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# The Leuenberg Agreement and Polish Evangelical Churches

#### "Konkordia Leuenberska" a polskie Kościoły ewangelickie

**Key words:** Leuenberg Agreement, Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe, Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland, Evangelical Methodist Church in Poland, ecumenism

**Słowa kluczowe:** Konkordia leuenberska, Wspólnota Kościołów Ewangelickich w Europie, Kościół Ewangelicko-Augsburski w RP, Kościół Ewangelicko-Reformowany w RP, Kościół Ewangelicko-Metodystyczny w RP, ekumenizm

#### Abstract

The article aims to analyse the significance of the Leuenberg Agreement for the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, the Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland and the Evangelical Methodist Church in Poland in three contexts. Firstly, the relationship between the Leuenberg Agreement and bilateral agreements introducing altar and pulpit fellowship between Polish Churches. Secondly, the question of how the Leuenberg Agreement influenced the proposals put forward in the Polish ecumenical debate to create a single united Polish Protestant Church. Finally, the reception of the Leuenberg Agreement and other work of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe in the life of Polish Evangelical Churches.

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#### Streszczenie

Celem tekstu jest przeanalizowanie znaczenia "Konkordii leuenberskiej" dla Kościołów ewangelickich w Polsce: Kościoła Ewangelicko-Augsburskiego, Kościoła Ewangelicko-Reformowanego i Kościoła Ewangelicko-Metodystycznego. Zostało to przeanalizowane w trzech kontekstach. Po pierwsze relacji między "Konkordią leuenberską" a bilateralnymi porozumieniami wprowadzającymi między polskimi Kościołami wspólnotę ołtarza i ambony. Po drugie w kontekście pytania o wpływ "Konkordii leuenberskiej" na formułowane w polskiej debacie ewangelickiej postulaty stworzenia polskiego zjednoczonego Kościoła protestanckiego. Po trzecie wreszcie na recepcję "Konkordii leuenberskiej" i dorobku Wspólnoty Kościołów Ewangelickich w Europie w życiu polskich Kościołów ewangelickich.

In 2023, the Leuenberg Agreement, one of the most important ecumenical documents in Europe, celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Its signing in 1973 introduced church fellowship between the churches of the Lutheran, Reformed and United traditions, as well as the Waldensians and the Czech Brethren, thus first giving rise to the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, and in 2003 to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, and in 2020: the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (hereinafter also as CPCE). Since 1 January 1997, the Leuenberg Church Fellowship has also included churches of the Methodist tradition (Karski 2007, 140).

In order to answer this question, the significance of this document must first be considered in the context of the bilateral Lutheran-Reformed, Reformed-Methodist and Lutheran-Methodist agreements that had been signed before these churches became part of the model based on the Leuenberg Agreement. Secondly, it is necessary to consider the ongoing discussion in Poland regarding the creation of a single evangelical church. Finally, analysis of the reception of the work of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe in Poland will be helpful.

#### 1. Agreements between Evangelical Churches

In Poland, church fellowship between the Lutherans and the Reformed was introduced in 1970 ("Jedność Ducha w spójni pokoju..." 2016, 507-509), between the Reformed and the Methodists in 1990 ("Deklaracja braterskiej współpracy..." 2016, 510-511), and between the Lutherans and the Methodists in 1994 ("Deklaracja współpracy..." 2016, 512-513). But what is the significance of the Leuenberg model of ecclesial communion in the context of these agreements introducing altar and pulpit fellowship between the Evangelical Churches in Poland before the adoption of the Leuenberg Agreement or its extension to the Methodist Churches? In the following paragraphs, we will try to answer this question first with reference to the Lutheran-Reformed Agreement and then collectively to the Lutheran and Reformed agreements with the Methodist Church.

#### 1.1. Lutheran-Reformed Agreement

The Lutheran-Reformed cooperation in Poland has a distinctive historical context, i.e. the *Consensus Sendomiriensis* of 1570. Three facts are relevant for the following discussion. Firstly, the *Consensus* provided a substitute solution when confessional unity between the three currents of the Reformation, i.e. Lutherans, Reformed and Czech Brethren, could not be achieved based on the Polish adaptation of the Second Helvetic Confession, i.e. the Confession of Sandomir (Augustyniak 1994; Bartel 1973; Malłek 1990). Secondly, it provided a framework for the cooperation of the three confessions in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. For this to be possible, it declared mutual recognition of the tachings of the respective churches as being true and in accordance with the Word of God (especially regarding the truths about God the Father, the Trinity, the incarnation and justification). It also addressed the dispute over the Lord's Supper at some length, proposing a description that was acceptable to all parties.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The references contained in this passage went back to both the Church Fathers (Irenaeus) and Melanchthon's 1551 Saxon Confession (Melanchton 1860, 369-468; article about Lord Supper cf. 415-424).

These agreements on doctrine laid the basis for the church fellowship announced in the *Consensus Sendomiriensis*. The text also defined an organisational framework for the cooperation of the three currents of the Polish Reformation in the form of joint general synods (Jürgens, Daugirdas 2012, 17-20; cf. Pelikan 1947, 826-830).

The 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this agreement between the three denominations in Poland provided the incentive to enshrine the Lutheran-Reformed relations in Poland in a more concrete framework. The agreement entitled "Jedność Ducha w spójni pokoju. Odezwa na 400-lecie Ugody Sandomierskiej" [Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace. Proclamation on the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Consensus Sendomiriensis*] is dated on the exact 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century *Consensus Sendomiriensis*, i.e. on 14 April 1970. This act of confessional agreement between, as stated in the text, "the Czech Brethren, Calvinists and Lutherans" is explicitly referred to in the introduction ("Jedność Ducha w spójni pokoju..." 2016, 507). Interestingly, the text of the 1970 agreement emphasises that the three denominational groups

...shook their right hands in agreement, stating that the teachings of the befriended Churches are in accordance with the Word of God. It was agreed that in Holy Communion, which is the sacrament of Christian unity, all denominations find unity with Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church. It was pledged to let go of everything that had been violating and destroying the then accepted unity of the followers of Jesus Christ. The overarching goal of the Consensus for all the endeavours of the three denominations was to be a "fraternal union and edification of the Church" ("Jedność Ducha w spójni pokoju..." 2016, 507).

The text goes on to point out the ecumenical significance of this fact, better seen today from a 400-year perspective, and the authors go on to make a key declaration:

Thus, as the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the memorable act has arrived, the same Churches, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession and the Evangelical-Reformed Church in Poland, are renewing their existing

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bond and pledging fraternity and agreement to each other, maintaining unity in the spirit of their shared Lord, Jesus Christ ("Jedność Ducha w spójni pokoju..." 2016, 507).

The 1970 agreement between the churches thus refers to the 16<sup>th</sup> century consensus on doctrine and wants to be nothing more than a renewal of it. At the same time, this consensus is considered so momentous that fundamental conclusions are drawn from it for the ecclesial communion between the two denominations:

Both Churches wish to serve each other's faithful with the goods they possess:

- the Word of God through the fellowship of the pulpit,

- the sacraments through the fellowship of the baptismal font and the Lord's Table ("Jedność Ducha w spójni pokoju..." 2016, 508).

This statement, while being essential, does not exhaust the whole content of the agreement. We also find in it an invitation to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary together at the level of individual congregations, to view the act of renewal embodied by the *Consensus Sendomiriensis* in the context of broad efforts for the unity of the Church, and to treat the *Consensus Sendomiriensis* as an impulse for the unity of all Protestant denominations in Poland. The *Consensus* is not limited to a declaration of altar and pulpit fellowship, but also calls for a deepening of mutual cooperation:

In all areas, however, such as in the work of the synods, in joint training of the clergy, in the curricula for religious instruction and the education of children, in the cooperation of publishing houses and in social and charitable activities, they will strive for a rapprochement aimed at the unity of the Church of Christ in visible forms. We wish to treat the possibility of fraternal cooperation with the utmost sincerity and to deepen it, thus building on the work begun four centuries ago and expressing our readiness to develop it. ("Jedność Ducha w spójni pokoju..." 2016, 508).

The concept of cooperation on the basis of the church fellowship is understood here as broadly and practically as possible.

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In this context, it is surprising how the agreement was received in both churches. In the commentaries that appeared in the evangelical press, one can clearly sense a distancing from the doctrinal content of the agreement. On the Lutheran side, Rev. Waldemar Preiss Sr., to whose concept of the unification of the Evangelical Churches we shall return, commenting on the agreement in a lecture reprinted in the pages of the "Zwiastun Ewangelicki" wrote as follows:

Just as the *Consensus Sendomiriensis* was in fact not a full agreement, but rather a settlement, i.e. a beautiful, noble compromise, but a compromise none the less, so is, in my view, the present Agreement just a compromise of sorts. It confirms the actual state of affairs that has existed for 25 years and has been imposed by life itself [...] regardless of the greater or rather lesser confessional commitment of both the clergy and, above all, the lay members of both Churches. It seems to me that we are still a long way from full agreement on all things, from full integration and complete unification of the two Churches. [...] The statements and positions of today's younger generation on the issue are significant. Realistic, concrete, optimistic, practical. Without the burden of tradition and different dogmas and rites (Preiss 1970, 303).

On the Reformed side, on the other hand, the Rev. Bogdan Tranda wrote in the pages of "Jednota" that the agreement included a mutual recognition of the dogmatic foundations, while at the same time stating:

In these circumstances, it must be concluded that, since the communion of the Lord's Table has been mutually recognised, the centre of gravity of the issue has shifted to matters other than interpretation of the manner in which Christ is present in the sacrament (Tranda 1970, 5).

He further postulated:

However, it seems necessary to reformulate what we believe in accordance with current knowledge and in accordance with the spirit of the age in which we live. [...] On the basis of orthodox dogmatism, it will be difficult to find agreement between the two evangelical streams. The dogmatic foundations that have been in force so far are well known only to a narrow group of specialists, while the general faithful are less

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familiar with the subtleties of theological definitions, which does not at all prevent anyone from experiencing Communion authentically. The new era presents us with new problems. The way we think has changed, and this may make it easier to define a new, common way (Tranda 1970, 6-7).

The theme of having to resort to a more contemporary language and a more contemporary sensibility is repeated in both these commentaries. The commentary of Rev. Waldemar Preiss Sr. refers to the temporary nature of the solution, both of the *Consensus Sendomiriensis* and of the 1970 agreement, which he sees as the result not so much of deliberate theological or ecumenical activity, but of a welcome reaction to the changes in the situation of the two Churches after the Second World War<sup>3</sup>. Rev. Bogdan Tranda's commentary is additionally striking in its conclusion that the introduction of ecclesial communion confirms how the key dividing issue of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. the presence of Christ in the elements of the sacrament, is no longer paramount.

The above commentaries also show that the 1970 agreement lacked several elements. Firstly, it has not updated the theological description of the foundations of church fellowship. Admittedly, the text of the 1970 declaration invoked the key statement of the *Consensus Sendomiriensis* on recognizing the teaching of the brother Churches as consistent with the Word of God and mentioned the search for a common formula concerning the Lord's Supper. However, it did so laconically, merely signalling the relevance of these issues to the consensus concluded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and renewed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. No effort was made to express these theological formulas in more contemporary language or to put them in more comprehensive terms. This perhaps heightened the impression that this theological reference had been made due to the anniversary and could have led to the conclusions formulated above

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> On the cooperation of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches in Poland from the end of the Second World War until 1970, cf. Kłaczkow 2010, 202-214; Jóźwiak 2019, 58-78; Kasprzycki 2018, 128-175.

by Rev. Bogdan Tranda, which included a distancing from the earlier confessional tradition.

Secondly, the 1970 agreement lacked reflection on the theological foundations of the model of unity to be applied to the renewed church fellowship. Admittedly, one can argue that the summary of conclusions of the Consensus Sendomiriensis implicitly includes a typical Lutheran or Reformed model based on agreement on notae ecclesiae or the means of grace, i.e. the Gospel (the doctrine of justification) and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. However, in our view, starting from the model offered in this respect by the Leuenberg Agreement ("Agreement between Reformation churches in Europe ..." 1973 {No. 6-16.18-20}), it must be said that the references in the 1970 statement to the Consensus Sendomiriensis are very laconic, emphasising that they recognised each other's teaching (in their entirety) as being in accordance with the Word of God and pointing to a wider, shared 16th-century reflection on the Lord's Supper. When we return to the text of the Consensus Sendomiriensis itself (to which the 1970 document refers), it must be said that it only includes a broader reflection on the Lord's Supper. The question of justification is merely mentioned when it refers to the resolutions of the Sandomir Confession ("Konfesja sandomierska" 1995) and the Augsburg Confession ("The Augsburg Confession" 2000). The consensus on Baptism is merely implied among other fundamental articles of Christian doctrine (Jürgens, Daugirdas 2012, 17-20; cf. Pelikan 1947, 826-830).

It should be noted in this context that the appearance of the Leuenberg Agreement three years after the 1970 Polish statement was also significant from the perspective of the two Polish Churches (which had also signed the 1973 agreement). The Leuenberg Agreement offered a common language which allowed them to describe the agreement on the Gospel and the sacraments, in turn key for church fellowship. Moreover, it did so within a well-considered model of unity that not only clarified the relationship between the signatory Churches, but also thoughtfully emphasised continuity with the confessional tradition of

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all the traditions involved in the agreement. Regarding the Polish efforts for unity between the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, it should be pointed out that the Leuenberg Agreement not only added to the theological component they had neglected, but also provided a broader description of the relationship between the two Churches:

There remain considerable differences between our churches in forms of worship, types of spirituality, and church order. These differences are often more deeply felt in the congregations than the traditional doctrinal differences. Nevertheless, in fidelity to the New Testament and Reformation criteria for church fellowship, we cannot discern in these differences any factors which should divide the church ("Agreement between Reformation churches in Europe …" 1973 {No. nr 28}).

Also, the practical part of the 1970 agreement was interestingly developed in the Leuenberg Agreement reflections on "Realizing church fellowship" ("Agreement between Reformation churches in Europe ..." 1973 {No. 35-49}).

In conclusion, the Leuenberg Agreement provided an interpretative framework for Polish ecumenical efforts. Through it, to cite Rev. Waldemar Preiss Sr., that which felt like a temporary compromise gained a solid theological grounding in reflection on the model of unity proper to Evangelical theology and practice.

# 1.2. The Lutheran-Methodist and Methodist Reformed Agreements

A similar conclusion may be applied to the agreements reached in the first half of the 1990s between the Reformed and the Methodists and the Lutherans and the Methodists. Both agreements were similarly laconic as the one from 1970. However, the fact that the Polish Reformed and Lutherans signed the Leuenberg Agreement may have contributed to the fact that this time both agreements referred to a clear model of church unity in neither of them is there a problem indicating that they are based on agreement about the Gospel and the sacraments. It is interesting to note where the emphasis is placed. The 1990 Reformed-Methodist agreement refers to the common tenets of the faith, while being very laconic when it comes to understanding the Gospel:

... We also acknowledge the essential agreement on the understanding of the Gospel message ("Deklaracja braterskiej współpracy..." 2016, 510).

The issue of the sacraments is addressed somewhat more broadly:

... we mutually recognise the validity of Baptism as a sign of confession of faith, rebirth and new life, we wish to come together to the Lord's Table as a sign of redemption through Christ's death, when through faith we receive the Body and Blood of our Lord ("Deklaracja braterskiej współpracy..." 2016, 510).

The situation is reversed in the case of the 1994 Lutheran-Methodist Agreement. It elaborated some more on the question of a common understanding of the Gospel:

We confess together that, according to Scripture, justification is the work of God in Christ. We are justified by grace through faith in the Son of God, not on our own merits ("Deklaracja współpracy..." 2016, 512).

On the other hand, agreement on the sacraments is treated quite laconically:

We affirm the agreement on the Gospel message, recognise the validity of the Sacrament of Baptism and the Lord's Supper administered in both Churches, and the legitimacy of the ordination of clergy ("Deklaracja współpracy..." 2016, 512).

Once again, due to the brevity in framing the key theological issues, the agreement could only be filled with substance when the Methodist churches (including the United Methodist Church Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe, of which the Polish Evangelical Methodist Church is a part) acceded to the then Leuenberg Church Fellowship in 1997. Since then, the above laconic wording of the Polish agreements could be read through the lens of what the Leuenberg Agreement and the "Joint Declaration of Church Fellowship" say about church fellowship (cf. "Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft..." 1993). Thus, membership in the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe provides a theological framework for interpreting the ecclesial communion between the main traditions of Polish Protestantism: Lutheran, Reformed and Methodist.

Finally, we should mention two elements of the two agreements ("Deklaracja braterskiej współpracy..." 2016, 510-511; "Deklaracja współpracy..." 2016, 512-513) as they concur with observations already made with regard to the 1970 Lutheran-Reformed Agreement. Firstly, the introduction of church fellowship allows the churches to remain diverse and diversity is not seen as a divisive factor for <u>Church unity</u> ("Agreement between Reformation churches in Europe ..." 1973 {No. No. 28}). Secondly, the agreements are not limited to defining the theological foundations of church fellowship, but also refer to its development through practical cooperation in as many fields as possible. Here too, therefore, we find intuitions going in the direction more broadly described in the Leuenberg Agreement in the section on "Realizing church fellowship". ("Agreement between Reformation churches in Europe ..." 1973 {No. nr 35-49}).

# 2. Concepts for the unification of the Protestant Churches in Poland

The question of the unity of Polish Protestantism accompanied Polish Reformed and Lutherans not only in the sixteenth century, but also in the following centuries (Jóźwiak 2019, 17-58; Kasprzycki 2019, 69-90). The topic returned with renewed vigour during the Second World War, when the Reformed pastor Ludwik Zaunar formulated his proposal to form a Polish Evangelical Church (proclamation of 1941). This concept, however, primarily focused on the organisational framework, with the important argument being the factor of national unity (cf. "Memoriał ks. Ludwika Zaunara..." 2019; "Projekt Prawa Wewnętrznego..." 2019; "Deklaracja ideologiczna..." 2019).

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The signing of the Lutheran-Reformed Agreement in 1970 also brought about the project of unification of Polish Protestants formulated by the aforementioned Rev. Waldemar Preiss Senior. This unification was to originate from a union of the Reformed, Lutheran, Methodist and Baptist Churches. Regarding confessional issues, the Rev. Waldemar Preiss Sr. only advocated for "The establishment of a mixed commission for confessional and constitutional matters" (as quoted in Wojak 1970, 361), and then: "Convening a joint Synod to realise the Communion" (as quoted in Wojak 1970, 361).

Both approaches, either because of their focus on organisational and national issues (Zaunar) or because of the laconic nature of the surviving information about them (Preiss), hardly mention the confessional foundations of a single Evangelical church. Viewed from the perspective of the Leuenberg Agreement and its recommendations on local efforts for an organic union,<sup>4</sup> it can be pointed out that Zaunar's idea was to preserve the autonomy of the individual confessional groups, and their influence on the functioning of the Church as a whole was to be determined by their numbers. Again, the brevity of the account of Preiss' concept does not allow for a more extensive commentary on this issue.

In this context, the importance of the Leuenberg Agreement for the Polish discussion on the possible unification of Polish Protestantism becomes evident. It obviously served as a point of reference for Prof. Karol Karski when he formulated his unification proposals in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> "The question of organic union between particular participating churches can only be decided in the situation in which these churches live. In examining this question, the following points should be kept in mind: Any union detrimental to the lively diversity of styles of preaching, ways of worship, church order, and diaconal and social action, would contradict the very nature of the church fellowship inaugurated by this declaration. On the other hand, in certain situations, the service of the Church may call for formal legal unification because of the intimate connection between witness and order. Should organizational consequences be drawn from this declaration of church fellowship, it should not be at the expense of the freedom of decision of minority churches" ("Agreement between Reformation churches in Europe …" 2018, 38-39 {no. 44-45}).

early 1990s. Moreover, Karski drew on the experience of the Protestant Churches from France and the Netherlands, which had implemented an organic union. At the same time, he viewed doctrinal issues that had been settled in the Leuenberg Agreement as ones to which plausible and acceptable resolutions already existed, and only saw a challenge in the understanding of the practice of Baptism in the context of the possible participation of the Baptist tradition in such a common organism. On this point, he looked to the Italian Methodist-Baptist experience for inspiration (Karski 1992; reprinted in Karski 2001, 255-263).

The significance of the Leuenberg Agreement for such considerations becomes even more apparent when Prof. Tadeusz Zieliński speaks in an anniversary book dedicated to Prof. Karol Karski on the unification of Polish Protestantism in one church organism. In his reflections, he invokes the programmes of Rev. Waldemar Preiss Sr. and international examples, and summarises the existing inter-church agreements involving Lutherans, Reformed and Methodists,<sup>5</sup> as well as their joint initiatives.<sup>6</sup> Finally, he comes to the question of doctrinal foundations, where he refers critically to the *solas* of the Reformation and invoking the reflections of Wolfgang Huber states the following (Huber 2008):

In other words, those churches in which the declaration of faith in the great *solas* bears the fruit of a continuous self-reformation in the light of the Gospel and the challenges of the times (*Ecclesia reformata et semper reformanda*), including but not limited to leading them to give up the idea that they are self-sufficient communities, bear the mark of Protestantism. These assertions are expressed in a different language in the provisions of the Leuenberg Agreement, which, thanks to several

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Cf. part 1 above. Zieliński also recalls another initiative from 1970 (year of the 400th anniversary of the *Consensus Sendomiriensis*) which pertained to free churches cf. "Odezwa do Zborów..." 1970.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> He cites the joint voices of the Evangelical-Augsburg, Evangelical-Reformed and Evangelical-Methodist Churches on social issues: the war in Iraq (cf. "Biskupi w sprawie wojny" 2003) or Poland's membership of the European Union ("Stanowisko w sprawie integracji..." 2003).

decades of practical verification, could be considered a satisfactory account of the doctrinal basis of a joint evangelical church in Poland (Zieliński 2010, 504-505).

We should add that not much progress has been achieved on the implementation of these concepts. However, we can say that the Lutheran-Reformed cooperation is faring better than Prof. Karol Karski diagnosed at the beginning of the 1990s when he wrote the following about the practical demands of the 1970 document:

In view of the years that have passed since the proclamation, it is fair to say that these have not been years of increased cooperation in the areas [...] concerned (as quoted in Karski 2001, 259).

At the same time, not much has happened regarding the proposed unification efforts. We should note here that, from a formal and organisational perspective, the only agreement that has been made is the 2012 agreement between the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland and the Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland regulating the affiliation of members of one church to the parish of the other church if their church is not represented in a given location (cf. "Porozumienie o wzajemnym dopuszczeniu…" 2012).

As can be seen, reflection on the unification of Polish Protestantism has produced several theoretical concepts. At the same time, none of them has led to any concrete action towards the realisation of the unification. However, when it comes to the role of the Leuenberg Agreement, it should be noted that when it was signed it became an obvious point of reference for defining the doctrinal basis of such a hypothetical united Protestant Church in Poland.

#### 3. Reception of the theological reflection of the CPCE

The Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) itself defines the process of reception in its document "Church Communion" adopted by the General Assembly in Basel: Reception is a process in which a church or a church tradition appropriates a truth that does not derive from itself, but which it recognizes and receives as a formulation of faith. [...] Reception cannot be restricted to the formal act of assent. Only spiritual acceptance, the taking over of what is to be received into the spiritual life of the communion, gives its true authority to what is to be received ("Kirchengemeinschaft..." 2019 {No. 75-76}).

Prof. Karol Karski is a key figure for the reception of CPCE work in Poland in this sense.<sup>7</sup> Thanks to his efforts, not only was the Leuenberg Agreement translated and published in Polish, but also numerous documents produced at the CPCE as well as discussions about its work (e.g. Karski 2004b) appeared in the pages of "Studia i Dokumenty Ekumeniczne [Ecumenical Studies and Documents]". In various publications, Karski devoted much attention to its history (e.g. Karski 2007, 140-145), as well as its thinking on unity (e.g. Karski 2001, 45-66). In 2018, the collected translations of documents published in "Studia i Dokumenty Ekumeniczne" were published in a single volume (see Karski Karol 2018). It provides insights into various aspects of the CPCE's discussion of the sacraments ("On the Doctrine and Practice of Baptism", "On the Doctrine and Practice of the Lord's Supper"), ecclesiology ("The Church of Jesus Christ", "Church-People-State-Nation") and ecclesiastical ministry ("Ministry, ordination, episcope"), models of unity ("Leuenberg - Meissen - Porvoo/Modelle kirchlicher Einheit aus der Sicht der Leuenberger Konkordie"), the relationship between the Church and Israel ("Church and Israel"), or the CPCE's ecumenical arrangements with Baptists, Orthodoxy or Anglicanism. It is worth noting that in 2019, the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> As an expression of the CPCE's appreciation of these efforts, on 24 May 2023, at the academic conference "50 years of the Leuenberg Agreement – heritage and challenges" organised by the Christian Academy of Theology in Warsaw, the Evangelical Augsburg Church in Poland, the Evangelical-Reformed Church in Poland and the Evangelical-Methodist Church in Poland, Prof. Karol Karski was presented with the CPCE's 50th anniversary medal by the General Secretary of the CPCE, Rev. Dr. Mario Fischer (Sojka 2023b, 917; "Dziedzictwo porozumienia…" 2023).

documents from the aforementioned volume were supplemented by the Polish translation of the document "Church Communion" ("Wspólnota kościelna" 2019) published in "Studia i Dokumenty Ekumeniczne".

Initiatives coming from the Commission for Theological and Pastoral Affairs of the Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession of the 14<sup>th</sup> term or personally from Rev. Prof. Marcin Hintz to make CPCE ethical reflections such as "A time to live, and a time to die" 2018 or "Being Church Together in a Pandemic - Reflections from a Protestant Perspective" 2021 available to the Polish reader should be regarded as a continuation of Prof. Karski's important contribution. And so should the constant openness of "Jednota", i.e. magazine of the Evangelical Reformed Church, to texts on issues related to the CPCE's output (in recent years e.g.: Fischer 2021; Karski Michal 2018; Koktysz 2018; Sojka 2021; Sojka 2023a).

Prof. Karol Karski's role was not limited to providing translations or scholarly and popular analyses of the CPCE's activity and theological thought. He also spoke in the intra-church debate in the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession defending the relevance of the fundamental provisions of the Leuenberg Agreement for church life and practice. A spectacular example of this are his comments on the statement of the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland 2003, which, in reaction to the first ordination of a woman in the Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland,<sup>8</sup> recalled that clergy from brother churches are only permitted to perform those liturgical acts in the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland which they are permitted to carry out by the internal law of that church.<sup>9</sup> In practice it meant the exclusion of female clergy from

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> The event in question was the ordination of Wiera Jelinek on 14 September 2003 (Karski 2004, 195).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> The statement of the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland of 11 December 2003 reads: "1. Our Church admits only men to presbyteral ordination, and both men and women to diaconal ordination

the celebration of the Lord's Supper at the time. Prof. Karol Karski not only reminded readers in the pages of "Zwiastun Ewangelicki" that such a solution was fundamentally contrary to the recognition of the ecclesiastical ministry adopted in the Leuenberg Agreement, but also added:

... let us imagine situations where our clergy are abroad at one conference or another and are asked to co-celebrate a worship service with a female pastor. According to the recommendations of the Bishops' Conference, they should refuse. The only question that arises is that if this happens, for example, at some conference convened by the Lutheran World Federation, what repercussions will there be? Similar situations could arise at various meetings within the Leuenberg Church Fellowship.

[...] 2. We respect the right of all our ecumenical partners to determine their own rules autonomously in this regard, and we expect the same respect for our rules from others. 3. This applies in particular to the Reformation churches in Europe and to the evangelical Churches in Poland, with which we are bound by the Leuenberg Agreement as well as bilateral declarations and agreements. The existing differences concerning the understanding and organisation of pastoral ministry, the principles of admission to it and the powers and properties ascribed to it do not harm unity in diversity wherever the principle of respect for the differences and autonomy of the ecumenical partner is respected, as the Leuenberg Agreement states in section c) Organizational consequences in item. 42 and 43. 4. With regard to the churches with which we are bound by the communion of sacraments and pulpit [i.e. pulpit and altar fellowship - comment by JS] and the mutual recognition of pastoral ministry, in the context of the provisions in force in our Church, we reiterate the following: a. Deacons of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Republic of Poland, while participating as ministers in religious celebrations of these churches, perform only those actions which, according to our church law, are proper to the ministry of a deacon. b. Pastors and the Bishop of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Republic of Poland shall participate actively only in such ordinations taking place in these churches as would be permissible on the basis of the law of their own Church concerning the understanding and organization of ordained ministry. c. Women ordained by these churches, appearing at services in the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland will be invited to perform only those actions which, according to our church law, are reserved for deacons. d. Our clergy and faithful, when participating as guests in the services of these churches in other cases and roles than those mentioned under a). and b), may adhere to the rules of their own church or to those of the church in which the service is held, however with the pastoral indication to prefer the former" ("Komunikat Konferencji Biskupów... 2004, 21).

After all, by signing the Leuenberg Agreement (1973) we committed ourselves to altar and pulpit fellowship with the Evangelical Reformed and Evangelical United Churches, later also (1997-r.) with the Evangelical Methodist Churches. This means that we have recognised the ordination of other evangelical churches. Can gender be an obstacle here? I have been watching the development of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship closely for many years, but I have never heard so far that any church associated with this fellowship has questioned the legitimacy of the ordination of women ("Głosy czytelników..." 2004, 21).

The later retraction of the Conference's statement by the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession shows that Prof. Karol Karski's diagnosis was correct.

Summing up the reception of the Leuenberg Agreement and CPCE reflections in Poland, we should also point out that the Synods of the Evangelical Reformed Church in Poland and the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, in adopting a common message for the 500th-year Reformation Anniversary, firstly directly appreciated the significance of the Leuenberg Agreement. Secondly, in outlining the prospects for future cooperation, they drew on the language of the ecclesiological documents of the CPCE (cf. "The Church of Jesus Christ..." 2018, 71-75) referring to koinonia, leiturgia, martyria ("Wspólne przesłanie Synodów..." 2016). These aspects of church life, as well as a broader reflection on the ecclesiastical ministry (cf. "Ministry, ordination, episcope" 2018) also became an important point of reference for the study document "Urząd kościelny - teologiczne rozumienie i praktyka we współczesnym Kościele luterańskim" ["Ecclesiastical ministry - theological understanding and practice in the contemporary Lutheran Church"] prepared as part of the work of the Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland XIV term (Urząd kościelny... 2022).

Finally, we should also mention that, as of 2021, the MA programme in Evangelical theology at the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw (where, among other denominations, future clergy of the signatory churches of the Leuenberg Agreement are trained) includes a course entitled "Evangelical Churches Today", an important objective of which is, among other things, to introduce students to the Leuenberg Agreement itself and the output of the work of the CPCE ("Kościoły ewangelickie współcześnie..." 2024). As an aside, this subject had been studied in courses on dogmatics, ethics and the history of the ecumenical movement before. Moreover, in 2022 at the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw, one student wrote a bachelor's thesis on the document "Before I formed you in the womb" addressing the ethical challenges of the beginning of life (Krauze 2022), and in 2023 a master's thesis was defended dealing with the document "A time to live, and a time to die" in the context of a broader debate on the ethical challenges of the end of life (Hanson 2023).

#### 4. Summary

The above analyses demonstrate the considerable importance of the Leuenberg Agreement for the Evangelical Churches in Poland. Even though they signed the Leuenberg Agreement or joined the CPCE after having already signed bilateral agreements on altar and pulpit fellowship, it was the Leuenberg Agreement that provided the basic interpretative framework for the theological content of the said bilateral agreements. It offered a model of Church unity and contemporary language for describing the basic content of theological consensus. This made it possible to introduce unity efforts rooted in the sixteenth-century tradition of interfaith cooperation (framed by the *Consensus Sendomiriensis*) into contemporary ecumenical discourse.

The Leuenberg Agreement as a fundamental reference point of theological consensus for Evangelical circles in Poland revealed its significance also in the context of plans for the unification of the Evangelical Churches. From the moment it entered the debate, this document became the obvious provider of definitions of doctrinal foundations in terms of the understanding of the Gospel or the sacraments for the United Protestant Church envisaged in various concepts. At this point we should note, however, that these efforts have never actually gone beyond theoretical proposals.

Finally, the Leuenberg Agreement and the resulting output of the CPCE became the object of reception in the life of the Polish Evangelical Churches. Thanks to the activity of Prof. Karol Karski and his continuators, a significant part of the study documents of the CPCE is available in Polish. Importantly, the Polish Evangelical debate has not been limited to ensuring the availability of those documents in the native language, but there are examples where their content has actually influenced intra-church debate. Firstly, following effective criticism of the 2003 position of the Conference of Bishops of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland, it was withdrawn as the stance referred to the ordained women of the CPCE's sister churches in a manner contrary to the provisions of the Leuenberg Agreement.. Furthermore, the proclamation on cooperation between the Lutheran and Reformed Churches issued by their Synods on the occasion of 500 years of the Reformation in 2017 shows traces of inspiration by the theological language of the CPCE. This is also the case in the 2022 reflections of the Polish Lutherans on pastoral ministry.

Regarding the process of its reception, it is also telling that the Leuenberg Agreement itself and other output of the CPCE are a permanent part of the Evangelical theology curriculum at the Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw. It is also noteworthy that Academy students engage with and write theses on the ethical proposals of the CPCE.

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