Article XV: Church Ceremonies ("Church Usages")

Introduction:

Lutheranism embraces the good historic traditions of the Church, especially those of the Western Church. These include such things as following the pattern of the Church year, lectionary readings from the Bible, a liturgical order of worship, various festival days, vestments worn by clergy, and the use of candles, crucifixes, and other objects. As this article makes very clear, in the Lutheran Church, rites, decorations, or traditions are never used or followed to appease God's wrath or to earn the forgiveness of sins. Lutheranism removed from the Church useless and harmful traditions such as monastic vows and insisting on certain foods on certain days.

Article XV: Church Ceremonies ("Church Usages")

[1] Our churches teach that ceremonies ought to be observed that may be observed without sin. Also, ceremonies and other practices that are profitable for tranquility and good order in the Church (in particular, holy days, festivals, and the like) ought to be observed.

[2] Yet, the people are taught that consciences are not to be burdened as though observing such things was necessary for salvation (Colossians 2:16-17). [3] They are also taught that human traditions instituted to make atonement with God, to merit grace, and to make satisfaction for sins are opposed to the Gospel and the doctrine of faith. [4] So vows and traditions concerning meats and days, and so forth, instituted to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, are useless and contrary to the Gospel.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do the "changes" to the Service of the Sacrament that Pastor Zellers suggested apply to Article XV?

2. The Lutheran approach to *adiaphora* is apparent in Article XV. Define *adiaphora*:

3. Why is it important to distinguish between what God has instituted and what the Church has established?

4. Does *adiaphora* give us license to do whatever we want?

5. Can the Church demand obedience to man-made regulations under threat of eternal consequences?

6. Can the Church attach the promise of the forgiveness of sins or eternal blessings to a man-made rite?

7. Do man-made ceremonies appease an angry God or merit His grace?

8. What is the center of Christian worship/the Divine Service?

9. How does the Divine Service clearly convey Christ, His work, and His gifts?

Conclusion:

The Lutheran Church does not reject tradition; it rejects tradition that obscures the Gospel. We preserve historic rites and ceremonies because they serve the Word of God, teach the faith, promote reverence, and maintain peace and good order in the Church. Yet we must never confuse these human traditions with God's commandments or burden consciences as though they were necessary for salvation.

The Divine Service is not about what we do for God, but about what God does for us through Christ. Therefore, our rites and ceremonies must always serve that purpose: proclaiming Christ crucified, comforting consciences, and delivering His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation through the Word and Sacraments.