No Jews in the German Nation: "German" and "Jewish" According to Achim von Arnim in His "Christian-German Society" (1810)

Abstract

At a meeting of the German Christian Society (later: Christian-German), which he co-founded, the writer Achim von Arnim (1781–1831) gave a talk in 1810 entitled "On the Distinguishing Signs of Jewishness." The talk was not public, but it was circulated and discussed at length in Berlin. Arnim refused to admit Jews into the society and denied their equality: he described them as non-Germans and accused them of disguising their difference through assimilation. Like Adam Heinrich Müller (1779–1829), he defined Germanness as non-Jewishness, interpreting a confessional difference as an essential one.

Source

Report from one of the members of the committee on laws and regulations.

It is my duty to an esteemed society to give a report on an important addition to the laws, which, although it necessarily arose from the spirit of the legislation, has by no means been duly discussed in our association, but which in our days, when extraordinary negotiations in religious matters are imminent, could not be postponed for another fortnight without serious danger. To the law on the expulsion of Philistines I believed it was necessary to add, in the spirit of German-Christian fellowship, that a written declaration from ten members is sufficient to remove secret Jews or converts to Judaism from the society. As our society is rapidly expanding, and we have heard that news has already reached the Caribs and the cannibals—who according to some theologians are descended from Jews—that it was an order of Illuminati because there had been talk of rays of light among its founders; under the condition of this rapid expansion it seemed very troubling that secret Jews could smuggle themselves in through disguise or interrelationship, in order to illicitly import a group of ten of their people, who as familiar, longtime enemies of "Philistines" would then lawfully be able to get rid of all of us, whom they despise in equal measure, under this name; thus, that in the place of this Christian society a synagogue would assemble, which would wail instead of singing joyfully, which instead of pheasants would slaughter Christian children, instead of cakes would impale the Host with fork and spoon, instead of the great good deeds that we still intend to initiate in the future, would poison the public wells and perpetrate similar small wrongdoings in order to rouse the Jews in all the countries of Europe to blood. O gentlemen, what regret I feel, that I so often laughed about the great lawmakers who surprise their people with secretly contrived wisdom suddenly, overnight, and want to compel them to felicity, while in their vehemence they rub out with one hand what the other has written; this laughter now pains me when I see that such an important object that could overturn the entire law, despite the many sleepless nights I spent in devising proposals, despite the repeated advice before the assembly and in committees, is nevertheless forgotten at the moment when I read in the newspaper that in Vienna, just as throughout France, a secret band of Jews could be observed doing all manner of evil deeds. Then the wool fell from my eyes. Philistines are easy to identify; like snails, they carry their shell around with them for all to see; they also do not like to remain where they cannot find others of their kind; but Jews have, one, a rare art of hiding themselves, and their

idiosyncrasies have still not by any means been ascertained by science; and two, they have a devilish curiosity to get to know the good in order to spoil it, or, according to a familiar saying, in order to mix themselves with the pepper,[1] like a critic.

In their books, they speak with great pride of their art of concealing themselves. They tell how a Jewish boy, first a peddler of hair ribbons, became the emperor of Turkey; how another, in Mainz, who could imitate the nightingale and other birds, was stolen by the Christians and made Pope. Afterwards he called for his father, who was a learned chess player, and with a move that only he understood, let his father know he was his lost son. They also insist the strong monk Ilfan, who tied two dozen of his fellow monks together by their beards and hung them from a long pole, was one of their people. This art of concealing themselves is most strikingly evidenced in Spain and Portugal, where thousands, despite all the vigilance of the Inquisition, secretly celebrated their old beliefs, while already seeming like good Christians since the time of their fathers, until they thought it safe to openly appear in public, or until they moved to foreign lands, where their beliefs met no resistance; indeed, it is not unlikely that it is thanks to them that in Portugal, where they had mixed with the finest houses, less of a sense of national honor was shown during the last war than in Spain. Everyone knows how artfully they interpret their laws so that they may bend them to their needs. […]

NOTES

[1] This is a reference to the expression "Mausdreck mit dem Pfeffer mischen," literally, to mix mouse droppings with the pepper, transl.

Source: Achim von Arnim, "Über die Kennzeichen des Judenthums," in *Achim von Arnim, Werke in 6 Bänden,* vol. 6, *Achim von Arnim Schriften,* eds. Roswitha Burwick, Jürgen Knaack, and Hermann F. Weiss. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992, pp. 362–64.

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