

Loyalism, Anglican Toryism, and Canadian Conservatism

by Robert W. Passfield

In Canadian historiography, there has been a wide disagreement as to the nature of the conservatism of the Loyalists during the American Revolution and in Upper Canada, and their contribution to the conservative tradition in Canada.

The Loyalists as Emotional Conservatives

The late professor Syd Wise of Carleton University interpreted the origins of Canadian conservatism ("Upper Canada and the Conservative Tradition", 1967) as being the product of the intermingling of two streams of conservatism in Upper Canada in the several generations that followed the American Revolution. The Loyalist settlers embodied one stream of conservatism, which Professor Wise viewed as "an emotional compound of loyalty to the King and Empire, antagonism to the United States, and an acute if partisan sense of recent history". The other intermingling stream, he saw as being "the Toryism of late eighteenth century England", which provided "a more sophisticated viewpoint" and was brought to Upper Canada by its first governor, Lt. Governor John Graves Simcoe, and his government officials.

For Professor Wise, both streams of conservatism in Upper Canada were infused with a counter-revolutionary outlook in that the emotional conservatism of the Loyalists and the philosophical conservatism of the Anglican Tory British immigrants were each reinvigorated in response to the anarchy and irreligion of the French Revolution. Otherwise, Professor Wise attributed the longevity of the emotional conservatism of the Loyalists to "a psychological need" to accept their history, and to justify their actions to themselves in retrospect. (1)

In his interpretation of the emotional conservatism of the Loyalists, Professor Wise ignored several earlier assertions by a Canadian philosopher, George Grant (*Lament for a Nation*, 1965) that there was a deeper "moral significance" in the Loyalist experience; and that the Anglican Loyalists, in opposing the American revolutionaries, "appealed to the older philosophy of Richard Hooker", an Anglican theologian whose writings on moral and political philosophy were embodied in English Toryism. (2) Moreover, an American historian, William Nelson (*The American Tory*, 1961), in his examination of Loyalist motives had concluded that among the protagonists engaged in the revolutionary debates there were two groups – the "Anglican High Tories" and the "Whig theoreticians of the Revolution" – that did differ "in fundamental principles". The basis difference rested in their political philosophy: the "organic conservatism" of the Anglican Tories versus the "Lockean individualism" of the American revolutionaries.

Nelson argued further that it was recent immigrants from Britain, particularly the Anglican clergy, who had taken the lead in opposing the Revolutionaries; and that the Anglican minorities in the northern colonies were for the most part 'true Tories'. Moreover, it was Anglican minorities from the northern colonies who comprised a significant component of the Loyalist migration to Upper Canada following the American Revolution. According to Nelson, it was their religion which motivated and provide the ultimate justification for their actions. Hence, based on his analysis, Anglican Toryism was present in Loyalism from the very beginning among the orthodox Anglican Loyalists. It was inseparably from their adherence to the Loyalist cause. (3)

The Loyalists as Lockean-liberals

Despite such assertions, the Syd Wise focus on the emotional conservatism and the political loyalty of the Loyalists were expanded upon and carried forward by two Canadian historians who were his former

graduate students. David V.J. Bell ("The Loyalist Tradition in Canada", 1970) denied that Toryism was present in the American colonies in the 18th Century. Bell asserted that the arguments employed by the so-called 'tories' and 'whigs' during the American Revolution, reveal that the two groups shared "virtually identical" Lockean-liberal assumptions and values, and were not separated by ideology. (4) Terry Cook ("The Conservative Blueprint", 1972), expressed his agreement in declaring that:

Since nearly all public men in the eighteenth century shared ... Whig assumptions [on sovereignty, order, hierarchy, and the balanced constitution], it is possible to agree that the gentlemen destined to become Tories and Whigs during the American Revolution were all really Whigs, that their values were indeed virtually identical. (5)

In sum, Bell and Cook argue that all 'tories' at the time of the American Revolution shared the same Lockean-liberal assumptions and beliefs as the revolutionaries, and that the Loyalists differed from the revolutionaries only in their loyalty to the Crown and the unity of the British Empire. Both historians denied that there were any 'true Tories' among any of the Loyalist groups, and that there was no philosophical difference between the Loyalists and the American revolutionaries.

The Crux of the Lockean-liberal Argument

The argument that the 'tories' of the American Revolution were, in reality, Lockean-liberals rested on the work of an American historian, Bernard Bailyn (*The Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution*, 1967), who had examined the content of the various political pamphlets that were circulating in the American colonies during the pre-revolutionary period, 1763-1776. Bailyn concluded that it was a period marked by "a conflict of ideas and political values" that brought about a total transformation of the political culture of the American colonies in the span of just over a decade.

According to Bailyn, the American Revolution had its origins in a belief on the part of the colonists that they were defending the English tradition of liberty against encroachments by the King, and against impositions by Parliament on 'the rights of Englishmen'. However, gradually the colonial dispute had taken on greater implications as the colonial pamphleteers and polemicists began to produce political tracts that set forth radical political ideas that were borrowed principally from John Locke (*Two Treatises on Government*, 1689) and the earlier Puritan radicals of the English Civil War and Commonwealth period.

There were contradictions and inconsistencies within the body of radical ideas espoused by the colonial polemicists and pamphleteers, but gradually a political consensus had emerged in the American colonies which was based on the tenet of the Lockean-liberal political philosophy. According to Bailyn, by the time of the outbreak of the Revolution, the American colonies had achieved a remarkable unity of thought in a general adherence to Lockean liberal-Whig values, principles, and beliefs, which came to be embodied in the July 1776 Declaration of Independence. (6)

However, such a broad generalization fails to account for the study of William Nelson who did find a clear philosophical difference between the beliefs and values of the "Anglican High Tory' Loyalists and the leading American revolutionaries. What that difference of interpretation confirms is that Anglican Toryism was a rather weak voice in the American colonies during the revolutionary period, and that Anglican Tory political tracts were not widely circulated. Anglican Tory arguments were easily lost in the revolutionary rhetoric that transformed the political character of the American colonists and resulted in the formation of an almost monolithic Lockean-liberal political culture by the time of the American Revolution.

The Anglican Tory Presence in Loyalism

The failure to recognize the presence of Anglican Toryism within the Loyalist opposition to the revolutionaries in the American colonies, and among the Loyalist settlers in Upper Canada, is readily understandable. The Anglican Tories comprised only one component element of the Loyalist refugees who settled in Upper Canada, and not all Anglicans in the Thirteen Colonies were philosophical Tories and supporters of the Crown and the Unity of Empire.

The establishment of the Church of England in a colony, and even its predominance, did not necessarily ensue the prevalence of Anglican Tory values, principles, and beliefs among its adherents. For example, in colonial Virginia prior to the American Revolution, the Church of England was the established Church and encompassed almost the entire population of the colony within its membership; yet the pioneer environment and the circumstances of the colony had prevented the effective dissemination and retention of Anglican values, political beliefs and principles among the adherents of the Church of England.

In Virginia at the time of the Revolution, Anglicans were ignorant -- for the most part -- of the theology of the Church of England and the organization of the Church was 'congregationalist' in practice. (7) Gradually, under the congregationalist system of church government, the Established Church of Virginia had been transformed until, by the 18th Century, it was primarily a social institution which served as "the bulwark of decency", moderation, and upholder of religious toleration, which characterized that colony. (8) Neither the theology of the Church of England, nor its moral and political philosophy, nor the Anglican episcopal form of Church government, were familiar to the adherents of the Established Church of Virginia. By the time of the American Revolution, Virginians had fallen into "secular habits". (9)

In Virginia, members of the established Church of Virginia were oblivious to the deeper meaning, principles, beliefs, and values of the Anglican religion, as well as unconscious of its characteristic reverence for authority, and belief in the balance of liberty and authority, and self-denial in a God-centred world. What the Church of England in Virginia did teach was a reverence for the traditional 'rights of Englishmen' which inspired the American Revolution; and it was the Anglicans of Virginia who supplied the leadership -- together with the Congregationalists of New England -- for the American revolutionaries. (10)

The situation was different with respect to the recent Anglican immigrants from Britain who were settled in the American colonies. Moreover, that was particularly the case for the immigrant Church of England clergy who took the lead in seeking to organize resistance to the activities and propaganda of the revolutionaries. Two of the leading Loyalist spokesmen were Anglican clerics: the Rev. Charles Inglis (1734-1816), Rector of Trinity Church, New York; and the Rev. Jonathan Boucher (1738-1804), pastor of St. Barnabas Church, Upper Marlboro, Maryland. (11) Both clerics based their opposition to the revolution on principles and philosophical arguments which were derived from traditional Anglican religious beliefs, and the moral and political philosophy of Anglican Toryism. To wit, it was among the recent Anglican immigrants in the American colonies, and the orthodox Anglican communities in the northern colonies, that the older Tory values and principles of the Church of England remained strong and had not been supplanted by Lockean-liberalism. (12)

The Upper Canadian Anglican Tory Loyalists

In Upper Canada, the Anglicans among the Loyalist refugees comprised either recent English Anglican immigrants to the American colonies, or former members of Anglican settlements in the northern colonies. The actual number of the Anglican Loyalists who settled in Upper Canada, and who had rejected the American Revolution out of a conscious philosophical rejection of Lockean-liberal values of the revolutionaries, has not been established. However, what is historically significant is that there were true philosophical Tories of the Church of England among the Loyalist families who settled in what

became the Province of Upper Canada; and that, subsequently, the Anglican Tories played a leading role in the governing of the Province and in establishing its political culture.

There were also numerous Loyalists, so-called 'tories', of other religious denominations who had different beliefs and motives for opposing the American rebellion, as well as Loyalists who shared the same Lockean-liberal values as the American revolutionaries but opposed the rebellion because of feelings of loyalty to the Crown and the unity of the British Empire and a belief that the tax dispute with the mother country did not justify a rebellion. Moreover, there were also Loyalists who were 'tories' simply in wanting to preserve what was, based on custom and habit, who had the misfortune of having backed the losing side in the conflict. (13)

Nonetheless, it was the Anglican Churchmen and clerics among the Loyalists who were aware of the deeper "moral significance" of the revolutionary struggle, and who rejected the arguments of the American revolutionaries on philosophical grounds. In their values, principles and beliefs, the Anglican High Tory Loyalists were 'true Tories' who – in the words of George Grant – "appealed to the older philosophy of Richard Hooker" in rejecting the Lockean-liberal principles, values, and beliefs that were being espoused by the leading revolutionaries in seeking to justify their rebellion. (14)

Hence, the substantive conservative interpretation and critique of the American Revolution rests on the political philosophy of the Loyalist Anglican Tories which was based on the theology and political philosophy of the Church of England that embodied an older traditional social and political order and a Christian worldview. Subsequently, in Upper Canada, it was the political philosophy of the Anglican High Tory Loyalists with which the Anglican Tory governing elite identified and publicly associated themselves.

Three Streams of Loyalist Conservatism

There were three identifiable conservative streams that entered the future Province of Upper Canada with the Loyalists: an emotional conservative stream – 'situational conservatism' – composed of families who had supported the established political order simply out of custom and habit and a feeling of loyalty to the Crown and Empire; a Lockean-liberal stream of Loyalist families who shared the same philosophy as the revolutionaries but upheld the existing colonial social and political order based on their belief in loyalty to the Crown and unity of the British Empire and their view that a rebellion was not justified; and a philosophical conservative stream – Anglican Toryism – which was embodied in the Anglican High Tory Loyalist settlers.

The three Loyalist streams of conservatism were reinforced and invigorated by the Anglican Toryism of late 18th Century England which was brought to Upper Canada by British government officials and High Church Anglican immigrants following the founding of the Province of Upper Canada in 1791.

At the same time, the conservatism of the Loyalist settlers was further reinforced and reinvigorated by the writings of an Old Whig, Edmund Burke (*Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 1790) that drew on conservative arguments in denouncing the doctrines of the French revolutionaries as being destructive of the social order and moral character of the nation, and of the Christian religion. The conservatism of the Loyalist settlers was further strengthened by a general public abhorrence of the excesses of the French Revolution during the Reign of Terror (September 1793 - July 1794).

For a time, the three Loyalist conservative streams and the immigrant English Tory conservative stream combined to establish a viable conservative political culture in the Province of Upper Canada. For two decades following the War of 1812, the Loyalist Asylum of Upper Canada was governed by highly

educated Anglican Tories who comprised -- for the most part -- native-born, second-generation Loyalists who adhered to traditional conservative beliefs and values.

Notes

1. S.F. Wise, "Upper Canada and the Conservative Tradition" in Edith Firth, ed., *Profiles of a Province, Studies in the History of Ontario* (Toronto: The Ontario Historical Society, 1967), 2033, and especially page 20. See also S.F. Wise, "Colonial Attitudes from the Era of the War of 1812 to the Rebellions of 1837" in S.F. Wise and Robert Craig Brown, *Canada Views the United States* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1967), 21-22. J.J. Talman ("The United Empire Loyalists", *Profiles of a Province*, 3-8) points out that most of the 5,960 Loyalists, who settled in what became the Province of Upper Canada, were farmers and minor property holders from upstate New York; whereas, in contrast, among the 35,000 Loyalists who settled in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, there were a significant number of professionals, gentlemen, and former public office holders. Other than a loyalty to the Crown, Talman says little about the beliefs of the Loyalists or their legacy.
2. George Grant, *Lament for a Nation, The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965), 63. Anglican Toryism embodies the traditional theology, moral and political philosophy of the Church of England as clearly formulated by the Anglican theologian Richard Hooker (1554-1600), at the time of the English Reformation, in his monumental eight-volume work: *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Politie*.
3. William Nelson, *The American Tory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 17, 72-80, 85-115 & 186-188. Numerous articles have been published on the motives of the Loyalists. The Nelson book and an article by H.A. Morton ("The American Revolution: A View from the North", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, VII, May 1972, 45-54), provide valuable insights into the meaning of the Loyalist experience and tradition. See also: Christopher Moore, *The Loyalists, Revolution, Exile, Settlement* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1984); and Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles, American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).
4. David V.J. Bell, "The Loyalist Tradition in Canada", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, V, 1970, 32-33.
5. Terry Cook, "John Beverley Robinson and the Conservative Blueprint for the Upper Canadian Community", *Ontario History*, LXIV, June 1972, 79.
6. Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967).
7. Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York: Random House, 1958, 24-35, 125-127, 132, 134 & 137; and Clarence L. Ver Stegg, *The Formative Years, 1607-1763* (New York: Hill & Wong, 1964), 74, 88-90. Among the factors cited as contributing to the breakdown of the traditional Anglican religious values and beliefs in Virginia, were: the great distances between churches, the dearth of Anglican ministers, and the lack of a colonial bishop to enforce conformity of belief and ritual. Over time, the absence of a central clerical authority to enforce discipline and maintain orthodoxy in Virginia, had resulted in the local vestries usurping the episcopal power. The power of the vestries, composed of the leading laymen of the parish, was further strengthened by the local practice of refusing 'to present' a clergyman for induction into his parish. As a result, the clergymen were denied tenure and could be dismissed by the vestry at will. In effect, it was a congregationalist system in which "the supervision of the clergy and the definition of religious practices fell into the hands of the leading members of the parish". (Boorstin, 127.)
8. According to Boorstin, the established Anglican Church in Virginia has been transformed over time in becoming more democratic and in shedding "its atmosphere of hierarchy and of excessive reliance on ritual". For Boorstin, that transformation was a 'purification' of the Church. (Boorstin, 133.) To the Anglican Tories of Upper Canada, such a development was deplorable. It was an awareness of the transformation that Anglicanism had undergone in the American colonies that motivated the Upper Canadian Anglican Tories to strive to maintain the orthodox religious character, discipline, and clerical function of the Church of England, the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and the union of church and state in Upper Canada. One response was their effort to use the revenues from the clergy reserves land endowment to render the Anglican clergy independent of the financial support and dictates of their congregations so

that the parish priest could serve as a moral beacon in the community in promoting morality and religion in resisting popular passions.

9. Van Steeg, *The Formative Years*, 90.

10. Boorstin, *The Americans*, 131.

11. The Rev. Jonathan Boucher returned to England at the outbreak of hostilities that brought on the American Revolution. Subsequently, he published: *A view of the Causes and Consequence of the American Revolution in Thirteen Discourses, Preached in North American between the Years 1763 and 1775; with an Historical Preface* (London: G.G. & J. Robinson, 1797). The Rev. Charles Inglis remained in New York as the Rector of Trinity Church during the American Revolution while the City was in the hands of British troops. He returned to England after the Revolution and was subsequently invested as the first Bishop of Nova Scotia with a diocese that comprised the Maritime Provinces, Newfoundland, the old Province of Quebec, and Bermuda. In 1793, a separate See of Quebec was created under Bishop Jacob Mountain, which comprised Upper and Lower Canada. The Rev. Inglis anonymously published two significant works during the American Revolution: a political treatise, [Charles Inglis], *The True Interest of American Impartially Stated in Certain Strictures on a Pamphlet intituled Common Sense, by an American* (Philadelphia: James Humphreys, 1776, 2nd ed.); and an historical appeal for loyalty to the King and Constitution: [Charles Inglis], *Letters of Papinian in which the Conduct, present State and Prospects of the American Congress are examined* (New York/London: J. Wilkie, 1779).

12. Nelson, *The American Tory*, 17, 72-90 & 186-188. Boorstin (*The Americans*, 124-125) has argued that one of the reasons why the Congregationalists of New England and the Anglicans of Virginia "became more practical and less interested in dogma" was due to the absence of theological opponents challenging them to defend and articulate their beliefs. Where the situation in Virginia was concerned, one could argue that the lack of a robust preaching and teaching of the principles, values and beliefs of the Anglican Church and the failure to inculcate Anglican beliefs and values into the youth of the parishes, left the adherents of the established Church of Virginia open to succumbing to Lockean-liberal principles and beliefs, which came to predominate by the time of the American Revolution.

13. Political scientists and historians in applying the cultural fragments theory of Louis Hartz to the Loyalists of Upper Canada, maintain that the Loyalists shared the same Lockean liberal-Whig values as the American revolutionaries, but that the Loyalists differed slightly in retaining 'a tory touch' from the pre-revolutionary period. Moreover, the 'tory touch' is held to account for the differences between the political culture of Canada and that of the United States. It is associated with a strong belief in monarchical government, imperial unity, law and order, a natural social hierarchy, an activist government in pursuing the common good and national economic development, elitism, and a suspicion of democracy and a fear of mob rule. (Gad Horowitz, *Canadian Labour in Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968, 4-15).

What the Hartzian theory neglects to consider is that there were orthodox Anglican Tories living in minority communities within the Lockean liberal-Whig political culture monolith at the time of the American Revolution; and that the beliefs associated with the 'tory touch' were an expression of a deeper Tory political philosophy that existed among the Anglican Loyalists who fled to Canada. Two prominent Anglican Tory Loyalists were Richard Cartwright (1759-1815) from Albany, New York, and the Rev. John Stuart (1741-1811) of Fort Hunter and Schenectady in the New York colony. Both men settled in Kingston, Upper Canada, where they subsequently became close friends and associates of John Strachan following his emigration to Canada from Scotland in December 1799. Strachan converted to the Church of England, studied for the priesthood under the Rev. Stuart, and was ordained in 1803. Subsequently, it was the Rev. Strachan, at his Cornwall District Grammar School (1803-1811), who educated the 'young Tories' – second generation Loyalists – who were to govern the Loyalist Asylum of Upper Canada during the two decades following the War of 1812.

14. William Nelson, in his analysis of the political debates of the revolutionary era, refers to the 'true tories' among the Loyalist American tories as being "organic conservatives" or "Anglican High Tories". The traditional Anglican Tory beliefs, principles and Christian worldview, as set forth in the classic works of the Anglican theologian, Richard Hooker, and upheld by the Upper Canadian Anglican Tories, are set forth in: Robert W. Passfield, *The*

Upper Canadian Anglican Tory Mind, A Cultural Fragment (Oakville: Rocks' Mills Press, 2018). Anglican Toryism is contrasted with Lockean-liberalism in that work. (See pages 571-593.)

(This article is a revised and expanded version of a much earlier piece printed as an appendix to the Anglican Tory Mind book. Subsequently, the revised piece was published in *The Loyalist Gazette* (LVIII, no. 1, Spring 2020, 25-29), but without the endnotes. Herein, the 'Loyalism, Anglican Toryism, and Canadian Conservatism' article is reproduced in full.
