Adam Heinrich Müller, "The True German" (1809)

Abstract

The jurist and political theorist Adam Heinrich Müller (1779–1829) worked for the Prussian state and, from 1813 to 1825, for Austria as well. Opposed to the politics of the Hardenberg reforms, he advocated for an organically developed, monarchic, corporative state. Together with Achim von Arnim, he founded the "Christian-German Society." In his review of Fichte's *Address to the German Nation*, Müller transmuted the difference in religion between Christianity and Judaism into the alleged opposition of German vs. Jewish. He stated that Germans and Jews were in the historically comparable situation of being a "nation without a nation," but he rejected as inconceivable the notion that Germans should take the Jews as an example.

Source

[…] What foreigners[1] think or would like to think when they hear the words "German" and "Germanness," "German man" and "German woman," is just as incomprehensible to us true Germans, and hopefully as unimportant, as those foreigners are unable to understand or sympathize with the joyful, dignified, and truly national feeling, all our own, that grips us when we speak these words aloud with sober awareness, or think them, or when from another breast, through words or deeds, the existence of this same awareness, of this recognition and faith in our own inner dignity is vibrantly and clearly articulated. It would be a vain pursuit to attempt in a few or many words to make what we believe comprehensible, to those for whom the single word is not enough, to which is tied a sacred meaning that transcends the ordinary caricature of nationality; a characteristic feature of spirit that first borders on Christianity and in its widest extension can dwell within that son of earth, through whose tongue or whose writing it is accustomed to reveal its inner life. The real German is faithful, modest, pious, and hardworking, a brave defender of the fatherland and of the good cause, a peaceful and law-abiding citizen, the twin brother in misfortune of the Swiss, however current events seem to stand in contradiction to this, and however many mangy sheep run with the herd. For the fact that they, the Germans, do not make up a single, visible kingdom, that they have become subordinate to their victorious neighbors well versed in warfare, the fault lies with political evils far in the past, the enervating force of cold Enlightenment and the lassitude of governments, which necessarily gave rise to an absence of the feeling of unity and external cohesion, an unconsciousness of their shared power, and an unfamiliarity with fast, though well-considered action. As long as they are lacking these, they will never enter the political association of states as an independent power, but will remain a tool in foreign hands, and moreover, will earn no other fate. But the author of the address seems to have had in his mind something entirely different from this distinguished political existence, which was lost as a result of recent events: he rather intended the shared entity of language, way of thinking and mindset, which truly make nations (not states) into nations, which reproduces itself and binds the single parts into a whole; what kind of transformation can also occur in the organization of countries and governments; and what can exist and endure, without the respective governments and rulers therefore having to worry themselves or having to lean on this entity, as it cannot lean on itself. It is bad that history has presented us with no other example for this endurance of nationality as precisely such a one to which we look with reluctance, and which stands in opposition to Germanness according to its inmost nature: namely, Jewishness. But precisely this nationality is the only possession that can comfort us about the loss of external freedom to which it may in the future, in a happy time, be able to return us; this single possession that can be stolen from us by no one, but also can be given to us by no

one except by ourselves. It is apparent enough that it has been preserved in complete, high purity in only a few representatives, that it perhaps will perish like the other enslaved nations and that it needs must perish, if, through these few individuals, it is not sustained, tended, and made vigorous. Each of these few should therefore regard it as his most sacred duty to feed the sacred flames, and wherever a pure voice is raised, it should be listened to with reverence, should be acknowledged with seriousness and zeal, should be answered with love and faith. However, the matter is too sacred and too dignified for that false sensitivity on the part of all who speak of it should result in the bad being called suitable and the mediocre excellent, and any form of charlatanism being tolerated or addressed at all, in no matter what form it announces itself. […]

NOTES

[1] *Barbari* – on whatsoever patch of earth they may have been born or fed to death, it matters not.

Source: Adam Heinrich Müller, "Vom echten Deutschen" (1808); reprinted in Heinz Ludwig Arnold, ed., *Deutsche über die Deutschen. Auch ein deutsches Lesebuch*. Munich: C.H. Beck, 1972, pp. 156–58. Republished with permission. Originally from "Fichtes Reden an die deutsche Nation," in Adam Müller, *Kritische/ästhetische und philosophische Schriften*, edited by Walter Schroeder and Werner Siebert. Neuwied and Berlin, 1976.

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