



RECOVERING HERSTORY – III

THE 2011 HERITAGE TOUR ENDED THIS WEEKEND AFTER A VISIT TO WORMS, FAMOUS FOR LUTHER'S TRIAL, AND A DELIGHTFUL DRIVE ALONG THE RHINE WHERE WE ENCOUNTERED YET ANOTHER OUTSTANDING WOMAN WHO COUNSELLED AND REPRIMANDED POPES AND EMPERORS—THE FORMIDABLE FIGURE OF HILDEGARD OF BINGEN.

This gifted and prodigious abbess was the last of a number of significant women in church history we met on this year's tour.

• Last weekend in Herrnhut we visited the grave of **ANNA NITSCHMANN** (1715-1760) in *Gottes Akker*, the Herrnhut cemetery. She was the second wife of Count Nicolas von Zinzendorf, the leader of the Moravian movement, after the death of Dorothea with whom he was married for 34 years, and who bore him 12 children.

Anna's marriage to the count for the last three years of his (and her) life was rather startling for several reasons: she was 15 years his junior; she was a commoner and Dorothea had only died a year earlier. But Anna was a remarkable young woman when she first joined the Herrnhut community. Only 12 years old when the community had experienced a spiritual renewal in 1727, she was at the forefront of organising worship and ministry among the young women of Herrnhut. At age 15 she was chosen by lot as elder. When Zinzendorf strongly advised her to refuse the appointment, she respectfully reminded the nobleman that she was accepting the appointment as from the Lord. Three years later she was to become head elder of the community for a season. She engaged in pioneer mission work in America, and wrote more than 30 published hymns.

• Passing on through Prague, Dachau, Augsburg and St Gallen, we arrived in Zurich, a city in which women played a founding role. Two of the city's three patron saints were Egyptian women, **REGULA** and her servant **EXUPERANTIA**. The third was Regula's brother Felix. These three believers, stationed in Helvetia with the Theban legion of the Roman army, were beheaded on the site of the future Zurich for refusing to worship Roman gods. Legend has it that Charlemagne built the Grossmünster on the site of their burial. Charlemagne's grandson appointed his daughter as abbess of the Fraumünster Abbey on the opposite bank.

Succeeding abbesses virtually ruled the growing city as it attracted streams of pilgrims to the site of the saints' martyrdom. Later, in 1298, women dressed up in soldiers' armour and, equipped with spears and shields, frightened off an attack from an Austrian/Hapsburg army. (See mural)



• Via Bern, Thun, Spiez and Gstaad, we arrived at Lac Lemman (Lake Geneva), and drove up the spectacular winding road from Montreaux to Caux, to discover Mountain House and the story of **IRÈNE LAURE**. An embittered former socialist member of the French resistance, she had visited this Centre for the Reconciliation of the Nations soon after the end of WW2. But angered by the presence of Germans, she stormed off to her room to pack and leave. Evangelist Frank Buchman, leader of the centre, challenged her to think what sort of Europe could be built without the Germans. She stayed and began to hear stories from

Germans who also had suffered greatly under the Nazis. Realising that forgiveness and reconciliation was the only way forward, she publically asked forgiveness for her hatred from all the Germans present. They then invited her to speak at rallies and political meetings all across West Germany, thus helping to create a climate of reconciliation which enabled the foundations of European unity to be laid.

Appropriately, Mountain House was sponsoring a *PeaceWomen* exhibition stressing the role of women across the world today in transforming conflict parties into conflict partners.

• After Geneva, Bern, Basel and Strasbourg, we headed back to Holland via the Rhine. Bingen is nestled opposite high sloping vineyards, dominated by the restored Benedictine monastery founded by **HILDEGARD** (1098-1179) in the 12th century. Poet, writer, composer, theologian, dramatist, botanist, mystic, preacher and pioneer of herbal medicine, Hildegard conducted preaching tours from Cologne to Stuttgart.

She engaged in vigorous correspondence with popes, emperors and other spiritual leaders across Europe and was sought after for advice by people of all rank and none.

Next to a fascinating museum featuring her life and work, a hedged '*Hildegarten*' introduced to us the many plants and vegetables which Hildegard had identified as having healing properties.

We concluded our 5000 km pilgrimage keenly aware of an all-too-forgotten heritage of Christian women and men who have shaped our continent.

Till next week,

Jeff Fountain