

The Religious Enlightenment – Protestants, Jews and Catholics from London to Vienna  
by David Sorkin. Princeton University Press 2008.

The Religious Enlightenment was published in 2008 but I only became aware of it in 2011. Divided into six chapters plus an introduction, Sorkin's approach to his subject is to consider it through six different individuals in different locations, Brant Broughton, London, Gloucester; Geneva; Halle; Berlin; Vienna-Linz; Toul-Paris-Lyon.

The individuals, through whose work the issue is considered, are William Warburton, Jacob Vernet, Sigmund Jacob Baumgarten, Moses Mendelssohn, Joseph Valentin Eybel and Adrien Lamourette. Some of these names will be new to those who have not made special studies of the subject, and it is salutary for Jewish readers to acknowledge – influenced heavily as we are by the impact of the Haskalah, the enlightenment, on Jewish life and religious practice – that the enlightenment was a phenomenon that caused revolutionary developments in the world at large, not just in the Ghetto.

Another fascinating aspect of The Religious Enlightenment, as the title suggests, is that Sorkin considers the positive impact on religious thought and communities of the Enlightenment, when it is all too often stated that various religious establishments were obstacles to the process of Enlightenment, the history of Prussian Lutheranism and German Judaism being prime examples that refute this assertion.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh