

Mysticism and visionary experience in later Stuart Britain

This monograph will present a new interpretation of the role of religious experience in the changes of the period 1660-1714, arguing that prophecy and ecstatic mysticism were central agents in intellectual and cultural development. It will argue that the preoccupation of early modern historians with high ideas and the politics of religion has prevented them from seeing clearly how spirituality, as well as intellectual and political imperatives, could act as a motor of change, innovation and action. Using the Philadelphian Society as a central case study, it will suggest that their apophatic and imaginative mysticism actually opened up the space in which radically new theological insights were achieved, rather than shutting down intellectual creativity. The political reaction of British rationalists against mystical divinity and enthusiasm, I will argue, helped to shape Enlightenment discourse as fundamentally opposed to miracle and revelation, but also to conceal the profound visionary and spiritual currents which inspired its priorities and values.