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POPULAR AND ELITE UNDERSTANDINGS OF MIRACLES IN ENLIGHTENED ENGLAND

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WILFRED GRAVES, JR.

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To my parents with love
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ABSTRACT

Popular and Elite Understandings of Miracles in Enlightened England

Wilfred Graves, Jr.
Fuller Theological Seminary
Dissertation Adviser: Dr. James E. Bradley

This dissertation investigates the issue of miracles in the Anglophone world of much of the long eighteenth century and contributes to our understanding of how people of various social backgrounds understood and debated the meaning of these phenomena. It seeks to establish that the common assumption of this period as one of thorough secularization is incorrect.

Chapter 1 reviews the issues involved in the study of miracles, popular-elite religion, secularization, and Enlightenment in England. Chapter 2 lays out the political, social, intellectual, and religious context in which discussions about the supernatural occurred in the late seventeenth century. Chapter 3 deals with a number of reported seventeenth-century miracles from both inside and outside the Anglican Church.

Chapter 4 extends the discussion of the supernatural through the first half of the eighteenth century. The literature of the period typically was not hostile toward the idea of the miraculous, although many Protestant leaders believed in the cessation of miracles beyond the New Testament occurrences. The most vicious attacks on miracles at the time were from the Deists. However, Orthodox apologists ably defended foundational Christian tenets against deistic assaults. Reported miracles continued to retain an important place among the populace.
Chapter 5 focuses on the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival. A close examination of primary sources, especially John Wesley’s Journal, uncovers many supernatural accounts of physical healings, exorcisms, prophecies, and “falling down.” These phenomena, which were recorded well into the latter half of the eighteenth century, present a notable contrast to the cessationism taught by some church leaders and reveal that eighteenth-century popular religious practice often transcended prescribed religion.

Chapter 6 explores the classic attack on miracles by David Hume and presents various responses to both Humean and deistic arguments. It also looks at discussions about the supernatural during the latter years of the eighteenth century in England. Apparently, belief in miracles survived the storm of the preceding decades.

This dissertation affirms the vitality of religious belief and practice in Enlightened England and concludes that thorough secularization and de-Christianization did not occur during the period under consideration. The most that can be claimed is partial secularization.
INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE OF MIRACLES IN ENLIGHTENED ENGLAND

The Topic and Goals of this Study

This dissertation investigates the issue of miracles in the Anglophone world of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The period generally has been understood as one in which miracles were either discounted or denied as society moved in a more secular and enlightened direction. Yet, in reality, the period in England was both a time of high intellectualism and reported miracles. When individuals such as Thomas Woolston,

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1 Specifically, the analysis of this dissertation extends from the middle of the seventeenth century to the late 1780s. Not every writer cited in this treatment was from England; some were from neighboring regions. The synecdochic use of “England” in the title reveals the location to be the central, but not necessarily exclusive, focus of this work.


Closely related to the issue of miracles in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is the issue of prodigies. Two helpful books about prodigy writing and other forms of popular pamphlet literature in the period are Jerome Friedman, The Battle of the Frogs and Fairford’s Flies: Miracles and the Pulp Press During the English Revolution (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993) and William E. Burns, An Age of Wonders: Prodigies, Politics, and Providence in England, 1657-1727 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002). Friedman’s analysis covers the period from 1640 to 1660.
Conyers Middleton, and David Hume were denying the possibility or verifiability of miracles, others like John Wesley and George Whitefield were embracing miraculous and other preternatural phenomena as a vital part of their religious experience. Some individuals such as Lydia Hills in England and Mercy Wheeler in America reported dramatic physical healings that were well documented and received multiple attestations within the communities in which they lived. Their accounts are preserved for us today in newspapers, diaries, pamphlets, and other media.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries truly were a time of religious vitality in the Anglophone world. As one author from the Edinburgh Magazine stated in 1758, “There never perhaps was an age in which religion was so much in fashion among us.” Or as

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4 The account of the healing of Lydia Hills can be found in A Relation of the Miraculous Cure of Mrs. Lydia Hills of a Lameness of Seventeen or Eighteen Years Countenance, and Extraordinary Pains Attending It, on Saturday the 17th of November, 1694 (London, 1694). The healing of Mercy Wheeler is described in several sources, including: Nicholas Gilman, The Diary of Nicholas Gilman, 1740–44 (Durham, NH), Jan. 5, 1744; Benjamin Lord, God Glorified in his Works, of Providence and Grace . . . (Boston, 1743), title page; and Francis G. Walett, ed., The Diary of Ebenezer Parkman, 1703–1782 (Worcester, Mass., 1974), 90. Unfortunately, this dissertation does not deal extensively with the discussions over miracles in the American colonies. The pursuit of these discussions will be left for future research. For a very helpful recent article on the healing of Mercy Wheeler, see Thomas S. Kidd, “The Healing of Mercy Wheeler: Illness and Miracles among Early American Evangelicals,” William and Mary Quarterly, 3d ser., 63, no. 1 (Jan. 2006): 149-70.

another author of *The Court Magazine* declared in 1761, “There never was an age
wherein a thirst after Christian knowledge more universally prevailed, than the present.”⁶

A time of religious vitality—how could this be? How could it be that in an
“enlightened age,” characterized by the deification of Newton and the exaltation of his
mechanistic interpretation of the universe, there also persisted a belief in miracles? Was
not the Enlightenment, as Peter Gay suggests, “the rise of modern paganism,” when
human reason triumphed over religious dogma and superstition in general and
Christianity in particular?⁷ If so, then did the discussions of the miraculous at the time
have particular relevance for the whole of society, or just for the elite? More specifically,
did the populace generally accept the conclusions of the philosophers and intellectuals or
was there a climate of relative indifference to or antagonism toward these conclusions?
Finally, were there particular expressions of popular religion that influenced elite
thinking about miracles?

This dissertation examines the bi-directional flow of ideas about miracles between the
popular and elite segments of the Anglophone world. It contributes to the larger
discussion of religion in Enlightened England by exploring the issue of secularization—
its timing, rate, and mechanism. Whereas the tendency in scholarship has been to see
religion as on the decline during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this work,
along with other revisionist treatments, paint a different picture: one in which the

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⁶ *The Court Magazine* 1 (1761): 126.

volume 1 is “The Rise of Modern Paganism” and of volume 2 is “The Science of
Freedom.”
secularization and de-Christianization of the West were not as early and as total as previously thought.

**A Statement of the Research Problem**

Typical discussions of the debate on miracles in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries generally focus on the ideas of the elite. That is, they tend to examine the thoughts of “major” figures such as Spinoza, Hume, Middleton and the like without much concern for the thoughts of lesser known individuals. For example, Colin Brown’s masterful *Miracles and the Critical Mind* concerns itself primarily with the issues of philosophy and Christian apologetics. Brown’s discussion in section 2 of the book centers primarily on the “standard” group of intellectuals: Spinoza, Locke, the English Deists, and Hume. Similarly, the main focus of R.M. Burns’s *The Great Debate on Miracles* is Hume’s arguments against miracles and his dependence on earlier deistic arguments. More recently, Joseph Houston’s *Reported Miracles* presents a meticulous defense of the evidential value of miracles for belief in God. Houston’s treatment is basically a refutation of Hume, with the words “Hume” or “Hume’s” appearing in four of its twelve chapters.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher is still a hot topic of debate. *Hume, Holism, and Miracles*, by David

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Johnson, challenges the success of the Humean attack on miracles. Johnson concludes that Hume’s refutation of the verifiability of miracles lacks philosophical merit. Similarly, John Earman’s *Hume’s Abject Failure: The Argument Against Miracles*, which viewpoint is evident from the title, argues for the unoriginality of Hume’s attack on miracles. Earman, who is a self-proclaimed atheist, highlights the weaknesses of Hume’s arguments based on probability theory and concludes that the ambitious and confused goals of the philosopher’s “Of Miracles” are ultimately unconvincing. Robert J. Fogelin attempts to resurrect Hume’s reasoning against miracles in *A Defense of Hume on Miracles*. Fogelin argues that most attacks on Hume’s reasoning have resulted from misreading his essay. Fogelin concludes that Hume’s arguments are indeed coherent.

In Brown, Burns, Houston, Johnson, Earman, Fogelin, and others, little or nothing is said about what middling or lower sorts may have thought about the idea of the miraculous. It is assumed then by many readers of the secondary literature that elite perspectives and conclusions concerning miracles adequately reflect the thinking of the larger society as well. However, approaching history exclusively “from above” or from a top-down perspective may not yield an accurate picture of religious belief and practice as they existed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the words of Roy Porter, “Our social vantage on enlightened ideologues must be nuanced, taking in the view ‘from

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below’ as well as ‘from above’, from the provinces as well as the metropolis, embracing female no less than male responses.”

The “from above” approach to history closely resembles the “great thinker” approach to history discussed in *Church History: An Introduction to Research, Reference Works, and Methods* by James Bradley and Richard Muller. The “great thinker” model locates meaning in individuals, when arguably meaning should be located “in the materials and ideas used by individuals and mediated by them to others after further meaning and significance have been added by their own efforts.” The model is flawed because it often “loses track of the interrelationships of ideas and indeed, of the host of ‘lesser’ minds whose work may have been far more important to their contemporaries than the ‘great thinkers’ identified by later generations.” According to Bradley and Muller, “The location of meaning lies in the interaction of ideas, in a particular period as understood by particular individuals, but always as contributory to the larger development.”

A more complete picture of religion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries must include popular considerations as well as those of the elite. Religion in popular practice may look a lot different from how members of an educated and/or wealthy minority think or write about religion. Because Enlightened England was both a place of high intellectualism and reported miracles, it should be examined from perspectives in addition to those of elite history.

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In *Miracles in Enlightenment England*, Jane Shaw suggests that a broader and longer discussion about miracles started several decades before the philosophical debate that culminated with Hume’s “Of Miracles” in 1748. This discussion began in the seventeenth century with people’s lived experiences, when those who were sick, suffering, in pain and experiencing anguish found themselves relieved of those ills and agonies, and believed that God had cured them. It began when some independent churches in the 1650s wished to follow to the letter a particular biblical text about healing [i.e., James 5:14], and radical sectarians claiming apostolicity announced that they could heal the sick and raise the dead. In short, it began when there was a revival of miracles in the second half of the seventeenth century.

Making miracle cases of the seventeenth century the primary focus of her book, Shaw examines a number of developments:

the articulation of a new theology of the miraculous in a Protestant context, over and against the official Protestant doctrine of the cessation of miracles; the intra-Protestant disagreements about miracles; the particular context which made it possible for people to claim that miracles had occurred; and the responses and debates that the miracle stories generated.15

Shaw argues that the reason why Royal Society fellows, clergymen, theologians, Deists, and others displayed an interest in miracles was because people were making claims that they had experienced miracles or were able to work them. Shaw ends her work with the following main conclusion:

[It was] not so much that there was a distinct elite-popular split, but rather that a range of views on and attitudes towards the miraculous—and all the related questions that had been thrown up by the debates about miracles—co-existed by the middle of the eighteenth century.16

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Shaw’s analysis demonstrates quite forcefully how religious practice informs theological reflection. Her work indubitably will evoke welcome critical discussion on the issue of the miraculous for many years to come.

Even though popular religious studies help to broaden our understanding of early modern England, these studies often have their own historiographical shortcomings. Many works that deal specifically with the issue of miracles or prodigies often place them within the context of witchcraft, magic, myth, superstition, enthusiasm, or folk religion. One problem with these categories is that they tend to cast a pejorative shadow over the religious lives of large groups of people. These groups are then assumed to be on the fringes, their beliefs and practices being either exceptions or aberrations. For example, in *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (1950), Ronald Knox chronicles a number of “enthusiasts” from different periods in church history, with a special emphasis on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.\(^{17}\) Although Knox offers a sympathetic portrayal of the Quakers, Jansenists, Methodists, Quietists, and others, the appellation “enthusiasm” sounds too much like “fanaticism” for many readers.\(^{18}\)

Similarly, Jerome Friedman’s *The Battle of the Frogs and Fairford’s Flies: Miracles and the Pulp Press During the English Revolution* (1993) is also problematic from the perspective of the pejorative shadow that it casts. Friedman declares that most people in civil-war England were superstitious, regardless of their educational level or social class. Friedman seeks to counter the classist bias in the secondary literature that connects


\(^{18}\) In fact, Knox says of the age of Enlightenment, “[It] was also an age of fanaticisms” (*Enthusiasm*, 388).
credulity with socio-economic status or the absence of education. However, by categorizing the entire population as superstitious, Friedman has oversimplified the religious tendencies of an entire society and made it difficult for the modern audience to take them seriously.\(^{19}\)

Another historiographical problem with some popular treatments is their overemphasis of the distinction between popular and elite when speaking of ways of being religious. The “bipolar” view of early modern culture proposed by Peter Burke has sometimes been accused of oversimplifying the make-up of society, which exists on a continuum rather than as only two categories.\(^{20}\) According to Martin Ingram, for example, the bipolar model “makes it hard to do justice to the infinite gradations of the social hierarchy (and in particular to the middling social groups who straddled the world of the elites and of the common people), to the cultural variations to be found at any point on the social spectrum, to regional variations or to gender differences.”\(^{21}\)

It is very possible for an educated person and an illiterate person to believe the same things. Indeed, it is an almost universal human impulse to seek after the divine. It is also possible for people of various social strata to share in the same experiences (worship services, for example). Furthermore, people of the same station in life can differ in their perspectives of certain issues. As Tim Harris wisely suggests, “Poor Anglicans” may

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\(^{19}\) Friedman, *The Battle of the Frogs and Fairford’s Flies*, 259-60.


have “possessed a stronger sense of cultural identity with upper-class Anglicans . . . than they did with people from a similar social background who did not share their religious leanings.” Therefore, class is not always a helpful way to categorize thought.

A third historiographical problem with some popular treatments involves the way in which they conceive of the spread of Enlightenment ideas. In her 1994 Ph.D. dissertation, Jane Shaw describes two models employed by social historians when discussing the spread of Enlightenment ideas: the “trickle down” model and the “persistence” model. The trickle down model assumes that the educated elite are the agents of intellectual and social change while the “common” people are assumed to remain static, their beliefs and practices remaining basically unchanged, except when

22 Tim Harris, “Problemitising Popular Culture” in Harris, ed., Popular Culture, 19.

23 See Jane Shaw, “The Miraculous Body and other Rational Wonders: Religion in Enlightenment England” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1994), 8ff. Shaw’s dissertation is a study of the theology and practice of popular religion in Enlightenment England (Shaw 1994, 1). It examines the significance of the frequent occurrence of religious phenomena in the period and the contexts in which the meaning of religion was debated (Shaw 1994, 1). “It concludes that the ideas involving the miraculous, providential, prodigious and supernatural were not simply traces of an earlier more ‘primitive’ religion, but, rather, changed in response to and reflected new scientific ideas and an increasingly commercialized culture which placed a new emphasis on entertainment” (Shaw 1994, 1-2).

Shaw’s recent Miracles in Enlightenment England (2006) is a significant reworking of her doctoral thesis. In this book, Shaw ceases to use the term “popular religion” and replaces it with the term “lived religion,” a concept which she borrows from American writers David Hall and Robert Orsi. According to Shaw, “The study of lived religion begins with practice in the dynamic sense and proceeds to draw out the theological (and other) meanings of that practice within a specific context” (Shaw 2006, 9-10). Shaw, however, does invoke the language of elite/popular in her conclusion. She states, “Certainly the deists had made their own contribution to the cultivation of an elite/popular split, at least at an intellectual level . . . . By claiming to demystify Christianity . . . the deists were, in effect, trying to create a ‘natural religion’. They were also being thoroughly elitist. Their critique of miracles—and indeed, their critique of all that they considered ‘superstition’ or ‘enthusiasm’—were based on their idea of the credulity of the masses (Shaw 2006, 176).
they embrace the ideas of the elite.\textsuperscript{24} Such a model is seen, for example, in Keith Thomas’s \textit{Religion and the Decline of Magic}.\textsuperscript{25} Thomas states that magical thought declined because:

> the series of intellectual changes which constituted the scientific and philosophical revolution of the seventeenth century . . . had a decisive influence upon the thinking of the intellectual élite and in due course percolated down to influence the thought and behaviour of the people at large.\textsuperscript{26}

Thomas also states:

> It did not matter that the majority of the population of eighteenth century England had possibly never heard of Boyle or Newton and certainly could not have explained the nature of their discoveries. At all times most men accept their basic assumptions on the authority of others.\textsuperscript{27}

Hence, in the trickle down model, critical thought and philosophical exchange are limited to the intellectual elite and the ideas of the elite filter down to the masses.

Some historians adhere to a different model, which Shaw describes as the persistence model. The persistence model assumes that many strands of popular devotion and practice continue to exist regardless of and separate from the skepticism and increasing

\textsuperscript{24} Shaw, “The Miraculous Body,” 8.


\textsuperscript{26} Thomas, \textit{Religion and the Decline of Magic}, 643.

\textsuperscript{27} Thomas, \textit{Religion and the Decline of Magic}, 646-47.
rationality of the educated.\textsuperscript{28} James Obelkevich exhibits this view in his study of
nineteenth-century South Lindsey.\textsuperscript{29} Says Obelkevich:

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the world view of the educated
classes, as it became mechanistic, Newtonian, and desacralized, increasingly
departed from that of the populace, and by the nineteenth century little common
ground was left between them.\textsuperscript{30}

The trickle down and persistence models usually rest on the assumption that common
people are not much engaged in the origination of meaningful ideas. They either inherit
their perspectives from an enlightened elite class or they resist these perspectives because
of certain social factors. The problem with these two models is that they do not allow for
the flow of ideas from bottom to top. Surely popular belief and practice affect theology,
philosophy, and other systems of thought.\textsuperscript{31} Philosophers, theologians, and scientists
were not the only individuals involved in the exchange of meaningful ideas in
Enlightened England. People of various social strata, not just the elite, engaged in
thoughtful dialogue.

One recent book that contains a very helpful discussion of popular and elite
historiography is \textit{The Church in an Age of Danger: Parsons and Parishioners, 1660-}


\textsuperscript{29} See James Obelkevich, \textit{Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey 1825-1875}
period of the present treatment, nevertheless has key methodological insights for the
examination of popular culture.

\textsuperscript{30} Obelkevich, \textit{Religion and Rural Society}, 302-03.

\textsuperscript{31} To see the validity of this claim, one needs only to consider Pentecostalism. This
popular movement, which began at the beginning of the twentieth century, is now one of
the strongest forces in Christendom at the beginning of the twenty-first century, although
arguably it is out of touch with twenty-first-century secular reality.
1740 by Donald Spaeth. Spaeth’s book, which portrays the Anglican Church in largely positive ways, details the dispute between the clergy and parishioners in the county of Wiltshire in southern England. Spaeth avoids several methodological pitfalls of previous popular-elite studies that tended to divide culture into only two categories. According to Spaeth, the two-tiered approach not only oversimplifies the complexities of the structure of society, but it also overly emphasizes cultural conflict, rather than consensus.\(^{32}\)

Oftentimes various groups in a society share beliefs, perspectives, and cultural phenomena.\(^{33}\) Therefore, instead of debating the validity of the two-tiered model, according to Spaeth, “It seems more productive to explore cultural interactions between the people and the elite.”\(^{34}\) Spaeth adds that religion in the period of discussion “was . . . a focus of negotiation between different social groups and cannot be viewed merely in terms of polarisation or the enforcement of elite hegemony.”\(^{35}\)

The need to explore cultural interaction is especially apparent for studying religion in Enlightened England, because previous theoretical frameworks have often pitted “popular” religion against “official” religion. According to Spaeth, historians have had


\(^{33}\) One new volume on popular and elite religion which seeks to show how people from various social strata participate in a shared religious culture is Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory, eds., *Elite and Popular Religion* 42 (The Ecclesiastical History Society in Association with The Boydell Press, 2006). In the introduction, Eamon Duffy comments on the 2004 conference on which this volume is based. He states, “The theme, it needs to be noted, was ‘Elite and popular religion’, the two—to the extent that there are two—in tension or interaction, not one or the other in isolation” (p. 1).


\(^{35}\) Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger*, 3.
difficulty in accepting the fact that the Church of England could have exemplified popular religion. However, Spaeth uncovers solid evidence for popular support of the Established Church. Among his conclusions are: (1) there was a high level of commitment to the people by the clergy and (2) there was a high level of ecclesiastical participation by the parishioners.

This dissertation does not use the language of “popular and elite” in order to argue for simple bipolarity in the structure of society or to emphasize cultural conflict over against cultural consensus in Enlightened England. Instead, the language of “popular and elite” is used as a sign of inclusiveness that points to a broader collection of thinkers about miracles than has usually been considered. By no means does this work exclude elite perspectives on miracles. It does, however, include additional dialog partners to insure that more voices are heard in the lively discussion of the supernatural occurring in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Much work has been done on elite contributions to miracles in the past, but the contributions of the people have not been fully explored.

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36 Spaeth, The Church in an Age of Danger, 3.

this discussion. Similarly, popular religious practice related to the supernatural has been
dealt with quite extensively. What is unique to the present treatment is that it represents a
comparative study of popular and elite understandings of miracles in Enlightened
England. This dissertation deals with the bi-directional flow of ideas between the popular
and elite segments of the Anglophone world rather than with the uni-directional flow
from top to bottom required by the trickle down and persistence models. Not only do we
discuss the writings of scientists, the Deists, Hume, and other members of the elite, but
we also examine popular reactions to their writings along with other writings concerning
the miraculous from among various social strata. Some of these writings include the
following: unpublished manuscripts, sermons, newspapers, pamphlets, broadsides,
diaries, journals, and other primary printed sources.

This dissertation seeks to look at history from below and from the middle, rather than
only from above. Therefore, particular attention is paid to so-called “middle figures”
such as pastors, teachers, and other leaders whose job it would have been to operate in
dual spheres of society. Pastors, for example, played an important role in mediating the
ideas of the elite (even if only negatively) to their congregations. Middle figures also
interacted with the elite segments of society, sharing popular notions with them. The
Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalog (ESTC) and other related tools uncover a host of

38 For one discussion of this approach to history, see Frederick Krantz, ed., History
from Below: Studies in Popular Protest and Popular Ideology (Oxford: Basil Blackwell,
1988). Another useful discussion is found in Jim Sharpe, “History From Below,” in Peter
Burke, ed., New Perspectives on Historical Writing, 2nd ed. (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania
State University Press, 2001), 25-42. For the origin of the concept of “history from
below,” see E.P. Thompson, “History from Below,” Times Literary Supplement, 7 April
1966, reprinted in Dorothy Thompson, ed., The Essential E.P. Thompson (New York:
middle figures not typically referenced in the literature. The analysis of the bi-directional flow of ideas concerning miracles in this dissertation reveals that all kinds of people, not just the elite, shape the course of history.

The Question of an “English” Enlightenment: Modern Revisionism

This dissertation contributes to the larger discussion of religion in Enlightened England by exploring the issue of secularization—its timing, rate, and mechanism. The Enlightenment, traditionally defined, is the period extending roughly from the late seventeenth century to the late eighteenth century during which occurred a significant development of the intellectual history of Europe and America. The Enlightenment was the era of David Hume, Dennis Diderot, François-Marie Arouet (Voltaire), and Thomas Jefferson; and in England, Isaac Newton, Edward Gibbon, Adam Smith, and Thomas Paine. The comparative significance of these individuals can be debated, but all made considerable contributions to what may be termed as “modernity” and all lived in an age of significant philosophical, scientific, religious, and social development.

German philosopher Immanuel Kant defined the term “Enlightenment” as humanity’s emergence from immaturity to adulthood. According to Kant the ethos of Enlightenment thinking is captured in the phrase *Sapere aude!* (“Dare to know!”)—i.e., use one’s own

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understanding and reasoning.40 Many leaders of the period stressed human reason as the best method of acquiring truth and emancipating oneself from the bondage of past ignorance, superstition, and prejudice.41 These leaders typically relied heavily on the scientific method with its emphasis on experimentation, careful observation, and systematization.

Recent scholarship has shown that the older notion of “Enlightenment” as a single category is now untenable. To speak of “the Enlightenment” is problematic for several reasons. The first reason involves the assumption that the eighteenth-century period represented one homogeneous movement. Typical of this view is Peter Gay:


41 Unfortunately, this emancipation from prejudice often did not include racial prejudice. Hume, for example, made the following claim in his essay “Of National Characters” (1748): “There never was a civilised nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences” (Footnote to the 1753-4 edition). Kant, writing several years later in 1764, embraced Hume’s racial outlook. Said Kant, “Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a simple example in which a Negro has shown talents . . . So fundamental is the difference between the two races of men [i.e., black and white], and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color” (Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime, translated by John T. Goldthwaite, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960, pp. 110-11). Voltaire was no less enlightened in his racial views. See for example, Voltaire, “Of the Different Races of Men” (1765), reprinted in The Best Known Works of Voltaire: The Complete Romances, including Candide, The Philosophy of History, The Ignorant Philosopher, Dialogues and Philosophic Criticisms, Eight Volumes in One (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1927). Voltaire said of the black race: “Their large round eyes, their broad flat noses, their thick coarse lips, their differently formed ears, and the measure of their intellects, show a great difference between them and other species of men” (p. 373). Ironically, this English edition of Voltaire’s works has a swastika on the title page.
There were many philosophes in the eighteenth century, but there was only one Enlightenment. A loose, informal, wholly unorganized coalition of cultural critics, religious skeptics, and political reformers from Edinburgh to Naples, Paris to Berlin, Boston to Philadelphia, the philosophers made up a clamorous chorus, and there were some discordant voices among them, but what is striking is their general harmony, not their occasional discord.\footnote{Gay, \textit{The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism}, 3.}

Over the last thirty years or so, many scholars have challenged Gay’s assumption of unity. J.G.A. Pocock, for example, dismisses the notion of a monolithic Enlightenment in \textit{Barbarism and Religion: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737-1764}.\footnote{J.G.A. Pocock, \textit{Barbarism and Religion}, vol. 1, \textit{The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1735-1764} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Pocock argues that Gibbon was a figure of the conservative rather than \textit{philosophe} Enlightenment. Pocock’s book discusses a number of non-secular Enlightenments including: a Protestant Enlightenment, an Arminian Enlightenment, and an Anglican Enlightenment, to name a few.} Other scholars have stressed the necessity of viewing the Enlightenment in specific national contexts.\footnote{The first major work arguing for the necessity of viewing the Enlightenment in specific national contexts was Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, eds., \textit{The Enlightenment in National Context}. J.G.A. Pocock suggested the idea of an English Enlightenment slightly earlier. See Pocock, “Post-Puritan England and the Problem of Enlightenment,” in Peter Zagorin, ed., \textit{Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment} (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1980).} Factors such as language, culture, economics, politics, and other social realities contributed to the development of many unique features of the Enlightenment as manifested across geographical boundaries. In France, for example, there was a strong anti-clerical attitude toward the Catholic Church, with its vast wealth and its exertion of influence on government, education, economics, etc. In England, however, religion played a crucial role throughout the eighteenth century.\footnote{For an excellent examination of the importance of religion in England during the “long eighteenth century,” see John Walsh, Colin Haydon, and S. Taylor, eds., \textit{The}}
authorities on eighteenth-century England, the alliance between the Church and the
“enlightened” thought of the period set England apart from France and its other European
neighbors. As James Bradley puts it:

Some have gone so far as to suggest that the term “Enlightenment” as defined by
the *philosophes* is not applicable to England, precisely because of the importance
of religion. The serious religious convictions of major figures like Newton and
Locke; the Christian antecedents of the Royal Society; and the contributions of
Anglican clergy and Nonconformist minister alike to science, political and
economic theory, and social philosophy, have all been cited to show that the
“moderate” (or even “conservative”) Enlightenment in England must be
distinguished from its less religious, continental counterparts.

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given at the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies at Providence, RI, 1993, 1.

The intellectual movement that is usually called the Enlightenment was by far the most important cultural development in Europe during the eighteenth century. Primarily French in inspiration and leadership, it went far toward establishing the intellectual supremacy of France in the western world.\footnote{William F. Church, ed., \textit{The Influence of the Enlightenment on the French Revolution: Creative, Disastrous or Non-Existent?} (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Company, 1964), vii.}

One result of this sort of Francocentrism has been the characterization of “the Enlightenment” as secular when such a characterization would be truer in France, where there developed quite a bit of opposition to Catholicism, than in England, where the Church of England remained a vital part of the lives of the people. The goal of the present treatment is neither to minimize the importance of the Enlightenment in France nor radically to Christianize the Enlightenment in England. There is no question that France’s influence on the language, culture, and intellectual thought of Europe was immense. Neither is there any doubt that various non-Christian forces were at work within England. Yet, the identification of a single Enlightenment is at best difficult. Segregation of Enlightenment thought according to geography helps to illuminate
understanding of the complex social, political, historical, and evolutionary factors of the
movement and to prevent generalizations that may be irrelevant (or tangentially relevant)
to specific contexts.

The second reason why the term “Enlightenment” is problematic lies in the pejorative
categorization of religion connoted by the designation. The term “Enlightenment” was
often utilized by writers, philosophers, scientists, and other intellectuals of the eighteenth
century who believed that a new age of intellectual freedom, social progress, and
scientific understanding was emerging over against the “darkness” of religious dogma,
traditional values, and ignorance. Because many of these intellectuals had the platforms
to expound their views, many scholars since that time have assumed that the period as a
whole was markedly hostile toward Christianity, as if the thoughts of a relatively small
handful of thinkers could be taken as characteristic of the thoughts of everyone in the
society. The focus on a handful of anti-religious thinkers has led many to define the
Enlightenment as an anti-religious movement that ushered in a post-Christian era in the
West. Evangelical scholar Harold Lindsell, for example, says this of the period:

The Enlightenment battled with Christianity in a life and death struggle. While the victory
of the Enlightenment did not erase the church from history and the West, it did unseat the
church from its primary position in Western civilization and break its hold by installing a
new Weltanschauung that stood in opposition to Christianity, and that in turn brought the
West under the control of a new Zeitgeist that was secular and anti-Christian.  
Hence for Lindsell, the period of the Enlightenment led to a total secularization of the
West. Without a doubt, many of the leaders of the Enlightenment were antagonistic
toward Christianity, especially toward notions such as revelation, but some scholars are
questioning the extent of this antagonism. J.A.I. Champion, for example, mitigates the

supposed hostility between Deism and Christianity, suggesting that the Deists tried to reform Christianity rather than overthrow it.\textsuperscript{51} Henry May characterizes the Enlightenment in England as “moderate.”\textsuperscript{52} If groups like the Deists in England were indeed opposed to Christianity, they were not much of a threat because of their relatively small numbers. Margaret Jacob notes that the only Enlightenment that was hostile to Christianity was the “radical Enlightenment,” a materialistic strain of Enlightenment in England that lost out to the dominant Newtonian Enlightenment.\textsuperscript{53} J.G.A. Pocock has proposed that the Enlightenment in England was conservative and clerical in nature.\textsuperscript{54} B.W. Young also takes this view in his \textit{Religion in Eighteenth-Century England: Theological Debate from Locke to Burke}:

This study extends the implications of Pocock’s claim that the English Enlightenment was decidedly clerical and intellectually conservative in nature, not least by demonstrating that clerical culture was not inimical to stimulating fruitful intellectual controversy. Analysis of this sense of pervasive controversy

\textsuperscript{51} Champion, \textit{The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken}, 236.

\textsuperscript{52} See May, \textit{The Enlightenment in America}. The “Moderate Enlightenment” (1688-1787) is one of four overlapping Enlightenments that May discusses in the book. He places Newton and Locke in the Moderate Enlightenment, Hume and Voltaire in the Skeptical Enlightenment (1750-1789), and Rousseau and Paine in the Revolutionary Enlightenment (1776-1800). In the Didactic Enlightenment, May places Thomas Reid, Adam Smith, and Dugald Stewart.


\textsuperscript{54} See Pocock, “Clergy and Commerce.”
within the clerical culture of early and mid-eighteenth-century England, as opposed to that between clergy and freethinkers, provides the core of the present investigation.\textsuperscript{55}

J.C.D. Clark’s *English Society* argues that: 1) eighteenth-century England remained a confessional state; 2) the Church of England was not in decline during the period and remained a vital part of the lives of the people; and 3) the new ideas of the period were in many cases a product of religion rather than antagonistic toward religion.\textsuperscript{56}

To support the view that the new ideas of the period were in many cases a product of religion rather than antagonistic toward religion, one may look at the life and ministry of John Wesley, founder of Methodism and the Pan-European Evangelical Awakening (1738-1790s). Whereas Wesley and his followers were once widely viewed as enthusiasts who rose in opposition to the currents of the Enlightenment, several important recent treatments of Wesley view him more as a product of the times rather than an opponent of it. This observation is not meant to imply that Wesley did not embrace the task of reformation. Wesley indeed reaffirmed certain declining religious beliefs as over against certain secular perspectives. Yet, even though Wesley may have been a reformer, he still was a product of his times and may be seen as a man of the Enlightenment. David Hempton notes, for example, that Wesley may be seen as a man of the Enlightenment in his concern for religious toleration, his hatred of persecution and violence, and his


\textsuperscript{56} See J.C.D. Clark, *English Society*, 2000 edition. There is no change here from the earlier edition of Clark’s work. The second edition of *English Society* is more moderate in its attack on scholars whom Clark considered to have Whiggish or Marxist historiographical paradigms.
doctrines of perfection. Several scholars have even examined the influence of John Locke on Wesleyan thought. Thus, the connections between religion and the Enlightenment were more complex than previously assumed by many scholars. Therefore, the simple assumption that the Enlightenment represented an age of broad hostility to Christianity must be challenged in order that a better understanding of the period, especially in England, can be reached.

The third reason why the term “Enlightenment” is problematic is closely related to the assumption of anti-clericalism discussed above. As there has been an assumption that Enlightenment thought was antagonistic toward religion, there also has been a widely held assumption that the Enlightenment was an era where science triumphed over religion. Margaret Jacob has challenged this assumption in her ground-breaking book:


The Newtonians. In this book, Jacob argues that the Newtonian Enlightenment, with its synthesis of science and Christianity, ultimately triumphed over more radical strands of Enlightenment.60 Indeed, for Jacob, Anglicanism is the birthplace of modern science.

It is impossible to uphold the view that science triumphed over religion during the Enlightenment when one considers the fact that many of the major scientific figures of the period such as Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, and John Wilkins retained strong religious convictions. Many of these scientists were Latitudinarians, a group whose orthodoxy is being more greatly recognized in recent scholarship.61 Particularly, in the present discussion of the miracle debate, it must be noted that despite the advancement of a mechanistic science, these scientific leaders were advocates of belief in miracles. In the words of R.M. Burns, “The believers in miracles, and not their opponents, may more plausibly be regarded as the advanced thinkers of their age, most in touch with the scientific spirit.”62 Peter Harrison also understands the importance of religion for the key English scientists of the period. He notes:

Leading scientists of this era, almost without exception, had a dual commitment on the one hand to a science premised upon a mechanical universe governed by immutable laws of nature and on the other to an omnipotent God who intervened in the natural order from time to time, breaching these “laws” of nature. This puzzle is heightened by the fact that (in England at least) those figures who were at the forefront of an advancing mechanical science were also the most staunch

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60 See Jacob, The Newtonians.


62 Burns, The Great Debate on Miracles, 12.
defenders of miracles. The Christian virtuosi of the Royal Society—Robert Boyle, Thomas Sprat, and John Wilkins, to take the most prominent examples—insisted not only that miracles could take place but that they played a vital role in establishing the truth of Christian religion.63

Alexandra Walsham adds:

If we recognize that experimental enquiry was frequently not so much an agent of secularization as a buttress of traditional Christian truth and an ally in the discernment of the benevolence of divine Providence, it no longer becomes so difficult to explain why the leading natural philosophers of the period—Robert Boyle, Isaac Newton and others—were among the foremost advocates of belief in the existence of miracles.64

Jane Shaw states that although “it may seem counter-intuitive to the usual historical story, the evidence suggests that miracles and science ‘grew’ together in the second half of the seventeenth century.”65

Although the term “Enlightenment” will be retained in this treatment of popular and elite understandings of miracles in Enlightened England, it is now apparent that some revision is necessary in the interpretation of the basic thrust of the Enlightenment. Specifically, for the present discussion on miracles and for the broader issue of religion in the Enlightenment, such revision is crucial in order to assess the timing, rate, and mechanism of the secularization and de-Christianization of the West.


65 Shaw, Miracles in Enlightenment England, 12.
Miracles and Secularization: Preliminary Considerations

Not all scholars agree on what is meant by the word “secularization.” The term, broadly defined, denotes the transference of ecclesiastical property into non-ecclesiastical (usually princely, civil, or lay) hands. However, the concept of secularization is more complex than this simple definition implies, taking on different connotations in the hands of different authors. Hence, secularization has been variously defined as 1) the separation of church and state; 2) the preoccupation with temporal rather than eternal concerns; or 3) the conversion to or imbuing with secularism (i.e., rejection of or indifference to religion and religious considerations).

Lutheran sociologist Peter Berger, in his book *The Sacred Canopy*, defines secularization as “the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols” and further states that “[a]s there is a secularization of society and culture, so there is a secularization of consciousness.”66 A few years later in *The Homeless Mind*, Berger connects secularization with modernization and concludes that secularization arises out of individuals’ need for meaning.67 As religion is required less and less to meet the various needs of life or to explain the various questions of life, secularization, according to Berger, is the natural consequence.

In *The Secularization of Early Modern England*, C. John Sommerville defines secularization as “a separation of almost all aspects of life and thought from religious

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associations or ecclesiastical direction.”68 Bryan Wilson defines the term as “the process by which religious institutions, actions, and consciousness, lose their significance.”69 Wilson adds that secularization accompanies “the process in which societal organization itself changes from one that is communally-based to a societally-based system.”70

In an article written in 1998, Sommerville discusses five meanings of “secularization” that are in common, non-controversial use today. (1) When discussing social structures, secularization can be used to mean differentiation. So in this case, secularization means the separation of religious activities, groups, or ideas from other characteristics of society. A secular judge, for example, has no connection with the church in vocation, but personally may be either religious or nonreligious. (2) When discussing institutions, secularization can mean the transformation of an institution that had once been considered religious in character into something not thought of as religious. Many universities, for example, were originally founded as religious institutions, but have now lost that connection. (3) When discussing activities, secularization is taken to mean the

68 C. John Sommerville, The Secularization of Early Modern England: From Religious Culture to Religious Faith (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3. Although Sommerville deals almost exclusively with the period before 1700, his definition of “secularization” is generally applicable to any period. See especially his “The Study of Secularization” (pp. 3-17) and “Antecedents, Causes, and Conclusions” (pp. 178-87).

69 Bryan Wilson, Religion in Secular Society (London: Watts, 1966), xiv; (Penguin edn., 1969), 14. Wilson repeats the use of his definition in Religion in Sociological Perspective (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 149. In this latter work, Wilson clarifies that his definition does not imply that all men have acquired secularized consciousness. Neither does it suggest that most individuals have relinquished all their interest in religion. Wilson states that his definition maintains no more than that religion ceases to be significant in the working of the social system (pp. 149-50).

70 Wilson, Religion in Sociological Perspective, 153.
transfer of activities from institutions of a religious nature, to others without that character. The transfer of welfare services from church to the state is an example of this type of secularization. (4) When discussing mentalities, secularization can mean a significant shift of attention from ultimate (religious) concerns to proximate concerns. This understanding of secularization is probably the most common and implies a decline in personal religious commitment and a movement toward a more secular lifestyle. (5) When discussing populations, secularization can refer to societal decline in religiosity. Sommerville concludes that the term “secularization” cannot be used unambiguously when referring to religion generally. Thus, to speak of secularization occurring in Christianity, for example, one needs specifically to refer to what aspects of Christianity are being discussed.71

The issue of secularization is important to the present study because of a long-standing historiographical assumption that thorough secularization characterized the Enlightenment (or even earlier periods) and relegated religion to a non-central role in Western society. Some historians and sociologists place the process of secularization at later periods and the debate over the timing, rate, and mechanism of the process has been intense.72


In *Christianity in a Secularized World*, Wolfhart Pannenberg describes secularization as resulting from the “unintended consequences of the Reformation.” 73 Similarly, Max Weber places secularization with the rise of Protestantism. 74 According to Weber, Protestantism brought about a marked decline in a magical understanding of nature and religion, which he describes as a “disenchantment” of the world. C. John Sommerville places secularization in the Restoration period in England. 75

Keith Thomas draws upon Weber’s methodology in *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. He sees the disenchantment of the world as a seventeenth-century phenomenon that occasions the scientific revolution with its “triumph of the mechanical philosophy.” Says Thomas, “The notion that the universe was subject to immutable natural laws killed the concept of miracles, weakened the belief in physical efficiency of prayer, and diminished faith in the possibility of direct divine inspiration.” 76

In *The Making of Post-Christian Britain*, Alan Gilbert declares of the Christian worldview in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, “while it remained dominant . . . [it] was no longer normative.” 77 He locates secularization largely in the Industrial Revolution. Says Gilbert:


Thus to the extent that this book has a particular thesis, its theme is the relationship in modern Britain between the decline of religion and the emergence of a complex urban-industrial society. And for the purposes of such a theme, ‘religion’ still means ‘Christianity’ in the British context.78

Robert Hole says that the wind of secularization blew in from France in the 1790s after the French Revolution.79 Hole deals with the question of secularization with specific reference to political arguments, leaving the broader question of the secularization of society to others. Owen Chadwick places secularization in the nineteenth century rather than the eighteenth century. He links secularization with factors such as urbanization, the growth of technology, and the rise of evolutionary science. However, for Chadwick, the initial spark of secularization clearly began during the Enlightenment. According to Chadwick, “Enlightenment was of the few. Secularization is of the many.”80

J.C.D. Clark challenges the whole concept of “Enlightenment” as a viable category because the term has been so implicitly separated from religion.81 However, for Clark, religion was the primary concern for Englishmen and women throughout the eighteenth century. He argues for an Anglican hegemony until the Reform Act of 1832. Thus, Clark is the moving force behind the “long eighteenth century” concept. He also locates 1980), 36. Gilbert states that a “post-Christian society is not one from which Christianity has departed, but one in which it has become marginal” (p. ix).


secularization in the Industrial Revolution, but much later in the nineteenth century than
does Gilbert or Chadwick. He states:

The fully urbanized society of the late nineteenth century, living in great cities
and conurbations, was susceptible neither to Anglican nor to Dissenting
missionary endeavor: only that society came to organize itself around universal
suffrage, and to regard religion with widespread secular indifference.  

In *The English Churches in a Secular Society*, Jeffrey Cox takes issue with Bryan
Wilson (and also with Peter Berger, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Alan Gilbert), stating that
Wilson is in a tradition which dogmatically characterizes religion as a marginal
phenomenon in all advanced industrial societies. Cox argues that religion has always
played a significant role in the lives of people. He notes that the religious indifference of
the twentieth century in England resembles in some respects that of the eighteenth
century. However, he points out that “eighteenth-century apathy was reversed in the late
eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, when the English people either
endured or entered into a succession of religious crusades conducted by men and women
who were convinced that England should be Christianized or re-Christianized.”

The “secularization thesis” has come under tremendous scrutiny in recent years.
Peter Berger, for example, in light of the overwhelming evidence for the present-day
strength of religion, has recanted his earlier espousal of secularization. He states, “The
world today, with some exceptions . . . is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in
some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians

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82 Clark, *English Society, 1688-1832*, 69.

83 Jeffrey Cox, *The English Church in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930*
and social scientists loosely labeled ‘secularization theory’ is essentially mistaken.”

Berger continues:

Although the term “secularization theory” refers to works from the 1950s and 1960s, the key idea of the theory can indeed be traced to the Enlightenment. That idea is simple: Modernization necessarily leads to a decline in religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals. And it is precisely this key idea that has turned out to be wrong.84

Coming from a slightly different perspective than Berger, Rodney Stark argues that secularization theory is now irrelevant because it assumes a past religiousness in Europe that never existed.85 Stark and Roger Fink suggest that the older notion of secularization should be laid to rest. They state, “After nearly three centuries of utterly failed prophecies and misrepresentations of both present and past, it seems time to carry the secularization doctrine to the graveyard of failed theories, and there to whisper ‘requiescat in pace.’”86 They conclude, “What is needed is not a simple-minded theory of inevitable religious decline, but a theory to explain variation.”87

C. John Sommerville, in conversation with Berger and Stark, deduces “that we can speak of secularization without committing ourselves to secularization theory.” He does not wish to bury the concept of secularization, but he does believe that the term should be used judiciously. He concludes a recent essay on the subject as follows:


In short, some kinds of secularization have no particular connection to what is broadly termed “religious decline.” I share Stark's exasperation with the sloppiness of claims for such a general decline. One may find a secular “society” that contains a religious population. That is, a society can be entirely secular in its structures and processes, but contain people of a religious bent. Where that is the case, there has been a secularization of things, though not of people. The Age of Religious Culture is apparently past, perhaps beyond recall. But as Stark implies, we might even now be entering something of an Age of Faith.88

Most would now agree that traditional secularization theory needs to be revised. However, there has been no general agreement on how this should be done. Sommerville is right to suggest that secularization can be a value-neutral term and his recent, nuanced discussions of secularization are helpful.89 If a religious landmark, for example, is removed from a park, the removal could be described as secularization in the strictest sense, but may suggest nothing about the strength of religious belief in the community in which the park is located. However, critics of secularization theory have rightly judged that the term “secularization” has often been used so loosely that many people have come to understand it as meaning “the process of loosing one’s religion” or “the process of becoming antireligious” or some such. If secularization is to remain a useful concept, then it must be allowed to function only within the world of description; it cannot be allowed to evolve into a doctrine or an ideology. There is no question that Max Weber, Karl Marx, and others expected the eventual downfall of religion, a perspective which colored their characterization of religion.


89 This dissertation disagrees with Sommerville on the timing and scope of secularization. Whereas Sommerville argues for early and pervasive secularization, this analysis will show that some spheres of society were not thoroughly secularized. Therefore, partial secularization is the most that should be claimed.
It is not the goal of the present treatment to advance a new secularization thesis for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, only to counter the notion of pervasive religious decline during the period through the examination of belief in miracles and other related forms of supernaturalism. This dissertation defines secularization as “the process of decline in religious association or connection in a specific sphere or institution.” From this definition, one could develop a “partial secularization” theory that would take seriously secular influences within a society without dealing pejoratively with religion as a whole. In the development of a partial secularization theory, one would need, first of all, to define what is meant by religion, or superstition, or the supernatural and then explain precisely what spheres of life had experienced or were experiencing change. A partial secularization theory could, for example, admit to a decline in the use of magic or the visitation of shrines on the one hand and the rise in church attendance or the participation in religious revival on the other.

**A Discussion of Methods: Sources and Statistics**

Many reasons have been given for secularization during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: the rise of science, the inevitability of human progress, and the heightening of skepticism, to name a few. Secularization is a vague concept and the debate over its timing, rate, and mechanism continues. The concept is useful for this treatment in that it is one way of assessing religious vitality. Religion may not serve the same functions or answer the same questions that it once did in the past, but yet may remain a vital part of people’s lives. This dissertation seeks to demonstrate one aspect of religious vitality by considering the issue of the miraculous in much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
This issue is extremely important to the topic of secularization in Enlightened England. Although debates concerning miracles are readily understood in an intellectual climate that is largely hostile towards claims of the miraculous, outbreaks of revival and other signs of the embrace of supernatural phenomena are not so well understood in such a climate. If the climate was indeed hostile, either 1) large segments of the populace were unaware of or did not participate in the high intellectual discussions and thus, did not embrace the corresponding conclusions of the elite; or 2) in the case where the larger society was aware of and participated in the discussion over miracles, it still retained openness to the supernatural.

Accepting options (1) or (2) could lead us quite naturally to embrace either the “trickle down” or “persistence” model. However, this dissertation will argue that the climate was not hostile toward the miraculous in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There were indeed hostile elements in English society at the time, as there are in every age. Yet, these elements were not the only ones in operation. The history of Enlightened England, therefore, should not be written only from the perspective of a minority element that happened to discount miracles. Instead, it should be written from a broader range of perspectives, for the Enlightenment in England was a complex, multi-layered movement of diverse beliefs and perspectives.

Therefore, this dissertation seeks adequately to present the full range of ideas concerning miracles that were circulating throughout society. It examines newspapers, magazines, and other periodicals, sermons, diaries, journals, pamphlets, and other available primary sources. It also takes into consideration how meaningful ideas were
exchanged during the period. It concludes with a positive portrayal of the Church and demonstrates that people of all social strata shape history.

Although this treatment highlights commonality among the different popular and elite views of miracles presented, it avoids speaking of “the people” or even “the elite” in terms of homogeneous units unless such a characterization is warranted. The reality of the human condition is that it sometimes contains many social and cultural contradictions that cannot be harmonized. Thus, in these cases it is better not to seek a consensus and simply to acknowledge the tension that exists.

Judicial examination of the extensive amount of literature utilized for this project has required some amount of statistical savvy. The key statistical issues involved the gathering and presentation of data and the application of standard inferential techniques to them. Even with these issues in mind, it must always be remembered that the techniques of statistics, although good at producing numerical correlation, may not be so good at describing causative relationships. Hence, knowledge of other factors such as education and industrialization had to be taken into account along with the quantitative techniques. In any case, the author’s statistical expertise was very valuable to the present treatment. Two useful sources that were consulted for their statistical methodology are James E. Bradley’s *Popular Politics and the American Revolution in England* (1986) and his *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism: Non-conformity in Eighteenth-Century Politics and Society* (2000).90 In these books, Bradley quantifies public opinion by

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counting signatures on petitions, tracking voter records, comparing surveys, and applying a number of techniques from the fields of inferential and descriptive statistics. Some of these techniques, which will be used in later chapters, allow the researcher to present large quantities of data in digestible forms.

Because the topic of popular religion is relatively new, it was sometimes necessary to dialog with sources outside the chronological framework of this treatment in order that their methodological insights could be noted and utilized. Two such works on popular religion in the nineteenth century are Robert Moore, *Pit-Men, Preachers & Politics: The effects of Methodism in a Durham mining community* and Mark Smith, *Religion and Industrial Society*. Both works describe the growth of religion among members of the working class. The factors that they utilize as evidences for growth are considered in the present study.

A major challenge for the popular component of this study during the early stages of research was the location of various printed sources by subject. The recent work of James Tierney was very helpful in this regard. Professor Tierney gave me access to his CD-ROM Subject Index to Pre-1800 British Periodicals, a tool that was quite beneficial to this project. The EEBO, ESTC, and the recent ECCO database by Thomson Gale were also invaluable for finding primary sources, especially those containing the work of “middle figures.”

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A Brief Preview of Chapters 2-7

Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation discuss the issue of miracles during the second half of the seventeenth century. Chapter 2 lays out the political, social, intellectual, and religious context in which discussions about miracles occurred. It presents the thoughts about miracles by church leaders, philosophers, scientists, and other thinkers such as Benedict de Spinoza, John Locke, and Isaac Newton. Chapter 3 continues the seventeenth-century discussion of the supernatural by dealing with the issue of reported miracles. Chapter 3 contains several accounts of miracles from the ministry of Quaker founder George Fox along with other accounts from inside and outside the Anglican Church. Chapter 4 extends the discussion begun in chapters 2 and 3 and roughly covers the first half of the eighteenth century. Most pieces of literature utilized for this period are not hostile toward the idea of the miraculous, although many Protestant leaders expressed their belief in the cessation of an age of miracles following the ministries of Jesus Christ and the apostles. The most vicious attacks on miracles during this period were from the Deists, especially Thomas Woolston. Even though his tracts were widely circulated, Woolston’s ridicule did little to upset the dominance of supernatural religion. Orthodox apologists ably defended foundational Christian tenets against deistic assaults and reported miracles continued to retain an important place among the populace.

The focus of chapter 5 is the Evangelical Revival led by John Wesley, George Whitefield, and others. A close examination of primary sources, especially Wesley’s *Journal*, uncovers a plethora of supernatural accounts including: physical healings, exorcisms, prophecies, and “falling down.” These phenomena were frequent occurrences in revival meetings and were recorded well into the latter half of the eighteenth century.
The preternatural occurrences present a notable contrast to the cessationism taught by many of the leaders of the church and reveal that eighteenth-century popular religious practice often transcended prescribed religion. The first part of chapter 6 examines the classic attack on miracles by David Hume. The chapter reveals Hume’s dependence on the writings of the Deists and presents various responses to both Humean and deistic arguments. Chapters 5 and 6 continue to present other discussions about the supernatural uncovered in the primary literature beyond those of the “key players” and reveals a spectrum of beliefs and practice concerning miracles. At the same time that David Hume wrote his essay about miracles, Bridget Bostock was healing about six hundred to seven hundred people a day in Cheshire.

The second part of Chapter 6 moves beyond Hume’s attack on miracles to discussions about the supernatural in the final years of the eighteenth century in England. Apparently, belief in miracles survived the storm of the preceding decades. This dissertation concludes with a final look at the issue of secularization in England and suggests that the present treatment supports the thesis that thorough secularization and de-Christianization of the West did not occur during the period under consideration. The most that can be claimed is partial secularization.
Popular and Elite Understandings of Miracles in Enlightened England

Book Summary: This dissertation investigates the issue of miracles in the Anglophone world of much of the long eighteenth century and contributes to our understanding of how people of various social backgrounds understood and debated the meaning of these phenomena. It seeks to establish that the common assumption of this period as one of thorough secularization is incorrect. Chapter 1 reviews the issues involved in the study of miracles, popular-elite religion, secularization, and Enlightenment in England. Chapter 2 lays out...