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Thomas P. Rausch

Loyola Marymount University, trausch@lmu.edu

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An Ecumenical Eucharist For a World Assembly

The Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches gathered at Vancouver, and its members joined in a common liturgy. This Eucharist has implications for the future, even for Catholics

Over 20 years ago one of the great ecumenists of the 20th century, Edmund Schlink, observed that the World Council of Churches was not an ecclesial community in the New Testament sense because its member churches were not able to celebrate together the Lord's Supper at its assemblies. Today the W.C.C. is still a free association of separate churches, but it is no longer true that it is unable to celebrate the Eucharist, as its Sixth Assembly at Vancouver in July and August 1983 made abundantly clear.

The Vancouver Assembly was above all an assembly of prayer and liturgical celebration. Its heart and center was the huge 3,000-seat yellow and white striped tent, topped by a large white cross, erected on the campus of the University of British Columbia. United Church of Canada journalist Hugh McCullum described the big yellow tent as "the enduring symbol of the Sixth Assembly." Here took place the prayer and worship that was to give an entirely different character to this assembly, for the watching world as well as for the delegates themselves. They prayed together in more than 30 languages. They sang works from traditional European hymnals and composers, as well as Kyries and responses from the Eastern Orthodox churches, canons from the ecumenical Protestant monastery at Taizé in France and various songs of celebration from the churches of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Pacific. They gathered for opening and closing liturgies; they participated in a rhythm of daily prayer: worship services in the morning, preaching services at noon and evening worship led by local congregations. On Aug. 5-6, they held an all-night vigil to pray for justice and peace. And on Sunday, July 31, some 3,500 rep-

resentatives from churches around the world gathered to celebrate the Eucharist, using what is known as the Lima liturgy.

The celebration of the Lima liturgy and its enthusiastic reception by the delegates marked the high point of the Sixth Assembly and a significant milestone in the history of the W.C.C. According to Ans van der Bent, the librarian at the W.C.C. Ecumenical Center in Geneva, Vancouver represented a liturgical breakthrough that "may in the non-Roman church become as significant as the Vatican II decision to allow the Latin Mass to become official in the vernacular." What then is the Lima liturgy?

The liturgy was prepared for the recent meeting of the W.C.C. Faith and Order Commission at Lima, Peru, and first celebrated there on Jan. 15, 1982, the final evening of the meeting. Avery Dulles, S.J., has written a moving description of that celebration ["Toward a Christian Consensus," *AM.* 2/20/82] led by American Episcopalian J. Robert Wright with ordained ministers from several other churches assisting: "The occurrence of two brief power failures, forcing the celebrants to read by the candles on the altar, seemed to enhance the sense of the commission's fragile efforts, guided by 'a lamp shining in a dark place' (2 Pt. 1:19), to grope its way toward the light in which there is no darkness (1 John 1:5)."

That evening celebration was a unique liturgical expression of the commission's work, for the Lima liturgy had been specifically composed to illustrate the theological convergence expressed in the document "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" (B.E.M.) unanimously accepted at Lima, the result of years of work on the part of the Faith and Order Commission. The Introduction stresses the achievement it represents: "That theologians of such widely different traditions should be able to speak so harmoni-

«Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., teaches theology at Loyola-Marymount University in Los Angeles, Calif., and is currently Catholic tutor at The Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches, which is located in Bossey, Switzerland.»

ously about baptism, Eucharist and ministry is unprecedented in the modern ecumenical movement." That theological convergence was not merely formulated in a text; at Lima and again at Vancouver it was expressed and celebrated in a common Eucharist.

The liturgy itself is divided into three parts, an entrance rite, the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. The order followed is that suggested in paragraph 27 of the B.E.M. text on the Eucharist. It is the same as the Roman Catholic Order of Mass and reflects the influence of Taizé. The official text prepared for Vancouver, entitled "The Feast of Life," was printed in four languages, English, French, German and Spanish, in parallel columns.

The entrance rite consists of an opening hymn, a greeting, confession of sin, declaration of pardon, Kyrie, litany and Gloria. The declaration of pardon is strongly expressed as a general absolution: "As a called and ordained minister of the church and by the authority of Jesus Christ I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins." Both the confession and absolution were taken from the *Lutheran Book of Worship* published by the Joint Lutheran Liturgical Commission of the Churches of the United States and Canada. The text of the Gloria is the same as that in the Roman Catholic French, German and Spanish sacramentaries and virtually the same as the English, though the International Commission on the English Liturgy (ICEL) translation used in the United States and much of the English speaking world has one less verse than the original Latin text.

The liturgy of the Word includes the collect or opening prayer, the Scripture lessons, homily, silence for reflection, the confession of faith and the intercessions. A commentary on the liturgy by Frère Max Thurian of Taizé, who was largely responsible for the preparation of the liturgy, recommends three readings: the first from the Old Testament, Acts or Revelation, the second from an epistle and, after the alleluia, the Gospel. The Creed professed at Lima and Vancouver was the form approved in 381 at the Council of Constantinople prior to the addition of the "filioque" in the West and hence acceptable to the Orthodox.

'Diversity in theological expression and eucharistic practice . . . still exists'

The liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the representatives of the congregation processing to the altar with the bread and wine, candles and flowers. The preparation of the gifts is accompanied by two benedictions with Jewish roots, taken from the revised Roman Catholic liturgy, and concludes with a prayer from the Didache, asking the Lord to gather His church as the grains once scattered in the fields have been gathered on the table. The congregation re-

sponds by singing "Maranatha." Some liturgists have objected to the inclusion of these "offertory" prayers on the grounds that it is redundant with the presentation of the gifts in the eucharistic prayer, but similar prayers accompanying the preparation of the gifts represent a longstanding tradition, at least in the Roman Catholic liturgy. The text of the two benedictions is the same as the French and Spanish versions in the Catholic sacramentary.

The preface that began the great eucharistic prayer at Lima was composed of themes celebrating Christ's baptism and consecration as Servant, the eucharistic memorial of His cross and resurrection and the church's ministry within the royal priesthood of all believers. At Vancouver it was slightly abridged. As in the Alexandrian and Roman traditions, the Holy Spirit is invoked upon the gifts prior to the words of institution. This "epiclesis" prays that "the outpouring of this Spirit of fire transfigure this thanksgiving meal that this bread and wine may become for us the body and blood of Christ." Frère Thurian notes that the "idea of transfiguration by the Spirit of life and fire is intended to point to the consecration of the bread and wine in a sacramental and mystical manner transcending all our understanding and all our explanation."

The institution narrative is followed by the "anamnesis," a second epiclesis, and the commemorations. The anamnesis celebrates "this memorial of our redemption," calls to mind Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension to glory and asks the Father to remember the sacrifice of His Son. The second epiclesis, as in the second, third and fourth eucharistic prayers in the Roman Catholic liturgy, invokes the Holy Spirit on the congregation, that it might be united in the one body of Christ. Again following the ancient tradition, in the commemorations special prayer is made for the church, its ministers ("bishops, presbyters, deacons and all to whom you have given special gifts of ministry") and for the faithful departed, that they might rejoice in God's presence "with the blessed Virgin Mary, with the patriarchs and prophets, the apostles and martyrs. . . and all the saints." The congregation participates with brief sung responses ("Veni Creator Spiritus," "Maranatha," the Lord comes) after the epiclesis, the anamnesis, the commemorations, with the eucharistic acclamation after the institution and with the great amen in response to the trinitarian doxology, the "per ipsum" that closes the eucharistic prayer.

There follows the Lord's Prayer, the prayer for peace and the sign of Peace. The fraction rite and "Agnus Dei" are introduced as in the Reformed tradition with a verse from Scripture: "The bread which we break is the communion of the Body of Christ." The liturgy is concluded with the final thanksgiving prayer, a hymn, a word of mission and the blessing.

The Lima liturgy was composed to incorporate in wor-

ship the doctrinal convergence presented in the B.E.M. text. It was enthusiastically received at Vancouver by the 3,500 representatives of widely different liturgical and theological traditions who were present at the celebration in the big yellow tent. In the days that followed, they besieged the Assembly bookstore for replicas of the Communion chalice used in the liturgy. Unfortunately there were none available. One Asian participant said, "I very much want one to remember the only time I shall have Communion with the world church."

The diversity of the congregation was reflected in the six ordained ministers, two of them women, who assisted the presiding celebrant, the Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie. They included a Lutheran from Denmark, a Reformed minister from Indonesia, a Methodist from Benin, a Baptist from Hungary, a Moravian from Jamaica, and a United Church of Christ pastor from Canada. A member of the W.C.C. Central Committee, Dr. M.M. Thomas, remarked on the greater integration of the free church and liturgical traditions and said that "the way in which the people received the Lima liturgy goes a long way to strengthen the Baptism-Eucharist-Ministry concerns. The words are now prayed, which gives 'reception' a different sense."

Perhaps even more important is what that enthusiastic response of the participants suggests about a growing eucharistic consciousness within the W.C.C. The report of Issue Group II recognized this, noting that "the aspect of Christian unity which has been most striking to us here at 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."

In regard to the liturgy celebrated at Vancouver, a Roman Catholic might raise the following question. Granting the diversity in theological expression and eucharistic practice that still exists in the different Protestant churches, can a common core of doctrinal content be identified concerning the meaning of the Eucharist that all the participants in the Lima liturgy shared? That diversity does exist, and no doubt was represented among the participants. At the same time, they were participating in a liturgy specifically developed to incorporate "the doctrinal convergences expressed in the text on 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,' whose maturity was unanimously approved at Lima for the reception of the churches," as the program for the Lima liturgy notes.

The B.E.M. text is sensitive to Roman Catholic theological concerns. It speaks of the Eucharist as "the sacrament of the unique sacrifice of Christ" which cannot be repeated. Noting the traditional Roman Catholic references to the Eucharist as a "propitiatory sacrifice," B.E.M. points out that this term should be understood as meaning

"that there is only one expiation, that of the unique sacrifice of the cross, made actual in the Eucharist and presented before the Father in the intercession of Christ and of the church for all humanity."

In respect to the question of the eucharistic presence of Christ, the Eucharist statement speaks of the variety of ways in which Christ fulfills His promise to be with His own. Then it adds: "But Christ's mode of presence in the Eucharist is unique. Jesus said over the bread and wine of the Eucharist: 'This is my body . . . this is my blood 'What Christ declared is true, and this truth is fulfilled every time the Eucharist is celebrated."

Is the eucharistic vision that so many associated with the Vancouver Assembly shared by the W.C.C. member churches? Not all were comfortable with the identification of the Eucharist in the B.E.M. text as "the central act of the church's worship." This became evident at Vancouver when a report entitled "Taking Steps Towards Unity" was discussed. According to the W.C.C. magazine: "A few speakers from the Reformed and Lutheran traditions cautioned against overemphasizing the Eucharist at the expense of the proclamation of the word," even though the text makes clear that the Eucharist always includes both word and sacrament. The statement that the Eucharist "should take place at least every Sunday" will be a challenge to those churches whose ecclesial life does not yet indicate a clear awareness of the nature-of the church as a eucharistic community.

Perhaps especially important is the statement in the B.E.M. that "the best way toward unity in eucharistic celebration and communion is the renewal of the Eucharist itself in the different churches in regard to teaching and liturgy." Implicit in the challenge to the renewal of the eucharistic worship of the churches, expressed here and elsewhere in the document, is the recognition that theology and doctrine grow out of prayer (*lex orandi est lex credendi*). In the long run, a renewed experience of praying the Eucharist will probably be more effective in bringing the churches to a common eucharistic faith than all the agreements of the theologians.

'The Roman Catholic Church may not yet be able to recognize an ecumenical liturgy'

So praying the Lima liturgy at Vancouver does give "reception" a different sense; it means that reception has already begun, though it is crucial that the process be carried through by the various churches. Similarly, the fact that the delegates from such different traditions were able to so identify with the eucharistic vision that emerged from Vancouver may indicate a growing awareness of the place of the Eucharist in their churches.

What does this mean for the Roman Catholic Church? First of all, it is important that the Roman Catholic Church acknowledge the eucharistic vision that emerged at Vancouver. A symbolic gesture on its part might encourage those W.C.C. member churches that are already seeking to incorporate that vision more concretely into their ecclesial lives, as well as help to dispel the impression many have that official ecumenism will never get beyond the dialogue stage.

Second, as Protestant churches image more adequately the eucharistic nature of the church, it will become increasingly difficult for the Roman Catholic Church to continue to question the sacramental "validity" of their Eucharists. Vatican II's "Decree on Ecumenism" said that because of the lack ("defectum") of the sacrament of orders, Protestant churches have not preserved "the genuine and total reality of the Eucharistic mystery." Postconciliar discussion has made clear that the council's concern in regard to ordination and thus ministry was the loss of the apostolic succession through episcopal ordination. But the council was not specific as to the precise way in which the Eucharist celebrated in the Protestant churches was to be considered defective, nor is there any agreement among Catholic theologians on this point.

'For the Roman Catholic Church, intercommunion is contingent upon a unity of faith'

Few if any Catholic theologians would go so far as to say that a Protestant Eucharist has no eucharistic reality. The "Decree on Ecumenism" itself implies that the eucharistic mystery is in some way present. Similarly, just as the Roman Catholic Church recognizes that Protestant ministries have ecclesial and spiritual qualities that cannot be ignored, even if from a Roman Catholic point of view they have not preserved the fullness of the church's apostolic ministry, so also many Catholic theologians would argue that a Protestant church realizes a eucharistic sacramentality that is commensurate with its eucharistic faith and ecclesial life. Others would go even further. Karl Rahner has argued that Protestant ministries are legitimate and "in many cases are sacramental both in their conferral (ordination) and in exercise of these ministries (the celebration of the Eucharist)."

Officially the Roman Catholic Church may not yet be able to recognize an ecumenical liturgy such as the one at Vancouver as technically valid in terms of its own inner-church canonical requirements. At the same time, it cannot exclude the sacramental reality of such a celebration. George Tavard has observed that the concept of canonical validity "cannot apply to what takes place only in the realm of the Spirit's free and sometimes unforeseen activity, e.g.,

what degree of the presence of Christ there may be or there actually is in a Eucharist otherwise judged invalid." The Spirit is not bound by the canonical requirements of the Roman Catholic Church.

Finally, closely related to the renewal of eucharistic life is the question of intercommunion. The celebration of the Lima liturgy at Vancouver called attention to this question, which will become more and more of an issue. At present, Roman Catholic discipline does not permit intercommunion (apart from certain extreme cases). The division and pain this entails was acknowledged by Archbishop Runcie in his opening remarks. He observed that some of those present felt in conscience able to practice intercommunion, some, such as the Anglicans, normally did not but could on such occasions, and others, such as the Orthodox and Roman Catholics, could not. He invited all to pray and participate to the measure of their possibilities. Nevertheless, it was very widely noted that a number of Roman Catholics felt that their consciences allowed them to participate beyond what the official norms of their church permitted.

For the Roman Catholic Church, intercommunion is contingent upon a unity of faith expressed in doctrinal agreements between churches that must include a mutual recognition of ministries. To many, Catholics and Protestants alike, doctrinal agreement still seems very remote, if indeed it can be realized at all. On the other hand, as Protestant churches become more clearly perceived as eucharistic communities, not just in terms of their theological self-understandings, but even more in their ecclesial lives and worship, the inability of the Roman Catholic Church to welcome even occasional intercommunion will become even more difficult for Catholics to explain and for Protestants to understand.

The issue cannot be avoided. Protestants and Catholics are increasingly coming together at university campus ministry centers, on retreats, at ecumenical institutes and in small communities. Separate Eucharists in such cases are often neither practical nor desirable; they are seen as countersigns. Insisting on Catholic discipline occasions sadness and even resentment; Protestants feel excluded, or wonder why Catholics seem not to recognize the sacramental reality of the Protestant Eucharist. Frequently church discipline is not followed, resulting in a widening gap between official ecumenism and grass-roots practice.

It is true that relations between Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church do not yet seem to indicate that the restoration of eucharistic communion is appropriate. Similarly, Rome may not yet be ready to make allowances for occasional intercommunion. Yet some signs of progress in this direction would be helpful.

Perhaps one positive step in response to Vancouver might be for national conferences of Catholic bishops to consider accepting the eucharistic prayer of the Lima litur-

gy as one of the approved texts for Roman Catholic worship. There would be several advantages to such a move. First, it would acknowledge that the Roman Catholic Church finds in this ecumenical eucharistic prayer an expression of its own tradition of eucharistic worship. Second, it could encourage the reception of the theological convergence found in the B.E.M. text by showing that the

expression of these themes in the Lima liturgy is acceptable to Roman Catholics as well. Third, making it possible for Roman Catholic communities to pray the Lima liturgy would be a significant step toward the development of truly ecumenical worship texts, looking forward to the day when Roman Catholics will no longer be divided from their Protestant sisters and brothers at the Lord's Table. ■

PETER McDONOUGH

South America Revisited

'It no longer passes as profound to observe that the church in Latin America is divided. It is noted less often, however, that these divisions are multiple'

Except for a brief visit to Rio de Janeiro in the summer of 1982, I had not been in Latin America for a decade. Nostalgia was settling over my time in Brazil, from 1969 to 1973, when as a newly minted Ph.D. I had taught and conducted research in politics and become enraptured with the exuberance of the contry. So, when the invitation came this past summer from the United States Information Service to tour South America as a lecturer to academic and religious audiences, I accepted.

Officially, the trip began in Barbados and ended in Argentina, with no stop scheduled in Brazil. No matter: I could catch a plane from Buenos Aires to Rio on the way back. However, it was toward the middle of the trip that I was to have a pair of revealing encounters: one with the Jesuit community in Georgetown, Guyana, another with the papal nuncio in La Paz, Bolivia.

Guyana. Georgetown's Hotel Pegasus, in which nearly all foreign transients stay, is isolated at the end of embassy row. It is an enclave, as well, for the sons and daughters of government officials, who at night cruise inside the "Savannah Lounge" and the "Bow and Arrow Disco." Expressionless police stand chaperone duty.

Two or three blocks away, the streets go native: a mixture of private homes, canals overhung with bougainvillea, doctors' offices marked by hand-painted signs, shabby, not quite vertical pensions, flyblown shops with practically

nothing to sell—all constructed of wood in various stages of decay and most of them whitewashed. The buildings have a pretty, glass menagerie look. Everything grows in Guyana, it seems, except the economy. There were flowers, bushes and vines all around. Six feet below sea level, Georgetown is neither a jungle nor a city.

Downtown, next to the Anglican cathedral, is the Jesuit residence, made airy by numerous screened windows. I chatted with Andrew Morrison, S.J., who edits *The Catholic Standard*, the only opposition paper in Guyana. The chairs were weathered but comfortable. In the midst of our conversation, Father Morrison, who looked to be in his early 60's, was also supervising the preparation of posters commemorating the assassination, four years earlier, of his Jesuit colleague, Bernard Darke.

Father Darke, I learned, had been beaten and stabbed to death while taking pictures of a rally in support of Walter Rodney, the young opposition leader who was himself to die a few months later, torn apart by an electronically detonated explosive. "He [Father Darke] said he would rather finish grading examination papers," Father Morrison told me. "He had little interest in politics . . . the mildest of men. But he knew about cameras." There would be an all-day memorial vigil in a few days on the street where he had been murdered.

A young art student entered with a poster honoring Father Darke, with words from a poem by Pablo Neruda that

«Peter McDonough teaches political science at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.»