

JAMES PARKES IN THE HITLER YEARS



International Interfaith Interracial Humanitarianism

When World War One veteran James Parkes went up to Oxford in the fall of 1919 he was part of a generation in search of 'the moral foundations of a way of life' that would preclude a repetition of what had just happened to the war-torn world. The non-utopian path of impartial humanitarianism on which Reverend (and eventually) Dr James Parkes embarked after Oxford had both international and national implications, for, in his view, humanity reached fulfilment through the fullest possible development of all of its constituent nations. Humanity's progress would only be made through mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation between the peoples of nations, races, and religions. As thirty-two year old Parkes took up the work of building international understanding for the International Student Service in Geneva in 1928, its greatest challenge was the mounting aggression of nationalists toward Jewish minorities in the new or newly configured post-WWI nations of eastern Europe. Even though the redrawing of national borders had been reinforced by mandatory Minorities Treaties that guaranteed the rights of those within the new or expanded states, there was avid discontent over who was and was not a state national. Within months of the signed treaties Numerous *Clausus* laws, which most radically applied to Jewish students, restricted university education to those who fit the newly structured nationalist criteria of belonging. By the time Parkes assumed the role that would lead to his life work in the history of antisemitism and Christian-Jewish relations, the leader of the antisemitic party in Romania was an esteemed university professor; agitation, nationalist ardour, and anti-Jewish violence had spread from universities to the general populations; and the combined effects of *Clausus* in Hungary, Poland, and Romania, both by law and *de facto*, had driven as many as ten thousand eastern European Jewish students to expatriation in search of university enrolment. Within this context, the 2019 Interfaith Lecture will look at the pioneering humanitarian thought and work of Parkes as he moved back and forth between the internationalist milieu of Geneva, the nationalist fray of antisemitic politics in eastern and central Europe, and the home front of Britain during the Hitler years.

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