



Image of Toledo Synagogue from Wikimedia Commons

Bodo-Eleazar Dies At Age 61 or 62

By

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Bodo's obituary is a creative piece. The class was asked to write a fictional obituary of an individual in the early Middle Ages from the perspective of a different person of the same time period. I selected the subject of my obituary to be Bodo, a ninth-century Frankish deacon. Raised and educated at the royal court at Aachen, Bodo, in his early twenties, experienced a deep spiritual crisis and, while on a pilgrimage to Rome, made a sudden conversion to Judaism. He moved to Cordoba in Spain, changed his name to Eleazar and spent the rest of his life trying to convert other Christians to the Jewish faith. The perspective from which the obituary is written is that of the Empress Judith, the second wife of Carolingian ruler Louis the Pious. While the empress herself died in 843 C.E., the following work is my own interpretation of how Judith would have reflected on the life of Bodo.

It is with great sadness that I, Empress Judith, announce the death of a friend; once close, but still dear to our hearts. Bodo, formerly a member of our fine and upstanding court, has died at the age of 61 or 62. While some may know the man of whom I speak as Eleazar, if you will forgive me, I shall refer to the young man, whom I knew well, as I knew him before the grave day of his apostasy. It was a day recalled in the kingdom as, "something to be bewailed by all of the children of the Catholic Church."

But of course, Bodo's story should be told from the beginning. For what way is it to remember such a friend as to speak first of the darkest and most troubling moments of his life.

A child of Alemannic heritage such as myself, Bodo was raised by a proud family and quickly showed promise. As a child, he was educated and took to knowledge with great

ferocity at the palace in Aachen, and soon the handsome young boy had grown into a charming young man. Also deeply devoted to the teachings of Christ and the Catholic religion, he, by his eighteenth year, had risen beyond the Minor Orders of the Church and earned status as a subdeacon under the guidance of archchaplain Hilduin, then a chief of the royal abbey at Saint-Denis.

It is at this point in Bodo's life, however, that many rumors began to spread of his affinity for the religion of Judaism. While it would be foolish to deny that Bodo, as a subdeacon, did not deal with the sacred texts of the Old Testament, it would be unreasonable to believe that interaction with this text would sway him to the ways of the Jews. Have many not read the word of God and his prophets in the Old Testament and been strengthened in their faith, as opposed to being persuaded to lose it?

Indeed, for our dear friend to have made such a tragic decision, he must have been "seduced," it is written, "by the enemy of the human race," none other than the devil himself. In a correspondence with Pablo Alvaro, a Spaniard and a layman of exceptional Christian faith and knowledge, many years after his conversion, he is said to have broken his vow of chastity many times in the very chapels in which the Lord is praised. It pains me to know these words to be confirmed true by his own writing, as the young Bodo seemed far too devout, too devoted to the Lord our God, to have strayed on his own accord.

He spoke also in his letters of bishops and other religious officials preaching and teaching heretical doctrines within the court of Aachen itself. But how could this be? How could such unspeakable atrocities occur in the kingdom of my most pious and venerated husband, Louis? It is with great shock and disbelief that I approach such claims.

But, returning to the subject at hand. Looking back at the young Bodo of only 23 or

24 years of age, all looked promising. When he requested to take a most holy pilgrimage to the city of Rome in the year 838, we were at first saddened, but willingly agreed to let him go. For though we were going to miss his captivating presence at home, who were we to keep him from journeying to the Holy See of St. Peter? He was supplied well, both with wealth and with men, to ensure a most successful journey.

As to what happened next, there is much contention. There appear to be conflicting opinions on whether the misguided young Bodo ever made it to the city of Rome. Many, including myself, would like to believe that if he had made it to that most splendid place, that he would have been overcome with the presence of God and set straight on the path of the Catholic faith. But alas, in the year 839, Bodo had made his final decision and abandoned the Christian faith and the court at Aachen.

As the story is told, Bodo (may God have mercy on his soul) discussed, "apostasy and his own perdition with some Jews he had brought with him to sell to the pagans." And so he did, after making up his mind, sell all but his own nephew over into slavery, forcing the poor soul to convert alongside him. When those in the court at Aachen heard of what had happened, all were completely shocked. Poor Louis could scarcely believe the tale himself.

Within about three months time he formally renounced his baptism and taking the new name of Eleazar, he let his hair and beard grow, was circumcised and took a Jewish wife. He left the lands of the Emperor and entered into the region of Spain, still under rule of the Umayyad Emir of Cordoba. The city of Saragossa was home to him for some time, but he soon moved further south, finally settling in Cordoba.

What is more, this conversion did not lead him to a life of humble piety in his newfound religion, but instead he began to

speaking out and even condemn the Catholic faith. He began to spout nonsensical claims against the Messiah and even went so far as to suppose Christianity as a polytheistic religion.

In his continuing correspondence with Bodo-Eleazar, Pablo Alvaro, though not advocating for the conversion of all Jews, made the effort to reincorporate the misguided man back into the faith out of kindness and consideration. However, as the exchange grew more hostile over the doctrine of the two faiths, the once kind and gentle soul snapped, addressing Alvaro saying, "You are like a yapping dog." It was, at this moment, clear that Bodo was never again to return to the court at Aachen and to the Catholic faith.

Bodo-Eleazar lived out the rest of his days seeking to convert the Mozarabic Christians of Spain to Judaism. Many of these Christians began, in the 850s, to be persecuted by the caliphate, and, having made a name for himself, many felt Bodo-Eleazar was to blame.

In some ways, I too feel responsible for the apostasy they young man, now grown old, and gone. Perhaps if my dear Charles (God rest his soul) had not delayed the restriction on the practice of Judaism throughout the kingdom, Bodo would have remained in the favor of the court at Aachen and died as a servant of the holy Catholic Church. I despair to think what might have been.

Even still, may God have mercy on his soul. Amen.

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