

# Exercising Authority – Women and the Church

Rev. Dr. David S. Hasselbrook

Calov Conference

September 16-17, 2024

## Part II – Adiaphora and Method of Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions

As has been seen from the CTCR documents, the determination of the roles of women in the church hinges on the understanding of the nature of adiaphora and on the method of interpretation of the Scriptures. Therefore, we now turn to the Lutheran Confessions for guidance on these topics. For it is futile to seek to understand the role of women in the church without clarity in these matters.

### Adiaphora

Article X of the “Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration” (FC SD) deals with church rites that pertain to the category of adiaphora or indifferent things. Such indifferent things are described as ceremonies and church practices “which are neither commanded nor forbidden in God’s Word, but are introduced into the Church with a good intention, for the sake of good order and propriety, or otherwise to maintain Christian discipline” (FC SD X, 1).<sup>1</sup> No Scripture passages are given in support of this definition. It is presented as self evident that what God’s commands or forbids is not a neutral matter. That which God commands should be followed. That which God forbids should be avoided. It is also implied that ceremonies which may not be forbidden by God’s Word in and of themselves, are nevertheless forbidden by God if they are not introduced with good intention or if they do not foster good order, propriety, and the maintenance of Christian discipline. After indicating that the article was taken up after having been occasioned by a dispute over the nature of adiaphora during times of persecution, the category of adiaphora is further qualified or elaborated on as follows:

---

<sup>1</sup> Here and in what follows, quotations of the Lutheran Confessions are from the author’s translation of *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998). Unless otherwise noted, translations are from the German for “Formula of Concord: Solid Declaration” (FC SD), “Formula of Concord: Epitome” (FC Ep), “Augsburg Confession” (AC), “Smalcald Articles” (SA), and “Large Catechism” (LC), and from the Latin for “Apology of the Augsburg Confession” (Ap) and “Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope” (Tr).

1. Those things that are presented under the title and pretext of external adiaphora, but which “in principle”<sup>2</sup> are contrary to God’s word, although painted another color, are not true adiaphora and must be avoided as things prohibited by God (FC SD X, 5).

Again, no Scripture verses are given to support this, rather it is presented as self-evident. That which is contrary to God’s word is forbidden by God. This section refers to types of ceremonies that, while perhaps not commanded or forbidden by God by name or title, are forbidden by the general theology or principles of the Scripture.

2. Also, not fitting the category of indifferent things are those ceremonies which give off the impression or, in order to avoid persecution, are intended to give off the impression that “our religion” is not much different than the religion of the Papists or that the same is not highly contrary; those ceremonies that have the purpose and are required and received in such a manner that by and through them both opposing religions have been reconciled and have become one body; or those ceremonies which allow for a departure from the pure doctrine of the Gospel to the Papacy to occur or gradually follow. To these situations the Confessions apply the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:14, 17 as: “Do not put on a foreign/strange yoke. What has the light for participation/association with darkness? Therefore, go out from them and separate yourselves”<sup>3</sup> (FC SD X, 5-6).

This section deals not only with intent but also with result, that is, whether the ceremonies are intended to suggest a communion between light and darkness or, whether intended to do so or not, result in establishing a communion between light and darkness.

3. Likewise, “pointless, foolish/carnival-like spectacles,” which “are useful neither for good order, nor Christian discipline, nor evangelical propriety [i.e., the promotion of the gospel],” are not proper adiaphora or indifferent things (FC SD X, 7).

No Scripture passages are given to support this, although we do find specific support for the need for good order and propriety in the Christian assembly in 1 Corinthians 14:40, where the command is given: “But let all things be done with propriety and according to good order.” The idea that church practices should promote Christian discipline seems to be based on the general theology or principles of the Scripture which call for restraining the sinful flesh (e.g., Rom 13:14; 1 Cor 5:5; Gal 5:13,16; 2 Pet 2:18; 1 John 2:15–16; 1 Cor 9:27). Ceremonies which are neither commanded nor forbidden by God in and of themselves, but which do not foster good order, Christian discipline, or the promotion of the gospel, are forbidden by contextually specific passages of the Bible (e.g., 1 Cor 14:40) or by the general theology/principles of the Scripture.

---

<sup>2</sup> German: “im Grunde;” Latin: “revera”

<sup>3</sup> The Latin has “iugum . . . cum infidelibus” for “frembden Joch.” The Greek is “ἑτεροζυγοῦντες ἀπίστοις.”

The article goes on to state that true adiaphora or indifferent ceremonies are in and of themselves no worship of God or part of the same, and are to be properly distinguished from such. It supports this statement with a citation from Matthew 15:9 as: “In vain they serve me, because they teach such teachings, which are nothing other than commands of men”<sup>4</sup> (FC SD X, 8).

Now what does it mean when the Confessions state that “true adiaphora or indifferent ceremonies are in and of themselves no worship of God or part of the same?” To probe this, let’s take the sacrifices that God commanded to be made in the Old Testament. They were worships of God because God commanded them to be made. But they were not worships of God if they were not offered in faith (see Ap XXIV, 27-29). In the same way, God commands that a person should not steal. This is a worship of God because God commanded this, but it is not a worship of God if a person refrains from stealing, not because he has faith in God, but in order to not be punished by the government. While God will reward this act of civil righteousness with earthly peace, it is not a worship of God because faith is lacking.

Looking now at true adiaphora or indifferent ceremonies, they are no worship of God “in and of themselves” in that they have not been commanded (or forbidden) by God. But certainly they are a worship of God when done in faith. Paul reveals this in Romans, for example, in regard to observing days and eating food. He says,

On the one hand one man is having faith to eat all things, but on the other hand another who is being weak is eating **vegetables**<sup>5</sup> . . . on the one hand one man is distinguishing one day above another day, on the other hand another is considering every day [equally]. Let each man be in a state of being fully assured **in his own mind**. The man who is having great esteem for the day is having great

---

<sup>4</sup> In the context of this passage, the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem ask Jesus why his disciples transgress the tradition of the elders by not washing their hands when they eat bread. Jesus knows that this is not just an indifferent practice, but one that is undertaken with the idea that somehow this action takes away ceremonial uncleanness and so seems to have gained the connotation that one is sinning if it is omitted. This tradition of the Jews set up a law that God had not provided. It was obviously not being viewed as a matter that was free and that could be omitted without guilt. Yet rather than first address the error related to this one practice, Jesus responds by attacking this kind of use of tradition of the Jews as part of a general and broader category. He attacks a specific tradition of the elders which very plainly demonstrates that the tradition of the elders was contrary to God’s purposes, by fostering and approving the breaking of the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment. He says,

God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘he who reviles his father or mother let him come to an end by death.’ But you are saying, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “With respect to whatever you are helped by me is an offering;”’ he shall surely not honor the father of his and you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. Hypocrites, well Isaiah prophesied concerning you saying, ‘This people is honoring me with the lips but the heart of them is being far distant from me. And in vain they are worshipping me by teaching as teachings the commands of men’

After addressing the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus calls the crowd to himself and deals with the matter of eating with unwashed hands, saying, “Hear and understand. Not the thing that is entering into the mouth is defiling the man, but the thing that is coming out from the mouth, this is defiling the man.”

<sup>5</sup> Where Paul places an emphasis on a word or phrase by placing it first or toward the beginning of a clause or sentence, bold type is used to show that an emphasis exists in the Greek.

esteem for [it] **in honor of the Lord**.<sup>6</sup> And the man who is eating is eating **in honor of Lord**, for he is giving thanks to God. And the man who is not eating is not eating **in honor of Lord** and is giving thanks to God. For no one of us is living **for himself** and no one [of us] is dying **for himself**. For both if we are living, we are living **for the Lord**, and if we are dying, we are dying **for the Lord**. Therefore both if we are living and if we are dying, we are **the Lord's**. (Rom 14:2, 5-8)

While Paul, in the context of this passage, is dealing with how to interact with a brother who has a weaker faith, the verses included above reveal principles related to adiaphora. A person is not forbidden or commanded to only eat vegetables. A person is not forbidden or commanded to eat both vegetables and meat (Rom 14:14; 1 Tim 4:3-5). Yet the person who uses these forms of adiaphora does worship the Lord through them, for he eats in honor of the Lord. The same applies to days. A person is not forbidden or commanded to observe specific days, for instance, like observing Tuesday as a day of fasting. A person is not forbidden or commanded to observe all days alike, for instance, in fasting on any particular day. Yet the person who uses these forms of adiaphora does worship the Lord through them, for he is either having great esteem for a day in honor of the Lord or he is holding all days alike in honor of the Lord. Paul ends the section we are considering by stating, “And everything which is not from faith is sin” (Rom 14:23). If there is no faith added to the use of adiaphora, they are used sinfully. But if faith is added, they are worships of God through faith, even though they are not worships of God “in and of themselves,” in that they are not specifically commanded or forbidden by God. In fact, all adiaphora, while taking into account the weaker brother, is supposed to be used in worship of God, as Paul says, “Therefore whether you are eating or drinking or doing **anything**, be doing **all things to the glory of God**,” (1 Cor 10:31). To do something to the glory of God is to worship God through that something you are doing, which includes adiaphora.<sup>7</sup>

When it comes to ceremonies in the church, a category which doesn't deal with individual choices but which involves participation by the whole community, the Confessions go on to state/reiterate,

Thus we believe, teach, and confess that the community of God of every place and at all times, according to circumstance and for good reason, has power and authority, without carelessness and offense, in an orderly and proper way, to change, reduce, and increase the same [i.e. adiaphora or indifferent things], as it at any time is considered most useful, most beneficial, and best for good order, Christian discipline and training,<sup>8</sup> evangelical propriety [i.e., the promotion of the gospel], and for edification of the church. How one also is able to yield and give way to the weak in faith in such

---

<sup>6</sup> The deduction from this which is explicit in the Majority Test is: “and the man who is not having great esteem for the day is not having great esteem for [it] **in honor of the Lord**.”

<sup>7</sup> In Ap XXIV, Melancthon includes as sacrifices the ceremony (i.e., celebration) of the Lord's Supper (as an act of praise to God), the proclamation of the Gospel, faith, prayer, thanksgiving, invocation, confession, afflictions on account of the Gospel, and “similar things” (Ap XXIV 30, 35, 74). His main concern is to make it clear that the celebration of the mass does not justify or merit the remission of sins *ex opere operato*, that is, by the mere performance of the work (Ap XXIV, 31). He does not speak of the ‘liturgical’ elements of the worship service here by name. However, such would fall under his “similar things” category when done in faith.

<sup>8</sup> or ‘discipline’, in which case 2 words are used to reinforce the one concept.

external indifferent things with good conscience, Paul teaches, Rom 14, and shows it with his example, Acts 16 and 21; 1 Cor 9.<sup>9</sup> (FC SD X, 9).

The Confessions do not define the “community of God” (*die Gemeinde Gottes*) here. Given that the following section refers to the “entire community of God” (*die ganze Gemeinde Gottes*) (FC SD X, 10), the “community of God” may not be intended to include everyone in the community as being involved in the decision to change, reduce, or increase adiaphora. Regardless, the confessions state again that ceremonies which are neither commanded nor forbidden by God in and of themselves, but which do not foster good order, Christian discipline, or the promotion of the gospel, cannot be grouped under adiaphora, since, as we have seen, such are forbidden by contextually specific passages of the Bible (e.g., 1 Cor 14:40) or by the general theology/principles of the Scripture. Also another criteria is added, namely, the edification of the church. Those ceremonies which do not bring edification to the church are also not to be classified as adiaphora. No passages are given to support this additional criteria, but we find this Scriptural idea spoken of by Paul who commands that, when the church/assembly comes together, “Let **all things** be done **for edification**,” (1 Cor 14:26, 4-5, 17).

It seems that today discussion over worship styles or other ceremonies or church practices is often quickly placed under the banner of adiaphora. It is particularly this portion of the Confessions, however, that reveals that what constitutes adiaphora is not merely something that has not been commanded or forbidden in and of itself by Scripture. Rather, practices have to be further evaluated as to whether they foster good order, Christian discipline, the promotion of the Gospel, and the edification of the Church. If these criteria are not met, then the practice is not a matter of adiaphora, rather, it falls under that which is forbidden by God. Changing a service constantly does not foster good order. Feeding the desires of the flesh for entertainment, emotional highs, and no Law does not foster Christian discipline. Engaging in foolish/carnival-like spectacles and failing to recognize, in the fear of God, the unique presence of God in Word and Sacrament at the gathered assembly does not foster the promotion of the Gospel as God’s gracious service to us in Christ. Failing to sing doctrinally sound songs does not foster the edification of the Church.

We also see that, according to circumstance, changes to ceremonies which are adiaphora are to be made “for good reason, . . . , without carelessness and offense, in an orderly and proper way.” Here we see that Paul’s directive in 1 Corinthians 14:40, “But let all things be done with propriety and according to good order” is applied not only to the nature of what constitutes adiaphora but also to act of altering adiaphora. The suggestion is that to alter adiaphora in an orderly and proper way involves doing so without carelessness and offense. Changes that are made without good reason and careful thought and that cause offense (i.e., to the conscience of the weak in the sense of Rom 14:1-13 and 1 Cor 8:1-13) are not showing love to the community of God.

---

<sup>9</sup> When one looks at the passages cited, it can be seen that they pertain not only to not causing offense to the weak in faith, but also to not causing offense to those without faith.

The next section speaks of the situation where the chief article of the Christian faith is under attack, namely, the Gospel. It states,

We believe, teach, and confess also, that in the time of confession, where the enemies of God's Word desire to suppress the pure teaching of the Holy Gospel, the whole community of God, indeed every Christian, especially, however, the servants of the Word as the leaders of the community of God, are obliged on the basis of God's Word to confess the teaching and what belongs to the entire religion freely, publicly, not only with words, but also in deed and with action, and that then in this case also not in such indifferent things to yield to the adversaries, nor are supposed to permit to allow to be forced upon them the same by the enemies by might or deceitfully, to the weakening of the true worship of God and planting and confirmation of idolatry. (FC SD X, 10)

In support of this stance, the Confessions quote Galatians 5:1 and 2:4–5 as: “Therefore continue now in the freedom with which Christ has freed us, and let not yourselves be caught again in the yoke of slavery,” and “Because several false brothers together had broken in and besides had snuck in to spy out our freedom which we are having in Christ Jesus, that they might capture us, we were not yielding to the same to be subject for a moment, in order that the truth of the Gospel among us<sup>10</sup> would remain.” The Confessions note that, while circumcision was a free, indifferent thing (according to 1 Cor 7) that Paul made use of at other times (according to Acts 16), he refused to give in to those who demanded circumcision in order to confirm their false teaching that works of the law were necessary for righteousness and salvation (FC SD X, 11–12).

While noting that Paul yields and gives in to the weak in regard to food and time or days, the Confessions go on to note that he does not yield to the false apostles who were wanting to place on the conscience as necessary such indifferent things that are in themselves free. In support Colossians 2:16 is cited as: “Let no one make for you a conscience over food, drink, or over certain feast days.” It is noted that when Peter and Barnabas gave in somewhat in such a case, Paul in Galatians 2 rebukes them publicly as those who in this matter “were not walking properly/rightly according to the truth of the Gospel” (Gal 2:14) (FC SD X, 13). The distinguishing feature in the latter case is that:

[H]ere it no longer has to do with external indifferent things, which according to their nature and essence are and remain in themselves free and therefore are able to permit no command or prohibition for their use or omission, but it has to do with the high/distinguished article of our Christian faith, as the apostle testifies, “in order that the truth of the Gospel may continue,” which truth is obscured and perverted through such coercion and command, since such indifferent things then are either publicly required/demanded for confirmation of false doctrine, superstition, and idolatry and for suppression of pure doctrine and Christian freedom, or nevertheless are misused by the adversaries and so viewed with this result. (FC SD X, 14)

---

<sup>10</sup> Latin has “vos” for “uns.” The Greek is ὑμᾶς.

In this paragraph indifferent things or adiaphora are described as things which “are and remain in themselves free” “according to their nature and essence.” In other words, there is nothing in the nature and essence of indifferent things which make them something that must or must not be used or omitted. Rather, it is the connotations that can be associated with them, connotations which are external to their nature and essence, connotations which are put upon them by the person or persons demanding their use or omission or who are misusing them, which connotations can then remove them from the category of indifferent things to that which become no longer free but which must then be employed in such a way that denies the unbiblical connotations now associated with them. The Confessions specifically address two such connotations, both of which are supported by passages of Scripture, that affect an otherwise indifferent thing and turn it into that which must be used (or omitted) in a manner that denies the connotation being foisted or placed upon it. The first is the connotation that a particular indifferent thing must be used in order to earn salvation, such as the idea that a person needed to be circumcised to be saved. This connotation militates against “the high/distinguished article of our Christian faith,” namely, that a person is saved by grace through the gift of faith in Christ. This situation has already been addressed. The second connotation addressed by the confessions militates against the article of Christian freedom,

Likewise, it also has to do with the article of Christian freedom, which article, through the mouth of the holy apostle, the Holy Spirit has so seriously/earnestly commanded his church to keep, as we have now heard [i.e., Gal 5:1]. For as soon as this article is weakened/undermined, and the commands of men with coercion are forced upon the church as necessary, as if the omission of them would be wrong or sin, the way of idolatry already is prepared, by means of which afterwards the commands of men are piled up/accumulated and not only are held equal to the commandments of God as a service/worship of God, but also are placed above them. (FC SD X, 15)

Here we can see the second connotation that moves things that are “external indifferent things, which according to their nature and essence are and remain in themselves free,” out of the category of indifferent things to that which become no longer free but which must then be employed in such a way that denies the connotation. This connotation is the idea that it is wrong or sin to omit the otherwise indifferent things that are now demanded or implied by men as necessary. While the first connotation maintained that a person must make use of or omit an indifferent thing in order to be saved, this second connotation maintains that a person must make use of or omit an indifferent thing in order to not be damned; for if the use or omission of an indifferent thing is wrong or sin, then the person who doesn’t make use of or omit the indifferent thing is guilty of living in sin, that is, is unrepentant and will be damned. When this second connotation is being foisted or placed upon things that are otherwise indifferent, the church is now called by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of the holy apostle, to maintain the article of Christian freedom.

This section of the Confessions indicates that as soon as the article of Christian freedom is weakened or undermined “and the commands of men with coercion are forced upon the church

as necessary, as if the omission of them would be wrong or sin, the way of idolatry already is prepared, by means of which afterwards the commands of men are piled up/accumulated and not only are held equal to the commandments of God as a service/worship of God, but also are placed above them.” This statement finds support in the matter of the Jews who washed their hands prior to eating according to the tradition of the elders. When they question Jesus as to why his disciples don’t follow this tradition, Jesus goes on to say, “After leaving the command of God you are holding fast to the tradition of men” (Mark 7:8). This statement of the confessions also would have found support in the experience of the people of their time, where the church of Rome held certain traditions higher than God’s word. It is the nature of the sinful flesh of men, prodded on by the world and the devil, to gravitate away from God and toward idolatry. It is not only idolatry to hold the commands of men above the commandments of God, where men are ultimately worshiped above God. It is also idolatry to hold the commands of men equal to the commandments of God, where men are ultimately being worshiped as equal to God.

The concerns related to idolatry pertain both to the idolater and the believer. So the Confessions continue,

Thus also, through such yielding and compromise/agreement in external things, where one previously is not united in the doctrine in a Christian way, the idolaters are strengthened in their idolatry; on the other hand, the true believers are grieved, offended, and weakened in their faith; both of which every Christian is obliged to avoid for his soul’s well-being and salvation, as stands written, “Woe to the world on account of offenses.” Likewise, “He who offends the littlest ones of these, who believe in me, to him it would be better that to him a millstone would hang on his neck and he would be drowned in the sea, where it is deepest,” etc.

Especially, however, it is to be considered that Christ says, “He who confesses me before men, him will I also confess before My heavenly Father” etc., Matt 10. (FC SD X 16, 17)

For the sake of his neighbor and himself, the Christian will want to make use of indifferent things in order that the high/distinguished article of our Christian faith (i.e., salvation by grace through the gift of faith in Christ and not by works) and the article of Christian freedom be preserved. Where the former is not upheld, the Gospel is undermined. Where the latter is not upheld, the Law, both in convicting of true sin and instruction in true godliness, is undermined. To uphold both articles is to confess Christ before men, being assured that Christ will confess us before His Father in heaven.

Claiming continuity with “the most distinguished teachers of the Augsburg Confession” regarding the belief and confession about indifferent things, the Confessions cite various portions of the “Smalcald Articles.” Concerning the church it quotes the following:

We are not conceding to them (the papal bishops) that they are the church, and they really are not; and we are also not intending to listen to what they under the name of the church command or forbid to us. For a child of 7 years knows, thank God, what the church is, namely the saints, believers and the lambs, who hear their shepherd’s voice. (FC SD X, 19)



This quote appears to be used to support that idea that a Christian is one who listens to God's word, not to what men command and forbid, even in the name of the Church, if it is not supported by the Word of God.

The next part of the "Smalcald Articles" quoted comes from the portion concerning ordination and vocation:

If the bishops were wanting to be true bishops and attend to the church and the gospel, then one might allow to be granted to them, for the sake of love and unity, yet not out of necessity, that they ordain and confirm us and our preachers, yet after leaving behind all masks/pretense and deceptive nonsense of unchristian nature and ostentatious display. Now, however, they are not, nor even want to be, true bishops, but worldly lords and princes, who are wanting neither to preach, nor to teach, nor to baptize, nor to administer communion, nor to perform some work or office of the church; in addition the ones who have been called/appointed to such office, they expel, persecute, and condemn. Nevertheless, however, the church must not on account of them remain without servants. (FC SD X, 19)

These words indicate that the church is free to make use of the Roman bishops to ordain and confirm preachers. This might even be done for the sake of love and unity in the church. However, since the Roman bishops do not carry out their job of attending to the church and the gospel, and even persecute those appointed for such a purpose, they need not be used to ordain and confirm pastors. In other words, the use of Roman bishops for the ordination and confirmation of pastors is an indifferent thing,<sup>11</sup> an adiaphoron, and when making use of them leads to neglecting the church and the gospel, they no longer need to be used and others can fulfill this function. In such a case, the Roman bishops are the ones who are acting against love and unity, and the concern for love and true unity moves the church to reject them. In this situation, the high/distinguished article of our Christian faith (i.e., salvation by grace through the gift of faith in Christ and not by works) and the article of Christian freedom are intertwined and preserved by the Lutherans.

The next portion quoted from the "Smalcald Articles" is from the section on the primacy or lordship of the pope:

Therefore, as little as we are able to worship the devil himself as Lord or God, so little are we able also to endure his apostle, the pope or antichrist, in his rule as head or Lord; for lies and murder, to ruin body and soul eternally – this is really his popish rule. (FC SD X, 20)

This quote may be used to support the idea that indifferent things can not be used in such a way that suggests oneness with the pope, since he is aligned with the devil in his false teachings. It is perhaps also used to suggest that submission to the pope as head over Christendom is also an indifferent thing, an adiaphoron, which, however, can not be done when the pope attacks the gospel, promotes lies, murders, and ruins bodies and souls eternally.

---

<sup>11</sup> Cp. Tr, 60–68.

The Confessions next quote the following sentence from the “Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope,” noting it as having been appended to the “Smalcald Articles:”

No one should burden the church with his own statutes/laws, but here it should be enjoined, that no one’s power or authority carries more weight than the word of God. (FC SD X, 21)

This passage shows that the Treatise is in agreement with the current article on church usages regarding the teaching of Christian freedom.

The Confessions add one more citation from the Treatise:

Since now with respect to this it is so, all Christians should guard themselves most diligently that they not make themselves partakers of such ungodly teaching, blasphemy, and unjust cruelty, but should withdraw from the pope and his members or followers as from the antichrist’s kingdom and execrate it, as Christ has commanded, “Guard yourselves from false prophets;” and Paul commands that one should avoid false preachers and execrate them as an abomination;<sup>12</sup> and in 2 Corinthians 6 he says, “Do not pull on the strange/foreign yoke with the unbelievers, for what is the light having with respect to communion with the darkness.”

It is a grave matter that one wants to separate oneself from so many lands and people and to promote a separate teaching, however here stands God’s command, that everyone should guard himself and not be in agreement with those who hold incorrect doctrine or intend to maintain it with cruelty. (FC SD X 22, 23)

This passage shows that the Treatise is in agreement with the current article on avoiding and maintaining distance from the teachings of the religion of the Papists, which is the same as avoiding false prophets and false teachers.

The Confessions next generally refer to particular writings of Luther, which are maintained to be in accord with the statements and principles of this article. The final portion of the article provides summary statements of the points thus far established.

## Method of Interpretation

In reviewing Article X of FC SD, when reference is made to adiaphora as those things that are neither commanded nor forbidden in God’s Word, we do not find the language of “expressly commanded,” “expressly forbidden,” “explicitly commanded,” “explicitly forbidden,” or “explicit apostolic prohibition.” Rather we find language that speaks of that which is “commanded” or “forbidden” in God’s Word. Support for what is commanded or forbidden is found in specific passages of Scripture with the same context as the matter under consideration (according to good order, for edification) or by the general theology/principles of the Scripture

---

<sup>12</sup> No passage from Paul is given here. The statement is supported by Rom 16:17; Gal 1:8–9; Phil 3:2; Col 2:18–19; 1 Thes 5:22; 2 Tim 2:16; Tit 3:10–11.

articulated in passages that do not have the same specific context but present general principles that have broader application (promoting Christian discipline and the Gospel).

We turn now to Article XXI of the “Apology of the Augburg Confession” which addresses the invocation of the saints. The Confessions speak against the invocation of the saints. One angle it comes from is showing that the saints cannot be invoked as “propitiators, that is, as mediators of redemption,” (Ap XXI 16) since this role belongs to Christ alone” (Ap XXI, 14-31). Another angle it comes from is showing that the saints cannot be invoked as “intercessors.” It is on this point that we shall dwell for a little.

According to Article X of FC SD, adiaphora was defined as that which is neither commanded nor forbidden by God. With this as a basis, someone might argue that invoking the saints as intercessors is neither commanded nor forbidden by God. We have the example of Paul invoking the Christians at Rome to pray for him (Rom 15:30-32). If Paul can invoke the Christians in the Church militant to pray for him, why shouldn’t we invoke the Christians in the Church triumphant to pray for us?

The Confessions state:

[T]his we grant, that angels pray for us. For there exists the testimony of Zechariah 1:12, where the angel prays, “Lord of hosts, how long will you not feel pity for Jerusalem?” etc. Concerning the saints, although we concede that, just as the living pray for the church universal in general, so in heaven they pray for the church in general, although no testimony concerning the dead praying exists in the Scriptures, except that dream having been cited from the subsequent book of Maccabees, 2 Macc 15:14.

Moreover, granting that especially the saints pray for the church, nevertheless it does not follow that they are to be invoked. However, our confession asserts this only, that the Scripture does not teach the invocation of the saints or to seek aid from the saints. Since, however, neither a command nor a promise nor an example is able to be brought from the Scriptures concerning invoking the saints, it follows that the conscience is being able to have nothing certain concerning that invocation. And since prayer ought to be done from faith, how are we knowing that God approves that invocation? From which place are we knowing, without the testimony of Scripture, that the saints understand the prayers of individuals. Certain people clearly attribute divinity to the saints, namely, that they discern the unspoken thoughts of the minds in us. . . . Nothing is able to be produced by the adversaries against this reasoning, that since the invocation does not have a testimony from the Word of God, it is not able to be confirmed that the saints understand our invocation or, granting essentially that they understand, that God approves it. Therefore the adversaries should not compel us with regard to an uncertain matter, because prayer without faith is not prayer. For although they adduce the example of the church, this exists as a new custom in the church. (Ap XXI, 8-13)

But concerning the invocation of the saints, what command, what example are the adversaries able to produce from the Scriptures? (Ap XXI, 18)

The adversaries . . . give command to invoke the saints, although they have neither a promise of God nor a command nor an example of the Scripture. (Ap XXI, 21)

[W]e grant that blessed Mary prays for the church. (Ap XXI, 27)

And let us imagine that the invocation of the saints be taught with most moderation, nevertheless, since the example is most dangerous, to what end is it useful to defend, since it has no command or testimony from the Word of God? (Ap XXI, 33)

The bishops, theologians, and monks . . . do not tolerate us, who, in order that the honor and office of Christ be able to be more visible, do not require the invocation of the saints. (Ap XXI, 38)

In speaking against the invocation of the saints as intercessors, the Confessions do not see it as a matter of adiaphora. It has neither a command *nor* a promise *nor* an example from Scripture. It implies that such invocation is forbidden by the Scripture, not by an “express” or “explicit” passage that states it in so many words, but by the general principle that it cannot be done in faith with a sure conscience that God approves it. No passages from Scripture are used to support this.<sup>13</sup> One passage that supports the idea would be Roman 14:23, “And everything/anything which is not from faith is sin.”<sup>14</sup>

To press the ideas we are looking at here further, what if someone said that he invokes the saints as intercessors, asking them to pray for him, not knowing whether or not they hear the request directly or receive the request through some other means (e.g., as delivered by angels), but that he is fine with that. In other words, the person invokes the saints in this way in faith that they may or may not hear him, but believing that there is a possibility that they might hear. Since such a position would in a sense remove the faith/sure conscience problem and the lack of promise problem from the act, the remaining argument from the Confessions would be that it should not be done since it does not have an *example* from the Scriptures.<sup>15</sup>

Looking again at some of the interpretative concepts being encountered in the Confessions, we see that something is considered an adiaphoron if it is neither commanded nor forbidden by the Scriptures. This seems to be the common criteria that is considered in the use of the term today. It seems to be assumed that if it meets this criteria, it can be done in faith that God approves it, without any promise connected with it. This view seems to be based on the theological deduction that engaging in an action that is neither commanded nor forbidden by God has the promise from God that He does approve of it, so long as it is done in faith, that is, by a person who has faith. The case of the invocation of the saints, however, brings another element into the picture. And that is that a practice is not an adiaphoron if it is commanded *or* forbidden *or* lacks an *example* in the Scriptures.

---

<sup>13</sup> The passages of Scripture cited in this Article mostly have to do with refuting the idea that the saints are not to be invoked as propitiators (e.g., Ap XXI, 17-18). No specific passage is cited to refute the idea that the saints shouldn't be invoked as intercessors.

<sup>14</sup> See also Jam 1:6-8.

<sup>15</sup> Luther's discussion on the invocation of the saints in the “Smalcald Articles” is similar to Melancthon's in the “Apology.” Regarding invoking the saints he says, “[It] also is not having been commanded nor recommended, [it] has no example of Scripture” (SA II, ii, 25).

One might argue that Article X of FC SD stands against such an idea. However, this is not actually the case. Article X of FC SD pertains to ceremonies and church practices (FC SD X, 1). We know that ceremonies and church practices have plenty of examples, for instance, in the Old Testament. It exists as a category of which the saints of old have made use. Albeit the forms were specifically commanded by God, they were used by him to point to spiritual/theological realities (e.g., Col 1:16-17; Heb 9:23; 10:1). While we are not commanded by God to use those specific forms, they provide examples to guide us in applying the underlying principle that the church ceremonies and practices we use should still point to spiritual/theological realities. When we look at the practice of invoking the saints in heaven, there is no example in the Scriptures. The category is absent. The category is also absent when it comes to masses for the dead. Article XXIV of the “Apology,” states:

Although to be sure our adversaries defend the application of the ceremony for liberating the souls of the deceased, . . . they have no testimony, no command from Scriptures. And indeed it is not an insignificant sin to establish such worships in the church without a command of God, without an example of Scripture, and to apply to the dead the supper of the Lord, which has been instituted for remembrance and proclamation among the living. This is to abuse the name of God contrary to the second commandment. (Ap XXIV, 89).

The category of women reading Scripture at the temple or in the synagogue or in another setting where people assemble is absent as well. On the other hand, we find the category in the Scriptures of God’s people using, say, healthcare and technology in their daily lives and serving in the government (Luke 10:34; Deut 20:20; Rom 16:23). The examples of the Scripture, even the Old Testament passages, are written to teach us. The example of the Old Testament women, including that of Sarah, teaches women how to be submissive wives (1 Pet 3:5-6). The example of David eating the bread of the presence from the temple taught that God desires mercy not sacrifice even some 200 years before God spoke the words through Hosea, “I desire mercy not sacrifice” (Matt 12:1-8). The Old Testament people didn’t need to wait 200 years to be taught, they had the example of David to learn from.

Regarding examples, Article II of the FC SD maintains,

Here belong also all prayers of the saints, in which they pray that by God they be taught, enlightened, and sanctified, and even by it indicate that they are not able to have that thing which they are requesting from God from their own natural powers. As in the 19<sup>th</sup> Psalm alone, David asks more than ten times that to him God would impart understanding, so that he would rightly comprehend and learn His divine teachings. Such prayers are in [the writings of] Paul, Eph 1, Col 1, Phil 1. Which prayers and verses about our ignorance and inability are not written to us for the purpose that we should become lazy and idle in reading, hearing, and contemplating God’s Word, but that we first thank God from the heart that He has freed us from the darkness of ignorance and the imprisonment of sin and death through His Son and has regenerated and enlightened us through Baptism and the Holy Ghost. (FC SD II, 15)

Article VIII of the FC SD refers to the examples of Christ at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, among the teachers at the temple when he was twelve years old, and in the Garden of Gethsemane casting his enemies to the ground with one word, as teaching that according to the personal union and communion of the divine and human natures, Christ performed all his miracles and manifested his divine majesty when and how he willed, not only after his resurrection and ascension but also in his state of humiliation (FC SD VIII, 25). Here we have an example where a teaching is not revealed by “explicit” statements in Scripture of doctrinal truths, but by examples.

In addition to positive examples, we also have negative examples in the Scripture that teach. We are to learn what not to do from the examples of idolatry, sexual immorality, and grumbling that the Israelites provide us with (1 Cor 10:6-13). We are taught to not contradict the faith we confess by our actions when we see the example of Peter doing this among the Galatians (Gal 2:11-15).

Returning to the Confessions, more insights into the use of examples are found. Article XXVII of the “Apology to the Augsburg Confession” examines the example of the Rechabites. It states,

The Rechabites are also cited, who neither were having any possessions nor were drinking wine, as Jeremiah writes chap. 35:6f. Certainly the example of the Rechabites agrees beautifully with our monks, whose monasteries surpass palaces of kings, who live most sumptuously. And the Rechabites in that poverty of theirs of all things nevertheless were married. Our monks, although they abound in all delights, profess celibacy.

Moreover, it is appropriate for examples to be interpreted according to the rule, that is, according to the clear and sure Scriptures,<sup>16</sup> not contrary to the rule or contrary to the Scriptures. And indeed it is most certain that our observances do not merit the remission of sins or justification. Therefore, when the Rechabites are praised, it is necessarily true that these have observed their custom not because they were believing that they merited the remission of sins through it, or that the work itself was a justifying act of worship, or that on account of which custom they were obtaining eternal life, instead of through the mercy of God on account of the promised seed. But because they kept the command of their parents, their obedience is praised, concerning which obedience the commandment of God exists, “Honor your father and mother.”

Next, the custom was having a particular purpose: Because they were nomads, not Israelites, it is apparent that their father desired to distinguish them with certain marks from their own countrymen, in order that they not relapse into the impiety of their countrymen. He was desiring by these marks to remind them of the teaching of faith and immortality. Such a purpose is permitted. But far different purposes are taught for monastic life. They imagine their works to be monastic acts of worship, they imagine them to merit remission of sins and justification. The example of the Rechabites, therefore, is not similar to monastic life. (Ap XXVII, 59-62)

In this discussion of the Rechabites the Confessions note that examples must be interpreted according to “the rule” and not against “the rule.” This is stated to mean that examples must be

---

<sup>16</sup> The German reads, “nach der klaren Schrift.”

interpreted “according to the clear and sure Scriptures.” The context with the Rechabite passage is that the adversaries were somehow suggesting that the Rechabites supported the idea that works merit forgiveness of sins or justification. “The rule” in this case that has been established in the earlier parts of the Confessions is that forgiveness of sins and justification is not merited by works of an individual but through faith in Christ’s death which was for the sins of the world. Since the Rechabites are praised by God, it cannot be that they believe, contrary to God’s Word, that they merit their own forgiveness or justification by their works. The principle that is articulated here is that examples cannot be used to support teachings that are contrary to other passages of Scripture.

After establishing this first principle, the Confessions then demonstrate that examples must be understood in their context. According to the context of the Rechabite account, the Rechabites are praised for keeping the commandment to honor one’s father and mother. After noting this interpretation, the Confessions proceed to provide further interpretation which is stated to be “apparent,” that is, *clear*, as to why the father of the Rechabites commanded abstinence from wine and possessions. Here the Confessions *deduce* that the imposition of a more austere lifestyle upon the Rechabites was related to the desire of their forefather to seek to avoid a relapse into the impiety of their countrymen and to foster an understanding of the fleeting nature of this world and therefore the value of faith and immortality that comes through faith. That this is not a farfetched interpretation finds support when referencing the full account given in Jeremiah 35. The Rechabites indicate that their forefather, Jonadab, son of Rechab, gave them the command saying, “You shall not drink wine, you and your sons forever. And a house you shall not build and seed you shall not sow and a vineyard you shall not plant, and it will not be to you. But you will dwell in the tents all your days in order that you may live many days upon the face of the land where you are sojourning there.” The words of Jonadab echo the words of Exodus 20:12, “Honor your father and your mother in order that your days may be caused to be long upon the land which Yahweh your God is giving you.” This suggests the Rechabites were worshipers of Yahweh. The only way Jonadab could know that the honoring of his command by his descendants would lead to them being long in the land was by him believing in God’s Word. The fact that he believed that they would live long in the land where the Israelites dwelt implies that his instructions to his descendants were meant to foster piety and to remember the importance of faith and immortality that it brings. The fact that he speaks of his descendants as being sojourners may again imply an understanding of the passing nature of the world with an eye to eternity.

So far we have looked in the Confessions at ecclesiastical ceremonies and practices which are neither commanded nor forbidden, but have examples (as a category), in God’s Word, and we have looked at invoking the saints as intercessors which is neither commanded nor forbidden, but does not have examples (as a category), in God’s Word. We now move to a matter that has a command and promise, but no example, in Scriptures.

Looking at the subject of infant baptism, Article IX of the “Augsburg Confession” (AC) states:

About Baptism it is taught that it is necessary and that through it grace is offered; that one also should baptize the children, who through such Baptism become entrusted to God and pleasing to him.

Therefore the Anabaptists are condemned, who teach that the Baptism of children is not right. (AC IX, German)

Concerning baptism they teach that it is necessary for salvation and that through Baptism the grace of God is offered; and that children are to be baptized, who being offered to God through Baptism are received into the grace of God.

They condemn the Anabaptists, who reject the Baptism of children and affirm that children become saved without Baptism. (AC IX, Latin)

Here it is asserted that children should be baptized and that they become entrusted/offered and pleasing to God and received into the grace of God through Baptism. The Anabaptists are condemned because they reject the Baptism of children and maintain that children are saved apart from Baptism. No passages of Scripture are supplied to support this position. Such an approach is not atypical for the Augsburg Confession, which in the “Preface” maintains that the positions set forth are based on the Holy Scriptures (AC P, 8). Nevertheless, this lack of specific reference in support of infant Baptism leads us to search elsewhere in the Confessions for further insight.

Turning to the “Apology of the Augsburg Confession” we hear:

The Ninth Article has been approved, in which we confess that Baptism is necessary for salvation, and that children are to be baptized, and that Baptism of children not is invalid/ineffectual, but necessary and effectual for salvation. . . . And as we condemn a great number of other errors of the Anabaptists, so also this one, that they argue the Baptism of little children to be useless. For it is most certain that the promise of salvation pertains also to little children. And indeed it does not pertain to those who are outside of the Church of Christ, where neither the Word nor the Sacraments are, because the kingdom of Christ only exists with the Word and Sacraments. Therefore it is necessary to baptize little children in order that the promise of salvation be applied to them according to the command of Christ, Matth. 28:19, “Baptize all nations.” In which place just as salvation is offered to all, so is Baptism offered to all – to men, women, children, infants. Therefore, it follows clearly that infants are to be baptized, because salvation is offered with Baptism. Secondly, it is manifest/clear that God approves of the Baptism of little children. Therefore, the Anabaptists who condemn the Baptism of little children are thinking wickedly. That, however, God approves of the Baptism of little children, is shown by this, that God gives the Holy Spirit to the ones having been thus baptized. For if this Baptism were invalid/ineffectual, the Holy Spirit would be given to none, none would be saved, finally there would be no church. This reason even alone is able to sufficiently strengthen good and godly minds against the ungodly and fanatical opinions of the Anabaptists. (Ap IX, 1-3)



In this article, the Confessions make two arguments to support infant Baptism. The latter involves the use of *logic*, maintaining that if God disapproved of infant Baptism, then he would not give the Holy Spirit to those baptized as infants. The implication for the church of that time, where most people only received infant Baptism, would be that none thus baptized received the Holy Spirit, none would have been saved, and there would have been no church.<sup>17</sup> No Scripture is given to support this argument, although we could supply some. If there is no church anymore, then that means that Christ's words would be in error, when he says that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church (Matt 16:18). Also, if Baptism is necessary for salvation, as asserted in the "Augsburg Confession" (AC IX), and the majority of the people only received a useless infant Baptism, then the majority of the people did not have a valid Baptism and therefore were not saved.<sup>18</sup>

The former argument used to support infant baptism is also based on *deduction*. It begins with the assertion that the promise of salvation pertains to little children. No passage of Scripture is given, but we could supply the passages where Jesus indicates that the kingdom of God belongs to children (e.g., Matt 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:15-16). Next, since the promise of salvation does not apply to those outside the church (e.g., Matt 25: 31-46; Rev 22:14-15), therefore children in Christ's kingdom must be in the church, which is where the Word and Sacraments exist (e.g., 1 Cor 4:1). Since the kingdom of Christ only exists with the Word and Sacraments, that is, is only brought about by the Word and Sacraments (e.g., Rom 10:17; Titus 3:4-7), "it is necessary to baptize little children in order that the promise of salvation be applied to them according to the command of Christ, Matth. 28:19, 'Baptize all nations.'" In this passage "just as salvation is offered to all, so Baptism is offered to all," which includes men, women, children, and infants. Based on this argumentation "it follows clearly," that is, it is *clear* by way of *deduction*, "that infants are to be baptized, because salvation is offered with Baptism."<sup>19</sup>

Regarding the use of *deduction* and *inferences* in the Lutheran Confessions, Ralph Bohlmann states:

Thus the truthful, pure, and infallible Scriptures serve as the only source and norm for the church's doctrine and life. . . . Not only are the actual statements of the Scriptures authoritative, but deductions or inferences drawn from Scripture also have divine authority. . . . [T]he confessions . . . uphold the legitimacy of using deductions or inferences based on Scripture, as is evident in their own practice. Faith is necessary to receive the benefits of the sacraments because the sacraments are signs of promises, and a promise is useless unless faith accepts it, as Paul teaches in Rom. 4:16 (Ap XII, 61). . . . Several non-Eucharistic passages of the New Testament are used to prove that the Lord's

---

<sup>17</sup> The German "translation" of the Latin original brings this sense out.

<sup>18</sup> The argumentation in LC IV, 49-51, is similar.

<sup>19</sup> "Smalcald Articles" (SA) III, v, 4 argues in a similar way in support of infant baptism. LC IV, 37-43, focuses on the command of God as the main reason to baptize infants. It notes that whether or not faith is present does not make the Baptism invalid. It also draws attention to God's ability to create faith through Baptism. For the creation of faith in Baptism, see also SA III, viii, 7. FC Ep, XII, 6-8, 23 and FC SD XII, 11-13, 31, in pointing out the errors of those who reject infant Baptism, focus on the reality of original sin for infants and the regenerative power of Baptism.

Supper is intended also for those whose faith is weak (FC SD VII, 70-71); this inference is possible because the confessions understand the Lord's Supper to be a form of the Gospel (SA III, iv).

The rule "Nothing has the character of a sacrament apart from the use instituted by Christ," which is used in discussing several important issues in the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, is "derived from the words of institution" (FC SD VII, 85). The Formula accepts the Christological rule, inferred from the Scriptures, that whatever the Scriptures say Christ received in time He received according to His human nature and not according to His divine nature (FC SD VIII, 57). The doctrine of the exchange of properties in Christ (which is so crucial in the debate against the Sacramentarians) is derived from the personal union and communion of natures (FC SD VIII, 31). The Formula argues inferentially. Since there is no variation with God (James 1:17), nothing was added to or detracted from the essence and properties of the divine nature in Christ through the incarnation (FC SD VIII, 49). Finally, let us note a deduction from Scripture that is also related to the interpretation of Scripture. Because everything in the Word of God is written that we might have hope, "it is beyond all doubt" that the true understanding of God's foreknowledge will not cause or support either impenitence or despair (FC SD XI, 12).<sup>20</sup>

Regarding the use of inferences, we have an instructive example in the account where Jesus is confronted by the Sadducees about the resurrection (Matt 22:23-32). The Sadducees refer to the Levirate Law spoken of by Moses in Deuteronomy 25:5-6, where after a man dies, if he has no children, his brother is to marry his widow in order to raise up children to his brother. They provide a scenario where each time a brother marries the widow, he dies before having children. The widow is in this way married seven times and then she dies. Now they ask Jesus whose husband the widow will be in the resurrection. They are ultimately reasoning like this: Since it is unlawful according to Old Testament law for a woman to be married to more than one man at a time, and if there is a resurrection of the body, then, they infer, the woman would have to be married to 7 men at the resurrection. This would involve a contraction with Old Testament law. Therefore, they deduce/infer that there cannot be a resurrection. Jesus responds to them saying, "You are being deceived because you do not the Scriptures nor the power of God." (Matt 22:29). He goes on to say that people are not marrying or being given in marriage at the resurrection, but are like the angels in heaven. With this Jesus shows that it was not the fact that they made an inference that was the problem, but that they made the wrong inference. He shows that the correct inference to draw from the Scripture comes about like this: Since it is unlawful according to Old Testament law for a woman to be married to more than one man at a time, and since there is a resurrection (as shown from the Old Testament Scriptures), then, it is to be inferred, at the

---

<sup>20</sup> Ralph A. Bohlman, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions*, rev. ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1983) 45-46. Bohlman notes, "While the confessions rule out making *our own deductions* on the basis of our speculations (FC SD XI, 55), they uphold the legitimacy of using deductions or inferences based on Scripture, as is evident in their own practice." The passage of the Confessions referred to here is part of the discussion on the foreknowledge of God in terms of who are and are not among the elect. The Confessions state, "Since, however, such mystery/secret God has reserved to his wisdom and to us has revealed nothing about it in the Word, much less commanded us to search into such [mystery/secret] with our thoughts, but earnestly has deterred [us] from it, Rom. 11, we should not on the basis of our thoughts deduce/infer, conclude, nor brood concerning it, but hold ourselves to his revealed Word, to which He points us" (FC SD XI, 55). Here what is spoken against is making deductions, conclusions, or broodings from our thoughts rather than from the Word of God which has been revealed to us.

resurrection there has to be a different relationship between former husbands and wives. Jesus expected that the Sadducees, if they knew the Scriptures, would make this inference. In fact, it could be said that Jesus expected all of the people living in Old Testament times to make this inference, since apart from the account of Jesus' confrontation with the Sadducees in the Gospels, there is no direct statement concerning the relationship of the married after this life in the Old Testament. This shows that God expects his people to make inferences from the Scripture.

Further demonstration of this point comes later in the same account. In this portion of the account, Jesus speaks with an awareness of the other resistance to the resurrection that the Sadducees had. They believed that the soul perished with the body at the time of death.<sup>21</sup> Their inference would be that since the soul is no more there can be no resurrection. Jesus, aware of this stumbling block, says, "And concerning the resurrection of the dead, did you not read the thing which was spoken to you by God when he was saying, 'I, I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.' He is not the God of dead people but of living ones" (Matt 22:31-32). Here Jesus makes it clear that the souls of God's people continue to live after death and that it is the power of God that unites the souls with the bodies again at the resurrection. Bodies can be resurrected because they consist of matter that disintegrates but doesn't disappear. If souls, which do not consist of matter, disappear at death, they cannot be resurrected. Again, Jesus faults the Sadducees with making wrong inferences because they do not know the Scriptures. He indicates that the passage from Exodus 3:6 was spoken to them in order that they should (i.e., this is God's expectation) infer from it that the souls of the dead live on and that the resurrection is a resurrection of the body where soul and body come together again.

As was noted earlier, the CTCR 2022 praises CTCR 2017 for exercising "a degree of restraint by not urging theological inference (as opposed to a clear statement of Scripture) upon the consciences of the faithful" (p. 14). However, we have seen that the Confessions and Jesus do not make a distinction between "theological inference" and "clear statement of Scripture." Both are binding upon the consciences of the faithful because both have "divine authority" and both are urged and expected by God to be believed. We have also seen the CTCR repeatedly use adjectives like "expressly" and "explicit" when referring to the Scripture. For instance, R 2004-2006 defines adiaphora as "matters that are explicitly neither commanded nor forbidden by Scripture" (p. 26). CTCR 1985 is similar, stating, "we must first ask whether God's Word expressly permits it or whether it expressly prohibits the activity" (p. 40). But as we have seen, the Confessions speak of adiaphora as that which is neither "commanded" nor "forbidden" by Scripture, without the use of qualifiers like "explicitly" or "expressly." And even though the CTCR suggests that its theological claims are based on "explicit" passages of Scripture, is this really the case?

---

<sup>21</sup> Acts 23:8 indicates that the Sadducees say that there is no "spirit" (πνεῦμα). See also Josephus *Ant.* 18.16 and Josephus *War* 2.165.

CTCR 1985 indicates that Paul’s prohibition against women speaking in 1 Corinthians 14 “is uttered with reference to the worship service of the congregation (1 Cor. 14:26-23). Any other interpretation is artificial and improbable” (p. 33). It must be noted that this conclusion is not explicitly stated in these passages but is inferred from the context. The question is, is this a valid inference? CTCR 1985 maintains that Paul’s prohibition against women teaching or exercising authority over a man in 1 Timothy 2 “are directed to the worship/church setting.” This conclusion is not explicitly stated in these passages but is inferred from the context, in particular, Paul’s use of the phrase “household of God” in 1 Timothy 3:14-15 (p. 34). The question is, is this a valid inference? Along the same lines, CTCR 1985 states:

1 Cor. 14:33b-35 and 1 Tim. 2:11-15 speak of women’s roles in the public worship service. The main application of these passages in the contemporary church is that women are not to exercise those functions in the local congregation which would involve them in the exercise of authority inherent in the authoritative public teaching office (i.e., the office of pastor). (p. 38)

Now certainly this conclusion is not explicitly stated in these passages. This is again an inference, in this case drawn from the uses of the word for teach (*didaskain*) (p. 34-35). Also, notice how the CTCR moves from first maintaining that the prohibitions pertain to a worship setting to then maintaining that it pertains to an office – an office which, by the way, is exercised beyond the worship setting. We see another shift occur in just a matter of a few pages with the statement, “women are not to be pastors nor perform the essential and unique functions of the pastoral office, since the pastoral office has oversight from God over the congregation, “the household of God” (1 Tim 3:15)” (p. 41). While on page 34 we are told that the “household of God” refers to a worship setting, on page 41 we are told that the “household of God” is now not a place or setting but a congregation. The CTCR makes much about the “thus says the Lord” passages, but do they really themselves even abide by the rules that they have created?

As we have heard, R 2004-2006 says, “[T]here is an important distinction between applications explicitly made by Scripture and applications that are left to our own ministerial use of reason” (26). We saw that the Confessions derived the rule “Nothing has the character of a sacrament apart from the use instituted by Christ” from the words of institution. Certainly this rule was not explicitly stated in the Scriptures. Nevertheless, the rule is applied to several issues pertaining to the practice of the Lord’s Supper. These applications are not made explicitly by Scripture. Should we, therefore, conclude that these applications come from the ministerial use of reason? Are these really the only two options available?

In a discussion on the Second Commandment in the Large Catechism, after speaking about what it means to take God’s name in vain, the Confessions state, “From this every one himself is now indeed able to infer/work out<sup>22</sup> when and in how many ways God’s name is abused, although to enumerate all abuses is not possible” (LC First Part, 53). If we were to apply the CTCR’s criteria to the Second Commandment, we could only make the applications of abuse

---

<sup>22</sup> The German is “ausrechnen;” the Latin is “colligere.”

against God's name that we find explicitly stated in Scripture. Yet the Confessions state that the applications of abuse are innumerable and that we are able and expected to figure these out. The implication is not that this is a ministerial use of reason.

In the discussion on the Fourth Commandment, the Confessions state:

Therefore St. Paul also in Eph. 6 such [i.e., the Fourth Commandment] highly praises and extols, when he says, "This is the first commandment which has a promise: 'That it may be well with you and you may live long on earth.'" For although the other commandments also have their promise included/implicit,<sup>23</sup> yet to none is it so clearly and explicitly placed. (LC I, 133)

Here the Confessions indicate that lack of clear and explicit statement does not mean lack of a promise. A promise is included in each commandment by implication or inference. This is not a ministerial use of reason. We find the use of implication also in the discussion on the Lord's Supper:

[Y]ou say, "it is written, however, in addition, 'as often as you do it'; there he compels no one, but leaves it to free choice." Answer: It is true; it is written, however, not that one should never do it. Indeed, just because he speaks the words, "As often as you do it," it is nevertheless also implied, that one should often do it. (LC V, 46-47)

Similarly, regarding the Second Commandment, "You shall not take the name of God in vain," we read:

Therefore, it now is inferred/follows,<sup>24</sup> since here it is forbidden to use the holy name for falsehood or wickedness, that conversely it is commanded to employ it for truth and all good. (LC I, 64)

Regarding the duty of authority figures, the Confessions state:

Although it is not written explicitly in the Ten Commandments, it is, however, otherwise abundantly commanded in many places of the Scripture. God also wants to have it included precisely in this commandment when he speaks of father and mother. (LC I, 167)

Here, although not explicitly stated in any of the Ten Commandments, it is deduced that it is God's desire to include the role of authority figures in the Fourth Commandment.

Regarding making use of the government for vengeance rather than handling matters privately, the Confessions say, "Public vengeance, which is done through the office of the magistrate, is not spoken against, but is commanded and is a work of God according to Paul, Rom. 13:1 ff." (Ap XVI, 7 [59]). Now this is not explicitly stated in the passage from Romans. Rather there is a command to "be subject to the governing authorities" (Rom 13:1) and there is a

---

<sup>23</sup> The German is "eingeschlossen;" the Latin is "inclusa."

<sup>24</sup> The German is "schleußt sich;" the Latin is "evincitur."

statement that the governing authorities are a “servant of God, an avenger for wrath to the one who is doing the evil thing” (Rom 13:5). There is no explicit statement that says, “Carry out public vengeance through the office of the magistrate.” This command is inferred from the context: we are not to carry out private vengeance but leave vengeance to God (Rom 12:19); we are to submit to the governing authorities (Rom 13:1); the governing authorities are God’s avengers on those who do the evil thing (Rom 13:5); therefore, vengeance is to be carried out by the governing authorities; therefore, we are commanded to use the governing authorities for vengeance, which constitutes public redress; the office of magistrate is the governing authority in the time of the Confessors; therefore the Confessors are commanded to seek public vengeance through the office of the magistrate.

One thing this last example shows is that, for example, when the CTCR states that “the matter of franchise is not discussed in the Scripture” (CTCR 1985, p. 43) this really means little. As the Confessions indicate that all the ways God’s name can be taken in vain cannot be expressed but must be inferred, and we are expected to make those inferences, so all the ways authority may be exercised need not be expressed in the Scripture but must be inferred, and we are expected to make those inferences. Just as the word “office of magistrate” is not found in the Romans passage but is inferred to be a subset of “governing authorities,” so the word “vote” is not found in the Scriptures but is inferred to be a subset of “exercising authority.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, to say that there is no “explicit apostolic prohibition” of women reading Scripture in the public worship setting (CTCR 1985, p. 9) means very little as well, for the public reading of Scripture is authoritative and therefore, a subset of “exercising authority.” Here we let the most recent CTCR document related to the roles of men and women show the CTCR itself its own flaw in the matter. For after all the demands for “explicit” statements and cautions against “inferences” in the prior CTCR documents, CTCR 2022 states, “[T]he term “order of creation” is not explicitly found in Scripture,” yet “it is nonetheless a biblical concept” (p. 2, 5).

Continuing to look at the use of inferences in the Confessions, we read:

For thus we have heard in the Second Commandment, “You shall not take God’s name in vain,” that therein it is required to praise the holy name, to call upon it in ever need, or to pray. For to call upon is nothing other than to pray. Therefore, prayer is strictly and earnestly commanded, as highly as all other Commandments: to have no other God, to not kill, to not steal, etc. (LC III, 5)

A negative command to not use God’s name wrongly is inferred to be a positive command to use God’s name rightly, and the command to use God’s name rightly is inferred to include prayer. So the command to pray is inferred from the Second Commandment, which does not explicitly mention prayer.

Referring to the Second Commandment as a commandment to pray, the Confessions continue:

---

<sup>25</sup> Even CTCR 1985 recognizes that voting deals with authority, stating, “it is actually the assembly that exercises authority as a result of suffrage, not the individual voter,” (p. 44). To suggest that the individual voter is not involved in exercising authority as part of the assembly is merely a sophistic game of words.

For through such commandment He gives us plainly/clearly<sup>26</sup> to understand that He will not cast or chase us away from Himself, although we are sinners, but rather will draw us to Himself so that we would humble ourselves before Him, lament such misery and plight of ours, [and] pray for mercy and help.<sup>27</sup> (LC III, 11)

Here the Confessions draw various inferences based on the fact that God commands us to pray. These inferences are not explicit yet they are considered to be “plainly/clearly” understood.

Regarding that which is “clear” from the Scriptures, we read in the Apology:

To this point pertains also the statement of Christ, Luke 17:10: “When you have done all things which have been commanded to you, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants.’” These words clearly<sup>28</sup> say that God saves through mercy and on account of His promise, not that He owes us on account of the merit of our works. (Ap IV 334 [213])

Now certainly the passage from Luke does not explicitly say this truth that is deduced from the words of Christ. Nevertheless, according the Confessions, the words of Christ “clearly” say this by inference.

Another noteworthy usage of “clarity” in the Confessions is seen in the “Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope.” In this writing the first article demonstrates that the Roman bishop is not above all other bishops and pastors by divine right. The second article shows that the Roman bishop does not by divine right possess both swords, that is, the authority to bestow and transfer kingdoms (Tr, 1-2). In comparing these two articles, it states:

The second article is even more clear.<sup>29</sup> (Tr, 31, Latin)

The second article is even clearer than the first.<sup>30</sup> (Tr, 31, German)

Now certainly the first article is not less true or somehow uncertain. Rather, in indicating that the second article is clearer than the first, the Confessions seem to be recognizing that more inferences are used to establish the first article, whereas the second article has some direct statements to support it.

In the discussion on the word’s of institution of the Lord’s Supper, the Confessions address the manner in which God speaks His words. Indicating a continuity between this manner and the manner in which God speaks in all articles of faith and in the institution of other covenant-signs and grace-signs, it states:

---

<sup>26</sup> The German is “genugsam;” the Latin is “satis.”

<sup>27</sup> Translation from the German of *Concordia Triglotta: Die Symbolischen Bücher der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 698.

<sup>28</sup> The Latin is “clare.”

<sup>29</sup> The Latin is “magis etiam perspicuus.”

<sup>30</sup> The German is “noch klärer dann.”

[Christ] here, as in the establishment of His last will and testament and of His continually lasting covenant and union (as elsewhere in all articles of faith and in the institution of all other covenant-signs and grace-signs or sacraments, as the institution of circumcision, of the various offerings in the Old Testament, of Holy Baptism), uses not veiled/figurative, but entirely precise, simple, unquestionable/indubitable, and clear words.<sup>31</sup> (FC SD VII, 50)

This statement seems to find its basis in observation of how God speaks related to the articles of faith and the institution of covenant-signs and grace-signs. It also appears to be inferred from the fact that God wants us to have confidence in the truth of His Word (Psa 119: 42, 105; John 17:17; Rom 15:4; 2 Tim 3:16) and that we couldn't have such confidence if the articles of faith and the institution of covenant-signs and grace-signs were to be established on the basis of figurative language. We can also see that Holy Baptism is included by the Confessions as a covenant/grace-sign whose institution is based on words that are "precise, simple, unquestionable/indubitable, and clear." Since, as we have seen, infant Baptism is established by inference rather than explicit statement, that means that such inference is drawn from "not veiled/figurative, but entirely precise, simple, unquestionable/indubitable, and clear words" and is itself "not veiled/figurative, but entirely precise, simple, unquestionable/indubitable, and clear."

To speak of clear words of Scripture does not mean that anyone can understand the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit is necessary to rightly comprehend the Scriptures. The Confessions state:

As to us it is also given by God's grace that we indeed are able to interpret the Scripture and to know Christ, which is not able to happen without the Holy Spirit.<sup>32</sup> (LC IV, 49)

At this point a look at the understanding of the clarity of Scriptures by Luther in *On the Bondage of the Will* is instructive. Luther doesn't deny the existence of obscure texts in the Scriptures. He says:

I admit, of course, that there are many texts in the Scriptures that are obscure and abstruse, not because of the majesty of their subject matter, but because of our ignorance of their vocabulary and grammar; but these texts in no way hinder a knowledge of all the subject matter of Scripture.

The subject matter of the Scriptures, therefore, is all quite accessible, even though some texts are still obscure owing to our ignorance of their terms. Truly it is stupid and impious, when we know that the subject matter of Scripture has all been placed in the clearest light, to call it obscure on account of a few obscure words. If the words are obscure in one place, yet they are plain in another; and it is one

---

<sup>31</sup> The German is "nicht verblümte, sondern ganz eigentliche, einfältige, unzweifelhaftige und klare Wort."

<sup>32</sup> Regarding the need for the Holy Spirit in order to understand spiritual things, see also FC SD II, 9, 12, and FC Ep II, 2.



and the same theme, published quite openly to the whole world, which in the Scriptures is sometimes expressed in plain words, and sometimes lies as yet hidden in obscure words.<sup>33</sup>

Luther then proceeds to speak of two kinds of clarity in Scripture: internal clarity and external clarity. The former applies to the individual and his heart:

If you speak of the internal clarity, no man perceives one iota of what is in the Scriptures unless he has the Spirit of God. All men have a darkened heart, so that even if they can recite everything in Scripture, and know how to quote it, yet they apprehend and truly understand nothing of it. . . . For the Spirit is required for the understanding of Scripture, both as a whole and in any part of it.<sup>34</sup>

What we say is this: the spirits are to be tested or proved by two sorts of judgment. One is internal, whereby through the Holy Spirit or a special gift of God, anyone who is enlightened concerning himself and his own salvation, judges and discerns with the greatest certainty the dogmas and opinions of all men. Of this it is said in 1 Cor. 1<2:15>: “The spiritual man judges all things, but himself is judged by no one.” This belongs to faith and is necessary for every individual Christian. We have called it above “the internal clarity of Holy Scripture.” . . . But this judgment helps no one else, and with it we are not here concerned, for no one, I think, doubts its reality.<sup>35</sup>

External clarity, on the other hand, pertains to the ministry of the Word. According to this type of clarity “nothing at all is left obscure or ambiguous, but everything there is in the Scriptures has been brought out by the Word into the most definite light, and published to all the world.”<sup>36</sup> Here one should keep in mind that in Luther’s context, “everything there is in Scripture” is a reference not to all words or phrases in Scripture, but to the “subject matter of the Scriptures,” that is, the articles of faith. Speaking further on external clarity Luther says:

There is therefore another, an external judgment, whereby with the greatest certainty we judge the spirits and dogmas of all men, not only for ourselves, but also for others and for their salvation. This judgment belongs to the public ministry of the Word and to the outward office, and is chiefly the concern of leaders and preachers of the Word. We make use of it when we seek to strengthen those who are weak in faith and confute opponents. This is what we earlier called “the external clarity of Holy Scripture.” Thus we say that all spirits are to be tested in the presence of the Church at the bar of Scripture. For it ought above all to be settled and established among Christians that the Holy Scriptures are a spiritual light far brighter than the sun itself, especially in things that are necessary to salvation.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Martin Luther, *On the Bondage of the Will*, in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, The Library of Christian Classics: Ichthus ed., eds. E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson, trans. Philip S. Watson and B. Drewery (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 110-111.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

In support of this position, Luther applies in particular three passages of Scripture to the ministry of the Word. The first is 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture inspired by God is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction.” The second is Titus 1:9 ff, where Luther points out “that a bishop must be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it, and silence empty talkers and deceivers.” The third passage of Scripture which he applies is Luke 21:15, “I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand.” It is this third passage that Luther seems to focus on and spends several pages developing in light of external clarity. He also cites the example of Christ who in Matthew 22:23 ff “put the Sadducees to silence by quoting Scripture and proving the resurrection of the dead from the words of Moses.”<sup>38</sup>

The last passage mentioned relative to Luther’s discussion of external clarity is perhaps suggestive of the fact that external clarity will pertain largely to the inferences that are made from the Scripture. For as we saw, Jesus used inferences in this account with the Sadducees and expects the teachers of the Word to do the same. In this regard, ministers of the Word who exercise judgment, that is, provide external clarity, must have a thorough acquaintance of all the Scriptures to make sure that the inferences drawn from one passage of Scripture do not violate the truths revealed in other passages of Scriptures.

Now the question arises, does external clarity pertain to the CTCR or only to the CTCR. The answer to the first question is that external clarity pertains to the CTCR in so far as they have correctly made judgments concerning the Scripture. The answer to the second question is that external clarity does not pertain only to the CTCR, but to the public ministry of the Word. The CTCR is not above the public ministry of the Word. While such a view may not be stated by the CTCR or believed by its members, it needs to be reiterated nonetheless. Also, decisions of the Synod in convention are not above the public ministry of the Word. Such decisions may have a binding force on the members of the Synod due to the nature of the Synod, but they are not above the ministry of the Word. All of this is to say that God’s Word is not to be, and ultimately cannot be, bound by the CTCR or the decisions of a synod (2 Tim 2:9), but the CTCR and the decisions of a synod are to be bound by the Word of God. This is not a new concept or one that most would deny, nevertheless it is worthy to be reiterated.

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 162-167.