

August Julius Langbehn, *Rembrandt as Educator*: “German vs. Jewish” (1890)

Abstract

Julius Langbehn (1851–1907) was a writer, a philosopher, and the author of the 1890 book *Rembrandt als Erzieher* [*Rembrandt as Educator*], which was published anonymously (“by a German”) and went on to become a bestseller. In it, Langbehn criticized democratization as tantamount to the leveling and destruction of the nation, and he advanced the definition of German as non-Jewish. Langbehn only allowed for “good Jews”—those Jews who did not profess to be German but rather emphasized their difference from Germans. When Jewish Germans identified as German, Langbehn attacked them harshly.

Source

[...]

The “Jewish question” that is so frequently discussed today falls under this aspect. In Händel’s oratorios, true Old Testament character has been transfigured into true German character. A strong human spirit lives in them and a gentle divine spirit speaks from them. This is the polarity. The native soul requires a gentle nudge from the foreign; the foreign clouds it but the clouding is divine, spurring it to procreation, to creation, to a higher life. To be sure, Luther learned much from the Psalmists; and to be sure, Goethe was inspired by Spinoza, just as Spinoza was by the Dutch: thus exemplary Jews and exemplary Germans should inspire one another. But among the majority of modern, in other words, plebian Jews, there are neither Spinozas nor Psalmists. They have sacrificed their own individuality and have gained no higher individuality in return; they have become renegades. Germany will thus have to defend itself from them to the best of its ability. They are poison for us and have to be treated as such. Contemporary Jews themselves regard the Portuguese Jews as their aristocracy and the Polish Jews as their rabble; Germany has received very few of the former but very many of the latter. The ancient Jewish institution of the jubilee year is based on a truly sublime idea; it, in its way, solves the social question. However, today’s average Jews stand a world away from such an idea. They do not keep the laws anymore! Their avarice is boundless; they tread a crooked path; their morality is not ours. They disparage both art and science. They are democratically inclined; they are drawn to the rabble; they sympathize putrefaction everywhere. Since they no longer keep the year of jubilee voluntarily, it could well be, therefore, that a year of misery will be forced upon them. For all sins are avenged, and many signs indicate that an event of this kind is in store for the Jewry of today. When it occurs, the German who so often acknowledged the good Jews will then also punish the wicked Jews. When he is mindful of himself, he is relentless in his love as well as in his hate.

In this pending Jewish question, a coming “secret emperor” will need to intervene forcefully. He will have to sway the scepter and separate the sheep from the goats, for a ruler must first of all be just. But it is just to stand up for the noble and against the mean. To grant the same rights to the noble as to the mean is only a sham justice; it is only a justice of the Devil’s mercy. It is not German justice. Whoever is a proper Israelite without falsification, as the Bible says, will certainly be welcome to that future judge and leader, welcome as an honest and possibly also brilliant foreigner; this will not be the case for the “counterfeit” [*gefälschten*] Jews who want to be German at the same time. For only he is honest and honorable who remains true to himself. True Jews can indeed be friends with true Germans; even those who, like Spinoza, Rahel, and Börne, have preserved only a noble, abstract Judaism; but

all true Germans will always be united against all untrue Jews. These are the *gens sceleratissima Judaeorum*—the totally despicable Jewry—of which Tacitus spoke, from which Isaias separated; and from which noble spirits always will separate. A beloved picture by [Moritz von] Schwind in the Schack Gallery in Munich depicts St. Wolfgang building a church: the Devil has to bring him stones on a wheelbarrow, and thus serves him while resisting him. This is the relationship of modern Jewry to the true German people; legend and art were in this case, as they are so often, prophetic. And another holy Wolfgang—von Goethe—if he were still alive today, would share this conception. Today's scribbling Jews in the stock exchange and in literature would have been nauseating to him; he has nothing in common with them nor they with him. It seems necessary to emphasize this, especially in light of certain present-day events. Jewish lack of character may curse itself under the mantle of Goethe's idea of humanity; but it may also be flushed out there. "For no alliance can be made between the sons of light and of darkness." [...]

Source: *Rembrandt als Erzieher. Von einem Deutschen* [August Julius Langbehn]. Leipzig: Hirschfeld, 1890, pp. 284–85. Available online at: <https://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-8943>

Translation: Elizabeth Tucker

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