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# The Niagara Report: Report of the Anglican-Lutheran Consultation on Episcopate 1987

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summary, an excellent refresher course, and a stimulating invitation to put the method into practice and to "let each gospel speak for itself."

Editors should know that German nouns are always capitalized (*Sitz im Leben, Redaktionsgeschichte*).

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### **The Niagara Report: Report of the Anglican-Lutheran Consultation on Episcopate 1987**

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vi + 71 pp. \$8.50

As Appendices 3 and 4 and the Bibliography of this little volume make clear, Anglican-Lutheran dialogues have been going on for two decades in places as diverse as Tanzania, Malaysia, India (between Lutherans and the Church of South India), Australia, Europe, the U.S.A., and Canada, with results ranging from agreed statements on doctrine to joint eucharistic celebrations. With *episcopē* remaining as "the chief obstacle to full communion" (5), the Consultation on which this document reports was convened at Niagara Falls in the fall of 1987. The report notes (ch. 3) how much the two communions have in common (including scriptures, creeds, sacraments, similar orders of worship) and that they have neither "officially engaged in any divisive theological or doctrinal controversy" nor "officially condemned each other as Churches" (34).

Rather than restricting apostolic succession to "an unbroken chain of ordinations from the apostles' time" (8), as has often been done but is here labelled a "mistake" (8), the Consultation includes in apostolicity "characteristics of the whole Church" (14) such as mission, doxology, faithfulness and continuity, disciplined communal life, nurture, and structure (ch. 2), concluding that in view of their "commonly held apostolic faith" neither church "can, in good conscience, reject the apostolic nature of the other" and that "the ordained ministry is no longer an issue which need divide" them (33). The "continued isolation" of those who exercise *episcopē* in the two churches is therefore "no longer tolerable and must be overcome" (33).

To this end, however, both churches are asked to make certain changes. Lutherans are asked 1) to designate as bishop or suffragan bishop all "who exercise an ordained ministry of *episcopate* (41); 2) to elect bishops "to the same tenure of office as are congregational pastors, chaplains, and other pastoral ministers in the Church," i.e. until "death, retirement, or resignation" (42); 3) in accord with the canons of Nicaea, to revise the rites of installation of bishops "so that there is a laying on of hands by at least three bishops" (thus giving liturgical expression to the church's recognition "that

the bishop serves the local or regional church through ties of collegiality which are links to the universal Church”) and that at full communion “one or more of the bishops at a Lutheran installation should be from a Church in the Anglican communion” (42); and 4) to make it their “unfailing practice that only bishops or suffragan bishops... preside at all ordinations of clergy” (43).

For their part, Anglicans are asked 1) to “make the necessary canonical revisions so that they can acknowledge and recognize the full authenticity of the existing ministries of the Lutheran Churches” based on “the recognition that the apostolic succession in the episcopal office does not consist primarily in an unbroken chain of those ordaining to those ordained, but in a succession in the presiding ministry of a church, which stands in the continuity of apostolic faith” (43–44); 2) to “establish and welcome structures for collegial and periodic review” of bishops’ ministry (44); and 3) to “invite Lutheran bishops to participate in the laying on of hands at the consecration and installation of Anglican bishops” (44).

In addition, a number of questions implying the need for reform and renewal are addressed to both churches (45–49) and practical steps are outlined to realize full communion (ch. 5).

Things have come a long way since the meetings in days past discussing whether bishops belonged to the *esse*, the *bene esse*, or the *plene esse* of the church—or none of the above. Thanks to the arduous and often unsung labours of those engaged in Anglican-Lutheran dialogue, the next step is for the Anglican Consultative Council and the Lutheran World Federation and the members of these two organizations (which the two episcopal signers of the Preface, interestingly and surprisingly, call “parent bodies”) “to decide whether this ‘Niagara Report’ represents any breakthrough in understanding, and how far and how soon its proposals should be implemented” (2). (Interesting too, and probably not surprising to Canadians accustomed to such oversights, is that the same signatories do not identify the “Niagara Falls” from which they speak as on the American or Canadian side of the border.)

The lists of participants in the Consultation and of members of the Anglican-Lutheran International Consultation Committee (53–54) as well as of those giving papers at the Consultation (70–71) are noteworthy for the number of Third World representatives. Closer to home, Waterloo Lutheran Seminary graduate Annette Smith is listed among the participants in the Consultation.

One of my fond hopes is that if and when full communion between the two churches is achieved their shared Latin heritage will be recognized by consistently punctuating “e.g.” with two periods rather than one (e.g. 50 and 64: “eg.”).