One lazy afternoon in 1769, a heartfelt reunion between an incredulous young man and his former tutor led to a polite discussion regarding the possibility of miracles. After having expressed his disappointment that the young man had fallen prey to the vain discourses of the empirically minded philosophes, the devout Catholic tried to convince his former student that not only were miracles possible, but that one had, in fact, occurred shortly before their reunion. He presented the young man with a plethora of evidence, including eyewitness accounts and doctors’ testimonies, confirming that earlier that year a woman had been healed miraculously of her paralysis during the Corpus Christi procession. Despite the evidence presented to him, the young man remained unconvinced, asking:

How do I know if her paralysis was truly complete, if her recovery was sudden, and whether her health has sustained itself since? How do I know if the doctors followed the sick woman with attention, and if their capacity suffices to decide whether this sudden change was natural or supernatural? . . . How do I know that the witnesses you present to me are worthy of trust, that all of this is not but a show, that some spirit of partiality did not contrive this entire affair, that the vanity of the sick woman did not mislead her, or that the designs of interest did not lead to a maneuver that would perhaps make the most zealous partisans turn red if it was ever entirely unveiled?

1 Louis Guidi, Entretiens sur la religion entre un jeune incrédule et un catholique, à l’occasion d’un miracle opéré par le Saint Sacrement, sur un
What followed this tirade was an in-depth discussion about the importance of trusting in one's fellow man. Although this fictional work shared the dialogic approach common to the philosophes, the aptly titled *Entretiens sur la religion entre un jeune incrédule et un catholique* (Discussions between an incredulous youth and a Catholic) inverted the Enlightenment paradigm of the wise skeptic and the ignorant believer. Here the adroit reasoning of a learned Catholic exposed the naïveté of a young philosophe-in-the-making. The Catholic insisted that the philosophes attacked religion in an attempt to replace it with a Pyrrhonic philosophy that bred uncertainty and distrust. He insisted that the humble paralytic who was "healed suddenly by a laying of the Holy Eucharist upon his head is a philosopher who by the movement of his pinky finger alone confounds and overturns all the coryphées of irreligion." While the miracle could reverse the philosophy of the Enlightenment, only witness testimony stood as proof of the event. The healed man was an uneducated laborer who admitted that he knew little of medicine or philosophy. His proof was simple: "[I was] an incurable paralytic; I asked God to heal me the Thursday of the Feast of Corpus Christi and I was healed." Furthermore, he insisted that prior to his healing "I was attached to no society, and I was acquainted with no party." After an extensive discussion with the healed man, the young skeptic could not deny that his testimony was simple and sincere. He concluded that "[i]t is necessary that I either believe him, or else give up the society of men, which has for a foundation only their testimony and good faith." Despite the happy ending here (at least, for religious orthodoxy), this work clearly acknowledged the primary obstacle apologists for miracles encountered during the eighteenth century in France. The reliability of witness testimony was the

---

paralytique, à la Procession de la Paroisse de S. Côme le jour de la Fête-Dieu 25 mai 1769 (n.p., 1769), 13–14. All translations from the French are my own.

2 Ibid., 2.
3 Ibid., 21.
4 Ibid., 22.
5 Ibid., 33.
central component of what I would call "the crisis of miracles." The young man did not reject the miracle because he believed it to be impossible; rather, he asserted that witness testimony was unreliable, thus rendering all miracles dubious.

Scholars of eighteenth-century France have long been preoccupied with the trends of religious skepticism and secularism in the years before the French Revolution. In recent decades, historians have expanded discussions of these trends beyond the intellectual debates of the French Enlightenment to foster a better understanding of the origins and nature of major shifts in lay religious practices and beliefs. Although these discussions have revealed the complexity of religious beliefs and practices during this period, it has contributed little to an understanding of the changing place of miracles in French society. While scholars have linked changes in lay religious devotions and faith to the evolution of social practices and values, changing views toward miracles have been situated largely within the intellectual context of the Enlightenment.

Rather than focusing on the intellectual debates over the possibility and probability of miracles, this paper expands the boundaries of the discussion over skepticism toward miracles into the realm of public judgment and social interactions. Although many historians have noted that claims to miracles were increasingly questioned by the clergy and derided by unbelievers throughout the century, most have assumed that these trends indicate a growing doubt about the likelihood—or

---


even the possibility—of miracles. While such doubts undeniably permeated the intellectual debates of the Enlightenment, skepticism of a different sort seems to have held more sway over the minds of the common people. I contend that the reluctance to report and accept miracles was driven largely by a growing incredulity not toward supernatural occurrences per se, but, rather, incredulity toward the testimony of witnesses. Testimony was the central factor of the verification of miracles; as people grew more distrustful of the judgment of others, miracles were slowly pushed out of the realm of public devotion. Although miracles remained a fundamental component of Catholic belief and apology, the public demonstration of this belief became increasingly controversial and difficult to authenticate. Throughout the eighteenth century in France, the miracle was slowly internalized, as it came to be centered on the private devotion of the individual.

From the earliest days of the Church, the presence of a crowd to witness a miracle was enough to prove divine intervention. However, in the wake of the Protestant


9 For example, miracles continued to serve as the primary proof of the divinity of Jesus Christ and his mission. See, for example, Daniel Le Masson de Granges, *Le philosophe moderne, ou l’incrédule condamné au tribunal de sa raison* (Paris, 1759), 78–86, and Claude Marie Guyon, *L’oracle des nouveaux philosophes, pour servir de suite et d’éclairissement aux oeuvres de M. de Voltaire* (Berne, 1759), 77–161.
Reformation, the Church established stricter regulations for verifying these publicly sanctioned miracles. The decrees of the final session of the Council of Trent (1559–1563) declared that "no new miracles are to be acknowledged, or new relics recognized, unless the said bishop has taken cognizance and approved thereof; who, as soon as he has obtained some certain information in regard to these matters, shall, after having taken the advice of theologians, and of other pious men, act therein as he shall judge to be consonant with truth and piety." By requiring bishops to obtain precise knowledge of the circumstances surrounding alleged miraculous occurrences, the Church placed the examination of witness testimony at the center of miracle verification.

Throughout the seventeenth century, miracles regularly made their way up the ecclesiastical ladder on their way to verification—from the simple faithful, to the lower clergy, and eventually to the bishop. Although eighteenth-century methods for verifying miracles were consistent with those of the seventeenth century, the process of verification was complicated by various developments, including advances in medical knowledge and a heightened distrust of the common faithful. However, this paper will focus primarily on the use of miracles as propaganda throughout the century and how the blatant polemical nature of works that supported or refuted reported miracles fostered a widespread reluctance to trust the testimony of witnesses.

Although miracles had long been employed as a means of verifying divine approval of particular Church doctrines and religious groups, such polemics reached their height in the 1730s during an eruption of highly publicized miracles that occurred at the tomb of the Jansenist deacon, François de Pâris. Upon his death in 1727, crowds of poor people from nearby flocked to his

---


grave at the Saint-Médard cemetery in Paris. As news of reported miraculous cures from blindness, deafness, paralysis, and other afflictions spread, the number of visitors to the cemetery grew rapidly, and the number of miracles reported there increased dramatically. The development of a popular religious cult at Saint-Médard alarmed both ecclesiastical and royal authorities who feared that this cult presented a serious threat to social stability. The fact that the deacon had quickly become a saintly hero in the eyes of Jansenists exacerbated this fear. François de Pâris was deemed an appellant, which meant that he had opposed the papal bull *Unigenitus*. Promulgated in 1713, this bull condemned conciliarism, predestination, and other unorthodox tenets commonly held by Jansensists. Thus, as an exceptionally pious appellant, the deacon Pâris became a perfect symbol of the Jansenist struggle against the monarchy and the Church, particularly the Jesuits. This struggle lay at the nexus of ecclesiastical and royal politics in eighteenth-century France.

Critics and skeptics quickly sought to disprove these miracles, especially because they seemed to indicate divine support for the Jansenist cause. Such critics often deemed those who attested to any element of these miracles "superstitious fanatics." Yet, "superstitious fanatics" or not, there were hundreds of people from all walks of life who testified to these supernatural events. This enabled Jansenist propagandists to compile hundreds of miracle accounts, replete with ample witness testimony that was perfectly in keeping with Tridentine requirements. However, such attestations did not silence the critics. One of the most widely and thoroughly criticized miracles was that of Anne Lefranc, which occurred shortly after

---


the dismissal of her Jansenist-leaning priest from his post in 1730. After having suffered from blindness in one eye and partial paralysis for almost thirty years, she was miraculously cured at the tomb of François de Pâris. The archbishop of Paris assembled a commission to examine the miracle. Unsurprisingly, after having questioned only forty of the original one hundred and twenty witnesses, the commission concluded that the miracle was a hoax. The doctors hired by the archbishop to investigate the matter concluded that her illness was the result of a "hysterical affection" produced by "menstrual irregularity" and that no illness, thus no miracle, had occurred.\textsuperscript{14}

However, the opponents of this miracle claimed that it was not her melancholy alone that had affected Anne Lefranc's judgment. Rather, as a woman of humble origins, she had been easily misled by the adherents of the cult of Pâris who were trying to use this supposed miracle to recruit people to the Jansenist cause. Because François de Pâris had been a Jansenist sympathizer, the miracles that occurred at his tomb were easily exploited by those who held similar sentiments—and especially those with access to a printing press. The opponents of the miracles, foremost the Jesuits, accused supporters of the cult of partisanship and deception. One critic directly condemned the Jansenists for their attempts to legitimize their resistance to Church authority and (what he believed to be) heretical tenets. Asserting the alleged futility of their efforts, he claimed that the works "with which for many months you flood the public are false miracles expressly spread for the purpose of authorizing the conduct and of justifying, if it is possible, the Doctrine of your Party."\textsuperscript{15} Similar criticisms were expounded on the stage in a

\textsuperscript{14} Kreiser, Ecclesiastical Politics, 125–128. A similarly skeptical writer criticized another miracle operated by the intercession of Pâris, claiming that this "imaginary healing" was only the result of "the ardor of zeal that some had for this new saint," which "often leads to superstition." Misoplanes [pseud.], Lettre à Monseigneur l'evêque de Montpellier, au sujet du prétendu miracle de Pezenas (n.p, 1733), 4.

\textsuperscript{15} Lettre à Monsieur ***: Au sujet du concours qui se fait à Saint Médard, & d'un écrit intitulé, Dissertation sur les miracles, & en particulier sur ceux
series of Jesuit plays in the early 1730s. In one of them, *Saint Déniche*, written in the early 1730s, the playwright claimed that the actors were composing a "Jansenist Theater." Throughout the play, the actors consistently mocked the credulity of those who believed in the miracles at Saint-Médard. This credulity was portrayed as the result of "seduction" and the miracles as "impostures paid for in a plot to seduce the people."¹⁶ Such suspicions seem to have been confirmed when the episcopal commission uncovered a ring of corruption surrounding the witnesses of Anne Lefranc's miracle, some of whom purportedly had been bribed into attesting to her healing.¹⁷

Jansenists fought back against such criticisms. They hurled accusations of their own, claiming that the only reason the Church had not yet accepted the miracles was due to the desire of some, particularly the Jesuits, to obscure the truth and that these miracles displayed God's approval of the Jansenist cause. One of the most avid supporters of Jansenism and the miracles at Saint-Médard was a magistrate in the Parlement of Paris named Louis Basile Carré de Montgeron. In a letter to the king, he explained that the Jesuits refused to believe these miracles only because such events did not serve their designs. He asserted that "[t]hey have spread terror everywhere in order to brush aside the proofs. They have used the name of Your Majesty, which is always so respectable, to declare war on those who dare to say publicly that they have been healed by miracles, and on those who render testimony to these miracles."¹⁸ According to Montgeron, the Jesuits were hiding these miracles from the king

¹⁶ Nouvelles ecclésiastiques ou mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la constitution Unigenitus (Paris and Utrecht, 1728–1803), 16 May 1732, 93.
and from the people because these events so clearly indicated God's will to free the French crown from Jesuitical and papal infiltration.

Both Jansenists and Jesuits claimed to be above reproach, nonpartisan, reasonable, and utterly unlike their opponents, whom they characterized as corrupting the truth to serve their own ends. This cyclical and seemingly endless debate was by no means limited to the learned elite. In addition to theological treatises and pastoral letters, the debate comprised short accounts of miracles, newspapers, images, broadsides, sermons, songs, plays, and even handwritten notes hidden in the back of church pews. Although the history of the Catholic Church is replete with miracles that supposedly proved divine approval of a particular sect, religious house, doctrine, or individual, rising literacy rates and increased printing capacities throughout the century broadened the audience of this debate significantly. While both supporters and opponents of the miracles had the opportunity to exploit an ever-expanding literate (or at least semi-literate) populace, it was the Jansenists who best took

---

19 Various such notes are found in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Archives de la Bastille, Ms. 10196–10202. Regular police reports about the arrests of those distributing such works suggest that they were widely available, especially in major cities. For a discussion of the readership of the newspaper, see Strayer, *Suffering Saints*, 171–72, and Van Kley, *Religious Origins*, 96.

20 Between the end of the seventeenth century and the end of the eighteenth century, literacy rates in France increased from 29 to 47 percent for men and from 14 to 27 percent for women. Chartier, *Cultural Origins*, 69. Literacy in Paris, where the controversy surrounding the miracles and convulsions of Saint-Médard was fiercest, increased from 85 to 90 percent of men and from 60 to 80 percent of women within the same period. McManners, *Church and Society*, vol. 2, 435–36. McManners also notes that, in Paris, many of the social groups from which Jansenism gained a great deal of support, such as domestic servants, were often highly literate. Furthermore, the interest in religious reading materials remained strong during this period and did not noticeably decline until after 1750. Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 219. For a fuller discussion of literacy rates in eighteenth-century France, see Harvey J. Graff, *The Legacies of Literacy: Continuities and Contradictions in Western Culture and Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 192–220.
advantage of this opportunity. At the center of their massive printing campaign was an illegally published newspaper, the *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques*. The paper was read by tens of thousands of people, including clerics, nobles, students, merchants, shopkeepers, and every issue between 1730 and 1735 made some reference to the miracles at Saint-Médard.\(^{21}\) Between four thousand and six thousand four-page issues were distributed every week, and it was quite affordable in comparison to other such newspapers.\(^{22}\) As a result of both increased literacy rates and low prices, the *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques* was the most widely distributed and widely read regular publication in France until the 1770s.\(^{23}\)

If the distribution of information about the miracles does not indicate how such information was received, at the very least it suggests that large numbers of people knew about the miracles. Furthermore, opponents of the miracles seem to have gone to great lengths to condemn them as false, suggesting that news of the miracles was quite widespread. Anti-Jansenist churchmen in cities as distant as Marseilles, Laon, and Bayeux were quick to condemn the miracles as forgeries from their pulpits. In 1731, the Bayeux contributor to the *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques* claimed...

---


\(^{23}\) Strayer, *Suffering Saints*, 171. Not only was the paper widely read, but it also forcefully encouraged critical reasoning on the part of its readers. Historians have noted the deliberate efforts of the editors of the *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques* to engage their readers, to give them a sense of individuality, and to encourage them to judge religious controversies for themselves (although they were always careful to stack evidence of righteousness in favor of Jansenists). Arlette Farge, *Subversive Words: Public Opinion in Eighteenth-Century France* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 36–48; Van Kley, *Religious Origins*, 94–96; McManners, *Church and Society*, 2: 426.
that "[t]he miracles of M. de Pâris are beginning to be attacked from the pulpit. This has already been done in two parishes."\textsuperscript{24} The \textit{curé} of the church of Notre-Dame-des-Accoules in Marseille also condemned the Jansenist miracles publicly, assuring his congregation that witnesses to the miracles were unreliable and that "[a]ll the miracles of M. Pâris are false."\textsuperscript{25} In Laon, a Jesuit read an episcopal pastoral letter from the pulpit of the cathedral that confirmed that the miracles in Paris were false and warned that anyone caught reading the hagiographical \textit{Life of Pâris} would be excommunicated.\textsuperscript{26} While the common faithful seem to have been inspired by the reports of miracles, they were also likely disturbed after being told that the miracles were forgeries conjured by false witnesses.

Most common people were likely indifferent to the theological elements of these debates; nevertheless, the overtly polemical nature of both sides of the miracle debate would have been impossible to ignore. The Jansenist miracles of the 1730s were not the first to have had a propagandistic quality. However, never before had a series of miracles enjoyed so much publicity, nor had any before endured such widespread criticism. The blatantly partisan aspect of these miracles called into question the trustworthiness of all claiming to have witnessed them. The occurrence of these miracles at a time when print was more widespread than ever before exposed the biased designs that hid behind these miracles to a large audience composed of both literate and illiterate individuals. Jean-Baptiste Molinier deplored the damaging effects of this controversy in his \textit{Dissertations on Miracles} (1734). He asserted that these biased debates sometimes went so far "that it seems that one searches on one side to crush the foundations of Religion, and that on the other side one undertakes to render it superstitious and too credulous.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Nouvelles ecclésiastiques, Supplément pour l'an 1731}, 271.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 9 November 1731, 211.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., \textit{Supplément pour l'an 1731}, 272.
However, the piety of the people suffers from it, and it finds itself almost equally exposed to the two sides."

Despite the pleas of Molinier and others to abandon partiality in favor of the general cause of religion, witness testimony had already suffered too many blows ever to make a full recovery. The increase in skepticism toward witness testimony was not only evident in the numerous criticisms concerning the reliability of witness testimony and the development of new methods to combat such criticism; it was apparent, too, in the reluctance of many to testify to miracles they had witnessed. For example, when a young man was healed of his blindness in 1733, the failure of many of his family members to attest to the miracle threw the entire event into doubt. One critic failed to understand "people who received such sensible and striking marks of the presence of God in their family, in favor of which the God of miracles displayed his all powerfulness for the healing of one of their close relatives. How could it be that these people show such slowness and repugnance to publish the glory of his good deed?"

As the eighteenth century progressed, reports of miracles were increasingly sullied by the reluctance of witnesses to come forth and attest to them. The growing reluctance to believe reported miracles made many reluctant to publicize them. For example, when the wife of a Parisian lawyer was allegedly healed by Holy Eucharist in 1777, she tried to keep the event secret "out of fear of exposing the work of God to the impious criticisms of unbelievers" who she believed would contest even "an event certified by so many


28 As the century progressed, calls to abandon the constraints of religious partiality continued to increase as religious apologists, both Jansenist and Jesuit, struggled to counter a swell of irreligious works. See *Journal de Trévoux*, March 1735, 540–42; *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques*, 11 September 1758, 152.

29 *Lettre à Monseigneur l’evêque de Montpellier, au sujet du prétendu miracle de Pezenas* (n.p., December 20, 1733), 11.
Miracles on Trial

irreproachable witnesses." Even clerics were often reluctant to attest to miracles out of fear of public embarrassment. When one Mme Gardet was healed of her ailments at the Corpus Christi procession in 1778, the twelve witness testimonies supporting her miracle were rendered dubious by the fact that the prior leading the procession refused to attest to the miracle. Although the prior had encouraged her to seek miraculous healing from the Eucharist at the procession, he insisted that she could only do so "[o]n the condition that this will not bring about any embarrassment," and he required that she return home with her crutches "whether you are healed or not." 

Religious apologists recognized the implications of skepticism toward witness testimony for miracles. One author who recounted the healing of a young woman by the intercession of Saint Peter in 1785 complained about the reluctance of contemporaries to trust witness testimony. While in the time of Jesus and the evangelists the attestation of witnesses was enough to verify a miracle, this no longer sufficed in the eighteenth century. When Saint Peter healed a lame man in the temple of Jerusalem, the miracle was considered certain because the people had seen him unable to walk for years and afterward miraculously healed. In contemporary times, however, when the people of Gonesse witnessed the same healing of a woman who had walked with crutches for three years, the general public was reluctant to declare this a miracle despite the large number of witnesses. The miracles of the Bible converted unbelievers despite the fact that the only evidence for them was the

---


testimony of eyewitnesses. Clearly God esteemed witness testimony sufficiently reliable to deliver his message. The author sadly proclaimed, "What disciples are we, if the discretion of our master does not appear to us worthy of being the model of our own prudence?" At last, the widespread incredulity toward witness testimony had broken the back of the regulations that the Council of Trent had set out two centuries earlier for the verification of miracles.

In 1764, an anonymous author sent a letter to the Archbishop of Paris complained about those "politiques" who, although they believed in miracles, discouraged people from publicizing them. He claimed that

Nothing is more common today, Sir, than a politique, completely conscious of what he is doing, who is not afraid of being reckless, who seems to maintain the language [of a believer], but at the root of whom is only a disgraceful indifference for Religion, a criminal timidity, or at least a displaced caution, with the result that Religion no longer finds at present anything but cold admirers, trembling defenders, or well-behaved corruptors.

The concerns of this author are an excellent representation of the new role that miracles increasingly played in Catholicism in France. While miracles remained a central component of the Catholic faith, they were slowly being pushed out of the realm of public religious practice and into the realm of private devotion.

32 Lettre de M. Vauvilliers, professeur de la langue grecque, au Collège Royal & de l'Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres, à Monseigneur l'Archevêque de Paris, sur le miracle opéré à Gonesse le 30 juin 1785 (n.p., n.d.) 36–38. Similar sentiments were expressed in various works from the second half of the eighteenth century. For example, one author asserted that "[t]hose who read the Sacred Scriptures and the history of the Church know that our fathers did not require the certificate of doctors to believe in miracles." Relation de la guérison de la sœur Ste. Geneviève . . . obtenue par l'application de la vraie Croix & l'intercession de la Sainte Vierge, le 17 août 1790 (Paris, 1790), 23.

33 Lettre à Monseigneur l'Archevêque de Paris, sur le miracle opéré dans la Maison des Cent-Filles, le jour de la Fête-Dieu de cette année 1764 (n.p., 1764), 17–18.
Hagiographies were still being printed, encouraging the faithful to trust that God continued to fulfill his promise to intervene in the lives of his followers in the form of miracles. Pilgrimage guides, devotional manuals, and episcopal pastoral letters continued to assert that believers should seek out relics for spiritual and corporal healing. In both cases, however, miracles of recent times were neglected, if not altogether excluded, from the extensive lists of miracles operated via God’s saintly intercessors. Such works suggest that miracles continued to serve as an important link between God and terrestrial existence for the common faithful. Furthermore, they indicate that the

34 Many hagiographies doubled as devotional manuals and often included prayers, hymns, and regulations for invoking the intercession of particular saints. For example, see Abregé de la vie et miracles de S. Hubert Patron des Ardennes, par un religieux de l'abbaye dudit S. Hubert (Liège, 1704), Abregé de la vie et miracles de St. Amable, patron de la ville de Riom & des effets miraculeux de ses précieuses reliques, & du ruban, avec les prières, hymnes & litanies (Riom, 1739), R. P. Joseph de l'Isle, Histoire de la vie du culte, de la translation des reliques et des miracles de S. Nicolas Evêque de Myre en Lycie (Nancy, 1745), and Abregé de la vie et des miracles de l'illustre confesseur de Jesus-Christ Saint Druon, en faveur des habitans de Sebourg, des pélérins qui y viennent de toutes les parties du monde chrétien (Douay, 1781).

35 For example, Abregé de la vie, vertus et miracles de Saint Jean de La Croix, premier carme déchaussé, et coadjuteur de Sainte Therese dans la réforme de l'ordre de Notre-Dame du Mont Carmel, trans. R. P. Amable (Paris, 1725). Of ninety-one miracles recounted herein, sixty-four of which had occurred since his death, only one of the attested miracles occurred in the eighteenth century (1704). Jean-François Beaupied, Les vies et miracles de St. Spire et St. Leu, premier & troisième evesques de Bayeux, avec l'histoire de la translation de leurs reliques au Château de Palluau en Gatinois, & de-là en l'Eglise Royale & Collegiale de Corbeil (Paris, 1735). Of fifty-six miracles recounted herein, only one occurred in the eighteenth century in 1729 on the day of the translation of the saints' relics. Similar patterns occur in eighteenth-century collections of Eucharistic miracles. For example, see Histoire de la Ste. Hostie, conserve à la Sainte Chapelle du Roy à Dijon, depuis l'an 1433, avec l'amande-honorable qui s'y fait les vendredis des Quatre-Tens, augmentée de prieres & réflexions pour chaque jour de la semaine (Dijon, 1739). Although the collection contains an extensive list of miracles operated by the Eucharist, the latest recounted took place in 1643.
authors who compiled such works continued to believe that there was a great deal of benefit to be drawn from such devotions.

The general increase in incredulity toward witness testimony was twofold. Not only were people less likely to trust in this once-lauded form of evidence, but also both the clergy and the laity became less inclined to offer their testimony out of fear of embarrassment and ridicule. Because the public miracle was now more than ever nearly impossible to verify, Catholic believers in eighteenth-century France internalized, or perhaps it is best to say privatized, their faith in miracles. For over three decades now, historians of eighteenth-century France have been grappling with the complexity of religious change throughout this period. While some have chosen to deem the slow decline of religious fervor "dechristianization," historians have come to recognize the insufficiency of this term.\(^{36}\) The shift toward incredulity in witness testimony that I have traced reveals the complexity of religious change throughout the eighteenth century. Although this shift supports to some degree the existence of a crisis of faith, it reveals something much more specific about shifts in belief. That is to say, the growth of incredulity toward particular Church tenets, whether it be the real presence in the Eucharist, the efficacy of masses for the dead, or the possibility of miracles, did not always result directly from a realization of the apparent improbability of the event or unreasonableness of the tenet itself. Rather, unbelief was the result of a combination of religious, cultural, political, and social factors. In this case, belief in miracles was challenged by the rise in incredulity toward witness testimony, an incredulity that was fueled by a heightened recognition of the pervasiveness of partiality.

By the end of the Entretiens mentioned in my introduction, the devout Catholic's frustration with the skepticism of the incredulous youth led him to lament that, "[i]f the testimonies of

men count for nothing, if the hallmark of the public faith merits no respect, if the notarial records are to become the plaything of Pyrrhonism, from now on everything dissolves, everything collapses, everything vanishes in Society." The concerns of the devout Catholic expressed here relay a more general eighteenth-century anxiety about the larger implications of the growth of incredulity toward witness testimony. Although it would, indeed, be a great exaggeration to claim that this particular form of incredulity resulted in a collapse of French society, it stands to reason that incredulity toward witness testimony did fuel a decline of the public miracle. While fear of shame and embarrassment combined with a general distrust of witness testimony to marginalize miracles, a desire to maintain a direct connection with the divine ensured that miracles would not disappear from the realm of Catholic belief altogether. The marginalization of the miracle was not a direct result of a growing incredulity toward supernatural occurrences. Rather, it is another manifestation of the internalization of piety, a trend recently revealed by historians of eighteenth-century France. According to this view, the desire for corporate salvation was slowly displaced by an internalized view of individual salvation. Throughout the eighteenth century, many French people came to rely less on corporate salvation, that is to say, they no longer believed that their personal salvation was inextricably linked to that of the community. This decline was closely associated with a general decline in various forms of public worship.

---

38 Chaunu, *La mort à Paris*, 216; Vovelle, *Piété baroque*, 211. According to Chaunu, a "progressive disaffection" for collective piety was growing at the end of the seventeenth century. Parisian elites, in particular, began to shun confraternities and collective festivals and processions. This trend filtered down to the lower classes throughout the eighteenth century. See McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment*, 438–46. According to McManners, the abandonment of baroque forms of worship points to a "refinement of the religious outlook," that is, a more internalized view of personal salvation. He believes that just as one's social sphere came to be more closely limited to the nuclear family rather than the community, so too did one's salvation come to be more personal rather than
article has shown, people also gradually came to believe that, like their salvation, their judgment should not depend on that of others.

communal. On the abandonment of collective piety see also, McManners, *Church and Society*, vol. 2, 119–55.