

# Freed & RENEWED in Christ 500 YEARS OF GOD'S GRACE IN ACTION

## Reformation ABCs

### D is for Diet of Worms

The 1521 Diet of Worms was a formal assembly of the principal leaders of the Holy Roman Empire held in the city of Worms. In response to the controversy arising from Martin Luther's 95 Theses and his subsequent publications, Pope Leo X had already excommunicated Luther. But, at the insistence of the German Estates, Emperor Charles V summoned Luther to appear before the Diet to answer for himself. The stakes were especially high for Luther: a century before, Jan Hus, an earlier church reformer, was tried and executed for his heretical ideas. Luther was shown a collection of his writings and asked to renounce their heresies. He replied, "I am bound by the scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience." (Accounts from his supporters included the famous words he probably did not say at Worms: "Here I stand, I can do no other.") The Diet then issued the Edict of Worms, decreeing Luther a heretic and announcing an imperial ban, rendering Luther an outlaw. Luther's protector, Prince Frederick III, Elector of Saxony, spirited Luther away and hid him in Wartburg Castle, where he remained for 10 months, until popular opinion turned in his favor.

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### E is for Elizabeth I

Elizabeth I, the third Protestant monarch of England, was also the third female monarch ever, and in a row, when many doubted a woman could rule effectively. Before her, Jane Grey was queen for nine days, and ultimately executed. Staunchly Catholic Mary I then led the country into yet more religious strife, and an unpopular Spanish alliance. Mary's reign ended in 1558, with her premature death from cancer.

Thirty years had passed since the Ninety-five Theses. England had been officially Catholic, then Catholic without pope and monasteries, then solidly Reformed, then Catholic again. Large regions were still Catholic in 1558, while the Protestant cause born in the universities and triumphant under Edward VI persisted in the south and east. When Elizabeth became queen, refugees who'd fled from persecution to the Protestant bastions of Frankfurt, Zurich and Geneva returned to bolster a strong Calvinist surge.

Raised Protestant, yet sharing her father's Catholic worship sympathies, Elizabeth outwardly conformed during her older sister's five-year reign to papal Catholicism. She had to steer a course between it- which would deny she was legitimate- and Calvinism, which would abolish the bishops she considered essential for stability. The "Elizabethan Settlement," known as the "Middle Way", plotted that course over her 44-year reign, laying the foundations of a third (after Lutheran and Reformed) state-church expression that would come to be called Anglican.

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## F is for Frederick the Wise

Frederick the Wise, Prince Frederick III of Saxony, had several claims to fame. He was one of seven hereditary electors whose privileged role was to select the Holy Roman Emperor. This title gave him considerable political influence with popes and emperors. Frederick also owned one of the largest collections of holy relics in 16th century Germany. These were items purported to have religious significance, such as fragments of saints' bones and other memorabilia of more questionable provenance. An inventory from 1520 listed nearly 19,000 items in his collection. Relics and indulgences were part of medieval piety allowing the faithful to hasten their progress, and that of their deceased loved ones, toward paradise. On particular holy days, a pilgrim viewing Frederick's complete collection of relics at the Wittenberg Castle Church could shorten a stay in Purgatory by 1.9 million days! Despite his financial stake in the relics market, Frederick is perhaps best known as Martin Luther's steadfast protector, safeguarding Luther from arrest and detention by the political and ecclesial forces allied against him. Frederick remained within the Catholic fold, but his dedication to Luther's safety through the early years of the Protestant Reformation may have reflected his interest in promoting the prestige of his capital city, Wittenberg, by protecting its university's most well-known professor.

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*Reformation ABCs is a project of the Delmarva North Conference of the Delaware-Maryland Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We invite you to use, reprint, and circulate these weekly posts as we observe Reformation 500!*