

Prof. Dr. **Jane Shaw**, FRHist.S, Principal of Harris Manchester College, Professor of the History of Religion and Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Oxford

Professor Jane Shaw is an intellectual and cultural historian of religion who, in her work, seeks to relate lived religion to the history of ideas. She has examined how the practice of religion has influenced theology and philosophy in the modern period, questioning and reversing the usual assumption that ideas “trickle down” to affect religious practice. She first explored this in her book *Miracles in Enlightenment England* (Yale University Press, 2006), examining the ways in which belief in miracles persisted or was revived amongst some Protestants in the mid-late seventeenth century. She argued that it was the claims of miracle events amongst certain Protestant individuals and groups, events that were much debated in the public and print sphere, that came to prompt, influence, and shape the famous philosophical and theological debates about miracles of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In short, that philosophical debate did not happen in a vacuum.

Some reviews of *Miracles in Enlightenment England*:

“While Jane Shaw's study is by no means the first attempt to deconstruct the Enlightenment, expand its chronological parameters, or assert its religious roots, it applies formidable theological learning and sound historical insight on an important subject. It is also an inspiring example of how the history of ideas, and the social history of religion, can be brought together in fruitful conversation.” –Peter Marshall, *Times Literary Supplement*

“Rich and entertaining. . . . While Shaw's is surely not the last word on the miracles debate, it is the best. And anyone who follows after into the subject will have to take account of her provocative book.” –Robert G. Ingram, *Anglican and Episcopal History*

“Fascinating. . . . The key contribution of this volume is a rich contextualization of the debate on miracles—familiar from the writing of David Hume and Bishop Butler—by relating it to lived religious experience. . . . Through clear prose and circumspect claims, Shaw situates these miracle cases at the heart of the Habermasian emerging public sphere.” –Lori Branch, *American Historical Review*

In *Octavia, Daughter of God: The Story of a Female Messiah and her Followers* (Yale University Press (USA) and Jonathan Cape (UK), 2011), Shaw told the story of an extraordinary millennial community of the 1920s and 30s, The Panacea Society in Bedford, England, whose archives she had discovered. In that book she looked at how the community's life was shaped by the distinctive biblical hermeneutics of its female charismatic founder (Mabel Barltrop, known as Octavia to her followers) and the series of prophets on whose work she drew for inspiration. Shaw also demonstrated how the community, despite its heterodox theology and religious

practices, was symptomatic of the period in its paradoxical intertwining of radical ideas and conservative nostalgia.

Some reviews of *Octavia, Daughter of God*:

“[This] astonishing book... reveals the cosmic events that took place behind the front doors of a quiet street in Bedford.... Shaw recounts the Panaceans’ history with humor, sympathy, and understanding.” —John Carey, *Sunday Times*

“With superb empathy, she uses the history of this eccentric group as a keyhole through which to observe [interwar] society, its problems with politics and anxieties over the role of women. The triumph of Shaw's book is that it demonstrates not how peculiar Barltrop's sect was, but how achingly typical and predictable it was.”—Stuart Kelly, *The Scotsman*

“Shaw has been blessed with unfettered access to the society's archives.... That is every historian's dream, but my envy of Shaw is eclipsed by my admiration for how well she handles such a weight of material and for her sense of responsibility to the surviving members.”—Peter Stanford, *The Observer*

Shaw’s more recent research and writing is on mysticism. Looking especially at the work of those early twentieth-century thinkers who revived mysticism and re-emphasised the cultivation of a spiritual life, such as Evelyn Underhill. Some of this work was presented in the Sarum Lectures, delivered in Salisbury Cathedral in 2017, and published as *Pioneers of Modern Spirituality: The Neglected Anglican Innovators of a ‘Spiritual but not Religious’ Age* (Darton, Longman and Todd (UK) and Church Publishing (USA), 2018). Her current book project develops these themes further, providing a new interpretation of the history of religion in twentieth-century Britain through an exploration of the writings and spiritual practices of a wide range of early twentieth-century figures in theology, spirituality, literature and the arts.