

Einsiedeln- abbey of a thousand years

Autor(en): **Henggeler, P. Rudolf**

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EINSIEDELN — ABBEY OF A THOUSAND YEARS.

By P. Rudolf Henggeler.

We herewith reproduce this article which appeared in the "Catholic Herald" by courtesy of the Editor.

The Benedictine foundation of Our Lady of Einsiedeln was sanctioned by the Emperor Otto the Great on October 27, 947, and in the following years its first church was consecrated.

Thus was inaugurated not only a place of divine worship but also a centre of Benedictine culture. For 1,000 years it was to extend its blessings to the surrounding world.

A tradition which can be traced back to the 12th century attributes to Christ Himself the consecration of the cell of the holy Meinrad, which became embodied in the first abbey church, and hence Einsiedeln became one of the most famous pilgrimage centres in the Western world. It was here that St. Meinrad lived as a hermit in the ninth century and was murdered by robbers in 961.

The memory of this and later periods is preserved in the abbey library in numerous manuscripts, which were produced by the monastery's own scribes.

In time, however, disturbing influences made themselves felt. The church consecrated in 948 was destroyed by fire in 1029 and was not reconsecrated until 10 years later. In 1226 another fire accident occurred.

The Last Monk.

Like many other churches, the foundation had considerable differences of opinion with its patrons and protectors, the Nellenburgers and the Counts of Rapperswil.

Through the Hapsburgers, who succeeded the Rapperswilers, Einsiedeln was involved in much conflict with their neighbours, the Schwyzers, to whom the foundation finally had to cede more than half its property.

When in 1525 the last medieval monk, Diebold van Geroldseck, went over to Zwingli, the Zurich Reformer — the only inhabitant left in the monastery being the 86-year-old Abbot Konrad von Hoerrechberg — the Schwyzers, who followed the Hapsburgs as overlords, took possession.

From the foundation of St. Gall they brought a new abbot, Diethelm Blarer, who in 1536 began to accept candidates without titles of nobility into the monastery. This opened the way for a new spell of life for the monastery and was put into effect mainly by Abbot Joachim Eichhorn (1544-69). In 1577 the foundation was again the victim of a serious fire.

But in the years after 1600, a second flourishing period of the foundation began, and during the period of the Catholic Counter Reformation, it became the focal point of the religious and cultural life of Catholic Switzerland.

Many Activities.

Towards the end of the 17th century the number of the community rose to 100. This made it necessary in the first place to rebuild the foundation, and the work was begun in 1704.

In accordance with the plans of a member of a monastery, Dom Kaspar Moosbrugger, there arose the

mighty baroque building (1704-19), the monastery, and in 1719-35, the church, the whole being completed in 1770 by the farm buildings. It is still a monument of a great period.

Towards the end of the 18th century, the monastery was seriously threatened by the invasion of the French revolutionary troops. For a time the monks had to leave their monastery, but they were able to return in 1801 and to carry on with the work of restoration of the very severely damaged foundation.

Gradually it recovered, but not before its existence had again been further threatened by the political events of 1848.

A new lease of life was given to pilgrimages. Of great importance was the fact that the monastery school was further extended and today it has 320 students.

The monks have in their charge a new monastery settlement in the Argentine, 16 parishes in Switzerland and in the Vorarlberg; others are chaplains to convents.

Thus the 180 members of the community today seek to devote themselves in the most diverse fields of activity in the service of God and their fellow-men, as a symbol of which the first abbey church was consecrated 1,000 years ago.

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