



„Our Churches all have the same Problems“

The Protestant Forum for Young Theology in Worclaw, 4.-8. April 2018

Daniel Lenski

Alex Clare-Young standing on the balcony of the Protestant Centre of Worclaw scratches his stubbly beard. Meanwhile, the lightblue tram drives through the main road of the Silecian city. “We are so different but still build a community. We talk and pray, we laugh and complain and we all want to grow in understanding of each other,” the 26-year-old Scot sums up his impressions of the past few days.

Clare-Young is one of the 17 participants who came from all over Europe to Worclaw to discuss the future of Protestantism in Europe for five days. Some of them are pastors, others are writing their thesis, most of them are still studying like Clare-Young who studies in Cambridge: “At my college there are only a few students of theology of my church. Therefore, it is nice to see that so many different people from all over Europe are willing to take over responsibility for their churches.”

The participants of the Protestant Forum for Young Theology which was organised by the Protestant League of Hesse and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe presented their churches. Through this, very difference challenges became obvious the European churches have to deal with. While Clare-Young reported on the situation of the church in Great Britain after the Brexit, Kevin Kirs (24) from Estonia talked about the situation of women in the Baltic country. “In the north of the country the situation is much better but even there a parish refused to accept a woman as its pastor. In comparison with the past there are more critical questions throughout the country,” observes the Masters student from Tartu. The abolition of the ordination of women in Latvia in 2016 was also perceived carefully in Estonia.

In the presentations and the working groups it became clear that despite all differences in the national situation there are many topics which connect the various churches: One topic is the progressing secularization which – related to demographical transformation processes – confronts all churches with challenges: In this context, the professor of Practical Theology at the University of Groningen, Henk de Roest, referred to the “Pioneer Movement” in the Netherlands which was influenced by the new church form “Fresh Expressions” from Great Britain.

Also the tense political situation in many European countries was an important unifying topic. The Hungarian participants pointed out that the Hungarian Reformed Church was very reserved concerning the criticism of the immigration policy of the government of Victor Orbán before the elections because they also benefit from the state support.



More than once, the young protestants of the Forum called on the Protestant churches in Europe to work together more closely and to be more visible in public. “This also has to have institutional consequences for the churches, e.g. holding a European synod,” demanded the doctoral student, Lukas David Meyer, from Munich. Clare-Young from Great Britain is rather sceptical concerning this: “Instead of even more committees there should be more social commitment for those at the margins of society.”

Ortmann regards the controverse discussion on a European synod as one example of the success of the Forum. The habilitated church historian who assisted in organising the Forum as member of the Protestant League of Hesse confirmed: “We wanted to create a kind of young think tank apart from academic conferences and correctness of church politics. This worked out.” Ortmann can imagine a continuation of the Forum in two years time escorted by the development of a Europe-wide network. “Such a network could be the first step to a development of a Protestant League at European level. This forum demonstrated that we in all churches need to think outside the box.”

The author Dr. Daniel Lenski wrote his thesis at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich. Since 2017, he works for the Institut of Confessional Studies in Bensheim focussing on Anglicanism and global ecumenism. (<http://konfessionskundliches-institut.com/das-institut/das-team/daniel-lenski/> (09.04.18))

On the website www.young-theology.eu you can find further information on and pictures of the conference. The participants described their impressions of the conference in a blog.

For further information on the organizers of the conference, the Protestant League of Hesse (www.eb-hessen.de) and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (www.leuenberg.net), visit their websites.

Pictures:

- Alex Clare-Young (Source: Daniel Lenski)
- Part of the Program of the Conference was a Trip to Krzyżowa. (Source: Daniel Lenski)
- Mart Jan Luteijn, Lukas David Meyer, Blanka Muza, Henk de Roest and Diana Pöpcke (from left to right) (Source: Daniel Lenski)