

Morton C. Fierman

1914 - 1995

PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND EDUCATION, EMERITUS

B. A., Case Western Reserve University; M.H.L., D.D., Hebrew Union College;
M.A., Tulsa University; Ed.D., Arizona State University, May 31, 1960
California State University, Fullerton From September 1, 1967 To August 21,
1983

Birth: January 26, 1914; Death: November 7, 1995

Morton was born in Cleveland in 1914 and showed an early aptitude for music. But the tug of service as a rabbi lured him away from a scholarship to the Julliard School of Music and into Hebrew Union College.

Long before it became fashionable, Morton got involved in ecumenism, something which characterized all of his life. As a chaplain serving with the Eighth Air Force in England, he had immediate contact with people of all faiths in the most intimate and significant events of their lives. Practice came before the theory, but the theory was not far behind. Always curious, he began examining the relationship between Judaism and its often estranged daughter, the Christian Church. James Parkes, the earliest and most widely known English-speaking scholar connected with the dialogue between Christians and Jews, became a close friend of Morton's during that stint in England during the Second World War. They were to remain life-long friends. Morton promoted the friendship in the academic world as well as in correspondence and visits. He conducted seminars on the thought of Dr. Parkes and established an undergraduate award for students involved in community service and interreligious dialogue as the James Parkes Award. (It was, upon Morton's retirement and in recognition of his own community service and promotion of inter-religious harmony, altered to the James Parkes-Morton C. Fierman Award).

The service he performed for the community was as rich and diverse as his own personality. He was instrumental in the foundation of the Children's Hospital of Orange County as well as the Orange County Chapter of the National Council of Christians and Jews. At Fullerton he was one of the founding members - and most faithful contributors to and promoters of - the Patrons of the Library. (It is hard for anyone who ever saw his office to believe that he gave several times the number of books you found there to the library).

As already noted, Morton was a first-rate musician, a truly accomplished pianist, and gave up a music scholarship for the rabbinate. The love and care he took with music, however, remained with him. He used his musical talent while in the seminary and integrated it into his teaching. It seems quite clear that one of the reasons he always liked to teach the course on the Psalms at Fullerton was that he would not have to rationalize bringing music into the classroom whenever he liked. As a rabbi he was always at great pains to see to it that well-trained, engaging cantors were a part of the Temple staff.

There was always something of the entrepreneur about Morton. He genuinely enjoyed being with people and knew that he was part of a large network that was always a work-in-progress, getting broader and deeper all the time. There was rarely a more delightful thing for him than to introduce people from this vast web to each other and then watch those relationships bloom, whether in friendship or function. The correspondence files he has left behind in the Religious Studies Department are teeming with letters of introduction or recommendation for students or friends, smoothing the way to work or friendship.

Before coming to Cal State, Morton was a rabbi for six years at Temple Beth Sholom, a Reform congregation in Santa Ana. In addition to all of the day-to-day affairs of such a responsibility, he oversaw the early stages of that congregation's physical growth into one of the largest congregations in the area. Perhaps his most lasting contribution to the Temple was his role in selecting and supporting an able, talented staff. The lasting friendships and close working relationship with the Temple members were a treasure throughout his life.

While he came to Fullerton as Associate Professor of Education in 1963, it was in the Religious Studies Department that he contributed most fully. He was a co-founder of the Department and chaired it for three years. He introduced many of the courses which are still a part of the Department's offerings. Perhaps he was most proud of starting the course on The Holocaust, one of the first such courses in the country. He arranged for the Jewish Chautauqua Society to fund courses in Judaica each semester and he obtained literally thousands of dollars in external funding for guest lecturers, travel expenses, publications and student awards throughout his time here.

He founded the Institute of Judaism and, with Dr. Gard, the support group, Friends of the Religious Studies Department. He was active and held office in professional organizations in the fields of Education and Religious Studies. He published extensively in both fields. His last published work, *Leap of Action: Ideas in the Theology of Abraham Joshua Heschel*, 1990, is still in print with the University Press of America. Morton received the system-wide Distinguished Teaching Award, and his *alma mater*, Hebrew Union College, gave him the degree Doctor of Hebrew Literature, *honoris causa*.

He is survived by Isabel, his gracious, charming, stately wife of 53 years, his son Nathan, and two grandchildren, on whom he doted unashamedly.

Submitted by
Daniel A. Brown
Professor of Religious Studies
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