

*To Prefer Nothing to Christ*  
*Saint Meinrad Archabbey 1854-2004*  
 Edited by Cyprian Davis, OSB

(St. Meinrad, Ind.: Abbey Press, 2004. Illustrations, notes.)

Founded in Spencer County in 1854, Saint Meinrad Archabbey has long been an institutional and architectural landmark in southern Indiana. As one of several imposing Benedictine monasteries in the United States, St. Meinrad's, an offshoot of the famous Benedictine Abbey of Maria Einsiedeln in Einsiedeln, Switzerland, enjoys a pride of place as archabbey of the Swiss Benedictine Confederation. Its monastery-sponsored seminary has provided a steady stream of priests and religious who have served the Catholic Church down through the years. The intellectual and cultural accomplishments of some of its monks and alumni have contributed substantially to Catholic life in the United States.

One of the monastery's premier historians, Father Cyprian Davis, O.S.B., edited this collection of essays to commemorate the monastery's sesquicentennial. While it lacks the cohesiveness of a straightforward account, Father Davis's compilation does provide a number of fascinating snapshots of different aspects of Saint Meinrad's. In addition to their competence in their respective areas of expertise, the contributors, for the most part, bring a sensitivity to the deeper meaning of monastic life.

Essays by Walker Gollar, Kevin Abing, Pedro Wolcan Olano, Joseph

White, and Nathan Mitchell accentuate the external works of the monks. Gollar unfolds the wider context of the monastery's placement in southern Indiana, providing a sense of the region's physical and social geography and of the role of Swiss monks from far-off Einsiedeln in creating their new foundation. Abing and Olano discuss the abbey's external missions—one to the Sioux Indians, the other a two-year effort to establish a monastic foundation in Colonia Suiza, Uruguay. White, one of America's leading scholars of the history of seminary education (and once a junior seminarian at the monastery), explores the evolution of St. Meinrad's seminary program and provides an interesting window into the lives of hundreds of priests trained there who served not only the monastery itself but also dioceses all over America. Mitchell, a leading liturgical scholar and also a former monk of the archabbey, discusses the efforts of Father Bede Maler in promoting a precursor of future liturgical renewal through his efforts on behalf of the "Eucharistic Movement" and the Priest's Eucharistic League (PEL).

The remaining essays reflect "in-house" monastic history. Although each of these essays is likely to be more appreciated by the monks of the

abbey or other monastics, they nonetheless include inviting case studies for social, cultural, and religious historians. Matthias Neuman, in his rather straightforward article on the monastic chaplaincy to the Ferdinand nuns, narrates a story of an ever-increasing demand for autonomy on the part of the nuns—a microcosm of similar dynamics occurring in other women's congregations with male chaplains and, to some degree, among American women religious in general. Joel Rip-pinger, the leading authority on Benedictine life in America, discusses the career of Bishop Martin Marty, a founder of the abbey and later a missionary bishop on the Great Plains. Davis's own essay, a superb case study of the brick-and-mortar ethos of American Catholicism in the early twentieth century, identifies ways in which Ignatious Esser's expansion of the monastery resembled the work of many other major clerical leaders of the time. Edward Shaughnessy's account of the building of the monastery's huge Romanesque Our Lady of Einsiedeln Church offers considerable evidence of a building that aimed "to bring the old world into the new." Designed by the little-studied but prolific Franciscan architect, Brother Adrian Wewer, the abbey church celebrated the larger impact of the monastery as "old Einsiedeln joined the American heartland." Harry Hagan's and Kim Malloy's work on the interior decor and ecclesiastical furnishings opens the door wider

onto the inner world of Benedictine life and its effort to transfer the rich spiritual tradition of European monasticism to America.

Davis has done an admirable job of editing these essays. This collection reveals much about American monasticism, American Catholic intellectual life, ethno-history, the evolution of Catholic devotions, and liturgical life, architecture, and leadership. For Indiana readers, it will become evident that the monks of St. Meinrad were every bit as much Hoosiers as James Whitcomb Riley. As "lovers of the place," they invested heart, soul, resources, and sweat into making southern Indiana a home.

STEVEN M. AVELLA is professor of history at Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

