

The *Consensus of Sandomierz*: An Early Attempt to Create a Unified Protestant Church in 16th Century Poland and Lithuania

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In early April 1570, representatives of the Reformed, Lutheran, and Bohemian Brethren Churches in Poland and Lithuania met in the city of Sandomierz for an extraordinary general synod. The purpose was to formulate a common confession which would symbolize the united faith and practice of the three churches to the crown and the parliament. The result was the formulation and acceptance of the *Consensus of Sandomierz* (Latin: *Consensus Sendomiriensis*).¹

The signing of the *Consensus of Sandomierz* has been regarded as a watershed event, unique not only in the history of the Polish and Lithuanian Churches, but in the Reformation era. It was here that, for the first time, representatives of three separate Protestant confessions with diverse theological and liturgical traditions stated that the chief obstacles in the way of church union had been overcome. They were now essentially united in faith, making intercommunion possible. Future efforts would make the realization of this unity evident to all.

Never before had Lutherans been willing to concede so much in order to enter a consensus, even though there was no agreement on the essential sacramental issues. In the 1520s, Lutherans had even refused to enter into a military alliance with Zwinglian and other Reformed princes and territories to create a common defense in the face of what seemed to be an inevitable attack from Roman Catholic military forces. At Marburg in 1529, Luther and Ulrich Zwingli were unable to come to an agreement concerning the nature of Christ's presence in the Sacrament of the Altar thereby dooming any possibility of a common Protestant front against the Roman Catholic Church. At Augsburg in 1530, the representatives of the cities of Strassburg, Constance, Memmingen, and Lindau, which had not

¹ Maria Sipayłło, Opracowała, *Akta Synodów różnowierczych w Polsce Tom II (1560-1570)*, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1972), 295-298.

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agreed to the sacramental articles of the *Augsburg Confession*, were forced to hastily prepare a separate document, called the *Tetrapolitan Confession*, to present before the Emperor.² The *Consensus of Sandomierz*, therefore, represents the first instance of a statement of unity between the Lutherans and the Reformed. What had not been possible before happened here in Poland and Lithuania in an event which some historians have thought to be a precursor to the Prussian Union in 1817, more than two centuries later.³

The *Consensus of Sandomierz* has been generally understood in three different ways. In the eyes of the Polish and Lithuanian Reformed Churches, the *Consensus* has always been regarded as a truly significant monument, a pledge of full union between the three confessions. A host of synodical protocols and other official church documents have called attention to the *Consensus* in regards to ongoing relations with the Lutherans.⁴ The same opinion is shared by the eminent Protestant historian, Theodor Wotschke, of the Prussian Union Church, who says that the *Consensus of Sandomierz* must not be considered a political document but a religious statement of theological convergence.⁵

Lutherans, on the other hand, have taken a wholly different position. The 18th century Lutheran historian Christian Gottlieb von Friese characterized the work at Sandomierz as tentative, incomplete, and based on an inadequate understanding of the classical Lutheran position. He went on to state that the *Consensus of Sandomierz* greatly weakened Lutheranism in both Poland and Lithuania.⁶

Secular historians have regarded the *Consensus* primarily as a political document. Łukaszewicz, Szujski, Lukšaitė, and others are of the opinion that the document produced little more than a statement of intention mapping out a course of action not yet realized, produced by church officials who gave little thought to the immediate and practical

² Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical notes, vol. I: The History of Creeds* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877), 525–529.

³ Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 588; Theodor Wotschke, *Geschichte der Reformation in Polen in Studien zur Kultur und Geschichte der Reformation Verein für Reformationsgeschichte*, Bd. 1 (Halle: Haupt, 1911), 250.

⁴ Ingė Lukšaitė, *Reformacija Lietuvos Didžiojoje Kunigaikštystėje ir Mažojoje Lietuvoje. XVI a. trečias dešimtmetis - XVII a. pirmas dešimtmetis* (Vilnius: Baltos lankos, 1999), 336.

⁵ Wotschke, *Reformation in Polen*, 250.

⁶ Christian Gottlieb von Friese *Beyträge, zu der Reformationsgeschichte in Polen und Litthauen besonders*, Teil 2, Bd. 1. (Breslau: Korn, 1786); Lukšaitė, *Reformacija*, 32.

consequences of the agreement.⁷ They hold that the *Consensus* came too late to be of consequence. The time for the establishment of a national Protestant church had come and gone. The Jesuits had arrived and were on the offensive, and so the counter-Reformation had already begun.

It is not sufficient that we form our evaluation of the *Consensus* without closely examining the document itself and its theological arguments. Only by doing this is one able to understand what the synod of Sandomierz did and its place in Polish and Lithuanian church history. The purpose of this study is to satisfy the need for such an examination.

I. The Road to Sandomierz

The *Consensus of Sandomierz* came at the end of a series of meetings between 1555 and 1570 during which representatives from the Reformed, Lutheran, and Bohemian Brethren congregations sought to work out their theological and liturgical relationships. A close relationship had already existed between the Minor Polish Reformed and the Bohemian Brethren because the Reformed had looked to the Bohemian Brethren for theological and ecclesiastical guidance. As a result, full communion was declared between these two confessions in 1555 at the Koźminek Convocation.⁸ This relationship was a model for future negotiations, as well as an impulse toward further unification efforts among Polish Protestants.

The first to move resolutely toward a unified Protestant church in the region was Johannes a Lasco, who had returned to Poland in 1557 from England during the reign of Queen Mary. He held before people the vision of a united Protestant church in Poland and Lithuania. The first step toward this goal was taken at the Włodzisław Synod on June 15–18, 1557.⁹ Lasco personally asked whether for the sake of Polish Protestantism it might not be advisable that the groups represented in this synod to enter theological discussions with the Lutherans.¹⁰ For this purpose, he

⁷ Józef Łukaszewicz, *O kościołach Braci Czeskich w dawnej Wielkiej Polsce* (Poznań, 1835), 112; Józef Szujski, *Dzieje Polski*, T. 2. (Kraków: Pompejusz, 1894), 399; Oskar Halecki, *Zgoda Sandomierska 1570 R. jej geneza i znaczenie w dziejach reformacji Polskiej za Zygmunta Augusta* (Warszawa: Gebethner and Wolff, 1915), 274–275; Lukšaitė, *Reformacija*, 336.

⁸ Maria Sipayło, Opracowała, *Akta Synodów różnowierczych w Polsce*, Tom I (1550–1559), (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1966), 18–45.

⁹ Sipayło, *Akta Synodów I*, 201.

¹⁰ The Minor Polish Reformed who were in the union with the Bohemian Brethren saw the possibility after the Koźminek Union of 1555 that the closer proximity between the Lutheran and Bohemian Eucharistic theologies might provide the key to Protestant unity in Poland. Although the Reformed and Bohemians were moving in quite different

proposed a colloquium with the Lutherans.¹¹ This invitation was rejected. The Lutherans did not think that there was sufficient agreement in sacramental teaching to make the union possible. The convocation of the Minor Polish Reformed and Bohemian Brethren in Gołuchów, held on October 16, 1557, failed to produce any positive results because the Lutherans were not present. The Reformed used this fact as one of the reasons for their own refusal to participate, although a few ministers actually did. The Bohemians recognized that Lasco's vision was unrealistic because Polish Lutherans were beginning to question their sacramental orthodoxy. They also expressed the conviction that no further discussions with the Polish Lutherans were really necessary, since agreement had been reached in 1536 with Luther and Melanchthon.¹²

Lasco remained undaunted by this early failure. He understood that most Polish Lutherans were strongly under the influence of the Prussian Lutherans and the Königsberg theological faculty. He, therefore, contacted Albrecht of Brandenburg (1490-1568), Duke of Prussia, for the purpose of initiating theological discussions on controversial doctrinal issues. Upon his arrival in Königsberg on April 14, 1558, he entered into a public disputation concerning the doctrine of the Sacrament of the Altar and the two natures of Christ. He was unable to move the Lutherans from their doctrinal position. After the disputation, he sought to regain the favor of the Lutherans by presenting a summary of his doctrinal position and calling upon them to enter into a fraternal association in order that they might do battle together against the Roman church. Lasco died unexpectedly in 1560 and never saw the realization of his proposals for reunion, but the dream of a national Protestant Church in Poland and Lithuania did not die with him.¹³

Further discussions were carried on between the Bohemian Brethren and the Lutherans in Major Poland. Their relationship was not altogether cordial, because they disagreed about the Sacrament of the Altar and other related doctrines. The Lutherans were invited to the Bohemian Synod in Poznań on November 1, 1560.¹⁴ The eighth canon of that synod recommended achieving common agreement on the nature of Christ's

theological directions in sacramental practice, the terms of this union were reaffirmed in Pińczów in 1556, Włodzisław in 1557, and Książ in 1560. Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów I*, 53-78, 179-208; Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 32-68.

¹¹ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów I*, 201.

¹² Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów I*, 228-229.

¹³ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 69 fn. 1; Halina Kowalska, *Działalność reformatorska Jana Łaskiego w Polsce 1556-1560* (Warszawa: Neriton, 1999), 70.

¹⁴ Łukaszewicz, *O kościołach Braci Czeskich*, 54.

presence in the sacrament.¹⁵ Since some Lutheran pastors accused the Bohemians of false doctrine from their pulpits, no such agreement could be formulated. In 1563, the Lutherans and Bohemian Brethren again conferred to consider the charges which Benedykt Morgernstern had leveled against the Bohemians.¹⁶ These included questions concerning repentance born of faith, the role of confirmation, and, most significantly, the presence of Christ under the form of bread and wine. The Lutherans and Bohemians made further efforts to find a basis for agreement on important doctrinal issues in 1565 at Gostyń. Once again, their efforts failed. As a result of the meeting, the Lutherans drew up a list of 16 points on which they considered the Bohemians to be in error.¹⁷ At the Synod in Poznań on January 28, 1567, Lutherans again leveled charges raised earlier by Morgenstern against the Bohemians. In response, the Bohemians appealed to the Wittenberg Faculty, which dismissed the charges and declared the *Bohemian Confession* to be orthodox.¹⁸ As expected, Crypto-Calvinists on the Wittenberg faculty issued an opinion which approved the position of the Bohemians. The favorable Wittenberg '*Gutachten*' seems to have had the desired positive effect, because the Polish Lutherans had always regarded the opinions of the Wittenberg faculty to be authoritative.

The most urgent impulse toward union came from King Sigismund Augustus. He promised not to persecute dissenters, and, in the last session of the Lublin parliament in 1569, he expressed his desire that there be only one Protestant church in his realm.¹⁹ The Protestants took the king's statement to mean that there could be but one Protestant confession which would serve as the basis of a Protestant union. They thought that this would satisfy the king and achieve religious liberty. The king expressed to some of the senators his hope that there would be peace among his Protestant subjects.²⁰

¹⁵ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 71.

¹⁶ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 169.

¹⁷ Jolanta Dworzaczkowa, *Bracia Szescy w Wielkopolsce w XVI i XVII wieku* (Warszawa: Semper, 1997), 37.

¹⁸ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 210–212; Łukaszewicz, *O kościołach Braci Czeskich*, 69–70; Wotschke, *Reformation in Polen*, 239–240.

¹⁹Theodor Wotschke, *Der Briefwechsel der Schweizer mit den Polen* (Leipzig, 1908), 315; Halecki *Zgoda Sandomierska 1570*, 145–146; Jaroslav Pelikan, "The Consensus of Sandomierz: A Chapter from the Polish Reformation" *Concordia Theological Monthly* 18 (1947): 833.

²⁰ Wotschke, *Der Briefwechsel der Schweizer mit den Polen*, 328–329; Halecki, *Zgoda Sandomierska 1570*, 169.

The Protestants immediately attempted to take advantage of what they perceived to be an ideal situation to achieve official status. However, they needed to be able to present themselves as a church united in faith and confession in the eyes of the king and people. This task could not be easily accomplished. The Lutherans met with the Bohemians in colloquy at Poznań on February 14, 1570. A key point in the discussion was concern about the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, particularly the nature of Christ's presence in the bread and the wine and the adoration of the body of Christ in the Supper. The Lutherans insisted upon the use of the terminology of the *Augsburg Confession* and their Lutheran fathers, that Christ's presence in the Supper is *substantialiter, realiter, essentialiter, corporaliter*.²¹ The Bohemian Brethren, while insisting that the bread is the true body of Christ and the wine is his true blood, rejected the Lutheran terminology. They preferred to define Christ's presence in the earthly elements as *sacramentaliter*,²² in a manner unique to the Sacrament of the Altar. They refused to adopt the language of the *Augsburg Confession*, protesting that their own confessional position was correct and adequate. The Bohemians did not agree with the Lutheran identification of bread and body, wine and blood. On this and the nature of faith of baptized children, the Lutherans and the Bohemians differed considerably. They determined to postpone further discussion of these matters until the general synod to be held in Sandomierz.

A sudden breakthrough came at Vilnius. Here the goals which the Poles had failed to achieve in their February meeting in Poznań were accomplished. Representatives of both groups met on March 2–4, 1570, in Vilnius under the auspices of Mikołaj Radziwiłł the Brown. They succeeded in devising a formula of agreement between the two churches. Although we have only indirect information concerning this meeting,²³ it is generally understood that it was agreed that church buildings would be opened for the use of both groups, the official acts of ministers of both churches would be mutually recognized, and both churches would work together in the matters relating to the government.²⁴ Some have suggested that agreement was also reached on the Lord's Supper, but no definite evidence of this exists. We may suggest that any agreement of this nature would have been cast in very general terms, such as would be acceptable

²¹ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 239.

²² Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 239–240.

²³ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 291; Danielis Ernesti Jablonski, *Historia Consensus Sandomiriensis* (Berlin: Haude, 1731), 35–36; Friese, Teil 2. Bd. 1., 432; A. F. Adamowicz, *Kościół augsburski w Wilnie* (Wilno: Korn, 1855), 53–54.

²⁴ Lukšaitė, *Reformacija*, 334.

to both the Reformed and Lutherans. The Vilnius meeting was local and could serve only as a model. The formulation of an acceptable confession would emerge only after prolonged and serious debate in the Synod of Sandomierz.

II. The Formulation of the *Consensus* at Sandomierz

On April 9–14, 1570, representatives of the Polish and Lithuanian Reformed, Lutherans, and Bohemian Brethren met in the general synod at Sandomierz to formulate a document mutually recognizing the basic orthodoxy of all three groups and to work toward the creation of a united Protestant church. The gathering was dominated by Calvinists who outnumbered the Lutherans and Bohemian Brethren. The aristocrats who were present were also mostly Calvinists. In their attempts to maintain the particular theological and ecclesiastical stance of their churches, each of the three groups presented its own classical confession as a working model from which a general agreement could be drawn. For the Bohemians, this was the *Confessio Bohemica* 1535, which, as they pointed out, had already been accepted by Luther and the Lutheran Reformers. The Lutherans took the position that the *Bohemian Confession* was only one of several confessions and these did not represent a united position. Therefore, they suggested that the *Confessio Augustana* 1530 alone could serve as the model. The Reformed, who were clearly in the majority, looked to the *Second Helvetic Confession* of 1566 as representative of the true spirit of Protestantism.

On Tuesday, April 11, after the report of the Vilnius agreement between the Lutherans and Reformed of Lithuania was read, it was decided that the *Second Helvetic Confession* should be used as the basis for their discussion. The Reformed view prevailed by majority vote.²⁵ The next day the reading and discussion of the confession was completed. Still, each group wanted its own confession to be the basis for consensus.

The Reformed, nevertheless, moved for the acceptance of their *Second Helvetic Confession*. The Bohemians noted that such acceptance would be possible only if they would be allowed to retain their own *Bohemian Confession* and their distinct form of worship and ceremonies. This caught the Lutherans off guard. In the face of this pressure, the Lutheran representatives Mikołai Gliczner and Erazm Gliczner, the Superintendent of the Lutheran Church in Major Poland since 1566, stated that they could not accept the Calvinist confession while remaining loyal to the *Augsburg Confession*. They would agree to a further meeting if its purpose was

²⁵ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 272–279, 286–287.

formulating a completely new confession to satisfy the doctrinal concerns of all three groups.²⁶ This threw everyone into confusion, yet it was agreed that all three groups should meet together in Warszawa (Warsaw) on the feast of the Holy Trinity to formulate the new confession.²⁷

The Lutherans insisted that much work remained to be done before a definitive statement of common confession could be produced. The prevailing opinion of the other two churches was that this meeting must produce some common statement which would demonstrate to the Polish and Lithuanian nations that all three churches shared the same general presuppositions and were able to work together. This task was not easily done, because important doctrinal differences still remained. In their discussions on April 13, the delegates decided to use the Vilnius agreement of March as the basis for their own common statement. The *Consensus Sandomiriensis* which came to be known as the *Formula Recensus* of April 14th represents the results of their negotiations at Sandomierz.²⁸

III. An Examination of the *Consensus*

The *Consensus* begins by stating the high regard in which these churches held each other and the measure of common agreement that they had reached. The Latin text does not speak of the formula as an *Act of Religious Union*, as translated by Krasiński.²⁹ It describes itself rather as *Consensus mutuus in religionis Christianae*, namely, a statement of mutual consent in matters of the Christian faith.³⁰ The second paragraph pronounces the rejection, by all three groups, of all heresies that are inimical to the gospel and God's truth, which had plagued the Protestant churches in these countries. In the third paragraph all three churches affirm that they regard each other as pious and orthodox in their theological statements concerning God, the Holy Trinity, and other primary articles. They also pledge to defend this mutual confession against all foes. The next paragraph states that the words of Christ in the Supper must be understood in such a manner that both the earthly and heavenly elements are recognized. These elements and signs exhibit and present by faith what they signify, so that the substantial presence of Christ is represented, distributed, and exhibited to those who eat and drink. For purposes of clarification, a section from *Confessio Saxonica* beginning with

²⁶ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 290.

²⁷ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 291.

²⁸ See appendix for the complete document.

²⁹ Valerian Krasiński, *Historical Sketch of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of the Reformation in Poland*. Vol. I. (London: Murray, 1838), 383.

³⁰ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 295.

the words *Et baptismus et Coena Domini* is appended here. The fifth paragraph pledges that those who agree to this *Consensus* are to be acknowledged as orthodox Christians and treated with Christian charity. In the sixth paragraph, the signers resolved to persuade their brethren to conform to this *Consensus* by mutual participation attending the others' services and intercommunion (i.e., sacramental participation). In the next paragraph, rites and ceremonies of each church are designated *adiaphora*, as is stated in the Augsburg and Saxon Confessions. In the paragraph that follows, attendance and participation in the general synods of the participating churches are encouraged and hope is expressed that in the future it will be possible to formulate a common body of doctrine to be confessed by all the churches. In the penultimate paragraph, the signers pledged to build up both faith and peace, avoiding all occasions of alienation and promoting only the glory of Christ and the truth of his word by their own words and actions. Finally, the blessing of God is invoked on the *Consensus*. The signatures of all those subscribing on behalf of their churches concluded the document.

Although formal confessions ordinarily begin with a positive statement and then make note of rejected opinions, the *Consensus of Sandomierz* reverses this order and begins with a statement rejecting the erroneous opinions of sectarian Tritheites, Ebionites, and Anabaptists. The delegates had good reason to do this. In the past, the Reformation churches in Poland had been beset with contentious conflicts and sects which made it appear that these churches, particularly the Reformed, had departed from orthodoxy. In 1562-1563, the Antitrinitarian teachings, which had reached the highest levels in the leadership of the church, had caused a division and the establishment of separate churches. Sectarian and heretical teachings caused the Reformed Church to lose its place in the esteem of the Polish and Lithuanian people and made the quest for official recognition all the more difficult. These churches wanted to distance themselves from all such heresies.

The use of plural pronouns (e.g., *we*, *they*, *our*, and *their*) is somewhat perplexing in a document which claims to be the common statement of all three groups. One would expect that the pronouns "*we*" and "*our*" would refer to the consenting churches and "*they*" and "*their*" would refer to those not part of the *Consensus*. This, however, is not the case. Although definitions seem to change from one paragraph to another, the overall impression is given that the document was written chiefly from the perspective of the Reformed delegates who were in the majority. For example, we find this statement: "As both *we* who in the present Synod have published our confession and the Bohemian Brethren have never

believed that those who adhere to the Augsburg Confession. . . .” “We” (*nos*) and “have never believed” (*nunquam credidimus*) clearly refer to the Reformed Church over against the Bohemian Brethren and Lutherans.

The signers determined that there were no fundamental doctrinal differences among themselves. The Reformed and the Bohemian Brethren have never called into question the orthodoxy of the chief articles confessed by the Lutheran Church concerning God, the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation of Christ, and justification. From their point of view, adherents of the *Augsburg Confession* openly stated that they could see nothing contrary to Christian orthodoxy and the word of God as confessed in these same articles by the Reformed and the Bohemian Brethren.

There were wide areas of agreement between the churches in these chief articles. One article in which there were differences between the Lutherans and the Reformed was the incarnation of the Son of God, the area upon which Luther and his followers drew upon most heavily in support of their understanding of the nature of Christ’s bodily presence in the bread and wine in the Sacrament of the Altar. The Reformed would agree with every word of the *Augsburg Confession* in Article III, “Concerning the Son of God.” The Lutherans, however, understood this article from the standpoint of Christological positions taken by Luther in his polemical writings against Zwingli, Karlstadt, and Oecolampadius in 1525–1529.³¹ Very early in the Reformation, Luther saw the essential connection between the doctrine of the two natures of the incarnate Son of God and the nature of Christ’s physical presence in the bread and the wine of the Lord’s Supper, while the Reformed did not. For Luther, Christ is present in the sacrament in a similar way in which he is present in the incarnation. The body of Jesus is the body of God; the blood of Jesus is God’s blood. It is the body and blood of him who is both completely God and man that was crucified for man’s sins and raised again for his justification. Thus Luther, in his *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper* of 1528 says, “in the Sacrament of the Altar the true body and blood of Christ are orally eaten and drunk in the bread and wine.”³² From the Reformed perspective such teaching was rejected since the separate human and divine natures of Christ were not understood to relate directly to each other, but each separately related to the person of Christ. Thus, the *Communicatio idiomatum* can never be more than a play on words and an expression,

³¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1986), 37:41–42 (Henceforth *LW*).

³² *LW* 37:367.

which Calvin said was unfortunate. The human nature can never be more than the symbol or sign of the heavenly.

Earlier colloquies between the Reformed and Lutherans in Poland and Lithuania had proceeded directly to this Christological issue. For example, in the meeting held in late 1557 and early 1558, the Lithuanian Reformed theologian Szymon Zacjusz directed his fire against the Lutheran understanding of the real presence of Christ in the sacrament on precisely this basis. He stated that although the divine nature is unlimited, the human nature is limited with regard to time and space. Christ's physical presence in the earthly elements, therefore, can only be a figurative presence. In the same way, Christ's descent into hell and other experiences are inappropriate matters of discussion, if the divine nature is the subject.³³ Also, Lasco's public disputation at Königsberg in April 1558 was concerned with the Sacrament of the Altar and the two natures of Christ. He was unsuccessful in moving Lutherans from their doctrinal position.³⁴ This position is also seen in *De Confessione ministrorum ecclesiae Vilnensis* (1560) in which the Vilnius Reformed parish addressed the Prussian pastors. Central attention was given to the question of Christ's presence, the adoration of the sacrament, and related matters articulated on the basis of Reformed theology.³⁵ The same is the case in the meetings between the Lutherans and the Bohemian Brethren in Major Poland. At convocations held between 1560 and 1570 at Sandomierz, they were not able to resolve these matters to everyone's satisfaction.

Any assertion that the Lutherans, Reformed, and Bohemian Brethren were now in agreement concerning the incarnation can only be made if one ignores the fact that Lutherans understood the mutual relation of the two natures on the basis of the *communicatio idiomatum* confessed at Chalcedon (AD 451) and that the Reformed understood that phrase on the basis of the philosophical principle *finitum non capax infiniti* ("the finite is not capable of the infinite"). The assembly at Sandomierz avoided the Christological problem altogether. The *Consensus* sidesteps the issue by stating that the churches are in essential agreement with reference to the incarnation. This question along with the unresolved issues concerning the

³³ *Akta tho iest sprawy Zboru krześciańskiego Wileńskiego, ktore się poszeli Roku Pańskiego 1557 Miesiąca Decembra Dnia 14... 1559, Monumenta Reformationis Polonicae et Lithuanicae*. Serya X, Zeszyt I. (Wilno: E. Wende i Spolka, 1913), 10–11.

³⁴ Kowalska, *Działalność reformatorska*, 70.

³⁵ Theodor Wotschke, "Vergerios zweite Reise nach Preußen u. Lithauen. Ein Btr. z. Reformationsgesch. des Ostens," in *Altpreußische Monatsschrift* Bd. 48 (Königsberg: Thomas and Oppermann, 1911), 302–303.

Sacrament of the Altar and predestination would reappear constantly in later discussions. Finally, when they invited the Lutherans to stand together with them at the *Colloquium Charitativum* in 1644, the Reformed and Bohemian Brethren had to acknowledge that agreement on the incarnation could not be accomplished. Thus, they asked the Lutherans to avoid going into detail on this controversial point.³⁶

Having stated the essential agreement of all parties regarding major Christian doctrines, the *Consensus* then turns to a more detailed description of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. It states:

Moreover, as far as the unfortunate difference of opinion on the Lord's Supper is concerned, we agree on the meaning of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, as they have been understood in an orthodox manner by the fathers, and especially by Irenaeus, who said that this mystery consists of two elements, namely, an earthly and a heavenly one. Nor do we assert that those elements or signs are bare and empty; we state, rather, that at the same time by faith they actually [*re ipsa*] exhibit and present that which they signify. Finally, to put it more clearly and expressly, we have agreed to believe and confess that the substantial presence of Christ is not merely signified, but that the body and blood of the Lord are represented, distributed, and exhibited to those who eat by the symbols applied to the thing itself, and that the symbols are not at all bare, according to the nature of the sacraments. But lest the diversity of manners of speaking bring forth another controversy, we have decided by mutual consent, in addition to the article which is inserted into our Confession, to add the article of the Confession of the Saxon churches on the Lord's Supper, sent to the Council of Trent in 1551, which we acknowledge as correct and have accepted.³⁷

First, it is recognized that there has been an unhappy (*infelix*) disagreement with regard to this doctrine. The delegates, however, sought to affirm some agreement concerning this matter. They state that they are "*convenimus in sententia verborum*," that is, "they agree in the sense of the words" as they have been understood in an orthodox manner by the fathers. In their search for consensus, the delegates found it helpful to make use of a distinction originally introduced by Irenaeus of Lyon in his polemic against those who spiritualized the resurrection. He noted that two realities or sides are present in the sacrament, the earthly and the

³⁶ Łukaszewicz, *O kościołach Braci Czeskich*, 212.

³⁷ English translation quoted from Pelikan, "The Consensus of Sandomierz," 827-828.

heavenly, and states that its blessings are both earthly and heavenly. Both the body and soul of the communicants are rendered incorruptible by the sacrament.³⁸

This quotation from Irenaeus was often cited in Reformation sacramental debates. Martin Bucer made use of it in his attempt to bring the Reformed and Lutherans into agreement at the *Wittenberg Colloquium* of 1536. In the original statement, Irenaeus spoke of these two realities as united into one. Bucer, however, divided them, saying: "We confess in agreement with the words of Irenaeus that the Eucharist consists of two matters, earthly and heavenly. Thus [the parties at Wittenberg] believe and teach that with the bread and the wine the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present, distributed, and eaten."³⁹

Luther had reacted coolly to Bucer's position and later rejected it. The *Wittenberg Concord* never achieved official status among the Lutherans, since it became clear that Bucer assigned no saving value to the earthly elements in the sacrament. He wished to formulate a position which was capable of contradictory interpretations. The delegates at Sandomierz, however, held the *Wittenberg Concord* in high regard and thought the phrase of Irenaeus to be a sufficient basis from which to move forward.⁴⁰

The *Consensus* states that the delegates agree in the sense of these words *in sententia verborum*. We must ask to what words the Latin phrase *in sententia verborum* refers. One possible interpretation is offered by Jaroslav Pelikan, who in his 1947 translation adds here the words "of our Lord Jesus Christ."⁴¹ This suggests that Pelikan thought the delegates were addressing the same point that Luther had asserted in his 1527 treatise *That These Words of Christ, "This Is My Body," . . . Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics*.⁴² Luther began this essay with the statement: "It is perfectly clear, of course, that we are at odds concerning the words of Christ in the Supper," thus indicating that he, Ulrich Zwingli, Andreas Karlstadt (1480-1541), and Johannes Oecolampadius (1482-1531) had not been able to

³⁸ Irenaeus, "Book IV", in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to 325*, 10 vols., ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 1:484-486.

³⁹ *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1956), 65.

⁴⁰ Luther does not use the Irenaeus quote, but the *Formula of Concord* does in the Solid Declaration Article VIII Paragraph XXII, where it is used to support the doctrine of the communion of the earthly and heavenly elements. *Die Bekenntnisschriften*, 1024.

⁴¹ Pelikan, "The Consensus of Sandomierz," 827.

⁴² *LW* 37:13-150.

agree.⁴³ The *Consensus*, however, says nothing concerning the words of Christ or of their meaning. Instead, it is the words of the fathers and Irenaeus that are central here. The delegates determined not to deal with the question of the interpretation of Christ's words at all, but instead to concentrate on Irenaeus' description of the mystery of the Eucharist. His words proved helpful because of his assertion that the mystery consists of two parts or elements, earthly and heavenly. This fits easily into the pattern of Reformed thought, which separates earthly and heavenly in such a manner that they have no direct mutual relationship.

It is asserted that the elements, according to this understanding, are a sign which is neither bare (*nuda*), nor empty (*vacua*). They deliver and give what they signify to believers who receive them by faith. If we are to understand these words as a statement concerning the presence of Christ in the Supper, we are given no indication of the nature of that presence. No clarification is offered concerning the manner in which Christ is received by those with faith and those without faith. Further, if Christ is present by faith, it is not yet clear what this faith is that makes Christ present. One looks in vain for any clear statement as to the content of the faith by which Christ is made present. Lutheran confessional statements traditionally spoke explicitly as to the content of faith. In this case, one would look for a statement that faith leaves reason behind and clings only to Christ's consecratory words. No further mention is made either of the earthly elements of bread and wine or the heavenly elements of body and blood as such, nor is it made clear what the nature of the relationship is between them. Clearly faith is understood to be the means by which Christ is given and received. This would satisfy the Reformed. Although the pattern of thought in the *Heidelberg Catechism* imitates Luther's definition of the Sacrament of the Altar in his *Small Catechism*, it avoids any identification of the material with the celestial elements.⁴⁴

By way of clarification, the *Consensus* states that the delegates agree they believe and confess that the substantial presence of Christ (*substantialem praesentiam Christi*) is not only signified but is really represented, distributed, and delivered by means of the symbols. These symbols are by no means bare but function according to the nature of sacraments. In other words, Christ is present in a sacramental manner, the definition that the Bohemian Brethren had traditionally preferred and to which Wittenberg reformers had been willing to agree.⁴⁵ This was

⁴³ LW 37:25.

⁴⁴ *Heidelberg Catechism*: Question and Answer 75.

⁴⁵ Sipayllo, *Akta Synodów II*, 292–293.

acceptable also to the Reformed on the basis of Bullinger's *Second Helvetic Confession* of 1566 which speaks of a sacramental eating.⁴⁶ What was sufficient in 1535, however, was no longer sufficient after the introduction and wide distribution of Calvinistic opinions. In the intervening years, especially after the union of Koźminek in 1555, the sacramental theology of the Bohemian Brethren moved increasingly away from Wittenberg and more closely approached the Calvinist understanding. This made further definition necessary. Here *vere et substantialiter* can no longer carry the weight of full sacramental definition. *Substantialiter* is a philosophical term which is capable of more than one interpretation. It can refer to a heavenly reality toward which the earthly sign points. Here too, the qualification is added that what is offered, distributed, and delivered by means of the symbols is present to those who eat the Supper (*vescentibus*). This is a Reformed qualification over against Lutheran insistence that all who receive, receive what God gives whether for their benefit or judgment.

Such a definition was in itself not satisfactory to the Lutherans. For this reason the Reformed and the Bohemian Brethren allowed that the relevant words concerning the Lord's Supper from Melancthon's *Saxon Confession* of 1551 be added to satisfy the Lutherans and to avoid further controversy. In the *Saxon Confession* we find the following statement with reference to the sacrament:

Also men are taught that sacraments are actions instituted of God, and that without the use whereunto they are ordained the things themselves are not to be accounted for a sacrament; but in the use appointed, Christ is present in this communion, truly and substantially, and the body and blood of Christ is indeed given to the receivers; that Christ does witness that He is in them and does make them His members and that He does wash them in His blood, as Hilary also says, "These things being eaten and drunk do cause both that we may be in Christ and that Christ may be in us". Moreover, in the ceremony itself we observe the usual order of the whole ancient Church, both Latin and Greek. We use no private masses, that is, such wherein the body and blood of Christ is not distributed; as also the ancient Church, for many years after the Apostles' times had no such

⁴⁶ "Besides the higher spiritual eating there is also a sacramental eating of the body of the Lord by which not only spiritually and internally the believer truly participates in the true body and blood of the Lord, but also, by coming to the Table of the Lord, outwardly receives the visible sacrament of the body and blood of the Lord." *Second Helvetic Confession* 1566: Of the Holy Supper of the Lord, Chapter 21.

masses, as the old descriptions which are to be found in Dionysius, Epiphanius, Ambrose, Augustine, and others do show.⁴⁷

This confession states that Christ is truly and substantially present in the Sacrament of the Altar and that his body and blood are delivered to those who receive. The classical words *vere et substantialiter* are used, and the body and blood are said to be delivered to those who receive. Those who receive communion receive Christ. The *Saxon Confession*, however, lacks any specific reference to the bread and wine and the body and blood. Accordingly, it might be asserted that communion is an action instituted by God in which the participants perform a ritual action and receive a spiritual blessing that is not necessarily directly related to it. It was the lack of clarity in this area which occasioned dissent with regard to sacrament within Lutheranism and which made necessary the clarifications found in the *Formula of Concord*. Although the *Saxon Confession* was and remains a provincial document of only limited significance and force produced by a faculty in which some professors had been openly accused of introducing Crypto-Calvinism into the Lutheran Church, the Reformed and Bohemian Brethren at Sandomierz found it imminently suitable for quotation. The Lutherans present may have felt uneasy about the matter but they went along with it.

All three churches had agreed on this paragraph from the *Saxon Confession* because each group was able to see a reflection of its own position in it. The Lutherans, however, understood that the Saxonian definition was insufficient and in need of clarification, especially since little had been said about the relationship of Christ's body and blood to the bread and wine. The precise meaning of the phrase *substantialem praesentiam* was unclear, so they asked that the words *corporis Christi* be added.⁴⁸ The Reformed and Bohemians were unwilling to grant this request; they thought the insertion of the sacramental section from the *Saxon Confession* to be sufficient. In the interest of peace and harmony, the representative parties chose to underline areas of agreement and avoid discussion of divisive issues, as is often the case in modern interchurch dialogues. Blunt questions such as Luther's, "what does the priest put in your mouth," "what do unbelievers receive," and "for what purpose and for what benefit" are avoided for the sake of a declaration of broader unity in the face of political and social pressures.

⁴⁷ Johann Michael Reu, *The Augsburg Confession: A Collection of Sources with an Historical Introduction* (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1930), 413-414.

⁴⁸ Sipayllo, *Akta Synodów II*, 292-293.

The churches decided that they would work together within the parameters set down in the earlier paragraph and agreed to acknowledge as orthodox those churches that accept the terms of this *Consensus* together with “our confession . . . and that of the Brethren. . .”⁴⁹ *Confessionem nostram* could be understood to refer to this *Consensus* document, but careful reading makes it clear that the reference here is to another document.⁵⁰ It is probable that the Reformed added an oblique reference to their *Confession of Sandomierz*⁵¹ at this point, referring to it as *Confessionem nostram, in hac synodo publicatam*. This document was their Sandormirian version of the *Second Helvetic Confession*, whose definition of the sacrament Lutherans found inadequate.

Understanding that the really pertinent questions had not been resolved, the representatives of the churches moved to delay further debate by imposing interdiction on all further debate and “utter silence upon all bickering, disagreement, and controversy.”⁵² They promised to persuade their brethren to take the same course of action and deal with each other peaceably and charitably for the good of the fraternal union that had been established. At the same time, the churches promised to use the “utmost zeal” to quash opposition. The delegates pledged themselves to prevail upon all of their brethren to agree to the *Consensus*.

To be effective the *Consensus* needed to be applied, so a program of implementation was detailed. Members of each church were to be encouraged to attend the services of the other churches and to receive the sacraments. Like methods employed by the modern ecumenical movement, it was understood that differences in doctrine and practice will fade only as interchurch activities become commonplace.

Finally, the delegates of each church were to consult together with the other two churches and freely participate in the general synods, so that each church may have input into the discussions and decisions of the other two churches. They pledged themselves to seek this goal and they looked

⁴⁹ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 296.

⁵⁰ This is made clear both by the *et* which precedes the phrase *Confessionem nostram* and the reference to the statement of the Brethren which is included in the same sentence.

⁵¹ *Confession of Sandomierz - Wyznanie wiary powszechnej Kościołów Krześciańskich . . . 1570* was published under the supervision of Krzysztof Trecius (Trecy) (†1591), Rector of the Calvinistic gymnasium in Kraków, who played a supervisory role in its composition in the synod of Sandomierz. Jerzy Lehmann *Konfesja, Sandomierska na tle innych konfesji w Polsce XVI Wieku* (Warszawa, 1937), 108–115.

⁵² Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 296.

forward to the day when the churches would work together to assemble and formulate a new and comprehensive body of doctrine which would supersede the confessions of the individual groups. This would finally stop the mouths of evil men and enemies of the truth, and provide great comfort to all the faithful of the churches of the Reformation in Poland, Lithuania, and Samogitia. Forgetting themselves and acting as true ministers of God, all sacredly promised to avoid occasions that might lead to alienation and instead to nurture faith and tranquility. The signers ardently prayed that God, who freed them from the papal tyranny, would be pleased to bless abundantly the unity they achieved.

IV. The Implementation of the *Consensus*

From the start, the Reformed saw the *Consensus* as a great breakthrough and the dawning of new day for interchurch collaboration. They spread the word throughout Europe that they had been able to achieve the goal which Zwingli, Calvin, and the Lutherans had not. They now wished to move ahead and build upon this agreement. In a letter to Hieronim Zanki of Heidelberg, they asserted that it should now be possible to formulate a new Protestant *Corpus Doctrinae* on the basis of the unique accomplishment at Sandomierz. In answer, Zanki expressed his great joy at the formulation of the *Consensus* but noted that in his opinion no further work towards the formulation of a common body of doctrine was necessary.⁵³

Reaction was predictable among the Lutherans. The Wittenberg theological faculty gave the *Consensus*, along with the whole movement toward Protestant union, its blessing.⁵⁴ The leading professors Paul Eber, George Major, and Caspar Peucer (Melanchthon's son-in-law), were strongly influenced by Melanchthon and had been labeled Crypto-Calvinist by more orthodox Lutheran theologians.⁵⁵ The *Consensus* was in line with their ecclesiastical views. At the faculty of theology in Leipzig, the *Consensus* was also accepted with approbation.⁵⁶ Prussian Lutherans, however, were far more critical. They saw that many necessary points

⁵³ Portions of this letter are printed in Николай Любавичъ *Начало католической реакции и упадок реформации в Польше* (Варшава: Типография К. Ковалевского, 1890), 191; Wotschke, *Der Briefwechsel der Schweizer*, 315; Halecki, *Zgoda Sandomierska 1570*, 356.

⁵⁴ Maria Sipayłło, *Opracowała, Akta Synodów różnowierczych w Polsce*. Tom III (Małopolska 1571-1632), (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1983), 128.

⁵⁵ Pelikan, "The Consensus of Sandomierz," 836.

⁵⁶ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów III*, 128.

were not mentioned and they condemned the *Consensus* as inadequate.⁵⁷ Strong criticism also arose in Jena, where many on its theological faculty had left Wittenberg because of its Philippism.⁵⁸

The Roman Catholics were aware of these differences and immediately understood that a united Protestant church was not possible on the basis of the *Consensus*. Cardinal Stanisław Hozjusz, said in his letter of August 31, 1570, to Jakób Uchański, Archbishop of Gniezno, that it would not be possible to persuade all the parties to come to common consent concerning the Lord's Supper.⁵⁹

The Reformed and the Lutherans had very different understandings of what had been achieved. The Reformed claimed that a common agreement had been reached. The Lutherans, however, viewed the *Consensus* as the first step toward the formulation of a common agreement. The Lutherans realized that they had allowed themselves to be put in the position of practicing intercommunion with churches who did not share a common confession concerning the Lord's Supper. They had signed the *Consensus* establishing altar and pulpit fellowship without the doctrinal agreement that such fellowship requires. It is hard to imagine that Lutherans could come forward to receive Christ's body and blood in bread and wine over which his testamentary words (1 Corinthians 11:23-25) had not been spoken in blessing. Unlike the Bohemian Brethren, the Lithuanian Reformed did not use the *Verba Christi* to consecrate the Sacrament. Lithuanian Reformed of the Lasco liturgical tradition included only a historical recitation of the institution of the Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-29) spoken as a Gospel lesson before communion.⁶⁰ There was no notion that the words of Christ consecrate the bread and wine to be what Christ's Words make them, nor did the Lithuanian Reformed have any intention of consecrating bread and wine, in accordance with the Lutheran understanding. To them the Lutheran practice was far too reminiscent of Roman transubstantiation. How then would the Lutherans react to the Reformed manner of observing the Supper? What would they have understood as being given and received—bread and wine, or body and blood? Although the *Consensus of Sandomierz* allows for latitude of

⁵⁷ Любoвичь, *Начало католической реакции*, 193; Lukšaitė, *Reformacija*, 388.

⁵⁸ Sipayło, *Akta Synodów III*, 128.

⁵⁹ Portions of this letter are printed in Любoвичь, *Начало католической реакции*, 191.

⁶⁰ *Formá álbo porządek spráwowania świętosći Pańskich ... znowu wydana y drukowana w Wylnie. Roku od náródenia Syná Bożego: 1581, bv.*

interpretation, in actual practice there could be no such breath of interpretation. It had to be one or the other.

The problematic nature of the *Consensus* concerning the Lord's Supper was evident weeks later at the Convocation of Lutherans and Bohemian Brethren at Poznań in May 1570. Many Lutherans were dissatisfied with the lack of clarity in the *Consensus* and sought more precise definitions but some, such as Erasmus Glicner, recognized that any attempt at further definition would destroy the fruits of the work at Sandomierz. The focus was not on further clarification of confession, but the implementation of the *Consensus*. A document was drawn up which spelled out a program of twenty points upon which all three churches must agree. All the points were based on Reformed theology: the Lutherans were asked to agree to Calvinistic proposals. With reference to the Lord's Supper, only the terminology of the *Consensus* and the *Saxon Confession* were to be allowed. Members of the three churches were to be admitted to the communion table if they could provide a letter of membership from their pastor. Under no circumstances were members of these partner churches to proselytize or seek to induce members of another confession. The rites and ceremonies of the consenting churches were to be respected and patrons, such as princes and town councils, were not to require ministers to change rites and ceremonies without the consent of the superior ministers.⁶¹

The adoption of the twenty-point program revealed, first of all, that the leaders had forestalled any discussion concerning the Sacrament of the Altar on the basis of their belief that further discussions would be detrimental to the *Consensus* and destroy the union. Second, the program directed its major attention to agreement on secondary matters. It condemned Roman practices which all desired to eliminate, but among these were some Lutheran practices which the Reformed and Bohemian Brethren did not approve. By the adoption of this program, the Lutherans departed from their traditional practice and moved toward the acceptance of Reformed Protestantism as normative for Polish Protestantism. It would seem, at least in part, that Lasco's vision of co-opting Polish and Lithuanian Lutheranism had been fulfilled.

On the basis of the *Consensus*, the king and parliament regarded the Lutherans, the Reformed, and the Bohemian Brethren as one united Protestant church with full liberty to live and worship according to their beliefs. All three groups began expectantly to prepare for the coming meeting of the Parliament in Warszawa. Few Lutherans and Bohemian

⁶¹ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 309-311.

Brethren attended; Calvinists predominated. When the Calvinists appeared before the parliament to represent the entire Protestant community they did not present the *Consensus of Sandomierz*, but instead substituted their own *Sandomierz Confession*. This greatly diminished the value of the *Consensus*. The bishops and senators rejected the Reformed *Sandomierz Confession* and refused to grant religious liberty on the basis of it.⁶² This made it impossible for the king to give the Protestants what they wanted. The battle for the religious liberty which the Protestants had so earnestly sought from the Parliament was not forthcoming.

When the Lutherans were informed that the Calvinists had presented their *Sandomierz Confession* as representing their view, they were furious. At the Convocation at Poznań on October 4, 1570, they expressed their desire to disassociate themselves from the decisions made at Sandomierz and the subsequent actions of the Calvinists.⁶³ This was the first step among Lutherans to move away from the *Consensus* and in the next thirty years that would gradually reject the *Consensus*. The representatives of the Bohemian Brethren present at Poznań interpreted the action of the Calvinists more calmly, reminding the Lutherans that the churches of the *Consensus of Sandomierz* allowed for each group to retain its own historic confession. They noted that they had no exact record of how the Parliament reacted to the *Consensus*. Even if the Calvinists presented their own confession, they would have been entirely within their rights. The Lutherans did no more than to write a letter to the Reformed congregation in Kraków admonishing them to follow the terms of the *Consensus*.⁶⁴ The Reformed and Bohemian Brethren thought that harmony had been established and that it was now possible to move forward in implementing the *Consensus*.

A general attitude of good feelings seems to have resulted from the approval of the *Consensus* by the general synods at Kraków in 1573, Piotrków in 1578, and Włodzisław in 1583. Even the Lutheran leaders, including Erazm Glicznier, adopted the attitude of the Reformed, who came to regard the *Consensus* as the model which ought to be followed also in Germany. In their letter of 1578, he and Paweł Gilowski, Reformed Superintendent of Kraków, wrote:

A perfect understanding prevails amongst us, notwithstanding that foreign intrigues attempt to destroy the union. Though separated by

⁶² Wotschke, *Reformation in Polen*, 250–251; Halecki, *Zgoda Sandomierska 1570*, 313–314.

⁶³ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 314.

⁶⁴ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 315–316.

minor differences, we compose one body, and one host against Arians and Papists. We wish that the German churches could come to a similar union. It is necessary to convoke a general European Protestant synod, which shall unite all shades of the Reformation into one general confession, and give it a uniform direction.⁶⁵

All was not as it seemed on the surface. The deficiencies of the *Consensus of Sandomierz* were becoming increasingly evident. Although all three churches consented to it, it was clear that no real harmony had been achieved on sacramental teaching. The political situation was such that the deficiencies of the *Consensus* could be overlooked for a time. For the next several years, all three groups determined not to press the matter further in their general synods. Instead, they turned their attention to matters on which all could agree. With the publication of the *Formula of Concord* in 1577, the Lutherans in Poland and Lithuania began to examine the *Consensus* in the light of their church's fuller doctrinal statement on the Sacrament of the Altar. Now they would be forced to choose whether to follow Luther or go to Geneva.

On June 25, 1578, the 48th anniversary of the presentation of the *Augsburg Confession*, the Lutherans in their convocation with the Reformed at Vilnius moved away from their earlier acceptance of the terms of the *Consensus*. During this meeting in Duke Krzysztof Radziwiłł's ("Piorun") palace, they formulated a statement entitled *Concordia Vilnensis* that expressed their dissatisfaction how the *Consensus* had described the nature and purpose of Christ's presence in the Supper.⁶⁶ Although some interpret this as an isolated local action, the position of the Lutheran parish in Vilnius as the bellwether parish of Lithuanian Lutheranism indicated that it had more than merely local significance.

In the same year, tensions concerning the doctrine of the Lord's Supper and Lutheran agreement with the *Consensus of Sandomierz* were

⁶⁵ English translation quoted from Krasieński, *Historical Sketch*, 72.

⁶⁶ The Lutherans were represented by Maciej Dambrowski and Job Sommer (pastors of the Vilnius Lutheran parish), Mikołaj Talwosz, Castellan of Samogitia and others. Included among the Reformed participants were Mikołaj Kantz a Skala, Stanisław Sudrowski (pastor of Vilnius Reformed Parish), Caspar Tarasowski (Superintendent of the Reformed Church), Stanisław Martianus, and Dziewałtowski (Reformed pastor at Deovalte). It is noteworthy that among those present in the convocation was Mikołaj Pac, the former Roman Catholic Bishop of Kiev, who turned toward the Lutheran Church after his earlier allegiance to the Reformed. Andreae Wengerscii, *Libri quatuor Slavoniae Reformatae* (Amstelodami, 1679), 80-81; Jablonski, *Historia Consensus*, 81-86; Adamowicz, *Kościół augsburski*, 54.

beginning to become evident in Poznań.⁶⁷ A few years later, in 1582, Paweł Gericius, the Lutheran pastor in Poznań and Jan Enoch came out in opposition to the *Consensus*, mainly because of its eucharistic doctrine.⁶⁸ This action made it necessary for Duke Radziwiłł, Palatine of Vilnius and Hetman of Lithuania, to make an attempt at reconciliation. Radziwiłł convoked a Colloquium in Vilnius on June 14, 1585.⁶⁹ Andreas Volanus, speaking for the Reformed, made the Lord's Supper the central subject. He stated that pressures from the forces of the Roman church made it most desirable that Lutherans and Reformed should form a common opinion. He declared that this could best be accomplished by laying aside the relatively recent works of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Oecolampadius, and all other human authorities, except those of ancient fathers.⁷⁰ Volanus built his arguments upon his careful distinction between earthly and heavenly things, after the manner of the distinction between the *signa* and *res signata* (basically a Neo-Platonist argument). He alluded to evangelical confessions from other countries, all of which clearly were built upon the same philosophical foundations. He spoke of the true gift of the body and blood of Christ, but he did not equate it with the physical eating of the external elements.⁷¹ While using terminology which Lutherans employ in speaking of the sacramental gifts, he did not connect the heavenly gifts to the consecrated bread and wine in a manner acceptable to the Lutherans, as can be seen in his own words:

We believe and acknowledge that when the sacrament of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ is distributed to the believers

⁶⁷ Maria Sipayłło, Opracowała, *Akta Synodów różnowierczych w Polsce Tom IV* (Wielkopolska 1569–1632), (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1997), 49.

⁶⁸ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów IV*, 73.

⁶⁹ Among the Lutherans participating in this meeting were Paul Weiss (professor of Divinity in Königsberg), Martin Henrici, Job Sommer (Lutheran pastor of Vilnius), Paul Oderborn (Lutheran Pastor of Kaunas), George Plotkowski (later served a Lithuanian parish in Šiaulėnai/Ingė Lukšaitė). *Die reformatorischen Kirchen Litauens: Die Evangelische Kirchen Litauens*, (Erlangen: Martin-Luther-Verlag, 1998), 108 n.255. The Reformed representatives included Duke Krzysztof Radziwiłł, Stanisław Naruszewicz, Castellan of Mińsk, Andreas Zawisza (*tribunallasessor*), Jan Abramowicz, Starosta of Lida, and Reformed theologians Stanisław Sudrowski (Latin: Sudrovius), Johann Ulrich, Mathias Johannides, Andreas Chrzastowski, and Andreas Volanus (an eminent theologian and secretary of the King). Joseph Łukaszewicz, *Geschichte der reformierten Kirchen in Litauen. T. I.* (Leipzig: Dyk, 1848), 36.

⁷⁰ *Colloquium habitum Vilnae in palatio Illustriss[imi] ac Mag[ni] Du[cis] D[omini] Christophori Radiuili in Birtza et Tubinga Ducis, Palatini Vilnensi, die 14. Iunij. Anno 1585.* (Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel. Call No.: Cod. Guelf. 11. 14 Aug. 2°), 265–279.

⁷¹ *Colloquium habitum Vilnae 1585*, 265–279.

according to his institution, the bread is his body and the wine is his blood, not by an exterior and invisible transformation of elements into heavenly and visible things, but by the real and true gift of the body and blood of Christ, in such a manner that those who, being endowed by the grace of God with true faith and repentance, receive with the mouth the external elements, are partaking at the same time with the spirit and faith of the body and blood of Christ, to the certain remission of sins and the gift of eternal life, which is obtained by the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁷²

Lutherans objected strongly to this omission and that Volanus had not spoken to the question of unworthy reception of the sacrament. The Vilnius meeting revealed how the Lutherans and Reformed became entrenched in their traditional sacramental teachings. The Lutherans insisted that careful attention be paid to the words of Christ without resort to rationalistic interpretations. Whereas the Reformed insisted that rational philosophical principles be included in the teaching of the Lord's Supper. The Vilnius Convocation ended without any real advance.⁷³

Relationships between the churches in both Poland and Lithuania were put under increasing strain. It became evident that the *Consensus of Sandomierz* could not carry the weight in future discussions. Paweł Gericus, for example, was unwilling to compromise on any point. Although Lutheran Church officials tried to mute the effect of his arguments, his position was increasingly supported among the Lutheran clergy and parishioners. In addition, his position had the support of prominent Lutheran theologians in Germany. These formidable opinions led Superintendent Erazm Gliczner to reevaluate his support for the *Consensus*. As a result, he published the *Unaltered Augsburg Confession* of 1530 in the Polish language in 1594 to the chagrin of Reformed and the Bohemian Brethren.⁷⁴

It had become evident that serious steps needed to be taken to preserve the unity that the *Consensus* had supposedly established among Protestants. A general synod was called to meet at Toruń during August of 1595 to address this and other issues. Świętosław Orzelski, the chairman of

⁷² *Brevis et perspicua Conclusio colloquij Instituti Vilnae ab Illustrissimo principe et M. D. palatino Vilnensi, die 14. Iun[ii] Anno 1585.* (Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel. Call No.: Cod. Guelf. 11. 14 Aug. 2°), 262; English translation quoted from Krasiński, *Historical Sketch*, 84.

⁷³ Łukaszewicz, *Geschichte der reformierten*, 36–37; Lukšaitė, *Reformacija*, 483.

⁷⁴ Wojciech Adam Sławiński, *Toruński synod generalny 1595 roku* (Warszawa, 2002), 105.

the synod, declared that the meeting was for the purpose of renewing, conforming, and consolidating the *Consensus of Sandomierz*, as well as to determine how the Polish Protestants could avoid the injuries and persecutions that they were suffering, especially from the Jesuits. Gericius, the Lutheran pastor in Poznań, immediately objected to the manner in which theological issues in the *Consensus* were to be discussed, stating that contradictory theological statements in the *Consensus* must be resolved.⁷⁵ Orzelski replied that it was common knowledge that Lutherans, Bohemians, and Reformed had theological differences, but these were not reasons for setting aside the *Consensus*. Gericius pointed out that Andreas Volanus, in his reply to the Jesuit Piotr Skarga, had stated that the *Consensus of Sandomierz* denied the presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the sacrament, and the same denial could be found in the catechism of Paweł Gilowski.⁷⁶ In an effort to turn the discussion away from the doctrinal matters, Krzysztof Rej, the Chamberlain of Lublin, stated that the synod had gathered not to discuss the doctrinal issues of the Lord's Supper but to strengthen the unity achieved at Sandomierz. Superintendent Gliczner insisted that the doctrinal issues must be faced because many adherents to the Helvetian Confession were destroying the *Consensus* by their teachings and writings. Attention turned to attempts to force Gericius to sign the *Consensus*. He left the city rather than subject himself to such pressure. In order to quiet his opposition to Superintendent Gliczner, it was resolved to excommunicate Gericius should he fail to repent before the end of the year.⁷⁷ He did not repent. When Gliczner was instructed to carry out the decision of the synod to depose Gericius for continually preaching against the *Consensus*, the strong reaction of the Poznań congregation moved Gliczner to abandon the action for fear of violence.⁷⁸

The General Synod of Toruń had resolved to accept the *Consensus of Sandomierz* and require that every minister in the Polish kingdom conform himself to its provisions. It was further resolved that no one should be made a minister unless he signed the *Consensus* and conform to it. The senior of every district was to keep a book in which all ministers of his district recorded their agreement. Every year the superintendents of the three confessions were to meet in order to deliberate concerning affairs of

⁷⁵ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów III*, 122-123.

⁷⁶ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów III*, 124 fn. 2.

⁷⁷ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów III*, 153; The decree of Paweł Gericius' excommunication is cited in Łukaszewicz, *O kościołach Braci Czeskich*, 161-162.

⁷⁸ Krasieński, *Historical Sketch*, 130.

the church. Churches had the liberty to maintain their traditional ceremonies until a future synod established conformity.⁷⁹

The General Synod at Toruń was the last time the Lutherans reaffirmed the *Consensus of Sandomierz*. In the 17th century, Lutheran officials began to declare openly that they no longer supported the *Consensus*, because it did not provide a basis for solid and enduring unity among the Protestant churches.⁸⁰ The clarity of Lutheran confession seen in the publication of the *Formula of Concord* and the entire *Book of Concord* was such that Lutherans had come to the inevitable conclusion that the *Consensus* was inadequate. As confessionalism grew among Lutherans, support for the *Consensus* waned and it was most clearly repudiated at the *Colloquium Charitativum* in 1645, when the Lutherans refused to make common cause with the Reformed and Bohemian Brethren before the Polish monarch.⁸¹ On the basis of a commonly held opinion of that era, the Lutherans refused even to engage in common prayer with the Roman Catholics, Reformed, and Bohemian Brethren, because in colloquium they shared no common confessional position.⁸² From the standpoint of the Reformed, however, the *Consensus* was and would remain the crowning achievement of a decade of struggle to establish Reformed sacramental doctrine. The Lithuanian Reformed church regards the *Consensus of Sandomierz* as the definitive confessional document for understanding their relationship to the Lutherans even to this day.

V. Conclusions

Like every document of its time, the *Consensus of Sandomierz* was formulated to meet a need. Protestants thought that it was only by a show of unity that they would be able to obtain official recognition of the king and parliament in both Poland and Lithuania. In addition, it would indicate to the people of both nations that their churches were not simply minority sects but the true church of Christ, deserving of equal status with the Roman majority church.

Theological examination of the *Consensus of Sandomierz* reveals that it was not a church union document in the usual sense of the term. To speak of religious union in the 16th century was to speak of agreement in all articles of faith, including those previously controverted. We see this in the

⁷⁹ Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów III*, 166.

⁸⁰ Henryk Gmiterek, *Bracia czescy a kalwini w Rzeczypospolitej. Połowa XVI-połowa XVII wieku* (Lublin: Pektor, 1987), 204 fn. 11.

⁸¹ Łukaszewicz, *O kościołach Braci Czeskich*, 212–213.

⁸² Łukaszewicz, *O kościołach Braci Czeskich*, 220.

case of the Augsburg Diet of 1530. Mutual agreement in doctrine and practice was required of those who signed the *Augsburg Confession*. Those who could not agree on all articles were considered to be outside the terms of agreement. From this perspective the document produced at Sandomierz did not produce a religious union because common confession was not formulated. Instead of searching for solutions to controverted issues, it chose rather to speak only of matters in which there was apparent agreement. It might even be asked whether this was a theological statement at all, because little was said about doctrinal definition. Theological concerns appear in only one paragraph, and then only superficially. It might be better described as a preliminary statement of consensus and mutual cooperation towards the eventual achievement of complete agreement.

From another perspective, one may regard the *Consensus* as a statement of formal ecclesiastical union on the basis of the fact that it did establish altar and pulpit fellowship among the signatory churches. It was on this basis that Reformed theologians and some later historians have continued to regard the *Consensus* as a statement of religious union. Such is clearly the view of the Polish Reformed historian Krasiński and Prussian Union Church historian Wotschke. They do not give attention, however, to the fact that the fellowship established by this document lacked the necessary theological agreement.

The fact that Polish and Lithuanian Lutherans at that time would indicate a willingness to allow parishioners and clergy of another confession to commune at their altars and preach from their pulpits would be regarded by other Lutherans of the same period as a serious weakness and departure from Lutheran teaching and practice. No doubt they understood themselves to be acting on the basis of sound advice from the Wittenberg faculty in which a very congenial attitude toward Calvinism had developed. Lutheran confessionalism was beginning to grow during this period, but by 1570 it had influenced only a few pastors and theologians in Poland and Lithuania. By the end of this decade, the influence of Lutheran confessionalism in these countries strengthened to the point that the Lutherans adopted the position that there could be no pulpit and altar fellowship without complete doctrinal agreement. This position is evident in the 1645 *Colloquium charitativum*.

The *Consensus* was not without some positive results, especially in the Reformed liturgies of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. During this period, Reformed worship was greatly enriched by the introduction of traditional forms and practices which the Lutherans had kept. The

Reformed hoped that this would open the door to a common liturgy to be used in both the Reformed and Lutheran Churches.

The pressing political needs of the time explain the willingness of the three main Protestant bodies to participate and sign the *Consensus*. The churches were fighting for their lives in the face of the Counter-Reformation and the growing Jesuit offensive, and they decided to take seriously the king's proposal that his Protestant subjects should unite in one Protestant church. From this perspective, historians should not talk about the *Consensus* as a true religious union. The verdict of Polish historian Józef Szujski that the *Consensus of Sandomierz* brought about primarily a political union is correct.⁸³

Appendix

The Consensus of Sandomierz Formula of Recessus⁸⁴

Mutual consensus in the chief articles of the Christian religion between the churches of Major and Minor Poland, Russia, Lithuania, and Samogitia concerning which there appeared to be descent in the *Augsburg Confession* and that of the Valdians (as they are called) and the Swiss, concluded in the synod of Sandomierz April 14, 1570.

Since, after many long conflicts with sectarians, Tritheites, Ebionites, and Anabaptists, we have nevertheless emerged, by the grace of God, from so many great struggles and deplorable contentions, it was decided by those Reformed and Orthodox churches of Poland which seemed to the enemies of the truth and of the Gospel to be in least agreement in certain articles and formulas of doctrine to call a Synod in the interest of peace and concord and to attest their mutual consensus. Therefore, after a friendly and Christian conference, we agree to these articles with minds thus joined and agreed.

First. As both we who in the present Synod have published our confession and the Bohemian Brethren have never believed that those who adhere to the *Augsburg Confession* feel otherwise than piously and orthodoxy about God and the Holy Trinity, also the incarnation of the Son of God and our justification and other principal articles of our faith; so also those who follow the *Augsburg Confession* have openly and sincerely confessed that they, on the other hand, know of nothing in the confession of our churches or that of the Bohemian Brethren concerning God and the Holy Trinity, the incarnation of the Son of God, justification, and other primary articles of the Christian faith which would be contrary to the orthodox

⁸³ Szujski, *Dzieje Polski*, 399.

⁸⁴ Latin text of the *Consensus of Sandomierz*: Sipayłło, *Akta Synodów II*, 295–298. The English translation is from Pelikan, "The Consensus of Sandomierz," 826–830. The translation in the first paragraph and footnoted editorial comments are by Charles Evanson and Darius Petkunas.

truth and the pure Word of God. And there we have mutually and unanimously promised according to the rule of God's Word that we shall defend this mutual consensus in the true and pure religion of Christ against papists, against sectarians, against all the enemies of the Gospel and the truth.

Moreover, as far as the unfortunate difference of opinion on the Lord's Supper is concerned, we agree on the meaning of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ⁸⁵, as they have been orthodoxly⁸⁶ understood by the fathers, and especially by Irenaeus, who said that this mystery consists of two elements, namely, an earthly and a heavenly one. Nor do we assert that those elements or signs are bare and empty; we state, rather, that at the same time by faith they actually [*re ipsa*] exhibit and present that which they signify. Finally, to put it more clearly and expressly, we have agreed to believe and confess that the substantial presence of Christ is not merely signified, but that the body and blood of the Lord⁸⁷ are represented, distributed, and exhibited to those who eat by the symbols applied to the thing itself, and that the symbols are not at all bare, according to the nature of the Sacraments. But lest the diversity of manners of speaking bring forth another controversy, we have decided by mutual consent, in addition to the article which is inserted into our Confession, to add the article of the *Confession of the Saxon churches* on the Lord's Supper, sent to the Council of Trent in 1551, which we acknowledge as correct and have accepted. These are the words of that Confession: *Baptism and the Lord's Supper are signs*, etc.⁸⁸

We have decided to be bound by this holy and mutual consensus, and have agreed that just as they regard us, our churches, our confession published in this Synod, and that of the Brethren as orthodox, so also we shall treat their churches with the same Christian love and acknowledge them as orthodox. We shall avoid the extreme and impose utter silence upon all bickering, disagreement, and controversy by which the course of the Gospel is impeded to the great offense, of many pious people, and from which there comes a severe calumny by our adversaries and contradiction to our true Christian religion. Rather let the occasion be provided to strive for public peace and tranquility, to exercise mutual charity; we should also offer our labors for the building up of the church in our fraternal union.

For this reason we have agreed by mutual consent to persuade all our brethren with utmost zeal and to invite them to increase, build up, and conserve this Christian and unanimous Consensus, to nourish it and testify to it, especially by the hearing of the Word (by attending the services first of one, then of another of the confessions) and the use of the Sacraments, observing the proper order and manner of the discipline and custom of each church.

We leave the rites and ceremonies of each church free by this concord. For it

⁸⁵ "...of our Lord Jesus Christ" are not in the Latin text.

⁸⁶ "In an orthodox manner."

⁸⁷ "...that the body and blood of the Lord" are not in the Latin text.

⁸⁸ "...and to this end the words this article are included" are not in the English text.

does not matter much what rites are observed, as long as the doctrine itself and the foundation of our faith and salvation are kept intact and incorrupt. So the *Augsburg Confession* itself and the *Saxon Confession* teach on this matter; and in this our Confession published in this Synod of Sandomierz we have expressed the same thing. We have therefore promised and decided to compare counsels and works of charity among ourselves, and in the future to consult about the conservation and growth of all the pious, orthodox, and Reformed Churches' of the entire realm of Lithuania and Samogitia, as well as [the formation of] one body.

And if they ever hold general synods, let them inform us; and when called to our general synods, let them feel free to come.⁸⁹

And to put a colophon to this consensus and mutual concord, we do not think it would be inappropriate for the saving and assuring of this fraternal society to gather in a certain place, where, forced to this by improbity of the enemies of truth, we would draw up a compend of the body of doctrine (one out of the several Confessions) and publish it, that the mouths of evil men may be stopped to the great comfort of all the faithful in the name of all the Polish, Lithuanian, and Samogitian Reformed Churches which agree with our confession.

Having given and joined our right hands, therefore, we have sacredly promised and mutually agreed that we want to build up and nurture faith and peace and to strive more and more for the building of the kingdom of God, avoiding all occasions for the alienation of the churches. Finally, we agree that unmindful and forgetful of ourselves, as is proper for true ministers of God, we shall promote the glory solely of Jesus Christ our Savior and contend for the truth of His Gospel in word and deed.

That this might be fixed sure and firm forever we pray with ardent petitions to God the Father, the Author and abundant Fountain of all consolation and peace, who rescued our churches from the morass of the Papacy and endowed us with the pure and holy light of His Word. May He deign to bless this our holy peace, consensus, conjunction, and union to the glory of His name and the building up of the Church. Amen.

[The names of those who subscribed to the *Consensus* follow.]

⁸⁹ "...if it would be beneficial" are not in the English text.