

The excursion to Marburg with Intercultural Theology students

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On June 9th a group of the Master Students of the Intercultural Theology visited old city Marburg on the river Lahn. Marburg is famous by the first Protestant University in the world, University of Marburg (Philipps-Universität-Marburg), which was founded in 1527. The celebration of 500 years of Reformation this year makes this city a tempting destination for Christians, and anyone who is interested in the history. Master students were lucky to bring the whole day in the old city in a warm company of two members of the Faculty of Theology, PD Dr. Fritz Heinrich and Dr. Cornelia Schlarb. Their broad knowledge of the German history and history of Reformation in particular was impressive, and their personal inspiration with the subject transformed the plain historical facts into a lively stories from the lives of Philipp I, Landgrave of Hesse (1504-1567), his sister Elisabeth of Hesse (1502-1557), Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and other prominent people of that time.

- If someone would be lost, we're meeting near the St. Elizabeth's Church, - Dr. Heinrich notified students, pointing at the two Gothic spires of the Church somewhere higher on the hill. Soon after starting "climbing" to the castle, the students realized that hilly Marburg is not flat Göttingen, to which everybody already got used too. However, limited time was a good pressing factor, and was keeping students from countless breaks in front of unique buildings and monuments on their way.

When you stand close to the St. Elizabeth's Church, it is even more majestic than on every of its numerous pictures. That's not surprising, when one thinks how much has the Church seen during its long history. It was built between 1235 and 1283 over the site of the grave of St. Elisabeth von Thüringen (St. Elizabeth of Hungary). Its Gothic style was influenced by French cathedrals in Reims and Amiens, but has specific details of the later developed German Gothic. St. Elizabeth was a daughter of King Andrew II of Hungary; she was brought to Thuringia at the age of 4, in order to be brought up with her future husband, the Landgrave of Thuringia Ludwig IV. She was only 21 when became a widow. She left Wartburg and settled in Marburg, where she lived in poverty, following the ideals of Franciscan monks. The Marburg Hospital was founded by Elizabeth, with a chapel devoted to St. Francis of Assisi; she was working there together with other nuns to cure poor people until her death in 1231 at the age of 24. St. Elizabeth was canonized in 1235 by a Pope Gregory IX.

St. Elizabeth's Church in Marburg was one of the most important centers of pilgrimage in the Middle Ages. Moreover, from its foundation it was under the patronage of the Teutonic Order of Knights, making Marburg one of the centers of this Order in Germany. Although due to the Philipp I Hesse was one of the first lands under the Reformation - since 1526-27, - the Teutonic Order continued to use the Church until 1809. Another function of this Church was and still is the tomb of Landgraves of Hesse, a tomb of St. Elizabeth and even the final resting place of President of Weimar Republic Paul von Hindenburg since 1945.

Even though inside of the Church time is stopped, outside in the city life is continuing. Walking fast barely as a sportsmen, crossing the old town and its cozy narrow streets, passing by the old synagogue with a lot of tourists taking photos around, smelling the Italian food in the restaurants nearby, we reached the Castle - the most remote goal of our journey. The street became much steeper, and soon we have stopped because of the picturesque view from the hill down on the city. "Marburg is like from fairly tale, - shared with me Peniel, student from

Ethiopia. - If only I could spend more time here!” Usually reserved, now he was inspiringly taking dozens of photos - “for memory”.

287 meter high on the Schlossberg the Marburg castle is situated. Inside thick stony walls one can find the whole history of Germany: the story of the Castle begins from 900, making it older than the city of Marburg itself - the latter was based “only” in 1140. In 1529 in the Sough wing of the castle famous Marburg religious discussions (“Marburger Religionsgespräche”) of the importance of the sacrament took place between Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli and Philipp Melanchton.

In that time Landgrave Philipp I made Marburg the center of the Reformation, but - as we knew from our “lecturers” - not only because of his strong Christian faith. Although he was attracted by views of Martin Luther and became Protestant in 1524, at the first place he still was a ruler, a patriarch with his political strategy and also material interests. Being a gifted strategist, he skillfully teetered between his political motifs, the needs of the reformers and his own interests. Soon after Philipp of Hesse organized a Protestant alliance in 1538, he was occupied with an idea of having two wives. In 1524 he already married Christine of Saxony, but after 1540 he committed adultery. He asked Martin Luther for a permission to marry once more, without divorcing Christine. At first, the “father of Reformation” declined the sinful desire of the Landsgrave, but Philippe I used all his influence in supporting Reformation against the Catholic alliance of the Emperor - and, of course, in any moment he could have stopped his support... Finally in 1540 he married Margarethe von der Saale, and that was one of the most famous “bigamous marriage” in German history.

- The train is in 30 minutes, - reminded Dr. Schlarb. - We need to hurry up!

Students, engrossed in the history of the middle ages and in the cool shade of stony walls, reluctantly looked at their watches and run - finally! - down the slope. Now it was easy to go, but nobody wanted to leave fabulous Marburg. On the way back, I realized that not only Peniel would try to return here - someday all of us will take a trip to Marburg.



Intercultural Theology students with PD Dr. Fritz Heinrich and Dr. Cornelia Schlarb in front of the Elizabeth church in Marburg a.d. Lahn