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Any reader of Thucydides knows that history is not always written by the winners. Still, we ought to be alert to the ways in which dominant narratives can obscure the voices of those on the losing end of major conflicts—the Huguenots, the Anti-Federalists, scores of indigenous communities in the West, and so forth. Recovering the rearguard perspective helps to uphold the integrity of the historical record as well as the health of public discourse, in which notes of dissent, even from the past, can hold prevailing conventions in check.

One historical convention that has proved especially popular is the perceived bond between the American founding and Protestant Christianity, a narrative actively promoted by Christians since the beginning of the republic as a means of preserving their cultural standing and political influence. A counternarrative to the “Christian nation” thesis, focusing on the more rationalistic features of the founding documents, emerged in the mid-twentieth century (see Matthew Stewart, *Nature’s God: The Heretical Origins of the American Republic* [Norton, 2014], for a recent summary of this angle), and has been further refined in studies of founding-generation Christians who actually expressed misgivings about the secular orientation of the state and national constitutions (see John W. Compton, *Evangelical Origins of the Living Constitution* [Harvard University Press, 2014]).

Joining these reassessments of early American Christianity is a new volume, Gregg L. Frazer’s *God against the Revolution*, which draws attention to the republic’s original dissenters. The book serves up a reminder that even in the earliest days of the founding, Christianity was a two-sided coin. Yes, sermonic defenses of the Revolution abounded (see Ellis Sandoz’s multi-volume *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era* [Liberty Fund, 1991]). However, a considerable faction of Protestants—including many who would today be labeled “biblical conservatives”—stood against the cause, a stance they maintained in the face of persecution and against the tide of Patriot victories.

Given the flight of Loyalists from the United States after the Revolution, intellectual historians are often at a loss as to how, if at all, to integrate their ideology within American political thought. Frazer’s book offers an essential and accessible point of entry to this side of the story. It centers on a manageable cast of characters in the 1770s, focusing on five clerics—Jonathan Boucher, Thomas Bradley Chandler, Charles Inglis, Samuel Seabury (all Anglicans), and John Joachim Zubly, a Swiss-born Calvinist who served a Presbyterian church in Georgia—along with glances at more than a dozen others from all over the colonies, uncovering what appears to be a broad, cross-denominational literature of Loyalist political theology.
Frazer organizes his survey of this archive thematically, focusing on the various types of argument the Loyalist clergy leveled against the Revolution. Chapter 2 highlights, as promised in the work’s surtitle, the scriptural arguments, a terrain on which the Loyalists seem to have had a clear advantage over the Revolution’s defenders. The New Testament apostles, after all, urge believers to submit to governing authorities, warning that even ungodly rulers must be respected as agents of God himself (Romans 13:1–7 and 1 Peter 2:13–17). The Patriot clergy’s attempts to explain away these passages handed Boucher, Inglis, and others evidence of scriptural casuistry, if not outright heresy. Frazer himself concurs: “The Loyalists typically took [the Bible] at face value without adding to or subtracting from the text, while the Patriot preachers adjusted texts to fit their purpose by adding qualifying language.”

Curiously, the debate on biblical hermeneutics runs its entire course in this early chapter. Thereafter, Frazer devotes attention to the Loyalist’s political philosophy (chapter 3), which he characterizes as patriarchal in the divine-rights tradition of Robert Filmer (and in candid rejection of John Locke), and then to their opposition on legal grounds to the authority of the Continental Congress (chapter 4). Chapter 5 is devoted to outlining the Loyalists’ strategic critiques of the decision to break ties instead of seeking conciliation with Britain. Finally, in chapter 6, Frazer highlights their objections to Congress’s rampant violations of due process—the confiscation of Loyalist property, the imprisonment of many without trial, the banishment and physical harassment of others—all of which were visited heavily upon Loyalist clergy, and amount to a Jacobin-like underside to the American Revolution that often goes ignored.

Frazer’s separate treatment of these distinct lines of thought does much to reveal the breadth of the Loyalists’ intellectual offerings, but it leaves unresolved the matter of what actually formed the core principles of their stance. Was their opposition to the Revolution primarily theological, philosophical, or just self-defensive—the work of establishment figures fighting for their jobs? Amplifying this ambiguity is the apparent sense that any one of the five arguments that Frazer explores could well be the driving force, pulling all the other justifications behind it. The chapters could come in any order. Frazer draws hardly any logical connections between them, and indeed, one could well question whether these distinct lines of thought even cohere. For example, the Loyalists’ biblical literalism might compel their fidelity to a reigning monarch, but it furnishes a far more dubious backdrop to their philosophical belief in constitutional monarchy as such. And what about when the reigning monarch cedes his authority to a new, nonmonarchical government in your region? Wouldn’t Peter and Paul urge you to stick around and “submit”?

It is not Frazer’s job to resolve these matters, but the siloed nature of his analysis provokes interesting questions about the Loyalists’ political theology. To invoke God in a political debate typically implies a one-directional stream
of thought in which one has attempted to derive political principles from theological doctrines. Early on in the study, Frazer joins the Loyalists in accusing the Patriot preachers of doing the exact opposite, of retrofitting their understanding of the Bible to suit a political agenda. By the end of the volume, however, the reader has encountered such a variegated smattering of rationales for loyalism that it is tantalizingly unclear whether this clerical faction went about constructing their political theology any differently.

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Douglas I. Thompson’s excellent *Montaigne and the Tolerance of Politics* is both a book about philosophic history and a book for our times. Thompson writes of a bipartisan loss of confidence in the value of tolerance: the Left worries that “mere tolerance” is much less than “full social equality,” and prefers to insist on the latter standard for its favored social groups; the Right worries that its concerns about the erosion of “important customary norms” are frequently labeled as intolerant so as to exclude them from the realm of reasonable debate (5). Nonetheless, tolerance remains a cornerstone virtue of liberal democracy, which, in spite of its present travails, is clearly superior to “the alternative forms of government currently available” (6).

Liberal democracy needs tolerance. But what exactly is it? While political theorists often describe tolerance as a “species of moral or ethical respect,” Thompson notes an obvious problem with such definitions: “to feel respect for someone is to hold them or something important about them in high regard or esteem; to tolerate someone is to put up with them even though you do not hold them or something about them in high regard or esteem” (8). Tolerance is best understood not as a moral or philosophic principle but as something we “go out and do,” entering into conversation and negotiation precisely with those whose views or behavior we think pernicious or repugnant (4). So understood, tolerance is a *political* capacity.

Thompson celebrates Michel de Montaigne as an exemplar of this kind of tolerance. The great sixteenth-century author of the *Essays* (and inventor of that now ubiquitous literary form) was also a serious practitioner of shuttle diplomacy—a political go-between during France’s eight wars of religion.