

Footstep #46 *The Augsburg Confession*

Two additional teachings the Lutherans presented before the Diet were on the sacrament of the Confession of Sins and the Absolution of the priest. Martin Luther taught that people come to faith through the action of the Holy Spirit leading them to repentance. This is an action and gift of God but the repentance of sin is left to the decision (and free will) of the individual to accept this gift from God. For Luther, God's forgiveness is freely given rather than people having to demonstrate good works to satisfy a judgmental God. This is similar to a Declaration of Christian Independence!

Article XI. Confession

“It is taught among us that private absolution should be retained and not allowed to fall into disuse. However, in confession it is not necessary to enumerate all trespasses and sins, for this is impossible. (Psalm 19:12, “who can discern his errors?”)

Article XII. Repentance

“It is taught among us that those who sin after Baptism receive forgiveness of sine whenever they come to repentance, and absolution should not be denied them by the church. Properly speaking, true repentance is nothing else than to have contrition and sorrow, or terror, on account of sin, and yet at the same time to believe the Gospel and absolution (namely, that sin has been forgiven and grace has been obtained through Christ, and this faith will comfort the heart and again set it at rest.”

Another critical teaching of Luther is that sin is the separation of man from God and that although everyone is a sinner at the same time everyone with true faith is forgiven and a saint. This is what Luther means in his expression that people with faith are the “priesthood of all believers” and the “community of saints.” It simply means that people who confess and repent of their sin(s) to God, a called servant of God (pastor or priest), or another person who has faith in God, is saved. Every Lutheran worship service includes a public confession of sins (silently to God) and absolution or forgiveness. People in worship then extend a greeting of God's peace with each other as a sign of God's love and their faith. Through forgiveness, everyone is a “saint” in God's eyes, even though people continue to separate themselves from God.