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Then and Now

The most important place in the history of Bad Driburg is the mountain Iburg, which rises 1,246 feet above sea level. The Franconian imperial annals mention an Iburg in the year 753 when the archbishop of Cologne, Hildegar, was killed there by the Saxons. From 772, the Frankish king Charlemagne led his campaigns against the Saxons and destroyed Irminsul, the sanctuary of the pagan Saxons. Well-known historians assume that Irminsul, a mighty pillar of wood, which according to the beliefs of the Saxons bore the gods of heaven,
stood on the mountain Iburg. Charlemagne conquered Iburg in a hard fight. He took possession of the conquered castles and goods of the Saxons and declared them to be "royal estate." On the Iburg Mountain, this former Saxon fortress, the king built a church dedicated to St. Peter. It became a "mission church" for the area between Egge and Weser. When Pope Leo III was in Paderborn from July to October 799 to establish there, together with the Frankish King Charlemagne, the diocese of Paderborn, the King donated, at the expressed request of the Pope, the Church of St. Peter with all its attachments to the newly created diocese of Paderborn. Around the year 1256/60, the Paderborn Prince-Bishop Simon de Lippe transferred the seat of the parish, from St. Peter’s Church on the Iburg to the city church he built and dedicated to St. Peter in Bad Driburg (until 1919 Driburg), a city that he himself founded. The long Catholic history of Bad Driburg would finally reach its remarkable repute in the reconstruction of the former Romanesque parish church, St. Peter, built in 1260, to the present Church of Sts. Peter and Paul, consecrated on May 4, 1897 by Bishop Hubertus Simar of Paderborn.

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A Piece of Heaven on a Hill

At the foot of the hill of the once pagan stronghold, now stands the little Adoration Chapel (Anbetungskläösterchen). Then, the sacrificial fires blazed and filled the air with smoke; now the light of eternal love burns, enveloped by delicate clouds of incense that aspire to heaven. The sacrificial stones of the gods had long fallen into ruins; at the altar of the Most Blessed Trinity, the Victim of eternal worship is celebrated. Certainly a piece of heaven! How real and excellent! This piece of earth, which has become so historical for Christianity, now carries the Motherhouse in Steyl. Towards the end of 1921, M. M. Michael thought that the conditions of her home country were so far sure and secure for her to be able to pursue the work. The process of establishing foundations in Philadelphia and Lipa in the Philippines was relatively easy. Finding a suitable place for a convent in Germany was much more difficult. After several attempts, the efforts were concentrated on the then diocese of Paderborn, especially on Bad Driburg, a health resort with natural mineral and mud baths and well-known in the Westphalian province of Germany. As early as March 1920, the Sisters were offered a property in Neuhaus near Paderborn and in October of the same year M. M. Michael tried to buy a house on Pink Street in Paderborn. On October 30, 1920 the purchase contract was concluded – but with the stipulation: “If His Lordship the Bishop does not give permission, then the contract is null and void.” As a matter of fact, the bishop was not enthusiastic about opening a new convent in the city of Paderborn. From October 1921, the ever-active Fr. Anton Freitag, SVD and the mayor of Bad Driburg tried to find a piece of property. On November 16, 1921, M. M. Michael informed the rector of St. Xavier’s Mission House about the Sisters’ plans. The rector of the seminary, Fr. Hahn, was upset by the way the matter was negotiated and so too was the bishop of Paderborn, because the Sisters acquired the property in Paderborn before he actually gave his permission – even though the Sisters did indeed make the purchase conditional on the episcopal “green light.” On November 29, 1921 the official application to open a daughter foundation in Bad Driburg was sent to the bishop. Among the reasons given were: “To obtain German vocations we must open a convent on German soil and such a daughter foundation has to be near a house of the Society of the Divine Word.” Bishop Caspar Klein generously acceded: “I gladly agree to your expressed request for an approval of a foundation of the Sister-Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration.” Mother M. Michael heartily thanked the bishop: “Our joy was exceedingly great. When our Sisters will be in Bad Driburg, they will endeavor to give Your Grace and all the priests of the diocese only consolation and joy, but especially to their chief shepherd; and to
stood on the mountain Iburg. Charlemagne conquered Iburg in a hard fight. He took possession of the conquered castles and goods of the Saxons and declared them to be "royal estate." On the Iburg Mountain, this former Saxon fortress, the king built a church dedicated to St. Peter. It became a "mission church" for the area between Egge and Weser. When Pope Leo III was in Paderborn from July to October 799 to establish there, together with the Frankish King Charlemagne, the diocese of Paderborn, the King donated, at the expressed request of the Pope, the Church of St. Peter with all its attachments to the newly created diocese of Paderborn. Around the year 1256/60, the Paderborn Prince-Bishop Simon de Lippe transferred the seat of the parish, from St. Peter's Church on the Iburg to the city church he built and dedicated to St. Peter in Bad Driburg (until 1919 Driburg), a city that he himself founded. The long Catholic history of Bad Driburg would finally reach its remarkable repute in the reconstruction of the former Romanesque parish church, St. Peter, built in 1260, to the present Church of Sts. Peter and Paul, consecrated on May 4, 1897 by Bishop Hubertus Simar of Paderborn.

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Almost simultaneously with the work of founding a house in the Philippines, M. M. Michael made an earnest effort to establish also a foundation on German soil. Vocations were mostly coming from Germany, and Germany was the support of the Motherhouse in Steyl. Towards the end of 1921, M. M. Michael thought that the conditions of her home country were so far sure and secure for her to be able to pursue the work. The process of establishing foundations in Philadelphia and Lipa in the Philippines was relatively easy. Finding a suitable place for a convent in Germany was much more difficult. After several attempts, the efforts were concentrated on the then diocese of Paderborn, especially on Bad Driburg, a health resort with natural mineral and mud baths and well-known in the Westphalian province of Germany. As early as March 1920, the Sisters were offered a property in Neuhaus near Paderborn and in October of the same year M. M. Michael tried to buy a house on Pink Street in Paderborn. On October 30, 1920 the purchase contract was concluded – but with the stipulation: “If His Lordship the Bishop does not give permission, then the contract is null and void.” As a matter of fact, the bishop was not enthusiastic about opening a new convent in the city of Paderborn. From October 1921, the ever-active Fr. Anton Freitag, SVD and the mayor of Bad Driburg tried to find a piece of property. On November 16, 1921, M. M. Michael informed the rector of St. Xavier’s Mission House about the Sisters’ plans. The rector of the seminary, Fr. Hahn, was upset by the way the matter was negotiated and so too was the bishop of Paderborn, because the Sisters acquired the property in Paderborn before he actually gave his permission – even though the Sisters did indeed make the purchase conditional on the episcopal “green light.” On November 29, 1921 the official application to open a daughter foundation in Bad Driburg was sent to the bishop. Among the reasons given were: “To obtain German vocations we must open a convent on German soil and such a daughter foundation has to be near a house of the Society of the Divine Word.” Bishop Caspar Klein generously acceded: “I gladly agree to your expressed request for an approval of a foundation of the Sister-Servants of the Holy Spirit of Perpetual Adoration.” Mother M. Michael heartily thanked the bishop: “Our joy was exceedingly great. When our Sisters will be in Bad Driburg, they will endeavor to give Your Grace and all the priests of the diocese only consolation and joy, but especially to their chief shepherd; and to

1 cf. Die 120jährige Geschichte der katholischen Pfarrgemeinde St. Peter und Paul Bad Driburg, Pfarrer Döther Poppel, 1990, p. 7
2 cf. ibid, pp. 9–10
3 Wikipedia, “Bad Driburg”
4 cf. ibid, 1990, pp. 7, 17
5 cf. ibid, 1990, pp. 115, 124
7 cf. Contemplation and Mission, Karl Müller, SVD, 1998, pp. 142-143
8 cf. H. Fischer, Mutter Maria Michaela, Adolfine Tönnes, Mitgründerin und erste Generaloberin der Steyler Anbetungsschwestern (Steyl 1938/August 2013), p. 86
10 cf. Burning Lamps, p. 53
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3 cf. ibid, p. 354

Remembering Mother Mary Michael

An Everlasting Corpus Christi Sermon

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