ORIGINS OF THE SOUTHERN MIND: 
THE PAROCHIAL SERMONS OF 
THOMAS CRADOCK OF MARYLAND, 1744–1770

Donald K. Enholm, David Curtis Skaggs, 
and W. Jeffrey Welsh

The history of ideas in America focuses largely upon conclusions drawn 
from formal treatises by major commentators, with scholars disagreeing over the 
extent to which such documents account for popular opinions, beliefs, and attitudes. At least three positions have been proposed. The first, advocated by historians like Edmund Morgan and Lawrence Chenoweth, describes the people as passive, as 
swayed easily into accepting ideas articulated by leaders. According to Chenoweth, 
most people are too preoccupied with immediate concerns to give much thought to 
profound ideas: “Thus, political, religious and economic leaders phrase ideologies as 
if they were philosophies of life to persuade individuals to act for the benefit of 
institutions.”

Jesse Lemisch and other New Left historians adopt the opposite position, arguing 
that the people are active, possessing ideas of their own, and are not dependent upon 
some unquestioned loyalty to leaders. To understand accurately the ideology of a 
period or place, Lemisch says, it is necessary to work from the bottom up, comparing 
the ideas of the people to those attributed to them in the treatises of the elite. The 
difficulty with this view, as Lemisch admits, is that it depends upon “the inarticulate 
rather than the articulate.”

Farmers, seamens, mechanics, and others of their class are not compelled or often are unable to put their thoughts on paper.

Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood, in an attempt to reconcile these two positions, contend that there is a correspondence between the ideas of leaders and their followers. Wood quotes John Adams: “No popular leader...has ever been able to persuade a large people for any length of time together, to think themselves wronged, injured, or oppressed unless they really were, and saw and felt it to be so.” Wood is describing the common speaker-audience relationship of focusing or inculcating, a relationship in which, as Donald Smith explains, the speaker serves as a catalyst, affirming that which the audience “believe[s], but which it had lacked the skill to affirm for itself.” A similar relationship is noted by Ernest Wраже, who suggests that the public speeches of a particular time and place—sermons, academic lectures, patriotic addresses, and similar fugitive materials—may provide a juncture at which the ideas of top and bottom meet. Wраже writes that the ideas of a speech should be viewed inclusively, both as “thoughts uttered by accredited spokesmen” and as “the product and expression of social incentives.” A public speech, he argues, is shaped not only by profound concepts of major thinkers but by the impress of the popular mind: it is a medium useful for explaining “complex thought” as well as for “mirroring the tone and temper of audiences.”

Wраже identifies the basic ingredient of a public speech as its content. Anticipating Donald B. Bryant’s well-known definition of rhetoric as the adjustment of “ideas to
people and people to ideas,"7 Wrage emphasizes that the transmission of this content is the proper function of a public speech: "It is a mode of communication by means of which something in the thought of the speaker is incorporated and expressed in language in ways which make for ready comprehension by one or more audiences."8 The analysis of content, Wrage adds, should be treated as a whole: "ideas are to be studied as a body of intricate tissues, of differentiated yet related thoughts."9 And because most public speeches are products of the cultural matrix of their time, Wrage concludes that the study of their "surviving record provides a repository of themes and their elaborations from which we may gain insights into the life of an era as well as into the mind of a man."10

One of the most influential of all public speeches in colonial America was the sermon.11 Closely reasoned and persuasively presented, "the publick ministry of the Word" brought settlers "comfort and courage from biblical example and admonition."12 The sermon's content, according to Daniel Boorstin, provided "the ritual application of theology to community-building and to the tasks and trials of everyday life. . . . Ministers were, in their own words, 'opening' the text of the Bible by which they had to live and build their society."13 As ideas with both pious and practical emphases, sermons should, as Wrage points out, provide a useful index "to the history of man's values and goals, his hopes and fears, his aspirations and negations."14

Most rhetorical and literary studies of colonial sermons have concentrated on the published homiletic writings of the New England Divines or on those of the dissenting clergy of the Great Awakening.15 Little scholarly work, however, has been done on southern preaching, particularly on the Anglican ministers who constituted the most significant denomination south of the Mason-Dixon line.16 Much of this neglect can be attributed to the failure of these ministers of the established church to publish their ordinary discourses. Many of their surviving sermons are either addresses to important political gatherings or political polemics that are not typical of their normal preaching styles. Yet, Richard Beale Davis has argued that colonial Anglican homilies "show southern clerics as thoughtful, certainly as well educated, and even perhaps as introspective as their brethren of New England."17

The recent discovery of nearly one hundred manuscript sermons by the Reverend Thomas Cradock (1718–1770) of Baltimore County, Maryland,18 affords an opportunity to examine one of the colony's leading Anglican ministers; to isolate and analyze the ideas contained in his sermons; to determine as nearly as possible the sources of those ideas; and to note any changes in those ideas as they collided with other ideas19—in short, to determine the extent to which Cradock's ideas both molded and reflected the culture of the time and place in which he lived, the often ignored colonial South. For whatever its later geographic designation, colonial Maryland was clearly "southern" in its economic, political, and social outlook. Its economy revolved around the production and distribution of tobacco, the same type of plantation gentry dominated Maryland politics as in Virginia and the Carolinas, and the institution of black slavery distinguished the Chesapeake colony from its northern neighbors. Also, like the rest of the colonial South, Maryland maintained the Church of England as the established religion.20 An analysis of Cradock's sermons thus provides insight into the origins of a peculiar regional approach to religious expression and understanding of the cultural values of an emerging Southern Mind.
Born in Staffordshire, England, Craddock studied at local schools and Oxford before ordination in 1743 and migration to Maryland the following year. In early 1745, he became the first rector of St. Thomas Parish in western Baltimore County, where he served for twenty-five years until his death. Craddock was a somewhat typical country parson of his day. He was a true shepherd of his flock; companionable with his parishioners, he enjoyed a convivial drink and conversation; a sensible man, he could laugh with and at his faults and those of his friends; a scholar, he translated Latin verse and made his own poetic observations of his Chesapeake world.

Craddock is most famous for his sermon before the Maryland General Assembly in 1753, which described the unholy conduct of many of his parochial brethren, attacked proprietary control over the religious establishment, and urged creation of a bishopric to remedy the administrative deficiencies of the Church of England in the colony. Because Craddock publicly condemned the immorality of many of his clerical colleagues, and openly attacked the authority of the Lord Proprietor, his effort has been described by Charles Barker as perhaps “the most courageous Anglican sermon of the pre-revolutionary period.” And it led Richard Beale Davis to conclude that while “No more polished pulpit orator lived in eighteenth-century colonial America than Virginia dissenter Samuel Davies,” Craddock “was almost as graceful in his language and equally vehement in his fulminations.”

Despite the importance of Craddock’s General Assembly address, his ordinary Sunday discourses provide more reliable evidence of typical Anglican preaching in rural Maryland. Following Wrage’s lead, this study will adopt an “ideas centered” approach to these parochial sermons. The thesis is that Craddock’s pulpit rhetoric, following in the tradition of moderate Anglicanism as transported to the shores of the Chesapeake, expressed what Richard Weaver, a southern scholar, has called the “roots of southern thinking”—a feudal theory of society, a code of chivalry, an education of a gentleman, and an older religiousness—roots that had begun to develop even earlier than Weaver traces them and from a denominational source he failed to examine.

The eighteenth century was a time of intense ideological change, involving conflicting currents that religious leadership had to navigate. Economic and social mobility, for example, created a spirit of egalitarianism that conflicted with the traditional acceptance of deference to superiors. Religiously, colonial America was becoming increasingly pluralistic, in contrast to the single national orthodoxy which the first settlers of the Chesapeake region had brought with them. The growing multiplicity of ethnic groups and their accompanying variety of missionary efforts forced a grudging toleration of religious diversity. At the same time, the enthusiasm of the Great Awakening, which swept Western Europe and North America in the first half of the century, left embittered conflicts between Old Lights and New Lights, or, as they were called in the Anglican church, between High and Low Churchmen. Moreover, scientific advances made deism and religious skepticism popular, which conflicted with the traditional acceptance of the mysteries of Christian faith. Craddock approached these conflicts as a moderate, preaching both rationalism and faith, adherence to the established church and toleration of others, enjoyment of the world’s pleasures and restraint. Typical of southern Anglican Churchmen, in his parochial sermons Craddock “stood for moderation, comprehensiveness, liberality of doctrine, and stability of custom.”
Cradock’s sermons are in the plain, pithy tradition of Archbishop John Tillotson (1630–1694), who was “colonial America’s theological stylist.”26 Tillotson was one of the architects of modern English prose with his combination of rational logic and homely, unadorned language. Moreover, his “gentle toleration of most things other than transubstantiation and predestination and atheism, his latitudinarianism and his plain style, made him a favorite model for southern colonial preachers and favorite reading matter in their parishioners’ homes.”27 Cradock modeled his sermon content and style after the reasoned argument, lucidity, and impartiality that characterized this famed Archbishop of Canterbury. Following Tillotson’s organization, Cradock’s typical sermon consisted of a statement of text, an explanation, an elaboration of main points, and then a conclusion in which he demonstrated to his congregation the “uses” of his argument: an exhortation to show application to their lives. During the course of his ministry, Cradock’s parishioners heard many of the sermons more than once. Repetition thus popularized and reinforced his major theological arguments.

Like the homilies of Jonathan Edwards, Cradock’s sermons may be classified into four general groups: disciplinary—concerned with eternal damnation and salvation; pastoral—depicting the obligations of Christian life; doctrinal—interpreting denominational faith; and occasional—preached at particular events such as marriages, funerals, thanksgivings, and legislative meetings.28 These occasional sermons sometimes were delivered outside Cradock’s parish and are not the subject of this study because their content normally differed from those preached to the congregation at St. Thomas’. Because pastoral and disciplinary concepts often appear in the same sermons, they are discussed together. The major doctrinal homilies concern the emergence of deism in the Age of Enlightenment and will be discussed separately in this study.

The Pastoral and Disciplinary Sermons

In The Enlightenment in America, Henry F. May describes the tenor of the typical pastoral and disciplinary sermons of the Church of England in America.

The note Anglican preaching tried hard to strike was one of rational piety, of a strong golden mean between Calvinism and Arminianism. God was sovereign but could not violate his own goodness or forget his promises. Sudden and violent conversions were at most only one means to grace; others included prayer and—properly understood—the sacraments of the church. Always emphasizing repentance and hope, discouraging too much speculation about predestination and eternal punishment, the church sometimes seemed to hint that somehow everybody would eventually be saved. American Anglicanism tried to be at once fervent and comforting; at once missionary and comprehensive.29

Anglicans in America were seldom evangelical in their articulation of these principles. Their church was “practically coextensive with the community,” which meant an emphasis “on institutions rather than on doctrines.” Church members “devoted their energies . . . to the problems of the parish, the vestry, the churchwarden, the assisting of government, the enforcement of morality, and provision for the poor.”30

Thomas Cradock is an excellent example of an Anglican cleric appealing to such “practical Godliness.” The majority of his sermons were directed toward developing proper social conduct. Anglican theology argued that religion was morality, that
civilization was a primary goal of humanity, and that one's actions within society determined whether one was saved. Cradock demonstrated this in his sermon "On Education." Although aimed at showing the importance of religion and pedagogy, the sermon also illustrates the root of education of southern thinking. Weaver writes that education in the South was based not on producing bookish minds, but on molding character, at giving young people a sound set of values through moral upbringing. Education beyond the most elementary served the needs of the upper class, "was humanistic and ... so framed as to instill the classic qualities of magnificence, magnanimity, and liberality." Its aim was to produce the capacity for "integrity and decision" in those "whose position in life carried a mandate for public leadership."32

Cradock declared that there were two responsibilities in education. The most important was to educate children in religion, for in it they would learn the principles of morality which would enable them to lead virtuous lives. Such actions would be deemed appropriate by God and would secure for them His blessings in this life and the next.33 Since education was the responsibility of parents, Cradock urged them to train their children "up in those duties which will infallibly secure for them a happy Eternity. ... [L]ook on your children as lent unto you for a time, and that your heavenly Father may soon ... demand them again; and consequently that it is your duty to fit and prepare them as well as possible for their great call."34

The second responsibility was more secular, and designed to benefit both the individual and society. For the liberally educated, Cradock held out the distinction of a successful public life.

Learning is not only useful and necessary in the training [up] of our minds to religion and virtue; but also no man can expect to shine in any of the nobler employments of life without a competent share of the advantages she yields. The Statesman, the Lawyer, the Physician, as well as the Divine ... without a liberal Education ... find themselves wonderfully at a Loss in the commerce of their lives; and much do they regret the too great fondness or neglect of their Parents, in not furnishing their youth with such necessary Qualifications as might have made them pass over [to] their manhood with honour.35

Higher education, however, meant larger and more important duties; those of greater substance were expected to carry heavier burdens. As Weaver notes, the gentry expected "academic training . . . to prepare their sons to play their parts as leaders in the little plantation world, or perhaps in the state or national legislatures."36 And Cradock made this clear when he contrasted communities led by the educated with those led by the uneducated: "learning . . . may be said to be necessary to the happiness of a People; and the want or neglect of it in those who are concern'd with the government of them, must necessarily tend to their ruin and misery."37

Once trained to this idea of education that was both moral and civic, people had a choice of accepting its consequences or not. Acceptance was demonstrated by a life of virtuous action. Acceptance also connoted repentance, which was the act of sinners recognizing their sins and promising to lead virtuous lives. Cradock preached that people should have time to prove their repentance was sincere, which meant the performance of good deeds. Such acts were not occasional exercises in piety. People would be judged on the general tenor of their lives: whether they inclined toward good or evil. Sinners who deferred their repentance to their death beds were not examples of Christians in a state of continual striving. Those who live a wicked and
degenerate life “and never repent until they come to die, cannot die the death of the righteous.” Cradock discerned a difference between virtual and actual obedience. Repentance was not just in the “foresaking of sin and resolving to do well, but in the actual, or rather indeed, habitual Practice of Piety.” Repentance required a change in the frame and temper of the mind, and it was contrary to nature that people would suddenly change. As true followers of Christ, “we ought thru the whole Course of our Lives, to adorn ourselves with all the Christian Virtues and graces . . . so we may be in constant Readiness, whenever our Lord calls upon us to meet him.”

Essential to the practice of these “Christian Virtues and graces” was a feudal social theory, the taproot of the southern heritage, which required lower-class discipline and upper-class direction as necessary for a stable community. The impulse for feudalism was economic and political: “a large estate . . . worked by laborers who were bound to their station proved the best means of acquiring wealth from the soil . . . [and] by making the owner of broad acres true lord of the domain it simplified administration.” But feudalism was also supported by the Anglican church, whose social theory was based upon the “Great Chain of Being” philosophy which conceived of a universe composed of an infinite number of links ranging in order from the meagerest kind of existents . . . to the highest possible creature, . . . every one of them differing from that immediately below by the ‘least possible’ degree of difference.” This variation in ability was part of the cosmic division of labor that allowed everyone to utilize their particular talents so that they contributed to the well being of all, what Weaver calls “Each working in his own sphere . . . to make up the whole.”

Cradock underscored this theory most clearly in his sermon “On Wealth.” He told his congregation that “it is fit and good, and God hath wisely ordained it, that particular men should be placed in different stations for the benefit of all.” Later, Cradock returned to the point in more detail:

Every man that comes into the world has his proper work assigned to him by the great Lord of all, in doing which he is obliged to exercise proper care and industry, not to live an amiable and unprofitable life, but [to be] constantly employed in some business tending to the benefit of the whole community.

The mutual interdependence of the human components of the chain also required them to observe what Weaver terms “propriety,” or their obligations to one another in conformity with their stations. Cradock articulated these obligations concisely when he told his congregation that the faithful Christian “shews deference to superiors, is open and friendly with Equals, [and is] easy of access to Inferiors.”

During the late seventeenth century, various ideologies and economic developments began to undercut this theory of a stable social order. Economic liberalism, for example, created a rationale for individual freedom that undermined the traditional class structure by arguing that growth lay with the unleashing of the economic energies of the people. Cradock was faced with accommodating his orthodox views to a colonial reality changing toward a more mobile economic and social order. Consistent with the moderation of the Anglican approach, he argued for conditional mobility and chastised those who attempted to improve their position at the expense of society. It was permissible for someone to “lawfully increase his wealth . . . as due
recompense for extraordinary diligence or uncommon skill in some act, profession, or employment serviceable to the Community." But this compromise of the deferential social structure with the emerging egalitarianism was tempered by Cradock's insistence that the acquisition of wealth "be in no way injurious to the publick, or to any particular member of society." 

Cradock denounced especially the immorality of increasing one's wealth at the gaming table or race course. Southern society was known for its frivolity and Cradock's remarks were directed against it. May notes that to northern visitors, southern society seemed "remarkably easy-going and even frivolous. In Annapolis ... cards, racing and the theater were normal parts of the legislative season." Typically, Cradock opposed these pursuits when they were performed immoderately because they undermined the deferential system. People, rather than performing what Weaver calls the tasks of their allotted stations, were increasing their wealth by improper means. No advantage was gained by those involved or the community at large because as one person won, another was certain to have lost.

This notion of moderation also comprises part of the third root of southern thinking, the code of chivalry, which Weaver describes as a "body of forms and sentiments . . . elevating and refining civilization." It is more difficult to explicate this idea from Cradock's sermons since he never mentions "chivalry" by name. This is, however, consistent with Weaver's explanation that chivalry was vaguely alluded to in antebellum days. Still, nearly all of the characteristics of the code were present in Cradock's sermons, beginning with the attention which he gave to moderate actions. Weaver writes that "Chivalry was construed as a support to civilization because in keeping their impulses in check, it preserved the humanity of men." Cradock's sermons are full of references to moderation as the best means of self-restraint. In his sermon "On Education," for instance, he says that "Christianity . . . obliges [men] to restrain their passions, and submit to many duties that bear hard upon the senses." In "On the Love and Wisdom of God," he tells his parishioners that God's "Afflictions bring us to a considering temper, to a sober sense of things . . . for it is generally the want of consideration that makes men run headlong into sinful and vicious courses." In "On Faith and Patience," he particularly warns the gentry: "Tis a great Tryal to be surrounded with the allurements of affluence and splendor and at the same Time to control all the irregular Sallies of our sensual appetites." Finally, while Cradock condemned gambling, he endorsed and enjoyed drinking, dancing and eating during times of "Joy and Feasting." Such activities, "if they be rightly tim'd and moderately pursued are so far from having any Thing of Guilt in them, that they are not only innocent but laudable." Christ's conduct during the marriage feast at Cana "shews how little ground there is, for that stiff and precise Temper which condemns all outward Expression of Mirth, but publick and solemn Entertainments." Nothing so demonstrated Anglican preachers' spirit of the "golden mean," or so emphasized moderation as a characteristic of the code, than Cradock's conclusion that "if any Spiritual Inconvenience" should follow such festivities, "the blame is not due to the Things, but to the Abuse of them." 

While Cradock criticized those who attempted to acquire wealth from gambling, he was also quick to point out the hazards confronting those who obtained it by moral means or otherwise. This is the second characteristic of chivalry, specifically that part of the code that saw wealth as morally contaminating. Cradock argued that the wealthy "are continually beset with those Temptations which are most formidable to
a Christian Spirit. I mean the Temptation of Grandeur and Prosperity. . . . Pride and Luxury have the easiest access to our Hearts; they undermine and often destroy before our danger is discern’d.”

Cradock urged his congregation to put aside the love of money, for it debased the soul and tempted people into pride and self-confidence. By concentrating on the acquisition of wealth, people turned their hearts from their main interest—service to God—and jeopardized their inclusion into the Kingdom of Heaven. Cradock chastised people for viewing happiness and misery in life as the ultimate reward for their actions. “Neither health nor strength, place or affluence can secure us from the sudden assaults of death.” Cradock was not speaking hypothetically; like congregations everywhere, many of his parishioners were probably guilty of such sinful practices and were not truly penitent. Anglican preaching was directed primarily toward moral and religious reform; and if May is correct in assessing the church’s theology as discouraging speculation about eternal punishment, then it can be concluded that Cradock acted somewhat differently from his coreligionists when he warned his congregation about the consequences of their evil ways. Still, Cradock did not feel required to express in great detail the aftermath of a life of irreligion and immorality. He described the wrath “of an avenging God,” and the fate of those who “sink into the grave and go down to the place where there is no repentance.”

More commonly, however, he urged his parishioners to “bear in mind the great pity, the tender mercy that our God had for us;” for theirs was a “God who delights rather in rewarding than afflicting his Creatures.”

Salvation required the performance of those duties that were to be discharged by persons at different levels of society. For those at the top, generosity, the third part of the code of chivalry, was emphasized by Cradock when he challenged the wealthy to be charitable in their affairs, so that their “Acts of Piety, Justice and Charity” would secure them a “treasure in heaven.” Such conduct was properly religious for it relieved the burden of the poor; also, it was properly social in a system that was paternalistic. Cradock forewarned of damnation, however, for those who, as a result of their higher rank in society, took advantage of the poor. “It is a horrid thing . . . that men should take advantage of the necessities of poor People, and make their very Poverty a Reason for Oppressing them; which God had made and which in his own nature is a Strong reason, why they in particular shou’d be protected from all manner of oppression.”

Thus, the rector of St. Thomas’ gave divine sanction to the feudalistic structure of his society as well as to the generosity which militated against some of the worst features of that structure.

Cradock directed those at the bottom of the hierarchy to reciprocate the gifts they received in the form of prayers to those who bestowed them: “God will hear and answer the Pray’rs of his Gratitude.” Cradock cautioned, however, that God frowned upon those who did not take due care in the determination of charitable causes. People who gave relief to the idle and undeserving, while neglecting the honest poor, would be reproached for their misplaced charity. The blessings of those who assisted thus would not be attended by God, when others who rightfully should have received help were overlooked. Rather, the cries of the poor, the widow and the fatherless would be heard by God and He would not reward action which was contrary to justice. This argument was consistent with the Anglican view of social order. Relief given to the idle and undeserving served neither the benefactor nor the community because no return was gained.
The acceptance of benevolence as virtue was a product of the latitudinarian tradition of the Anglican church. Benevolence attached more importance to the moral means of Christianity than it did to speculative theology. It stressed that since God was benevolent in allowing people a second chance, people should be charitable in their own affairs, take responsibility for the welfare of the less fortunate, feel virtuous when they acted benevolently, and be confident about life; this, in contrast to the Puritans who were continually insecure with regard to earthly endeavors. As Ronald Crane puts it, “In their insistence on religious value for human works; in that exaltation of ‘goodness’ over doctrine; in their zeal for ‘universal charity and union’ [Anglicans] attacked the darker aspects of Puritanism.”

The power of God, rather than exposing people to dark, unpredictable perils, should make them enjoy His creation and obey His commandments. The true Christian placed public interest over private, thereby demonstrating a primary concern with the community. As noted earlier, this was consistent with the Anglican belief that a person’s place in society was of God’s choosing and people should not be concerned with changing it. As Craddock said, “God hath in great wisdom given variety of abilities to men, suitable to the several stations in life, for which he hath design’d them, that everyone keeping his station, and employing his respective abilities in doing his own work, all might receive advantage.”

But benevolence and deference were not all of the Anglican faith. One must also learn to prefer the Creator’s will to one’s own, to attempt to become “one spirit with the Lord, to partake of a divine nature as far as our imperfect nature will already admit us.” Every person was to strive for perfection which, although never achieved during this earthly life, would be accomplished in the next.

THE DOCTRINAL SERMONS

While practical Godliness was the major theme of Cradock’s parochial sermons, another important topic concerned the validity of revealed religion. During the sixteenth century the world view of people had gradually changed from the contemplation of God to the exploration of the world. The result was a new theory of the universe in which it was postulated that the earth was not the center of all things, but rather one part of an ordered system.

This concept was crystallized in 1686 with Isaac Newton’s (1642–1727) *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*. Newton developed the “law” of gravity, which became the keystone for the concept of a universe governed by “natural law.” As a result, the world was perceived as ordered by principles which people could discern through the use of reason. John Locke (1632–1704) in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* applied Newton’s ideas to society. Breaking with the dominant seventeenth century view that people were born with innate ideas implanted by God, Locke argued that knowledge was acquired through the examination of the environment and comprehended as a result of one’s ability to think.

Newton and Locke ushered in a period of intellectual history known as the Enlightenment. The universe became static, governed by unchanging laws which could be discovered by the use of reason. Not only did natural laws govern the physical universe but society as well. In the Middle Ages, faith had preceded reason. Reason was used to explain doctrine that had been accepted by faith. Now this
pattern was reversed. Reason was no longer the explicator of authority; it had become the test of it. Only that which met the test of reason was deemed worthy of acceptance.

This theory of the world had profound implications for religion. The popular belief that God was acting directly upon matter had been undermined. Rather than being the immediate cause of things, God became the First Cause. Theologians who attempted to reconcile "the new science with the old religion" argued that Newtonian ideas reinforced traditional beliefs. "They found in the 'design' of nature not merely proof of the existence of a Designer, but also of the attributes theologians had long assigned to the Deity on the strength of Revelation."75 Others, however, found it difficult to accommodate the Newtonian universe with the Bible. "How could man believe in a universe governed by natural law and at the same time accept the Biblical account of miracles?"76 "Those unable or unwilling to bridge this dilemma took God out of the universe and made Him a disinterested observer. This deistic philosophy was transplanted to America and found acceptance in many orders of southern society, with the result, as Weaver points out, that it "tended to undermine the whole institutional character of religion, and the state as well."77

Anglicans were particularly susceptible to deism because the emphasis of their religion was on institutions rather than dogmas. Indeed, as the discussion on pastoral and disciplinary sermons indicates, the church's stress upon public pieties at the expense of theological tenets left Anglicans with a kind of "doctrinal innocence,"78 an important aspect of the older religiousness, the fourth root of southern thinking. Weaver writes: "the average Southerner knew little . . . about casuistical theology or the metaphysics underlying all religion; what he recognized was . . . that general respect for order, natural and institutional, which is piety."79

Cradock imitated the Christian apologists of England in his efforts to provide doctrinal immunity against the spread of deism. It is, of course, impossible to reconstruct all of the sources of Cradock's intellectual background. It is known that the diocese of Lichfield and Coventry where Cradock grew up was led by vigorous antideists. Conspicuous among them was Edward Chandler (Bishop, 1717–30) whose Defence of Christianity from Prophecies (1725) constituted an important justification for the doctrine of the Trinity. His successor, Richard Smalbroke (Bishop, 1731–49), was another outspoken antideist. Archbishop Tillotson, upon whom Cradock relied so much, also opposed deism. He argued "that nature itself, including human nature, is a revelation of God that . . . may be trusted as an independent source of divine truth." Tillotson added "that religion stands to benefit from the free exercise of rational invention with regard to the authority of the best literature of Christian controversy."80 In his famous sermon before the Maryland General Assembly, Cradock quoted the writings of Bishop William Beveridge and Reverend Jeremiah Seed, two antideists of considerable renown. Of particular influence was Samuel Clarke, thought by many to be Locke's successor as a metaphysician. Rector of St. James', Piccadilly, Clarke was one of the most important of the rational Christians. His Sermons were so valued by Cradock that he specifically willed his copy to one of his sons.81 Clarke's and Tillotson's rational Christianity would form the basis of Cradock's response to deism.

Cradock articulated an explicit defense that provided his congregation with a reasoned understanding of the foundations of their beliefs, particularly in God and His mysteries. This was consistent with the older religiousness which, as Weaver
describes it, left “man convinced of the existence of supernatural intelligence and power, and led him to the acceptance of life as mystery.”

In his doctrinal sermons, Cradock spoke not as a theologian to theologians, since everything he said was common knowledge among the clergy, but as a pastor reassuring the laity. Again, Cradock aimed at a compromise, this time by employing deism in the service of religion. He began by accepting the Enlightenment belief in an ordered universe and then used its principles to prove the existence of God. Cradock based his position upon two points which he believed provided a rational explanation. First, he declared that without an eternal superior being, there would be no succession of temporal beings.

Tis Evident both we ourselves and all other Beings we know in the world, are weak and dependent Creatures; which neither gave ourselves Being, nor can preserve it by any pow'r of our own; and that therefore we entirely owe our Being to some superior and more powerful Cause; which superior Cause must either be itself the First Cause; which is the notion of God; or else by the same argument as before, must derive from Him, and so lead us to the knowledge of Him.

Second, Cradock pointed to the order and beauty of the world, which operated in complete harmony. Here his remarks were directed against those who saw this harmony as a reason for the nonexistence of God and who concluded that the world was created by a second cause. Cradock admitted that even if this were so, it did not diminish the existence of a first cause: “all second Causes are nothing else but either the inanimate motion of senseless matter or the voluntary motions of dependent Creatures.” These, Cradock argued, were developed by a first cause, thus inferring that nothing can exist without a cause, an argument which followed closely the geometric rationalism of Samuel Clarke.

Cradock declared that God gave people the ability to think, to reason, thus making them wiser than all other creatures. This ability created a bond between them and God, allowing them to serve God directly. But the rector of St. Thomas’ added that good people looked further than their senses, further than reason, to truly understand God and be part of Him.

The true nature of God, and people’s relation to God, was embodied in God’s revelation. True Christians were not so concerned with proving the existence of God, but rather in demonstrating their duty to Him. Contrary assertions came from free-thinking deists “who tried to determine the elements of religion independently of the Bible and Revelation since a benevolent Deity would certainly not have concealed the great truths from all but a small proportion of mankind.” Cradock responded that God had revealed Himself wholly through Christ and therefore did not need to reveal Himself again, a position which Weaver claims as “the essence of religion in its older sense. Reverence for the ‘word of God’ is a highly important aspect of religious orthodoxy. . . . The necessity of having some form of knowledge that will stand above the welter of earthly change and bear witness that God is superior to accident.”

Cradock saw the revelation of God in three stages. The first was through the Law. The Law was given to Moses as direction for the special nation of the Jews as a result of the covenant made by God with Abraham. Essentially, the Law directed the Jews in the proper method of worshipping God. The second stage, according to Cradock, was through the ministry of the Prophets. Each Prophet was chosen by God as a

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spokesman to instruct the Jews. Each had a twofold duty: to reform religion by calling attention to the corruption caused by not following God’s laws and to predict the coming of Christ. Cradock pointed out that “God did not reveal his will to the jews all at once, but by due Portion and Degree, revealing one thing by one prophet and another by another.”

The Old Testament was composed of many parts which seemingly appeared to have no relation, but when put together, fit naturally and led to one great end. The manner of God’s revelation, therefore, was different in each case and was imperfect and obscure. The third stage brought clarity to God’s message with the birth of Christ. God, “instead of making known his will to the Fathers successively and by Degrees . . . has reveal’d by Jesus Christ the whole Doctrine of our Salvation.” Cradock concluded his interpretation by stating that the resurrection of Christ constituted the totality of God’s message: “we must not then expect new Inspiration and Revelations, nor abandon ourselves merely to our Reason to believe what we please and to make for ourselves a particular religion.”

Cradock’s desire to harmonize Anglicanism with the new eighteenth-century world view illustrated the inroads which deism had made. His attacks upon the purveyors of reason was exceptionally strong because they were unable to reconcile God with natural laws. More importantly, they were unwilling to accept the Biblical account of miracles, which undercut the foundation of God’s final revelation. This is still another aspect of the older southern religiousness. As Weaver writes: “the Southerner clung stubbornly to the belief that a certain amount of life must remain inscrutable, and that religion offers the only means of meeting it, since reason cannot here be a standard of interpretation.”

Thus, in his sermon “On Miracles,” Cradock condemned those “who have pretended to know better than their neighbors and [the] rest of the world, and have made a wondrous Ridicule of miracles, as if there were in Reality no such Evidence, but have been only the tricks and Jugglings [sic] of designing Man, to impose upon the ignorance and Credulity of the Vulgar and Unlearn’d.”

Cradock defined a miracle as a supernatural effect produced by a power superior to humans which could not be done in a natural way, invisibly assisting yet obvious to human senses so that its reality is discernible, and designed to some great use and benefit: to bring people into the path of virtue. Against those who denied miracles, he offered two defenses. First, “for the objections of those who say such Supernatural Effects are impossible: give me Leave to remind them that whatever does not imply a Contradiction does not admit an Impossibility.” Where, Cradock asked, is the contradiction? Where is the proof that there does not exist an intelligence superior to man’s? He concluded that the deist’s assertion was presumptuous and inconclusive. Second, Cradock inquired whether the laws of nature were so settled that they could not be suspended by Him who made them? The laws were established by God for people to follow, not by God. As controller of the universe, God was capable of acts unattainable by people.

Miracles were preserved in the Gospel from which religion drew its strength and its understanding of the divine will. Those who questioned the validity of the Gospel were ignoring the “better Evidence and the Stronger Marks of Truth than any other ancient History transmitted to us, and if we have reason to reject the Gospel, we have greater Reason to reject all other Accounts of ancient Facts whatsoever.” The Gospels were written by men who were well-acquainted with the events they described and without private ends to serve. Furthermore, they were willing to lay
down their lives for what they wrote, which demonstrated that they believed their writing to be divinely inspired. Finally, there was collateral evidence from those who opposed the early Christians, but who attested to the performance of Christ’s miracles.96

Cradock’s denunciation of deistic philosophies illustrates his deep concern about their influence upon the inhabitants of the colony. By challenging deistic beliefs on the critical issues of no antecedent cause and the danger of every person to make what they could of a world open to the senses, Cradock hoped to hold his congregation to what has been called “the inner order of the soul, the outer order of society.”97 And this twofold order did not die. Despite attacks by deists, preachers like Cradock were able to combine the rationalism of the age with traditional Christian belief and effectively articulate this integration. His congregation included men and women who sympathized with the orthodox rather than the novel. But they needed to have their orthodoxy defended. Blind faith was mere popery; pure reason was unbelief. Cradock’s antideist apologetics balanced between the two, without depending upon the Anglo-Catholic romanticism of an age to follow or the emotional revivalism of his own day.

CONCLUSION

Cradock’s pulpit rhetoric typified what Richard Weaver has called the “roots of southern thinking”—roots that had begun to develop even earlier than Weaver traces them and from a denominational source he failed to examine. Nearly all of Weaver’s references about the ideas of the antebellum South are taken from the period after the Revolutionary War, with the bulk of these being drawn from 1800–1860.98 That leaves only a handful of references from the Colonial era, although the ideas in Cradock’s sermons suggest that the cultural values of an emerging Southern Mind were already well developed even before there was a South in any sectional sense.99

Weaver also failed to use Anglican sources, even though, as has been noted earlier, in the Colonial era, this faith constituted the largest denomination south of the Mason-Dixon line. Thus, Weaver’s analysis is not always based upon the most relevant sources, nor upon sources that best articulate his position. For an Anglican like Cradock expressed each of the roots of southern thinking: a feudal theory of society, a code of chivalry, an education of a gentleman, and an older religiousness.

Perhaps the best fit is the idea of a feudal system which Weaver characterizes as “subordination without envy, and superiority without fear,”100 a phrase that captures the arguments in Cradock’s pastoral and disciplinary sermons for a hierarchical community with lower-class discipline and upper-class direction. This was a corporative society demanding, as Weaver says, “a variety of offices which must be performed by human beings of different castes,”101 a point Cradock made repeatedly when he gave divine sanction to the idea of people having their proper work assigned to them by God. Even though the primary impulse for feudalism was economic and political, it was also upheld religiously by the established Anglican church—appropriate support since, as Weaver notes, the southerner “looked upon religion as a great conservative agent and bulwark of those institutions which served him.”102 For ministers like Cradock, who believed in the “Great Chain of Being,” support for the state structure was consistent with theology, and he gave only conditional approval to the mobility of the new egalitarianism which tended to undermine not only the state but the church as well. In time, of course, even this
conditional approval would end, particularly for black slaves, as evidenced by the repeated justifications for a rigid hierarchy by Reverend William Andrew Smith, President of Randolph-Macon College, and one of the spokespersons for southern intelligentsia during the first half of the nineteenth century.103

Somewhat less well fitting is the concept of chivalry, although here Weaver notes that “the spirit of chivalry was stronger in the Southern states after two hundred years of settlement than when ... landholders were first clearing their acres”104—a period of time that would place Cradock well before the end of the second century. Even so, Cradock’s sermons support three of the four characteristics of the code as well as its underlying assumption, although he never mentions “chivalry” by name. For example, Cradock’s admonitions to put aside the love of money manifested one of the tenets of chivalry; what Weaver calls indifference toward “material rewards,” a “contempt directed at money-getting, as well as a belief that money itself was somehow contaminating.”105 Ultimately, this disdain toward money would become more secular than sacred, but Weaver traces its origins to the Christian notion of self-denial,106 the same point Cradock was making when he urged his parishioners to turn from the acquisition of wealth to the service of God. Another part of the code, according to Weaver, was “generosity toward the weak,”107 and this idea too can be found in Cradock’s challenges to the wealthy to be charitable toward the less fortunate. Still another characteristic of chivalry was the idea of moderation: “that civilization,” as Weaver puts it, “consists of just such adherence to a code, or body of forms set up between the individual and his impulses.”108 Cradock’s sermons are full of calls to moderate actions as the best means of self-control, particularly to the gentry, whose ranks nourished the code, and whose affluence made them more susceptible to temptations. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the code depended upon distinctions in social order, what Weaver calls “assumptions of superiority” which set the gentry apart from the commonality;109 and whether the issue was the pledged word (which, interestingly enough, Cradock never mentions, although the idea has religious connotations), or any of the other characteristics noted, this distinction in social rank was integral to many of his pastoral and disciplinary sermons.

Another good fit involves the education of a gentleman. Weaver writes that in “every society education will ultimately serve the needs of the dominant caste.”110 He adds that in the South the “virtues of the ruling caste depend[ed] upon the kind of training that molds character,” and was “so framed as to instill the classic qualities of magnificence, magnanimity, and liberality.”111 Cradock’s sermons addressed all of these qualities, beginning with his emphasis upon moral upbringing as necessary for a virtuous life, and followed by his stress upon correct social conduct, upon pieties such as benevolence and forebearance, which are synonyms for liberality and magnanimity. Also, in Cradock’s sermon “On Education,” with its promises of the distinctions and honors of a successful public life for the liberally educated, there is more than a suggestion of magnificence. The goal of this education, as Weaver notes, was to prepare the sons of the gentry “to perform all general duties, both public and private.”112 And these two aspects are found in Cradock’s sermons as well, the first most notably when he contrasted communities led by the educated with those led by the uneducated, the second when he told his congregation that learning would produce men of integrity, understanding and judgment113—qualities that are as important in the private as the public sphere.

The fourth intellectual root—an older religiousness—also provides a good fit.
Weaver writes that the southern attitude toward religion “recall[s] the period preceding the Age of Reason,” and he characterizes it as “a simple acceptance of a body of belief, an innocence of protest and heresy which left religion one of the unquestioned and unquestionable supports of the general settlement under which men live.” While the description is of Protestant congregations generally, it could apply to Craddock’s Anglicans specifically; and it reflects the major ideas in Craddock’s doctrinal sermons: his attacks upon deism and his accompanying explanations about the existence of God, His creation, His revelation, and His miracles. And Craddock was successful in defending orthodox doctrine. Weaver explains why: “the Southerner clung stubbornly to the belief that a certain portion of life must remain incalculable, and that religion offers the only means of meeting it, since reason cannot here be a standard of interpretation.” In time there would be less room for compromise. The rise of religious radicalism in New England and its support for Abolition caused southern orthodoxy to harden, and moderate clergymen like Craddock gave way to military bishops like Leonidas Polk. Still, as Weaver concludes, “Confederate captains partook to a large extent of . . . ‘the older religiousness of the South.’ He quotes Reverend W. T. Hall of Mississippi: “Christian soldiers of the South, who believed in revealed religion, had a religious reason for fighting. Since the Yankees, ‘when all their objections had been answered, were disposed to place their institutions above revelation rather than yield the controversy.”

The point is sometimes made that Jefferson’s ideas of egalitarianism and deism typified southern regional thinking. As this study demonstrates, from the long view, Craddock’s ideas appear to have been more typically southern than Jefferson’s. What of the short view? One indicator comes from the absence of opposition to Craddock’s religious leadership during a quarter-century pastorate. Like the incident of the dog that did not bark, success can be inferred from the failure of any new dissenting churches to be formed in Craddock’s parish, which embraced hundreds of square miles and over six thousand persons at the time of his death. In an age of Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist evangelism in the backcountry, there was no formal rejection of the basic ideas Craddock preached. All this contrasts considerably from the religious situation found elsewhere in the Chesapeake colonies.

Another indicator of Craddock’s success comes from one of the few comments about him still extant. In the sole surviving letter to Craddock, the Reverend Thomas Barton of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, pleaded for the Maryland rector to visit him: “Positively you must come to see me; for I have so often boasted the Gentlemen here, that Mr. Craddock was my friend, that I am afraid they will think me a Man of no Consequence if you should disappoint me.” Similar testimonials to Craddock’s reputation came after his death. On his tombstone was inscribed a verse, probably composed by his friend Dr. Randle Hulse:

No pompous Marble, to thy Name we raise,
This humble Stone, Bespeaks deserving Praise,
When e’er we view’d Thee, o’er the sacred Page,
Thy Words persuasive, did our Hearts engage,
Parental Fondness did thy Life attend,
The tender Husband; and the warmest Friend;
The Good, the Just with Thee alone could vie,
Who court not Life, nor yet afraid to die,
Faith, Virtue, Honour, did in Thee combine,
Happy the Man, who leads a Life like thine.
Although such threnody was common in eighteenth-century graveyards, this Cradock elegy may be seen as another example of how he typified the values and imperatives of his time and place. While his English birth and education meant that he brought to his parish a somewhat different perspective from that of a native Marylander, his marriage into the gentry and his long residence in a frontier community undoubtedly allowed him to acquire local values. That he personified these values to the satisfaction of his contemporaries may be seen in the broadside eulogy which declared that Cradock "was universally allowed to be a sincere Christian, a polished Scholar, an elegant and persuasive Preacher."122 The surviving sermons testify not only to the impact of the ideas of the "persuasive Preacher," but also remind us of his contributions to the emerging southern intellectual tradition.

NOTES

Donald K. Enholm is Assistant Professor of Speech Communication, Bowling Green State University; David Curtis Skaggs is Professor of History at Bowling Green State University; W. Jeffrey Welsh is Assistant Professor of History at FIRElands College.


6. Wragge, 453.


8. Wragge, 453.

9. Wragge, 452. See also, 454–6, where Wragge’s examples are drawn from bodies of speeches by a single individual or groups of people so that the ideas in the speeches can be treated in a unified manner.

10. Wragge, 455–6.


The Craddock family kept the sermons at Trentham, the family home in Baltimore County, for two hundred years. In the nineteenth century, they gave five to the Reverend Dr. Ethel Allen, then historiographer of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland. He deposited them in the Maryland Diocesan Archives, now housed in the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore. To these were added in 1971 nearly one hundred manuscript sermons given by the Reverend Thomas Craddock Jensen, owner of Trentham. The authors have examined all of the sermons in preparation for this essay. The titles given the sermons are provided by the authors, but each sermon is also identified by the references to the supralinear text used to begin each address.

This methodology is suggested by Wrage, 456: “the focus . . . consists in the ideas communicated, in the ascertainable sources of those ideas, the historical vitality and force of the ideas and of demonstrable refractions, modifications, or substitutions.”


May 67.

Boorstin, 124–5.

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 78–9.

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 77.


Craddock, “Education.”

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 80–1.

Craddock, “Education.”


Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 48–59, lists a “feudal system” as the first root in southern thinking.


Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 55.


Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 78.


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48 Craddock, “Wealth.”
49 May, 68; also Weaver, Southern Tradition, 64–5.
50 Weaver, Southern Tradition, 49.
51 Craddock, “Wealth.”
52 Weaver, Southern Tradition, 59.
53 Weaver, Southern Tradition, 65.
54 Weaver, Southern Tradition, 69, n. 49.
55 Craddock, “Education.”
57 Craddock, “Faith and Patience.”
58 Thomas Craddock, “On Miracles, John 2:11,” f. 8. A more detailed expression of these sentiments occurs in an occasional sermon preached outside his parish; Craddock, Two Sermons, with a Preface Shewing the Author’s Reasons for publishing them (Annapolis: Jonas Green, 1747), 1–6.
59 Weaver, Southern Tradition, 64. Weaver notes that disdain toward money eventually became more secular than sacred, but he traces its origins to the Christian notion of self-denial.
60 Craddock, “Faith and Patience.”
61 Craddock, “Sudden Death.”
63 Craddock, “Love and Wisdom.”
64 Craddock, “Love and Wisdom.”
65 Craddock, “Faith and Patience.”
66 Weaver, Southern Tradition, 70.
67 Craddock, “Wealth.” See also “Faith and Patience.”
68 Weaver, Southern Tradition, 55.
69 Craddock, “Fraud.”
70 Weaver, Southern Tradition, 56.
71 Craddock, “Faith and Patience.”
73 Craddock, “Wealth.”
74 Craddock, “Faith and Patience.”
76 Van Tassel and McAbren, xi.
77 Weaver, Southern Tradition, 101.
78 Weaver, Southern Tradition, 98.
79 Weaver, Southern Tradition, 98.
82 Weaver, Southern Tradition, 48.
84 Craddock, “Faith.”
85 Craddock, “Faith and Patience.”
88 Weaver, Southern Tradition, 105–6.
89 Craddock, “Revelation.”
90 Craddock, “Revelation.”

Of Weaver’s 144 references where dates can be determined, 87 come from the period 1800–1860, 29 from the period after the Civil War, 19 from the period 1776–1779, and only 9 from the Colonial era.

There was,” as Carl Bridenbaugh writes, “no South . . . not even a geographic expression, as the members of the Federal Convention made evident in 1787 when they spoke of ‘the Southern states.”’ *Myths and Realities*, vii.

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 49.


Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 104.5.

For Smith’s views, as well as what happened to the “Great Chain of Being” philosophy in the nineteenth-century South, see Anthony Hillbrunner, “Inequality, the Great Chain of Being, and Ante-Bellum Southern Oratory,” *Southern Speech Journal* 25 (1960): 172–89.

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 61.

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 70.

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 70.

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 70.

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 68, n. 47.

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 59.

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 73.

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 77.

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 79.

Cradock, “On Education.”

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 98.

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 102.

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 103.

Weaver, *Southern Tradition*, 208.


Barton to Cradock, August 10, 1759, Cradock Papers, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.

The inscription is still readable in St. Thomas Churchyard, Garrison, Maryland, but the capitalization and punctuation come from a manuscript signed “R. H.” in the Cradock papers.

A copy of the broadside appears in Skaggs, ed., *Poetic Writings*, frontispiece.