A JOURNAL OF ORTHODOX FAITH AND CULTURE

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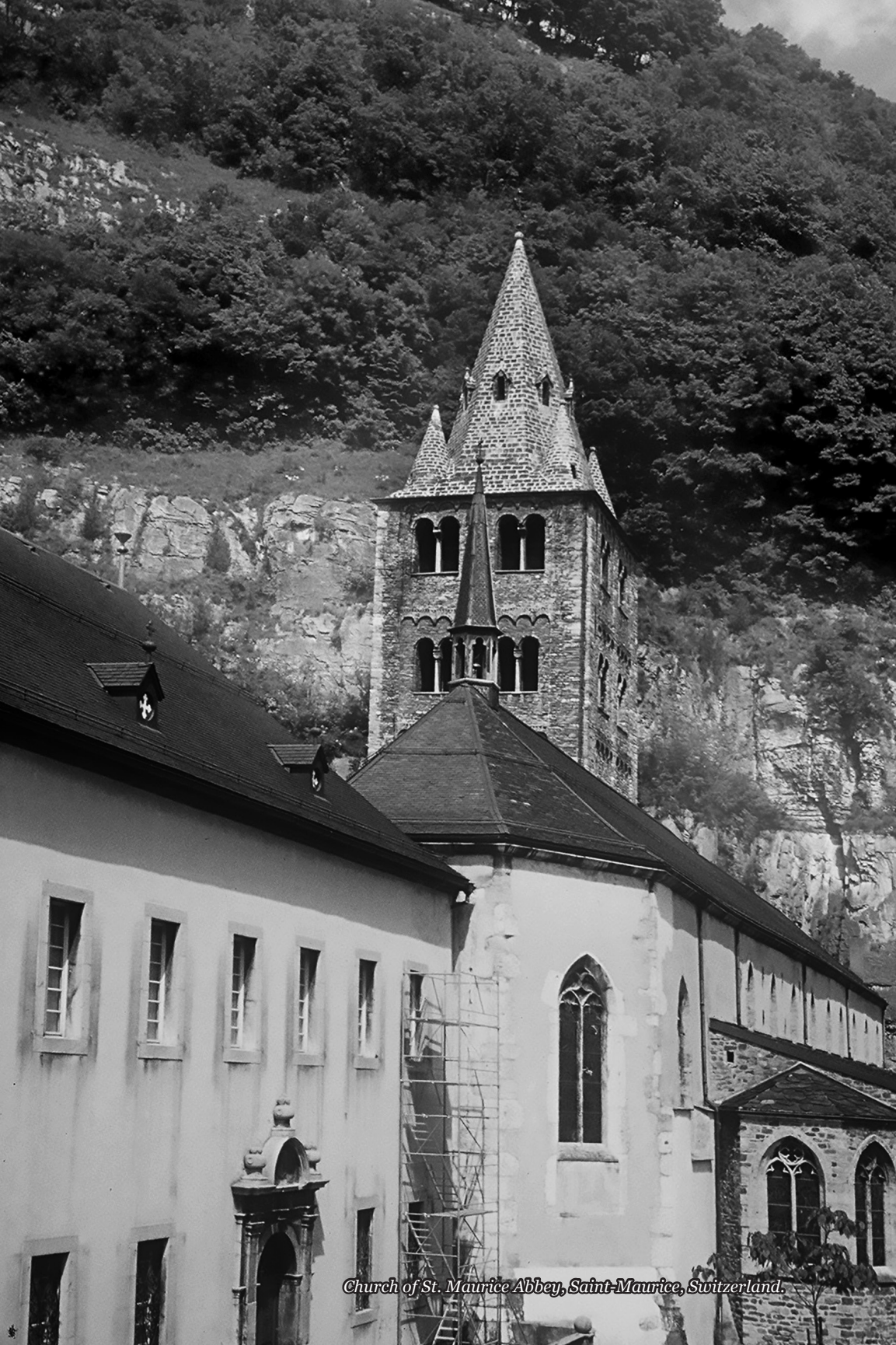
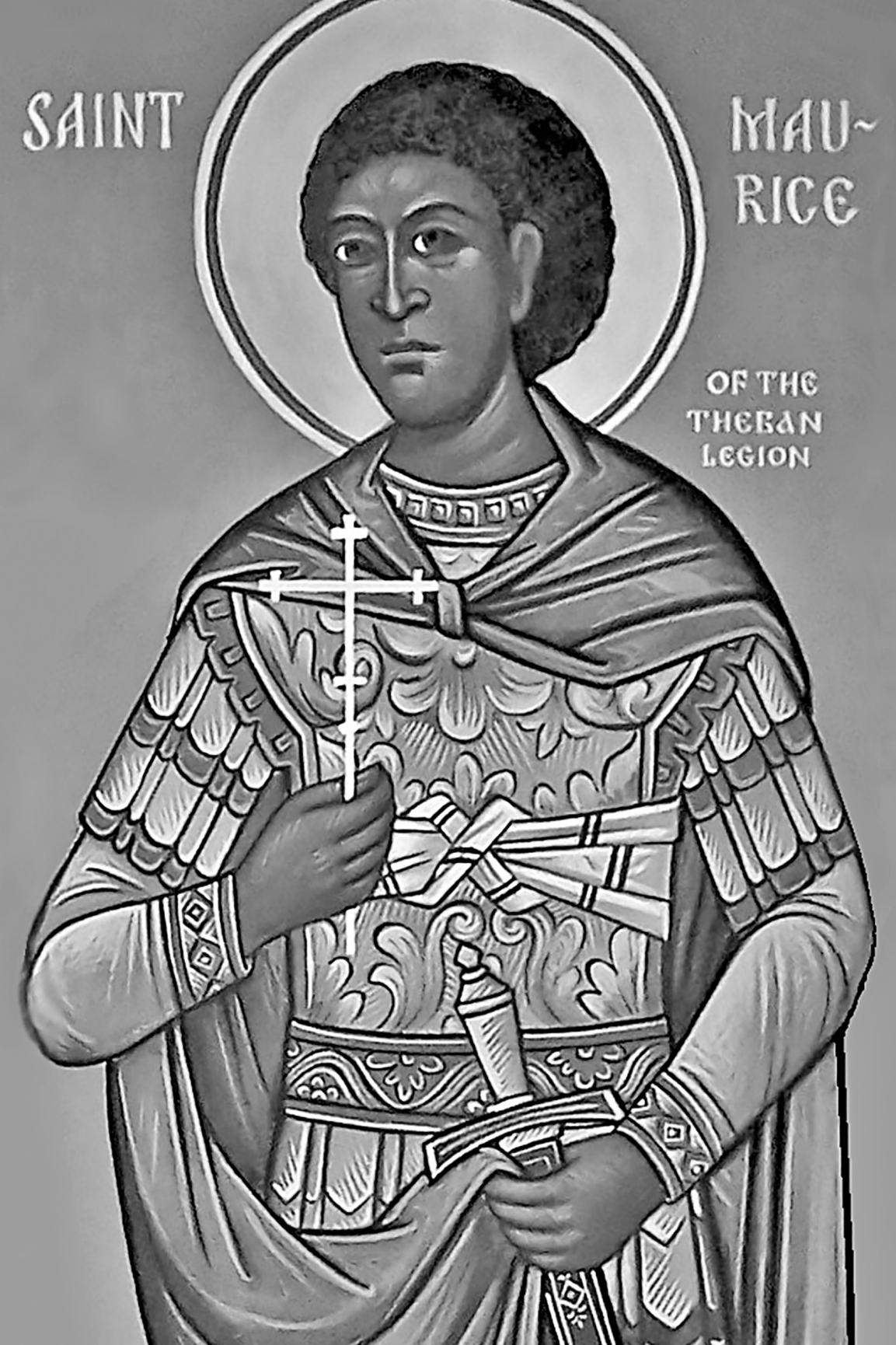


Church of St. Maurice Abbey, Saint-Maurice, Switzerland.

II
MARTYRS OF THE SWISS ALPS


SAINT
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SAINT MAURICE AND THE THEBAN LEGION

By Popadia Margaret Bauman

Saint Maurice and those with him (Sts. Candidus, Exuperius, Felix and Regula, Urs and Victor, and an unknown number of others) were North African legionaries of the Roman army who died for their faith in the mountains of Switzerland. Counted among the great martyrs of the early Church, they are revered by Christians of the Orthodox Church, as well as by Roman Catholics and Copts.

At the time of their martyrdom (around the year 300) people traveled extensively throughout the Roman Empire: merchants brought their wares to far-off regions, and both Roman soldiers and civil servants often served far from their native lands. Thus, for Europeans of the time, the idea of a group of North African martyrs in Switzerland was not as startling as it is to us today.

According to tradition, the Theban Legion was recruited in the Upper Egyptian city of Thebes, about 500 miles south of the Mediterranean, during a period of intermittent persecution of Christians under Roman Emperors Diocletian and Maximian. Blaming those who had abandoned the old Roman gods for the empire's mounting misfortunes, the Romans often punished the refusal to offer sacrifice by execution.

While there are two early accounts of the *passio* or martyrdom of St. Maurice and the Christian members of the Theban Legion, scholars speculate that both originate from an older written or oral tradition. The more detailed account is by St. Eucherius of Lyon, who in the mid-fifth century recorded the events of the martyrdom.

Opposite: St. Maurice, fresco from St. Innocent Orthodox Church, Redford, Michigan.

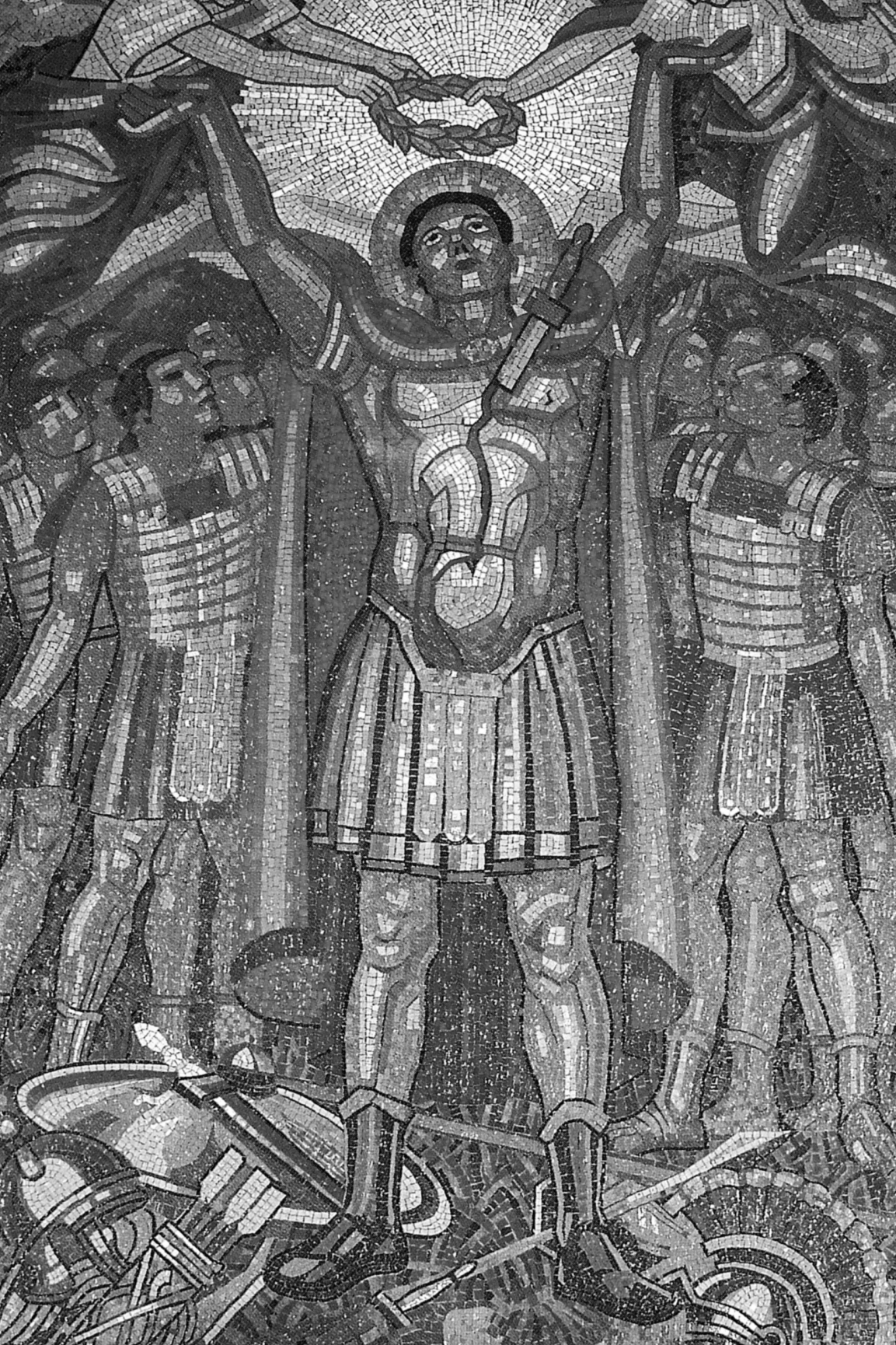
From Egypt, the Theban Legion was sent to Italy, and then crossed the Alps through today's Great St. Bernard Pass, arriving in southern Switzerland on their way to curb an uprising of Burgundian Vandals who were causing unrest along the Roman frontier. Once through the pass, the legion camped at Agaunum, a Roman post (now the town of Saint-Maurice) along the Rhône River, where they were asked to sacrifice to the Roman gods in preparation for their campaign. Other versions state that they were asked to persecute Christians in Gaul, or that they had already successfully defended the border and were camped in Agaunum for the winter. The traditional story records that Emperor Maximian, encamped nearby, ordered a celebration that included sacrifice to the Roman gods. The legion's Christians refused to sacrifice, and Emperor Maximian ordered that every tenth man be killed. They drew lots and those chosen were decapitated. Their Christian officers, Sts. Maurice, Candidus, and Exuperius, encouraged those who remained to stay strong, but when the emperor found out that they still refused, he repeated the execution of every tenth man. St. Maurice then wrote a letter which appears in Eucherius' account:

> "Emperor, we are your soldiers, but first and foremost we are servants of God. We offer to you our virtue in battle, to Him our innocent life. You pay for our efforts, He granted life to all the world. Even an imperial order does not authorize us to deny our God and Creator, our God who is also your God and Creator, whether you admit it or not. We use our weapons for our compatriots, not against them. We fight on account of our faithfulness to you, but how can we be faithful to you if we fail to offer our faithfulness to God? We first swore allegiance to God, and only afterwards to our general. You could not trust our second oath if we broke the first…"

The incensed emperor then ordered that all remaining Christians in the legion be put to death. Though a small number escaped, the majority were killed, and the martyred legionaries are commemorated by the Church on September 22/October 5.

A full Roman legion contained 6600 men, the number that Eucherius claimed was martyred. However, a portion of a legion was referred to by the

Opposite: Detail of statue of St. Maurice, ca. 1250, Cathedral of St. Maurice and St. Catherine, Magdeburg, Germany.



same name, and there are indications that parts of the larger legion were stationed throughout Italy, in Switzerland, and in Germany. Thus, another source relates that 520 soldiers were martyred in Agaunum/Saint-Maurice. Archeologists have only found six graves. In such early Latin texts, a line over a number multiplied it by a thousand, and it is thought that perhaps an accidental misreading of six became six thousand.

The martyrdom was not the end of the story. Local Christians knew where the martyrs were buried, and came to the place to pray secretly during persecution and publicly once the Edict of Toleration was implemented by Galerius in 311. Sometime after the edict was ratified by St. Constantine the Great and his co-ruler Licinius in 313, hermits moved into the area, which was already regarded as a holy site with, perhaps, a small church built there.

In the fourth century, Bishop Theodore of Octodurus uncovered the relics of the martyrs and moved them about a mile from the martyrdom to a site under a cliff where he built a church and baptistery in what is now the town of Saint-Maurice. This was a period in which the Christian West was greatly influenced by the fathers of the Egyptian desert, and the site Bishop Theodore chose recalled their isolation. In 515, the Burgundian King Sigismund founded a monastery in Agaunum/Saint-Maurice and enlarged the church. Historians believe that there was probably a monastic brotherhood there already, or at least local hermits who formed a community, and the first prayers and services glorifying the martyrs were probably written around this time. Early pilgrims to the grave of St. Maurice included Abbot Romanus of the Jura Fathers, St. Martin of Tours, and St. Athanasius of Egypt.

After the traditional account of the martyrdoms was recorded in the *Passio*, the relics became a major pilgrimage destination. Many were converted, healed of illness, or freed of demonic possession by praying at the graves, and liturgical hymns for the martyrs spread to churches throughout the region, contributing to the conversion of the local population to Christianity.

Eventually, the veneration of St. Maurice and the Theban Legion spread from the place of their martyrdom to Gaul, especially Burgundy, and then throughout Switzerland and Germany, and finally to Italy, where St. Ambrose of Milan promoted the veneration of other Theban Legionaries martyred in Italy. Churches and monasteries in other towns and regions soon enshrined portions of the relics, dedicating new temples and monastic sites to the martyrs.

Opposite: Mosaic altarpiece: Martyrdom of St. Maurice, St. Maurice Abbey.

In the ninth century, Charlemagne drew attention to St. Maurice by describing him as "the ideal knight," and relics of St. Maurice and his martyred soldiers were transferred to Magdeburg (eastern Germany) in 961. Within a few years, the Holy Roman Empire took him as patron of both empire and army. Until the mid-13th century St. Maurice was portrayed as a Caucasian soldier in Roman army dress. The first statue portraying him with African features was carved in the 13th century, and now stands in the Cathedral of St. Katherine and St. Maurice in Magdeburg, Germany. Around the same time, at least two other saints were portrayed as black: St. Gregory the Moor in Cologne, and one of the three kings or magi, whose relics are also ascribed to Cologne.

A Contemporary Pilgrimage to Saint-Maurice

The town of Agaunum (Saint-Maurice), which grew up around the monastery, is small and quite out of the way, though accessible by trains and good roads. Located in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, I was blessed to visit the site with my French-speaking cousin and her husband. Having driven through breathtaking Swiss scenery that included foothills of the Alps and the shore of Lake Geneva, we were welcomed into town by a rainbow overhead, and from our second-story balcony that evening we could see the Church of St. Maurice as a dark bulk rising out of the mist.

The monastery has been in existence from the fourth or fifth century, and the monks still pray the traditional *Laus Perennis*, around-the-clock psalter readings. The monks and clergy minister to people of the area and have a large parochial school for Catholic youth.

Tours of the monastery church and its treasures are available (although a tour in another language than French should be arranged in advance). We arrived for our tour just as an unannounced busload of French schoolchildren pulled up. Our monk-guide dealt with their presence by whisking us off to the treasury room, which opens like a large bank vault, where he locked us in while he spoke with the school children. Here, glass-fronted cabinets contain centuries-old gifts given to the church in honor of the Theban Martyrs, including a reliquary with small fragments from Christ's crown of thorns donated by Charlemagne. On a large central table are three reliquary caskets that are carried in procession on their feastday, containing relics of St. Maurice and his companions.

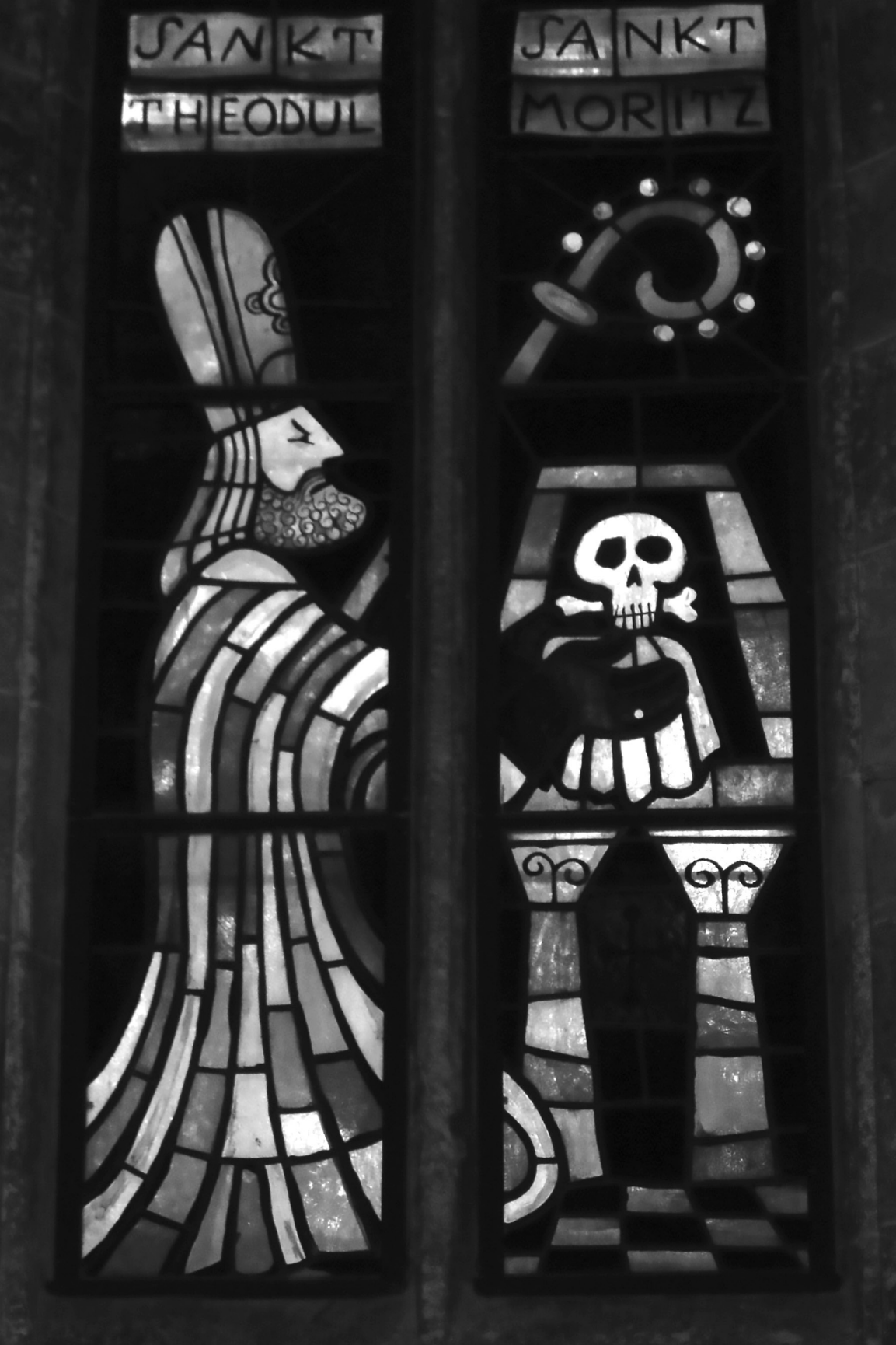
When the schoolchildren departed, we received our promised tour. The doors of the church have modern relief-work depicting the martyrdom of the Theban Legion, alongside more recent figures such as WWII German resistance workers, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and the Russian New Martyrs.

Inside the church are stunning modern stained-glass windows that tell the story of the Theban Legion, beginning with their departure from Thebes and ending with the reliquary procession held every year on the martyrs' feast. In front of the sanctuary is a large, magnificent mosaic of St. Maurice, portraying his martyrdom and reception into heaven. (Photo of mosaic, pg. 28.)

Finally, the monk opened up the gift shop, where we found booklets in English and German, and it was only when I read them later that I learned that about a mile outside of town is a small chapel where tradition says the martyrdom took place. A fresco of the martyrdom adorns the chapel walls, and a huge flat stone suspended by ironwork is believed to be the one on which they were executed. Those seeking a blessing or healing may walk or sit under it. The second floor of the chapel once contained living quarters for custodian-hermits, and in earlier centuries there were rooms off the chapel where pilgrims seeking healing could stay during their visit.

The veneration of St. Maurice and the Theban Legion is growing in the United States. On my return, I gave a slide show of my pilgrimage to St. Maurice at the annual Ancient Christianity and African-American Conference, attended mostly by Orthodox Christians who seek racial reconciliation and heavenly intercessors to guide them; a number of people were already familiar with him. (See www.mosestheblack.org). Also, several icons of St. Maurice have recently been painted in the United States and Canada, including the one shown here from St. Innocent of Irkutsk Church in Detroit, Michigan. (Photo of St. Maurice icon, pg. 24.)

In his *Vita Patrum*, St. Gregory of Tours says, "The purpose of the lives of the saints is not to give abstract knowledge but… to edify spiritually and to inspire to imitation." The saints of the Theban Legion continue to fulfill this role by inspiring new peoples of many lands and showing all of us an example of ultimate Christian witness. ✢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THE SWISS LEGACY OF THE THEBAN MARTYRS

by Cornelia Delkeskamp-Hayes

Agaunum and the Theban Legion

On a lovely drive south along Lake Geneva, we find ourselves between the Dents du Midi and the Bernese Alps with their snow-clad summits. The road itself follows the Rhône River, which, confusingly at this point, flows north for a cool bath in Lake Geneva, then arcs around south towards the Mediterranean.

Agaunum (Saint-Maurice) is situated in the Valais Canton, between Geneva and the Simplon Pass into Italy, where we arrive at the Abbey of St. Maurice, tucked at the bottom of a high cliff. The little town consists of a built-over stream (with a highway roaring along in the background) and one lively street whose little restaurants are populated by local families. The La Dent du Midi Hotel in the center offers a quiet lunch on its shady terrace.

The church is not terribly old: after a rockfall destroyed an earlier Baroque church, the present building was erected on a north-south axis. We'd booked a tour of the monastery church, but our guide, lacking knowledge about the saints and sympathy for Christianity in general, reels off unedifying years and meters. Next time we will insist on a tour by the abbot (available on advance booking, probably in French).

The famous baptistery from the fourth or fifth century is so small that full immersion must have been impossible even at that early date, and I wonder if they had already settled for sprinkling. While looking over the church I fail to spot the chapel dedicated to St. Sebastian, where a shrine on a Baroque altar contains relics of the Theban martyrs.

Opposite: St. Theodul elevating Theban relics, Saint-Maurice.

The excavations of the early church erected over a pagan temple to a nymph are closed, nor can the catacombs be visited, although from a high grid floor, we can look down onto 44 graves, accompanied by the sound of 6000 liters of water per minute rushing by underneath. When the train tunnel was built through the mountain, a Roman water pipe was cut, and this is a problem for the abbey's treasure room which now suffers from humidity.

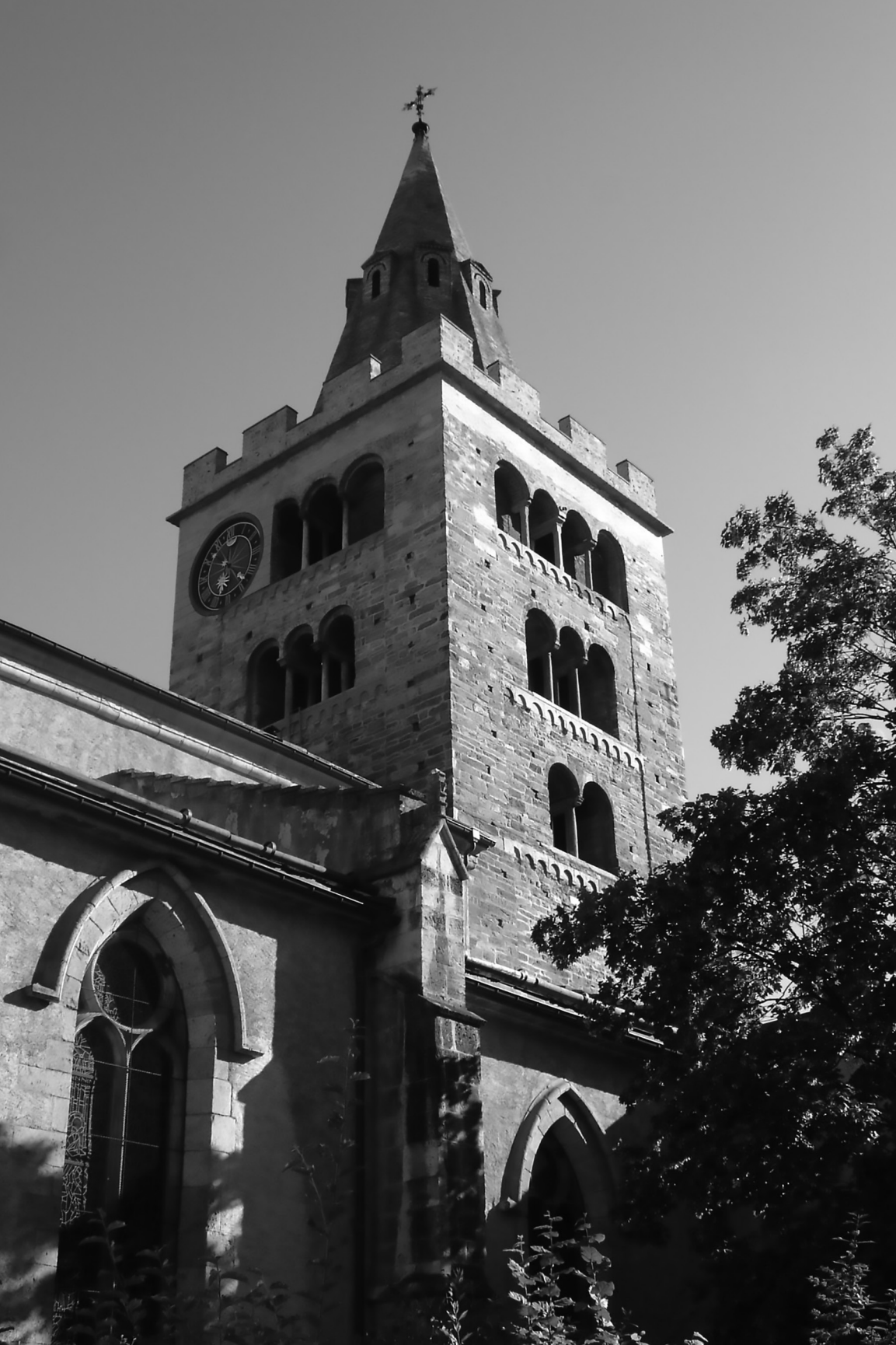
In the Church Treasury

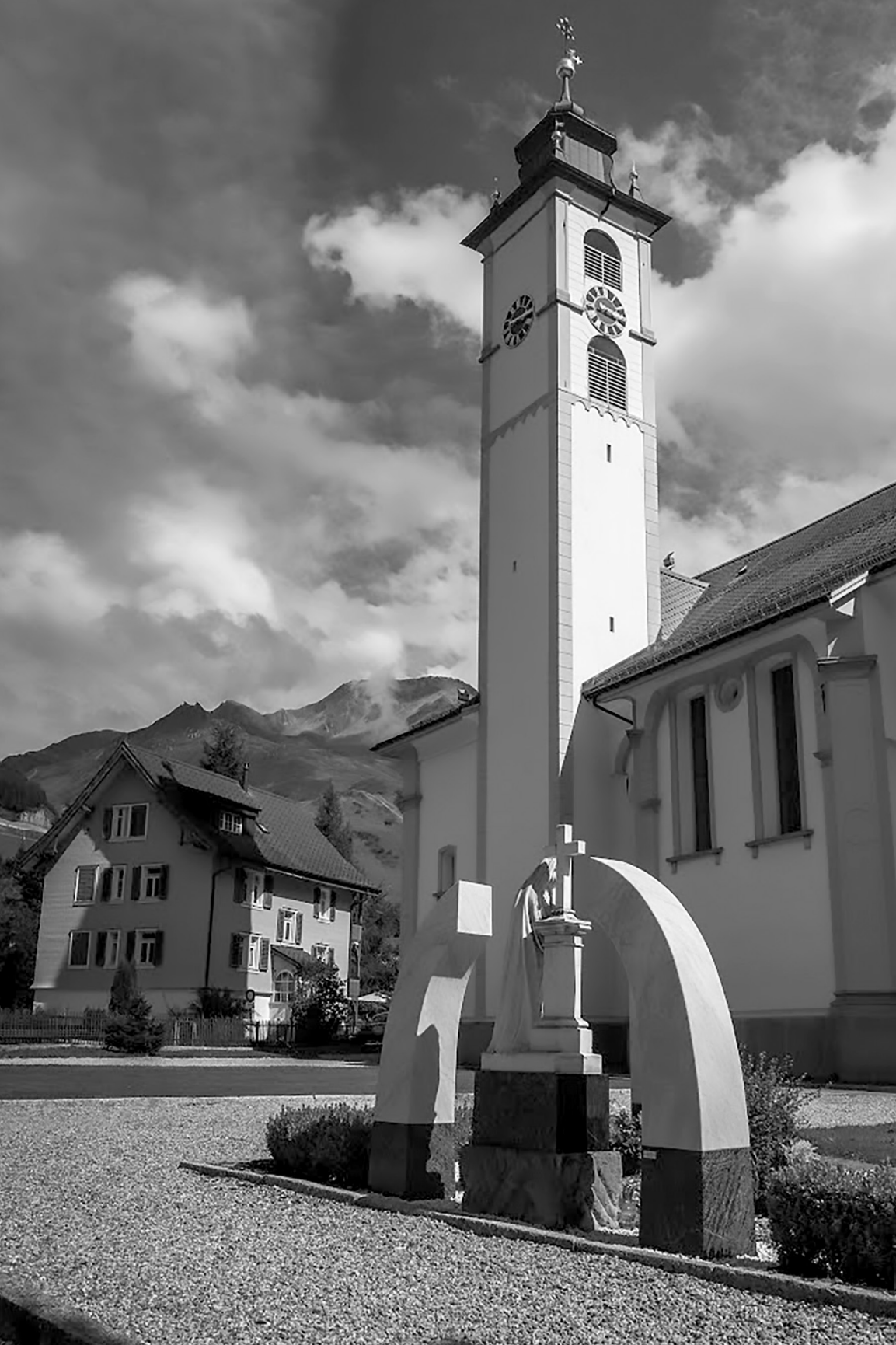
The Abbey of St. Maurice contains Switzerland's most precious collection of church treasure, along with a reliquary shrine for St. Mauritius and busts of Sts. Candidus and Victor. The nice watchwoman alerts me to the martyrs' relic chapel which is hardly noticeable to the casual visitor who focuses on the glittering exhibition. This, finally, is where pilgrims can hold their own services, a quiet place I hadn't found in the busy church. For a short time, I have that special place to myself.

Unfortunately, we miss the lovely St. Sigismund Chapel and his reliquary right next door. This king of Burgundy had converted from the Arian heresy in 500, with all of his people following suit, and he seems to have rebuilt the monastery here as a penance for having killed his first-born son at the instigation of a second wife. He himself and three later sons were eventually drowned by a Frankish Arian king in Orleans, and the monks of St. Maurice enshrined their relics three years later, venerating them as missionaries and martyrs.

From Agaunum we had planned to visit the Theban Legion's place of martyrdom at nearby Vérolliez with its very early chapels, but spectators of the *Tour de France* bicycle race had taken hold of the street in that direction, so we escape onto the highway. Way up on the mountain above the Abbey of St. Maurice, we can see the ruins of a hermitage that was inhabited by Saint Amatus of Grenoble, who became a monk here in 581, and later the bishop of Sitten.

Opposite: St. Maurice Church tower.





Andermatt and Zürich: Sts. Felix, Regula, and Exuperantius

We spend the night in Andermatt in a room right under the roof, very close to the church tower which, unlike the western cantons, keeps up its centuries-old service of marking time every quarter hour. I feel like I am back in my childhood village, where such bells used to keep me awake. The 12th-century church of St. Columbanus is closed for restoration, although relics of the Zürich patron saints, Felix and Regula, and possibly their servant Exuperantius, were moved here to Andermatt to protect them from the ravages of the Reformation. The relics are kept in the sacristy.

A decade ago, Margaret Bauman wrote about her pilgrimage to Zürich to venerate Felix and Regula:

> According to an eighth-century source, Felix and Regula were siblings, and members of the Theban Legion under St. Maurice stationed in Agaunum. When the legion was to be executed in 286, they fled, reaching Zürich before they were caught, tried and executed. After being beheaded, they miraculously got to their feet, picked up their own heads, and praying, walked forty paces uphill before laying down to die. They were buried where they lay, on the hilltop which would become the site of the 12th century *Grossmünster* (Great Minster), built over a Roman burial ground.
>
> Here I was especially shocked at the ravages of the Reformation. I learned that the Reformer Zwingli had gotten rid of the chalices, monstrances, and statues; thrown out the relics of the saints; painted over all of the beautiful frescoes; and torn down the altar tables in this and six other churches to build himself a pulpit from which to preach! The Swiss are now conscious of their losses, at least in the realm of art history, and are trying to uncover the frescoes in the churches and display the remaining church objects in museums.
>
> In 1950 a Catholic church was founded in Zürich in the names of the martyrs, and relics were brought to it from the small town of Ander-

Opposite: Andermatt Church of Sts. Peter and Paul.

matt. These relics had been rescued at the time of Zwingli, when the relics of Zürich's saints were thrown together into a "bone house" (ossuary). However, those of Felix and Regula, the city's patrons, were taken for safekeeping to Andermatt by a local man who was in Zürich at the time.

Another event which brought recognition to the patron saints of Zürich took place in 2004, when all of the Orthodox jurisdictions in town, including four Chalcedonian (Russian, Serbian, Greek, and Romanian) as well as five Oriental Orthodox churches, held a joint vespers service at the Grossmünster on the eve of the feast of Sts. Felix and Regula, and then presented the church with an icon which had been painted of the saints. This icon now hangs in the stairwell leading down to the former burial chapel of the martyrs.

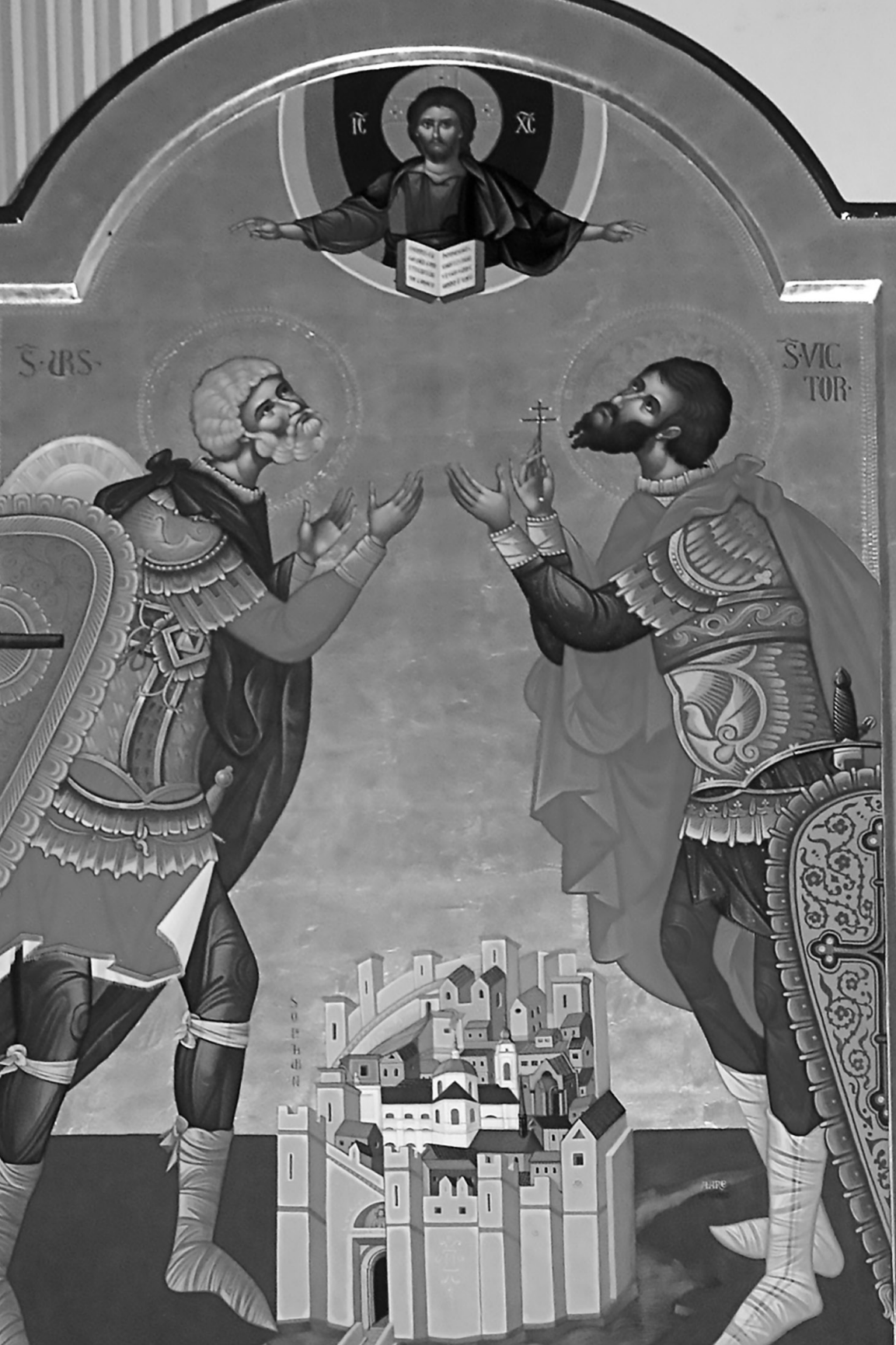
In Solothurn: Sts. Ursus and Victor

In Solothurn, the Aare River is easy to ford, and a late Celtic bridge marks an early settlement. Around 20 AD, a small Roman village was built here that expanded to both sides of the river and, by the mid-third century, had grown into a large settlement with fortifications to withstand the onslaught of migrating Germanic tribes.

Along with sixty-six other Christian soldiers, Sts. Ursus (Urs) and Victor escaped the massacre of St. Maurice and his troops in Agaunum (present-day St. Maurice), but were finally captured and killed in Solothurn in 303. When the Roman governor Hirtacus gave them the choice of sacrificing to the Roman gods or suffering death, they remained steadfast and were sentenced to be burnt on a great bonfire. However, a huge downpour of rain put out the fire. Hirtacus therefore ordered the soldiers to be decapitated on a flat stone placed on the Aare bridge; the bodies were thrown into the river. Their relics washed ashore, where they were secretly recovered and buried at night by local Christians.

The old town of Solothurn is one big pedestrian zone. Only hotel guests with luggage are allowed to drive their cars over the historic cobblestones, so we bump past the Cathedral of St. Urs (also dedicated to Sts. Victor and Ver-

Opposite: Icon of Sts. Urs and Victor. Solothurn Cathedral.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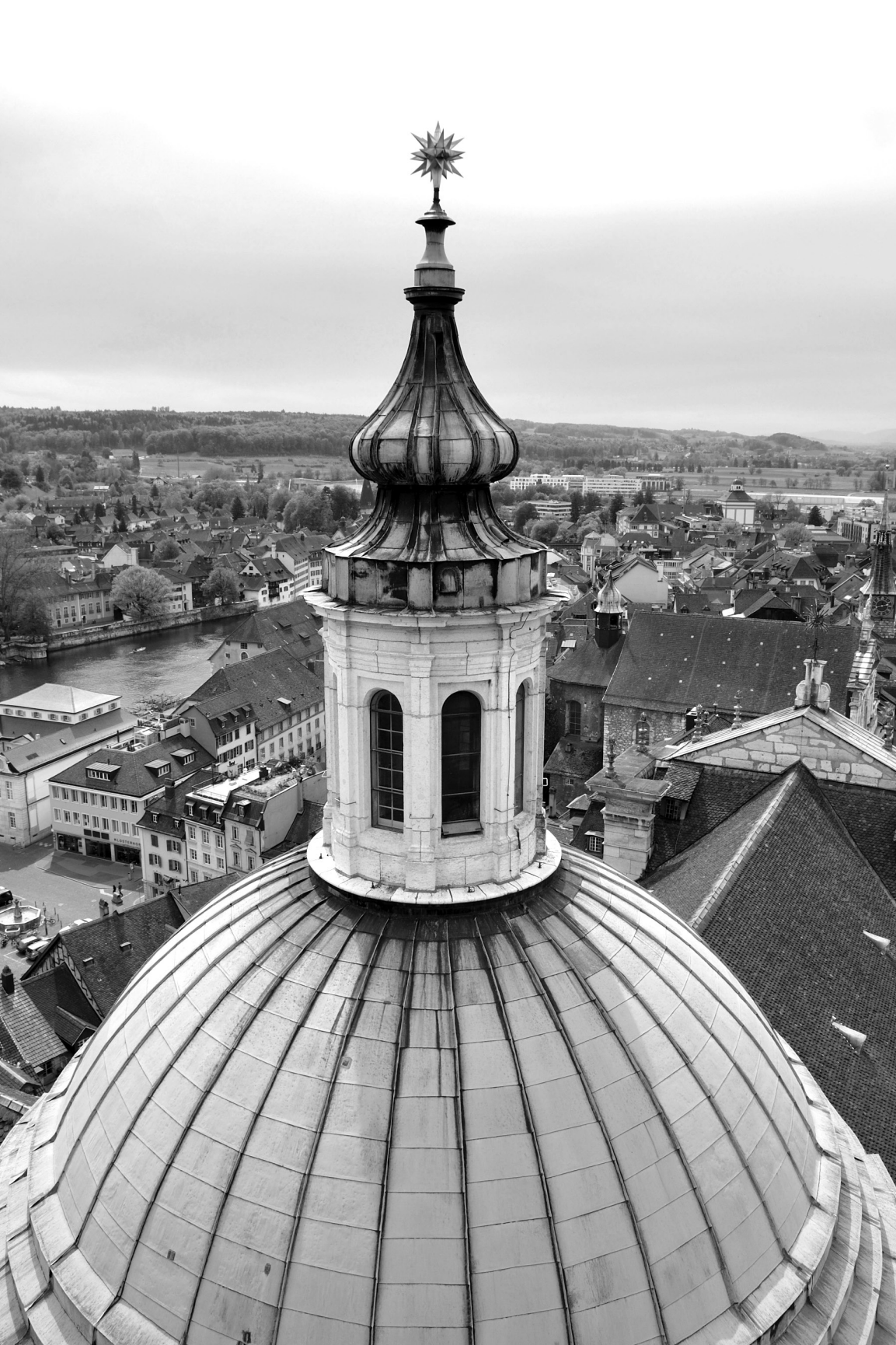


ena), asking our way to the charming little *Hotel Zum Wirthen*. Here, tourists and townspeople enjoy their evening drink on the sidewalk, and watch with interest our attempts to consolidate suitcases, notebooks, camera, picnic utensils, and laptop into inconspicuous-looking bundles. Our room faces the town's 15th-century clock tower, erected by the canton in order to silence competing church bells ringing out denominationally diverse hours of prayer – a solution that has become the rule in Switzerland. My foreboding is confirmed by another sleepless night: official times are proclaimed without mercy. Twenty-four times a day Solothurnians are treated to a droning secular *memento mori*, as knight, king, and a figure of death make their circling appearance. This 12th-century tower is the oldest edifice in the city, with the astronomical clockwork added three centuries later.

Solothurn's Cathedral of St. Ursus

Early next morning, I am eager to get into St. Ursus. Mighty steps lead up to the open portal and the huge space inside is filled with white stucco. I try to imagine the original Romanesque columned basilica, erected over an earlier memorial building for the saint. Here, a monastic settlement is said to have soon developed. That Ursus and Victor played an important role was first noted in 445 by Eucherius, bishop of Lyon, and author of the first account of the Theban Legion's sufferings. After 600 however, the original monastic cells were abandoned and both memory and veneration of the saints lapsed. Only in 740 did St. Werthrada (Berta), the mother of Charlemagne, revive the place by founding her own monastic dependency. The settlement soon grew into a village for fisherfolk, boatmen, and their families.

The present Baroque-Classicist design is from the 18th century when the complex was rebuilt. A dramatic Baroque Gloriole with a cross in a wreath of clouds dominates a glass sarcophagus with the bones of those who are identified today with the Theban Martyrs. I try to concentrate on the saints, doing my morning prayers in front of two beautifully painted icons.

Saint Peter's Church

The veneration of St. Victor, on the other hand, began at the place of his own *memoria*, situated under another church, a little below the cathedral and

Opposite: Cathedral of St. Ursus. Solothurn, Switzerland.

closer to the river. Today it is called St. Peter's Church. Access is possible (and for me alone) by leaving my passport with the Tourist Office as security for a key.[1] The church lies almost hidden, surrounded by houses for canons and curates of later times.

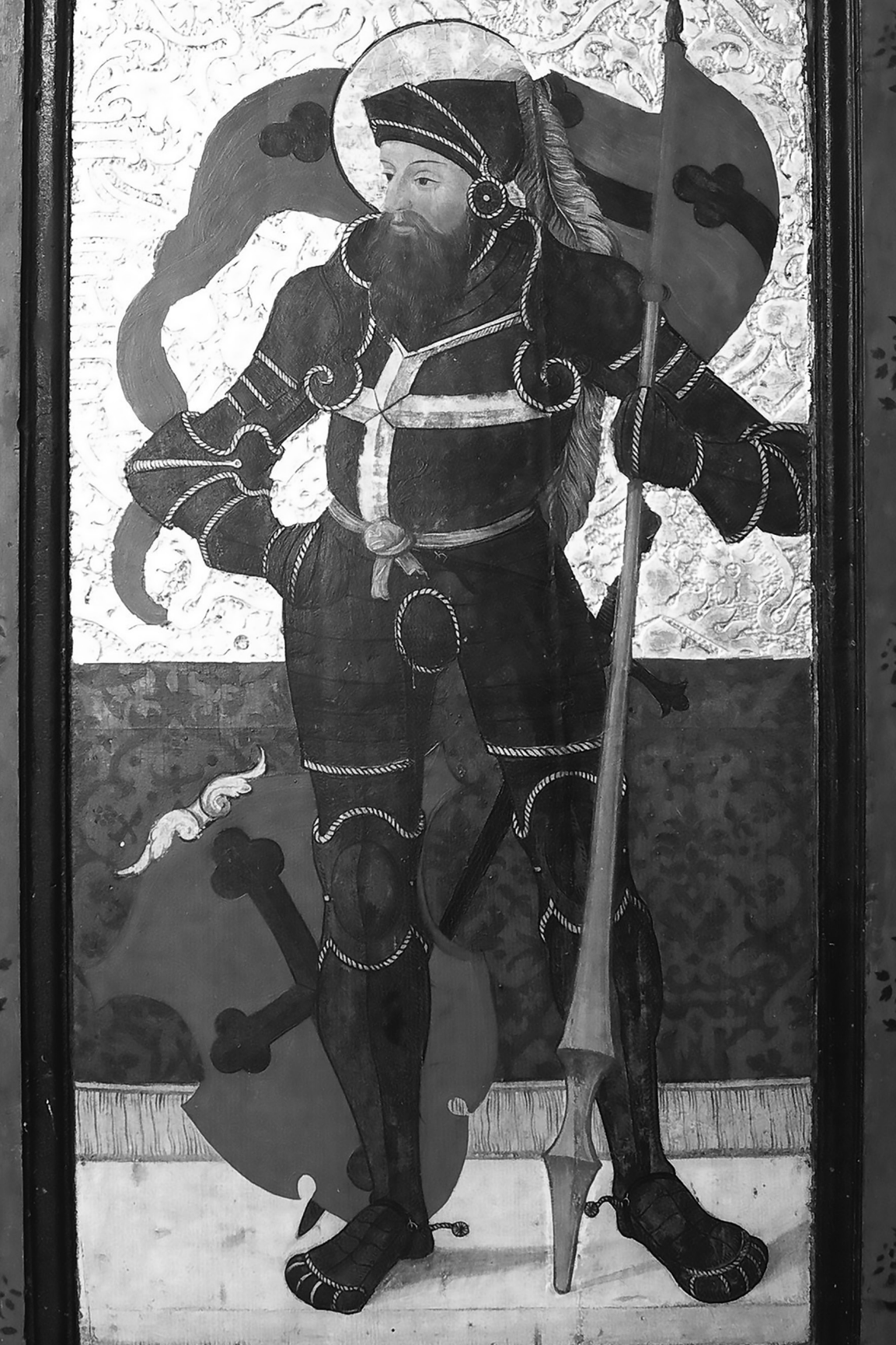
The present church seems to have been founded in the 10th century by another Berta, the queen and widow of Rudolph II of Burgandy, who was believed to have donated relics of St. Urs. In 1473, foundation work uncovered skeletons of many faithful who had been buried near the saints, and these were boldly identified as relics belonging to other Theban martyrs. (Therefore, relics in Solothurn after that date should be scrutinized with care.) In 1474, a year after this multiplication of Thebans, the original relics of both St. Urs and Victor are said to have been translated to the newly rebuilt Cathedral of St. Ursus. However, the inhabitants of Solothurn seem not to have been aware of that translation, for forty years later when they reworked the cathedral altar and found a sarcophagus with two skeletons, they were quite surprised. One had a silver nameplate designating him as St. Urs, and the other was assumed to be St. Victor.[2] Additionally, a 1973 renovation of St. Peter's high altar has revealed sealed pewter boxes containing relics. Today their relics are said to be located on the back of the altar in a sealed compartment. It is a lovely feeling to have the holy place all to myself, with plenty of time to look around and pray.

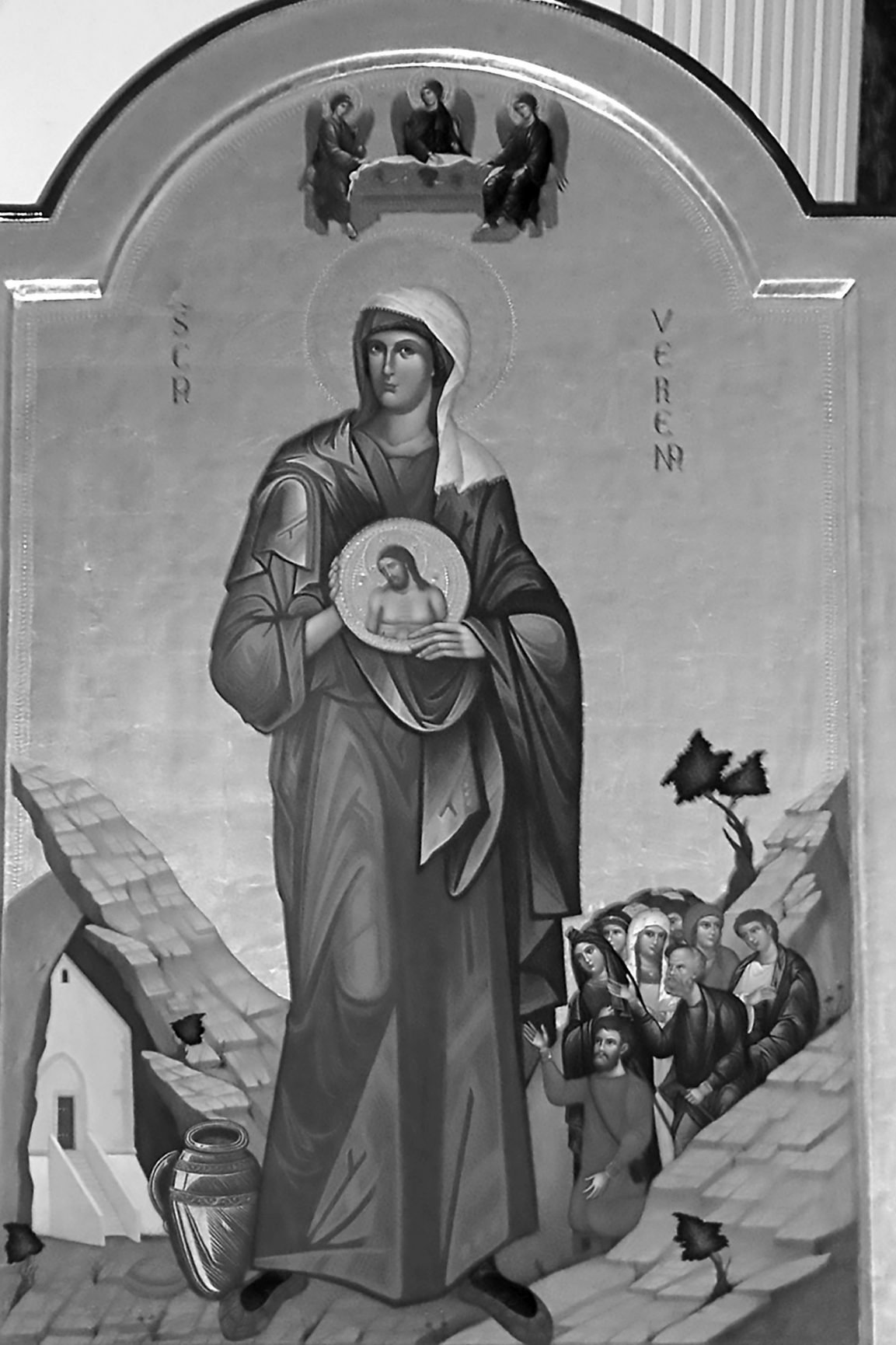
Surprisingly, the two saints remained entirely untouched during the Reformation, and once the counter-Reformation was securely established, Christians began distributing relics again. After the secularization following the French Revolution, the bishopric of Basel was reestablished and the bishop's seat moved to Solothurn. Only at that point was the church of St. Urs elevated to the rank of a cathedral. Although the history of veneration here is confusing, surely some of the relics of Urs and his companions are located in the cathedral treasury's reliquary busts that are placed on the altar on high feast days.

1 The policy of handing out keys has now been discontinued. Today one needs to contact the local church authorities in advance to visit St. Peter's.

2 According to one account, the 6th-century Burgundian Princess Sedeleuba translated the relics of St. Victor to a church in Geneva dedicated to him. No traces of the church remain today, however, and with the second skeleton in Solothurn now accepted as that of St. Victor, it seems clear that the relics transferred to Geneva had not been his after all.

Opposite: Image of St. Victor dressed as a medieval Swiss knight.




VERENA

Saint Verena Gorge

In the afternoon, we drive north toward the foothills, following signs to the *Verenaschlucht* (St. Verena Gorge). A stream glitters through the canyon, skipping over huge stones abutted by towering cliffs. Wooden bridges and shrines with crosses carved into the rock line the route, often with burning candles. There are few visitors in the evening and thankfully, the tourist restaurant next to the hermitage is closed.

Here, outside of Solothurn, St. Verena, an Egyptian woman associated with the Theban Legion, had her hermitage – a two-story cave where she prayed, missionized and healed. The 12th-century St. Martin's chapel was erected in front of the cave, and is open until early afternoon. On the other side of the little stream, built in the opening of a large cave, is a later Gothic style church dedicated to St. Verena. During St. Martin's opening hours, one can look through a small, iron-gridded window into the St. Verena's columned narthex, where a small bust of the saint may contain a relic. To view it we would have had to contact the Solothurn city chancellor before our visit. The "supervisor-hermit" in his small house next to the holy places is not authorized to open the chapel; rather, he is there to preserve the silence of the place. Until the 18th century a monk held this office, and when monks became scarce, laypeople took their place. It was such a beloved position that contests were held to decide who would qualify as successor. After the Reformation, interest in pilgrimage ran dry until the 19th century when visitors increased with the Romantic rediscovery of nature.

Life of St. Verena

Saint Verena is thought to have been a relative of the officer Mauritius (now Saint-Maurice), who served in the Theban Legion. His companion Victor was her fiancé, and to be near him she followed the legion to Milan. When the legionaries marched north over the Alps, Verena stayed in Milan, caring for imprisoned Christians and burying them after their martyrdoms. Hearing about the decapitation of Mauritius and his soldiers in Agaunum (now Saint-Maurice), she traveled there to bury them as well, and afterward continued to Solothurn where her fiancé also met his end.

Opposite: St. Verena icon in Solothurn Cathedral.

Alone and friendless, she found another Christian who had managed to escape from the legion. They moved into the two-story hermitage which can still be seen today. Verena also was befriended by an old Christian woman who sold the girl's handwork so that she could live. Blessed with a gift of healing, Verena was soon recognized as a saint by the neighborhood's pagan Alemanni,[3] and many were converted. Other young women joined her, forming a community. Eventually, the pagan governor imprisoned Verena, until a high fever laid him low. Remembering her reputation as a healer, he had the young woman brought from prison, and when healed he granted her freedom, but exiled her from the region.

Today, Solothurn is the most beautiful Baroque city of Switzerland, a legacy from the 16th-18th centuries when French emissaries to the Swiss Confederation resided here. The stores are exquisite and even late at night we find charmingly quiet squares with open outdoor cafes and sparkling fountains.

Bad Zurzach and St. Verena

The sun still burns down on us as we arrive in tiny Bad Zurzach on the Rhine River, whose famous St. Verena Minster can be mistaken for a stately village church. An impressive information center and museum depict life in an early Roman camp, medieval castle architecture, fairs, the first trains, and streets connecting Bad Zurzach with the world at large.

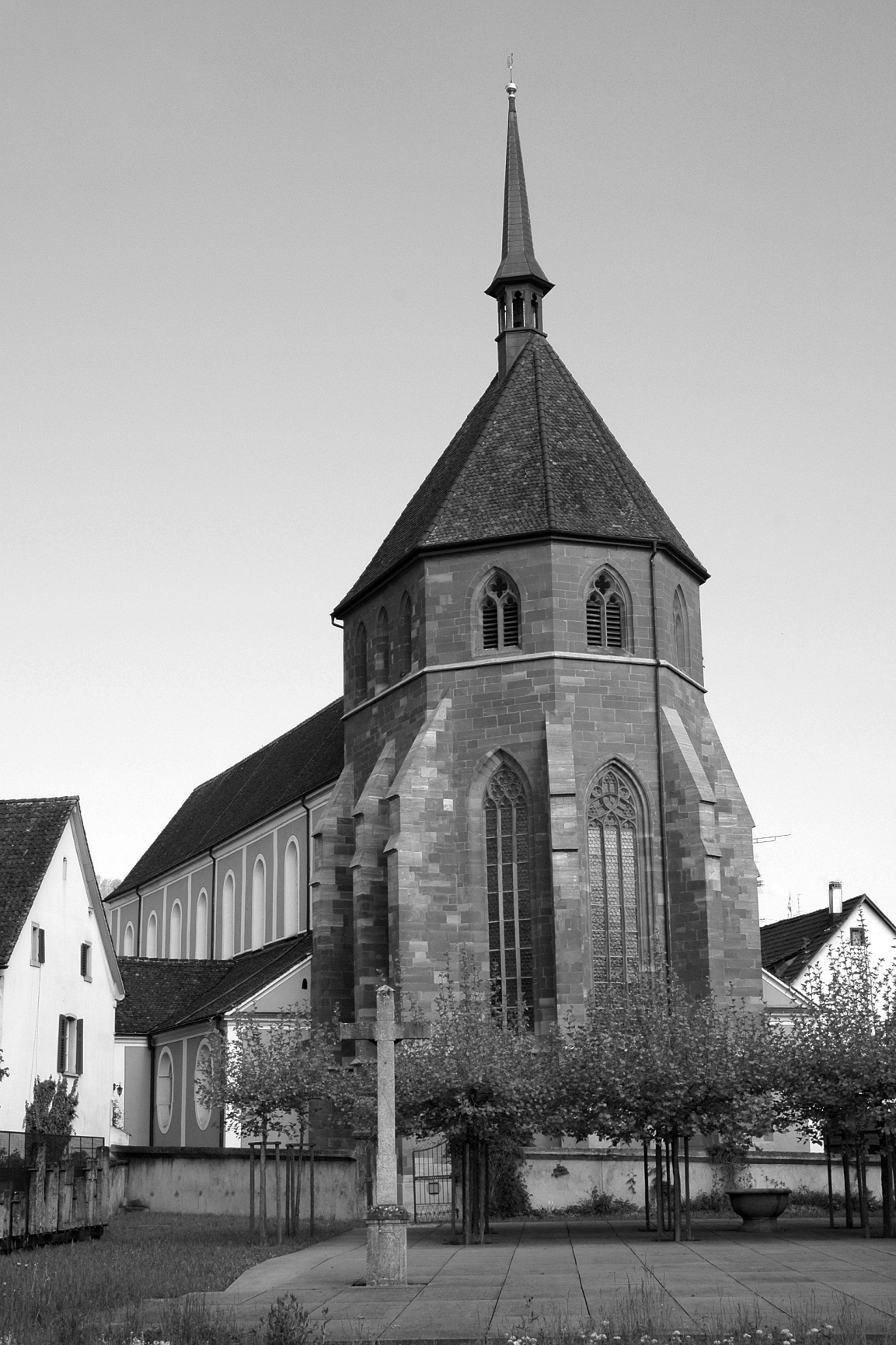
Bad Zurzach was first called Tenedo, conveniently situated on the Rhine and at the crossroads leading to Avenches, Augst, Zürich, Schleifheim on the Danube, and into Alsace. Here the Romans established a small military camp in 10 BC and later built a new *castellum*, a small Roman fort or tower where Christians are believed to have settled from the second century on. It was only after Stilicho led his Roman army over the Alps around 400 that the camp became a sizable civil settlement, its fortifications serving as the town's walls. In a corner of the walls was an early Christian church dedicated to the Mother of God with a baptistery and a house for the priest.

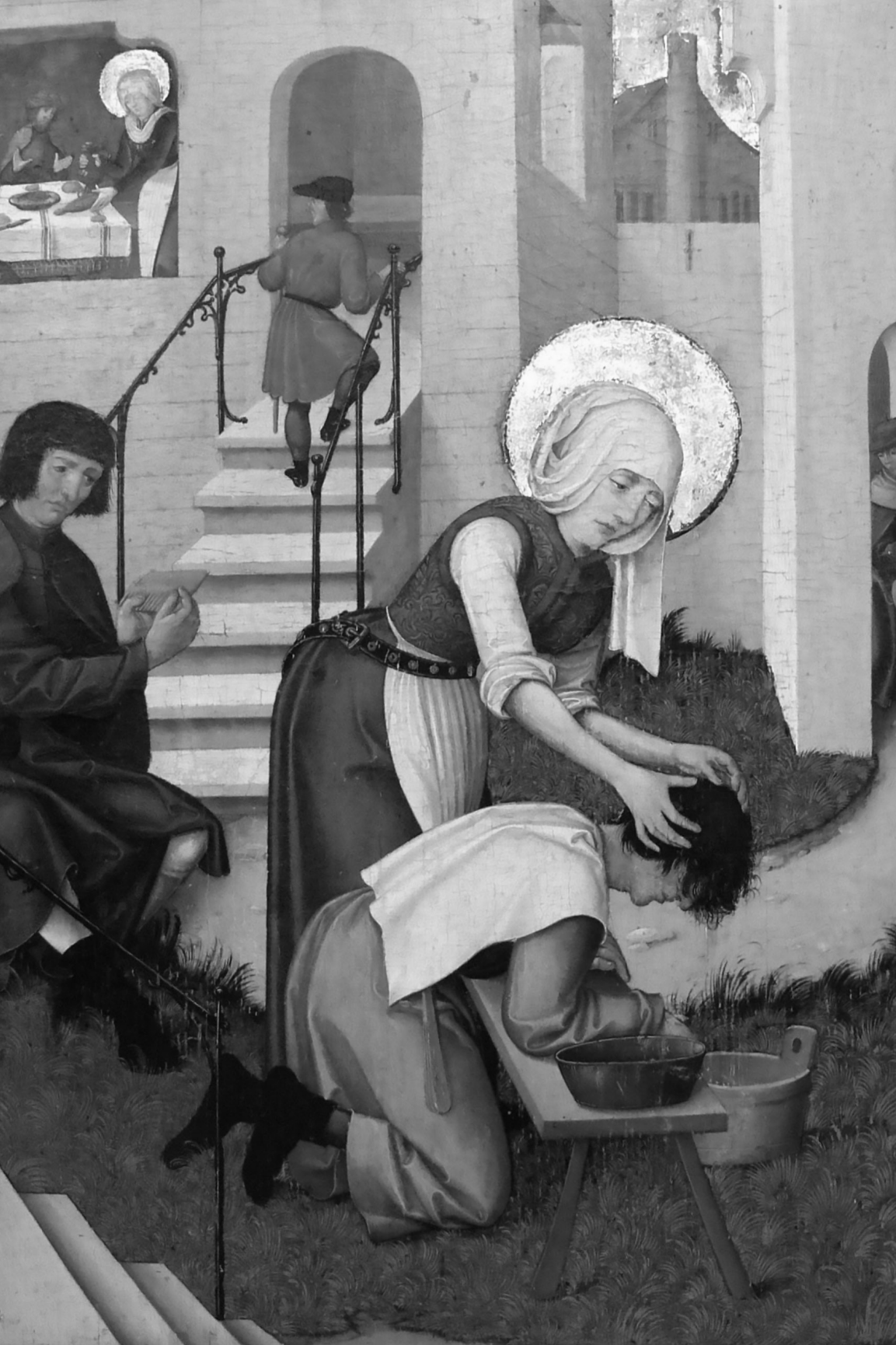
This, then, is the place where St. Verena ended her days. Living first in Solothurn, and then as a hermit on an island in the Rhine (now the small village of Koblenz),[4] she finally moved to Zurzach, where the priest willingly took her on as his housekeeper.

3 *The Life of St. Verena* errs here – the Alemanni came to the region later; the people in her time were probably Celts.

4 Not the large city of Koblenz at the confluence of the Moselle and the Rhine.

Opposite: St. Verena Minster and Crypt Tower, Bad Zurzach.





Every day Verena, carrying a jug and a comb, would walk from the town to a settlement of lepers and outcasts, to care for the sick and poor. The priest's envious servants rightfully accused the saint of serving the poor with the priest's own wine and bread, but when stopped and questioned, the household wine in her jug had changed to water.

Another miracle concerned the priest's ring. Not wishing to wear precious jewelry during Lent, he gave the ring to Verena for safekeeping. To discredit the saint, another servant stole the ring and threw it into the Rhine. In desperation, Verena begged God's help, and shortly after, a fisherman came to the rectory to present a large, newly-caught fish. When it was cut apart, the ring was found. Later Verena lived as a recluse in her own room until her repose.

A fifth-century church was erected over Verena's grave outside the fortress in a Roman burial ground, and today this grave is in the center of bustling Zurzach. The church was enlarged over time, her grave eventually covered by a remarkable choir tower. On the altar stand two Coptic icons, sent in 2007 from Port Said, depicting Sts. Mauritius and Verena.

Saint Verena's first *vita* was composed in 890 by Abbot Hatto of Reichenau, probably for the edification of the pious empress St. Richardis. An embellished life from the tenth century describes more miracles, one of them turning on a shepherd who found a little stone jug with healing powers in the ruins of the old church in the *castellum*. A chapel dedicated to Verena and Mauritius was erected inside the ruins before 1000, and it can still be seen.

From the tenth century onward, Zurzach became a prominent place of pilgrimage, and St. Verena is still one of the most venerated saints of Switzerland.

I wanted to visit the crypt with its arm relic of St. Verena, usually accessible from the outside of the minster. I also wanted my faithful driver-husband to experience that holy place, offering a little prayer to St. Verena. Although it was only 5:00 pm, long before the official closing time, the door was securely locked. As I searched for help, my husband came searching for me, and I spotted him beckoning from the back of the minster. There he stood, having opened the door without difficulty. Of course, he was convinced that I pulled or pushed where I should have pushed or pulled, but he was wrong. The door was locked, but this is how Michael found himself coming along – even if merely worried that his wife, unable to enter an open door, might not be able to get out by herself.

Opposite: Scene of St. Verena's charity. Bad Zurzach.

Now we are ready for a coffee. I'm aware that the lovely landscaping surrounding the information center with its delicious cakes was created at the cost of history, when the monastery's farm houses and medieval trade buildings were pulled down to further Zurzach's ambitions as a spa. The community must have thought that five churches were enough in the way of ancient architecture, and that visitors would favor flowers.

I realize that I have forgotten to take photos and return for a moment, this time without my husband. It is incredible, but the door is locked again. I go back to the church where one can peer into the crypt, but not well enough for a picture. In the meantime, Michael comes after me, and when I again complain about the locked crypt he doesn't believe a word. As we round the corner, there is the door wide open! He lingers to watch while I take my pictures and silently thank the saint for hearing my prayers.

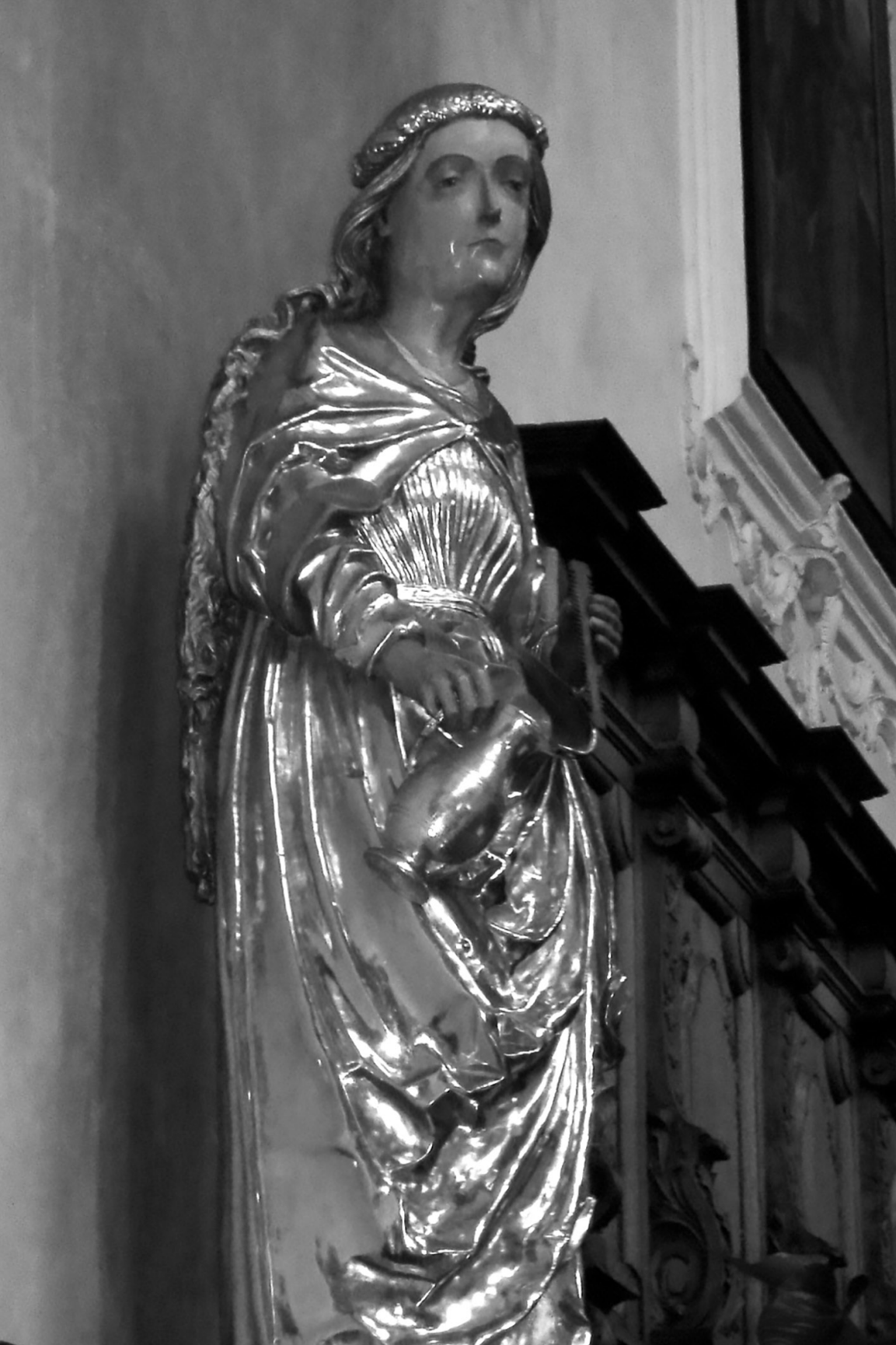
Vevey: Bishop Amvrosii and a Conversation About the Theban Legion

Margaret Bauman had asked if I might interview Bishop Amvrosii Cantacuzène, who was quite knowledgeable about the Swiss saints and had composed a service in their honor. Bishop Agapit of the Russian Church Abroad in Germany consented to call the retired hierarch on my behalf, and later reported that although the bishop still serves his church in Vevey, he is old and very ill. "Still," he continued, "it would benefit you greatly to try to talk with him."

I called, uncomfortable with my rusty French and imagining a weak invalid at the other end of the line. But instead, we had an exhilarating exchange, the bishop's voice much younger and livelier than I had expected. He emphasized that he was not strong enough for visitors, yet seemed eager to continue our conversation, and in the end set a time for a meeting.

On the appointed day, Vladika Amvrosii welcomed me warmly. As we became acquainted he spoke about growing up as an Orthodox Christian in Vevey. Though of Russian descent, his parents were also born in Switzerland, so he feels quite at home here. He alternates Russian and French services weekly, and about sixty percent of his Russian choir consists of converts for whom Russian is a foreign language.

Opposite: Statue of St. Verena, Bad Zurzach.



He also tells me about the service he has composed to the Swiss saints, and his plans to insert the biblical and patristic proof texts before publishing it. Here is the troparion, translated from German:

> As lovely fruit of your saving seed, O Lord,
> Helvetia offers you the multitude of her saints,
> who have grown forth from her soil.
> May You guard your church in our lands in deep peace
> through their prayers and the power of Thy cross,
> O gracious All-Merciful One!

I tell Vladika of our visit to St. Ursanne and Saint-Imier in the Jura mountains, of the palpable presence of St. Urs, and his continuing veneration in St. Ursanne, but also of the disappointing neglect of the architectural and spiritual heritage of St. Imier's founder. The bishop fills in details about St. Imier, and how the many relics he brought back from Jerusalem had made his hermitage so attractive to pilgrims: "At first, people came to venerate the relics, then they stayed to talk to the saint, but in the end, they came for his pastoral care."

Vladika does not have much patience for the doubts which have been raised in recent years about the existence and martyrdom of the Theban Legion in Augunum/Saint-Maurice. First, he argues that in times of underdeveloped literacy one can trust oral tradition. Second, he agrees with historians that no Theban legion had been levied from Egypt and transported over the Alps before the recounted martyrdoms in Augunum. In fact, the 10th and 11th Legions were stationed in Milan for quite some time, and only later sent north to settle the Danube border. Moreover, the bishop explains their martyrdom at a time when general persecution was no longer in force by an unfortunate accident: When Emperor Maximian passed through the area, he decided to visit the troops and reward their successful defense of the border with an official celebration. It was this celebration which included the usual pagan ritual sacrifices, and thus exposed the Christian soldiers when they refused to participate.

The bishop's third argument is particularly important. Vladika believes that the Egyptian origin of the martyrs is established by the witness of Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, who is said to have made a detour on one of his journeys to Gaul to venerate the relics of his compatriots. The journeys in

question must have occurred between 342 and 345, and I can only hope that someone more knowledgeable than myself will at some point work through the bishop's papers and find his sources.

At any rate, these findings caused Vladika to place St. Athanasius at the side of Saint Irenaeus of Lyon (along with the Apostle Barnabas who is believed to have gone to Milan, Vladika's own namesake, St. Ambrose) an icon he asked to be painted of the saints of Switzerland. Although they did not all live here, each of these saints had a significant role in the Christianization of Switzerland.

A newer version of the icon includes Saint John Maximovitch of Shanghai and San Francisco, who was Vladika Ambrosii's predecessor on the episcopal throne in Geneva. Saint John celebrated in Vevey, and Bishop Amvrosii is convinced that he still takes care of the Swiss Orthodox Church today. (Saint John's icon in the church contains a small relic.) He then goes on to tell me about a 12th-century church in Zillis (Graubünden) that features 153 Swiss saints frescoed on the ceiling.

Our exchange touches on the subject of ecumenism, which the bishop regards with a reserve based in history: Beginning with Charles Martel, the Carolingians had sent missionaries to Saxony, who prayed the Filioque addition to the Nicean Creed. Vladika fully sympathized with my own initial difficulties in regard to St. Boniface. In spite of the saint's enormous achievements for the Christian mission in Germany, he focused on streamlining all Christian practices to those endorsed by Rome, in particular enforcing the principle of a celibate clergy. In the end, Bishop Ambrosii followed the guidance of St. John Maximovitch and his recommendation to go ahead and venerate all of the pre-schism saints of Europe.

As I was informed later, the following night saw the completion of Bishop Amvrosii's service on earth. Memory Eternal! May he rest in peace with his beloved saints. ✢