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Implications of the Gospel: Some Hermeneutical and Ecclesiological Queries[1]

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I. INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

In their preface to *Implications of the Gospel*[2] the ecumenical officers OF the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Episcopal Church in the United States of America urge that the "churches individually and together must seriously weigh and consider this document. They must determine the degree to which they can accept the recommendations and change their thinking and practices" (10). It is in the spirit of this request that I wish to offer some thoughts and reflections about the effectiveness of this contribution, particularly in the area of hermeneutics and ecclesiology. In doing so, my goal is to raise questions and to make suggestions which might be addressed more fully in the subsequent sessions and publications of the Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue.

Implications of the Gospel represents the first contribution of Series III of the Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue here in the United States, published in 1988 and only recently distributed. In 1982 both churches declared that further clarity needed to be reached on certain key issues before full communion could be achieved. The preface to LED III rephrases the issues in this way: "The Episcopalians wanted greater agreement on the ordering of the church as the community of apostolic faith. The Lutherans sought greater clarity on the claim that there was sufficient agreement on the gospel to enter into eucharistic fellowship" (9). To begin to address these issues is the goal of the study, with particular reference to the implications of the gospel.

[1]Originally given as a lecture to Lutheran and Episcopal clergy in Worcester, MA, on May 4, 1989.

[2]Edited by William A. Norgren and William G. Rusch (Minneapolis and Cincinnati: Augsburg and Forward Movement, 1988). Henceforth referred to as "IG" or "LED III." (Page numbers incorporated within the article refer to IG.)

It is also worth noting a basic presupposition of the study stated in the introductory chapter: "We have tried to listen afresh to the Holy Scriptures as the 'rule and ultimate standard' (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 877), or 'the authoritative source and norm' (Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2.03, p. 13) of our common Christianity, to discover common insights in the creeds we both confess, and to draw upon the renewal of our shared liturgical heritage" (13). This theme of fidelity to Scripture is emphasized again when the dialogue shares what it considers to be two fundamental sets of questions to which it hopes to respond: (1) "What is the present truth of the gospel?" and (2) "Above all, how is our saying of the gospel faithful to the norm of Christianity, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?"

(13-14). A key question is whether IG provides us with an *adequate* response to these two fundamental issues.

The chapter of IG which most directly begins to address the mandates of both church bodies as well as the neuralgic issues standing in the way of full communion is Section 3, "The Church of the Gospel." My comments will, for the most part, be directed to it.

II. "THE CHURCH OF THE GOSPEL"

This section opens with an emphasis that the church, properly understood as rooted in Israel, is the necessary implication of the gospel. The manifestation of the church's life in its liturgy, polity, and doctrine is then addressed. Let us touch on each of these points.

A. The Church as the Necessary Implication of the Gospel

With keen insight these paragraphs correctly suggest that the issue of greatest sensitivity related to full communion between Lutherans and Episcopalians is in the area of "ecclesiology." In fact, ecclesiology is that theological doctrine which is least understood in contemporary Protestantism; it is the key area in which theological discourse must proceed, and no further progress will be made in our dialogue with Rome or the Orthodox until we take the doctrine of the church more earnestly. This observation holds equally true for Lutherans and Episcopalians. A not uncommon Lutheran constriction of justification, coupled with a restrictive view of the relationship of the gospel to the church, has allowed us to view ecclesiology as incidental at best. At the same time the contemporary Episcopal emphasis on the historic episcopate, often not revealing the fullness of the understanding of apostolic succession, has resulted in a less than comprehensive understanding of ecclesiology in that church body as well.

The dialogue report asserts that the "church and gospel are necessarily related because both have to do with the reign of God" and that "the church is the principal implication of the gospel in human history" (34). This is a very comprehensive assertion. Would a majority in both churches assent to that conclusion? If so, we will have made a major advance. Yet it is unclear how this statement coheres with the opening sentence of section five where it is written that "mission is the implication of the gospel *par excellence*." How are these two statements related? What is the difference between "principal" and "*par excellence*"? Are all implications of the gospel of the same order? Is the church simply *an* implication of the gospel or *part of its very fabric*? Can there be gospel without church?

One major reason given by LED III for the conclusion that the church is the

principal implication of the gospel is that "there is no proclamation of the gospel in word and sacraments without a community and its ministry" (34). IG presents a view quite similar to what John Knox helpfully described as the 'Christ event.'[3] By the use of the term 'Christ event' Knox meant that one would not simply talk of Jesus or the gospel without including Israel, the earthly ministry of Jesus, his death and resurrection, *and*, specifically, the new community resulting from God's revelation in Jesus. Jesus and the church are inseparable; one cannot have one without the other. As the historical scholarship of the twentieth century has documented, it was the church that bore witness to Jesus, transmitted and shaped his words and deeds, collected that material, and wrote and collected the books into canonical form which we refer to as Holy Scripture. To begin to recognize the inseparability of Jesus and church, gospel and church, is to stand at a critical threshold of insight which allows us more fully to comprehend the good news of the Kingdom.

B. Liturgy

IG develops its view of ecclesiology by employing three categories already referred to: liturgy, polity, and doctrine. Is this ordering incidental? If not, one might ask whether all would agree to it or whether some would prefer to make a case for a different ordering, i.e., doctrine, polity, and liturgy? If we, in fact, do hold different perspectives on this ordering, what does that reveal about our presuppositions?

This section on liturgy and worship contains a richer and fuller view of the eucharist than would be currently acknowledged in some circles of American Lutheranism. We find here perspectives quite similar to those outlined in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. However, it may be useful to add a word of caution to the following statement: "In contemporary ecumenical dialogue, Lutherans have agreed that in the Lord's Supper Christ is present 'as the once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of the world who gives himself to the faithful,' and that 'the celebration of the eucharist is the church's sacrifice of praise and self-offering or oblation'" (44). To be accurate, these assertions were made by *some* Lutheran theologians in dialogue with two specific churches, and these dialogues have yet to be officially received by the church. Does not the fact that LED III has to confirm the Lutheran view of the eucharist by reference to theological assertions perhaps suggest that for Lutherans doctrine determines liturgy and not liturgy doctrine? This raises another question. IG makes a number of recommendations for discussion *and* implementation in our congregations.[4] By what authority? Is this a legitimate process *before* the report has been received by the respective churches? Can one honestly evaluate *and* implement simultaneously without sacrificing one to the other?

C. Polity

Let us now turn to the second aspect of the church as the bearer of the gospel in human history: polity—polity as life together for witness to the gospel. This section of LED III recognizes that one of the most sensitive implications of ecclesiology is polity. "To Lutherans it seems that Episcopalian emphasis on the historic episcopate and its authority to ordain could be an unwarranted addition to the gospel. To Episcopalians the Lutheran view that, when there is agreement on the gospel, polity can become an *adiaphoron* seems an unwarranted indifference with

[3]See Knox's *Jesus Lord and Christ* (New York: Harper, 1958) 57, 138f., 200ff.; also Knox's seminal work, *The Church and the Reality of Christ* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

[4]See, for example, IG 29 and 114.

regard to something that is at least an implication of the gospel" (44). Unfortunately, IG cuts short the discussion on polity, referring to future study the issues of "historic episcopate, and ordering of ministry (bishops, priests, and deacons) in the total context of apostolicity" (44). The remainder of this section proceeds to an insubstantial attempt to support the ordination of women as a necessary reform movement implied by the gospel. It is unfortunate that this document, which so correctly stresses ecclesiology as central to the Christian faith, makes no attempt to deal precisely with the *ecclesiological* reservations of the Roman Catholic or Orthodox Church with regard to the ordination of women.[5]

D. Doctrine

A third section of "The Church of the Gospel" is the discussion on doctrine, which, it is stated at the outset, serves the church's proclamation of the gospel. Doctrine is defined further as "all teaching that is authentically Christian" (52). It is then suggested (52) that doctrinal formulations can function either descriptively ("This is what Christians, in fact, teach") or prescriptively ("This is what Christians ought to teach"). LED III understands Lutherans to lean more in the direction of prescriptive doctrine which results in "considerable doctrinal and theological homogeneity" and understands Episcopalians to attach more importance to the role of descriptive doctrine which results in "considerable doctrinal and theological variety" (53). While such distinctions may be historically true, they appear less valid for contemporary American Lutheranism.

Perhaps realizing that these distinctions between descriptive and prescriptive are not necessarily useful as we approach the twenty-first century, LED III urges that we "can and must affirm the concept of normative doctrine because what is at stake is the authenticity of the church's proclamation, that is, the authenticity of the church's gospel" (53). Also helpful are the observations that normative doctrine requires the church to struggle with the authenticity of the gospel it proclaims, the fidelity of its proclamation, and the reminder that all normative doctrine is always a combination of the categories *normative* and *gospel.* But where LED III is less useful is in its avoidance of any discussion as to how we make normative doctrinal decisions; in other words, it does not reflect upon the key theological issue of authority.

Almost as if they sensed something was absent from the discussion, IG returns to its earlier assertion that the "Holy Scriptures are the norm for the church's proclamation of the gospel" (55). The problem, however, is that no adequate hermeneutical discussion follows. How, or by what authority, is the normativeness of Scripture decided and applied? What is the hermeneutical context in which Scripture is interpreted? How do we decide between a fundamentalist understanding of the normativeness of Scripture and Bishop Spong's cavalier disregard fora the normativeness of Scripture?[6]

[5]Although IG is a document primarily addressed to the Episcopal and Lutheran churches, its wider ecumenical impact is recognized by the Dialogue Committee itself on page 50.

[6]John Shelby Spong, *Living in Sin? A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

III. CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON IG'S USE OF "DOCTRINE"

A. The Ordination of Women

IG asserts that "*profound doctrinal reasons" led to the ordination of women in the Lutheran and Episcopal churches*.[7] Furthermore, it is stated that the ordination of women "by our churches is a specific example of a recently undertaken reform" and that this action is an indication of "how our polity is a witness to the gospel of the reign of God" (49). Unfortunately, one looks in vain for the "profound theological reasons" or for a detailed discussion of what was so corrupt in the church for two millennia that needed "reform."

In an effort to show that these churches have "not acted simply as a concession to...social and cultural forces" (50), there follows a superficial exegetical treatment of certain New Testament passages that have nothing whatsoever to do with the issue of ordination of men or women and appear to be based on a 'foundationless hermeneutical enterprise' so prevalent today.[8] Neither of our churches has produced a sustained theological defense of its action. The need still exists for a theological treatment of the issue, a treatment which, among other things, will attempt to address the ecclesiological reservations prominent in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches.

In its effort to defend the ordination of women, LED III makes two questionable assertions. (1) It is urged that the New Testament does not "identify Christ's maleness as a quality which is necessary for those who preside at the Eucharist" (51). (Since the New Testament does not discuss the issue of who presides at the eucharist this is nothing other than an *ad hominem* argument.) (2) The second assertion is this: "We are also convinced that the historical antiquity of a practice is no guarantee of its validity and that no practice is beyond challenge and reform"; to this is added the comment that we "believe that the practice of ordaining only men must be challenged in the name of the gospel" (51-52). Based on its previous reference to Galatians 3:27-28 the dialogue concludes that the act of ordaining women "is an act of fidelity to the tradition of the *imago Dei* as comprehending both 'male and female' (Gen 1:26-28)" (52).

What are the implications of such facile theological reasoning? That those churches who only ordain men are unfaithful to the gospel? Who determines how far one extends the definition of the gospel? Are we in danger of having such an inclusive understanding of the gospel that it can be made to encompass anything that we believe should be included in it? All of this raises the important question about how we make theological decisions and in what ways consultation with sister churches should form part of the process. Do non-consultative, unilateral actions assist the cause of ecumenism and the unity of the gospel? (Before proceeding we need to be very clear that it is not I who have raised the issue of the ordination of women but LED III, and that what is at issue here is not what I happen to believe is correct in reference to this issue but the theological cogency of the arguments presented in LED III.)

A brief query on the issue of *imago Dei* and on the theme of Galatians 3:28 that in Christ there is "not male and female" is appropriate. Does oneness mean

[7]IG 49 (emphasis added).
[8]See note 10 below.

obliteration of the sexual differences that God created, or do these texts imply that oneness is only achieved in the coinherence of that which God created equal but with distinctively different roles? Is not the latter the meaning of Genesis 1:27? Do we follow the gnostics who wished to create a pristine androgynous state, or ought we follow the church tradition that argues that the fullness of God is precisely not in the obliteration, but in the glorification and unity, of the feminine and the masculine? That Paul wishes to eliminate any notion of inferiority or superiority is clear; but whether he wished to blur different but co-equal roles in the church is another question. It is certainly relevant to any discussion of this topic to remember that Being itself, the God of creation and the Lord of history, is described in Scripture relationally—in relation to his bride, Israel—in the same way that his Son, Jesus, is described in Ephesians 5 in relationship to his bride, the church. God is metaphorically described using masculine language and God's people, Israel and the church, are consistently described using feminine language. Thus, when the tradition describes Mary as *theotokos* and Vatican II, reflecting earlier theological tradition, refers to Mary as "Mother of the Church," we begin to see the image problem that the majority of Christians still have with the critical question of who is to be ordained.[9]

The recent comments of George Lindbeck are to the point. Speaking about the issue of the ordination of women, Lindbeck asks: "Is the tradition against their ordination basically cultural and thus similar to the church's long accommodation to slavery? Retrieval of the classic hermeneutics even in combination with historical criticism does not decide this issue. Yet it changes the context of the debate. Attention focuses, not on entitlements, privileges, and gender, but on the pastoral office itself as God's instrument for the nurturing of his people with word and sacrament. What builds up the church is what counts. Sociologically and historically speaking, it is ultimately the *sensus fidelium* which decides in such matters."[10] The point is simply this: since the *sensus fidelium* of the universal ecumenical church has not yet accepted the ordination of women, those churches who are in favor of such ordination need finally to develop more compelling hermeneutical and ecclesiological arguments than either the Episcopal or Lutheran church has produced to date and certainly more compelling than those that appear in LED III.

B. Feminine Language for God

In Section II, "The God of the Gospel," there is another area that seems more marked by the possibility of a foundationless hermeneutical enterprise than by serious theological reflection. On the one hand, there is the insistence that the "church's name for God, 'Father, Son, Holy Spirit,' is grounded in Jesus Christ" and cannot be altered; LED categorically rejects the substitution of such designations as creator, redeemer, and sanctifier for the trinitarian name (27). On the other hand, it is argued that while the "church has traditionally selected masculine images for God from the Scriptures, our churches need to *advocate* the use of feminine images

[9]To make a persuasive case for the ordination of women, the challenge of theologian Deborah Belonick needs to be addressed. See her *Feminism in Christianity* (Syosset, NY: Orthodox Church in America, 1983) 39.

[10]George Lindbeck, "Scripture, Consensus and Community," in *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church,* ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) 100.

as well as this traditional masculine imagery."[11] Finally, it is asserted that "*strategies*[12] for introducing the feminine element into talk about God do not stop with the first Person of the Trinity. Scholars have recovered the biblical theme of Jesus as the 'Sophia' of God. Others find feminine symbols to be appropriately descriptive of the Spirit's work" (29-30).

Two critical comments need to be offered. (1) One should not lose sight of the fact that metaphorical changes in the structure of language produce substantial changes in thought. This is, of course, what many feminists desire. But can we do that and still remain faithful to the discourse and normativeness of Scripture? When we start using "birthing" language, however naively, we take the first step into the feminist view of a "bisexual androgynous deity."[13] We then overlook that in Scripture God, metaphorically referred to in masculine terms, never impregnates anything or anyone in order to produce creation. Yet feminine language applied to the Deity, particularly given the presuppositions of feminist theology, results in a creator indissolubly intermingled with creation, and this negates the biblical perspective of God's relation to his creation—the careful distinction between Creator and creation.[14] (2) LED III's comments concerning feminine language about Jesus and the use of "Sophia" are not only misleading but irresponsible. First, it needs to be said, for example, that the gospel of John describes Jesus, not as Sophia, but as Logos, and it is this category, and not sophiology, which is adopted by Nicene orthodoxy. The fourth gospel and its successors could not use Sophia as a description of Jesus—aside from the fact that it was obviously impossible to refer to the man Jesus as the incarnation of feminine Sophia—precisely because the gnostics spoke of Sophia as 'the sister of Jesus,' "or represented her as an androgynous figure in a way that...recalled the classical Greek goddess of wisdom."[15] Second, any serious reflection on the doctrine of the Trinity recognizes that these unreflected LED III statements lead to utter confusion. The notion of a "divine family" as symbolic of the Trinity, which is where these comments of LED III are leading, is bizarre. "If the First Divine Person is to represent the father, and the Third, the mother, then the Son has to be regarded as produced in part by the Holy Spirit, which is theological nonsense."[16]

C. Further Hermeneutical Observations

All of these reflections keep coming back to a fundamental issue, perhaps today *the* fundamental issue: the hermeneutical context in which one interprets Scripture. In a lecture given at St. Peter's Lutheran Church, New York City, in January, 1988, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger raised the question whether the historical-critical method may not be susceptible to an uncritical influence by philosoph-

[11]IG 29 (emphasis added).

[12]I, for one, find this term offensive and reflective of the divisive politicization rampant in our churches.

[13]Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Spirituality, Christian Identity, and Catholic Vision," in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, ed. Carol P. Crist and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979) 99.

[14]For a biblical critique of this danger, see Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Female Language for God: Should the Church Adopt It?" in *The Hermeneutical Quest: Essays in Honor of James Luther Mays on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Donald G. Miller (Allision Park, PA: Pickwick, 1986) 109.

[15]Samuel Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings: A Biblical Theology of Manhood and Womanhood* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 118.

[16]Manfred Hauke, *Women in the Priesthood? A Systematic Analysis in the Light of the Order of Creation and Redemption* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988) 292.

ical presuppositions which may be antithetic to the teachings of the church. Mentioned was Bultmann's own dependence on Heideggerian philosophy. While for the most part this did not affect Bultmann's serious attempt to increase access to the Bible's message, there are today symptoms of "the disintegration of interpretation and hermeneutics."[17] In particular Ratzinger stated that "materialist and feminist exegesis, whatever else may be said about them, do not even claim to be an understanding of the text itself in the manner in which it was originally intended. At best they may be seen as an expression of the view that the Bible's message is in and of itself inexplicable, or else that it is meaningless for life in today's world. In this sense, they are no longer interested in ascertaining the truth, but only whatever will serve their own particular agenda...Thus historical method can even serve as a cloak for such maneuvers insofar as it dissects the Bible into discontinuous pieces which are then able to be put to new use and inserted into a new montage (altogether different from the original Biblical context)."[18] Central to Ratzinger's critique is the concern that there is a marked tendency in contemporary exegesis to reduce history into philosophy and to revise history by means of philosophy. Increasingly the "debate about modern exegesis is not a dispute among historians: it is rather a philosophical debate."[19]

If in fact we are in a situation where what one exegete takes as definite can only be called into question by other exegetes,[20] then we must ask whether something more is not necessary for exegesis to function effectively in the life of the ecclesia. By failing to make reference to the current disintegration of contemporary biblical studies, LED III's call to Scripture as the "rule and ultimate standard" and "the authoritative source and norm" (12) rings hollow; significant attention needs to be given to this current hermeneutical crisis in LED's future work.

In Professor George Lindbeck's response to Cardinal Ratzinger,[21] he suggested that one of the pressing contemporary theological problems is the lack of a *sensus fidelium* in most major Christian communions. "There seems to be less and less communal sense of what is or is not Christian."[22] At the heart of the dilemma is not only the decline in knowledge of the Bible but the lack of any sense of common biblical discourse in the nation and in many of the Christian communities. The issue which must concern all contemporary Christians "is the extent to which the Bible can be profitably read in our day as a canonically and narrationally unified and internally glossed (that is, self-referential and self-interpreting) whole centered on Jesus Christ, and telling the story of the dealings of the Triune God with his people and his world in ways which are typologically (though not, so at least the Reformers would say, allegorically) applicable to the present."[23] This vision has been largely lost. Can it be recovered? Has the Bible become just another book which is profitable primarily for ideological, philological, or historical purposes or is it, in fact, Scripture and, if so, how does it function scripturally in the life of the ecclesia? While

[17]Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches of Exegesis Today," in *Biblical Interpretation in Crisis*, 1-23.

[18]Ibid., 5.

[19]Ibid., 16.

[20]Ibid., 6.

[21]See note 10 above.

[22]Lindbeck, 74.

[23]Ibid., 75.

LED III is to be commended for stressing the authority of Scripture, it now must concentrate on the hermeneutical context and exercise of that authority.

D. Toward a Recovery of the Ecclesial Dimension of the Christ Event

Since one of the significant contributions of LED III is that it focuses our attention toward ecclesiology, some final thoughts may be in order with regard to the relationship between ecclesiology and hermeneutics. With Lindbeck I am convinced that at the heart of the contemporary crisis of authority in the ecclesial community lies the loss of a common biblical discourse and the gradual extinction of a specifically Christian hermeneutic. The very first step must be the recovery of the ecclesial dimension of the Christ event. Church and gospel belong together, they cannot be separated. There cannot be gospel without church and there cannot be church without gospel. They cohere in one another. The death and resurrection of Christ lead to gospel and church, church and gospel. The one cannot exist without the other. It is the church which transmits, interprets, collects, and finally shapes into canonical form the story of God's interaction with Israel and his revelation in Jesus who is the Christ. Thus, I would ask whether Ratzinger is not correct when he asserts that the "first presupposition of all exegesis is that it accepts the Bible as a book. In so doing, it has already chosen a place for itself, which does not simply follow from the study of literature. It has identified *this particular literature* as the product of a coherent history, and this history as the proper space for coming to understanding. If it wishes to be theology, it must take a further step. It must recognize that the faith of the Church is that form of 'sym-pathia' without which the Bible remains a *closed* book. It must come to acknowledge this faith as a hermeneutic, the space for understanding, which does not do dogmatic violence to the Bible, but precisely allows the solitary possibility for the Bible to be itself."[24]

George Lindbeck also reminds us that the canon was shaped in the early Christian movement alongside its rule of faith. The Lutheran Lindbeck's conclusion is remarkably similar to the Catholic Ratzinger's. "Thus a certain way of reading scripture (viz., as a Christ-centered narrationally and typologically unified whole in conformity to a trinitarian rule of faith) was constitutive of the Christian canon and has, it would seem, an authority inseparable from that of the bible itself. To read the bible otherwise is not to read it as scripture."[25] As a result, canon, hermeneutics, and the *sensus fidelium* are interrelated in the most intimate way. The Marcionite heresy of our time is not divorcing the New Testament from the Old but divorcing it from the hermeneutical framework of trinitarian Christianity. Thus we read the biblical stories less for what they tell us about God and his interaction with creation and humanity and more for factual, historical meaning, thus allowing the former to be lost. While fully recognizing the many contributions of the historical-critical method, a Christian must employ the hermeneutics of a trinitarian ecclesiology. For Lindbeck the Bible must be "read as a unified whole telling the story of the dealings of the Triune God with his people and world."[26]

Lindbeck also observes that a new scholarly caste of interpreters has made the Bible inaccessible, rather than accessible, to ordinary folk.[27] Many biblical studies

[24]Ratzinger, 22-23.
[25]Lindbeck, 77.
[26]Ibid., 88.
[27]Ibid., 90.

today no longer offer support or lucid articulation of the biblical faith but are rather engaged in "foundationless hermeneutical enterprises."[28] A not unimportant question for the church, and especially for the Episcopal and Lutheran churches, is to ask of its exegetes whether they are guided by such foundationless hermeneutical enterprises or by the trinitarian hermeneutic just described.

Remarkably timely for the hermeneutical and ecclesiological work which LED III has yet to do is the writing of Vincent of Lerins. In his *The Communitory* (434 A.D.) he proposes that Christian truth be defined by that which is believed everywhere, always, and by all: *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*. Put another way, his hermeneutical principles involve ecumenicity (*universitas*), antiquity (*antiquas/vestutas*), and consensus (*consensus*). Also quite relevant to our theological enterprise today is his distinction between *projectus* and *alteratio*, that is, between legitimate and illegitimate developments in Christian theology and practice. These offerings may well provide LED III with some useful criteria in distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate implications of the gospel.

Thus, a fundamental issue emerging from this discussion is whether we as Lutherans and Episcopalians can recover a classical, but not anti-critical, reading of the Bible which will once again inform the *sensus fidelium*. If this is to happen then communities of interpretation, "Schools of the Word," as Cardinal Martini of Milan calls them, must come into existence in which all the people of God together seek God's guidance in the written word for their communal as well as individual lives. If so, there "will be in these communities a renewed sense that Christians constitute a single people chosen to witness among the nations in all they are, say, and do to the salvation that was, that is, and that is to come, and guided by God in his mercy and judgment, and in their faithfulness and unfaithfulness, towards the promised consummation. They will care for their own members, and will also be deeply concerned about Christians everywhere. Openness to receive and responsibility to give help and correction from and to other churches will be embedded in their institutional and organizational fabrics."[29] Without such a "central core of privileged and familiar texts, social cohesion becomes more difficult to sustain, and depends more on bureaucratic management, the manipulation of public opinion, and ultimately, perhaps, totalitarian force."[30]

IV. CONCLUSION

This has not been a systematic review of all aspects of IG. Rather, certain key areas of thought and hermeneutical presuppositions have been examined and illustrated with select examples. While maintaining great respect for the members of LED III, I suggest that the following areas are in need of revision or further amplification:

1. Surely the concept "gospel" is a dynamic, rather than a static one in the New Testament.[31] But precisely because this is so, one would have expected more precise attempts at formulation and demarcation of limits.[32] The essential nature of the

[28]Ibid., 97.
[29]Ibid., 99-100.
[30]Ibid., 96.
[31]See Karl P. Donfried, *The Dynamic Word* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).
[32]See the excellent study by John H. Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1975).

gospel is left vague and the distinction between it and its implications remains imprecise. The relationships between the gospel, Scripture, and the church are blurred, and thus it is difficult to know by what hermeneutical and ecclesiological criteria one determines the legitimate implications of the gospel. In this connection the Lutheran concept of *satis est* must be brought to bear explicitly on LED III's use of the concept "gospel." There is a significant risk that when the gospel is defined as broadly as it is by LED III, this may, in fact, endanger the concept of *satis est* as an ecumenical principle.

2. There is a conflict between the intention that IG be evaluated as to its adequacy "as a faithful expression of the Gospel and a step toward full communion" (rear cover page) and the request that certain aspects of IG's theological proposals be implemented in parishes.[33] This raises a question about ecumenical policy and theological process. It is unfortunate that some of IG's recommendations are being advocated for implementation in congregations before they have had the benefit of wider reflection and critique by the theologians of both churches and before this report of LED III has been officially received by the churches. Such an abbreviated process has now created the potential for confusion and the possible erosion of the very support that the writers of IG had hoped to gain. Pastors and congregations must be urged to view critically the material offered; they must be reminded that the gift of discernment is necessary in sorting out that which is valuable—and much is valuable—and that which is determined more by the mood of the times than by the apostolic tradition.[34]

3. These questions and suggestions are raised not only with the hope that they may enhance the final results of LED III in such a way that full communion between our churches may be a possibility within the lifetime of some of us, but also that the future results of LED III will make a serious and responsible theological contribution to our ecumenical conversation with Rome and the Orthodox with whom we also seek full communion.

[33] I have in mind here, for example, pages 29 and 114, not the sound practical suggestions and questions raised in paragraphs 50, 100-104, and 112.

[34] In addition to the issues singled out in the brief essay, one ought also to raise serious concerns about the adequacy of IG's treatment of christology and soteriology. Classic Lutheran christology and soteriology has given way to an imprecise contemporary notion of "liberation."