

Article 7

In Germany

Fr. Jim McDougal and I arrived in Germany after an uneventful flight. Our entrance into Germany was equally uneventful with passport control, luggage and even the pickup of the car – a Leon – all uneventful. What did become eventful was the discovery that the car was a manual transmission! As best as I can figure, it has been over 25 years since I drove a stick shift. Fortunately my recall has not been too terribly bad.

We made our way to Bingen am Rheine which was probably about 45 miles from Frankfurt. It was a beautiful little town on the Rheine, right at a bend in the river and below was small rapids. The hillsides across the river were filled with vineyards that grew down the slopes to the river. It was very picturesque. The Museum of Hildegard von Bingen was open which was unusual. Normally it is closed on a Monday but because it was a national holiday celebrating the reunion of two Germanies, it was open. It told the story of this tough 12th century nun and mystic who was also a herbalist and a composer of sacred song.

Blessed Hildegard of Bingen (in German: *Hildegard von Bingen*) (1098 – 17 September 1179) is also known as Saint Hildegard, and **Sibyl of the Rhine**. She was a writer of three books which detailed her visions, a composer of hymns, a philosopher, a Christian mystic, a German Benedictine abbess and a visionary. She was elected a *magistra* (leader) and later prioress and abbess by her fellow nuns. She founded the monasteries of Rupertsberg in 1150 and Eibingen in 1165. One of her works as a composer, the *Ordo Virtutum*, is an early example of liturgical drama. She wrote theological, botanical and medicinal texts, as well as letters, liturgical songs, poems, and arguably the oldest surviving morality play, while supervising brilliant miniature illuminations.

Hildegard was one of the first persons for whom the canonization process was officially applied, but the process took so long that four attempts at canonization were not completed, and she remained at the level of her beatification. Hildegard's name was nonetheless added to a list of Roman saints at the end of the sixteenth century.

Her feast day is 17 September. Numerous popes have referred to Hildegard as a saint, including Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. Hildegard's Parish and Pilgrimage Church house the relics of Hildegard, including an altar encasing her remains, in Eibingen near Rudesheim.

Hildegard of Bingen also appears in the calendar of saints in various Anglican churches. In the Church of England she is commemorated on 17 September. In space, she is commemorated by the asteroid 898 Hildegard.

After lunch in Bingen at a small bar on the river street, we set out for Oberwiesel which is another town along the river. Along the way, the Garmin began to work, but with no address and being unfamiliar with its workings, it proved to be little help getting to the top of the steep hill on which sat Schoenburg Castle Hotel where we were to spend the night. After two failed but scenic efforts to find the road to the castle, we made our way up there, arriving about three.



Schoenburg Castle Hotel

After checking into the hotel, we were shown our rooms. Mine was small, Jim's was smaller yet. The 30 euro difference came because mine had a "Rheine view" and was a bit bigger. The unfortunate thing about my room was that the bathroom had a very low door – about a foot shorter than most doors, so I ended up hitting my head on the door jamb at least 3 times before leaving there. Despite being so high up all through the night I could hear the trains which ran along the river below. While they were not loud, it did explain why there were cotton balls and ear plugs provided in the bathroom.

The cost of a night at the castle was a little high, but now I can say, I slept in a 1,000 year old castle. There were no ghosts...the only thing that went "bump" in the night was my head on the door jamb of the bathroom.

We left Castle Schoenburg and made our way to Köln (Cologne). We parked right down town almost under the Dom – the Cathedral. It was very impressive, having been built from 1148 until 1880. It is one of the largest churches in the world and certainly one of the largest in the old world. The ceiling soars to 140 feet above the floor with windows at every level, leaving almost no wall without glass. As a result the interior is flooded with light.

According to the guide books, the sanctuary and transepts were built in the middle ages with the work coming to a halt during the reformation and 30 Years War. The sanctuary is enclosed to contain the altar and the choir area where the cannons of the Dom prayed the Liturgy of the Hours 7 times a day. Around it are several chapels where the archbishops of Koln are entombed. There is also a lovely Lady Chapel to the right of the sanctuary with huge triptych and an ancient statue of Mary. The floors surrounding the sanctuary are covered with very impressive mosaics.

The nave was not completed until the middle of the 19th century with over 700 workers laboring over 30 years to complete it. From what the guidebook said, the work was completed as a part of the nationalism that was very active in the middle of that century. Although Koln was heavily bombed by the allies in retaliation for the London Blitz, the Dom was not greatly damaged. Much of the stain glass was removed and stored to preserve it. Today the windows are filled with enough stain glass to fill 3 football fields: some is Medieval, some is 19th century and some is 20th-21st century (some was installed in 2004!)



The building itself is spectacular. It is filled with art from many centuries. The old high altar is back behind the choir while the new altar is in the middle of the transept on a platform with a new ambo and bishop's throne which are quite modern.

After leaving Koln, we made our way to Aachen. Like in Koln, we really had only one destination in Aachen, the Dom. The cathedral of Aachen was originally built by Charlemagne as the chapel for his palace. Essentially it is a Byzantine church, a large octagon with three levels of balconies that look down on an altar and choir located in a transept. All the ceilings are covered with beautiful Byzantine mosaics. Above the nave, there is a large depiction of Jesus the Pancrator and the apostles, all set in a field of gold. Suspended from the ceiling to about 15 feet above where the assembly sits is a huge chandelier that was given by Frederic Barbarosa in the 12th century. The ceiling in the walkway surrounding the nave is decorated with mosaics with stylized flowers in rich colors trimmed in gold. The altar and ambo are located in the choir area along with two large gold caskets. The one closest to the altar is said to contain the robe of Mary and the swaddling clothes of the Baby Jesus; the second large golden casket contains the remains of Charlemagne.



There is another chapel (baroque) for the Blessed Sacrament to the right of the main entrance and a third, Mary chapel, to the left of the main chapel. The Nicholas chapel lay beyond that. In this third chapel there is a tomb in the floor which the guide book did not explain. The window and some of the other décor was very modern in this small Romanesque chapel. The Mary chapel is very medieval but it appears that this is the place used for weekday Liturgy. There is a beautiful and very old statue of the Madonna and child that graces the chapel. She is a very northern and German lady. The Dom treasury is housed in a part of the complex that appears to once have been the bishop's palace or the residence of the cathedral canons. In any case, the church is over 1200 years old and has a huge treasury of wonderful artifacts, paintings and statues that have been given over all these years. From the time of Charlemagne's son until the 18th century, it was the place where the location for the coronation of the Holy Roman Emperor, so it was richly endowed by them. Perhaps the most outstanding treasures are a large golden reliquary shaped like a hand raised in blessing which contains the arm bone of Charlemagne and a large bust of him in gold and silver that contains his skull. This second reliquary was taken out to meet the new emperor when he arrived for his coronation and it led him to the Dom.

The one thing we did not see was the throne of Charlemagne which is housed in the balcony of the Lady Chapel. From the pictures, it is a simple marble chair. But for over a thousand years, it was the throne used in the coronation of the Holy Roman Emperors.

From Aachen, we made our way down to Trier traveling through parts of France along the way. Curiously, there was no indication that we had entered France except for suddenly there were lights along the road way and the signs switched from German to French. When we re-entered Germany there was a small sign welcoming us to Deutschland.

We spent Wednesday walking around Trier. In the days of Augustus it was raised to the rank of an imperial city and soon became a provincial capital. It was during the reign of Augustus that the first bridge was built over the Rheine. It became a walled city in that same century with four main gates; the last remaining is the Porta Nigra. It was preserved because it was turned into a church with a monastery attached.



Porta Nigra

From the Porta Nigra we made our way down to Marketplatz which is still a market today. It is surrounded by stores and restaurants. The timbered houses are the old Jewish quarter. In the center of the platz stands the old city hall which was built by the city whose burgers chaffed under the rule of the Prince Archbishop of Tier, one of the seven electors of the Holy Roman Emperor.



The burgers built the Rathaus, the city hall as an assembly hall because the archbishop refused to let them have any independence from his control. The building sits across the platz from the building that was once the medieval archbishop's palace.



Nearby is the church of St. Gangolph, which was the parish church of the town. At one point the citizens built a high bell tower, higher than the Dom's, with the words "Wait and Watch". The Archbishop would add another bell tower to the Dom with the words "For you do not know the hour your Lord will come".



St. Gangolph

Obviously there was enough friction between the town and the archbishop that the archbishop created a wall around his cathedral complex within the walls of the city.

The Dom was once the largest church in the north. It was built by Constantine who lived in Trier for many years. Originally, it was a part of Helena's palace but it was incorporated into a new church which was four times its present size and almost twice as high. Its special relic is the robe of Christ, given by Helena to the church. It is housed in a special baroque chapel at the back of the Dom. The walls and ceilings were once covered with frescos, but what now remains are the bare brick walls. Funeral altars and baroque memorials of dead elector archbishops line the sides of the Dom. Only a small part of the original Constantian cathedral remain, with parts added in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and in the 18th century. All of which are visible in this picture:



Next to the Dom is the Liebfrauenkirche, the Lady's Church. While the Dom is the oldest church in the north, the Liebfrauenkirche is the oldest Gothic church. It has just been reopened after extensive repair and renovation. It suffered more damage in the war and all of its stain glass has been replaced.

Not far from the Dom, is the ancient throne room of Constantine. It stands about 100 ft wide and 250 ft long with a ceiling about 100 ft above the floor. It was once incorporated into the archbishop's palace, which Napoleon gave to the city. In the 19th century it was renovated by Kaiser Frederick Wilhelm to become Christ the Redeemer Lutheran Church. In WWII it was extensively damaged and restored to its present, very simple style without any of the plaster work that was once a part of the old structure.



In front of the Dom was an enclosed robotic arm that is a project of some of the youth of Trier. It is copying the complete Bible in simple calligraphy, as the monks would have done it. The robot works 24 hours a day and it will take from May 6, 2011 until March 31, 2012 to complete the project.

This church still sits next to the garden wing of the archbishop's 18th century palace which included what had been the throne room of the Constantine. There is not much remaining of that palace which was taken over by Napoleon and later given to the city. Since the later archbishops were no longer princes, these buildings were lost to them and have become government buildings.

Beyond the palace gardens there is the unfinished bath of Constantine. If it had been finished before he left for Constantinople, it would have been the largest. Its ruins and the ruins of an amphitheater holding 16,000 people are the last of the Roman ruins in Trier.

On Thursday, we drove over to Luxemburg, which, as far as Europe is concerned, is fairly new. The city was founded by Siegfried in 938 and remained small until well into the second millennium. It really was not until the rise of the nation states that it played any significant role in history. Originally part of the Holy Roman Empire, one of its counts was elected emperor and he raised its status to a duchy. It was controlled by the Spanish, the French, the Austrians and the Dutch until it finally became autonomous. Today it is part of the EU and is a constitutional monarchy with a prince as grand duke.

The old city was very charming. It is filled with winding cobblestone streets that are lined with many 19th and 20th century buildings. St. Michael is the oldest church, dating back to the 12th century. The cathedral is 18th century. Interestingly it was not an independent diocese until the 1880's and it was only raised to the state of an archdiocese in 1988.

The ducal palace was once partly the medieval city hall, with renaissance and baroque additions. It was all redone in a renaissance style in the late 19th century. The house of parliament is connected directly to the palace, neither of which appears to be very large by the standards of most greater nations.

An intriguing part of the city is that there is a deep and wide valley that divides it; the Mosel River which runs through Trier flows through Luxemburg as well. The valley floor is called the Grund. It too is filled with charming buildings, winding cobblestone streets and parks. According to the guide books, until the early 19th century the city was heavily fortified and had over 180 miles of defensive tunnels connecting all the fortifications that surrounded the city, creating a city under the city.

One thing that really struck me about Luxemburg City was the greater diversity. German and French are very common with signs and other notifications in both languages. They also use a larger amount of English. The other thing is that there was a greater diversity of people as well. While Trier was obviously a German city even situated as close as it is to Luxemburg and France, Luxemburg had other minorities as well including African and Orientals.

In the older part of the city one of the main boulevards is named after FDR and in the new part of the city, there is another named after JFK. As we were leaving the city and making our way back to Trier we drove the JFK through the new part of the city which appears to have been built in the later 20th century. Banking and commerce seems to dominate Luxemburg and it appeared that the newer areas seem to double the size of the city.

Our day in Luxemburg was diminished by the rain that started about noon and continued through the afternoon. Of course both Jim's travel umbrella and my rain poncho were in the car, parked 4 stories down below the upper city. Shortly before the rain started, I bought a large umbrella marked Luxemburg, which made it possible for us to continue our sightseeing and keep our heads dry...at least mine. It will be the souvenir I will bring back from Luxemburg.