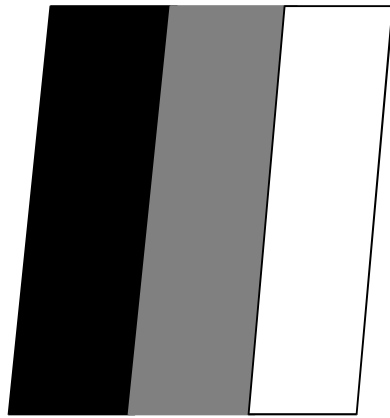


# Von den Mitteldingen Concerning Adiaphora



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## About Indifferent Things (Adiaphora)

### In Conclusion

Wuttke then comes to speak about recreation, which he sets forth wholly as morally required according to Schleiermacher's method. Recreation is a moral demand, since it is tyranny that man stands constantly in a moral call, *sei Ihrannei*<sup>1</sup>; however the form of recreation is reserved for personal freedom. The youthful form of recreation is play in the narrow sense (II, 373). For the more aged (I, 403; II, 374) recreation must be sought in moral fulfillment (still of the command?) (which again entirely is in contrast with I. 398 ff.). Again he says (II. 375): "Prominent among all matters of recreation and conduct is the harmony in which music is carried, whether it itself is for a proper Christian refreshment of the soul through the representation and reception of beauty (as if that has anything to do with the Christian!), or if it has any definite religious content" (Ferner (II, 376). "Dance is no doubt considered pure, as something moral, as an art (cf. I, 495)... [but] when one considers dance as for the Christian, it is unilaterally prohibited and ordained wicked... Dance is morally permissible only as a companion to social gaiety" (II, 377), thus family dance, and the like. Further (II, 378.): "Concerning the morality of drama, it is valued entirely like the morality of dance. There lies in the article nothing which should make the performing, and therefore also the viewing, of drama forbidden for a Christian." Although, concerning this, he nonetheless speaks to degrade the drama of our time. Wuttke: "Drama attendance, according to the present state of things, has weighty considerations against it."

In totality, concerning the remarks of Wuttke, there is to say: 1) Concerning the law, he did not handle it in conformity with Scripture; 2) His concept of permissible things remains precarious;

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<sup>1</sup> Frueher will prove exactly the opposite from 1 Corinthians 10:31, that is namely that in life no morally indifferent impulses/moments are given.

3) He has not proven that even such things as play, etc. may actually belong to the recreation which he has justified as indubitably moral, that is, he has not proven that the basis of dance, etc., namely the arts, belongs in the realm of morality. An actual requirement or decision concerning the whole question has not been given by Wuttke.

As for the Lutheran focused ethic, hear Vilmar (Professor in Marburg; Theol. Moral. 1871). He says (I, 83): “This darkening of the human understanding in this relationship of human action with God shows itself in the acceptance of the allegedly indifferent action (*Adiaphora*). There is not such a thing for us in and of themselves. Each act, even the most specialized and subordinate, has its primary relationship to God.” Here he misses the healthy distinction (Loescher) of direct and indirect relationship to God, without which ethics always deteriorates in to *Praezisismus*. Harless (Christl. Ethik, 5. Aufl. 1860, section 26, S. 160; Nota) does not shed much more light on the question: “Consider little those things which may be called *adiaphora*, that is, which also in and of themselves are not an expression and manifestation of an ethical Christian impulse. In relationship to an established individual person, such actions indeed immediately lose their naturally *adiaphoristic* character, because the person who does them or upon which they work, is not neutral, that is, can be considered out of the ethical relationship.” Critique: Here we have the same false conclusion as made by Wuttke and even in stronger measure by the Pietists, that, therefore, because man never can be considered something other than in a moral relationship to God, so immediately each concrete action bears a moral character. That is the *Prazismumus* which Harless again also no doubt brings forth but does not prove.

We conclude our summary and turn ourselves to a purely exegetical discussion concerning *Adiaphora*.

1. There is *adiaphora*, and it is indeed not only an ecclesiastical thing, with regard to ceremonies, nor merely pure physical things (eating, drinking, and the like), but also such things

which have an actual relationship to the Moral Law. This is certainly according to Scripture. As according to Romans 15:4 ff., where it speaks about the retaining and not retaining of days. It deals, thereby, not about days purely in and of themselves, but according to their actual significance. In the same place, vs. 20 ff., it deals with eating and drinking, not in their physical relationship, in regard to which one can accept eating, but, as it were, in the ethical relationship, as the drinking of wine indicates. The Roman Jew could, with regard to wine, have no misgivings, which the Roman heathen could not likewise have. Drinking or not drinking wine was thus a question of Christian living, of asceticism. 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 is once more speaking about the eating of meat, not in a physical relationship (whether it be cow or veal), but in a more suitable relationship, whether it is idol meat or not. Thus, this kind of thing, which is not then purely physical (as according to the physical impulse, urge, or custom in place), but appears to be dependent on a decision of the free will (whether to do or not to do), Scripture sets forth concerning such things total indifference, as to which to do or not to do. To do or to omit such a thing changes nothing concerning one's standing before God; one can please God with the one as well as with the other, Romans 14:5 ff. We are not any better or worse for doing or not doing such things, Colossians 2:16. In short: The Scriptures set forth adiaphora.

2. All is not in narrow physical sins, but on the contrary, free acts, which according to their subject, essence, and intent, contain nothing clearly forbidden by the command of the moral law. These are according to the following: 1) As was mentioned, there are those things on par with sitting in the idol temple and the eating of the idol meat, in so far as this has been acknowledged as adiaphora. These things are theatre, dance, founded upon an orderly and well thought out activity. In regard to dance, there is a determined movement. In regard to theatre, there is a scenic presentation or imitation of an event from life. The intent is rest and, in a good sense, pleasure. So far as these

things contain nothing contrary to morals, they also are valid to allow as adiaphora. They yet may be, as has been said: not [allowed] in every form, nor for every time, nor for every person.

3. These adiaphora (which must always be considered in and of themselves in the same way, that is, that they are neither moral, nor necessarily sinful, according to 1 Timothy 1:15) are employed or not employed in regard to how they affect faith. One can employ them and yet have faith (Romans 14:22). Another can employ them and thereby still have a good conscience (Colossians 2:16; 1 Corinthians 10:29 ff.). The opposite, however, does not follow. The general rule is to do everything to the honor of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). It is not understood by this that each and every deed must be judged directly and essentially according to the honor of God, such as praying and believing, etc., but that it must be in harmony with such things. In this God is honored since this is done with thankfulness. The primary passage [of this doctrine] demonstrates straight away that if you eat or drink it cannot essentially be according to the physical act of eating that God is honored, but this happens in the spirit, not with the mouth and teeth. Now if one still says that no one can in regard to the aforementioned use of adiaphora be a God-honoring man *per accidens*, he is thus judging simply *a priori* and accepts as already proven what should still be proven. The dance of David was not something in and of itself through which God would be honored. Rather, it is solely on account of his sentiment and intent, that is, as an outpouring of joy before God. The dance, in and of itself, certainly is not essential in any spiritual connection to one having faith in God, nor, however, is it in any way interruptive of the spiritual well-being of David, although we may find the leaping and dancing strange for a grown man of high position.

4. As to whether one should or should not employ an adiaphora depends not on one's freedom alone, which still continues on regardless in connection with the same.<sup>2</sup> The Word of God

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<sup>2</sup> We do not lose freedom by exercising good judgment and concern for weaker brothers. We still have it. We are just using it wisely.

truly gives instructions in connection with your use and non-use of these things upon which your employment of them is made dependent.

A) Concerning the consideration of one's own personal edification, there is 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23.<sup>3</sup> These judgments are often understood as though immediately all that which the apostle mentioned as exposed is projected [distorted] with the appearance of sin. Were that the case then Paul would not have spoken concerning the freedom and permissibility of these things. On these same grounds, these judgments are not to be understood as saying that indeed everything is permissible, including also that which does not edify, whereupon, the text indeed must be read *παντα ου συμφερει* instead of *ου παντα συμφερει*. The judgments are also not to be understood as though a man must restrain himself from free isolated things because they do not contribute to edification. The edification is not directly required because such things are indeed not generally in some way more cases of freedom than of necessity. One sees, however, that the *ου συμφερει* is thought of as hindering the edification because the apostle sets forth as explanation: *Πάντα μοι εἵξεστιν ἀλλ' οὐ πάντα συμφέρει· πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐγὼ ἐξουσιασθήσομαι ὑπὸ τινος*, for through that one becomes a captive under the thing that was free in of itself but which now is a case of the heart and the necessary requirement. Without this one errs in a certain manner and thereby sinfully abuses the grace which alone is able to make holy. Our edification for eternal life depends on these things and therefore so also does an individual's behavioral choices, so that for each and every use of a thing that in and of itself is free, he must stop as soon as he is hindering edification within by becoming a prisoner of that thing.

B) Concerning the consideration for the edification of others, see 1 Corinthians 8:9-13; 10:21-29; Romans 14:13-23. In these places there is admonition concerning the weak brother, that

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<sup>3</sup> 6:12--"Everything is permissible for me"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me"—but I will not be mastered by anything."  
10:23"Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is constructive."

is, concerning him who makes a conscience for himself without the grounding of the truth of God, so that, in its place, it leads him not to employ some work. This weak conscience of his should be respected. He should not be troubled (Romans 14:20)<sup>4</sup>, distressed, or provoked by that which the strong Christians do, things which indeed are not in principal scandalous, but which are scandalous to him in his weakness. See Romans 14:13, 20; 1 Corinthians 8:9; 10:25, 28ff., and v. 32. The respect for the weak conscience should go so far that he who holds an adiaphora which is troubling to the weak brother should avoid causing him offense as this is indeed his absolute duty according to the absolutely binding command of love (Romans 14:15)<sup>5</sup> as well as it is a sin against the Lord (1 Corinthians 8:12)<sup>6</sup>. Accordingly, then, one must follow this love-obligation, lest he look down on his neighbor and deal with him contemptuously (Romans 14:10)<sup>7</sup>, or distress him (v. 15), or perplex [embarrass] him (v. 1; v. 20ff.). In this way, those who are accepted as strong Christians often have the objectionable requirement of the weak brother imposed on them. The weak brother, however, must accept responsibility for this requirement being imposed and concede that it is grounded in his weakness so that he is distressed without real grounds, for if he can do this, than he may indeed no longer be a weaker Christian. Thus, even if the requirement set forth is objectionable, still it is correct according to the Word of God that one will seek to correct the weak in gentleness and indulgence, becoming weak himself, without yet allowing any derogatory condescension on the part of the knowing [strong] one towards the unknowing [weak] one (1 Corinthians 9:22<sup>8</sup>; Hebrews 6:2<sup>9</sup>;

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<sup>4</sup> Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.

<sup>5</sup> If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.

<sup>6</sup> When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

<sup>7</sup> You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

<sup>8</sup> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

<sup>9</sup> Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

Galatians 6:1<sup>10</sup>). Through the fulfillment of this absolute duty of love to treat the weak with consideration, the stronger Christian does not lose anything whatsoever of his knowledge for if he has the better and more correct knowledge of the faith (Romans 14:22<sup>11</sup>; 1 Corinthians 8:7<sup>12</sup>), it is not therefore essential for his Christian freedom that he now practically [by doing the thing] proves his better knowledge and his more complete understanding of the faith in connection with the adiaphora. It is enough that he has the faith and knowledge for himself (Romans 14:22) and that he knows namely that the execution of that adiaphora is not yet truly an obligation, but that for him neither the doing or not doing of that deed makes him better or worse before God. The respect of weak consciences, however, is not allowed to be extended in a way that those who regard some adiaphora as an obligation for themselves perceive that it may be required that they must regard their abstention from that adiaphora as a necessary obligation of conscience because of the sinfulness they have perceived in connection with the thing in question. In 1 Corinthians 10:20,<sup>13</sup> Paul does not want to allow his freedom to be judged by the conscience of another. Colossians 2:16<sup>14</sup> stands for this. All Christians will not have put on the right faith-knowledge, which would happen, if one required acknowledgement of a confession [here, a practice or observance] which included renunciation of the faith-knowledge.

<sup>10</sup> Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.

<sup>11</sup> So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.

<sup>12</sup> But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.

<sup>13</sup> No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.

<sup>14</sup> (16-23) Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. <sup>23</sup> Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

5. The right knowledge in connection with adiaphora is extremely significant, especially for the weak Christian who can come upon a thorough torment-grinder, so that a constant narrowing of the conscience takes place in regard to the adiaphora, so that he emerges from the distress having gradually suffered a shipwreck of his blessedness, because he had continuously internally compelled himself over many things or by one thing, concerning whether a conscience makes the thing in question permissible or forbidden (Romans 14:22). Through right knowledge he will not in this doubt whether the blood of Jesus covers all believers. Especially, through right knowledge, he will not, on account of this inner disposition, suppose that there is no faith for him because, in his [distorted] opinion, he has never arrived at the sufficient self-denial, which is at the same time the fruit of faith and gives witness of this truth.

On the other hand, the so-called strong Christian can, through the perverted assertion of his freedom in adiaphora, come into arrogance and exuberance of the flesh. Indeed, his freedom, which he has been given as blank in the Word, should not be spoiled in principal for him because the Scriptures do not do it. Not through 1 Corinthians 10:31: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” For out of the action of eating and drinking, which is serving as something to honor God, not directly or essentially, but indirectly and *per accidens*, there is something serving God, that has been demonstrated sufficiently. So also it has been demonstrated that the deed to the honor of God is not even a deed that is directly and in itself required as honorific of God, but a deed by which one honors God. The statement includes the indirect honoring of God. Now one could, as has also already been mentioned, nullify the principal teaching which was presented in regard to adiaphora by saying that even by things appraised as adiaphora one is unable to honor God. However, it has thereupon often been sufficiently pointed out that this is an entirely plain *petitio principii*<sup>15</sup>. The principal of freedom for the Christian is also not taken away through passages like 1 Corinthians 10:7; 6:12; 10:23. One may say, in the first place, that a negative

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<sup>15</sup> Begging the question.

[rejecting] judgment over against playing is clearly pleasing. However, this must also then extend over eating and drinking. Indeed, here to be sure play appears to be a piece of ungodliness, and therefore, since it is like eating and drinking considered as the golden calf. For in both of the later passages, which actually testify that the adiaphora is not always beneficial and thereby should be regarded as a reprehensible thing, there the apostle speaks in the first place (v.13.) certainly in connection with v.12, but then immediately comes to declare concerning fornication that it is not an adiaphora, it is significant that he does not say, “The members are not for play, and so on,” but “the body is not for fornication.” Yes, while he precisely speaks first in verse 12 (it stands free for all, however it is not beneficial to all), he connects it with verse 13, saying, “‘Food for the belly, the belly for food’, yet God will put an end to the former and latter.” Thus with this he gives the explanation that every adiaphoral thing has to do, not only with the transitory, but with the eternal.

One can, however, be such a so-called Christian, who according to 1 Corinthians 8:2<sup>16</sup> do not rightly know, how he should know. The same is not, however, if he does not seek the essence, 1 Corinthians 10:24<sup>17</sup>, but straightaway seeks self-importance and also becomes arrogant, 1 Corinthians 8:1,<sup>18</sup> and in this way acts against love for God (v. 3),<sup>19</sup> for Christ (v. 12),<sup>20</sup> and for the neighbor (Romans 14:13).<sup>21</sup> It is in the same way easily possible that a Christian is made captive through the employment of adiaphoral things, that is, they become a disposition for him, a rope (like a noose) for the flesh and consequently a danger for his soul (1 Corinthians 6:12).<sup>22</sup> Accordingly it is highly needed that the Christian recognize the proper understanding of adiaphora so that he may not

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<sup>16</sup> The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.

<sup>17</sup> Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

<sup>18</sup> Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

<sup>19</sup> But the man who loves God is known by God.

<sup>20</sup> When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

<sup>21</sup> Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

<sup>22</sup> “Everything is permissible for me”—but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me”—but I will not be mastered by anything.

only know that all stands free for him but also that not everything is beneficial for him, and the danger that he may fall into through the employment of adiaphora in ungodliness.

6. The pastoral praxis has been drawn out for all: 1) One must pay attention to the essence of the employment of the adiaphora. As soon as the essence fits well in comparison with this unbelieving, godless world, thus it is that the employment of that adiaphora is purely and simply rejected and prohibited for the Christian. This pertains to participation in public dancing, drama, and concerts. 2) One must pay attention to the scope of the employment of the adiaphora. Was, for example, the play perhaps an orderly, regular pleasure, having been set for a determined time, place, and so forth, and, in that way, not more something which serves for entertainment by a random (infrequent) meeting but rather something sought after which has become a need.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the Christian is ensnared, and in this case that should and may not be, it is required for him in the name of God to abandon such employment of adiaphora. 3) One must pay attention to the effect and consequence of the employment of adiaphora. If he reaches the point of distressing of the weak, he is to forbid that action. He has contributed to the distress of the weak if he has through that action either disturbed and upset them in conscience (1 Corinthians 8:12ff.) or induced them against their consciences to follow in the employment of that adiaphora (1 Corinthians 8:10), or enticed them in the name of adiaphora to the freedom of the flesh and a life conforming to the world. 4) One must pay attention to the times and standards of the community. According to the first, it is so in universal things and will be still more so, in most cases, according to the last, that not only is the use of the adiaphora encouraged, but rather it is discouraged thereof as well. 5) The pastoral praxis in connection with adiaphora can also not be such that the *Seelsorger* paints the adiaphora as plainly sinful or that he puts forward the contention, even though it is not provable, that the adiaphoral thing must always be connected with sin. He would embroil himself with it in endless deliberation which,

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<sup>23</sup> The idea is that it is a snare if it becomes something essential to one's life (i.e. an addiction) and therefore is carefully scheduled as a regular part of that persons lifestyle.

due to the subjective nature of the adiaphora (least of all in connection with that which may be employed), cannot lead to any result. Rather the praxis can only be this, that the *Seelsorger* gives consideration to his own salvation in avoiding giving snares to the Christian, also making himself well attentive thereupon how little he has to stand on in so far as significant Christian passages, and that he must regard all adiaphoral things according to the godly instruction of 1 Corinthians 6:12;<sup>24</sup> 10:20,<sup>25</sup> provided that he does not want to be one opposed to God and that he wants to align himself with what God has determined for instruction in connection with the handling of adiaphoral things, without daring to truly align himself disobediently against the directives of God, comparing 1 Corinthians 10:22<sup>26</sup> with v. 20. Further, the praxis of the Pastor must be that he prohibits for others the use obviously dangerous employments of adiaphora because God Himself requires with all seriousness for such snares, 1 Corinthians 8:12;<sup>27</sup> Romans 14:20,<sup>28</sup> whereby it must be explained ever cautiously that God now forbids for them these previously freestanding things, not because they are in and of themselves sinful, but out of consideration for the neighbor, to whom Christian love is owed (Romans 14:15<sup>29</sup>), through the denial of which he himself would be marked as unchristian (1 Corinthians 13:2<sup>30</sup>). 6) The pastoral praxis practiced in this manner, is difficult, however it must only correspond with the Gospel. It is easy in general under circumstances to allow an adiaphora to be explained through a congregation and then to operate and regulate with the charter of the congregation. In this, however, the snare is that the pastor is the highest disciplinarian of the law and

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<sup>24</sup> “Everything is permissible for me”—but not everything is beneficial. “Everything is permissible for me”—but I will not be mastered by anything.

<sup>25</sup> No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.

<sup>26</sup> Are we trying to arouse the Lord’s jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

<sup>27</sup> When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.

<sup>28</sup> Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.

<sup>29</sup> If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.

<sup>30</sup> If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

not the Gospel father (1 Corinthians 14ff.<sup>31</sup>). In the best snares one such praxis may bring about no injury of Christendom (through pharisaic arrogance), yet they certainly cannot require, what the truly evangelical praxis promote, namely at once self-assured concern for the edification of one's own soul which is born out of faith and further the genuine, sensitive care for the edification of another which is born out of love.

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<sup>31</sup> I am not sure what this refers to. This is how it appears.