

FC Epitome X. OF CHURCH RITES Which are [Commonly] Called Adiaphora or Matters of Indifference.

1] Concerning **ceremonies or church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden** in God's Word, but have been introduced into the Church for the sake of good order and propriety, a dissension has also occurred among the theologians of the Augsburg Confession.

STATUS CONTROVERSIAE. Chief Controversy concerning This Article.

2] The chief question, however, has been, **whether, in time of persecution and in case of confession**, even if the enemies of the Gospel have not reached an agreement with us in doctrine, some abrogated ceremonies, which in themselves are matters of indifference and are neither commanded nor forbidden by God, may nevertheless, upon the pressure and demand of the adversaries, be reestablished without violence to conscience, and we may thus [rightly] have conformity with them in such ceremonies and adiaphora. To this the one side has said Yea, the other, Nay.

AFFIRMATIVA. The Correct and True Doctrine and Confession concerning This Article.

3] 1. For settling also this controversy we unanimously believe, teach, and confess that the **ceremonies or church rites** which are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word, but have been instituted alone for the sake of propriety and good order, **are in and of themselves no divine worship, nor even a part of it.** Matt. 15, 9: *In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

Ceremonies and Rites

-adiaphora -may differ -weak in faith

4] 2. We believe, teach, and confess that **the congregation of God of every place and every time has the power, according to its circumstances, to change such ceremonies** in such manner as may be most useful and edifying to the congregation of God.

5] 3. Nevertheless, that herein **all frivolity and offense should be avoided, and special care should be taken to exercise forbearance towards the weak in faith.** 1 Cor. 8, 9; Rom. 14, 13.

6] 4. We believe, teach, and confess that **in time of persecution, when a plain [and steadfast] confession is required of us, we should not yield to the enemies in regard to such adiaphora**, as the apostle has written Gal. 5, 1: *Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage.* Also 2 Cor. 6, 14: *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, etc. For what concord hath light with darkness?* Also Gal. 2, 5: *To whom we gave place, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel might remain with you.* **For in such a case it is no longer a question concerning adiaphora, but**

A. concerning the truth of the Gospel,

B. concerning [preserving] Christian liberty, and

C. concerning sanctioning open idolatry, as also

D. concerning the prevention of offense to the weak in the faith [how care should be taken lest idolatry be openly sanctioned and the weak in faith be offended];

in which we have nothing to concede, but should plainly confess and suffer on that account what God sends, and what He allows the enemies of His Word to inflict upon us.

7] 5. We believe, teach, and confess also that **no Church should condemn another because one has less or more external ceremonies not commanded by God** than the other, if otherwise there is agreement among them in doctrine and all its articles, as also in the right use of the holy

Sacraments, according to the well-known saying: *Dissonantia ieiunii non dissolvit consonantiam fidei*, **Disagreement in fasting does not destroy agreement in faith.**

NEGATIVA. False Doctrine concerning This Article.

8] Accordingly, we reject and condemn as wrong and contrary to God's Word when it is taught:

9] 1. That **human ordinances and institutions** in the church should be regarded as **in themselves a divine worship or part of it.**

10] 2. When such ceremonies, ordinances, and institutions **are violently forced upon the congregation of God as necessary, contrary to its Christian liberty** which it has in external things.

11] 3. Also, that in time of persecution and public confession [when a clear confession is required] **we may yield to the enemies of the Gospel in such adiaphora and ceremonies, or may come to an agreement with them (which causes injury to the truth).**

12] 4. Also, when these external ceremonies and adiaphora are abrogated in such a manner **as though it were not free to the congregation of God to employ one or more [this or that] in Christian liberty**, according to its circumstances, as may be most useful at any time to the Church [for edification].

Solid Declaration, X.

5] Namely, when **under the title and pretext of external adiaphora** such things are proposed as **are in principle contrary to God's Word** (although painted another color), these are not to be regarded as adiaphora, in which one is free to act as he will, but must be avoided as things prohibited by God.

In like manner, too, such ceremonies should not be reckoned among the genuine free adiaphora, or matters of indifference, **as make a show or feign the appearance, as though our religion and that of the Papists were not far apart**, thus to avoid persecution, or as though the latter were not at least highly offensive to us; or when such ceremonies are designed for the purpose, and required and received in this sense, **as though by and through them both contrary religions were reconciled and became one body**; or when a reentering into the Papacy and a departure from the pure doctrine of the Gospel and true religion should occur or gradually follow therefrom [when there is danger lest we seem to have reentered the Papacy, and to have departed, or to be on the point of departing gradually, from the pure doctrine of the Gospel].

6] For in this case what Paul writes, 2 Cor. 6, 14, 17, shall and must obtain: *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what communion hath light with darkness? Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord.*

7] Likewise, when there are **useless, foolish displays**, that are profitable neither for good order nor Christian discipline, nor evangelical propriety in the Church, these also are not genuine adiaphora, or matters of indifference.

8] But as regards genuine adiaphora, or matters of indifference (as explained before), we believe, teach, and confess **that such ceremonies, in and of themselves, are no worship of God, nor any part of it**, but must be properly distinguished from such as are, as it is written: *In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*, Matt. 15, 9.

9] Therefore we believe, teach, and confess that the congregation of God of every place and every time has, according to its circumstances, **the good right, power, and authority [in matters truly adiaphora] to change, to diminish, and to increase them**, without thoughtlessness and offense, in an orderly and becoming way, as at any time it may be regarded most profitable, most beneficial, and best for [preserving] good order, [maintaining] Christian discipline [and for εὐταξία worthy of the profession of the Gospel], and the edification of the Church. Moreover, how we can yield and give way with a good conscience to the weak in faith in such external adiaphora, Paul teaches Rom. 14, and proves it by his example, Acts 16, 3; 21, 26; 1 Cor. 9, 19.

...14] For here it is no longer a question concerning external matters of indifference, which in their nature and essence are and remain of themselves free, and accordingly can admit of no command or prohibition that they be employed or omitted; but **it is a question, in the first place, concerning the eminent article of our Christian faith**, as the apostle testifies, *that the truth of the Gospel might continue*, which is obscured and perverted by such compulsion or command, because such adiaphora are then either publicly required for the sanction of false doctrine, superstition, and idolatry, and for the suppression of pure doctrine and Christian liberty, or at least are abused for this purpose by the adversaries, and are thus viewed [and are believed to be restored for this abuse and wicked end].

...26] 1. Therefore we reject and condemn as wrong **when the ordinances of men in themselves are regarded as a service or part of the service of God.**

27] 2. We reject and condemn also as wrong when **these ordinances are by coercion forced upon the congregation of God** as necessary.

28] 3. We reject and condemn also as wrong the opinion of those who hold (what tends to the detriment of the truth) that at a time of persecution we may comply with the enemies of the holy Gospel in [restoring] such adiaphora, or come to an agreement with them.

29] 4. We likewise regard it as a sin that deserves to be rebuked when in time of persecution anything is done either in indifferent matters or in doctrine, and in what otherwise pertains to religion, for the sake of the enemies of the Gospel, in word and act, contrary and opposed to the Christian confession.

30] 5. We reject and condemn also [the madness] when these adiaphora are abrogated in such a manner as though it were not free to the congregation [church] of God at any time and place to employ one or more in Christian liberty, according to its circumstances, as may be most useful to the Church.

31] Thus [According to this doctrine] the churches will not condemn one another because of dissimilarity of ceremonies when, in Christian liberty, one has less or more of them, **provided they are otherwise agreed with one another in the doctrine and all its articles, also in the right use of the holy Sacraments**, according to the well-known saying: *Dissonantia ieiunii non dissolvit consonantiam fidei*; “Disagreement in fasting does not destroy agreement in the faith.”

Ap, IV, 49 “It is easy to determine the difference between this faith and the righteousness of the law. **Faith is that worship which receives God’s offered blessing**; the righteousness of the law is that worship which offers God our own merits. **It is by faith that God wants to be worshiped, namely, that we receive from him what he promises and offers.**

Faith Receives the Gifts

Ap, VII and VIII, 5, “The church is not merely an association of outward ties and rites like other civic governments, however, but it is mainly **an association of faith** and of the Holy Spirit in men’s hearts. To make it recognizable, this association has **outward marks, the pure teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments in harmony with the Gospel of Christ....**

Doctrine: Word and Sacrament

Apology, XXIV, 1, “And **the usual public ceremonies** are observed, the series of lessons, of prayers, vestments, and other like things”

Ceremonies and Rites

Augsburg Confession, XXIV, 1-4, 9, “Falsely are our churches accused of abolishing the Mass *{that is, Service of Holy Communion}*; **for the Mass *{Service of Holy Communion}* is retained among us, and celebrated with the highest reverence. Nearly all the usual ceremonies are also preserved**, save that the parts sung in Latin are interspersed here and there with German hymns, which have been added to teach the people. **For ceremonies are needed to this end alone that the unlearned be taught [what they need to know of Christ]....** It does not, therefore, appear that the Mass *{Service of Holy Communion}* is more devoutly celebrated among our adversaries than among us.”

Apology, XV, 20-21. 38-39 “But they *{the holy Fathers}* observed **human rites** for the sake of bodily advantage, that the people might know at what time they should assemble; that, for the sake of example all things in the churches might be done in order and becomingly; lastly, that the common people might receive a sort of training. For the distinctions of times and the variety of rites are of service in admonishing the common people. The Fathers had these reasons for maintaining the rites, and for these reasons we also judge it to be right that traditions [good customs] be maintained. ... **But we cheerfully maintain the old traditions** [as, the three high festivals, the observance of Sunday, and the like] made in the Church for the sake of usefulness and tranquillity; and we interpret them in a more moderate way, to the exclusion of the opinion which holds that they justify. And our enemies falsely accuse us of abolishing good ordinances and church-discipline. **For we can truly declare that the public form of the churches is more becoming with us than with the adversaries (that the true worship of God is observed in our churches in a more Christian, honorable way).** And if any one will consider it aright, we conform to the canons more truly than do the adversaries.,

Augsburg Confession, Article XXVI, 40-42 “Nevertheless, **very many traditions are kept on our part, which conduce to good order in the Church, as the Order of Lessons in the Mass *{Service of Holy Communion}* and the chief holy-days.** But, at the same time, men are warned that such observances do not justify before God, and that in such things it should not be made sin if they be omitted without offense. Such **liberty** in human rites was not unknown to the Fathers.”

Christian Liberty

Augsburg Confession, Conclusion, 5 “Only those things have been recounted whereof we thought that it was necessary to speak, in order that it might be understood that **in doctrine and ceremonies** nothing has been received on our part against Scripture or the Church Catholic. For it is manifest that we have taken most diligent care that no new and ungodly doctrine should creep into our churches.”