

cd. Joseph Strange, 2 vols. (Cologne: J. Heberle, 1851), and Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum universale de apibus* (Douai: Baltazar Belleri, 1627).

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Recently the young daughter of a certain Jew of Louvain converted to the Christian faith in the following way. A priest who was chaplain to the duke of Brabant¹ customarily entered the home of a certain Jew who was a foreigner in that same city and disputed with him concerning the Christian faith. He had a small daughter who listened intently to the disputation in accordance with the capacity of her intelligence, weighing both the priest's word and the father's response. And so she grasped the meaning through divine disposition and was brought to the Catholic faith. So great was the girl's understanding [*discretio*] that, although not yet five years old, in the home of her Jewish parents she began to consider why there was such a difference between the name of the Jew and of the Christian; since the men of both peoples [*gens*] possessed the same appearance and language. She was more attached (as she said afterward) to the Christian than the Jewish name, and she was especially delighted to hear the name of the blessed Mary, which Christians customarily used both in prayer and while swearing. She used to hide bread from her parents' table under her sleeves and secretly gave it to beggar children so that she could hear them thanking her in the name of Mary. In these matters she continued from time to time in a wonderful way, but wisely hid them, so that neither of her parents could learn or hear anything about their daughter's thoughts.

It happened that in the course of time she came with several children to the home of the priest master Rayner. This priest knew her by name, and asked her, "Have you come, dearest Rachel, to become a Christian?" And she said, "I want you to teach me what it is to be a Christian." Then the priest, being a holy man and joyful in spirit, felt that this girl would have a divine future. And starting with the Creation, he began to explain Scripture to her, through which the faith of Christ, or Christ Himself, can be explained or shown. The explanation of these matters (as she reported afterward) was so complete that at the age of six and a half she comprehended by means of such great understanding of the spirit, so that rarely did the priest

1. Henry I (1218-35), duke of Brabant, was buried at the church of St. Peter of Louvain.

repeat any explanation. They studied for a year and a half in secret, in the course of meetings during which he taught the excited girl furtively and at the right time. What evidence of wonder! Rachel could never be satisfied, nor did she tire of hearing the word of God. Since both the priest and his assistant Martha, a religious² and prudent woman, were often tired, they would teach her in turns.

What more? Soon her parents turned their attention to their daughter, and in consultation with the other Jews agreed that the girl should be sent away from Louvain to the other side of the Rhine in order to be bound in marriage.³ When the girl found out, she tearfully told the priest that if that very night he did not remove her, and she did not become a Christian, she would be lost and troubled forever. When the priest had heard this, he told her to come to the usual entrance early in the morning. After she had agreed, in the evening she said to her mother, "Mother, I want to sleep by myself tonight." Since she was still a little girl, her mother refused for a long time, but agreed in the end, and ordered her daughter's bed to be prepared as a pillow at her feet. The little girl slept until morning, and since she disregarded what she had promised the priest the previous night, the glorious mother of God appeared to her dressed in a robe as white as snow and offering her a shining staff, saying, "Get up, Catherine, and take the road; a great road awaits you." When she heard these things, Rachel, believing she was grasping the wand, fell out of bed and cried out. Her mother, awakened by the cry, asked why she was crying, and the girl carefully dissimulated. Rachel then got up and went to the agreed-upon spot, where she soon found the priest. He joyfully lifted her up and went to the Cistercian monastery of Parc-aux-Dames, which was situated a league and a half from Louvain. He baptized her in the presence of many onlookers, giving her the name Catherine, which she had first been called by the mother of Christ, and she was baptized while wearing the holy garb of the order.

When her father and his friends heard what had happened, without delay they angrily approached the local duke, the bishop of Liège, and Pope Honorius⁴ in order to give them a great deal of money so that the girl would be returned to her parents, since she had been taken away before she had reached the legal age.⁵ Should she remain in her parents' home until the

2. Martha may have been a beguine; on the beguines see Christina of Stommeln (Section Four).

3. The center of Jewish life in the region was at Cologne in the Rhineland.

4. Hugh of Pierrepont, bishop of Liège (1220-29), and Pope Honorius III (1216-27).

5. The age of discretion was twelve for girls and fourteen for boys.

age of twelve, and should she remain firm in the faith, then she could rightly take a Christian name. They evilly thought that they could easily change the child's mind should she return to her parents' home. How grievous are the treacherous struggles of our times! Many great and learned men cherish the money that has been given them; which is why the priest was very concerned. He therefore tearfully invoked both Christ and his Mother, as she had been the cause of this event. Because the duke wanted to restore the Jewish daughter to her Jewish father, the priest Rayner stood firm and said, "Oh my lord, if you commit this evil deed against God and his bride, your soul will never be saved." The lord abbot Walter of Villers also approached the duke.

The Jew saw that the hope he had placed in the duke was in vain. He decided to bribe Hugh, the lord bishop of Liège. At the Jew's request, Hugh sent letters to nuns at the convent of Parc, urging that his daughter be restored to him. Finally the Jew came with his friends and relatives to the convent, where Catherine was studying in the cloister. Although she knew nothing whatsoever of their coming, she felt a great warmth, and said openly, "I don't know what it is, but the Jewish stench oppresses me." In the meantime, as the Jews knocked on the window, the abbess spoke to the girl, "My daughter Catherine, your parents want to see you." She replied, "It is their stench I feel, although I don't see them." She refused to go out. The bishop of Liège has recently made an accusation concerning this matter, in the presence of the lord Archbishop Engelbert of Cologne⁶ in his synod, and it has been decided that he should no longer trouble the convent concerning the baptized girl.

At that time he submitted, but in the end he did not obey. For afterward he summoned the girl to Liège by letter under pain of excommunication in order to respond to her father's objections. She came, but under good protection. The Jewish contention was that she had been taken away as a minor and baptized by force. They said to the girl, "Catherine, we are told that you will willingly return to your father if allowed." She replied, "Who says this?" They replied, "Your father." She then said the following in a clear voice, "My father lies totally through his beard." Oh what a wonderful thing, that up to now, through the centuries, has been unheard of! The girl asked the priest to accompany her to every summons and judge. "Perhaps," she said, "the judges are persuaded by my age and moved by my sacrifice." It happened as she said. She came to Liège, and in the presence of

6. Archbishop Engelbert of Cologne, who was consecrated in 1216 and martyred on November 9, 1225, was also the subject of a biography by Caesarius of Heisterbach.

the bishop, clerics, and magnates she confounded and moved various lawyers and judges with constant and truthful reasoning. For a great distance the voices of persons crying out with tears were heard from the church of St. Lambert of Liège. Astonished, all clearly saw and said that the wisdom of the divine spirit had remained strong in one so young. At this point, when the Jew's lawyer got up, lord Walter, abbot of Villers⁷ excitedly said to him, "Master, you speak against God and your honor. You should surely know that should you utter anything against the girl, I will go to the pope and request that you be permanently silenced in all legal proceedings." Secretly fearful, he answered the abbot, "Lord abbot, who will it harm if I am able to extort money from the Jews. I will say nothing that will injure this girl." Since he would soon receive his payment, he said to the Jew, "I dare not say any more."

Around that time, when lord Guy, abbot of Clairvaux, visited the monasteries of his order in the diocese of Liège, he conferred with the bishop, admonishing and asking him how long, in God's honor, he would continue harassing a girl already consecrated to Christ. The bishop answered him, "Good lord abbot, why is this case important to you?" The abbot replied, "It is important for two reasons: firstly because I am a Christian; and secondly because the house where she lives belongs to the line of Clairvaux." And he added, "I decree that the girl and her case should be under the pope's protection, and I appeal those letters sent by you against her." He did what he said, and sent to the prior of Parc those letters sent by the pope against the bishop, lest the bishop try to disturb the convent because of the girl, and so that they could defend themselves with those letters.

After two years the matter came to an end by legal judgment. A deceptive snare was then prepared by the Jews, using a handsome Jewish youth for the purpose. He came to the convent where the girl lived, pretending that he wanted to be baptized. When he had represented himself in that way, he asked to speak to his cousin Catherine because of her learning. He said the following, "The word of my cousin will be more effective to me than the speech of others." Catherine perceived the youth's falsehood in coming to the Faith, and neither imprecations nor money or any obedience could persuade her to speak even a single word with the youth. When the Jews saw this, they left her alone, and the Jew returned to his vomit.

After the above, much grace flourished in the person of the most elect Catherine, who was loved by all; no one was more serene than she.

7. Abbot Walter (1214-21) of Villers, one of the largest Cistercian monasteries.