

1 THE FIRST CHRISTIANS IN RHEIMS



Picture 1 — The she-wolf with Romulus and Remus (Museums of the Capitole) — photo TD



Picture 2 — Emperor Constantine (Museums of the Capitole, Rome) — photo TD



Picture 3 — Saint Sinice and Saint Sixtus, the identification is questionable (they could be apostles), southern portal of Saint-Remi — photo TD



Picture 4 — Nicaise, statue on the portal of the saints of the cathedral (portal of the northern crosspiece, right splaying) — photo TD

The origins

According to the legend, Rheims was created by Remus, one of the founding fathers. In fact, the current city was founded by the Rèmes (a Gaulish people) on the site of an ancient oppidum, Durocorter, which means “round fortress” in celtic language. Under Roman domination, the city was awarded the status of capital of the province of Belgium. This was a way to reward the Rèmes for their fidelity to the Roman Empire, to Julius Caesar in particular, during the Gallic War. According to the same legend, it was Julius Caesar himself who latinised the Celtic name Durocarter into Durocortorum.

Under the Late Roman Empire, like many other Gaulish cities, the city of Durocortorum changed its name and became Rheims, after the name of the ancient Gaul population who used to live there, the Rèmes. The city had a surface area of five hundred hectares; its boundaries were marked by four monumental arches, among them the Porte de Mars oriented towards Belgium.

From the year 300 to the year 500, barbarian invasions

It is at the time of the first invasions that Christianization started. Around 260, Sixte was sent from Rome to introduce Christianity to the city of Rheims and build churches. When he died, a funerary church was built on the site of his tomb. When he was canonised, the body of Saint Sixte was laid to rest next to his companion, Saint Sinice. Towards 357, the Germans dangerously approached the province. Threatened by the situation, the majority of the population turned to the new, long banished religion that Emperor Constantine had embraced and favoured a few decades before (272-337) through his reforms. The meetings of the Christians took place in the crayeres, and later in private homes. This step marks the beginning of an era of Christian peace.

In 407, other invaders appeared, the Vandals. They crossed the river Rhine, pillaged the North of Gaul, and forced their way into the city walls – which were in the shape of an oval that is still visible today, marked by the Talleyrand, Chanzy and Contrai streets. Archbishop Saint-Nicaise tried to negotiate with the invaders. He urged the faithful to take refuge in the cathedral and walked out on the church steps to try and reason with the Vandals. The kneeling bishop was beheaded while his sister, Eutropie, tried in vain to hit the murderer.

Saint Florent, Saint Jocond and Saint Eutropie were also martyred on the same disastrous day. A slab, in the nave of today’s cathedral, marks the site of this terrible episode. Another invasion took place in 451 by the Huns who also went to Paris where Saint Genevieve encouraged the Parisians.

The first Christian edifices

After these deadly invasions, the city of Rheims was bled white. A phase of reconstruction started with the edification of several oratories, chapels and necropolises, particularly in the vicinity of the Saint-Christopher oratory, on the site where the Saint-Remi basilica now is.

In the fifth century, a new cathedral was erected, on the site where it now stands. The post of archbishop being vacant, Remi was called to occupy this high position, at the age of 22.



Picture 5 – Remains of the Saint-Julian church, one of the oldest churches in Reims – photo TD



Picture 6 – Saint Christopher and Remi (Saint-Remi Basilica) – photo TD



Picture 7 – Detail of the tympanum: Martyrdom of Saint Nicaise (central portal, Notre-Dame cathedral) – photo TD

2 SAINT REMI, BISHOP OF RHEIMS

Meeting with Clovis the First

In 486, after the battle of Soissons in which Clovis vanquished Roma Syagrius, the sacred agate stone vases were stolen by the Frankish army. The event is recounted by Grégoire de Tours: Remi sent an emissary to Clovis, hoping to get back the most beautiful of the stolen vases that he really cared about. The king and the emissary then went to the site where the booty was to be shared. Clovis asked the valiant warriors to give him the vase on top of his share of the booty so that he could fulfil his promise of restitution. The soldiers accepted and said that the booty was his. But, to the general surprise, an impulsive and passionate soldier hit the vase with his axe, broke it and exclaimed: "You will only have what has been allocated to you by fate."

Clovis endured the humiliation and, in spite of his rancour, brought the broken vase to Remi. Later, in the same year, in the middle of a military review, Clovis spotted the soldier and broke his head, with his battle axe, shouting: "This is what you did to the Soissons vase."



Picture 8 — Clovis I and the Soissons vase (14th century)

Friendship between the King and the Bishop

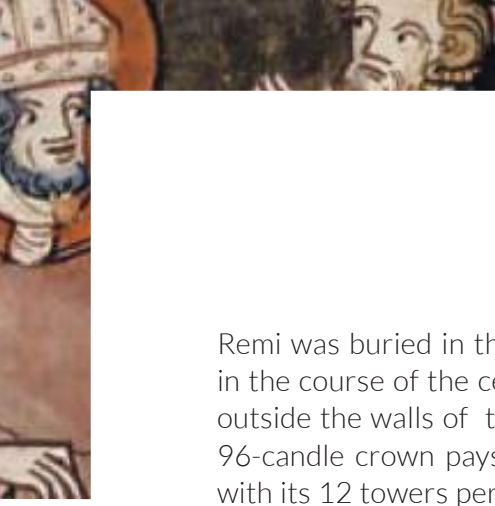
After this memorable episode, the bonds of friendship grew over time. Remi negotiated with the local aristocracy and obtained the submission of the city of Rheims. Soon, the Bishop became inextricably linked to the politics of Clovis, pacifying resistant rural areas, helping the poor and appeasing the Gallo-roman elite. To this powerful elite, Clovis appeared to be a resource person towards order and authority as he remained extraordinarily faithful to the Romans. In the next thirty years, the King and the Bishop forged a sincere relationship, based on mutual consideration and confidence.

The saint

Venerable Remi was praised in the whole of Christendom. He died, loved and glorified, at the canonical age of 96, on January the 13th, 533. In his will, Saint Remi bequeathed assets to the churches under the name of "pagi" (the Roman areas of Castrice, the Porcien, the Vongeois, Mouzon) because they were the first parishes, the first relays founded far from the city of Rheims to make sacramental life possible. Further in the will, it was mentioned that the Bishop bequeathed a silver vase of an 18-pound value to the church of Laon so that they could melt it to make patens and chalices. In the same document, Remi wrote "As to the other silver vase that was given to me at the baptismal font by dearly remembered King Clovis, [...] I order that it will be used to make a censer and a chalice engraved with decorations."



Picture 9 — Statue of Saint Remi (western facade of the Basilica) — photo TD



Remi was buried in the Saint-Christopher oratory which would later become the Basilica, in the course of the centuries. In tribute to Remi, the Basilica was erected as a sanctuary, outside the walls of the city (the "pomoerium"). In the nave of today's basilica, a luminous 96-candle crown pays tribute to the saint. This crown represents the golden walled city with its 12 towers personifying the apostles. Between these towers, a series of 8 candles – 8 being the number of the resurrection, of the new life. Celestial Jerusalem, described in the Apocalypse, is the term of contemplative monks' vocation, which they reached through the mediation of the Church.



Picture 10 – Remi and Clovis I by Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea*, 14th century © BNF

3 THE BAPTISM OF CLOVIS



Picture 11 – Baptism of Clovis I, Daphne du Barry (1996). Square of the Basilica – photo TD



Picture 12 – Detail of The Three Baptisms set (17th century) – Clovis – photo TD

The conquests of Clovis

The son of Childeric the First (Chlodovechus, 466-511), the young Salian Frank king Clovis the First ruled a territory located in what is now Belgium. He was not 20 yet when he extended his possessions to the East. He coalesced with other Frank peoples from Rhineland to confront the Ostrogoths and the Burgundians. Soon, Rheims territory was threatened by another German people, the Alamanni, stationed on the bank of the river Rhine. The Alamanni coveted Trier and Cologne which were in the fiefdom of his Rhenish allies. Clovis came to the aid of his friend Sigebert the Cripple. Then came the battle of Tolbiac (10 November 496). But the combat did not look good at all. Feeling that a defeat was pending, Clovis followed the advice of his secretary, Aurélien, and implored the sole and unique God of his new spouse, Clotilde. Indeed, Clotilde had constantly been preaching since their marriage in 493, as she wished her husband to convert to Catholicism. Clovis won the battle!

The conversion

Decided to fulfil his promise to convert himself in case he won the battle against the Alamanni, Clovis went to Rheims to be baptised. The ceremony was held in the new cathedral (on the same site where today's cathedral is) by the Bishop of Rheims, Remi. Clovis was baptised in a font with his two sisters, Alboflède and Lanthechilde... and 3,000 of his soldiers.

The symbolism of the baptism, the founding act of the kingdom, was re-enacted several centuries later in the coronation rites. After the dissolution of the Roman Empire, the Franks reconstituted a Nation that was to become very powerful. In memory of the baptism of Clovis, which legitimized the power of the Franks, the cathedral became "the Coronation Cathedral." With the new dynasty, Pepin the Brief initiated the coronation ceremony in 751 to legitimise his arrival on the throne. Indeed, Pepin, the strong man of the regime and mayor of the Palace managed to manoeuvre Childeric the Third out of the throne. Thanks to the coronation, Pepin would not be accused of stealing the power.

The legacy of the baptism

The traces of the baptism of Clovis can be seen today under the fifth bay of the Cathedral nave. Another consequence of this conversion: all the future conquests of Clovis had the blessing of the clergy and were considered raids against barbarian tribes who rejected Christ.



Then, the young Frank nation of Clovis and later of Charlemagne (Regnum Francorum) became the strongest kingdom of the Occident. This is why Clovis could take pride in the honorific title of “Roman Consul.” This founding myth can be considered as the starting point of the French nation, initiating both its golden legend and its royal lineage. Remi of Rheims accompanied the emergence of this new civilisation; in spite of the risks, he courageously protected the population against the ups and downs that threatened the people of Rheims.

In 511, when Clovis died, a delicate transition period started. The kingdom, the regnum Francorum, was divided between the four sons of the deceased. Thierry, the son of Clovis’s first wife, inherited the largest part (kingdom of Rheims or Austrasia). Clotaire, eldest son of the second wife, shared the rest with his two brothers; he inherited the Kingdom of Soissons; Clodomir the Kingdom of Orleans; and Childebert the kingdom of Paris.

An unreliable date

The date of the baptism of Clovis is still debated. The ceremony was probably held on December the 25th in honour of Christ – even though traditionally, baptism ceremonies were held at Easter. Was it in the year 496 (just after the battle of Tolbiac) or in 498 (the most widely accepted date) or in 505 or in 508?

An apocryphal prayer by Clovis (according to Gregory of Tours):

“Jesus-Christ, whom Clotilde asserts to be the son of the Living God, who art said to give aid to those in distress, and to bestow victory on those who hope in thee, I beseech the glory of thy aid, with the vow that if thou wilt grant me victory over these enemies, and I shall know that power which she says that people dedicated in thy name have had from thee, I will believe in thee and be baptized in thy name. For I have invoked my own gods but, as I find, they have withdrawn from aiding me; and therefore I believe that they possess no power, since they do not help those who obey them. I now call upon thee, I desire to believe thee only let me be rescued from my adversaries.”

Gregory of Tours *History of the Franks*, Chapter 2



Picture 13 – Baptism of Clovis – Tomb – Saint-Remi Basilica (16th century) – photo TD



Picture 14 – Procession of the Holy Phial, illumination, Paris, © Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. lat. 1246, fol. 4 © Bibliothèque nationale de France



Picture 15 – Anointing of the King and Rite of the Sword, illumination, Paris, © Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. lat. 1246, fol. 17

4 THE BENEDICTINES FROM THEIR FIRST SETTLEMENT, AROUND 760, TO OUR TIME



Picture 16 – Bishop Tilpin founds a Benedictine abbey on the tomb of Saint Remi (codex Palatinus Gerpanicus 112 © Heidelberg University Library)



Picture 17 – 17th century plate by Dom Michel Germain showing the Saint-Remi Abbey © BNF



Picture 18 – Anonymous engraving – Coronation of Louis XV (the abbot of Saint Remi bringing the Holy Phial to the cathedral) - 18th century © Fonds Bibliothèque Municipale de Reims

The origins

Immediately after the burial of Saint Remi, the tomb in his sanctuary was considered a venerable pilgrimage site. The fame of Saint Remi was maintained by the aristocratic families of Austrasia and Neustria during the Merovingian era. The city of Rheims perpetuated this memory and its statute of diocese capital. Rheims became an episcopal see under Tilpin (748-795). Rheims was a flourishing city, a key point between the Western part and the Eastern part of the Frank kingdom.

Towards 760, under the reign of Pepin the Brief, Archbishop Tilpin founded a Benedictine abbey on the site of Saint-Remi's tomb. The Benedictines adopted the Rule of Saint Benedict (Benedict of Nursie). Saint Benedict had founded the famous Mount Cassin Abbey towards 529, then he wrote his Rule in the following years (530-550). The abbots of Saint-Remi were given more power and they were responsible for the maintenance and functioning of the church. The development of the Remi cult took up a political role under the Pippinides. To ensure a legitimate lineage, the coronation tradition was reinforced and the figure of Saint Remi was summoned. Each new Carolingian king wanted to be considered as a protector of the Nation, just as Clovis used to be.

Towards 852, Archbishop and Abbot of Saint-Remi Hincmar (806-882) asked for the reconstruction of the edifice where Saint Remi's remains and the holy phial were kept. The prelate was inspired by the figure of the Frankish saint. Remi, "the Frankish apostle" (an expression used by Hincmar in *Vita Remigii* in 882), was a glorious figure on an equal footing with the king. This was the prestige that his successor, Hincmar, hoped to gain.

Until 945, the Saint-Remi abbot was the archbishop of Rheims. After that date, the father superior was elected by the monks; the first elected abbot was Hincmar II (abbacy from 945 to 967).

There were several steps in the building works, one after the other. In 1010, Abbot Airard (abbacy from 1009 to 1048) started an important phase of reconstruction. He had a vision of a very large Roman church, the largest in the Christian world after Saint-Peter of Rome. After 30 years of very hard work, his plans were modified by his successor, Abbot Thierry (abbacy from 1036 to 1048), because they were considered too costly and too ambitious. It is Abbot Herimar (abbacy from 1048 to 1076) who completed the work with the transept and the roof. The abbey, brought to the rank of funerary basilica, was consecrated by Saint Leo IX on October the 2nd 1049.



The organisation of the abbey

Life in the abbey was organised around a large cloister. To the east, was the chapter hall, to the north, the kitchen and the refectory. South of the Abbey, there was a chaplaincy in a chapel that was dedicated to Saint Laurent. The dwelling of the Abbot was to the north of the cloister. The infirmary, with a chapel dedicated to Saint Christopher, was east of the chapter hall. The chapter hall of the abbey is a twelfth-century marvel with its slender columns, its majestic cross vault and its magnificently carved capitals.

When Pierre de Celle became a Saint-Remi abbot in 1162, he took part in the history of the site. Until 1180, this new abbot deeply reorganised the architecture of the abbey church and cloister. The Roman portal was replaced by a gothic-style one. The nave was extended with two vaulted bays. A new choir was erected, a deeper one with five radiating chapels. To this day, we can see the organisation and elevation decided by Pierre de Celle (see chapter 5).

The Grand-Priors

Monastic life, which was flourishing in the twelfth century, declined after the One Hundred Years War. In spite of the work achieved by Pierre de Celle (1162-1180) and his successors, the influence of the site continues to decline. Under Louis XI in 1482, the abbey was subjected to a commendatory abbot and directed by a Grand-Prior; the first of them being Rheims Bishop, Robert de Lenoncourt. Even though the majority of the commendatory abbots neglected the abbey, Robert de Lenoncourt started important works and had a portal erected for the south transept. He also ordered the series of 10 tapestries illustrating the life of Saint Remi that are now on show in the Saint-Remi museum.

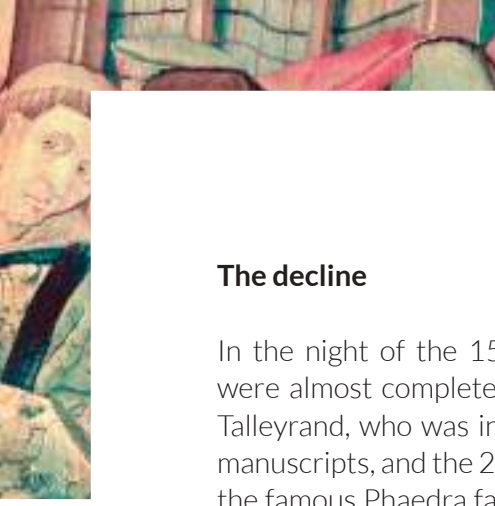
Robert de Lenoncourt crowned King Francis the First on the 25th of January 1515, holding the Holy Phial which had been preciously stored by the abbey. In 1627, Athanse de Mongin started the reform of the Saint-Benedict order. The abbey joined the congregation of Saint-Maur.



Picture 19 – View from Simon Street – photo TD



Picture 20 – The abbey's main courtyard – photo TD



The decline

In the night of the 15th to the 16th of January 1774, the abbey church and the cloister were almost completely reduced to ashes by a terrible fire caused, tradition says, by young Talleyrand, who was in care of the monks, and had forgotten to blow a candle out. The 900 manuscripts, and the 20,000 volumes of the library were lost in the catastrophe – among them the famous Phaedra fables, the cartulary known under the name of “polyptych of Saint Remi”, which had been started by the Archbishop of Rheims, the collection of Capitular Acts and two unpublished histories of the abbey, by Benedictines Dom Égée et Dom Levacher.

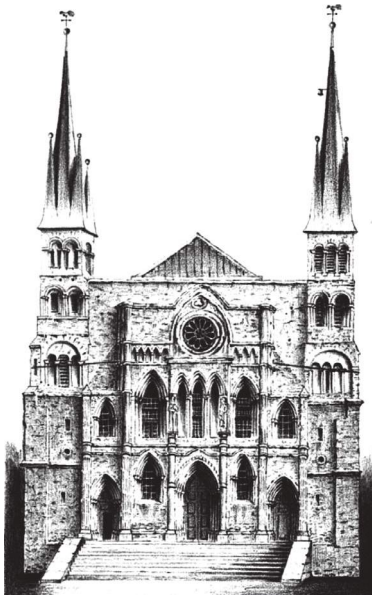
On the other hand, the book of “The origins” by Saint Isidore (750), the papal history by Archbishop Hincmar (780), a sacramentary by Saint Gregory (799) and the Hours of Queen Emma, wife of Louis d’Outremer were miraculously spared by the flames. The abbey buildings were reconstructed after the fire, in a more modern style. Architect Louis Duroché refurbished the yard, the flight of stairs and the façade.

On the 13th of February 1790, the Constituent Assembly declared the abolition of monastic vows and the suppression of religious congregations. The clergymen were in 1793. The abbey was then used as military barracks, and was transformed into a military hospital in 1796 until 1816, then into a Hotel-Dieu Hospital from June 1827. It became a civil hospital until the inter-war period. Today, the abbey hosts the Saint-Remi Museum of history and archaeology. The church has become a parochial church, with the title of basilica. The former Benedictine royal abbey and the Basilica were classified as a World Heritage site by Unesco in 1991.



Picture 21 – Detail of the tapestry of the Life of Saint Remi – photo TD

5 THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE BASILICA



Picture 22 – The western façade before the early 19th century restoration
– collection TD

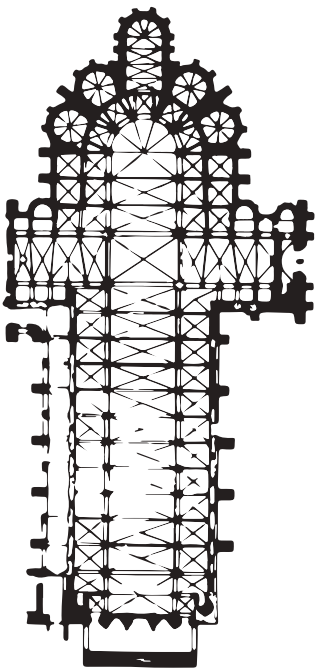
The Basilica, a work that has travelled the ages

Since its origin, and over the centuries, the basilica has been the fruit of the constant efforts of its builders. Before his death, Remi had expressed his wish to be buried in the Saint-Timothy basilica, next to the first martyrs of Rheims. But, given their veneration and the emotion caused by the decease of their bishop, the faithful chose to consecrate a building free of any other sacred presence to their revered bishop. They chose the Saint-Christopher chapel, a small oratory built in the 320s.

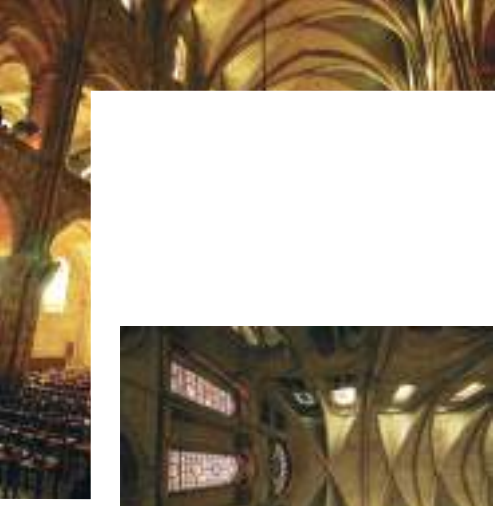
Soon, towards 535, the monument was enlarged and equipped with a crypt to store the relics. In 568, Gregory of Tours mentioned this monument and said it was a holy site of pilgrimage. Its architecture was simple: an apse with a vaulted semi-dome, and a wood framework typical of the sixth century. It is only in the tenth century that protection work was started, with the building of a bulwark around the borough that had grown around the basilica. But before the year 1,000, the edifice was going to ruin. Soon after he was elected in 1007, Abbot Airard undertook large-scale works; his plan endowed the basilica with five naves – a central one and two side aisles on each side. But this project was not carried out because it was too ambitious for the time.

The consecration in 1049

Abbot Airard's successor, Abbot Thierry, completely redesigned the already accomplished works. The side aisles were torn down and a harmoniously proportioned building came out, in pure Romanesque style. As a crowning achievement for the extraordinary campaign, Pope Leo IX was present at the consecration of the Saint-Remi basilica. He had accepted the invitation and announced that he would at the same time hold a council dedicated to the reform of disciplinary rules in the Church. On this occasion, the Pope condemned the wedding of William the Conqueror (called "the bastard") with his cousin Mathilda of Flanders. Hoping to be forgiven, "the bastard" had two abbeys built in Caen: the Men's Abbey and the Women's Abbey. The Saint-Remi basilica was the largest in the Christian world, north of the River Loire; it was almost as large as Saint-Peter in Rome, which had been built under Constantine. Then, the Gothic age came, in the middle of the twelfth century. Another huge building was a major project, with the reconstruction of the facade and the apse (that was before the next construction campaign of today's cathedral that started in 1211). After 1163, Abbot Peter of Celle started work to update the basilica in accordance with the new Gothic art that became dominant. Peter of Celle was from a noble family of the Champagne district. He was the Abbot of Montier-la-Celle in 1145 (that is where his name comes from), and he became Abbot of Saint-Remi in 1162. At the end of his career, he became Abbot of Chartres (1180-1183). Under this dynamic abbot, between 1165 and 1175, the Roman porch was refurbished and the nave was enlarged with two bays.



Picture 23 – Plan of the basilica. The north side is engaged with the adjoining abbey.



Picture 24 – Cross vaulting from the end of the 12th century – photo TD



Picture 25 – Spectacular view of the Romanesque nave and aisles – photo TD



Picture 26 – 16th century portal of the facade of the south transept – photo TD

Between 1185 and 1200, the vault of the nave was heightened, and rebuilt with a cross vault supported by new columns.

Then, after 1175 and until 1185, the apse was reconstructed with radiating chapels. These important works cost 1,500 pounds (in the same period, Suger gave 200 pounds a year to Saint-Denis). As a consequence, around 1190, under Abbots Simon and Peter II, the Basilica had a Romano-Gothic style, even if the Romanesque was still predominant. The light was diffused through the oculi that had been added by the threshold of the vault. This architecture was considered a significant milestone in the development of the Gothic style, with the constant use of pointed-arches and arch-buttresses.

End of the Middle-Ages and Renaissance

At the end of the fourteenth century, a bell tower was built at the cross-over point of the transept but it did not survive the Revolution. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the architecture was influenced by the Renaissance and Baroque styles. The commendatory abbot Robert of Lenoncourt ordered a new portal for the façade of the south transept, making the porch longer. The whole was treated with flamboyant gothic windows, and a magnificent sculpted group of statues, cornices, grotesque masks and pilasters. Built between 1648 and 1714, a choir enclosure offered the sanctuary a sumptuous delimitation. The tomb of Saint Remi, which was modified throughout history, stood in the middle of the choir. Today, it has a magnificent Renaissance style, with a group of statues from the sixteenth century.

Eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

On February the 13th 1790, the Constituent Assembly abolished monastic vows and forbade religious congregations. The ecclesiastics were expelled from the Abbey in 1793. At the same time, the mausoleum in the basilica was vandalized; the body of the saint was desecrated; and the Holy Phial was publicly broken on the Place Royale by Proconsul Philippe Ruhl.

The Basilica and the formerly Royal Abbey were despised and degraded like all the sites that were linked to the Ancient Regime. At the time of the coronation of Charles X, in 1825, people were worried about the poor condition of the Basilica and contemplated starting repair works. Architects were summoned, and the most pressing security problems were dealt with. Then, in 1828, the real campaign of reconstruction started. The west façade was modified and consolidated. In 1837, a part of the vaults collapsed. Under the direction of Narcisse Brunette, the vaults were repaired with wood and plaster that were less heavy. In 1841, the religious building was definitively saved when it was inscribed in the list of historical monuments. The north tower and the gable of the facade were totally rebuilt in 1844.

6 CHRISTIAN ART: A LANGUAGE OF FAITH FOR OUR TIME

Architecture, a universal language

All made of stone and glass, the Basilica delivers a spiritual message. All visitors are struck by the harmony and serenity that radiate from the building. The Basilica has expressed wisdom, compassion and faith for a thousand years, in accordance with the long tradition required by the first architects who wanted to pay homage to their venerated saint. The sanctuary has the traditional cross-shape of all churches, with the choir apse oriented to the East, to the rising sun.



Picture 27 – The crown of light above the nave – photo TD



Picture 28 – Detail of a late 12th century stained glass window destroyed during the Great War and reassembled in a new window – photo TD



Picture 29 – The Three Baptisms (1610) – photo TD



Picture 30 – Mater Dolorosa (1542) – photo TD

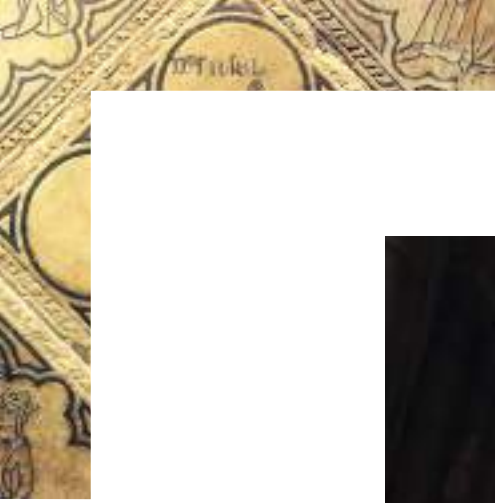
The stained-glass windows and the statues

An inestimable collection of stained-glass windows from the twelfth to the twentieth centuries are themed around the Bible, kings, and prelates like Saint Remi. The most remarkable ones are above the choir, with several windows among the oldest ones in Europe (1150 to 1180), like the great crucifixion in the centre, the Virgin Mary surrounded by apostles, prophets and saints in the higher level. Dating from the twelfth century, these stained-glass windows were partly salvaged from the Romanesque church, and then put in place in the new church with various additions. The windows of the nave are a remarkable gallery of portraits of Frankish kings and prophets.

The other windows are more recent. For example, in the west portal, the central rose dates back from 1841. This is also true of the two large windows that depict Saint Remi's life. In the transepts, the windows are from the 20th century. The north rose, which shows the Holy Spirit's dove holding the holy phial in its beak, was made by master glass-maker Jacques Simon (1890-1974). On the south side, the two windows with pink and gold birds and stylised flowers, are the work of the Simon-Marq workshop (daughter and son-in-law of Jacques Simon).

The successive abbots worked to densify the decoration with groups of sculptures. The successive shrines are signs of the will to make the sanctuary always more magnificent. On top of that, numerous majestic works can be seen, in the two sides of the transept, like the Laying in the Tomb (1531) which was brought from the ancient Rheims Temple Commandary, the Mater Dolorosa (1542) or the Three Baptisms (1610). The Sorrowful Christ, from the former Saint-Hilaire church, is from the same period. Another remarkable sculpted and painted group, shows the dressed Christ, with the Virgin Mary and Saint John (14th century).

This rapid inventory would not be complete if we omitted the Pavement of Saint-Nicaise, salvaged from the former abbey church that was destroyed during the revolution in the 14th century, which shows great delicacy.



Picture 31 – Composite stained glass window with Saint Remi and Saint Nicholas reused in the middle of a geometrical decoration – photo TD



Picture 32 – Detail of the pavement of Saint-Nicaise (early 14th century) – photo TD



Picture 33 – Entombment (Holy Sepulchre) - 1531, from the Temple Commandery destroyed in 1792.

7 ORDEAL AND RECONSTRUCTION (1914-1931-1958)

1914-1918, the terrible years



Pictures 34 and 35 – Postcards showing the basilica before and after 1915 – coll. TD

During the Great War, Rheims was martyred, which shocked the whole world. The Basilica was not spared. From the very first days of the conflict, Rheims was occupied by the enemy. The front line was on the north and east boundary of the city. The French troops used the former abbey and the basilica as a hospital and detention centre for the German wounded and prisoners. It was not unusual to requisition places of worship to place makeshift beds in war time.

In 1916, the apsidal chapels were destroyed. In 1918, an incendiary projectile set the timber work on fire; the wooden vaults built by Narcisse Brunette in the 19th century were irretrievably lost.

The disaster grew even worse; the war wreaked havoc upon the north tribune, the grand organ, and the choir organ. After the end of the devastating conflict, the south tribune of the nave collapsed, due to bad weather and the lack of inverted pressure.

The reconstruction, a long and delicate period

Immediately after the end of the war, in the summer of 1919, German prisoners were requisitioned to clear out the ruins and proceed to the filling of gaps. The cult was resumed sporadically in the north aisle, which was less damaged. From 1921, the south walls were re-erected with the salvaged stones. Stone by stone, the reconstruction required patience and courage. Henri Deneux (1874-1969), an architect from Rheims, was missioned by the City authorities and the National Monuments Organisation to reconstruct the religious monuments of the city. Thanks to his research on medieval techniques and how to adapt Philippe Delorme's timber work methods, the framework was made lighter and the work time reduced.

The end of the restoration

The nave was inaugurated in 1931 – but the restoration campaign was far from complete when Deneux's work was finished in 1938, and when money became scarce. Deneux left a huge number of sketches, documents and photos of the work he had planned on the Cathedral, the Basilica and Saint-Jack Church. The Second World War put an end to the work. The Basilica was fully returned to the cult for good.



Picture 36 – Reconstruction of the nave (1920s) © Ministry of Culture - Médiathèque de l'architecture du patrimoine (diffusion RMN)

8 IN THE SERVICE OF MEN OF THEIR TIME, FOLLOWING SAINT REMI



Picture 37 – Hincmar (stained glass window)
– photo TD



Picture 38 – Sylvester II on the right of Emperor
Otto III © The Yorck Project (2002) 10.000
Meisterwerke der Malerei (DVD-ROM),
distributed by DIRECTMEDIA

Hincmar (≈806 -882)

Born in a great Carolingian family, Benedictine Abbot Hincmar was called to the Imperial Court by Louis the Pious in 832. In 845, King Charles the Bald entrusted him with the post of Archbishop of Rheims, a post that he kept until his death that came as he was fleeing the Normans with the relics of Saint Remi. The relics were brought back to the cathedral under Bishop Foulques, his successor. It is Archbishop Herve who returned them to the abbey, probably after 911, date of the Saint-Clair- sur-Epte treaty, when the Normans had calmed down.

In the troubled period that followed the division of Charlemagne's empire, Hincmar tried to protect the possessions of the Church. The role he played announced the loyalty of the grand prelates to the monarchy.

Hincmar brought a precise regulation of the wedding and the dignity of young girls, condemning incest and rape which were common practice at the time. He reformed the Church of Rheims, installing the bishops he was responsible for. Imbued with Roman law, he launched an ecclesiastic justice system under his control. As a theologian, a jurist and a pastor, Hincmar had considerable influence on the spreading of new civilising practises inside the Carolingian Church; his legacy is a foundation stone for the Church and for Rheims. He built a second cathedral to replace the Merovingian one. Hincmar provided the coronation site, a ritual inaugurated by Pepin the Short, with a phial of chrisam (consecrated oil) which had supposedly been brought from the sky by a dove for the baptism of Clovis. Hincmar convinced the future kings to receive anointment with chrisam at their coronation, as a pledge of their royal loyalty and a sign of the prominent role of the Archbishop of Rheims.

Gerbert or Sylvester II (945-1003)

Born in a rural family, Gerbert d'Aurillac was educated at the Saint-Géraud d'Aurillac abbey, in line with the modern Cluny spirit. He became learned in antique texts, translated from Greek – the texts by Ptolemy in particular – or other Persian or Arabic texts. He became the headmaster of the School of Rheims in 972, on the recommendation of Rheims Archbishop Adalberon. He reinforced the traditional education programme with the introduction of a new subject, dialectics. He taught prestigious pupils, among them Louis the Pious (son of Hughes Capet), Fulbert of Chartres, Richer, etc. He later was the focus of philosophical controversies, at the time of the Ravenna "disputatio" (981)



Then Gerbert came back to Rheims and became secretary for the Rheims Archbishop, Adalberon. Gerbert supported Hughes Capet in the conflict against the Carolingians. He played a major diplomatic role when Adalbéron Ascelin, the Laon prelate who wrote *The Theory of Orders*, chose to follow Hughes Capet. As a reward, the new king appointed him to the post of his secretary. One after the other, the Carolingian bastions fell into the hands of the Capetians. Gerbert's influence on the King grew stronger and, when Adalberon of Rheims died in 991, he became Archbishop of Rheims. This nomination decided by King Hughes Capet against the will of Pope John XV, brought him into a conflict with the Pope. In solidarity with him, the Francie bishops joined forces against the position of Rome. Conciliatory, Gerbert left the post of Archbishop and moved to Italy where he became Empress Adelaide's advisor and tutor of future King Otton III. As an eminence grise, the prestige of Gerbert was at its peak.

In 999, Gerbert defeated the other contenders to the papal siege and was elected under the name of Sylvester II (Sylvester I had been the Pope of Constantine the Great). Sylvester II endeavoured to establish a universal Christian empire, by uniting the secular power embodied by Emperor Otton III and the power of the Church. The humanist and enlightened pope was a historic figure in the history of Christianisation in the Western world.

Saint Bruno (1030-1101)



Picture 39 – Saint Bruno at prayer in the desert
– Restout Jean Bernard (1732-1797) Paris,
© Louvre Museum

Bruno was born in a high-ranking family in Cologne. He was educated in Rheims, which was very famous for its cathedral school. The archbishop of Rheims, Gervais of Montreuil-Bellay, took him under his wing, appointed him to the post of canon and, soon, the master of the Rheims School. Gervais died in 1067 and Manasses, his successor, was more interested in wealth and material goods than in his episcopal charge; he appointed Bruno to the post of chancellor of the church of Rheims in charge of the diocesan administration. As a diocesan administration chief, his role was to ratify the decisions and send the acts. Soon, he did not hesitate to denounce the misdeeds of Manasses whose methods and aspirations he disapproved of. Bruno was condemned to exile. When Manasses was deposed, Bruno did not consider becoming the Archbishop of Rheims. Following the enlightened advice of Robert of Molesme whom he had met up with in his abbey, Bruno went into self-imposed exile in a mountain located near Grenoble with six companions. They built a church and a monastery that became the Grande Chartreuse.

His former disciple, Urbain II, who had become pope, called him to Rome for advice regarding reforms to conduct. Bruno continued to found priories in Calabria and Sicilia. He died in the Saint Mary of the Tower hermitage, in Calabria, in 1101.



Picture 40 – Charles, Cardinal of Lorraine (ca. 1555), school of François Clouet, Chantilly, Condé Museum. © National Museums, Mona Lisa catalogue entry 00000106646

Charles (cardinal of Lorraine, archbishop of Rheims, 1524-1574)

Charles of Guise is undoubtedly an important figure of the sixteenth century. He was the heir of a grand traditionalist family, the house of Guise, who held power on many bishoprics or “guisard” abbeys. When his uncle, John, resigned, he was appointed archbishop of Rheims at the age of thirteen. With this noble appointment, he was able to aspire to religious and political distinctions. As a Chancellor of the Saint Michael Order, he became an influential member of King Henry II’s advisors. When his uncle died, he was promoted to the post of cardinal and he founded the University of Rheims, with the authorisation of the Pope in 1548. Then he vehemently opposed Calvinism. He granted his patronage to printers that he invited to Rheims from 1559. Then as a rival of Catherine of Medici, he took part in the accession to the throne of Francis II in 1559 and was charged with the finance management of the kingdom. When his brother Francis was assassinated in 1563, he took the lead of the Guise family. Fearing an escalation of violence, the Queen Mother demanded peace between the Guise clan and Admiral Coligny.

In 1572, the cardinal headed to the Rome conclave for the election of a new pope. While he was away, the Saint Barthelemy massacre (5 September 1572) took place. He died on the 26th of December 1574, at the age of 50. He was buried in the Rheims Cathedral. As a humanist Renaissance prelate, He spent his life trying to combine personal family success, loyalty to the King, the reform of the Church and the reform of “his” church, the Church of Rheims.

Nicolas Roland (1642-1678)

Educated at the Jesuit College in Rheims, Nicolas Roland decided to become a priest at an early age. He pursued his education in philosophy and theology in Paris, at the time of the Fronde. Then he was taught by Antoine de la Haye in Rouen where he lived in complete poverty. In 1672, he met John-Baptist de la Salle; they became friends and mutually helped each other. They devoted themselves to helping the Sisters of the child-Jesus congregation who served the people in needs. As a preacher, he tirelessly travelled the dioceses to speak to the people. “Speaking with simplicity,” he said, “is speaking to everyone.”



Picture 41 – Nicolas Roland. Source: CC BY-SA 3.0 Garitan

On the 27th of April 1678, he died, exhausted, of cerebral palsy, at the age of 36. He was beatified by John-Paul II in 1994. As a theologian canon, Nicolas Roland was an indefatigable instigator in the Christian education of children and a precursor to John-Baptist de la Salle.



Picture 42 – Saint John-Baptist de la Salle (source: public domain)

Saint John-Baptist de la Salle (1651-1719)

Born in a middle-class family from Bearn, John-Baptist de la Salle felt he was called by God a very young age: he became Canon of the Cathedral at 16. When his parents died, he was not sure he wanted to pursue to the priesthood; yet, this is what he did a few years later, under the direction of Nicolas Roland, his spiritual guide. He was ordained a priest at the age of 27. From 1679, he helped Adrian Nyel setting up free schools for boys. Intending to educate young girls and boys, he founded the Brothers of the Christian Schools congregation.

In order to be able to devote his life to the congregation, he gave up his charge of canon – which assured him resources – and distributed what he had inherited to the poor. John-Baptist de la Salle intended to share the poverty of his brothers. In spite of the trials conducted against him by school masters for illegal competition, and in spite of the disagreements from his own Order, he pursued his undertaking.

Inventing new spiritual educational methods, De la Salle developed the reading skills of children not by making them read Latin but French. After a trial in vain, vile condemnations and awful slander, he was called by the Brothers of Paris in 1714 to take the head of the Brothers' Society. When he died, in 1719, he left many educational and spiritual written works. Pope Pie XII declared him "Patron of all Christian educators." His work came to be known around the world, spread by his disciples.



Picture 43 – Statue of the Virgin, Our Lady of the Factory and the Workshop © Saint-Remi Basilica

Cardinal Benoît-Marie Langénieux (1824-1905)

Born in 1824 in Villefranche-sur-Saône, Cardinal Langénieux was ordained to the priesthood in 1850 in Paris; then he was nominated Archbishop of Tarbes in 1873, and Archbishop of Rheims in 1874. He was elevated to the cardinalate with the priestly title of Priest-Cardinal of Saint John of the Latin Gate. He founded the first private district schools, youth clubs, catholic circles, and orphanages in his city. He was close to Albert de Mun, who initiated social Catholicism, to Leon Harmel, who was a partisan of the church's social doctrine, and to Pope Leo XIII. He was the founder of the archconfraternity of Notre-Dame of the Factory and Workshop to whom he dedicated a statue of the Virgin, which is still visible in a chapel of the basilica. He was nicknamed the Cardinal of the workers.

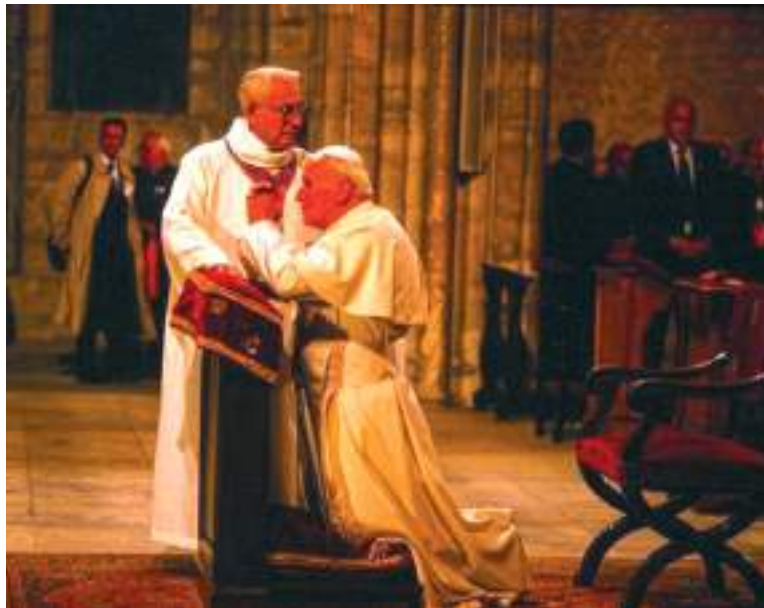
In 1896, he celebrated the fourteenth centenary of the baptism of Clovis. The Saint-Clotilde basilica in Rheims testifies to this centenary. Before that, in 1876, he had worked on a project for a statue of Urbain II, the crusade pope, in Châtillon-sur-Marne. He also facilitated the construction of many churches in his diocese.



Saint John-Paul II (1920-2005)

The first Slavish Pole Pope, Karol Józef Wojtyła strongly opposed communist ideology, just as he had against Nazi ideology when he was young. Through his actions, he contributed to the fall of the Eastern Block and to the promotion of human rights. He encouraged interreligious dialogue. A man of prayer and a man of action, he was considered as the pope of a new era; he addressed crowds with energy, and his life made a big impression on them. John-Paul II was a tireless globe-trotter and a very charismatic personality; he constantly wanted to meet the faithful throughout the world – each time, huge crowds came to meet him.

His spiritual work was marked by the Theory of the Body; he renewed the long tradition of the Church. He promulgated the Catechism of the Catholic Church in the light of Tradition, according to the forceful interpretation of Vatican Council II. He also reformed the Latin and Oriental canonical law Code, he founded new institutions and reorganised the Roman Curia. John-Paul II came to Rheims on pilgrimage in 1996 to celebrate the 1,500th anniversary of the baptism of Clovis. He suffered Parkinson disease and died after a long period of suffering, on the 2nd of April 2005, following 26 years of pontificate (the longest in history). He was beatified in 2011 by Benedict XVI, his successor, canonised by Pope Francis in 2014.



Picture 44 – John-Paul II in Saint-Remi Basilica in 1996.
© Jean-Michel Mazerolle – CIRIC

9 THE TOMB OF REMI THE HOLY OF HOLIES IN THE BASILICA



Picture 45 – View of the choir with the Tomb designed as a huge shrine – photo TD



Picture 46 – Under the choir vault – photo TD



Picture 47 – Detail of the group of full-length statues of the Baptism of Clovis, the kneeling king is anointed by Bishop Remi – photo TD

The tomb

Five tombs were successively erected in honour of Remi inside his sanctuary. The first one was erected by Hincmar in the ninth century; the second one by Herimar in the eleventh century; the third one by Abbey Lenoncourt in the sixteenth century; the fourth one by Ludinart of Vauzelles in 1802 and the fifth one by Archbishop Gousset in 1847 which, in fact, was a copy of the first level of the 16th century tomb. Indeed, the tomb copied in 1847 had been erected between 1533 and 1537, then partly destroyed by the revolutionaries. Gousset revived Renaissance architecture and reused the initial sculptures by Pierre Jacques which had survived the massacre; only the top of the monument was not reconstructed.

The sculptures

The sculptures represent the former peers; 12 characters on the north and south façades are wearing the royal insignia for the coronation, in particular the crown, the sword, the sceptre and the ring. On the south façade, six ecclesiastics including, from left to right, the Bishop of Noyon, carrying the harness, the bishop of Chalons, holding the royal ring, the Bishop of Beauvais with the coat of arms, the Bishop of Langres holding the royal sceptre and the hand of justice, the Bishop of Laon holding the Holy Phial, and the Archbishop of Rheims, crowning and anointing the king and holding the Episcopal Cross. On the north side, six laymen : the Duke of Burgundy with the crown, the Duke of Guyenne with the standard, the Duke of Normandy with the pennant, the Duke of Toulouse with the spurs, the Duke of Flanders with the sword, and the Count of Champagne with the royal banner. On the back side of the tomb, facing the axial chapel, a group of sculptures dating from the 19th century, show the Baptism of Clovis who, kneeling, is being anointed. Above the group, a dove brings the phial filled with holy balm and chrism.

The shrine

The reliquary shrine of Saint Remi is exhibited every year during the novena that precedes the first Sunday in October, and on 15 January, the day when Saint Remi is celebrated in France. It was made in 1896 by goldsmiths Charles Wéry and Emile Wéry, and painter Théophile Soyer. The sides of the upper part are decorated with a series of enamels on copper. The enamels of great beauty, that show the battle of Tolbiac and the baptism of Clovis, are inspired by those of the former shrine made in 1663 by Jacques Laudin. Two antique shrines are kept in the Saint Remi Museum. One of them, made in 1824, was deposited in the south tribune of the basilica, and later replaced by the current shrine in 1896; the other one, from 1803, is kept in the capitulary hall of the Museum.



Picture 48 – The shrine of 1896 – photo TD



Picture 49 – The shrine of 1803. Saint-Remi Museum – photo TD



Picture 50 – The shrine of 1824. Saint-Remi Museum – photo TD

10

THE STAINED-GLASS WINDOWS OF THE BASILICA (FROM THE 12TH TO THE 20TH CENTURY)



Picture 1 – Stained glass window of the crucifixion: the Virgin Mary (towards 1180) – photo Jean Diblik



Picture 2 – Stained glass window by Jacques Simon – photo Jean Diblik

The stained-glass windows of the Saint-Remi Basilica – a former abbey church classified as Historical Monument in 1840 and entered on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1991 – are a unique set characterized by their ancient age, and the restorations and creations.

The choir

The stained-glass windows were initially created under Pierre de Celle (abbey from 1162 to 1181), then replaced by clear glass windows in the 18th century (for more light), and then put back into place – first in the second half of the 19th century, and secondly from 1928 onward, after the destructions of the World War I. Between 1953 and 1992, they were restored by the Simon Marq glass-artist workshop.

In the higher windows, there are 33 lancets. In their upper parts, prophets and apostles can be seen surrounding the Virgin Mary; they each have a book in their left hands; the scenes are strictly organized, with the Virgin in the centre and, on each side, 6 apostles, 2 evangelists, and 8 prophets.

In the lower parts, a procession of bishops is surrounding Saint-Remi – from the origin to Henri de France; they all hold short crosiers, and wear supple chasubles and mitres.

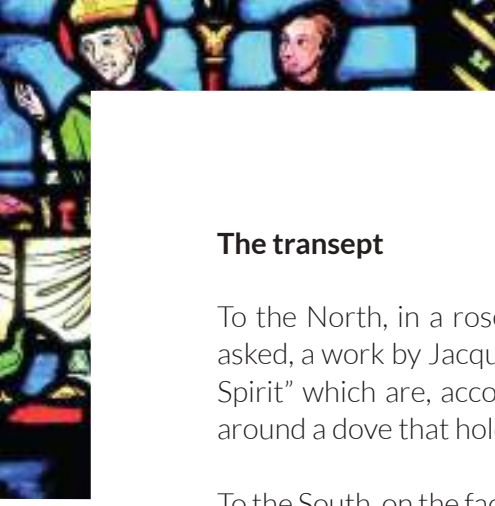
In the tribunes, the celestial court is shown – that is figures that mostly evoke the precursors of Christ (the kings of Juda) and a few saints. In the centre, the Crucifixion or Calvary of Jesus is represented (around 1180). Restoration works took place from 1980 onward.

The axial chapel

The stained glass windows were made by Charles Marq from 1976 to 1981. They are composed of geometrical lines or strokes that make a perspective effect. The windows have been referred to as “architecture within architecture” or “translucent forest”, which conveys an expressive search for light owing to the use of silver salts.

The nave

The windows, of Roman origin, were modified in the twelfth century, and then between 1850 and 1870. They were definitely put back into place from 1931 onward. They represent 12 royal figures, 7 prophets, 1 apostle and 1 bishop.



The transept

To the North, in a rose that was pierced in 1602 according to what Bishop Philippe Dubec asked, a work by Jacques Simon was put up in 1958; it is dedicated to the “talents of the Holy Spirit” which are, according to Isaie 11.2, wisdom, respect and intelligence and which stand around a dove that holds the Holy Bulb.

To the South, on the facade by Robert de Lenoncourt, a work by the Simon/Marq workshop can be seen, with a yellow and blue gamut of colours which shows stylized birds (some of them hold the Holy Bulb in their beaks) and, in the tympanum, lily flowers on a blue background.

The backside of the western facade

Louis Charles Auguste Steinhel (1814-1885), a painter and cardboard and glass maker, made all the stained glass windows after 1843, following the 1774 and 1793 fires. His works, dedicated to the life of Saint Remi, were totally cleaned in 2015. The central rose shows 16 saints, and Christ the Redeemer in the centre.

The meaning of the stained glass windows

In the twelfth century, stained glass windows had both a spiritual and political role. There was an interaction between the architecture (elevation) and the stained glass windows (characters) that was meant to be symbolic.

The stained glass windows evoked the precursors of Christ and the ancient Alliance (in the choir); the celestial Kingdom and the Church of Christ; and royalty and priesthood.



Picture 3 – Saint Remi at lunch in Cernay (when water was changed into wine) – photo Jean Diblik



Picture 4 – Wouldn't that be Saint Paul, a Roman and Jewish citizen who was converted on his way to Damas? This is a plausible interpretation but it cannot be ascertained – photo Jean Diblik



Picture 5 – The central rose of the nave – photo Jean Diblik



Picture 6 – The lower windows of the Saint Remi chapels – photo Jean Diblik