CHRISTIAN COPPENS

Seven Liberal Arts and Ten Commandments: the decoration intended for the library of the Celestine Monastery of Heverlee, Louvain

Among bibliophiles the name Arenberg achieved worldwide renown in the twentieth century. This occurred most spectacularly in 1952 when thirty-three precious manuscripts were brought on the market by the Seligman catalogue. Moreover, there were the incunabula which became well-known primarily through the Lessing J. Rosenwald collection. Finally, there was the castle library of Nordkirchen, property of the Arenberg family, which was dispersed. That was the end of a long tradition which had reached an initial high point with Charles of Croy (1560-1612), who brought together an impressive library, which was auctioned in Brussels in 1614 after his death. Additionally, it was he who, around 1600, tried to bring order to the family foundation, the Celestine monastery at Heverlee, and who wanted to re-organize the library there.

THE MONASTERY

When William of Croy, lord of Chievres, Duke of Aarschot, and advisor of Emperor Charles V, died in 1521 during the Diet of Worms. His childless widow, Mary of Hamal, was obliged, as executrix of his will, to found a monastery. Willem wanted to be buried in the chapel of the Celestine monastery that was supposed to be established near his castle at Heverlee. It was to be a funerary chapel connected to a monastery whose monks prayed for the salvation of the soul of the noble departed. Many greater and lesser princes had preceded


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him in this sort of foundation. There were illustrious predecessors from the Burgundian Court, from Philip the Bold to Margareth of Austria, his contemporary. Twenty-four conventuals were intended, - twelve priests, six lay-brothers and six other laymen. These last were to be chosen from among the former servants of the Duke of Aarschot. Construction of the complex began soon. The execution was entrusted to Rombout II Keldermans, appointed chief architect of Charles V from 1516, who in 1518-1519 was busy with the palace of Margareth of Austria at Mechelen. As early as 1522 eight priests and two lay-brothers from France were guests at the castle awaiting the completion of the buildings. The burial of William of Croy in the choir of the church could take place on September 27 that year, and the monks were able to move into the monastery. In 1527 the establishment was practically finished and further attention could be given to decoration and equipment, so that the complex could develop into an artistic shrine worthy of the name of its founder. The process did not, however, run entirely smoothly. Problems with conventual discipline arose quickly, as did financial problems. The religious disputes and the wars in the second half of the century did not contribute to improving the situation. Philip III of Croy (1526-1595), Duke of Aarschot, tried unsuccessfully to put things in order, with the help of the regent, Margareth of Parma, and of the ecclesiastical authorities. Towards the end of the century the situation was precarious.2

Charles III of Croy (1560-1612), Philip’s son and fourth Duke of Aarschot, attempted more thoroughly to get a grip on things. Although the duke lived primarily in Beaumont, he followed the affairs at Heverlee from closely with his characteristic tenaciousness. After a plan to alter the monastery into a college of secular canons was rejected by Rome, the duke considered making it a Cistercian monastery, in collaboration with the abbot of Villers-la-Ville. That also came to nothing. Charles did obtain from the Holy See, through intervention by the papal nuncio Ottavio Mirto Frangipani, the right to intervene personally in the situation through the person of the prior of the Carthusian monastery of Leuven.3 On May 10, 1601, the prior, subprior, the other conventuals and

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3 Leuven, Arenbergarchief, 2259. Ottavio Mirto Frangipani (ca. 1543-1612), nephew of Fabio (d. 1587), was papal nuncio in Brussels from April 20, 1596, until June 12, 1606. See Henry Blaudet, Les nonceatures apostoliques permanentes jusqu'en 1648 (Helsinki 1910), p. 165.