

Hebrew University. The Senate Hall. Thursday, 20 December 1984 (5:30 p.m.)

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Faculty of Humanities, and the International Centre for the Study of Antisemitism.

Lecture by Ron Nettler and Prize Award in Memory of the Rev. Dr. James Parkes (*)

Opening Remarks by

BAT YE'OR

Chancellor Abraham Harman – Mr. Chairman – ladies and gentlemen, I am very honoured to be invited to address you today at this lecture and Prize Award event in memory of the Rev. Dr. James Parkes.

James Parke's first book on antisemitism appeared in 1930 and in 1934 he published his authoritative Oxford doctorate: *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism*. It is most appropriate that, on the 50th anniversary of this innovative study, the man – and his life's work – should be honoured here in Jerusalem at the Hebrew University. The first lecture and prize award in memory of James Parkes is a fitting occasion to reflect both on his life and on the impressive legacy that he has bequeathed to us.

It was in the thirties that he became aware of the mortal danger menacing the Jews. For fifty years, until his death, he fought antisemitism – even risking his life during the Nazi period. Today evil forces are again rising up, whose aim is the destruction of the State of Israel and the Jews as a people. In such a situation, the life and the *oeuvre* of the late Reverend James Parkes is a source of inspiration and reflection.

Although the origin and evolution of antisemitism in European countries are well-known and are often analysed in the West and in Israel by eminent scholars, this is not the case with regard to Islamic judeophobia. There are many reasons for this failing, but the main cause is that those who should have denounced such manifestations were neither apt to the task, nor able to carry it out.

Until recently, Oriental Jewry did not grasp its own history. Historical research requires liberty: the liberty to write the darker pages of oppression and injustice, as well as brighter times. Jewish and Christian *dhimmi* communities (that is to say, Jews and Christians who lived under Islamic rule) were hardly in a position to describe and analyse their darker periods openly, since this would have offended the Muslims and implied that Muslim law, or Muslim rule, was unjust or had some defects. Such a criticism was severely forbidden under Islamic law.

The *dhimmi* peoples were unable to perceive the diverse aspects of their own history, because history – like culture – is a fundamental aspect of freedom, and *dhimmi* peoples were only tolerated by Islamic rulers as subjected populations.

Leaving aside the key role of the Soviet Union, it is the Arab countries that are today the principal source of judeophobia and anti-Zionism. Indeed, the ultimate aim of anti-Zionism is the destruction of the State of Israel, and this is the policy of the Arab League. To be sure, anti-Zionism is often cloaked in European antisemitic themes which are spread through Western methods of propaganda, but this is only a tactical manoeuvre. After all, if one wants to be understood by a Western public, one must relate to it. This is why one frequently finds Arab anti-Zionism conveniently dressed in European antisemitic garb.

It is futile to explain the Arab-Israel conflict as being the result of Soviet or foreign political interests. Although these interests certainly exist, they are merely peripheral. The conflict should be set in its own geographical and historical context, and should not be explained solely by reference to a foreign context. I will here limit myself to a few words about Arab anti-Zionism, which, in my opinion, is stimulating indirectly Western and Soviet anti-Zionism.

Ideology, prejudices and policies in a specific society do not emerge from a vacuum, rather they express the continuity of long, traditional and ideological trends, and the spirit of a particular civilisation.

Let me recall James Parkes' words, from his autobiography: "I was always conscious that historical research was justified because it was necessary for the understanding of a contemporary evil and its eradication."

We have therefore to examine the place of the Jew in traditional Islamic society, as well as the ideology, the motivation and the implementation of the specific legislation that was applied to him, which lasted in the Ottoman Empire until the mid-nineteenth century, and in some other Arab anti-Zionism is deeply rooted in the *dhimmi* stereotype. Western Jewry is also directly concerned by this stereotype, since it does not apply exclusively to Oriental Jewry, but, in general, to any non-Muslim people whose land has been Islamised – in this case, the Jewish people in relation to its ancestral homeland. The *dhimmi* condition applies to a people in relation to its religion and to its ancestral territory.

It is precisely this dual relationship that polarizes and unites antisemitism with anti-Zionism. Antisemitism relates to a community that is humiliated and stigmatised, because of its religion. Arab anti-Zionism relates to the national territory of this community, a territory that has been Arabised and Islamised. But antisemitism does not necessarily lead to anti-Zionism. One can be antisemite and accept or even admire Israel, just as one can have racial prejudices against Blacks without wishing to destroy African states. On the contrary, Arab anti-Zionism, by its very nature, is rooted in antisemitism. Arab anti-Zionism has to exploit antisemitic arguments in order to justify and achieve its aim. Modern Arab anti-Zionism inevitably leads us back to the history of Oriental Jewry and to the special Islamic regulations that structured Jewish life and allowed it to continue – as well as to all the diverse aspects of the *dhimmi* status.

I will here only make a few brief observations on the *dhimmi* status. It has two dimensions that are inexistent in the Jewish condition under Christendom.

1. One is on a political level. A *dhimmi* people is a people whose land has been Islamised through *jihad*. The existence of this people or community is tolerated under Muslim rule on two main conditions: it must repurchase its right to live on its own land by the payment of a tribute to the Muslim community, and it must accept to be humiliated and to be inferior to the Muslim dominant group. This contract implies that non-Muslim peoples do not have an imprescriptible right to life. They have only *conceded* and conditional rights that create a hierarchy between a superior group that conceded the right to life and can also withdraw it, and an inferior group that is grateful for the conceded rights and is placed in a situation of obligation forever. In short, the *dhimmi* condition is not determined only by a religion, a situation of inferiority and inequality between two groups, but also by a territorial conflict.
2. The other aspect of the *dhimmi* status is that it is universal. It is not restricted only to Jews, but should apply automatically to all non-Muslim peoples. In studying the condition of the

dhimmi Jew one may learn much about the condition of the Christian *dhimmi*. One reflects on the other like in a mirror.

To conclude – present Arab attitudes toward Israel stem from the traditional Muslim behaviour toward *dhimmi* populations: war on the frontier, terrorism inside Israel – since Israelis, like rebellious *dhimmis*, are worthy of death or exile.

On the international scene, Israel is mocked, defamed, isolated, boycotted, weakened economically, caricatured, delegitimised, obliterated from history and geography, in the same manner as were the *dhimmi* peoples.

A thorough study of the *dhimmi* status is indispensable if we wish to understand the historical background of the Arab-Israel conflict, especially now when the return of fundamentalism is bringing back the enforcement of traditional prejudices. It is precisely this knowledge of the past that will open the way to peace in the future. (In this respect, I would like to stress the extremely important scholarly research of Prof. Ron Nettler.) Should this *dhimmi* past be neglected and the toleration *conceded* to the *dhimmis* be praised, there is no reason to complain of today's situation, whereby killings, wars, terrorism and defamation are practised, for this is part and parcel of the lot of those who in former days dared to refuse their poll tax and to be humiliated. (Koran 9:29).

If however we wish to see a modification in this situation, we must open wide the *dhimmi* file and explain to Arabs and Muslims alike that it is time to modify traditional attitudes, to abandon the ideology of *jihad* and accept that non-Muslim peoples have similar legitimate rights to statehood, as have Muslim peoples. One can negotiate over territory and boundaries, but one cannot negotiate over one's own right to existence, a concept which is at the root of the conditional *dhimmi* status.

Arab anti-Zionism proceeds from a mentality attached to the values and achievements of *jihad*, that transfer exclusively to the Muslim community the political power over a conquered territory. If Israel's right to exist is not accepted as a principle, but becomes a matter of negotiations, then according to the same ideology, the rights to independence of each and every non-Muslim state could be similarly contested.

It is imperative to bring this conflict to an end, and a knowledge of the history of the *dhimmi* populations over the centuries is the only way to awaken the Arab-Muslim conscience to their sufferings, their rights, and their dignity – as a step toward peace. We must examine all the aspects of the *dhimmi* status, while maintaining a language of peace. It is a painful duty to denounce the *dhimmi* condition, but it is surely the only way to prepare a new framework of coexistence and mutual esteem with the Arab and Muslim peoples. This is the challenge to our generation. The concept of *conceded toleration* must give way to the acceptance of equality. The continued obfuscation of the history of the *dhimmis*, or the glorification of a contemptuous toleration, can only encourage the tragic repetition of the past and will make us, by our silence, collaborators in a system by which we all – Jews, Christians and Muslims alike – will be the victims.

(*) – The lecture, “Past Trials and Present Tribulations – A Muslim Fundamentalist View of the Jews” was delivered by the recipient of the prize, Prof. Ron Nettler.