CREATION AND SACRAMENT

A Eucharistic vision of creation

Ever since the 6th Assembly in Vancouver in 1983, the attention of the World Council of Churches has been focused on two developments. In the first place there has been the growing agreement regarding baptism, eucharist and ministry which has been formulated in the Lima Report. The second development is the Conciliar Process of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. Both developments have given the ecumenical movement a new elan, have significantly stimulated discussion about the unity of the church and challenge the individual member churches to take their own stand on the issues.

These promising developments, however, also display some drawbacks. The discussion about the present meaning of baptism, eucharist and ministry is gradually succumbing to the threat of becoming a dogmatic rear-guard action meant to be conducted exclusively by theologians thinking only in terms of their own internal church perspectives. The lion's share of attention is presently being directed toward the Conciliar Process that, given the concrete concern for the threatened environment, seems to have acquired a powerful wind in its sails. The dogmatic discussion in terms of the Lima Report is thus becoming isolated from the seemingly much more concrete concern for the issues of justice, peace and the environment and reflection on these life-issues scarcely seems to be nourished by salvation concepts derived from the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist. The discussion regarding the integrity of creation, in particular, is becoming increasingly burdened with this handicap. Under these circumstances, theological reflection is in danger of collapsing under the pressure of demands for speedy results in the field of reaching decisions involving ecological issues. This reflection is consequently acquiring somewhat short-term and narrow perspectives and is becoming increasingly vulnerable to capricious fashions.

Accordingly the promising developments of Vancouver have not yet resulted in an integration of the discussions concerning the issues of the
theology of creation (conducted mainly within "Church and Society") and the discussion concerning the theology of the sacraments (which is taking place exclusively in "Faith and Order"). And thus not much has been realized of the expectation that ecumenical agreement in the areas of baptism, eucharist and ministry would also bear fruit in a broader discussion among the faithful about the problems that confront them in their daily life-world. In this respect it is striking that in the joint consultation of "Church and Society" and "Faith and Order" about the theology of creation in Dublin in 1988, an attempt was in fact made to establish a relation between the JPIC Program and the Faith and Order Program 'Confessing One Faith', but, remarkably enough, not with the Lima Report.

From the point of view of the high-strung expectations after Vancouver, this is an extremely disappointing development. In the official reports of the Vancouver Assembly a very optimistic tone still clearly rings out. One spoke there about a "eucharistic vision" of the whole of creation and characterized it as follows: "Peace and justice, on the one hand, baptism, eucharist and ministry, on the other, have claimed our attention. They belong together. Indeed the aspect of Christian unity which has been most striking to us here in Vancouver is that of a eucharistic vision. Christ - the life of the world - unites heaven and earth, God and world, spiritual and secular. His body and blood, given us in the elements of bread and wine, integrate liturgy and diaconate, proclamation and acts of healing (...). Our eucharistic vision thus encompasses the whole reality of Christian worship, life and witness, and tends - when truly discovered - to shed new light on Christian unity in its full richness of diversity."

This eucharistic vision of Vancouver was greatly inspired by the impressive speech of the Russian archbishop Vitaly Borovoy given there under the title "Life in Unity. Borovoy's speech laid great stress on exhibiting the unity of cosmos and liturgy, and then especially of cosmos and eucharist, which is so characteristic of Eastern Orthodox spirituality. In the eucharist the unity of God and the world, lying behind and in front of us, already becomes reality in the present, so that we can say:

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1 Cf., Creation and the Kingdom of God (Consultation with Faith and Order), Church and Society Documents (1988) nr. 5.