

Court Chaplain Adolf Stoecker Introduces Antisemitism to the Christian Social Workers' Party (September 19, 1879)

Abstract

Adolf Stoecker (1835–1909) was a court chaplain and the leader of the antisemitic Christian Social Workers' Party, founded in 1878. This party was initially formed to draw the working classes away from socialism. By the time this speech was delivered, however, it was evolving in the direction of a mainly antisemitic party. Hence the word “workers” was dropped from the party name. Up to 1896, when Stoecker was forced to leave the Conservative Party, he was responsible for much of that party's appeal to lower-middle-class voters in Berlin and other large German cities. Some contemporaries referred to him as Germany's “second Luther.” Others referred to his prodigious (even “demagogic”) talent as a speaker and his ability to move the masses. In the passage below, Stoecker displays his considerable rhetorical talent. He keeps his audience's attention by listing his party's “demands” on the Jews, each of which is intentionally ironic. He calls on the Jews to be “a little more modest,” “a little more tolerant,” and a little more dedicated to the principle of equality. This speech also reflects Stoecker's ongoing effort to stake his claim to leadership among competing antisemitic leaders by linking the “Jewish Question” and the “social question.” Stoecker was always uncomfortable with calls to define the “Jewish Question” in purely racial terms. The underlying cause of Jewry's “threat” to Christian society, he felt, was Germany's rapid industrialization, the triumph of “Mammonistic” capitalism, the rise of a class-conscious proletariat, and workers' alienation from the church. In a nutshell, his solution to the “Jewish Question” was for German society to disavow liberalism and rededicate itself to the Christian faith.

Source

The Jewish question has long been a burning question. Amongst us it has flamed brightly for several months. It feeds on neither religious fanaticism nor political passion. The orthodox and the freethinker, the conservative and the liberal, write and speak about it with equal violence. None of them treats Jewry as the apple of discord because of religious intolerance but because of social concern. “The social question is the Jewish question,” writes [Otto] Glagau. “Elect no Jews!” cries W. Marr in his third pamphlet; in the first he reported on the “Victory of Jewry over Germandom” and from the “Jewish Theater of War” in the second. His highly agitated appeal to the nation ended with *Finis Germaniae*—“the end of Germany is at hand.” Well, now, we don't believe the death of the German spirit to be so near. Nations, like individuals, can be reborn. Germany, and even Berlin, will recover and free itself from alien spirits.

Yet symptoms of illness are present. Social evils are visible in all the limbs of the body politic, and social enmity is never without a cause. Christians and Jews must be seriously concerned that conflict does not grow into hatred. Here and there the summer lightning already flashes, heralding a distant storm.

It is quite remarkable that the Jewish-liberal press does not have the courage to answer the complaints and accusations of its attackers. It is usually all too ready to uncover scandals where there are none. They sharpen their poisoned quills on the sermons delivered in our churches and on the debates of our church assemblies. But they condemn the Jewish question to silence, and they avoid having their readers hear anything of those hostile voices. They adopt the air of scorning their opponents, pretending that they are unworthy of an answer. It would be better for them to learn from their enemies, to acknowledge their faults, and to work in common for the social reconciliation we so need.

It is with this intention that I would like to deal with the Jewish question in full Christian love but also in full social truthfulness.

Occasional utterances of mine on this theme in Christian Social gatherings have been conveyed to the public out of context, exaggerated, and always distorted—for partisan political reasons. Reporters from certain newspapers, a disgrace to the city of intelligence, have been equally ignorant and untruthful. Many of them falsify out of incomprehension but most out of malice. An occurrence that took place in the last year is both characteristic and instructive. In my absence, the Jews were discussed more than was necessary in our gatherings. The Jewish press wrote that the Christian Socials were animated by Jew hatred and that they were pushing for the persecution of Jews. I returned and seized the opportunity publicly and solemnly to declare: We hate no one, not even the Jews. We respect them as our fellow citizens and love them as the people of the prophets and apostles, out of which our Savior came forth. But this ought not stop us from identifying the danger when the Jewish papers assault our faith or when the Jewish spirit of Mammon ruins our people. This declaration was then distorted into the accusation that I said all Germany's woes came from the Jews. A flood of letters hailed down upon me. A Berlin Jew, whose name I know, wrote me that his people was the favorite of God. If Christians declared their love for the chosen people, this was no different from when a courtesan—I use the more polite word here—gives her heart to a high-ranking nobleman. A second sent “to the narrow-minded Jew baiter” a pamphlet in which a faithless, baptized writer describes and exaggerates the contributions of Jews to science in the Middle Ages.^[1] A third, writing from Frankfurt-am-Main, congratulates me for speaking openly about Germany's defects and signs himself: “unfortunately, a Jew.”

This episode, insignificant in itself, is a good example of the lies, arrogance, and hatred called forth by any discussion of the Jewish question. People who pour scathing criticism on the state and church, personalities and affairs, are outraged to the extreme when others allow themselves to cast so much as a scrutinizing glance at Jewry. They themselves fall upon every non-Jewish activity with hatred and scorn. But if we softly speak a word of truth about their doings, they play the insulted innocent, the victims of intolerance, the martyrs of world history. Notwithstanding, I shall dare openly and freely to speak my mind about modern Jewry. I am prepared in advance for lying reports.

In fact, I see modern Jewry as a great danger to German national life. [By “modern Jewry”] I do not mean the religion of the Orthodox or the enlightenment of the Reformers. As for the Orthodox with their ossification of the law, their Old Testament without temple, priests, sacrifices, or messiah, they hold no attraction for the children of the nineteenth century and pose no dangers. In its deepest core it is a dead religious form, a lower stage of revelation, a spirit that has outlived itself and, although still worthy of honor, has been invalidated by Christianity. It has no more truth for the present. Reform Judaism has even less religious significance. It is neither Judaism nor Christianity but a shabby little survival of the Age of Enlightenment. [...] Both types [of Judaism] boast that the Jews are the bearers of the highest religious and moral ideas for the world and humanity and that the mission of Judaism now and for all the future consists of holding fast to these ideas, developing them further, and disseminating them. The Jewish press of the Right and Left is united in this. The incense emanating from the synagogues of both schools simply intoxicates the senses. [...]

S. Meyer, editor of the *Jewish Press*, writes: “Indisputably, the lofty ideals upon which rests the moral order of the world and the intellectual content of modern culture and civilization which form the foundation of true brotherhood, all arise from Judaism.” “Everything good in the Gospels is not new, but rather derives from Judaism. And everything new in them is not good.”

In the same vein writes Dr. Adler: “The religion of Israel is the eternal, unchanging truth. Christianity and Islam are the preliminary stages which the truth must ascend before the whole truth becomes accessible.” And the Reform rabbi Nascher joins in the chorus: “Israel's mission and gift is to be the lighthouse on humanity's sea of thought. It is called upon, like the stars, to shine upon the totality of its

fellow-men,” or so preaches the vain man to his vain congregation.

[...]

At this point we make our first demand: *pray, a little more modesty!* We do not deny that Israel carried the knowledge of a personal, single God through the ancient world like a sacred flame. But then came Christ and completed the faith with a richer conception of God and a higher Truth. And it is a matter of historical fact that the nation of Israel constantly fell back into the coarsest sort of idolatry. The powerful personalities sent by God to fend off this backsliding succeeded for only short intervals. It is truly not the merit of Israel to have preserved the doctrine of the one God of the world but the result of God’s grace. Equally true is it that the ideas of religious freedom and tolerance in the modern sense are not characteristic of the Old Testament. Whosoever broke the sabbath was stoned. The priests of Baal were slaughtered. This was part of the peculiarities of their legal system. Far be it from us to reproach the Old Testament for this reason. But it is certainly erroneous when Jews take credit for ideas that were completely unknown to their religion in its historical form. They must know that they had a priestly caste (the very opposite of equality), that they cultivated slavery (the very opposite of freedom), and that they practiced polygamy (the very opposite of the ideal family life). It was Germanic-Christian life that first corrected these errors. It is true that Israel had enlightened economic laws: social forms of property, prohibition of interest, and extreme compassion for the poor. But we need only mention these things in order to feel the fearful distance between the Old Testament and the modern Jew. Only German law protected the conception of communal property; only the Christian church spoke out against the taking of interest. In just these matters the errors and sins of modern Jewry are clear for all to see.

Even conceding that Israel has a lofty and lasting mission, who are the shining thinkers and poets filled with the spirit of God, proclaiming the living God, praising Him, and bringing Him honor? Perhaps the editors of the [*Berliner*] *Tageblatt*? Or the scholars of *Kladderadatsch*?^[2] Where is the school for the prophets of the Holy Ghost in which the apostles for this world mission are to be educated? where the missions? where the missionaries? perhaps on the stock exchanges of Berlin, Vienna, and Paris? Oh, no. The Jews would not be so foolish. And just this is their doom. They foundered on Christ, lost their divine course, and surrendered their divine mission. Unheeding of the pithy maxim of the Lord Jesus that “thou canst not serve both God and Mammon,” the Jews ran after the golden calf, leaving off the ways of God.

[...]

Occasionally a sunbeam of recognition concerning their misery emanates from Jewish writers themselves. [...] [A reform Jewish weekly] finds the courage to lay before its readers the following verse:

*Everywhere it seems plain to the wise,
That the number of Jews is on the rise.
In theaters, concerts, and at the balls,
It’s mostly Jews who fill the halls.
If it’s more Christians than Jews you want to see,
Then in the New Synagogue you ought to be.*

“It is quite certain that in Berlin not a quarter, probably not even a tenth, of the Jewish prep-school students over the age of thirteen hear a word of religious instruction.” “Morality remains limited to the sentence: what the penal code does not forbid or what cannot be detected by the judge is permissible, useful, clever.” These Jewish voices date from 1871. It has become much worse today. The Jews combat our faith even though they know that man cannot exist without religion.^[3] [...]

All [these pretensions to importance] have worked to produce in the Jews, especially the Jewish newspaper writers, a degree of intolerance that will soon be unbearable. In all seriousness, we address

our second petition to the Jewish press: *pray, be a little more tolerant!* We shall not, as others who have written on this theme, cite the Talmud's contempt for foreign peoples or its hatred toward every human right. We do not believe it proper to make all the Jews of today responsible for books written millennia ago. We would then have to charge the Catholics with all the persecutions of heretics and the Inquisition (even though none of the popes have ever denounced them as an injustice). In fact a change has taken place. The strict Jews still hold that the Talmud is as infallible as the Law, and a few benightedly declare the entire Talmud, even the vengeful and wild passages, is holy to them. Nevertheless, long years of living together with Christians, mutual business relations, and the gentler spirit of the age have served to diminish the hatred for Christians in the synagogue.

Official hatred has ceased. [...] But in the Jewish press there breathes a hatred against Christianity that deserves to be abominated. Because articles are unsigned in our journals and newspapers, it may be objected that it is impossible to confirm that anti-Christian essays emanate from Jews. We know that there are enough [Christian] writers in the papers who perform the lamentable office of defaming their churches. But it is a fact that the worst Berlin newspapers are in the hands of Jews and that on their staffs the Jewish element predominates. Wholly convincing, however, is the circumstance that the religious arguments among the Jewish factions are scarcely ever mentioned, the intolerance of Jewish orthodoxy is never touched upon, the literary attacks against Jews are never discussed. Orthodox Jewry is never attacked. It can reject secular schools and threaten common-law couples with excommunication. And yet not a single liberal paper takes notice. If the same should surface in Christian meetings, the press rabble will fall upon them with open howls of rage. Our holy things are constantly dragged in the dust, while the synagogue is protected by the silent agreement of all the liberal newspaper writers. Just show us one article in the liberal press that handles Yom Kippur or the Talmud school in unworthy fashion. Yet this year the *Tageblatt* derided Lent, and the Berlin Jewish press pulled to pieces the conference of Augustinians. Only Christianity must put up with these indecencies. A Jewish city alderman of Berlin recently spoke in public about our church matters, which do not concern him, to the effect that there "were real inquisitors who would like nothing better than to consign dissenters to the pyre." Who gave him the right to sow discord among the Christian population and to stir up hate? This intolerance is unbearable.

As recently as 1873, the newspaper of the Reform [Jews] wrote: "The Jewish press is all too disfigured by tastelessness and spitefulness. A defamatory, bitter, and cutting tone makes itself felt on every page. These shortcomings have done a disservice to the public, which now delights in spicy stories." How much worse has the Jewish press become since then! Where can one find even a trace of such heedlessness in the Lutheran or conservative press? Where is a Jewish holiday or the kosher laws held up to scorn? The simplest sense of decency must forbid the violation of a people's sacred possessions. These constant attempts to undermine the fundamental beliefs, the morality, the national honor of a nation are criminal and shameful. From time to time, the Social Democratic press has been even nastier. Yet more destructive, because it is less coarse and more effective, is one of Berlin's most widely read organs.^[4] Unless this well of poison is stopped up, an improvement in our situation is unthinkable. In 1816, Benzenberg^[5] was already writing: "Perhaps the glory of Germany will perish from the Jews." If the Christians continue to yield to the effects of the Jewish spirit that de-Germanizes and de-Christianizes them, this prophecy will certainly come true. Perhaps, after this period of decline—and this is our hope—the glory of Germany will again go forth. We would really have to be a nation without honor if we could not break these chains of an alien spirit and instead allowed ourselves to be totally Jewified.

To the initiated, it is clear that the domination of the Semitic spirit over us signifies not only our spiritual but also our economic impoverishment. The German is strongly idealistic. For quite a while he has put up with his idealism being exploited by others for business purposes. But finally the figure of Nathan the Wise, created by Lessing in Christian love, has vanished behind that of Shylock. The admonitions about the Jews from Kant, Fichte, and Herder, our best men, have demonstrated their validity. The Jews are

and remain a people within a people, a state within a state, a tribe amid a foreign race. Sooner or later all immigrants disappear into the people with which they dwell. Not so the Jews. Over against the German essence, they set their unbroken Semitism; against Christianity, their stubborn cult of the law or their enmity toward Christians. We cannot judge them. As long as they remain Jews, they cannot change. However, we must protect ourselves from the danger by means of clear understanding. In Berlin alone there are forty-five thousand Jews, as many as in all of France or England. This is too many. If they were really bound to us, the number would be immaterial. Because this half hundred thousand forms a compact community in good circumstances and increasing power, because it is armed with a profitable intellectual energy, and because it does not participate in our German Christian interests, it constitutes a real danger. We are approaching the conditions of Poland.^[6] The only difference is that the Berlin Jews are much richer, smarter, and more influential than the Polish Israelites. Finance, banking, and commerce are in their possession. The press is in their hands, and they push into institutions of higher education beyond all proportion. This last is certainly a beautiful trait. I have often found it touching how poor Jews devote all their resources to give their children a good education. Nevertheless, this development is thoroughly unhealthy. We are on the way to having public opinion fully dominated by Jews and labor fully exploited by them. The process of dissolution is under way. Nothing will save us unless we reform and bring Israel to reformation. And here we pose our third demand: *pray, a little more equality!*

Formerly, it was thought that emancipation would drive the Jews into other sorts of occupations. Now that they are emancipated, the opposite has happened. Even more than before they favor the lucrative and easy occupations. Recently, they have pressed into the judiciary, which does not speak well of our system of justice. There are almost none of them in the handicrafts or manufacturing. It is fair to say, therefore, that they take no joy in labor and have no sympathy for the German work ethic. The slogan “cheap and shabby” we owe in large measure to them. They are to be found wherever need or speculative greed can be exploited. Indisputably, reckless speculation and usury are the businesses they love to pursue. They willingly reap where they have not sown. If the great social question is the problem of the correct proportion between labor and capital’s share of the proceeds, then an activity that systematically and boundlessly exploits labor in the interests of capital is the worst element in this problem. It is true that, thanks to Marx and Lassalle^[7], the Jews have their friends among the Social Democrats. Some of the nihilists in Russia are also Jews. Despite this, the one-sided speculativeness of the Jews poses dangers even to these [leftists]. For me, the epitome of the Jewish question is whether those Jews who live among us will learn to take part in the total spectrum of German labor—in the hard and bitter work of the crafts, the factory, and agriculture. More we cannot demand of them.

[...]

The question now is what ought to happen. We think that Jews and Christians must work together so that the right relationship exists between them. There is no other way. Here and there a hatred against Jews, which is contrary to the Gospels, is beginning to blaze forth. If modern Jewry continues as before to employ the power of the press and of capital to ruin the nation, then a catastrophe is ultimately unavoidable. Israel must give up the desire to be master in Germany. It must renounce the presumption that Judaism will be the religion of the future, since it is so completely of the past. And may foolish Christians no longer strengthen the nation in its darkness. Jewish orthodoxy with its circumcision has outlived itself. Reform Judaism is not even a Jewish religion. When Israel has recognized this, it will properly give up its so-called mission and cease trying to rob the nations that have given it domicile and citizenship of their Christianity. The Jewish press must become more tolerant, as a first condition of a better relationship. The social maladies that Jewry brought with it must be cured by wise legislation. It will not be easy to place Jewish capital under the necessary limitations. Only organic legislation can achieve this. Abolition of the mortgage system in real estate [with a pension system taking its place; animalistic guilds that make business operations difficult for an untrained capitalist;] a change in the

credit system that frees the businessman from the arbitrary power of big capital; change in the stock-market system; reinstatement of the denominational census so that the disproportion between Jewish wealth and Christian work can be established; limitation of the appointment of Jewish judges to their proportion of the total population; dismissal of Jewish teachers from our primary schools so as to strengthen the Christian-German spirit: these are the means with which to combat the excessive growth of Jewish influence upon German life. Either we will succeed in this and restore Germany to blessedness, or the cancer from which we suffer will continue to eat away at us. Our future will then be imperiled, our German spirit will be Jewified, and German economic life will be impoverished. Return to a more Germanic legal system and economy. Return to Christian faith. Thus shall our slogan ring. Then all will do their duty and God will help.

NOTES

[1] Matthias Jakob Schleiden was neither Jew nor convert. A botanist, he was one of the few Christian scholars who undertook a study of the Jewish role in medieval history. Stoecker, who insists on regarding him as a Jew or “worse than a Jew,” was referring to his laudatory article, “The Significance of the Jews for the Preservation and Revival of Science in the Middle Ages” (1876).

[Unless otherwise indicated, footnotes are from Richard S. Levy, *Antisemitism in the Modern World. An Anthology of Texts*. Lexington, MA, and Toronto: D. C. Heath, 1991, pp. 58–66.]

[2] One of the most successful of several satirical illustrated journals, *Kladderadatsch* was left-liberal in political orientation. Its satire fell upon friend and foe indiscriminately, however.

[3] Berthold Auerbach (1812–82), a Jewish writer who prided himself on his “Germanness,” registered the pain felt by many highly acculturated Jews upon the appearance of political antisemitism with an often-quoted lament: “I have lived and worked in vain.”

[4] Stoecker refers once again to the *Berliner Tageblatt*, a well-respected left-liberal newspaper that opposed militarism and the policies of Bismarck. It was part of the publishing empire being built by Rudolf Mosse (1843–1920), a Jew from eastern Prussia who introduced to Germany the mass-circulation daily. The German Right, and the antisemites in particular, used the “BT,” as it was called, as an example of how Jews undermined traditional German values.

[5] Johann Friedrich Benzenberg (1777–1846) was an early leader of the liberal movement in Prussia.

[6] In 1880, the Jews of Berlin, the largest Jewish community in Germany, numbered 53,949 or 4.8 percent of the city’s population. Estimates of the Jewish population of Poland, partitioned among its powerful neighbors Prussia, Russia, and Austria, usually place it at 10 percent of the total but 31 percent in most large urban areas. Thus Stoecker considerably exaggerates the peril of Jewish numbers in Germany.

[7] Karl Marx (1818–83) was descended from rabbis on both sides of his family; however, his father converted to Lutheranism in 1824. Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–64), born Lassal, though not a convert, was not a practicing Jew. Both men were pained by their Jewish origins. Because both were instrumental in the development of German Social Democracy, enemies of socialism frequently attacked the phenomenon as an un-German aberration.

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