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CHURCH LANGUAGE
AT THE SERVICE OF GENDER JUSTICE:
THE EXAMPLE OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCHES
IN THE UNITED STATES (ELCA)
AND CANADA (ELCIC)

Abstract. This article is aimed at presenting a certain limited and at the same time significant area on which such cultural and political pressure is exerted, i.e. the Churches' language policies. The issue of language policy, which is seen as a symbol of actions undertaken for the sake of gender equality in church life, will be presented based on the example of the Lutheran Churches. This is because it is Lutherans who, in recent years, have been the most committed to promoting equality between, and equal rights for, women and men (especially in North America) in social, economic and political life as well as within the Church's structures.

The article begins with a presentation of the issue of gender justice in modern mainstream Lutheranism. Then the role of church language for this trend in the Church is shown as a tool in the fight for gender justice and for eliminating inequalities as well as negative stereotypes. Next, the official recommendations of the largest Lutheran Churches in North America are presented concerning the purification of church language and containing guidelines on its proper, non-discriminatory use. Finally, an attempt is made at presenting the results of Lutheran language policy.

Key words: Lutherans, ELCA, ELCIC, gender justice, inclusive language.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Christian Churches and communities, which have a duty to preach Jesus Christ's Gospel, are confronted with many new cultural, social and political phenomena while carrying out their mission. Christian denomina-

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tions cannot avoid this confrontation because it is an inherent part of the environment in which their members, both men and women, function. Therefore, the impact of these new phenomena on the Churches not only takes the form of an external pressure but is also manifested in trends within the Churches, i.e. new ideas and views as well as requirements that Christians set for particular denominations.

Gender issues constitute one of the areas that influence the shape and objectives of the Church's mission in today's world. These issues are mainly connected with the need for Christian commitment to promoting equality between women and men with regard to all spheres of social, economic and political life. This also applies to the situation within the Churches themselves and in particular to the requirement set by Christians that the Churches should ensure equal participation of women in all Church structures and in any forms of church activity. Such postulates are based on the manifestations of oppression and injustice against women which can be observed in the contemporary world, also within certain structures and areas of the Churches' activity. There is no doubt, however, that the force with which these demands are put forward also results from the cultural and political influence that is exerted on Christians in Western societies and, through them, also on particular Christian denominations.

This article is aimed at presenting a certain limited and at the same time significant area on which such cultural and political pressure is exerted, i.e. the Churches' language policies. The activities that are undertaken to adapt church language to the requirements related to political correctness and the scale of changes that are being made to language show how Christians themselves perceive the difficulty in reconciling the traditional Christian language with the postulated actions for full equality between men and women. In this regard, one can also observe readiness on the part of the Churches themselves to adapt to the current cultural and political trends, which has its roots in these Churches' structures and theological principles. The issue of language policy, which is seen as a symbol of actions undertaken for the sake of gender equality in church life, will be presented based on the example of the Lutheran Churches. This is because it is Lutherans who, in recent years, have been the most committed to promoting equality between, and equal rights for, women and men (especially in North America) in social, economic and political life as well as within the Church's structures.

This article begins with a presentation of the issue of gender justice in modern mainstream Lutheranism. Then the role of church language for this

trend in the Church will be shown as a tool in the fight for gender justice and for eliminating inequalities as well as negative stereotypes. Next, the official recommendations of the largest Lutheran Churches in North America will be presented concerning the purification of church language and containing guidelines on its proper, non-discriminatory use. Finally, an attempt will be made at presenting the results of Lutheran language policy.

2. GENDER JUSTICE IN MODERN MAINSTREAM LUTHERANISM

The issue of gender justice and related commitment to combating discrimination on the grounds of gender has a very important place in contemporary mainstream Lutheranism, which is here understood as a group of the Lutheran Churches that are affiliated with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). It should, however, be noted that not all of the Lutheran Churches in the world are members of the Federation—some of them are affiliated with the International Lutheran Council. There are also Old Lutheran Churches which remain orthodox with regard to doctrinal and world-view matters and which hold to the original objectives of the Reformation. This part of world Lutheranism will not be discussed in the text.

Since the 1980s gender issues have been gaining in importance as far as social and political activity is concerned and especially in Protestant denominations (except for fundamentalist groups, in particular evangelical and Pentecostal ones, which seem not to have succumbed to this trend).¹ Mainstream Lutheranism, which is represented by the LWF, sees the fight for gender justice as one of the key elements of its social activity today. This is accompanied by a transformation of Church structures and procedures in line with the criteria of equality and equal rights. One can notice that the re-modelling of the Churches' social and political activity in the above-mentioned direction is a result of a strong influence of feminist theology on the Lutheran Churches.² This influence is particularly visible in North America although it is also present in Western Europe to a certain extent. It should

¹ Marcin Składanowski, "From Jesus Christ to 'green issues.' Development or degeneration of the ecumenical movement?," *Roczniki Teologii Ekumenicznej* 4 (2012): 172-174.

² Małgorzata Grzywacz, "Konsekwencje pewnego przekładu. Niemieckojęzyczna translacja Biblii na 'język sprawiedliwy.' Jej geneza oraz duszpasterskie implikacje," in *Protestancka kultura słowa*, ed. Zbigniew Pasek (Kraków: Nomos, 2009), 53.

also be noted that it is not only external influence, which is manifested in political and ideological pressure, that is exerted on particular Lutheran communities and organisations. This influence is also internal in character, i.e. it reflects a change in the views and sentiments of Western Christians, especially members of Protestant denominations (however, not only – this trend is also manifested as Catholic initiatives which are undertaken in North America and which are inspired by feminist and LGBTQ-related communities; these initiatives are not dealt with in this text). Therefore, changes in church practices and doctrine, which are visible in mainstream Lutheranism, also constitute the Church's response to real social needs that are communicated by many Lutheran Christian circles. These changes are taking place on a very large scale: they not only entail adjusting the Church's language and structures to equality requirements but are also directed towards writing a new history of Christianity, as some believe, in order to include all those who were excluded or marginalised in the past by patriarchal and oppressive Church structures, in particular women but also impoverished people and representatives of non-European nations and cultures.³

The LWF as a whole, and through many specialised branches, engages in the fight for women's rights as well as in counteracting discrimination and introducing changes that are aimed to ensure greater participation of women in the Church's structures at any level.⁴ Certain important doctrinal and pastoral texts testify to this practical engagement. Two documents connected with mainstream Lutheranism, which were issued in 2013, are of special significance. *Gender Justice Policy*, which is of an all-Lutheran character and which was published by the LWF, is one of these texts. It was created as a result of work which had been carried out by the LWF's members for a considerable amount of time and which had been aimed to set directions for the social commitment of Lutherans as well as for reforms of Church structures that would lead to equality and fight with discrimination against women.⁵ This text contains specific guidelines concerning gender parity within Church structures and ensuring women's participation in church

³ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴ Marcin Składanowski, "Polityka sprawiedliwości genderowej Światowej Rady Kościołów," in *O ekumenizmie w Roku Wiary. Księga pamiątkowa z okazji jubileuszu 30-lecia Instytutu Ekumenicznego KUL*, ed. Przemysław Kantyka, Piotr Kopiec, and Marcin Składanowski (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2013), 206–209.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 204.

leadership⁶. Language policy is also mentioned as one of the many aspects of the Lutheran Churches' activity which is to ensure gender justice and combat discrimination.⁷ However, the objectives of this policy are not specified because it seems that many of the Churches that belong to the LWF pursue such objectives on their own. Nonetheless, what is important is that the text emphasises that Christian commitment to gender equality and justice should be reflected in church language.⁸ The text titled *Zwischen Autonomie und Angewiesenheit. Familie als verlässliche Gemeinschaft stärken* is another important document. It deals with the possibility of redefining the concept of family within Lutheran communities and it was published by the Evangelical Church in Germany. This text testifies to Lutherans' commitment to promoting gender equality and combating all forms of discrimination, for example, by trying to reinterpret the Christian concept of family.

3. THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN THE STRUGGLE FOR GENDER JUSTICE

It should be noted that demands are being made to revise church language, including the language used in theological statements or in the Bible, in many contemporary progressive Christian circles, also in Catholic ones. Such revision is aimed to strengthen the equality between men and women as well as to fight against patriarchal prejudice and distortions of Christian doctrine that are supposedly reflected in the language of Christian worship and prayer as well as in the statements of theologians and church leaders. It is said that the traditional language of Christian doctrine, liturgy or prayer is "masculine" in character, which makes it difficult or even impossible for women to relate to the content this language conveys.⁹

The assertion that church language has been "contaminated with patriarchy" leads many progressive church activists and theologians to put forward, based on the results of research on feminist theology, specific proposals for

⁶ *Gender Justice Policy*, ed. The Lutheran World Federation (Geneva: LWF, 2013), 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8, 15, 23.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8, 15, 23.

⁹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Imaging God, Embodying Christ: Women as a Sign of the Times," in *The Church Women Want. Catholic Women in Dialogue*, ed. Elizabeth A. Johnson (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002), 46.

language changes that are to strengthen gender justice. Such changes mostly concern the image of God, which should be free from patriarchal prejudice and distortions and which should represent God as the Mother, or are related to avoiding any expressions that attribute typically “male” characteristics to God.¹⁰ As for European Protestantism, a German translation of the Bible – *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* (*The Bible in a Just Language*), which was published in 2006 after years of work and which had been inspired by feminism, is an example of such activities.¹¹ This translation aroused serious controversy even within German Lutheranism because it subordinates faithfulness to the original text to political correctness as well as social and political goals that are set to the Lutheran Church today. Nonetheless, despite these controversies, this translation shows the direction of Lutheran language policy which is aimed to promote gender justice, in accordance with the LWF’s documents.

In English-speaking areas, and mainly in connection with the debate that is being held by the Protestant Churches in North America, language policy that is intended to promote equal rights for men and women and combat discrimination against certain groups (not only women) in society and in the Church amounts to inclusive language. The issue of inclusive language is set in a very broad social, cultural and political context and it is being popularised by various centres and institutions. Since the 1980s the Protestant Churches, especially in North America, have also been committed to transforming their language so as to eliminate expressions which strengthen stereotypes or social inequality in some way or attribute features that are clearly associated with gender to God (mainly those which are associated with masculinity; the attribution of typically “female” characteristics to God does not cause problems). Avoiding gender-marked language leads Protestant groups to deeply interfere with traditional doctrinal and liturgical expressions. For the sake of gender justice and in order to cleanse their language of gender-marked statements, certain groups or even entire denominations have resorted to changing the formula of baptism from “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” into “in the name of the Creator, and of the Redeemer and of the Sanctifier (Sustainer)” (because “the Father” and “the Son” have gender connotations). It should, however, be emphasised that the Lutheran Churches are not using such practices yet

¹⁰ Marcin Składanowski, “Podstawowe aspekty chrystologii feministycznej,” *Studia Teologiczne. Białystok, Drohiczyn, Łomża* 31 (2013): 68, 77.

¹¹ Grzywacz, “Konsekwencje pewnego przekładu,” 53.

but their use is becoming increasingly more legitimate within contemporary American Lutheranism.

4. THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTATION SUPPORTING THE ELCA'S AND ELCIC'S LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

Although many objectives of language policy are similar in nature and purpose in mainstream Lutheranism and in most Protestant denominations (except for the above-mentioned evangelical and Pentecostal groups) as well as in progressive Catholicism, specific guidelines vary depending on the denomination. This is why two large American Lutheran Churches that are members of the LWF, i.e. the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), were selected for the purpose of this text to illustrate the theological assumptions as well as methods of implementing, and the consequences of, language changes which are to strengthen gender justice. These Churches are typical representatives of American mainstream Lutheranism.

When justifying the necessity of changes Lutherans are convinced that language is much more than just a means of conveying information. Since words also convey emotions and values, language also has a performative character—it not only describes but also creates and transforms reality. As such, it not only is a medium of human communication but it also influences people's attitudes and actions and plays a significant role in shaping women's and men's world view. For this reason the Churches cannot be indifferent to language, especially when it contains elements that stigmatise or discriminate against other people in some way. In this context, the appropriate use of language, which amounts to respecting every human being's right to dignity as well as his or her value, is a manifestation of obedience to God who sent Christ to bring salvation to all people and sacrifice His life for them.¹²

Canadian Lutherans (ELCIC) point to three basic anthropological and ecclesiological principles which form the basis of gender-fair language: „1. All persons share equally in God's plan for humanity. 2. Support for personal development of each individual's potential is part of the Lutheran concept of

¹² ELCIC Office for Communication, "Guidelines for Inclusive Language for writers, editors, and speakers," <http://elcic.ca/Resources/Inclusive-Language.cfm> [27.02.2014].

Christian vocation, wherein each person exercises his or her own priesthood within the people of God. 3. The church is the body of Christ. As such it must fully include all persons who come to Christ, regardless of what restrictions society may impose through prejudice, tradition or law.”¹³ By pointing to such motivation behind its language policy, the ELCIC embeds it in the fundamental Christian vision of the human being as having been created by God and endowed with inalienable dignity (principle no. 1) as well as in the concept of the Church as the body of Christ which includes all believers without exception (principle no. 3). At the same time the ELCIC makes a concrete commitment to fostering women’s and men’s personal development (principle no. 2). In this way Canadian Lutherans, who undertake actions for ensuring that gender-fair language is used in the Church, intend to combine traditional theological principles with social and political activities that are carried out by Christians.

The observation that there are still large groups of people in contemporary societies that are excluded from social life or marginalised in various ways is an additional motivation behind Christian commitment to promoting fair language. Although language is not a basic factor in exclusion or marginalisation, it may strengthen and consolidate these negative phenomena when used in an inappropriate and non-reflective way, as Canadian Lutherans note. In particular Christians who preach the equal dignity of all women and men should be sensitive to the consequences of using language in a way that contributes to the development of discriminatory practices or different forms of unjust treatment of women and men on the grounds of one’s gender, race, ethnicity, views or lifestyle. This is why the document which was published by the ELCIC’s Office for Communication reminds that “the conscientious believer will choose language supporting principles of inclusiveness and enhancing the dignity of all persons.”¹⁴ Obviously, language itself, even if it is proper and carefully used, cannot fix all the injustices that destroy interpersonal relationships because, after all, these are a consequence of human sinfulness. Nonetheless, Christians who really participate in the life of the society in which they live should do everything possible to cause the relations between women and men to be more consistent with the idea of human dignity which originates from God.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

This is also the theological orientation of American Lutherans belonging to the ELCA. Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, the presiding bishop of the ELCA, pointed out many times that inclusion, which is also manifested in language policy, is a priority as far as her commitment to the Church is concerned. Such activities testify to Lutherans' engagement in important social issues. By addressing the issue of equality and equal rights the ELCA wants to preach the truth about the fact that God loves His/Her Creation and, in particular, that God loves all men and women equally, regardless of their views, social position, gender, race or language.¹⁵

5. ACHIEVING GENDER JUSTICE IN LANGUAGE

The guidelines that were published by Trinity Lutheran Seminary (Columbus, Ohio), which is a school of theology belonging to the ELCA, not only recommend justice and inclusiveness (with regard to one's race, gender and physical state) as far as the relations between students are concerned (during church services, lectures and other activities in college) but they also suggest that those who fail to comply with these rules are under threat of being expelled from the school.¹⁶ The document titled *Strategies for Inclusive Communication: Pointers for Positive Interactions*, which was issued by Pacific Lutheran University (Tacoma, Washington), reminds one that what Christians say and how they say it is not insignificant because Christians preach the dignity of every woman and every man. Therefore, fair language not only contains proper words and eliminates those which might be humiliating for others but it also entails the appropriate way of speaking, which constitutes "inclusive communication." This means that one should not regard certain characteristics and physical or psychological limitations (e.g. disability) as an element that defines a given person and determines the way in which he or she should be treated. Therefore, this document indicates that one should communicate with a person with a disability in the same way as with any other person. It also provides many detailed guidelines on inclusive communication according to which, when communicating with others, people should respect every person's right to dignity, regardless of

¹⁵ T. K. Barger, "Bishop Eaton stands for inclusion. Ohioan takes reins of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," <http://www.toledoblade.com/Religion/2014/02/01/Bishop-Eaton-stands-for-inclusion.html> [27.02.2014].

¹⁶ "Community life," <http://www.tlsohio.edu/life-at-trinity/community-life> [27.02.2014].

his or her potential physical and psychological limitations.¹⁷ The ELCA's other institutions also issue similar guidelines and treat them as mandatory.¹⁸

Apart from guidelines concerning non-verbal elements of inclusive, fair communication, the ELCA's and ELCIC's various institutions also lay down specific guidelines regarding language together with a justification as to why particular expressions or styles of speech should be promoted and why many traditional words or phrases should be eliminated from church language. Since these guidelines are basically congruent, the following overview will be based on the example of a text which has been prepared by the ELCIC's Office for Communication.

A. GENDER ISSUES

The imprudent use of language which entails ascribing particular stereotypical gender roles to men and women may be inappropriate and unfair. This is particularly true of women for whom the overuse of masculine forms in church language can be hurtful. For this reason forms which do not take

¹⁷ "Approach people in your usual manner, without assuming that they need special attention. Introduce yourself. [...] Maintain eye contact, even if the person has no sight or vision impairment. If you are engaged in a prolonged conversation with a person in a wheelchair, sit down to keep eye contact. The art of conversation works best when kept natural. Speak in your normal voice. Most effective communication occurs when people speak clearly at a normal volume, pitch, and speed. Use normal language while considering your choice of words. Regardless of your intent, language can be disempowering and exclude a person with a disability. Allow time. Communication that is rushed is rarely inclusive. [...] When you make a mistake, apologize for your error and return to being natural. [...] When talking with a person who is hearing impaired, [...] remember to talk to that person, not to any interpreter or captioner who may be present. [...] Be especially patient when talking with a person with a speech impairment. [...] When talking with a person who has a vision impairment, describe things specifically. Avoid generalities such as 'over there' or 'down here.' [...] When talking with a person who is in a wheelchair or who has crutches, NEVER touch the crutches or the wheelchair unless you intend to touch the person. If you touch the crutches or wheelchair, you ARE touching the person since crutches and wheelchairs are extensions of the person using them. Do not attempt to assist without asking first if assistance is needed. [...] When talking to a person who has a mental health impairment, keep in mind that the person's mental health condition will likely have no bearing upon the nature or content of your communication". "Strategies for Inclusive Communication. Pointers for Positive Interactions," [http://www.plu.edu/dss/widgets/documents-forms/items/resources-for-faculty/ Strategies-for-Inclusive-Communication.doc](http://www.plu.edu/dss/widgets/documents-forms/items/resources-for-faculty/Strategies-for-Inclusive-Communication.doc) [27.02.2014], see also *Inclusive Language*, <http://www.plu.edu/provost/Faculty-Governance/november-11-2011-inclusive-language-attachment-c-corrected.pdf> [27.02.2014]

¹⁸ E.g.: "Use of Inclusive Language at Trinity Lutheran Seminary," <http://www.tlsohio.edu/academics/internship/all-downloads/item/use-of-inclusive-language> [27.02.2014].

women into account should be either removed or corrected. The ELCIC's document provides many examples of sentences which are "inappropriate" from the perspective of inclusiveness as well as many examples of politically correct sentences and recommended manners of speaking. Expressions that are considered improper are mainly those which attribute stereotypical social and professional roles to women and men (e.g. *housewife*), or which make use of masculinised language, i.e. based on masculine grammatical forms, when referring to mixed-gender groups (e.g. *clergymen*, *laymen*, *forefathers*, *brotherhood*, *mankind*). Criteria for the appropriate use of language also include a strict ban on any jokes that are based on gender stereotypes. It is also unacceptable to emphasise differences between women and men which are manifested in their psyche, feelings or sensitivity. According to Lutherans, it is necessary that complete equality between women and men should be underlined; this equality is also manifested in the psychological and emotional similarities between them. The Lutheran requirements concerning proper language also encompass the issue of homosexuality; there are also expressions that are considered acceptable and "fair" when used in reference to homosexual people (*gay* for male homosexuals, *lesbian* for female homosexuals, and *homosexuals* for both)¹⁹.

B. RACIAL AND ETHNIC ISSUES

From the Christian belief that all people have been endowed with the same, human dignity Lutherans conclude that church language should be adjusted in such a way as not to contain elements that could question equality between people, women and men, on the grounds of their race. Lutherans believe that the attribution of positive features to, or talking about the superiority of, "whites" in church language constitutes a major threat, which should be combated by means of language policy. Even if it is impossible to completely disregard those physical characteristics of men and women which are based on one's race, such characteristics cannot be associated with any moral judgements. Thus, it cannot be suggested that one's race determines something else apart from one's physical appearance. This is also why there is a ban on using language forms conveying racial stereotypes that are offensive to particular ethnic groups and stigmatised

¹⁹ ELCIC Office for Communication, "Guidelines for Inclusive Language for writers, editors, and speakers, <http://elcic.ca/Resources/Inclusive-Language.cfm> [27.02.2014].

specific groups of people. Moreover, one cannot favour particular cultures or civilisations by suggesting that certain cultures are less developed or “less civilised” than others. Lutherans also warn against the uncritical use of scholarly sources if these are written from the perspective of Europeans or “whites”. Such sources are not politically correct and, therefore, cannot be fully credible. Other expressions which might also be offensive are those suggesting that North American and European, i.e. “white” Churches have some advantage over Churches in other regions because such phrases perpetuate a colonial vision of the world from the perspective of racially and ethnically correct language. In order to make it easier for the faithful to choose the appropriate wording, the ELCIC’s document lists unacceptable as well as “fair” and recommended words and expressions also with regard to racial and ethnic issues.²⁰

C. RELIGIOUS ISSUES

Christians’ linguistic political correctness also applies to statements about other religions, which should always demonstrate respect for different religious views although Christians do not have to refrain from criticising non-Christian religions. However, they must necessarily eliminate expressions that convey prejudices and false beliefs or those that might incite hatred towards non-Christians. Even if other religions contain elements that Christians find objectionable (e.g. human sacrifices, mutilations, intolerance), Lutherans believe that political correctness also requires that Christians should emphasise the evil they themselves did in the past. In this context people should also be reminded about the Crusades, the Inquisition, forced conversions or colonialism and even the Holocaust, for which, as the ELCIC suggests, Christians are responsible. Also with regard to religious matters, as is the case with other issues, the ELCIC mentions expressions which should be removed from church language. What is of special importance is the suggestion that one should approach the statements about Jews which appear in the New Testament with caution so as not to transgress the limits connected with political correctness when citing them.²¹

Political correctness related to religious issues leads the ELCIC to conclude that one cannot suggest that God only acted through a specific official

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

Christian Church. This conclusion has very serious theological consequences because it indicates that actions for fair language and respect for followers of other religions go hand in hand with the postulates of pluralistic theology which denies the notion that Christianity is the only true and unique religion. The political correctness of religious language should be also manifested in avoiding a “hierarchy of grace” when talking about Church structure so as not to suggest that God values the clergy more than lay men and women because all Christians participate in the same ministry of preaching God’s Word to the world, although they do it in different ways.²²

D. FINANCIAL AND HEALTH ISSUES

The ELCIC warns against using language that would show arrogance or paternalism (maternalism) towards, and a sense of superiority over, impoverished people or those who have suffered different kinds of tragedies when undertaking actions aimed at helping them. In this context one is also reminded that Christian activity is not to excite gratitude and it does not seek recognition or thanks. Just as God loves human beings unconditionally, Christians love their neighbours unconditionally and without expecting anything in return (Luke 6,35–36; 14,12–14). Similarly, a paternalistic attitude towards persons who are physically or mentally ill may combine help that one offers to these people with a hidden lack of respect that is due to every human being, even if this is unintended. According to the Christian understanding of human dignity and calling, the value of every human being is undeniable, regardless of any physical or psychological limitations. This is why the ELCIC reminds that „The person with two functioning arms and legs is not inherently better than the person with less dexterity or mobility. People should not need to feel economically, mentally or physically superior to another person in order to help them. In a truly human community, all are dependent upon one another to make life whole.”²³ This approach has caused the ELCIC to point to proper words and expressions which can be used to describe people with disabilities (*persons who are disabled, people with disabilities, or disabled persons*) instead of those which suggest that these people have lower value or dignity (*the disabled, crippled, deformed or invalid*). It is also inappropriate to judge disability in an emotional way. It is

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

suggested that one should always think if it is really necessary to mention the disabilities or illnesses of persons who are being talked about in each particular case. In any case, Christians must remember that, when dealing with persons who are experiencing different kinds of limitations, be it financial, social or health-related, they always deal with women and men who have their personal dignity which is common to all human beings.²⁴

E. A POLITICALLY CORRECT WAY OF TALKING ABOUT GOD

Lutherans also apply the requirements concerning political correctness to statements about God which can be found in liturgical language or other forms of Christian piety. In particular, they believe that masculine elements in church language should be made less pronounced. It is intended that one conveys the meaning of biblical images and expressions by translating them in such a way that they are free from gender connotations. Therefore, it is proposed that traditional expressions (e.g. *King, Lord*) should be replaced with “fair” wordings (e.g. *Ruler, Sovereign*) and, whenever it is not possible because of well-established traditions, that masculinised language should be relativised by means of introducing alternative or supplementary expressions (this mostly applies to referring to God as the Father, which could be elaborated with new formulas: „O God, who watches over us as a father...”, „O God, who cares for us as a mother for her young”)²⁵.

6. REPERCUSSIONS OF THE LUTHERAN POLICY OF INCLUSIVENESS WITHIN THE CHURCH

Language policy pursued by mainstream Lutheranism, especially by the ELCA and ELCIC, which is a part of wide-ranging actions for the Church’s inclusiveness and for removing from Christian life any practices and formulas that discriminate against particular groups of men and women, influences the relations within Lutheranism itself. Lutheran activities which are aimed at promoting inclusiveness and tolerance in the first place contribute to changes in Lutheranism itself. On the one hand, these activities increasingly open this Church to contemporary, Western cultural trends (for which the

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

issues of tolerance and inclusiveness are incredibly important); one the other hand, they heighten tensions between particular communities.

One should not forget that, apart from mainstream Lutheranism, there are Lutheran communities which are attached to traditional Lutheran teachings and faithful to the traditional Christian language. In the United States the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is an example of such a community; although it does not recognise many of the doctrinal changes that have been introduced by the ELCA (such as the ordination of women), it still cooperates with this Church, for example, on charitable activities.²⁶ However, the increasing emphasis that the ELCA is placing on the implementation of progressive ideological postulates makes this practical cooperation more difficult.

The activities aimed at promoting inclusiveness, such as the ordination of persons living in homosexual relationships, have led to discord within the ELCA itself; this disagreement is manifested either in certain communities leaving the ELCA or in communities which formally remain within this Church's structures contesting such activities.²⁷ This contestation also takes the form of a frequently and openly expressed opposition to the departure from traditional Christian language in the name of political correctness and the Church's inclusiveness which is seen as a priority. In particular, Lutherans within the Church object to being pressurised to refrain from using the word "Father" when referring to God or to talk about God as "She."²⁸ There is also strong opposition to prayer to "Goddess" which is practiced in the most progressive communities or to other liturgical forms in which God is referred to as "Goddess."²⁹

7. CONCLUSIONS

The language policy of mainstream Lutheranism, which is presented in the ELCA's and ELCIC's guidelines, is a manifestation of the growing conviction among Christians themselves that church language must represent the

²⁶ T.K. Barger, "Bishop Eaton stands for inclusion."

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ "ELCA Seminarians Not Allowed to Call God "Father"," <http://www.exposingtheelca.com/1/post/2010/08/elca-seminarians-not-allowed-to-call-god-father.html> [27.02.2014].

²⁹ "Worship of "Goddess" in the ELCA and Led by Synod Council Leader," <http://www.exposingtheelca.com/1/post/2010/05/worship-of-goddess-in-the-elca-and-lead-by-synod-council-leader.html> [27.02.2014].

Churches' authentic commitment to the fight for human rights as well as for eliminating practices and customs that discriminate against certain groups of men and women on the grounds of their gender, race, ethnicity and social or religious affiliation or due to other reasons that are against the Gospel. At the same time this policy reflects the strong impact of ideological and political trends that are remote from Christianity. This is why, when evaluating the objectives and implementation of Lutheran language policy, one should identify its valuable elements as well as the threats that it poses to the Christian identity of the Churches which pursue this policy.

As for its positive aspects, it should definitely be noted that many Lutheran Churches really want to become engaged in solving the most difficult social problems of the contemporary world. Lutherans notice that there is a need for such an activity, which should be carried out by church institutions and organisations so that the practice of preaching the Gospel in today's world is credible. Proclaiming the Christian faith without making an effort to abolish structures of oppression, exclusion and marginalisation or to cleanse the language that perpetuates and strengthens such structures is not authentic Christianity. From this perspective, actions fostering full inclusiveness of the Churches' structures and institutions, which also entails promoting inclusive, fair language, constitute witness of faith, a manifestation of its vitality and proof that men's and women's close bond with God gives them strength to change certain habits, structures as well as laws and rules of life that are inconsistent with the Gospel, even those which are sometimes presented as unchangeable and inviolable. Meanwhile, in the light of the permanent newness of the Gospel, no human norm, even a centuries-old one, can be considered inviolable if it is against God's will and denies human dignity, humiliates or excludes a certain group of people or relativises the value of humanity and makes it dependent on particular well-established and socially acceptable criteria. In this light, Lutheran actions for promoting inclusiveness, together with language policy, may serve as a model of how Christians can become committed to changing the world in accordance with the Gospel.

However, the discrepancies within the Lutheran communities that deal with the issue of inclusiveness also indicate that the Churches' concentration on certain otherwise legitimate or valuable ideological elements may raise doubts about the authenticity of their professed faith. If social commitment is to constitute a witness and confirmation of their faith, this faith must first of all be integral and faithful to the Word of God; also, Christian doctrine

should not succumb to transient fads or changing ideological trends. The controversies surrounding the Churches' commitment to promoting inclusiveness arise, for example, because it sometimes seems that the Churches' activity in this area is more intense and noticeable than their strictly theological, doctrinal and ethical reflection. Therefore, this raises doubts as to whether the social and political engagement of the Churches still constitutes a witness of their faith or if it is already turning into activism which is an attempt to hide their weakness in preaching integral Christian teachings.

In this light, however, it seems that other Christian Churches cannot disregard the experiences of Lutheran communities such as the ELCA and ELCIC. And, although it seems advisable to critically evaluate those guidelines which would introduce a regime of political correctness into Christian language in a way that is against Christian freedom, the Churches should reflect on the way in which they preach the message of the Gospel to the contemporary world through their denomination-specific languages. If language as well as other church customs and practices are inconsistent with this message, than they should be changed, together will all such human traditions, into practices that are not based on the criteria of durability, universality or social acceptance but of faithfulness to God's Word only.

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JĘZYK KOŚCIELNY W SŁUŻBIE SPRAWIEDLIWOŚCI PŁCIOWEJ:
PRZYKŁAD KOŚCIOŁÓW LUTERAŃSKICH
W STANACH ZJEDNOCZONYCH (ELCA) I W KANADZIE (ELCIC)

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie pewnego ograniczonego, a jednocześnie znamiennego obszaru tych kulturowych i politycznych nacisków na Kościoły, jakim jest kościelna polityka językowa. Problem polityki językowej jako znaku działań na rzecz równości płci w życiu kościelnym jest ukazany na przykładzie Kościołów luterańskich. Wynika to z faktu, że w ostatnich latach luteranie – zarówno na forum światowym, jak też w wymiarze lokalnym (przede wszystkim w Ameryce Północnej) – najsilniej zaangażowani się w promowaniu równości i równouprawnienia kobiet i mężczyzn zarówno w życiu społecznym, ekonomicznym i politycznym, jak też w samych strukturach kościelnych.

Myśl artykułu wychodzi od ukazania problematyki sprawiedliwości płciowej we współczesnym mainstreamowym luteranizmie. Następnie w tym nurcie ukazana jest rola języka kościelnego jako narzędzia walki o sprawiedliwość płciową oraz o usunięcie nierówności i negatywnych stereotypów. W kolejnym etapie omówione są oficjalne wskazania największych Kościołów luterańskich w Ameryce Północnej dotyczące oczyszczenia języka kościelnego i podające wytyczne do jego właściwego, niedyskryminującego stosowania. Wreszcie podjęta jest próba przybliżenia konsekwencji luterańskiej polityki językowej.

Słowa kluczowe: luteranie, ELCA, ELCIC, sprawiedliwość płciowa (genderowa), język inkluzywny.