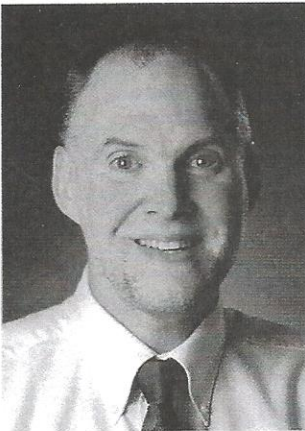




By Craig Keener



In his journal for December 15, 1742, John Wesley reports that he and a Mr. Meyrick both fell sick. But while Wesley recovered, Meyrick declined. On Christmas Day, Meyrick appeared to be dead. However, as Wesley and others cried out to God, Meyrick regained consciousness and then began to regain strength.

This incident was not isolated in early Methodism. Charles Wesley was healed from a severe condition when a woman commanded him to be healed “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.” Methodist preacher John Valton reported healings, revelatory dreams, and even rainfall through prayer. The blind eye of early Methodist Ann Brookes was healed after Jesus touched it in a dream. Many people in Wesley’s meetings fell to the ground under conviction from God’s Spirit; one skeptical physician was converted when one of his patients was cured from her sickness.

Western assumptions. Lest we suppose that Wesley had it easier than we do today regarding miracles, Wesley lived in a time when many discounted supernatural claims. Skepticism was so pervasive in certain circles that Wesley actually had to secure the release from asylums of persons committed there who were deemed “insane” from “religion and Methodism.” A key cul-

tural influence that Wesley had to combat was that of David Hume.

Although Hume’s essay against miracles simply recycled earlier deist arguments, it remains the primary philosophic case against miracles today. Most current philosophers writing about Hume’s argument find it hopelessly circular: he uses uniform human experience to dismiss the testimony of witnesses that such experience is not uniform. A central component of Hume’s argument is that miracles are not claimed by credible eyewitnesses with something to lose.

As a starting premise, however, this argument simply cannot work today. One 2006 Pew Forum survey suggests that hundreds of millions of Christians in the 10 nations surveyed claim to have witnessed divine healing. The survey covered three nations in Latin America, three in Asia, three in Africa and one in the West.

Ironically, China was not included in the survey. Reliable research has estimated that millions of non-Christians in rural areas of China — people without Christian “biases” — have become Christians because of healing experiences. Their willingness to change centuries of tradition suggests that they witnessed something unusual even by the criteria of their culture.