The Independent Jewish Community of Faith

As a result of the Constitution of 1849, the Community of the Mosaic Faith became a recognized, independent community of faith with the duties and privileges that ensued. Its clergy had the same professional authority as that of corresponding clergy of the Danish People’s Church to perform religious rituals that would be valid in civil life; a member of the Jewish community was obliged to pay ecclesiastical taxes to his own community only; on the other hand, the rabbi had to be endorsed by the king, and the other clergy had to be certified after being nominated by the Board of Representatives of the Jewish community and the Danish Cultus Minister (i.e., the minister of religious, educational, and cultural affairs, hereafter ‘Minister of Culture’). Furthermore, special rules were in place for building synagogues, congregational governance, conducting marriages and burials, registration in the ministerial records, etc. The Constitution gave full religious freedom. Jews could freely leave the Community of the Mosaic Faith. In this way, they shared the same conditions as other recognized religious groups. It was certainly a significant advance toward the goal of integration for Jews to be regarded as ordinary Danish citizens, who happened to have a different religion. With this in place, one might believe that the relations between Christians and Jews would develop harmoniously. This was not entirely to be the case. These new developments could put the cohesion of the religious community at risk, and various means were used to build up and strengthen the internal life of the community. Moreover, it would soon become clear that many of the old biases of Christians would remain alive for at least the rest of the nineteenth century. Efforts toward integration continued in spite of massive waves of anti-Semitism, which also surged here and there in the Danish People’s Church.

Wolff and most of the chief rabbis who succeeded him worked diligently to further integration but had to face the fact that one consequence of religious freedom was that many individuals chose to leave the Community of the Mosaic Faith. During the first years after the adoption of the Constitution,

---

194 On the constitution, see Lausten, *Church History of Denmark*, 229–233.
there was uncertainty about what the procedure was to be when a person wanted to leave the community. A decision of principle was made on the occasion of a concrete case of this sort. The Board of Representatives wanted to compel people who left the Jewish faith to report what religious group they were about to join, but the Ministry of Culture denied them the right to require this; the congregation could only demand that the withdrawal be formulated like a legal contract, a signed statement by the person in question that said that “all religious and communal connection” with the religious community was severed. The City Council also had to be informed, and would decide on how much the person was now to pay in school taxes. The cap manufacturer, Arnold Koppel, was the first to raise the issue in 1857, and his was the first such document:

I, the undersigned, cap manufacturer A. Koppel, hereby declare that I resign from the Community of the Mosaic Faith and give up all religious and communal connection with it, just as I also give up all the rights and benefits that I would have been entitled to through membership in the Community. In verification of the above statement, I here affix my signature, Copenhagen, date . . .

Numerous resignations occurred during the following years. Some Christians joined the Community, of course, usually in connection with mixed marriages, which we will return to later (see p. 217). However, these new members did not offset the resignations. The 1874 Danish census showed a Jewish population totaling 4072, with 2465 living in Copenhagen and 1607 in the provinces. A law, passed on May 5, 1850, lifted restrictions on Jewish immigration from abroad. In 1885, the Jewish population of Denmark was 4050, with 3542 living in Copenhagen and 508 in the provinces.195

The position of catechist had been established in 1817, but had never functioned well; Chief Rabbi Wolff had sent ten reports and complaints to the Ministry of Culture about this problem from the 1830s to the 1850s. It was crucial to him that the congregation be served by competent teachers, “who could improve the faltering health of the Church [sic].” After the ministry had him travel around the country to visit provincial congregations in order to form an impression of their local circumstances, he suggested in a lengthy report