MRIJ BOOK REVIEW
Title: Jewish Sketches: Judaism and Jewish-Catholic Relations
Author: Edmund Ryden

澳门利氏学社学刊书评
书名：犹太教概述：犹太主义以及犹太教与天主教的关系
作者：耶稣会雷敦龢

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Why would anyone concerned with social development in China and SE Asia take the time to read a big book on Judaism and its history in relationship to Europe and the Catholic Church? Is Edmund Ryden's *Jewish Sketches*, recently published in Taiwan where he is stationed as a Jesuit, simply a personal hobby project? Why should anyone else pause to consider the story he has to tell?

I write this review at a time when Russia's war against Ukraine, now in its second month, is getting grimmer, with credible reports of the barbarism unleashed by Russian invaders becoming better known and more outrageous by the day. Russia's alleged war aims are crystalized in the slogan, "DeNazification," a meme with perhaps unintended irony, given the fact that Ukraine's President is Jewish, and comes from a family that had several of its members killed in the struggle—allied with the other peoples of the Soviet Union—to resist the Nazi invasion of eastern Europe, after 1941. The war against

Ukraine seems like some delayed and collective form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), in which Vladimir Putin has projected his personal fantasies about the restoration of a Russian World ("*Russkiy Mir*") into political support among Russian people for his aggressions, beginning with the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. The tragedy is that Putin's fantasy has absorbed much of the toxic Nazi ideology that justified Hitler's "*Drang nach Osten*" in search of "*Lebensraum,*" undertaken through genocide against Eastern European Jewry and unspeakable war crimes against the Slavic peoples. Fast forward eighty years, and the same strategy of genocide seems to have been unleashed against the peoples of Ukraine. Russians, mesmerized by Putin and his propaganda machine, are fast becoming the monsters they once fought to overcome.

The world, even out here in the so-called Far East, now is appalled and confused, trying first to accept the facts concerning what is happening in Ukraine, and then come to an understanding of how this could possibly happen in what many considered its most civilized and prosperous region. How could this possibly happen in a Europe committed to the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, where liberal internationalism seeks to create prosperity out of interdependence, on the assumption that economic growth would be the tide that lifts all boats. How could it possibly happen?

Important clues may be found in Ryden's impressive and timely book. For, in terms easily accessible to ordinary readers, it tells the story of Judaism's relationship with Christianity, what Ryden lovingly describes as a tale of two sisters, namely, "the synagogue and the church." The question readers of this book need to ask is where did the Nazi anti-Semitism that led to the Holocaust (*Shoah*) in World War II, in which six million Jews were exterminated, where did it come from? Ryden leads readers through the history of Judaism, particularly in relation to the Christian churches that emerged from it, and their own trauma with theological anti-Judaism. Anti-Judaism, as in the sermons of St. John Chrysostom and the history of Good Friday liturgical prayers, while not the same thing as modern anti-Semitism, surely was the seed bed from which it sprang. But Ryden gives us so much more than an analysis of Christian pathologies that he clearly and convincingly shows to be rooted in the New Testament.

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He places this sorry legacy in the context of an overview of Judaism's development, after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem (70 CE), which fatefully forced the separation of the Jewish synagogue and the Christian churches. Post-Biblical Judaism, no longer tied to the Temple in Jerusalem, is the product of a diaspora whose identity is secured through synagogues and the ongoing study of sacred texts, as preserved in the *Talmud*. Ryden's chapter on the *Talmud* is especially effective in helping those unfamiliar

with it to understand the logic of its presentation in texts and their use in preserving respect not only for Jewish law (*Halakah*) but also the narratives (*Haggadah*) that support Jewish identity. The *Talmud*, unfolding in the two traditions, the one Babylonian, the other Palestinian, is a distinctive response to the post-Biblical situation, in which Jews attempted to remain faithful to the covenants made by their ancestors with God, in the radically changed circumstances of a diaspora in Europe and elsewhere, in cultures shaped by religious movements perceived as essentially hostile, namely, Christianity and Islam. As a glance at any page of the *Talmud* might suggest, the point of this Scriptural tradition is to build a fence around the *Torah*, centred on the revelation that God made to Moses on Sinai, the basic covenant between God and Israel for the sake of the whole of humanity.

As Ryden shows, the development and preservation of the *Talmud* occurs within living Jewish communities, coping with the diverse challenges of surviving as a minority within the states of Christendom, as well as the Muslim world. The story is not simply one of oppression, but of Jewish contributions that sometimes were honoured in the dominant cultures. Ryden reminds readers, for example, of Maimonides' philosophical work so highly valued by St. Thomas Aquinas. Nevertheless, Jewish life within Christendom was often precarious, as communities were uprooted, and forced to find patronage in other lands, often on the assumption that they could stimulate economic development in the newly urbanized settings that emerged after the so-called Dark Ages.

A more radical challenge occurred when the 18th century European Enlightenment often led to full citizenship for Jews, no longer confined to ghettos and other defensive arrangements. The result was an internal diversification among Jewish communities, now identified as Reform, Orthodox, and Conservative, and the emergence of new movements of renewal, spiritually in Hasidism, and politically in a Zionism seeking a restoration of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Ryden's discussion of these changes within modern Judaism, especially in Germany and the USA, is especially helpful in reducing complex histories to something manageable for non-Jewish readers. His discussion of modern Jewish cultural contributions and the ways in which the image of Jewish people was evolving, especially in secular literature, also helps to understand the backlash that met Jewish success in the arts and sciences, in business and the professions. He cites the contrast between the anti-Semitic paranoia evident in the writings of the German composer, Richard Wagner, and the normalization of relationships evident, for example, in the novel, *Daniel Deronda*, by the prominent British writer, Mary Ann Evans, known through her pen name as George Eliot.

Anti-Semitism is a distinctively modern ideology, a form of racism, fuelled by a *ressentiment* rooted in materialism, and the assumption that, "survival of the fittest," a Hobbesian "war of all against all," is the ultimate truth of human existence. As a convenient target, because of their success in the most advanced societies of post-Enlightenment Europe, Jewish communities became the scapegoat for popular reprisals, fomented by the power of lies, that culminated in Hitler's "Final Solution," the Holocaust. Ryden's story shows how anti-Semitism contributed to the rise of the Nazi party in Germany, but he also well observes how it wasn't a uniquely German pathology.

To his credit, Ryden acknowledges the link between traditional Christian anti-Judaism—which he refutes by showing how it is based on a jaundiced reading of selected passages in the

New Testament—and modern anti-Semitism. Christian preaching that for centuries condemned Jews as "Christ killers" created a cultural climate in which racist anti-Semitism may have seemed credible and legitimate. Christianity in general, and Roman Catholicism in particular, have a lot to answer for, and must take the lead in overcoming anti-Semitism. Ryden addresses this challenge, first by examining how the modern Papacy responded to the Holocaust, and second by explaining how a breakthrough was achieved at Vatican II (1962-1965), how the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, Chapter Four, emerged as an historic statement repenting the church's previously hostile teachings about Judaism and setting forth a new path of reconciliation.

> The faiths of Asian Christians are linked historically to mother churches in Europe and the Americas, however emancipated they may be today. We cannot pretend that the history of European Christianity in its complicated relationship to its own Jewish mother has no meaning for us, especially if we fail to recognize our own complicity in racism, national chauvinism, and the other cancers that accompany a globalizing modernity.

On these matters, Ryden digs deeply into the details to show how the Vatican under Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) was diplomatically involved in many successful efforts to rescue Jews before they could be taken into custody by the Nazis, as well as his Christmas message of 1942, which, while avoiding direct language, condemned the "progressive extinction" (Ryden, 269) unfolding in Nazi occupied lands. Could Pius XII have done more to prevent or mitigate the Holocaust? Ryden defends the Pope's actions, showing that they exhibit a pattern of care for the Jews, and the use of diplomatic channels—Pius' own area of expertise—to ease their plight wherever possible.

Regarding the successful drafting of Chapter Four of *Nostra Aetate*, Ryden shows how key Council *periti*, like Augustin Cardinal Bea, SJ, worked with key Jewish representatives, notably the American rabbi, Abraham Joshua Heschel, to shepherd the document to an impressive victory at the Council, where the final draft was passed with 2221 votes for and 88 against, on 28 October 1965 (Ryden, 322). Following an analysis of the final statement in detail, Ryden adds a chapter on the teachings of the popes since Vatican II, showing the consistency of the church's support for mutual respect, dialogue, and reconciliation. The follow-up includes a significant revision in the texts of the Good Friday liturgical prayers, withdrawing traditional forms of disparagement, such as the word "perfidious," used to describe the Jews, both then and now. In 1974 the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, issued a set of guidelines for implementing *Nostra Aetate* (Ryden, 332-334), which formally set policy for the church from now on. In 1998, the same Commission, with the encouragement of St. John Paul II (1978-2005) issued its statement, "*We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah,*" which specifically addressed the Holocaust, and acknowledges the link between it, traditional anti-Judaism, and anti-Semitism, and calls for repentance (*teshuva*) (Ryden, 336-338).

Ryden concludes his story with a commemoration of the life and work of Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), whose behind-the-scenes assistance in shepherding *Nostra*

Aetate has already been noted. But Heschel, who emerged from a Yiddish-speaking Hasidic Jewish family in Warsaw, well deserves further study, for his pioneering interfaith work in the USA, after he began his exile in New York in 1940. Heschel was a good friend and supporter of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in the American civil rights struggles of the 1960s, as well as the ecumenical protests against America's War in Viet-Nam. Beyond his activities for social justice and peace, Heschel is the author of important books in English on Jewish theology and spirituality, such *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*, first published in 1955 and *The Sabbath*, first published in 1951. These are rightly recommended for anyone inspired by Ryden's sketches to explore more deeply Jewish spirituality, its specificity and yet its universal significance for interreligious dialogue even now.

Ryden's book is an important first step for anyone, especially people oriented toward the traditions of Roman Catholicism, to get informed about Judaism, its history, as well as the struggles of Jews over the centuries to remain faithful to their covenant with God. But why should we, readers of the MRIJ, care? We are not in Europe, and Europe's problems are not our own. Or are they? The faiths of Asian Christians are linked historically to mother churches in Europe and the Americas, however emancipated they may be today. We cannot pretend that the history of European Christianity in its complicated relationship to its own Jewish mother has no meaning for us, especially if we fail to recognize our own complicity in racism, national chauvinism, and the other cancers that accompany a globalizing modernity. Once we have absorbed the lessons from Ryden's *Sketches*, we may need to go further, exploring the history of Jewish communities in China and SE Asia. What is the history of Jewish communities in major Asian trading ports, for example, in Kaifeng at the end of the Silk Road, or Kerala, and Goa in India? What of Jewish communities in Hong Kong and Macau? When did they flourish? How have they fared in modern times? How should they be regarded by Asian Christians? Ryden's survey of Jewish-Christian relations in Europe should inspire us to take another look at Judaism's impact in our own region of the world. What is our own involvement in the history of Jewish-Christian relations? Have we been spared from the sins of our European ancestors? If not, then there is even more reason to learn from Ryden's reconstruction of the Catholic church's struggle with the legacy of anti-Jewish prejudices and resentments. How is our own integrity bound up with the story he has told us?

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