

JOHN CALVIN AND THE AGREEMENT OF ZURICH (1549)

by
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In late May, 1549, John Calvin, grieving the recent loss of his beloved wife Idelette, was urged by his friend Guillaume Farel to travel to Zurich in hopes of sealing a long-sought accord between the two leading Reformed churches of Switzerland. The document which emerged from this meeting, slightly emended by subsequent negotiations, was published two years later (1551) as Consensio Mutua in Re Sacramentaria Ministrorum Tigurinae Ecclesiae et D. Ioannis Calvini Ministri Genevensis Ecclesiae.¹ The significance of this document, known since the nineteenth century as the Consensus Tigurinus, has been widely recognized by historians of the sixteenth century.² In an era marked by church divisions and lapsed plans of union, the Consensus Tigurinus stands out as one of the notable ecumenical achievements of the Reformation. The Basle historian Ernst Staehelin referred to the Consensus as "the solemn act by which the Zwinglian and Calvinistic reformations were³ joined in everlasting wedlock as the one great Reformed church."³ At the same time, however, the Consensus itself has been a focus of controversy among interpreters of the Reformed tradition. Does it represent the triumph of Calvin's eucharistic theology over a lingering, attenuated Zwinglianism, or, conversely, Calvin's unfortunate compromise with a less than fully adequate doctrine of the Lord's Supper? It is no coincidence that divergent interpretations of the Consensus stood at the center of the heated exchange between Charles Hodge of Princeton and John Nevin of Mercersburg over the proper understanding of the Reformed doctrine of the Lord's Supper.⁴ It is beyond the scope of this paper to settle these larger interpretive questions, the resolution of which would require a thorough and sympathetic analysis of Zwingli and Bullinger no less than Calvin, as well as an investigation of the influence of the Consensus on subsequent Reformed confessions. My assigned topic is more modest, namely, to look at the Consensus from the standpoint of Calvin's development and reforming strategy. We shall first review the course of events which led to Calvin's decisive visit to Zurich in 1549, then we shall examine the twenty-six articles which comprise the Consensus itself, and finally we shall list several conclusions and implications of this study all of which deserve further research and discussion.

The Road to Zurich

Calvin's concern for a true evangelical understanding of the Lord's Supper goes back to his earliest adherence to the reform movement, as his implication in the affair of the placards indicates. By the first edition of the Institutes (1536), he had arrived at an independent position on the Lord's Supper, emphasizing the spiritual nourishment of the eucharistic event rather than the mode of Christ's presence in the bread and the wine.

With an eye toward the Marburg Colloquy (1529) and the impasse resulting therefrom, Calvin avers that if this aspect of the Supper had been stressed, "there would have been quite enough to satisfy us, and these frightful contentions would not have arisen which of old, and even within our memory have miserably troubled the church."⁵ He further criticized the "subtlety" and "curiosity" of those who added to the simplicity of Scripture: some who said the bread itself was the body (read Roman Catholics); others, that it was the bread (read Lutherans); others, that only a sign and figure of the body were set forth (read Zwinglians).⁶

Calvin's effort to carve out a median position on the eucharist was further confirmed in the following year at the synod of Bern in 1537. The Swiss, who felt that Martin Bucer had conceded too much to the Lutherans in the recently concluded Wittenberg Concord (1536) asked Calvin, along with Farel and Viret, to draw up a Confessio fidei de Eucharistia. This brief statement denies the local presence of Christ in the Supper and stresses that the Holy Spirit is the bond of participation in Christ. At the same time, it declares that the Spirit "really feeds us with the substance of the body and blood of the Lord to everlasting life."⁷ The word substantia, which Calvin had already used in a similar way in the 1536 Institutes, would become problematic in his later eucharistic negotiations, but he never repudiated his early usage of it. Bucer and Wolfgang Capito were sufficiently pleased with this statement to sign their names to it, with the additional blast against the error of teaching "that it is naked and bare signs that Christ sets forth in his blessed Supper."⁸

Calvin's sojourn in Strasbourg (1538-1541) placed him at the center of the unionistic initiatives and dialogues promoted by Bucer and his colleagues. In his Short Treatise on the Holy Supper of our Lord, written in French at Strasbourg in 1540 and published upon his return to Geneva in the following year, Calvin laments the "contentious disputes" which continue to impede the advance of the gospel. For the first time in a public work he criticizes by name the great protagonists of the Marburg debate: Luther should have clarified his views on the local presence and the adoration of the sacrament; Zwingli and Oecolampadius should not have been so obsessed with opposing false views of Christ's presence as to obscure "the true communion" in the body and blood of Christ which is given by the sacrament. Still, Calvin asserts, one should not wonder that these great leaders did not understand such a difficult matter with perfect clarity since they had so recently escaped from the "slime of error" and the "abyss of darkness." Concluding on a conciliatory note, Calvin longs for a "published formula" to resolve the differences which continue to divide true believers on the Supper (formulaire public ou fust arrestée la concorde). In the meantime, he offers his own formula as a basis for further progress: "We all confess . . . that, in receiving the sacrament in faith . . . we are

truly made partakers of the real substance of the body and blood of Jesus Christ."⁹

When Calvin returned to Geneva in 1541 he had reason to be optimistic about his efforts towards eucharistic unity. At the Colloquy of Regensburg, he and Philip Melanchthon had come to a genuine meeting of minds and Calvin had willingly signed the Augsburg Confession in its emended form, the so-called Augustana variata. In hopes of achieving Protestant unity on the Supper, Melanchthon had changed the original wording of Article 10 from "the body and blood of Christ are truly present and distributed [vere adsint et distribuuntur] to those who eat in the Supper of the Lord," to the following reading: "the body and blood of Christ are truly exhibited with the bread and wine [cum pane et vino vere exhibeantur] to those who eat in the Supper of the Lord."¹⁰ Calvin always regarded this new version as a breakthrough. As late as 1557 he wrote: "I do not reject the Augsburg Confession which I long ago willingly and with pleasure subscribed to, as the author himself explained it."¹¹ The reformers of Zurich, on the other hand, never felt as sanguine about this document as Calvin, and this remained a bone of contention between them even after the publication of the Consensus Tigurinus.¹²

When Calvin's Short Treatise was translated into Latin in 1545, Luther himself is said to have seen it and to have commented favorably on its author and his conciliatory approach to the strife over the Supper.¹³ Calvin was gratified by Luther's response, and seemed eager to overlook his infamous irascibility -- "his restless uneasy temper which is so ready to boil over everywhere." In a letter to Bullinger in 1544 Calvin said of Luther, "If he were to call me a devil, I should still regard him as an outstanding servant of God."¹⁴ Throughout the 1540s Calvin seems to have thought that an accord with the Lutherans was within grasp. In a letter written shortly after Luther's death but before Calvin had learned of it, he referred to the favorable reception Luther had given to his Short Treatise and remarked: "As you say, if only the people of Zurich would agree with this formula on the sacraments! I do not think that Luther will prove so stubborn that we cannot easily reach an agreement with him on this matter."¹⁵ In retrospect, we may judge that Calvin was overly optimistic about Luther's flexibility or, to put it another way, perhaps he was looking at Luther through Melanchthonian lenses. However, the letter just quoted indicates that Calvin's strenuous efforts to reach an agreement with Zurich and the other Swiss churches on the eucharist was never conceived by him as an end in itself, but rather as an essential first step toward a wider pan-Protestant accord.

However, it was not Bullinger and the church of Zurich, but Luther himself who provided a new obstacle to such an ecumenical union with the publication in September, 1544 of his Brief

Confession Concerning the Holy Sacrament.¹⁶ Ostensibly directed against the spiritualist Caspar Schwenckfeld, this treatise reveals Luther at his polemical worst--or best! For fifteen years the embers of enmity kindled at Marburg had smoldered quietly, but now they flared forth in full blaze: "I condemn and reject the enemies of the sacrament--Karlstadt, Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Stenckfeld, and their disciples at Zurich and wherever they are." Such Schwärmer, Luther says, should be considered "all part of the same cake." Moreover, since Zwingli's followers continue to honor him after his disreputable death on the field of battle, "I have abandoned all my hope for their improvement . . . nor do I pray for them any more."¹⁷ Calvin, of course, regretted this coarse display and urged Melancthon to moderate his great colleague, if possible. In this context, Calvin himself wrote to Luther addressing him three times in one letter as his "father" in the faith. Melancthon, however, withheld Calvin's letter from Luther, fearing that even such an irenic approach¹⁸ from schwärmerisch Switzerland might lead to further outbursts.

The Zurich response to Luther's attack appeared in 1545 as the True Confession (Warhaffte Bekanttnis). Drafted by Bullinger, this treatise offered a hearty defense of the "faithful and praiseworthy Zwingli and Oecolampadius, and characterized Luther's book as "full of devils, unchristian expressions, slanderous words, quarrelsome wishes, impure speech, anger, deception, fury and foaming." More importantly for our purposes, it described the chief aspect of the Lord's Supper as "the remembrance of the sacrificed body and blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins." The necessity of faith for this act of remembrance was emphasized, and the Zwinglian Stichwort, credere est edere, to believe is to eat, was reiterated.¹⁹

Calvin did not think highly of this work, describing it in a letter to Melancthon as "more stubborn than learned."²⁰ At the same time he was eager to pursue a mutual understanding on the Supper with Bullinger. Calvin had first met Bullinger during his early sojourn in Basel and, as early as 1538, had proposed to him the meeting of a "public synod" to resolve differences on discipline and doctrine.²¹ Calvin now renews these appeals for a face-to-face encounter. In 1544 he writes to Bullinger: "If we were able to discuss the matter some time for only half a day, we would, I hope, easily agree, and not only in regard to the matter itself but even in regard to its formulation. Meanwhile, this small disagreement should not prevent our having the same Christ, or being one in him."²² This attitude, reciprocated by Bullinger, was to prevail during the course of the exacting and substantial negotiations which preceded and prepared the way for the Consensus Tigurinus.

Before we survey the document itself, it is important to note that the Consensus, like most confessions and doctrinal formulations in the sixteenth century, was shaped in part by con-

flicting ecclesiastical and political considerations. Without going into detail we can mention three such factors which quickened Calvin's desire for an agreement with Zurich. First was the sensitive and fragile relationship between Geneva and Bern. Bern's military hegemony in central Switzerland, jurisdictional disputes between the two territories, and the political base which Bern offered to Calvin's Genevan opponents all contributed to the tension between these two important neighbors. In an effort to pacify the Bernese, Calvin prepared twenty articles on the sacraments for a synod at Bern in March, 1549, a meeting he himself had been forbidden to attend by the magistrates of Bern. While Haller, the reformer of Bern to whom the articles had been sent, did not in fact present them to the synod for fear of provoking further hostilities, these articles surfaced again in the Zurich discussions and were, for the most part, incorporated into the text of the Consensus itself.

Beyond the bounds of the Swiss Confederation two other situations of international political significance factored in Calvin's desire for an agreement with Zurich. First, he advocated alliance with France, whose king, Henry II, was seeking military and political support from the Swiss cantons. Through this alliance Calvin hoped to gain some leverage with the French king and thereby ease the persecutions against Protestant believers in his native country. Bullinger, in keeping with a policy which went back to Zwingli, opposed any alliance with the French. Also, of grave concern to both Bullinger and Calvin was the resurgence of the Roman Catholic forces, marked by the convening of the Council of Trent in 1545 and the imposition of the Augsburg Interim on the Protestants within the Empire in 1548. In urging Bullinger toward an agreement, Calvin wrote in 1547: "If [the emperor] were to enter Strasbourg, he would, you perceive, occupy an encampment whence he could invade us By keeping silence, do you not, as it were, present your throat to be cut?"²⁴ When in October, 1548, the imperial forces did in fact occupy Constance, Bullinger realized how imminent was the threat and how dire the need for a united Swiss Protestant response. The Consensus Tigurinus was thus a timely response to an international political crisis as well as an ecumenical achievement drawing together the French and German-speaking Protestants of the Swiss Reformed Church.

The Consensus Tigurinus

As published in 1551, the Consensus Tigurinus consists of twenty-six articles. In this final form it could more accurately be called the Consensus Helveticorum, since the published version was approved not only by Zurich and Geneva, but also by the Reformed churches of Neuchatel, Bienne, Pays de Vaud, the Grisons, Basle, St. Gallen, Schaffhausen, Mulhausen and even, after some initial resistance, Bern. In this sense the Consensus was an important precedent and step toward the promulgation of the

Second Helvetic Confession of 1566. For the purposes of analysis we have divided the twenty-six articles of the Consensus into the following five sections: a christological introduction (1-6), the doctrine of the sacraments (7-9), the defense against sacramental materialism (10-15), the necessity of faith (16-20), refutation of specific errors (21-26).²⁵

1. Christological introduction (1-6). Unlike the majority of articles which derived from the confession Calvin had sent to the ministers of Bern in March, 1549, these introductory articles seem to have arisen directly from the Zurich conference in May of that year. Calvin later claimed that the entire agreement was settled in less than two hours. If this was not a rhetorical exaggeration, we may assume that much of this brief summit meeting was spent formulating and refining these foundational articles.

The christological concentration of these early articles reflects a theological orientation shared by Calvin and the Zurich tradition alike. Article 1 declares that "the object of the whole spiritual governance of the church is to lead us to Christ, as it is by him alone we come to God, who is the final end of a happy life." This echoes the third of Zwingli's 67 Articles of 1523: "Therefore, Christ is the only way (der eynig weg) to salvation of all who were, are now, or shall be."²⁶ Only in this context can one speak of the instituta dei, the ordinances of God. Calvin, too, had sounded this note as early as the 1536 Institutes where he described the purpose of sacraments as "to direct and almost lead men by the hand to Christ . . . to represent him and set him forth to be known."²⁷ It has been aptly said that "Calvin's thought moves outward from his apprehension of the gospel to his interpretation of the Eucharist."²⁸ Article 2 of the Consensus lends support to this formulation with its depiction of sacraments as "appendages of the gospel"--a phrase, again, used already by Calvin in the first edition of the Institutes where he characterized a sacrament as a seal or confirmation of the promise of God, and joined²⁹ to it by way of appendix (tanquam appendicem quandam adiungi).

Articles 3 and 4 present a succinct statement of the Person and Work of Christ which delicately balances the objective and subjective christological poles. Thus Christ is "the eternal Son of God, of the same essence and glory with the Father." he is sacerdos, rex, expiatrix, frater, reparator, intercessor, liberator, moderator, and Deus verus. We are given this knowledge of Christ (cognitio Christi), however, not to feed our curiosity, but rather that we may grasp the soteriological purpose of the offices and mission of Christ, namely, "that he may raise us to himself . . . and to the Father." Thus Article 3 sets forth three stages in the ordo salutis: justification, regeneration, and sanctification: "ingrafted by faith into the body of Christ . . . by the agency of the Holy Spirit we are first counted

righteous by a free imputation of righteousness, and then regenerated to a new life, by which we are reformed into the image of the Heavenly Father."

Article 5, entitled "How Christ communicates himself to us," was one of two articles--the other was Article 23, "On the eating of the flesh of Christ"--which was added, at Calvin's urging, after the Zurich conference in May of 1549. It underscores the necessity, already stated in Articles 1-4, of the union of believers with Christ: "Moreover, that Christ may thus exhibit himself to us and produce these effects in us, he must be made one with us, and we must be ingrafted (coalescere) into his body." This is only one of two places in the Consensus where the loaded word, exhibere, is used. This was one of Calvin's favorite words to describe the force of the Supper for believers: the body and blood of Christ are shown to us, presented or tendered, set forth for us in the sacrament. Calvin uses various forms of this word no less than 17 times in book IV, chapter 17 of the 1559 Institutes. For Calvin exhibere meant not so much to bring about a presence as to presuppose and manifest a presence.³⁰ It was this very word which Melancthon had substituted for adesse in the Augustana Variata--to Calvin's delight. Bullinger, however, had strongly resisted Calvin's use of this word since it seemed to imply a too-direct correlation between the creaturely signs and that which they signified. In the end, he acquiesced to the word (and the article) so long as it was placed in the introductory christological section where it could be applied to the sacraments only by inference. The only other usage of exhibere in the Consensus is in Article 8, where the reference is to the benefits "exhibited" on the cross rather than to the eucharistic exhibition which Calvin is so fond of commending (simulque pro beneficiis his olim in cruce exhibitis).

Article 6 serves as a bridge from the early emphasis on union with Christ to the more specific focus on the sacraments in the subsequent articles. It is significant that the opening presentation of the sacraments is in terms of their function as witnesses to spiritual communion effected by the Holy Spirit, an emphasis which must have been pleasing to Bullinger. However, the parallel placement of preaching and sacraments is as thoroughly echoed in Calvin's earlier writings as that of the Zurich reformer. To quote again from the 1536 Institutes: it is "a settled principle that the sacraments have the same office as the Word of God: to offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace."³¹

2. Doctrine of the sacraments (7-9). Turning now to our second division of the articles as we have outlined them, Articles 7-9 present a general statement on the sacraments in which Zwinglian and Calvinist themes are finely balanced. In Article 7 the sacraments are said to be "marks and badges of the Christian life and fellowship or brotherhood . . . contracts binding us to

a pious life." All of these images recall the strongly communal character of the eucharist in Zwingli's thought. In particular, the last phrase in Article 7 which describes the sacraments as public seals which confirm and ratify what God has announced would fit nicely one of Zwingli's favorite metaphors for the Lord's Supper. He likened it to the annual ceremony at Nafels, near his former parish at Glarus, where Swiss soldiers, clad in their white-crossed attire, gathered to commemorate a famous military victory of their forebears, and to declare, and renew as it were, their own Swiss identity.³² In his posthumously published Expositio de Fide (1536) Zwingli seems to have expanded his earlier memorialist view when he allowed that the sacraments could augment faith and recall the Christian to a deeper obedience and contemplation. Article 7 incorporates this tendency as well when it portrays the sacraments as visual aids which bring the death of Christ and all his benefits to our remembrance "in order that faith may be more fully exercised" (ut fides magis exerceatur). At the same time some concession is made to Calvin's instrumentalism in that the sacraments are said to be the means "through which (per ea) God testifies, represents, and seals his grace to us."

If Article 7 is tilted toward the concerns of Zurich, Article 8 reflects one of Calvin's major themes, namely that in the sacraments God truly effects that which he represents. To be sure, this article represents a reworking of Calvin's original language which, in the form submitted to Bern, had spoken of the sacraments as "true signs of the grace of God which truly exhibit (exhiberi) to us that which they figure."³³ Again, this language was not acceptable to the Zurich ministers; here it is claimed that the Lord "truly performs inwardly by his Spirit that which the sacraments figure to our eyes and other senses." The response of gratitude, which the proper celebration of the Supper evokes, points to its central liturgical significance for both individual piety and corporate worship. Article 9 restates the balance the entire Consensus is seeking to strike: there is a crucial distinction between signs and things signified, but no divorce or disjunction; so that all who in faith embrace the promises offered in the sacraments "receive Christ spiritually" and experience communion with him.

3. Defense against sacramental materialism (10-15). The third grouping of articles offers a hearty defense against sacramental materialism. Article 10 points beyond the "bare signs" to the "promise" and to "faith which makes us partakers of Christ." Article 11 declares that "we are not to be stupefied by the elements" which, apart from Christ, are nothing but empty masks (inanes larvae), and returns to the earlier theme of salvation through Christ alone. Each of the next four articles carries forth the dialectic between an instrumentalist view of the Supper (Calvin) and a refusal to invest any salvific efficacy in the sacramental signs (Bullinger). Article 12 picks up the theme of

accommodation: the sacraments are helps, adapted to our weakness; God uses them as instruments--"in such a manner, however, that the whole power of acting remains with God alone." Despite the concession of a qualified instrumentalist view, the word itself is resisted. In Article 13 the Zurichers substitute the word organa for Calvin's original instrumenta. In Article 14, however, it is Bullinger who accepts wording he had previously rejected in his correspondence with Calvin. He here agrees to refer to the sacraments as "aids" (adminicula), though only when it was also said that "the whole effect resides in the Spirit." Article 14 contains one of the strongest statements of sacramental realism in the entire Consensus: "Christ . . . in the Supper makes us partakers of himself." A similar line recurs in Article 19: "in the Supper Christ communicates himself to us." It should be admitted, however, that while the phrase in coena suggests in both of these contexts a clear instrumentalist view, it is ambiguous enough to allow for a looser interpretation. It might, for example, be translated simply "at the Supper." If construed in this way, it could be accommodated to Bullinger's mature eucharistic theology as set forth in the Second Helvetic Confession which Brian Gerrish has characterized as "Bullinger's parallelism." There, in Article 21, Bullinger says that when the bread is outwardly offered by the minister, "at the same time inwardly, by the working of Christ through the Holy Spirit, they receive also the flesh and blood of the Lord, and do feed on them unto eternal life."³⁴ The emphasis of the Consensus, however, falls neither on Bullinger's parallelism nor on Calvin's instrumentalism, but rather on the (we might say, nervous) rejection of a kind of sacramental imperialism which threatens the apriority and freedom of divine grace. Thus Article 15 asserts that "all these attributes of the sacraments sink down to a lower place, so that not even the smallest portion of our salvation is transferred to creatures or elements."

4. The necessity of faith (16-20). This point is further clarified and refined in the next five articles (16-20), which stress the necessity for faith in those who receive the Supper. The priority and freedom of divine grace are most clearly seen in the correlation of sacramental efficacy and the doctrine of predestination. "God does not exert his power indiscriminately (promiscue) in all who receive the sacraments, but only in the elect" (16). While the signs are administered to the reprobate and elect alike, the reality (veritas) of the signs reaches the latter only (17). Again, this is an emphasis on Calvin's side which goes back to the Institutes of 1536. There he had written: "The Holy Spirit (whom the sacraments do not bring indiscriminately to all persons but whom the Lord exclusively [peculiariter] bestows on his own people) is he who brings the graces of God with him."³⁵

This is not to deny that the grace of God is truly offered to all in common, the pious and the impious, the believers and

the unbelievers alike. Article 18 of the Consensus makes that point, and in so doing distances the Reformed doctrine of the Lord's Supper from every kind of Donatistic subjectivism. There is a kind of ex opere operato character to the sacraments: they "always retain their reality, their force" (quin semper vim suam retineant sacramenta). "Efficacy," which is how the Beveridge edition renders the word vis, is not perhaps the best translation of that word in this context. Not all, however, are capable of receiving the gifts of Christ in the Supper. The point of difference lies not in the moral quality of the ministrant, nor in the presumed obstacle of mortal sin in the communicant, but rather--and ultimately--in the eternal decrees of God since (Article 16) he enlightens unto faith none but those he has fore-ordained unto life. (Parenthetically, Nevin, who applauded Calvin's robust doctrine of the mystical presence of Christ in the Supper, was most uneasy about linking eucharistic communion with the doctrine of election, while his opponent Hodge, who was less sanguine about a full-orbed sacramental theology, championed the eternal decrees. To speak anachronistically, it seems to me that in this respect the Consensus tilts a bit toward Hodge.)

Article 20 moves beyond the distinction between elect and reprobate, and speaks of the advantage (utilitas) of the sacraments which is not restricted to the occasion of their administration. Just as in baptism elect infants who receive the promise of the sacrament in their earliest days but may not necessarily be regenerated until much later in life, so "it may sometimes happen that the use of the Holy Supper which, from thoughtlessness or slowness of heart does little good at the time, afterwards bears fruit." In his perceptive article "The 'Extra'-Dimension in the Theology of Calvin," Heiko A. Oberman has related this aspect of Calvin's sacramental theology to a wider motif in this thought, the so-called extra calvinisticum.³⁶ Just as Christ, the eternal Son, has a reality etiam extra carnem, so also Christ, once and for all offered on the cross, now ascended to the right hand of the Father, is present to believers by his Spirit ubi visum est, wherever he wills, that is to say, etiam extra coenam. This points to a genuine--and striking--objectivity of the Reformed doctrine of the Supper as set forth in the Consensus: the effectus sacramenti is not limited to the temporal enactment of the Supper, but is operative, in accordance with the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, throughout the life of the believer. That can hardly be called "mere memorialism."

5. Refutation of specific errors (21-26). The concluding six articles of the Consensus refute specific eucharistic errors, and are, for the most part, directed against distinctively Lutheran doctrines. Article 21 denies the idea of local presence and declares that Christ "must be sought nowhere else than in heaven." Article 25 further clarifies this theme, consistently shared by Zwingli, Bullinger, and Calvin over against Luther: the human body of Christ is "finite and is contained in heaven as its

place." Hence it is "necessarily as distant from us in point of space as heaven is from earth." Hence the refutation of transubstantiation and "other follies" (alias ineptias) in Article 24. The "other follies" refer to various construals of the doctrine of local presence which either place Christ "under" the bread (sub pane) or couple him "with" the bread (cum pane). Article 22 is a strong denial of a literal interpretation of the words of institution. They are rather to be interpreted figuratively, by "metonymy." Article 23 was one of the two articles which were added at the suggestion of Calvin after the Zurich meeting in May, 1549. It is entitled, "On the Eating of the Flesh of Christ." In arguing for its inclusion Calvin wrote to Bullinger in the summer of 1549: "So far there has been no mention of the reality itself, since it has been called a sign, and especially since there has been no word in the entire document about eating of the flesh."³⁷ Bullinger's willingness to include the article was a concession to Calvin, although the manducatio carnis Christi is qualified by the phrase, "which is here figured," (quae hic figurantur) as well as by the explicit denial of any commixtio or transfusio of substance. The final article (26) recalls an issue which had been a major bone of contention between Luther and Zwingli, namely, the proper posture and reverence due to the consecrated elements. The Consensus strongly countermands any adorationist tendencies since any undue veneration of the creaturely elements would border on or lead to idolatry.

Conclusion

We have rehearsed some of the steps which led up to the Consensus, and have reviewed its contents. It now remains for us to draw several conclusions and implications from our study.

1. The Consensus was an unmitigated victory for neither Calvin nor Bullinger; it represents instead a genuine intra-Reformed ecumenical achievement. It is certainly not correct to see the Consensus, as Doumergue, Kolfhaus, and others do, as Calvin's victory in the sixteenth-century Reformed debate over the Lord's Supper. Bullinger's persistence, and his ability to drive a hard bargain, ensured a fair representation of the major Zwinglian concerns. Even in places where the Consensus uses language which would not have pleased Zwingli, one must ask whether this represents a concession to Calvin or, more likely, a development within Bullinger's own sacramental theology. Still, it was Calvin who pushed for an agreement. It was he who, time and again, took the initiative in the negotiations. It was he with Farel who traveled to Zurich (in the days before there was the wonderful Swiss railway); Bullinger never came to Geneva. In this sense, to the extent that there was a Consensus at all, it can rightly be called a victory for Calvin.

2. Most Calvin scholars are agreed that the Consensus does not represent a complete, or some would say, even adequate

expression of Calvin's eucharistic theology. Wendel, echoing Niesel among others, has warned that "it is unsafe to take the Consensus Tigurinus . . . as a basis for an objective study of the real Calvinist teaching."³⁸ Indeed, in a letter to Bucer in which he attempts to defend the Consensus against certain of his friend's reservations about it, Calvin concedes: "You piously and prudently desire that the effect of the sacraments and what the Lord confers on us through them be explicated more clearly and more fully than many allow. Indeed it was not my fault that these items were not fuller. Let us therefore bear with a sigh that which cannot be corrected."³⁹ Calvin's second thoughts about the Consensus were reserved, however, for his private correspondence with intimate friends. Publicly, he was a zealous defender of it, claiming exuberantly at one point that neither Zwingli nor Oecolampadius would have changed a word in it, and that even Luther himself would have agreed to it.⁴⁰ More importantly, in his treatises in defense of the Consensus, Calvin interprets it invariably in accordance with his own instrumentalism, repeatedly referring to the sacraments as "means of grace," and saying at one point that "the ministry of our reconciliation with God is . . . contained in them"--language which must have made Bullinger wince.⁴¹ The Consensus, then, "did not say all Calvin liked to say about the sacraments, only what he was not prepared to omit."⁴²

3. Philip Schaff once referred to the Consensus as the "innocent occasion of the second sacramental war."⁴³ This description reminds us that (as Otto Strasser put it some years ago in an excellent article in Zwingliana written to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the Consensus) the Zurich Agreement was as much an Abgrenzung as it was an Einigung: it bound Calvin decisively with the other Swiss Protestants while at the same time it drove a greater wedge between the Reformed and Lutheran communions. It is clear that Calvin did not intend this latter result, nor did he anticipate the virulence of the gnesio-Lutheran reaction. He was genuinely surprised when Jan Laski forwarded him a copy of Joachim Westphal's Farrago of Confused and Divergent Opinions on the Lord's Supper Taken from the Book of the Sacramentarians (1552). This was a frontal assault on the Consensus in which the Hamburg pastor unkindly caricatured Calvin as das Kalbe, Bullinger as der Bulle and Laski as a Polish bear. Calvin responded with his Defense of the Wholesome and Orthodox Doctrine of the Sacraments (1555) in which he countered the attack of Westphal, calling him a "hothead" and "son of the devil." The last ten years of Calvin's life were preoccupied with a continuous and, one must say, not entirely edifying, pamphlet war with Westphal, and later, Heshussius. Calvin continued to hope that a moderating Lutheran eucharistic theology would prevail among the disciples of the man he once called his "father." He was bitterly disappointed when Melancthon remained silent and aloof in the face of Westphal's attacks. In 1557 when Calvin visited Strasbourg, then in Lutheran control, he was not even

permitted to preach in the city. Thus, in terms of what one historian has called "Calvin's almost pathetic craving for Lutheran-Reformed pacification and unity," the Consensus Tigurinus achieved far less than its principal author had hoped. Its real importance lies in the measure of unity which it enabled the Reformed to secure among themselves, and in its contribution to what might well be called the developing confessional consciousness within the Reformed tradition.

Notes

¹The Latin text of the Consensio Mutua is in CR 35, 733-48, and in Calvin's Opera Selecta, ed. P. Parth and G. Niesel (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1952), 2: 241-58. An English translation is given in Calvin's Tracts and Treatises, ed. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 2: 212-20.

²For recent scholarly appraisals of the Consensus, see Otto Erich Strasser, "Der Consensus Tigurinus," Zwingliana 9, no. 1 (1949): 1-16; Ulrich Gäbler, "Das Zustandekommen des Consensus Tigurinus im Jahre 1549," Theologische Literaturzeitung 104, no. 5 (1979): 321-32, and "Consensus Tigurinus," Theologische Realenzyklopädie 8 (1981), 189-92. I have also benefited greatly from the unpublished paper by Paul Rorem, "The Sixteenth Century Reformed Doctrine of the Lord's Supper: John Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger." Thomas J. Davis, a doctoral candidate at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, is currently pursuing a dissertation on "The Consensus Tigurinus and the Development of Calvin's Teaching on the Lord's Supper."

³Quoted, Reinhold Seeburg, The History of Doctrines (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 2: 417 n.2.

⁴John Nevin, The Mystical Presence and Other Writings on the Eucharist, eds. Bard Thompson and George H. Bricker (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1966). Nevin was pronounced in his negative assessment of Zwingli: "The relation of Zwingli to the proper life of the Reformed Church must be allowed to have been exceedingly external and accidental" (Ibid., 42). On the controversy between Nevin and Hodge, see Brian A. Gerrish, Tradition and the Modern World (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 49-70.

⁵John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1536 Edition, ed. Ford Lewis Battles (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 141.

⁶Ibid., 142. Cf. Joseph N. Tylenda, "The Ecumenical Intention of Calvin's Early Eucharistic Teaching," in Reformatio Perennis: Essays on Calvin and the Reformation in Honor of Ford Lewis Battles, ed. Brian A. Gerrish (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1981), 27-47.

⁷OS 1: 435: "Ergo spiritum eius vinculum esse nostra cum ipso participationis agnoscimus, sed ita ut nos ille carnis et sanguinis Domini substantia vere ad immortalitatem pascat, et eorum participatione vivificet."

⁸Ibid., 436.

⁹Calvin: Theological Treatises, ed. J. K. S. Reid (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 164-66. The French text is given in OS 1: 503-30.

¹⁰Melanchthons Werke 6: Bekenntnisse und kleine Lehrschriften, ed. Robert Stupperich (Gutersloh: Bertelsmann, 1955): 19. Cf. also Tylenda, "Ecumenical Intention," 35. On Melanchthon's "defection" from Luther's doctrine, see Hermann Sasse, This is My Body (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1959), 311-20.

¹¹CO 16:430.

¹²Cf. CO 15:305. Cf. also W. Nijenhuis, "Calvin and the Augsburg Confession," Ecclesia Reformata: Studies on the Reformation (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972): 97-114.

¹³CO 10/B:432.

¹⁴CO 11:774-75.

¹⁵CO 12:316: Eng. Trans. in John Calvin, eds. G. R. Potter and M. Greengrass (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 131-32. This letter is dated March 17, 1546; Luther had died on February 28 of the same year.

¹⁶Kurze Bekenntnis vom heiligen Sakrament, WA 54:141; Eng. Trans., LW 38:287-319.

¹⁷LW 38:267-88, 291.

¹⁸CF 39:698; 40:10.

¹⁹Warhaffte Bekanntnis der dieneran der kilchen zu Zuerych (Zurich: Froschaur, 1545). I follow the translation in Rorem, "Reformed Doctrine," 22.

²⁰Ibid., 25; CF 40:98: "Praeterquam enim quod totus libellus ieunus est et purilis, quum in multis pertinaciter magis quam erudite."

²¹Cf. John T. McNeill, Ecumenical Testimony (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 17.

²²CR 11:775.

²³CR 12:666.

²⁴CR 40:590.

²⁵I follow the division of the articles given by Strasser, "Der Consensus," 9-14. An excellent theological analysis of the Consensus is provided by Ernst Bizer, Studien zur Geschichte des Abendmahlstreits im 16. Jahrhundert (Darmstadt: Wissen Schafthiche Buchgesellschaft, 1962): 234-99. Cf. also Hans Grass, Die Abendmahlslehre bei Luther und Calvin (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Verlag, 1954): 193-241.

²⁶Huldrych Zwingli: Writings, eds. E. J. Furcha and H. W. Pipkins (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1984) I:17.

²⁷Institutes: 1536 Edition, 93.

²⁸Brian A. Gerrish, "Gospel and Eucharist: John Calvin on the Lord's Supper," in The Old Protestantism and the New (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 107.

²⁹OS 1:118.

³⁰Cf. the helpful discussion in Tylenda, "Ecumenical Intention," 31-32.

³¹OS 1:123.

³²Z 4:218, 231.

³³CR 35:716.

³⁴John H. Leith, ed., Creeds of the Churches (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 170-71; Gerrish, Old Protestantism, 124.

³⁵OS 1:124.

³⁶Journal of Ecclesiastical History 21 (January 1970): 43-64.

³⁷Rorem, "Reformed Doctrine," 60-61.

³⁸Francois Wendel, Calvin, 330.

³⁹CR 41:439: "Gemamus ergo ferentes ea quae corrigere non licet."

⁴⁰CR 37:11; 43:212.

⁴¹Calvin, Tracts and Treatises, 2: 225. Calvin defended his interpretation of the Consensus in a letter to Bullinger: "I have one fear you may think that I have sometimes granted them

more than I should. I have deliberately done this, so that if any, even now, should remain opposed to us then hateful is their obstinacy, and that the learned, who are in agreement with us and whom I see to be less courageous than is fitting, may have an appropriate excuse." CF 15:255-56.

⁴²Gerrish, Old Protestantism, 124.

⁴³Philip Schaff, Creeds of Christendom 1:473.