

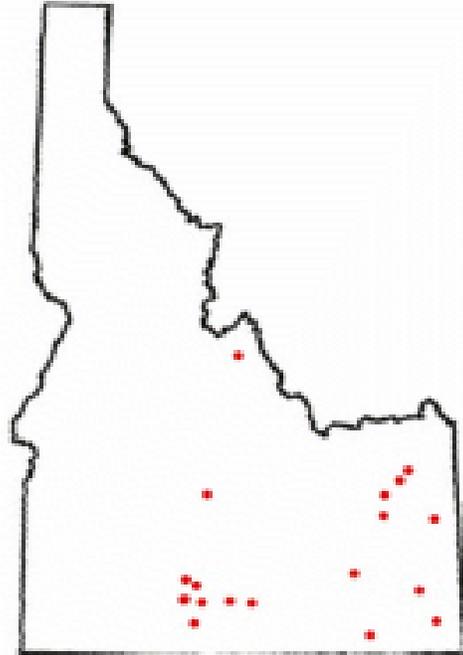
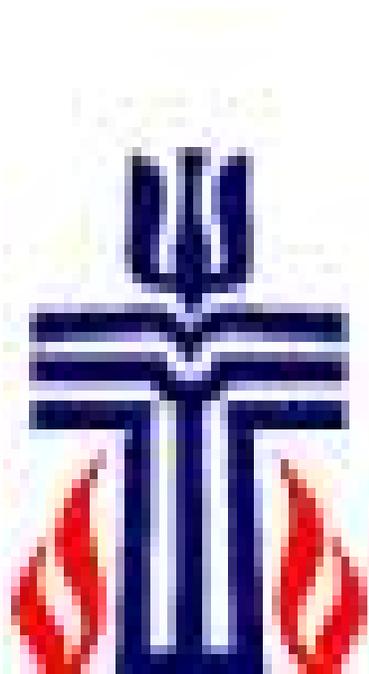
# ***THE KENDALL CONSTELLATION***

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*“A mighty fortress is our God,  
a bulwark never failing;  
Our helper He amid the flood  
of mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe  
doth seek to work us woe;  
his craft and power are great,  
and armed with cruel hate,  
on earth is not his equal.”*

*~Martin Luther*



Martin Luther, a monk of the Augustinian order, was summoned to appear before the imperial Diet at Worms on April 17, 1521. He was asked to repudiate the views contained in his recently published works on theology and Christian practice which criticized the status quo and the powers that be in the leadership of the Church.

He requested time to pray and consider before he gave his answer, which surprised many who had assumed he was a man of rash temperament. His request was granted, but the following day Luther, while admitting he had used some inappropriate language at times, said that he could not recant the substance of his writings unless shown by Scriptural proofs that his views were not in accord with God's Word. "*Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen,*" was his final reply.

While the theology of salvation was the presenting issue, the real confrontation was over the rights of individual conscience before

God. Over the next generation, the doctrine of *imputed* righteousness vs. *imparted* righteousness was vigorously debated as the Protestant Reformation, as it would become known, took hold.

Over that course of years, many began to see that the doctrinal and moral degradations that Luther complained of were systemic problems requiring a systemic reform. Among the leading voices of this movement was John Calvin, a French reformer who became the founder of the Reformed faith, or Calvinism, ultimately to become known as Presbyterianism.

The primary concern in this systemic reform was to transfer the rule of the Church from the hands of men to the Holy Spirit by giving voice and vote to the hearts and minds of God's people, men at first, but inevitably under the sway of that selfsame Spirit, to the hearts and minds of women as well. Because this was recognized as an ongoing challenge - that human beings will always crave power and control, the Reformed Church committed itself to continual efforts to relinquish the type of power that people seem to love to exercise, even in the Church, with its motto, "*The Church Reformed, always Reforming.*"

This does not mean that the Church will always be changing and losing hold of its founding ideals (as some today disparagingly claim), but that the effort to implement these principles of systemic reform must be extended with great effort by *every* successive generation or else the hunger for power and control (a trait we inherited with original sin) will certainly corrupt and overwhelm.

Early on it was recognized that there would be a cost to pay for

keeping this vision alive. It would mean that dissent and challenge to the status quo would need to be allowed and that in any particular generation there would be some unresolved controversy as people would be allowed to express their divergent opinions and, in some cases, be allowed to act on that basis as well. How else could the Holy Spirit be given room to breathe through the aisles of the Church?

And so, Presbyterianism with its perennial controversies was born. That *democratic process*, as it came to be known, was adopted as well in the secular governments of Geneva and in England and, ultimately, in that new nation born in the New World which we know and love as the land of our birth, with all its cherished liberties and attendant controversies - for they always go together.

Freedom of conscience ... for individuals, for Sessions, for congregations - all seeking to know and follow the mind of the Holy Spirit, and asking of one another across the broad spectrum of our fellowship, for the room to breathe, room to express themselves and room to practice the faith as they hear the Spirit directing them. They are asking for room to try things, to make mistakes and learn from them if need be, and to give some room to others in return.

It is true that Presbyterians disagree on some things, but in the grand scheme of things those disagreements, while emotionally vexing, are not central to our common profession of faith. They do not offend against the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, or the vast majority of our confessional lexicon.

It still pulls at us though, this insatiable desire to rule and control. Many consider the controversies to be almost more than they can stand, but the controversies prove that freedom of conscience and freedom of expression are alive and well in the Church. That means there is still breathing room in the Church till this very day. Among the many things we all take for granted is air to breathe. We all take it for granted, all except those of us who have ever felt suffocated - physically or emotionally.

The best and only hope for the Church's purity is the rule of the Church by the Holy Spirit. The greatest threat to the Church's purity is not the latest fad or radical idea taking hold here or there. No, the greatest threat to the purity of the Church is the universal human desire for power and control that goes about quenching the Spirit. It requires maturity and perspective to function in such an environment, but that is the cost of freedom and something that we are called upon to give. Those unable to accept this cost of freedom do not deserve it and will ultimately suffer its loss.

Let us cherish our liberty as individual Presbyterians, as Sessions, as local congregations. Let us live, and let live ...

In Christ our Lord,

*Ron Lavoie*

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