" idea; it is just that it is happening in other areas of doctrine besides the WO debate. The Apostle Paul writes, "*So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind*" (Philippians 2:1-2). The pastors and members of the LCA are not of the same mind. Pastors, especially, need to be reminded of the words of Ephesians 4:11-14: "*He (Christ) gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers. ¹² His purpose was to prepare God's holy people, to do the work of ministry and to build up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all become one in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God, until we become mature, until we reach the full height of Christ. ¹⁴ His purpose was that we might not be babies any longer, tossed and driven by every doctrinal wind, by the trickery of people and by their clever and deceitful scheming to lead us astray." Paul appeals to the Office of the Ministry because the ministers' faithful teaching promotes the Church's unity in true doctrine (Titus 1:9; 2:1). It is high time that these leaders of that church went back to preaching and teaching the authority and inerrancy of the Word of God to their hearers, and the people "*examine the Scriptures daily*" (Acts 17:11) to see for themselves the truth of the Word of God. In so doing, not only will they find themselves being faithful to the Lord, but if any were to seek us out, they would be better equipped to give an answer to our question, "What is your confession?"*

ARE WE PROUD?

"Oh, you conservative Lutherans! You think you're so smart! You think you're right and everyone else is wrong!"

Have you heard that complaint? I have heard it a few times. Is the complaint valid? Is the accusation just? It had better not

be!

Luther heard that accusation. "Are you alone clever?" He denied that. He also pointed out that it would not be the first time that God had opened the mouth of an ass (Numbers 22).

The accusation arises because true Lutherans (orthodox, conservative, confessional Lutherans) say that this is true and that is false. We make assertions. Any assertion is also a negation. If anyone says anything is true, he automatically says the opposite is false.

We boldly confess the faith. Lutherans say in explaining each article of the Apostles' Creed: "This is most certainly true" (Luther's Small Catechism). Whatever disagrees is false. Whoever disagrees is either honestly mistaken or deliberately deceitful.

Is that pride? It had better not be! The cross of Christ is to be the Christian's only boast (Galatians 6:14). How can we tell whether it is pride on our part, intelligence, education, reasoning, or tradition?

How have we come to believe, teach, and confess as we do? On what basis do we make such firm assertions? Why do we boldly reject all that contradicts our confession of faith?

We are proud if we hold the faith because of our opinions, feelings, traditions, or arguments. Then we would have philosophy, not theology; man's word, not God's Word. If we thought we were better or more intelligent than others, we would be Pharisees. We would not only be boasting in ourselves but also trusting in ourselves. That would be pride and idolatry!

The Word of God alone must be the only basis for any and all public and private proclamations. Sola Scriptura, Scripture alone, must be the source and standard for all we believe, teach, and confess. There is no reason for anyone to believe what we say about sin, death, hell, and damnation or about the Saviour, life, heaven, and salvation. All that matters is what God says. God has spoken and written. The Bible is His Word, not ours.

If the Bible does not speak clearly on any matter, then we need not know it. We should not try to explain what God has not explained. But the Bible does speak clearly on many issues. We are faithful to the Lord only if we believe, teach, and confess what He tells and teaches (John 8:31-32). We cannot change God's Word any more than we can change God's mind.

The Bible is clear about Law and Gospel: the condemnation of sin and the forgiveness of sin; the damnation that we have deserved for ourselves by sinning and the salvation that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has deserved for us by living a perfect life and suffering and dying for our sins in our place. We must always be clear about Law and Gospel.

Are we proud? We are sinful. Pride is a constant danger for us. When we have been proud, we should confess that sin and believe that Christ died for that sin, too. Pride should be combatted and eliminated with God's help, by God's power, through God's Word. We should be especially concerned that our natural tendency to pride does not enter into theology, preaching, teaching, or any aspect of the ministry of the Word.

We should not want people to be convinced that what we say is correct. We should want people to be convinced that what God says is right. If Law and Gospel are our idea, then salvation is uncertain and impossible. But if Law and Gospel are God's Word - and they are - then faith and salvation are certain. It does not depend on man's wisdom but on God's power (1 Corinthians 2:5).

When we speak boldly and plainly as we should, we should also make it clear that we are preaching not our word but God's Word and want people to trust and believe not us but God. If people object, they are objecting to God's Word. If they reject, they are rejecting Christ. If they attack, they are attacking God (Luke 10:16).

HOW DO WE KNOW CHRISTIANITY IS THE ONLY TRUE RELIGION?

The book of Acts describes how the citizens of Athens built altars to many gods, including one "to the unknown God" (Acts 17:16-34). In response, the apostle Paul tells them about this unknown God - specifically, how God, the creator of heaven and earth, has reached out to save humanity in Jesus Christ.

One of the remarkable aspects of this story is how Paul describes the way the unknowable God became knowable in Jesus, particularly in His death and resurrection. We often call this act "God's self-revelation." God, who is far beyond human comprehension, chose to become known to humanity.

Here is where we encounter one of the central truth claims of Christianity: though all of humanity's religious efforts to grab hold of God fall short, God drew near to us and actually became one with us in Jesus Christ.

Someone once said, "The greatest truth is not something we hold onto, but that which holds onto us." What we encounter in Jesus Christ is this truth in action: God grabbing hold of us in love to save us - and the whole cosmos - from our sin and all of its consequences.

Jesus Christ, then, is the living, active truth (John 14:6) that embodies God's love. As such, Jesus is transforming our understanding of truth from a noun that describes an abstract, philosophical concept into a living verb that shows us what God looks like in action. And what we see in Jesus' truthing is the embodiment - the flesh and blood expression - of God's love.

Astoundingly, because humanity was created in God's image, when we look at Jesus, we are not only seeing who God is but also the fullest expression of what it means to be human. Jesus, as the singular in-the-flesh expression of God's love, reveals the truth about God and about us.

So then, is Christianity the only true religion? Inasmuch as Christianity calls us to recognise our dependence on God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ in order for us to know God, to follow in God's ways, and to be saved, then yes, Christianity is the one true religion.

However, this reality is not for us to boast about, take pride in, or lord over others, including people who follow other religions. As with every human community and institution, Christianity is full of people who bring their brokenness with

them everywhere they go. Yes, the Holy Spirit is in the process of transforming us. But, as we've seen so clearly over the past year alone, Christianity can be co-opted by political agendas, Christians can be enslaved to a love of money and power, and the church can be an incubator for all sorts of sinful behaviours that repeatedly harm others. To the extent that we abandon our call to love our neighbours as God in Jesus loves us, one could easily think that Christianity fails to be the true religion.

The truth of Christianity leads us not to a position of pride over other people or even other religions. Rather, we are called into a humble way of life that seeks to embody the love of Jesus through the Spirit so that the whole world may come to know God, the Creator of heaven and earth, in and through Jesus Christ. For the truth of Christianity is not that we have somehow found our way to God, but that God, in Jesus Christ, has come and found us.

FROM THE PASTOR

It is hard to believe we are over halfway through the year! In a couple of short months, we shall be celebrating the Reformation. I always think that Christmas is just around the corner once this occurs!

On the last Sunday in July, an AELC Mission Day service was held at Bethlehem Toowoomba. It was, as usual, a terrific day, and around \$1200.00 was received to go toward the printing costs of more *Statements of Faith* as well as other booklets/tracts to be used for mission. Some of you may have noticed that the kitchen in the hall at Bethlehem has received an upgrade of new benches, and the floor has been prepped to receive new lino. Thank you to all who helped with this.

Our Seminary student Patrick is continuing with his classes. At the moment, he meets with me two days a week (usually Wednesdays and Thursdays), where we are having classes on *Pastoral Theology* and *Law and Gospel*. Patrick is also learning *Biblical Greek* through an online course and *Christian Dogmatics* as a home class following a Walther Theological Seminary (WTS) syllabus. Patrick has also been coming along with me when I carry out visitations. I have also encouraged Patrick to visit the different congregations on a Sunday to get to know our members. God willing, he will begin online classes with Walther Theological Seminary in September, where he will start studying the *Book of Concord (Augsburg Confession and Apology)*, the *Gospels* (studying the Gospel of John) and the *Theology of Luther*. These classes will run for 10 weeks before moving on to other subjects. I have set up a conference room at the manse where Patrick can go online to watch the lectures from the USA. Due to time differences, WTS will record the classroom lectures they present, and then Patrick will have the opportunity to watch and if need be, a time will be organised when Patrick can talk online with his lecturers with any questions etc he may have. Thank you to those who have helped with what has been required to set up the conference room - your knowledge, advice, and expertise have been welcome!

God bless!

Pastor