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Einsiedeln Abbey

Einsiedeln is a Benedictine monastery. The abbey is dedicated to Our Lady of the Hermits, the title being derived from the circumstances of its foundation, from which the name Einsiedeln is also said to have originated. It is a territorial abbacy and not part of a diocese.

Saint Meinrad, of the family of the Counts of Hohenzollern, was educated at the abbey school of Reichenau, an island in Lake Constance. After some years at Reichenau he embraced an eremitical life and established his hermitage on the slopes of the Etzel mountain, taking with him a wonder-working statue of Our Lady which he had been given by the Abbess Hildegarde of Zurich. He died in 861 at the hands of robbers who coveted the treasures offered at the shrine by devout pilgrims. During the next eighty years the place was never without one or more hermits emulating Saint Meinrad's example. One of them, named Eberhard, previously Provost of Strassburg, erected a monastery and church there, of which he became the first abbot.

The church was miraculously consecrated, so the legend runs, in 948, by Christ himself assisted by the Four Evangelists, St. Peter, and St. Gregory the Great. This event was investigated and confirmed by Pope Leo VIII and subsequently ratified by many of his successors, the last ratification being by Pope Pius VI in 1793, who confirmed the acts of all his predecessors.

In 965 Gregory, the third Abbot of Einsiedeln, was made a prince of the empire by Otto I, and his successors continued to enjoy the same dignity up to the cessation of the empire in the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1274 the abbey, with its dependencies, was created an independent principality by Rudolf I of Germany, over which the abbot exercised temporal as well as spiritual jurisdiction. It contin-

ued independent until the French Revolution.

The abbey is now what is termed nullius dioecesis, the abbot having quasi-episcopal authority over ten parishes served by the monks and comprising nearly twenty thousand souls.



Kloster Einsiedeln

Einsiedeln has been famous for the learning and piety of its monks for a thousand years, and many saints and scholars have lived within its walls. The study of letters, printing, and music have greatly flourished here, and the abbey has contributed largely to the glory of the Benedictine Order. Discipline declined somewhat in the fifteenth century and the rule became relaxed, but Ludovicus II, a monk of St. Gall who was Abbot of Einsiedeln 1526-44, succeeded in restoring the stricter observance.

In the sixteenth century the religious disturbances caused by the spread of the Protestant Reformation in Switzerland were a source of trouble for some time. Zwingli himself was at Einsiedeln for a while, and used the opportunity for protesting against the famous pilgrimages, but the storm passed over and the abbey was left in peace. Abbot Augustine I (1600-29) was the leader of the movement which resulted in the erection of the Swiss Congregation of the Order of St. Benedict in 1602, and he also promoted a high standard of scholarship and learning amongst his monks.

The pilgrimages, which have never ceased since the days of St Meinrad, constitute one of the features for which the abbey is chiefly celebrated. The pilgrims number from 150,000 to 200,000 annually, from all parts of Catholic Europe. The miraculous statue of Our Lady, originally set up by St Meinrad and later enthroned in the little chapel erected by Eberhard, is the object of their devotion. This chapel stands within the great abbey church, encased in marbles and precious wood-work and elaborately decorated, though it has been so often restored, rebuilt and adorned with the offerings of pilgrims that not much of the original sanctuary still remains.

September 14 and October 13 are the chief pilgrimage days, the former being the anniversary of the miraculous consecration of Eberhard's basilica and the latter that of the translation of St Meinrad's relics from Reichenau to Einsiedeln in 1039. The great church has been rebuilt many times, the last time by Abbot Maurus between the years 1704 and 1719. One of its chief treasures now is a magnificent corona presented by Napoleon III when he made a pilgrimage there in 1865. The library, which dates from 946, contains nearly 50,000 volumes and many priceless manuscripts.

The work of the monks is divided chiefly between prayer, the confessional and study. At pilgrimage times the number of confessions heard is very large.

In 2004 the community numbered 90 priests and 40 lay brothers. Attached to the abbey are a seminary and a college for about 260 pupils who are taught by the monks.

*Eternity is very long,
Especially towards the end.*

Woody Allen