

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

## Reformation ABCs

### H is for Holy Communion

In early writings Luther addressed practices that had emerged over the centuries and distorted the meaning of the sacrament. Laypeople were denied wine and were encouraged to view the bread rather than eat it, often traveling from parish to parish to watch the Eucharistic celebration as a good work. Priests celebrated private masses for those wishing to reduce their or a deceased loved one's time in purgatory. Luther encouraged that Holy Communion be shared in community so that real fellowship emerged and believers carried one another's burdens; and he restored older traditions of giving laypeople both bread and wine.

Luther affirmed that the Lord's Supper is neither a sacrifice performed by the priest nor a human work of communicants. The Holy Spirit works through the sacrament whether communicants are standing or kneeling, whether we use wafers or real bread, whether the priest is holy or not. What matters is that those who receive communion believe Christ is truly present and that their sins are forgiven as a gift from God. Luther taught that Holy Communion roots out selfishness and sows love for the common good, and this love is manifested in sharing "one bread, one drink, one body, and one community" that unifies us into a Christian fellowship. [The rest is adiaphora. See the letter A.]

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### H is for Huguenot

A derisive name for French Calvinists but later embraced by them- especially those who left France.

Humanist Paris was a strong center of early calls for church reform. Among many they influenced were William Farel, whose 1512 writings on St. Paul upheld "justification by faith alone," and John Calvin, whose Institutes in 1536 became foundational for Reformed Protestantism.

By 1560 "les réformées" represented 10% of the population, 2,000 congregations, 60 fortified cities, nearly half of the nobility, and significant proportions of military officers, merchants and manufacturers. Such power and numbers made them a target, either for alliances, or for repression. Drawn into shifting dynastic struggles, they militarized.

Civil wars between Catholic league and Huguenot controlled provinces dominated the latter half of the 1500's. The most infamous event, the "St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre" (1572) began with the slaughter of dozens of Reformed leaders who'd attended the inter-religious wedding of the king's sister Margaret of Valois to a Protestant- King Henry of Navarre. That provocation, and the example of the first murders

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exploded into weeks of mob violence against Huguenots, spreading from Paris across the country. The death toll, estimated to have been twenty to thirty thousand, stunned the known world.

Catholic moderates who advocated religious accommodation would be pushed aside. After nearly a century of limited freedoms, rights for Huguenots were abolished in 1685. Up to three-quarters would submit to Roman Catholicism, but more than 200,000 would flee to Protestant European states, or across the oceans.

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## I is for Indulgences

Indulgences were—and occasionally still are—granted by the Catholic Church to penitent sinners, in return for certain pious actions, to mitigate the penance prescribed for sins to which they had confessed. Early indulgences were granted for those who agreed to join the Crusades, who gave to charitable causes, or who made donations to build new churches. Eventually, papal rulings allowed the faithful to purchase indulgences for the benefit of others, particularly for those who were already deceased, buying down days spent in Purgatory, according to medieval Church teaching. This third-party brokering cancelled any supposed link between the indulgence and the penance of a contrite sinner and gave the Church financial leverage over parishioners concerned for their salvation. The practice of indulgences increased between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, at which point abuses in the sale of indulgences to common people aroused Luther's ire, prompted his posting of 95 theses disputing the propriety of the whole practice, and, in turn, touched off the Protestant Reformation. Luther's early writings against indulgences were the first steps in the development of his emerging theology of salvation.

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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!*