

Campaigner against Antisemitism – The Reverend James Parkes 1896–1981.
By Colin Richmond with a foreword by Tony Kushner.
Valentine Mitchell 2005.

James Parkes is by now a largely forgotten figure in Britain, though there was a time when he loomed very large indeed. Now he is chiefly remembered by some in the Jewish community who recall a ferocious campaigner against the evils of antisemitism (sic) and a Christian clergyman who evinced a philosemitism that was wholly atypical for his time, class and profession. In an age which all too quickly raises mediocrities to the level of heroes, Parkes **IS** a true hero of the 20th century and a man of whom the Church, and this country, should be very proud.

Professor Colin Richmond has written a superb biography of Parkes that is informative, engaging, funny and deeply thought-provoking. Richmond clearly admires his subject but he doesn't worship him: indeed Parkes the man and the clergyman are rigorously analysed and his strengths and weaknesses, his actions and his omissions are all scrupulously detailed. The author is also a living presence in the text, and if you agree with his views and his positions on various matters you will be very glad that he is not an anonymous chronicler of a great life.

The book is divided into 8 chapters, detailing Parkes' life through his youth and service in the trenches during World War One, his student career, ordination and work for the League of Nations Union and the International Student Service, his home life before and after the war centred round his home at Barley in Cambridgeshire, his marriage to Dorothy who shared so much of his work and his passion, and his latter years at Iwerne Minister.

Parkes was extremely well-informed about what was taking place under Nazi rule in continental Europe and did much to bring refugees out from Hitler's clutches as well as castigating the advocates of antisemitism, wherever they were found, for their views. He was also a determined and excellent historian whose books on Jewish history and on antisemitism have more than stood the test of time.

Another key part of this biography is the fate of the Parkes library, now happily ensconced in and funded by Southampton University, but for a suitable home for which Parkes struggled vainly in his latter years.

Richmond makes much of the fact that Parkes was a Victorian Englishman, and in spite of the fact that he was redoubtably persuaded of the rightness of his own views and at times self-confident to the point of arrogance, he also possessed a Victorian's diffidence which made him refuse to assume a high public profile when it was made available to him; one wonders what he would have made of the platform he was offered in the House of Lords. Nevertheless, this biography is a wonderful abiding testimony to an extraordinary man of God, a hero for many Jews and a role model for many Christians and deserves to be read as widely as possible. The life and work of James Parkes is much too important ever to be forgotten.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh