

James Bernauer and Robert A. Maryks, Eds.
“The Tragic Couple”:
Encounters between Jews and Jesuits
(Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 357 pp.

MARK EDWARD RUFF

ruff@slu.edu

St. Louis University, St. Louis, MO 63103

Originating out of a conference at Boston College in July 2012, this collection of eighteen erudite essays traces how Jesuits related to and thought about Jews. In a symmetrical arc of four centuries, it demonstrates how for much of the 16th century and again after 1965, Jesuits showed a greater openness toward Jewish converts, admitting some to the order. However, for the three centuries in the middle, prejudice dominated. Some of this was racial, as Jesuits barred those of non-Christian blood from entering the order.

As this brief synopsis suggests, the volume’s title is misleading. Promising a description of encounters between Jews and Jesuits in the vein of a “tragic couple,” it tilts its focus instead to only one of the two partners – the Jesuits. It rarely speaks of Jewish views of their Jesuit partners. It elucidates instead Jesuit preconceptions of Jews and Jewish converts and the reasons for shifts in understanding over the century.

It is divided into four episodes that occasionally overlap chronologically. Its first section, “Jesuits and New Christians,” focuses on the era from the founding of the Jesuits in 1540 through the early 17th century. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) and other early Jesuits, the volume shows, were free of common prejudices and did not believe that converts presented a menace to the order. Yet by 1593, the Jesuits altered their policy on membership. New members could no longer be of “Hebrew or Saracen stock.” These regulations requiring purity of blood, in fact, remained in place through 1946. What changed at the end of the sixteenth century? After all, societal prejudice towards conversos and New Christians had existed for more than century and had helped shape structures of the Inquisition. Though it points to leadership changes at the highest ranks of the order, this volume does not provide conclusive answers, lacking a separate chapter examining why hostility toward converts grew later in the 16th century.

The four chapters examining the 16th through the 18th centuries in this volume’s second section, “Jesuits, Jews, and Modernity,” cast a wide net from Germany and Italy to China. One chapter examines diatribes against Jews and Jesuits in early Modern Germany within the context of the processes of 16th and

17th century confessionalization. Both groups were marginalized, but did not make common cause with each other. In fact, dynamics shifted in the 18th century, as the Jesuit order was suppressed in 1773 by the Church and the Jews were emancipated, beginning with the French Revolution. But widespread suspicions remained, of both wandering Jews and Jesuits.

Focusing on how Jews and Jesuits were portrayed in the European *Feuilleton* and during the Spanish Civil War, the two chapters comprising this volume's third section, "Hateful Visions," comprise the shortest section of this work. The majority of this volume is to be found in its fourth section, "In the Shadow of 20th-Century Catastrophe," which offers two chapters on French struggles, five chapters on Italian struggles, and two chapters on the Jesuits and antisemitism in the United States.

The centerpiece of the volume are the discussions of the antisemitic articles found in the Jesuit journal, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, particularly those from the early 1880s. Were these articles representative of a more pervasive antisemitism within the larger order and, if so, were they part of an orchestrated campaign? David Lebovitch Dahl argues that these articles were, in fact, not representative of the order itself; their authors soon found themselves marginalized. But that these utterances of hatred were never publicly denounced or disowned indicated a climate of permissiveness towards antisemitism.

Equally weighty are the two articles focusing on Pietro Tacchi Venturi (1861-1956). Though lacking an official position in the Secretariat of State, he nonetheless came to serve as Pope Pius XI's personal emissary to Mussolini. In 1938, Tacchi Venturi helped orchestrate a deal between the Vatican and the Italian dictator. The Vatican would not speak out against Mussolini's planned antisemitic laws in exchange for an easing of pressure on Italian Catholic Action. This deal set precedents that would continue through 1943, when German troops conquered Rome. Yet at the same time, Tacchi Venturi assisted in the rescue of Italian Jews, and not just converts to Christianity but even those remaining true to their faith.

This volume also touches on changes in Jesuit attitudes toward Jews in the post-war era. The shock of the Holocaust undoubtedly shaped the decision of 1946 to allow converts into the order. Prominent Jesuits were involved in the drafting of *Nostra Aetate*, the famous statement from 1965 of the Second Vatican Council. Here too, however, an additional chapter on the Second Vatican Council might have presented an even more rounded picture.

Its omissions notwithstanding, this volume is of the highest order. It contains an all-star cast, bringing together prize-winning scholars like David Kertzer and Charles Gallagher, S.J. Remarkable is its nearly total absence of second-rate chapters; all eighteen essays engage with historiographical questions and shed new light onto the often painful relationships between Jews and Jesuits. For specialists, this volume will be a tremendous asset. It is a window into the historiography and a fount for reflection.