

Doctrinal Brief: "Agreement In Doctrine And Practice"

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In recent years a number of cases have come to the attention of the CICR which have made it clear that the traditional phrase, "agreement in doctrine and practice," which occurs in many of our documents about church fellowship, is often misunderstood today. Some people confuse the words "practice" and "practices" and ask, "Which practices must church bodies agree on to have church fellowship with each other?" It seems necessary to clarify the statement "for church fellowship it is necessary that there be agreement in doctrine and practice."

In the phrase "agreement in doctrine and practice" the word "practice" does not refer to "practices," that is, it does not refer to customs or adiaphora, nor to particular applications of doctrinal principles. "Agreement in practice" means that a church actually puts its doctrinal position into practice in the daily life of the church. If a church has a paper profession of the Lutheran confessions, but there is no attempt to discipline pastors who teach contrary to Scripture and the confessions, the church's practice is not in harmony with its doctrine, and we could not remain in fellowship with such a church. If a church declares its belief in closed communion, but it does not discipline pastors or congregations who defy the church's scriptural position, that church may agree with us in doctrine, but it is not in agreement with us in practice. "Agreement in practice" means that a church exercises evangelical doctrinal discipline against those who persist in teaching contrary to Scripture. An example of the meaning of "agreement in practice" is provided by the Statement of Faith of the South Asian Lutheran Evangelical Mission, which states, "We believe and accept this basic statement in its entirety *and teach accordingly.*"

With Article X of the Formula of Concord we say, "We believe, teach, and confess also that no Church should condemn another because one has less or more external ceremonies not commanded by God than the other, if otherwise there is agreement among them in doctrine and all its articles, as also in the right use of the holy Sacraments, according to the well-known saying: *Dissonantia ieiunii non dissolvit consonantiam fidei*, Disagreement in fasting does not destroy agreement in faith."