

TOLERANCE AND ENLIGHTENMENT IN DENMARK

The Theologian Christian Bastholm (1740-1819) and His Attitude Toward Judaism*

MARTIN SCHWARZ LAUSTEN
Copenhagen



CHRISTIAN BASTHOLM'S EDUCATION AND LITERARY PRODUCTION

Christian Bastholm was one of the leading theologians in Enlightenment Denmark, and it is precisely in his attitude towards Judaism and the Jews that we shall be able to get some idea as to how his thoughts about tolerance and enlightenment were able to manifest themselves as to the limits he imposed on those ideas.

In his student days, Christian Bastholm concerned himself with both theology, philosophy, and natural science. He began his ecclesiastical career as pastor for the Danish traders in Smyrna. After his return he quickly became one of the best-liked preachers in the capital. His sermons were modern, rhetorically perfect, appealing and entertaining, so that, after he became appointed to the court and Royal Confessor Bastholm was regarded as one of the most fashionable clergymen in the country.

When he studied theology, Bastholm came under the influence of the Danish Enlightenment theologian, Peter Rosenstand-Goiske, who asserted the reasonableness of Christianity and attempted to demonstrate the existence of God. Rosenstand-Goiske maintained that reason and revelation are in harmony with one another, as the truths of revelation does not conflict with

the reason, but rather transcend it. Bastholm's doctoral dissertation bore the characteristic title *On the Concord of Right Reason and Sacred Scripture* (De consensu sanæ rationis et sacræ scripturæ, 1774). Taking the German supranaturalist, Christian Wolff, as his model, Bastholm here asserted the characteristic Enlightenment idea about the fellowship of revelation and reason.¹

Abroad, Bastholm's best-known work was *The Art of Religious Speaking* (Den geistlige Talekonst, 1775), which was both an introduction to the art of speaking and an apology for Christianity. He explained here that one's sermon had to be useful for the simple while at the same time not being boring for the learned. He asserted the necessity of an established plan, logical argumentation, an elegant use of the Danish language, and also gave directions as to the preacher's factual expressions, gestures, and vocal tone. Ultimately, it was the case, as Nicolas Hope has asserted in his book on the Enlightenment in Germany and Scandinavia, that Bastholm translated Anglican, French, and German homiletic reform into what he called, the natural nobility of Danish. Copenhagen's modern theatre also stalked his pages: a preacher's worst offence was to bore his audience; much theatrical metaphor likening preaching to the reasoned and imaginative use of wit, enticements, conceits, and warnings designed to suit character, age, rank, and brush strokes and a deep perspective, painted the glories of heaven and horrors of hell. Words influenced emotions and morals; style related to diction: therefore a dry style for doctrinal matters, and a warm style for the devotional heart.²

To oppose the growing popular disinterest in the church, Bastholm suggested extensive changes in the worship service so that it might become "brief, interesting, encouraging, and providing a change of 'pace'". He also wrote a popular dogmatics and, together with bishop Nicolai Balle he composed a *Primer in the Evangelical-Christian Religion* (Lærebog i den evangelisk-christelige Religion) plus a hymnal which occasioned much discussion in ecclesiastical circles. The critics persistently claimed that the book was neither Christian nor evangelical.

Bastholm did not reject traditional Christianity in his popular edifying writings; however, his main aim was to emphasise Jesus as the unassailably great man. Learning was in agreement with the reason and "nature", and he accommodated his teachings to his audience's intellectual capacities. His target was a reasonable form of worship, free of ceremony. In an apologetic work, *Wisdom and Blissfulness* (1794) (*Teachings of Wisdom and Blissfulness*), Bastholm defended the clerical estate. Here he maintained that no estate could be more useful to the land; if the priests received appropriate education they would be able to support bourgeois society in an optimal fashion. In order to manage their apologetic tasks, the priests of the capital and the merchant

towns would have to have a solid theological education, whereas village priests would have to study physics, zoology, agriculture, horticulture, and veterinary science.³

In the years between 1777 and 1782, Bastholm published his *Den jødiske Historie fra Verdens Skabelse til Jerusalems sidste Ødelæggelse* (*Jewish History from the Creation of the World to the Destruction of Jerusalem*), and this study in two volumes was supplemented by yet another in 1783: *Den jødiske Historie fra Jerusalems sidste Ødelæggelse indtil vore Tider tilligemed nogle Tillæg* (*Jewish History from the last Destruction of Jerusalem until our Times, plus some supplements*). The work is an entirely worthwhile history of Judaism. If we ignore his edifying and didactic tendencies, Bastholm repeatedly justifies the Biblical miracle accounts. In so doing, he seeks not merely to rescue the credibility of the Old Testament, but of Christianity, as a whole, as Christianity is, in his view, “a further developed Judaism”. On the other hand, Bastholm also claims that most of the miracles had entirely natural causes.

I shall not discuss the issue more closely here, and shall instead concentrate on Bastholm’s supplements to the third volume, for it is there that he discusses the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. He discusses theological disagreements, the warrant for a mission to the Jews, and much besides. This is hardly a tiny “supplement”, as it comprises all of 132 pages!

A SURVEY OF THE SOCIAL POSITION OF THE JEWS IN DENMARK PRIOR TO AND IN BASTHOLM’S DAY: THE ATTITUDE OF CHURCH LEADERS TO THE JEWS

Jews did not live in Denmark in either the Middle Ages or in the Early Modern period. In the first half of the 17th century the government began to issue personal permissions to Jewish traders for trade-political reasons so that they might both travel and trade in Denmark. Particularly the court did business with these Jews, and the government began to issue personal permissions to Jews to settle in Denmark from around 1670.

Naturally enough, the few Jewish families in question desired permission to perform worship services, and although bishop *Hans Wandal* of Copenhagen protested against this and claimed that it would be the work of “Satan and the Devil” to grant them freedom of religion, the king nevertheless permitted the Jews in 1684 to establish a synagogue in Copenhagen. The conditions placed upon this concession were, however, that the synagogue was to be installed in an apartment, and that services were to be held in secret and with the curtains drawn in all the windows. The Mosaic Community of Worship

(Mosaisk Trossamfund) reckons this day (Dec. 16, 1684) as the day of its foundation.

The official attitude of the church to Judaism and the Jews in Denmark had been formulated in the normative textbook in dogmatics, *Universæ Theologiæ Systema*, from 1633; it consisted of about 8,000 closely written pages of Latin text. Its author was *Jesper Brochmand*, professor of theology, and its contents were thoroughly anti-Jewish. It was, moreover, entirely characteristic that the university scholars protested on every occasion when the government granted the new privileges to the Jews with respect to trade, immigration, residence, and the like.

In 1726, the king had promulgated three conditions on which the Jews might apply for permission to settle in Denmark: 1) he might document that he was in possession of at least 1,000 royal "daler", or 2) he had to undertake to erect within a given time limit an impressive dwelling "such as would grace the city", or 3) he had to establish a factory of some kind, in particular one dedicated to the production of clothing. Subsequently, 4) an oath of allegiance to the king was required, and, from 1736 onwards, the immigrant was obliged to pay a special Jewish tax to the police fund of Copenhagen (100 royal "daler" annually). A student working as a private teacher was paid 16 *rigsdaler* and a servant 10 *rigsdaler* (except free board and lodging).

In 1750 a sort of "family reunification provision" was enacted by means of which any foreign Jew who intended to marry a Jewish resident of Denmark might thereby obtain a dispensation from the requirements to possess 1,000 royal "daler" and the like. The government was in favour of the immigration of wealthy Jews; by the same token, it was open season on poor ones, particularly those of German origin who sneaked into the country to beg or peddle their wares without the benefit of passport or letter of safe-conduct. No Jew was permitted to reside in the country without a passport, ferrymen and ships' captains were rewarded for reporting truants, the Jewish congregation was to report the arrival of any foreign Jews immediately. Moreover, Jews were not permitted to travel about the country; they were required to dwell in the town named in their safe-conduct. Also, they were allowed to trade only in those commodities in which other Jews also traded, which is to say: in those commodities in which the guild did not have a monopoly in advance. What remained was, accordingly: financing activities, moneylending, trade with used objects and clothing, tea, coffee, chocolate, and tobacco; all of this was subsumed under the term "Jewish trade". Most such traders were poor people who frequented *Højbro* square and traded in used clothing and the like. However, there were some individual financial services which conducted extensive lending activity, and trade emporia.

In the course of the 18th century, the Jews of Copenhagen were repeatedly exposed to assaults and provocations, so that they were forced to seek police protection even though a varied succession of Copenhagen police chiefs had pronounced anti-Jewish attitudes. In 1692 one suggested that a ghetto might be established for the Jews in the city in a specific quarter of Copenhagen. Other police chiefs, too, subsequently presented the government with suggestions for a harsh anti-Jewish policy. After the Copenhagen fire of 1728 – the greatest disaster ever to visit the city – a group of seven Jews were accused of incendiary activities. They were subsequently released, but their arrest is a good expression of the popular anti-Jewish sentiment. A law was again proposed recommending the establishment of a ghetto, but the government rejected this once again, and a few years later (1745) the chancellery were presented with a demand that every Jew might have a red ribbon sewn onto the sleeve of his overcoat. However, the council rejected this proposition.

In 1787, about 1830 Jews lived in Denmark. Of these, about 281 families, comprising 1503 persons, dwelled in Copenhagen. The populace of the city was at that time (1801) about 100,000, and about 800,000 in the country as a whole.⁴

THE MAIN VIEWS IN BASTHOLM'S ATTITUDE TO JUDAISM AND THE JEWS

Prior to his publication of his history of the Jews, Bastholm had touched on this subject a few times in his sermons. In a sermon held over Lk 21.25–36 on the second Sunday in Advent Bastholm deplored the way the Jews had been treated in the past, and he seemingly also distanced himself from the Christian mission to the Jews on the same occasion. To him, Jesus' prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and the statement that the Jews would be spread throughout the world meant that they would remain a unique people until the end of time. This showed, so Bastholm, both Jesus' omniscience and his divinity, as the Jews had to date remained scattered for 1700 years and no one had succeeded by means of either threats or promises to induce them to abandon Judaism and become Christians. But, as he maintained, they ought also not *become* Christians, for if they did so, Jesus' prediction would be put to shame and indeed Jesus himself "would then be a liar and his religion a fraud". The Jews who dwell among us and whom we so unfortunately persecute with our contempt and despite, these "unhappy" Jews are precisely proof of Jesus' divinity. Hence, instead of persecuting Jews we must understand that Jesus, the "great teacher", will also come to sit in judgement over us Christians.⁵

In his work on the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, Bastholm divides his account into 6 large chapters:

- 1) The teachings of the Jews in Bastholm's own day (pp. 313–41).
- 2) The ceremonies and customs of the Jews of the time (pp. 341–69).
- 3) The reason for God's choice of the Jews as his peculiar people (pp. 370–91).
- 4) Can the rejection ("expulsion") of the Jews be seen to harmonize with the mercy and righteousness of God (pp. 391–404)
- 5) What is the reason that all the efforts of the Christians to convert the Jews are so fruitless? (pp. 404–23)
- 6) Could we ever expect the general conversion of the Jews? (pp. 424–44)

The first two sections, dealing with the Jewish doctrine and ceremonial practices will not be touched on here; I shall merely note that these sections are insightful, pedagogically well formulated surveys of Jewish piety of considerable informative value. Bastholm strives to be objective, but it pains him to be so. He naturally rejects Judaism as a religion, but nevertheless admits that there are some real points in it. However, he immediately adds that there is nothing remarkable in this, for it is quite logical that we should find here and there a gemstone of the original beautiful structure, since, as he says, "what is the learning of the Jews other than the ruins of the revealed religion which God had granted to the forefathers of the Jews of today?" Now, however, there are only decrepit ruins left. One could expect no better of a religion that is merely "a wretched mixture of divine and human errors", and that in addition to the Bible and traditions is based on "the foolishness of the rabbis" (p. 313). Bastholm attempts to point in his survey to similarities and differences between Judaism and Christianity. Although he attempts to be impartial, he nonetheless remains violently condemnatory as, for example, when we are speaking of his preparedness to admit that the Jews keep it with deepest piety, but then adds "that it is a superstitious piety" (p. 357).

Why has God chosen the Jews to be his special people?

Bastholm holds that it is both a problematical and difficult issue to address, and that the difficulty resides in the fact that, right from the beginning, the Jewish people have proven to be "the most defiant and rebellious of all the countries of the world, a people whose evil has at all times been in conflict with the goodness of the Lord ... a people, that almost seems to be in dregs of the entire human race". When they consider the Jews, according to Bastholm, evil people believe that they have a weapon with which to contest "the divinity of religion", whereas when good Christians are confronted with this problem they are forced to acknowledge the narrow limits and incapacity of reason to comprehend the decisions of the divine council. God himself has never

revealed his reasons for choosing the Jews, so that Bastholm admits that his answer can only consist of presumptions which are, however, sufficient to “justify God’s programme”, as they harmonize with the perfection of the highest being (pp. 370–1). After having rejected a variety of theories, Bastholm concludes by noting that there was “something good” in the Jew’s manner of thought, as is evidenced by the fact that they actually desired to preserve the true religion, but this good quality was mixed together with their well-known cowardice, arrogance, underhandedness, and evil. Unlike the heathen, they were equipped with the *light of reason* and thus were endowed with sufficient means to lead a *virtuous* and *honest* life. However, they did not follow reason’s dictates, but for the very reason that they were more evil than all other peoples Divine Providence was able to utilize them as tools. In order to provide for the crucifixion of Jesus, God had to find a people who were sufficiently evil to perform it, “and, as experience has shown, such a kindred were the Jews”. Thus the Jewish people was “well suited for the wise intentions which providence sought to provoke through them”. In this selection, which seems so remarkable, we thus see “the same admirable wisdom which shines forth everywhere throughout the entire divine economy with humanity (p. 390)”.

But is God’s rejection of the Jews reconcilable with his mercy and righteousness?

As far as the rejection of the Jews is concerned, Bastholm held that it would not be everlasting, but temporally limited. By surveying the Biblical narratives he finds himself able to conclude that no people has ever seen better expressions of God’s love, but also that no people has ever directed so much evil towards God, culminating in Jesus’ crucifixion. For this reason, God’s punishment of this people is just. And as far as Jews of the present day are concerned, Bastholm held that they consciously harden their hearts, as there are many books which demonstrate the truth of Christianity, just as other things testify to its truth as well, the door of the Church is always open to them, and God has even provided for their dispersal throughout the world, so that they might dwell among Christians. However, their prejudices and stubbornness destroy God’s efforts to convert them, so that Bastholm finds God’s punishment of them ultimately just: “They must accordingly always remain a haunted, persecuted, and oppressed people, as long as they abide in their hardness of heart” (p. 404).

In the next to last chapter Bastholm inquires as to “*why the efforts of the Christians to convert the Jews are so fruitless?*” Here the author has not organized his material as clearly as in the other chapters. This is no doubt owing to

the fact that he here takes a more complex position. In the manner of the "Enlightenment", Bastholm also gives expression to understanding for the Jew's position, and he also places a large measure of responsibility for the lack of Jewish conversions on the Christians themselves, just as he also points to methods and means for enabling the Jews' transition to Christianity. One might organize his various statements around some central topics:

The reasons why the effort to get the Jews to become Christians have not borne much fruit reside with the Jews themselves, are the result of the upbringing they have received by means of which they have received a long series of prejudices against Christianity, and, as Jews have always been "mighty at beclouding the reason", these prejudices have since been inherited by the people as a whole. Another reason is their ignorance and lack of education with respect to the old Testament, their own holy Scripture, and in this connection their false Messianic belief is important. But one can also find reasons in the Jew's character. For one thing, they are a "sensual" people, preoccupied by pride and will to dominate; they despise and curse other peoples, they pretend to themselves that the other nations have been cursed by god and that they alone are chosen; they also feel hate and contempt for others, "a way of thinking that is peculiar to the Jews alone" (p. 407–413).

However, Bastholm insisted, there are many reasons for the lack of Jewish conversion among the Christians themselves:

- 1) the low morality of the Christians. When Jews see this they must conclude that Christianity is not the way to improvement and in consequence to salvation. They do not believe that in Christianity, more surely than in Judaism, they will be "led on the path of virtue and the brink of salvation".
- 2) Bastholm notes that there are many internally warring Christian sects (p. 418): he goes on to say that one cannot expect that a Jewish critic would be able to find out the truth of the matter. Hence, in the absence of Christian unity there can be no hope, although it is possible to glimpse that happy time, even if it is from afar.
- 3) Bastholm regards the greatest obstacle to be *Roman Catholicism*, "the papist Church's by turns ridiculous, mad and blasphemous doctrine". He says that it must give the Jews a loathing for Christianity, inasmuch as they have no presuppositions for being able to evaluate critically and so to determine that Protestantism is the truth since, as he says, the Jews are mainly driven by a "spirit of commerce".
- 4) Unlike the Catholics, whose approach is condemned by Bastholm as consisting of trickery, hypocrisy and deception, the Protestants might in their efforts attempt to lure the Jews to conversion by means of economic advantage.

- 5) One of the main hindrances in *Denmark* is, as Bastholm says, the fact that up to the present we have deprived the Jews the possibility to obtain insight and scientific knowledge (p. 407–423).

By what means does Bastholm propose to get Jews to convert?

1) As one might expect, he first mentions *Enlightenment*. He has an unshakable faith in the fact that education will not only give the Jews new knowledge but it will also make them into better people, remove their “stiffneckedness”, and move them to embrace Christianity. Here Bastholm is not only thinking of a specifically Christian education or of instruction in the Christian faith. Rather, he holds that one should awaken in the Jews the interest in scientific study, and maintains that this may take place if one admits them to *academic* studies. In this event, he feels, many of them will abandon their life as merchants which only makes the soul as hard as the metals, that is, gold and silver, with which they are so preoccupied.

If the Jews receive academic training, Bastholm holds, their interest in discussion with Christians will be awakened, and he optimistically declares that there would then be no doubt that the truth, namely Christianity, would emerge victorious. When first a few learned Jews have become Christians, they will then be able to convince their own people as to the truth of the Christian views about the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah (p. 408). In support of this, he mentions that Jews who are doctors are not so dismissive of Christianity as other Jews are.

2) Another approach is that Bastholm proposes that the Jews have the same rights to join the guilds and to hold public office and enjoy public honors as the Christians do. In this fashion, or so he maintains, they will encounter Christians, artisans, and public officials, which will “ennoble the way of thought” of the Jews (p. 414); this was a revolutionary proposition in the 18th century.

3) A third suggestion was to permit *marriages* between Jews and Christians. Bastholm is, however, aware that he is on dangerous ground, and so qualifies his suggestion with the remark, “if that should prove practicable”, and goes on to add that one would in any case have to ensure that the children of such unions would be raised as Christians.

4) Bastholm’s proposal that the Jews be assigned the rights of citizenship (p. 416) was no less revolutionary than the above.

5) In general, he maintains that the Jews are to be dealt with *gentility* rather than to encounter them with hatred, as the latter is counterproductive (p. 407–423).

Finally, Bastholm confronts the question which has bedeviled the Christian community ever since the days of Paul: *can one expect the Jews as a whole will ever convert to Christianity?* On the basis of passages in the Old Testament (Zach. 14.9; Ps 22; Isa 2.2; Isa 11) and the New Testament (Rom 11.25-27) Bastholm feels that this will take place in the eschatological age. At that time, everyone will abandon their false faith and join the "teaching about Jesus Christ" (p. 431); we see the preparations for this already in the present age (the Christians live all over the world among the heathen, they are discovering more and more new lands; they are translating the Bible into many new languages). All this is understood as "certain measures and preparations undertaken by Providence". Thus the Jews will not remain obdurate until the end of time.

However, there is a serious obstacle which must be removed first, namely the *Roman Catholic Church* with all its errors and idolatry. Hence the eschatological sequence in Bastholm's view consists of: first, the removal of the papist church, then the conversion of the heathen, and finally (Rom. 11.25-27) the Jews will convert to Christianity. However, the time Providence has determined for all this has not yet come, which is why current efforts to convert bear so little fruit, and as we also can see from the fact that the papist church has not, as yet, been disposed of. But Bastholm is confident that this will come to pass, and he concludes his work with the enthusiastic exclamation "how great and magnificent Jesus' church will then become!" (p. 444).

CHRISTIAN BASTHOLM'S ACTIVITY IN CONNECTION WITH THE CONVERSION OF DR. SOLOMON DE MEZA AND JACOB DE MESA FROM JUDAISM TO CHRISTIANITY IN 1783

In 1753 the Dutch-born Jew *Solomon Theophilus de Meza* received permission to practice medicine in Copenhagen. This provoked a debate in ecclesiastical circles as to whether a Christian might allow himself to be treated by a Jewish doctor "without visible danger to life". De Meza was admitted to the Medical Society; he was known as a brilliant intellectual who spoke a number of European languages fluently, in addition to Latin. Twenty years later, *Justus*, one of de Meza's sons, applied to take the doctorate in medicine in the University of Copenhagen. The application was rejected on the grounds of one of the articles of the university's incorporation: "No one who has become notorious by reason of false doctrine may receive any *gradum academicum*".

Justus de Meza died subsequently, but his brother *Jacob* then made the same application. He was awarded a dispensation, so that he became (April 27, 1783) the first Jew to receive the degree of doctor of medicine from the University of Copenhagen. The passage in question was removed during a reform of the university's articles a few years later (1788), although it was retained by the faculty of theology.

In our connection the matter is interesting because the newly-constituted doctor converted to Christianity three months later and allowed himself to be baptised by Christian Bastholm in the chapel of *Fredensborg Castle*. And a few months after this the elder de Meza also converted and was likewise baptized by Christian Bastholm. Naturally, the affair occasioned much comment because of the social position of the new converts. It is possible that it is directly or indirectly required of the de Mezas that they should convert to Christianity in return for the dispensation for academic honors.

This event was so celebrated that Bastholm published a *tract* immediately afterwards dealing with the baptism, and both his own and de Meza's speeches and confessions are included. It appears that Bastholm was closely involved in de Meza's preparations for his conversion. It is uncertain whether he also composed the *confession* which de Meza made, although I do not think that this was the case. In this respect there was certainly nothing wrong with de Meza's qualifications. In any event, the contributions of the two men are interesting documents of the Christianity of the Enlightenment. This is apparent in de Meza's self-admitted grounds for his conversion as well as in the subjects which he and Bastholm account for what, in their eyes, is the nucleus of Christianity, that is, in the faith and its consequences.

de Meza, says Bastholm, has read the Christian writings for many years, as Bastholm can attest, and he has pondered the "fundamental Truths of the Religion of Jesus Christ" for a long time. It must have been repugnant to him that he was obliged to raise his children in the teachings of the rabbis until they matured and became Christians. Bastholm steers his course around the delicate question as to why de Meza only converted at a great age: "It is not for me to make judgement in this matter". It is sufficient that de Meza has now felt "the voice of virtue and conscience", and Bastholm acknowledges that it requires much time and trouble to think such a serious step through, and that de Meza has now understood the truth of Christianity through intellectual achievement.

For his part, de Meza distances himself in his *confession* from the Jewish faith and its ceremonies, confesses Jesus as the Messiah, and expresses his gratitude that the grace of God has awakened him so that he is no longer "deaf to the voice of reason and the heart". On his motives for his conversion, de

Meza says that “reasonableness, rationality, virtue and truth are my motives”, and he substantiates this by interpreting some Old Testament passages messianic, that is, in a specifically Christian messianic sense. He also advances by way of argument the historical proof of the truth of Christianity, namely the fact of “the growth and permanence of the church of Christ” in the course of history and in the face of persecutions and the like. These he ranges against “the poor state of present Jewry” (p. 14). Finally, he argues that unlike the Old Testament, the Bible of the Jews, the New Testament contains a “purified religion” the most important elements of which he characterizes as

- 1) the intimate knowledge of the eternal and omnipotent God, the creator and maintainer of the world
- 2) the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which God rewards “with respect to the relationships of the individual in this life”
- 3) the doctrine of the resurrection which God has promised to all with no distinction of persons
- 4) its perfect teachings on virtue and behavior (p. 19).

After the baptism itself Bastholm declares that de Meza will not be obliged to answer the usual examination “with respect to your virtuous thought and your well-known knowledge of our sacred books” (p. 10). Following this Bastholm again gives a speech which, naturally enough, has to do with the consequences of baptism for de Meza; here Bastholm focuses on a virtuous way of life: “Oh, that also that grace which the Lord has granted you might inspire in you new force, new ardor, and happiness on your course to eternity”.

Bastholm holds that all the Lord’s gracious acts which merit our thanks are intended to “challenge us to virtue and honesty and make us cheerful and ardent on the path of virtue and holiness. He violently attacks those Christians who merely affirm faith with their lips, but not with their deeds and insists that, more than any other religion, Christianity aims to destroy evil and improve the soul in its most intimate recesses. He concludes by directly addressing the newly-baptized: “the religion of Jesus has now garnished you. You are now by virtue and sacredness to garnish your religion”. Also, referring to de Meza’s great age, Bastholm adds that he will find comfort and peace on his sickbed at the approach of death and eternity (p. 24).⁶

CHRISTIAN BASTHOLM AND THE “LITERARY JEWISH WAR” (1813)

In 1813 a violent literary conflict broke out centering on the Jews in Denmark. A Danish writer, Thomas Thaarup, had translated the German anti-Semitic

tract *Moses and Jesus* by Friedrich Buchholtz, into Danish. This work contained a number of the more commonplace accusations against the Jews, such as: they seek to dominate the world, they have amassed incredible wealth in Jerusalem, the punishment of Jerusalem in 70 CE was a just punishment which was executed upon the Jews, the Law of Moses is the source of all moral degeneration, and the like. Thaarup's own preface to the work insisted that "selfishness, evil, slothfulness have been the special qualities of the Jewish nation since its first origins". The publication of the work caused quite a stir in Denmark, and it was followed by a series of pamphlets and short tracts. A number of intellectuals defended the Jews, while others attempted to explain in a rational manner that it was the general social development, rather than the Jews, that was behind the economic crisis in the country.

It was during this literary conflict that a typesetter named Eynarsson composed a compendium of Christian Bastholm's *Jewish History* in which he emphasized the anti-Semitic features and accused the Jews of faithlessness, usury, and treachery. It is quite striking that Bastholm did *not* protest against this use of his work. On the contrary, he himself published an article (June 6, 1813) in the newspaper *Dagen* ("The Day"), which deals with the Jewish question. The article won so much attention that it immediately appeared independently in a special edition entitled *Bastholm's Tanker i Anledning af Jødefeiden, 1813* (*Thoughts on the Occasion of the Jewish Conflict*). It is a remarkably perfidious work in which its author hides behind the passive and impersonal form, "It is said...". Thus, for example, we read that "It is said that the Jews are wretched and harmful citizens in any state". He mentions the habits of thought and action of this people in past centuries, and adds that "it is said that one may conclude from their rabbis' writings that they are faithless, hateful, and contemptuous of the Christians". He thus mentions how the Jews defend themselves and affirms that this is insufficient, for although there may be good Jews, what about the plurality of them? He concludes that one has accordingly to ask whether the Jews are "helpful or hurtful towards the State", and he suggests that one ask whether it is Jews or Christians who trick the simple out of their silver and coins, and ask who it is that runs about in the streets and tries to convince people to trade, and who conduct despicable usury, and who every week steal much gold and silver in Copenhagen...

In response to this gratuitous contribution to the debate, representatives of the Jewish congregation in Copenhagen worked out a reply motivated by "respect for honorable old man", although they otherwise declined to take part in the polemic centering on the *Moses and Jesus*-book, which they preferred to dismiss with "cold contempt". Surprised by Bastholm's contribution, they now provided a worthy, elevated, and – for Bastholm – an embarrassing

reply. Here they emphasized, among other things, their being Danish minded, the king's positive attitude towards them, and the stimulus they, who only numbered 2,400 people, managed to provide Danish business life.

Bastholm replied weakly that he had merely posed his questions in order to give the Jews occasion to answer the accusations and to justify themselves. "I have no wish to take a position in the matter. I do not want to force my own opinions on anyone" – a remark that, in itself, represents a position!

When the surprise and outrage provoked by Bastholm did not abate, he felt obliged to produce a longer work entitled an "Impartial evaluation of the defense treatise produced by the representatives of the Jewish congregation" (1813). It is clear that Bastholm attempts here to save face, but at the same time he maintains the accusatory questions and insists on the distinction between the good Jews and "the plurality", even though he also denies that it is possible to generalize. There is no consistency in this writing; Bastholm generalizes time and again and repeats prejudices which he elsewhere claims to have distanced himself from, as, for example, in the following:

That the suspicion in this matter (i.e., that the Jews have been stealing silver in Copenhagen) mainly falls on the Jews is solely based on the general, exaggerated striving for gold and silver which this people display so much, although they are neither goldsmiths nor jewelers.

He further speaks of their "inborn greediness for these noble metals" and says further that no apology could cleanse "this people" from suspicion in connection with the thefts until they have subdued this compulsion and have devoted their attention to other branches of commerce. As he says, the majority of Jews do not work in either fields or in workshops; they trade instead by barter and bargaining, and this makes them repugnant to the inhabitants of the city and useless to the state. It is therefore wrong to claim, as the Jewish representatives have done, that the majority of Jews are on the same stage as the Christian citizens with respect to "bourgeois activity and culture".⁷



Bastholm's position as a man of the Enlightenment appears – apart from his theologian point of views, where he like so many others concentrate on "God, virtue and immortality" – in his tolerance towards the Jews, his demand of treating the Jews in a friendly way, his demand of giving the Jews access to higher education and public offices that academic discussions will bring them to conversion. But at the same time he is full of prejudice – all Jews are evil, preoccupied by pride and will to dominate, despise other peoples, all of them are concerned about money, gold and silver etc.

Also in the de Meza-case Bastholm is struggling with both himself and with his general attitude towards Judaism. He knows that one must be tolerant and excuse the Jews who know no better and who have been raised in Judaism. At least in formal fashion he distances himself as a modern enlightened man from Christian prejudices, although he is himself susceptible to prejudice. Thus he acknowledges that the Jews who exercise their faith straightforwardly and truly, even if it is false, can be saved. But in reality Bastholm *despises* Judaism: the two religions are not of the same intrinsic value. As he goes on to say, it is not a trivial matter whether we honor the Creator in a worthy or an unworthy fashion. Nor can it be denied that not every type of worship is of equal worth to the highest being or of equal relative decency to ourselves, considered as reasonable beings. It is nevertheless the case that any Jews who should happen to convert merely for the sake of material advantage will be damned for it. On the other hand, if they "had remained what they were because they thought that they ought to be so, then there could have been hope for them by virtue of the general atonement which has taken place for the sins of the entire world".⁸

NOTES

- * Paper presented at *Tolerance and the Enlightenment Conference*, Cambridge, Sept. 1997
1. Michael Neiiendam, *Christian Bastholm, Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, Vol. 1 (Copenhagen, 1979) pp. 488–90. Michael Neiiendam, *Christian Bastholm. Studier over Oplysningens Teologi og Kirke* (Copenhagen, 1922). Michael Bregnsbo, *Gejstlighedens syn på samfund og øvrighed 1775–1800, belyst ved trykte prædikener og taler* (Copenhagen, 1992), pp. 60–61.
 2. Nicolas Hope, *German and Scandinavian Protestantism 1700 to 1918* (Oxford History of the Christian Church, Oxford 1995) pp. 288–91. Martin Schwarz Lausten, *Danmarks Kirkehistorie (A Church History of Denmark)* 5th ed. (Copenhagen, 1998), pp. 201–4 (An edition in English is being prepared by Ashgate Publ.)
 3. Nicolai Edinger Balle (1744–1816), professor of theology in the University of Copenhagen from 1772 onwards; bishop of the diocese of Zealand from 1783.
 4. Michael Hartvig, *Jøderne i Danmark i tiden 1600–1800*, Copenhagen, 1951 (*The Jews in Denmark in the Period 1600–1800*) pp. 119–45; Sv. Cedergreen Bech, *Storhandelens By (The great Trade Town)*, in: *Københavns Historie*, Vol. 3, 1728–1830, p. 338. Martin Schwarz Lausten, *Kirke og synagoge. Holdninger i den danske kirke til jødedom og jøder i middelalderen, reformationstiden og den lutherske ortodoksis tid, ca. 1100–1700 (Church and Synagogue. Attitudes within the Danish church to Judaism and Jews in the Middle Ages, the time of Reform, and that of Lutheran Orthodoxy, ca. 1100–1700.) Danish with a Zusammenfassung in German language*, pp. 496–505.
 5. Christian Bastholm, *Aandelige Taler over alle Evangelierne (Spiritual addresses covering all the Gospels)* (København 1779) pp. 23–42.

6. C. Bastholm, *Den ældre Doctor de Mezas Troesbekiendelse som blev aflagt ved hans Indlemmelse i den Christne Kirke tilligemed den tale, som blev holden ved samme Leilighed, København, 1783* (*Old Doctor de Meza's Confession of Faith, which was made when he was incorporated within the Christian Church, in plus the Speech which was given on the same Occasion*).

7. *Bastholms Tanker i Anledning af Jødefeiden, København 1813* (*Bastholm's Thoughts on the Occasion of the Jewish Conflict*). *Repræsentanterne for den jødiske Menighed i Kjøbenhavn til deres Medborgere af den christne Troe i Anledning af Herr Confessionarius og Ridder Dr. Bastholms ... Tanker, København 1813* (*Representatives of the Jewish Congregation of Copenhagen to their fellow Citizens of the Christian Faith on the Occasion of the Royal Confessor and Knight Dr. C. Bastholm's ... Thoughts*). *Confessionarius Dr. Bastholms Skrivelse i Anledning af de Herrer Repræsentanterne for den jødiske Menighed i København, København 1813* (*Royal Confessor Dr. Bastholm's Address on the Occasion of the Representatives of the Jewish Congregation in Copenhagen*).

8. Bastholm 1783, 3–5.

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SAMMENFATNING

Christian Bastholm (1740–1819) kunne som afholdt prædikant i København og kgl. konfessionarius udøve betydelig indflydelse i regeringskredse og blandt gejstlige og lægfolk. Hans holdning til jødedom og jøder efterlader indtrykket af en teolog, som både er en typisk repræsentant for Oplysnings-tiden, og som samtidig er behersket af de traditionelle kristne fordomme.

I sin *Den jødiske Historie* 1-3, 1777-1782, giver han en indføring i mange dele af jødisk tro og fromhedsliv, og selvom han tilstræber en vis objektivitet, kaster han sig ud i mange fordømmelser vedr. Treenighedslæren, Messiasspørgsmålet, sabbatoverholdelsen o.a. Han konkluderer, at jødedommen bygger på en række menneskelige vildfarelser. Både i dette værk og i sine prædikener (*Aandelige Taler*) beskæftiger han sig derfor med mulighederne for jøders omvendelse til kristendom, idet han bl.a. stiller spørgsmålene: hvorfor har Gud udvalgt jøderne som sit særlige folk? hvorfor er de blevet forkastet? Hvorledes harmonerer dette med Guds barmhjertighed? Hvorfor omvender så få jøder sig til kristendommen?

Årsagerne til det sidstnævnte forhold ligger både i jødernes manglende oplysning og kundskaber og i deres foragt for andre mennesker, hedder det. En årsag findes også i den romersk-katolske kirke, hvis vildfarelser i lære og ritualer afskrækker jøderne. Endelig er blandt årsagerne også de kristnes ringe moralske adfærd og de forkerte missionsmetoder, som man har anvendt. I bedste "oplysnings-stil" foreslår Bastholm, at man nu giver jøder tilladelse til akademiske uddannelser, til offentlige embeder, til håndværkslaug, og at man tillader ægteskaber mellem jøder og kristne, og at man i det hele taget udstrækker de almindelige borgerrettigheder også til jøder.

Men samtidig med disse tanker om tolerance og frihed afslører Bastholm en dyb foragt for jødedom og jøder. Dette kommer især til udtryk gennem hans aktivitet, da lægerne Salomon de Meza og Jakob de Meza konverterede fra jødedom til kristendom og gennem hans rolle i den såkaldte "litterære jødekrig", som udspillede i København i 1813, hvor han ikke afholdt sig fra de sædvanlige kristne fordomme mod jøder.