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# **OVERLOOKED**

**THE FORGOTTEN ORIGIN STORIES OF CANADIAN  
CHRISTIANITY**

**by james tyler robertson**  
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## INTRODUCTION: FAUX PAS

*"You can't be fond of living in the past  
'Cause if you are then there's no way  
that you're going to last"*

— "Wheat Kings,"  
The Tragically Hip

*"History does not repeat, but it does instruct."*

— Timothy Snyder,  
On Tyranny

*"Contemporary societies – not just North American – are no longer used to looking at where they have come from. They are far more fixated on...what comes next. Rather than use the past to help determine where they are on the trail of life in relation to where they started, they plunge ahead, frequently blindly, expecting that the future will correct any mistakes they make in navigation."*

— Terry LeBlanc,  
Walking in Reconciled Relationships

**Picture yourself** arriving at a party.

The door opens and you hand your host a large, brownish box containing a mixed assortment of doughnuts from a hockey-player-inspired Canadian franchise. Before you enter into their home you lean against the outside of the doorframe and kick the toe of your boot against the ground to dislodge stubborn remnants of snow. You enter while exchanging pleasant greetings. You tuck your gloves into the pocket of your winter coat before removing it; you unfurl your scarf and stuff it into one of the sleeves as you place the coat on a hanger. You bend over and undo the laces of your boots and then use the classic toe-to-heel- maneuver to remove your boots without touching them with your hands; you finish by placing the now dripping footwear on a rubber mat near the door. You stand up, adjust your sweater, and survey the gathering already in progress, pleased to see that this is a warm room full of friends. You find a small clique of people, again exchange greetings, and take some time to warm up both physically and socially.

After a few moments, and emboldened by the blood returning to your cold limbs, you make a slightly risqué joke, the content of which is admittedly controversial but, given your familiarity with the group, you are confident that your calculated risk will produce a laugh.

And then it happens.

Your joke yields only awkward silence. The eyes of your friends widen in shock and then firmly avoid any contact with you. The other members of the group share horrified glances with each other; there are shoulder shrugs, pursed lips, and non-committal head nods in your direction. Your stomach clenches and though you were in the cold only moments ago, you feel sweat roll down your back. You came late to the group and your first words effectively killed a conversation. It's all the more unsettling because you don't know why. If you have ever been in this type of situation, you know what it is to discover culture.

Social norms agreed upon by certain collections of people

is one way we can understand the term “culture.” Not the written down elements of society that are discoverable through careful study. Rather, the equally important unwritten rules that govern social interaction. Culture dictates human responses to a myriad of elements including race, religion, gender, time, family dynamics, conflict, priorities, parenting, friendship, humour, etc. and can be problematic because culture creates norms as well as taboos. One of the most awkward ways of discovering a norm is by saying—or becoming—something taboo.

This is what anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu calls the “habitus,” the repeated interactions within our various spheres that socialize us into acting in acceptable ways. This is also how we navigate in certain “fields” like parties, school, or the office. We find ways of minimizing perceived imbalances (like the joke) because these create uncomfortable experiences. These invisible social constructs are complex and as subtle as they are powerful. As Bordieu explains, these are “neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two over time: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures.”<sup>1</sup>

You are a decent person (I mean, you brought doughnuts for crying out loud) and, had you been at the party even five minutes earlier, you would have learned that one member of the collective just celebrated five years in programming for the CBC. Having known that, you would have chosen to focus on the engaging, new content rather than quipping that the network is a government-funded graveyard for creativity. You were an immigrant to that party community, you misread social and cultural cues but, most importantly, you were ignorant of the stories that helped shape that community; and your ignorance proved costly.

Hopefully, one friend in the party puts an arm around

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 170.

you, escorts you momentarily from the maligned group, and explains to you what happened before you arrived. Properly informed, you can make the necessary adjustments (probably should apologize and explain that *Schitt's Creek* is, honestly, one of the best shows you have ever seen) and rejoin the group to contribute in acceptable ways.

Learning the stories that create a culture is my way of explaining the relevance of knowing history. This book is my attempt to put an arm around anyone who feels like their religious and spiritual beliefs are akin to a party foul within the larger Canadian context. An attempt to walk away from the concerned looks of fellow party-goers and explain some of the pertinent stories of Canadian Christianity that, I think, many of us have overlooked.

## CAUSES FOR CONCERN

This book tells stories about the Christian faith in Canada that many of us have overlooked. It examines these overlooked accounts in order to challenge the belief that something is wrong with the church in present-day Canada. I want us to challenge the interpretive lens that speaks about secularity and post-Christendom as if they are indisputable facts. They are not. These are just words and, like all words, contain meanings that shift depending on *who* is saying them, *where* they are saying them, *why* they are saying them, and *when* they are saying them.

There are many different ways to interpret the word secularization but, for the sake of clarity, I find Robert Choquette's definition adequate to the task at hand. He writes that secularization, as a development of modernity, is, "the gradual emancipation of this world from the *other* world." In a more practical definition he goes on to state that secularization "was a process whereby segments of society and culture were withdrawn from the authority of religious institutions and symbols."<sup>2</sup> Ramsay Cook is also helpful at this juncture as he

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2 Robert Choquette. *Canada's Religions*. (Ottawa, University of Ottawa, 2004),

explains secularization as “the shift” from a religious explanation of people’s “behavior [sic] and relationships to a non-religious one.”<sup>3</sup> Such definitions tend to support the concerns of those who believe the Canadian church is in trouble. However, I wanted to put these terms here to show you that I do acknowledge the reality of the world we inhabit. I don’t want you to think I am being purposefully provocative or naïve but I do want to argue similar definitions have existed in other Canadian time periods.

I am writing to those who are concerned about the future of Christianity in Canada. But I also hope that those who are simply curious about religion or Canada will reap some benefit from this work (though I harbour no illusion that a historical book about Canadian religion will draw in a wide audience). For those who are more concerned than curious, the conversation tends to boil down to three parts:

**The concern:** numbers in regular church attendance are declining and the church has very little influence in society (the “we used to pray in school” argument).

**The culprit:** the church has failed to hold fast to the Gospel and has betrayed the message of God; and/or the nation is losing its faith due to a variety of issues related to generational differences, immigration, government policies, and cultural shifts; and/or the church has become irrelevant.

**The plan of attack:** Once we return to the “faith of our fathers” the bounty of souls will also return; and/or once we find ways to communicate the true power of the Gospel without the trappings of outdated religious modes people will find the benefit of church community once again.

From a statistical point of view, the drop in regular church attendance is a quantifiable fact. However, even the criteria for attendance are interesting and need to be read contextually, as we will see in a future chapter.

Those who believe the church has lost its way tend to point

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3 Ramsay Cook. *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 5.

to the increasing numbers of more theologically conservative churches like the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) and the declining numbers of more liberal churches like the United Church of Canada (UCC) as evidence that such a stance is correct. Again, such beliefs need to be scrutinized because they don't tell the full story and set up false myths about the nature of a successful church.

Others see earthlier reasons like irrelevant teaching, outdated music, cult-like rituals, hypocritical moralizing, or the relentless scheduling demands of modern life as the true issues. But how do we address such concerns without throwing away ancient Christian practices? Whatever the concern, many Canadians feel we are losing something precious and fear what that could mean for this place we call home.

### **THE POINT OF THIS BOOK**

A few years ago I was asked to bring a historical understanding to the topic of growing secularity in Canada. I provided a one-hour talk about the developments of Christianity in this land (some of those stories are in this book). As I prepared to write the book, based on this talk, a trend I had not previously considered began to emerge. A trend that, despite all my study in this area, I had overlooked: secularization is actually nothing new.

The remainder of this book is dedicated to explaining what I mean by that, and why that is a good thing.

Secularization—if we accept the definitions listed above—is not new phenomena. Sure, the ways in which the “other world” of faith have been minimized in recent years are very modern and wouldn't have existed in previous generations. However, I want to caution readers against such a narrow understanding of secularization because history reveals a different picture.

This books shows that even the religiously cataclysmic decade of the 1960s is better understood as a natural outworking of previous trends; some of them centuries old. Secularization is a term used by religious people who are currently experiencing

a perceived loss. It argues there was a time when a Christian worldview was more dominant than it is today. It is a term of lament and loss, a term that describes a feeling of powerlessness the religious are facing and want to correct. It is a term steeped in beliefs about what is, what was, and what could be again.

Such definitions set Canadian Christians up for a very specific kind of failure, a kind of failure that is unique to this country. While terms like post-Christendom, secularization, or loaded questions like “What happened to the Christian character of Canada?” can seem scary and unique to this time in history, this book challenges that this is something new or, perhaps, even something to worry about.

Each generation in this land from the 1500s and on has dealt with challenges to established religious worldviews and the perceived lack of Christian influence over this place. The who, what, when, where, and why are different but the outcomes and responses were noticeably similar. Even in a country as young as Canada, there have always been those who lamented and feared the loss of time-tested Christianity.

This was part of the missionary days in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; it happened in the pre-Christendom Canada when Christianity was the dominant interpretive paradigm; it happened during the heyday of Canadian Christianity when the church hit the pinnacle of power and influence; it happened in the 1950s and 1960s when everyone went to church; and it happened in the 1980s when the Seeker Sensitive movement hit full stride; and it is present yet again in this age. It is up to you, gentle reader, to discern what is unique about your time and place. But make no mistake, when it comes to the struggles of declining Christianity, Canada has been here before.

## **CANADA: OVERLOOKING AND OVERLOOKED**

Before I can explain the unique and ultimately surprising characteristics of Canadian Christianity, I need to spend some time talking about the land itself. First, we need to address the enormity of the land.

The geography of Canada is one of the main characters of this book. The pages to follow demonstrate how the sheer size of this land impacted the theologies that were born and developed here. Other than missionaries, church-planters, or immigrants, few people seem aware of how much location influences beliefs and practices. This is problematic for a variety of reasons. As it pertains to Canada, the vastness of Canadian territory meant that numerous faith communities grew and developed over generations with little awareness of other faith communities that equally and simultaneously claimed Canada as their home. Canada struggled to define itself with little ability to communicate internally until the advent of the railroad in the late 19th century. In a land this big, it was and still is very easy to overlook fellow inhabitants.

Added to such internal realities is the ongoing historic connection of Canada to the Old World of the British Empire. Which brings us to our second point: Canada, as a nation, is often overlooked on the global stage. At least that is what many Canadians feel. This nation struggled to define itself not only internally, but as a distant colony nestled on the shoulder of the New World giant located immediately to the south. Scholars call this the Atlantic triangle because Canada leaned on both America and the Empire to help define itself.<sup>4</sup> Combining these external influences with an internal dissonance brought on by massive distance and you have a people whose ideas about faith were as vast and varied as the land they called home.

## CANADIAN CHRISTIANS

Therefore, when I talk about a “Canadian Christian” or “Canadian Christianity” I don’t want you to see the first word indicating a country, while the second term denotes a religion. I rely on Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* to help me understand and explain what I mean by this.<sup>5</sup> Nations are

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4 John Webster Grant. *A Profusion of Spires: Religion in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 68-84.

5 As Anderson puts it: “The nation is imagined as limited because even the largest

not just places in an atlas; they are also agreed upon concepts contained within the minds of numerous people with some connection to a specific geographical locale. Both “Canadian” and “Christian” indicate a series of beliefs held in common by a collection of otherwise different people.

The term “Canadian” is a construct built around shared, though nuanced, beliefs rooted in the land, languages, rituals, and stories that were developed in this place. The term “Christian” is different only insofar as it is not as connected to geography (theoretically anyway, again this entire book argues that *where* and *when* you believe shapes *what* you believe). Christianity is equally tied to ideologies, languages, rituals, and stories that create meaning. This is important to note because Christianity helped create the “Canada” I am talking about in this book but that Canada also influenced how Christianity came to be understood.

Let me offer myself as an example: I grew up in Western Canada (B.C. and Alberta), but have lived in Ontario for almost two decades. Despite this move, I still cheer for the Calgary Flames whenever they play against the Toronto Maple Leafs, even if I am vastly outnumbered by Leafs fans. However, if the Leafs are playing any other team, I will cheer for *them* as loud as any native-born Torontonians. If geography was the only issue, I would have changed teams the moment I crossed the border of Ontario. I didn’t because strong personal ideologies—be they perceived loyalty to my place of origin, some form of nostalgia, a desire for distinctness, or the simple fact that Calgary has actually won a Stanley Cup in my lifetime—can transcend physical distance. However, geography does play a role because I never would have cheered for Toronto had I remained in the

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of them...have finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which live other nations...it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.” Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (New York: Verso Press, 2016), 7. Italics part of the original quote.

west. That example, while specific to me, gets at the concept I want you to remember as we go forward.

Here is a national example of this concept from recent history: in 1989, Baltej Singh Dhillon incurred the rancour of numerous fellow Canadians when he appealed to RCMP leadership regarding dress code. Dhillon's Sikh faith called him to grow a beard and wear a turban, a direct conflict with Mountie regulations regarding headwear and a prohibition against beards. When his appeal was granted (similar changes had been made in the 1970s to allow female officers to wear skirts and heels) cries that this ancient Canadian institution was being destroyed by a foreigner rang from coast to coast. Racism obviously played a major part in that controversy and that is one lamentable lesson we need to take from this encounter. Dhillon's non-Christian faith may not have precluded him from acceptance as a Canadian, but such tolerance turned to rage the moment his faith questioned a Canadian symbol, perceived to be sacred and unalterable. I would argue that a bearded Mountie in a turban is the epitome of historical Canadian values, not the end of them. Dhillon—now a decades-long veteran of the RCMP who has served with quiet distinction—clearly supported the values of his Canadian home (and risked his life to uphold them). He also valued his ancestors and his faith. That tension between honouring ancestral and modern homes is a much more foundational element of Canadian culture than even the iconic RCMP hat.

Fittingly, Linda Colley explains such tensions by using the allegory of hats in her brilliant work on Britons during the zenith of the British Empire.<sup>6</sup> A Welshman or an Irishman who self-identified as a Briton wore different social and cultural “hats” at different times in order to best embody his imperial identity in ways that were faithful to the land in which he lived. The same was true of early settlers in Canada. They were not Canadians

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6 Linda Colley. *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*. Revised Edition (New Haven: Yale University, 2009.)

*per se*, even if they used that word. They are better understood more distinctly as English, French, Irish, Scottish, American, German, and Eastern Europeans living in British lands and figuring out what it meant to be a Briton on the edges of the Empire. Frequently that meant bringing important elements of their previous home and blending them with the demands of their new home.

The same can be said for the later addition of Russian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, African, Indian and other immigrants. Despite the differences of these culturally diverse people, they shared a desire to remain connected to former homes in ways that made sense with their new home. Though far from their respective ancestral lands, they never stopped “cheering for the Flames” and the mashing together of Old World Empires, new world Republicanism, and Indigenous influences provided the building blocks of early Canadian culture.

Such multi-generational adaptations, conflicts, and evolutions also helped contribute to the lack of a clear Canadian self-identity. Figuring out what a Canadian is proves just as tricky for Canadians as it does for anyone else (not that anyone else really pays us much mind). The stereotype of Canada being the polite, hockey-loving, beer-drinking, maple-syrup-pouring, friendly, and gentle teddy bear of the world may be enjoyable and helpful to tourism, but it doesn’t stand up to any intentional scrutiny. I’ve been on enough C-Trains (Calgarian term for an LRT) leaving downtown Calgary after a long and cold workday to easily dispel the myth of the polite and cheerful Canadian. As it pertains to hockey, such stereotypes don’t take our growing immigrant population into account either, many of whom have alternate sports connected to a place of origin, which they prefer over Canada’s unofficial national sport.<sup>7</sup>

This matters because, historically speaking, Canada’s distinctness doesn’t come from novel ideas or innovations necessarily, but in its somewhat unique ability to blend

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<sup>7</sup> Our actual official national sport is lacrosse, not hockey.

seemingly contrary ideas together to make them work. We are, in some respects, a nation of mixed media artists taking pieces of other nations' ideas, mixing them with some practical realities of this place, and making everything slightly different; but something that can rightfully be called Canadian. That cultural mixology happens in Canada because even though we chose to remain engaged with the global world via the British Empire, we don't command the attention of the world. This has freed Canadians to experiment in relative obscurity. That is an important characteristic of Canada especially when compared to our closest neighbour, a country whose every idea is trotted out onto the world's stage.

### **A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW**

Such complexities must be taken into account and as I do that I am reminded of the profound shortcomings of this work. This is a bird's eye view of some overlooked stories from this land with a focus on the role Christianity played within those stories. Because this book's perspective is sweeping, the stories herein sometimes lack certain nuances that makes the academic in me cringe. This work also overlooks important smaller, regional differences in favour of larger concepts. In other words, I describe the size and shape of the Canadian Christian forest but spend precious little time describing the individual trees. Whereas you, the reader, have a more grounded perspective of what is around you but, perhaps, lack a sense of the larger woods within which your specific trees grow.

I have tried to capture stories from as many different parts of this land as possible but, as you will see, individuals from certain places wrote more and, therefore, feature more in this work. My own home provinces of B.C. and Alberta factor in less than my regional pride desires. The unique spirit and religious expressions of Atlantic Canada are addressed but their nationalism has all sorts of regional characteristics that are unique and valuable. Most disappointing to me is the fact that this book adds to the isolation of our brothers and sisters in

the Territories. I simply could not find enough sources to truly explain their religious landscape. For that I sincerely apologize. If you are reading this and you live there, please feel free to contact me because the lack of stories from your part of our land remains a noticeable and painful absence to me. I am genuinely sorry for overlooking you.

Most exciting about the vastness of this land is that I could write this book every year for the rest of my career and never tell the same story twice. For every choice I have made and every story I am about to tell, there are numerous other stories that would be equally valid. I am attempting to discern patterns with one eye toward history and another eye turned toward the period in time we currently inhabit. It is my hope that the situations and stories I have included have some particular relevance for you as they do for me. These are not the only stories I can tell but they are the stories that I chose. And I do hope that you find the stories amusing, insightful, and, most importantly, helpful.

## **CANADIAN FAITH IS NEW**

In late 2019 Don Cherry, the iconic broadcasting personality of Hockey Night in Canada, was unceremoniously dropped from the Canadian Broadcasting Company for comments deemed offensive to certain Canadians. While debate raged around this issue, few people saw this for what I think it was: proof of a fundamental shift in the Canadian ethos. A shift that was not as noticeable only a few short years ago. The incident is proof positive that so-called traditional Canadian values are once again yielding to undefined new ones.

While most people simply debated whether or not he should have been let go, the deeper point is the one I raised in the beginning of this introduction. Don Cherry thought he knew the norms of this nation, the norms of his audience. Don Cherry thought he could offer a risqué opinion and get away with it; he was wrong. He committed a party foul, he became taboo, and this TV icon of Canada's most iconic sport made a

comment one Saturday night—a comment similar to countless others he had made before—and was out in the cold by Monday. The careful observer of faith would do well to pay heed to this for it is indicative of the Canada we now inhabit. The concerned observer of Canadian Christianity might fear what this means for our own time-honoured traditions. However, the wise observer will see the new world forming and take a few moments to ask: “why *now*?”

Aaron Hughes rightly argues that religion “is imagined, constructed, and situated within specific national frames of reference.”<sup>8</sup> Canada is a child of the modern period and Christianity helped determine what the nation became. Canada is too big to unite its inhabitants with geographical proximity alone. It is better to see our national identity as a collection of regionalisms attached to each other through flexible and elastic boundaries tethered to certain understandings enforced by language, history, and law. Specific to this book are the elastically bounded understandings of the Christian faith that shaped, and were shaped by, modern ideas of nation. Although it might seem antithetical to use history to talk about something new, that is exactly what I want to do (that rhyme was unintentional). It is important to see Canadian Christianity as a vast collection of thoughts related to Jesus, but it is also important to see those ideas as new ones.

Christians can fall into the trap of thinking the messages, thoughts, and expressions of the faith are timeless given the belief in Jesus’ divinity. However, it serves us better to see how we frame our beliefs within a particular time and space. If the size and underpopulated nature of Canada contributed to the multiplicity of Canadian Christian beliefs, then the comparatively short amount of time Canada has existed reveals how young such multiple beliefs actually are.

This book begins in the 18<sup>th</sup> century looking at the faith of

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<sup>8</sup> Aaron W. Hughes. *From Seminary to University: An Institutional History of the Study of Religion in Canada*. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2020.), 173.

immigrants who arrived in a land already inhabited by others. At first look, this downplays the importance and relevance of the Catholic missionaries and explorers who came to Canada's shores centuries earlier. While there are numerous relevant stories to these earlier encounters, I have chosen to begin this book when Protestants began to populate Canada as well. This is not meant to disparage or minimize the contributions of Catholicism to Canada. I hope that is clear because of the many stories of Catholic Canadian Christianity that are told in this book. However, for the sake of the major themes in this book, I thought it was better to begin our stories when immigrants from both of these branches of the faith were present and interacting with each other (although "interacting" is a *very* polite term as you will come to see).

Those immigrants introduced and adapted concepts from their former homes in order to build what they began to refer to as the "New World." As they bore children in their new homes, these settlers and immigrants handed their adapted concepts on to these children and other immigrants and created institutions to maintain, uphold, and enforce their new worldviews. Over the past 200 years, these institutions adapted the concepts further for subsequent generations of immigrants from even more remote places on earth. Those adaptations became the culture of what we now call Canada. And Christianity, more than any other religion, had a hand in such developments.

It also means that it is hard to say where Old World ends and New World begins in this country. That is also uniquely Canadian and also contributes to our national self-identity crisis. Arguably the greatest hindrance to Canadians' ability to concisely describe their national traits is the seemingly concerted lack of attention to Canadian history. To speak of a Canadian context without even a peripheral working knowledge of Canadian history is to repeat the blunder of the four blind men describing an elephant by feeling only that part which is within reach. We simply can't do a good job because my elephant is a wide and gnarled leg while yours is a flexible trunk, still another

knows an elephant only by way of a tusk, and still another feels only the tail and assumes the animal to be quite tall and thin.

Most Canadians are pretty at ease when a person admits they attend church and see faith as an integral part of life. They will likely share a story of going to church when they were younger, ask some questions, talk briefly about how all religions are basically the same as long as they make people kinder (we'll see why that belief in kind faith is so common in a later chapter). Many will even listen to stories, smile at some of the programs offered by the church, and few have any issue with Jesus. However, if a Canadian Christian bring up salvation, eternity, or invites their neighbour to a service or something along those lines, watch how quickly the conversation will end as the person removes his or herself. That *laissez-faire* or indifferent attitude towards matters of faith (irrespective of which faith one practices) has more to do with the newness of this land rather than the vastness. Overlooking religion is a reality of the modern age that didn't exist only a few hundred years ago; and the exact same thing can be said about the nation of Canada.

### **HOPE IN THE OVERLOOKED**

This book is all about the unique nature of Canadian Christianity and argues that this current experience is merely another in the ebbs and flows of historical faith in this land. Since the nation of Canada is a social experiment of the modern era, it only makes sense that the dominant religious voice of that experiment would also face certain modifications and adjustments along with the nation. The problem occurs when we don't see such modifications for what they are and, instead, ascribe to them meanings that fail to consider the Canadian context.

What you are about to discover in the pages to follow is that even these seemingly recent concerns are not harbingers of a doomed future, but are more the continuing echoes of a forgotten past. Historical ignorance narrows our perspective, creates cultural blind spots, and makes us prone to overlooking

valuable lessons. When a forgotten ideology is re-discovered within the contemporary zeitgeist, our short-term cultural memory tends to label it as new. Even our so-called spiritual crisis is potentially something else entirely and that is why we find it so hard to define and correct.

I would like this book to help reframe concerns around secularism or post-Christendom Canada by offering a more full-orbed awareness of the actual history of Canadian Christianity. The current state of the church in Canada is not simply a result of religiously wayward Canadians or theologically unfaithful Christians. History shows us that big questions like this rarely have simple answers. They tend to be an amalgam of reasons that present us with equally complex and even competing potential solutions.

Now, I don't want you to fall under the misconception that simply hearing tales of Canadians of old facing (and, in some cases, conquering) their own religious struggles is going to somehow solve any perceived problems in our present world. It might, but that seems too lofty a goal to set. However, I do think this book can help us combat the nostalgic-laden myth that Canada is falling away from a golden age of Christianity into national apostasy. As with all things nostalgic, the reasons for this perceived calamity are rooted more in the issues and beliefs of this day being foisted upon the people of the past. What the past can actually offer us is the wisdom gained from experiences that didn't actually happen to us.

In order to do that, we have to take the time to root those people and what they were facing in *their* time and only after that can we gain clear insights. After rooting the people and events in their proper historical context, the historian interprets those people and events for contemporary audiences. This creates a tension as we examine a series of independent stories and somehow put them in step with each other. Sometimes it works in much the same way as a marching band with numerous independent instruments creating a unified sound; other times it is like herding cats. It is up to you to judge if this book is more

akin to the synchronized music of the former or the howling cacophony of the latter. I don't want to bore you with the internal arguments many of us historians have about our own discipline save to say that we are very aware of such realities but still see history capable of helping.

So, as you venture further into this book, please know that this is intended to be a hope-filled tool to inspire dialogue and discussion around the role of faith in the Canadian *milieu*. In all my conversations I have had on this topic I have yet to find a truly angry or combative person. Most have firmly held beliefs based on some research and genuine experience-based struggle; others base their arguments on prejudices, misunderstandings, memes, or myths. This is true of those who want Christianity to return and those who don't care. Although admittedly anecdotal, I am pleased to report that those I have spoken with over the years seem kind and willing to share their views with relative grace, ease, humour, and candour.

Most Canadian Christians tend to be pretty decent people.

Most Canadian critics of Christianity tend to be pretty decent people as well.

That's a pretty good place to start.

## **THE RHYTHM**

The chapters of this book reveal the rhythm of Canadian Christianity in a fairly—though not exclusively—chronological manner. For the most part I want to introduce you to the events in the order they happened to help you see the patterns for yourself. However, as I already mentioned, there will be times when I will have to jump backward and forward to help land a point I think is important. For example, even though this book starts in the mid-1700s, there will be times when we go back centuries earlier to show the importance of the Catholic nature of this land.

The first idea addressed is that of power because Canadian power dynamics are unique amongst the global community and need to be understood before we move forward. The Canadian

nation has always possessed a unique relationship with power and the churches of that time had to find their way in a strange new land unlike any other in many respects.

Next, we look at rivalry to see how the religious landscape was formed and how many of those early decisions shaped our context for generations to come. Denominational battles and feuds proved remarkably resilient to cultural change and damaging to unity, despite the myth that Canadians are pleasant and cooperative. This chapter will also show how 19<sup>th</sup> century Christians reversed the surprising statistical reality that almost 20% of Canadians in their day considered themselves secular.

What should be noted about these chapters is that they take place in a time when Christianity was the dominant expression of the day. Issues like Darwinism, biblical criticism, and scientific discoveries had yet to appear as challengers to the ancient interpretations of the faith. Even in such a blatantly Christian world, concerns that closely echo present-day discussions involving increased secularity in Canada were present.

Next, we see the church truly influencing what would become Canada. Confederation and the advent of the railway did little for church engagement but the idea of Canada as a Dominion (a purposefully biblical word) lit the fire under many Canadian churches. We will be able to see the nature of Canadian Christendom in all its power and influence and then judge its efficacy as well as its legacy.

Many of you might be tempted to move past these early times as less relevant or archaic but I strongly caution you not to do so. After all, if the Marvel Cinematic Universe has taught us anything, it is the importance of origin stories.

Next we tackle the 20<sup>th</sup> century and look at how language created new tensions in response to growing concerns about the faith. Old tensions continued and grew as English and French Canadians vied for control. New voices appeared on the landscape as the newly formed Fundamentalist Christians began to speak and shape significant portions of Canada. Pentecostalism was born in Canada in this century and while

always a small denomination, its influence over both Canadian and global Christianity belies its numerical size.

The increased freedom brought about by the 1960s ushered in a world-changing epoch with a legacy so large that we still live in its shadow. We will witness the end of the Canadian Christendom experiment 100 years, almost to the day, after it began. We will explore Quebec's Revolution, affordable housing's impact on churches, Canadian interpretations of the Bible, how padded pews ruined church, how money both helps and hinders ministry, and discover an overlooked culprit of secularization.

Building on that, we will then examine the reality all these events and ideas created to argue that they were neither accidental nor mysterious, but a natural—and fairly predictable—outworking of cultural trends. In this chapter we will see how women saved the church, how birth control shaped theology, how televangelism changed the nature of worship, how a Toronto church changed the world, the beautifully skeptical faith of Gen-X, and discover what Canadians really believed on the eve of the 21st century.

Reconciliation is at the heart of much of Christian theology but it tends to be more difficult than any other element of lived faith. The second-last chapter of this book deals exclusively with the story of Christianity and the people who lived here long before the first explorers ever set eyes upon the shores. Simply put: Indigenous peoples' history with Christianity is a terrible one. Responding to these tales is one of the most visible and obvious ways the followers of Jesus can embody the reconciliatory spirit lauded throughout the New Testament. The legacy of First Nations cripples some people with guilt, and creates new opportunities for systemic racism in others. The solutions are complex and not readily forthcoming but I can think of no greater hindrance to the faith in Canada than this and, because of that reason, Christianity's interactions with Indigenous peoples in Canada deserves its own chapter.

This book will stop in the early 2000s, and that might

be upsetting to some of you. I didn't do this because I believe nothing of merit has taken place since then, but I did choose that time specifically. First, this is meant to be a history book and I believe its examination should conclude well in the past so that I don't accidentally stumble into the realms of sociology or anthropology, two disciplines that are well beyond my abilities. That distance allows us to, hopefully, gain some perspective on situations not too far removed from our current world.

Second, I make the argument that 1990-2001 was a much more secular period in time than our current one. If we measure secularization based solely on numbers, you might have a problem with such a statement. If you measure it based on cultural significance, the last two decades have shown a decisive and noticeable increase in religious discourse.

Each chapter will also end with a resource section that you can consult if you want to dig deeper into the topics covered in the chapter. At the end of that section, I will summarize one idea that I think you should carry with you as you head into the next chapter.

## **LOOKING AT THE OVERLOOKED**

With these tales in mind, gentle reader, I hope you will feel more equipped to locate the struggles of today with an increased awareness of the rhythm of the Canadian Christian story. The final chapter will combine these histories and offer some practical critiques and examples of how churches in this nation can move forward with greater hope, clarity, and awareness of the Canadian context. I have found stories of the past to be messages of hope, reminding us that there is nothing new under the sun—despite changes to technology—and that we are not alone in our struggles.

I want to honour the concerns of those who believe losing Christianity would be detrimental to the life of everyone who calls Canada home. I want us to take some time and garner wisdom from our co-nationalists that have come before us. I want us to take seriously the indisputable fact that the times

are, indeed, changing. But that is not cause for concern or panic; times always change, culture always shifts, values always evolve and devolve, and Canadians have perpetually lived in the tension between what was and what is yet to be. I hope to show that Canada, more than any other nation in the world, is uniquely gifted to handle this global ideological shift we call secularization.

As Canadian Christians we are uniquely situated to be part of something important that is both rooted in the ancient while engaging in the new; because that is historically how Canada has tended to operate. The Christian faith has always called its people to follow Jesus' teachings (past experience) throughout life while awaiting Jesus' return (future hope). I argue Canadians have built an entire national culture around reverence for the past blended with eager excitement for the future.

Canada is also, in the words of Tom Wayman, "A Country Not Considered," an idea that presents a unique and exciting recipe for a national religious expression. A humble antidote for the malaise, controversies, and triumphalism of 21<sup>st</sup> century western Christianity. A way forward that makes space for questions and concerns; a way forward that values a mustard seed mentality; a way forward that is both Christian *and* Canadian. A unique, surprising, and challenging path forward for those who have eyes to see it.

So, if it is okay with you, let's walk away from this party for a moment so that I can tell you some stories many of us have overlooked.

**CHAPTER 1**  
**POWER**  
**1756 -**

*I had my hands in the river  
My feet back up on the banks  
Looked up to the Lord above  
And said, "hey man thanks"*  
— "New Orleans is Sinking,"  
The Tragically Hip

## INTRODUCTION

**Canadians have** a difficult time expressing what we are.

However, we all know what we are not: we are not Americans. Rest assured, the irony that our first story begins in America is not lost on me.

It was a dark and stormy night in New Port, Rhode Island in the year 1756 and a young woman and her father were having a fight. Overwhelmed with shame, the young woman stood out in the rain and, screaming over the frequent peals of thunder, called for lightning to strike her and send her immediately to hell. While dramatic, this was no idle concern as several members of the community recently met their Maker in that very manner. What was the nature of her trespass? Who knows; it is best to forget about that (as we should forget many of the sins of youth) because this story is not about her. This story is about her little brother, eavesdropping on the argument from inside the family home. Caught up in the histrionics of his eldest sibling, the boy wondered what she meant by hell, what she did to deserve such a fate, and whether this was something he needed to worry about as well.

Schooled in religion, he began to reflect on the destination of the damned. Curiosity became obsession and the child soon found himself unable to enjoy swimming for fear of drowning and winding up in hell. He removed himself from play for fear of neglecting personal reflection and penance. Occasionally, his boyish nature won the day and he played but, as soon as he was done, he felt even more worthy of the lake of fire than before. He found no rest from this topic. He found little peace in the simple joys that once filled his young life. His prayer life increased but he pictured God as a “hard hearted and cruel being” that needed to be placated with prayer in order to “get him pleased and get his favour.” Four years of this spiritual torment went by and no amount of study alleviated his pre-adolescent mind. Then, at the age of twelve, his father informed the family they were moving to a newly-forming colony in the north.

Our tortured theologian was much relieved by this news,

believing the countryside would offer many wholesome distractions “to amuse [and make him] happy.” Such happiness turned out to be an illusion as fear of travelling by sea and reports of vicious Natives in the region once again placed the dual spectres of death and hell before his eyes. Even the pleasantries of the countryside were tainted by fear. Any of the innumerable trees could fall on him or, as his sister had feared all those years earlier, “the next flash of lightning would be commissioned to cut me off.” He found himself longing for the distractions of the city. Reporting on this in later life, the famous man stated this fearful phase to be a vital element of true religion. Every lost soul, he would write, “roving here and there” must remain a “poor, starving, wandering soul, until he finds the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Piety unable to calm him, the young man indulged the desires of his “carnal passions” in order to earn the hell he believed awaited him. Sitting at the breakfast table after an especially raucous night, his mother scolded her wayward son that he alone was the trailblazer of his path to perdition. She warned him that if he refused her sage advice, he could blame only himself—not her—for his eternity in hell. Eyes wide and half-eaten food still in his mouth: “Those words were like pointed arrows to my inmost soul, and struck the greatest blow.” Is there anything more powerful than mom-guilt?

However, conviction didn’t turn to conversion until March in the year before the American Revolution began. The visions, research, trials, temptations, troubles, depressions, wanderings, and fears had done nothing to bring the now 27-year-old man closer to salvation. Grabbing the Bible and letting the book fall open, the words of Psalms 38 and 40 “seemed to go through my whole soul” in such a way that a near lifetime of fear was dispelled in mere moments:

*My whole soul, that was a few minutes ago groaning under mountains of death, wading through storms of sorrow, racked with distressing fears, and crying to an unknown God for help, was now filled with immortal*

*love, soaring on the wings of faith, freed from the chains of death and darkness, and crying out my Lord and my God; thou are my rock and my fortress, my shield and my high tower, [Ps. 18:2] my life, my joy, my present and my everlasting portion. O the astonishing wonders of his grace, and the boundless ocean of redeeming love.<sup>1</sup>*

Henry Alline had come to an ecstatic and personal experience of salvation. In his room, by himself, a bright light appeared and brought him to a place of assurance in his salvation. Such assurance was based not on his own works but because of a loving and forgiving Christ who, “with one drop of...blood” atoned for even as great a sinner as Henry. For the first time since he was eight years old, flashes of light no longer conjured up the terror of a hard-hearted God sending him to hell. Rather, the light transformed into a sweet revelation of a tender-hearted Jesus bringing him into glory. Alline would dedicate the remainder of his life to sharing this message with his fellow colonists in the Township of Yarmouth. Then throughout the predominantly Protestant colony of Nova Scotia (which, at that time, also included the present-day province of New Brunswick). And that, gentle reader, is where I have chosen to begin our story.

The “Apostle of Nova Scotia,” as he came to be known, began an itinerant ministry that would consume the remainder of his short life. By 1784 Alline was dead, but his legacy remains evident in Atlantic Canada to this day. In order to understand the impact of this man we must understand the world in which he lived. In order to do that, we must expand our view beyond the confines of Yarmouth for a moment and move ever out to gaze upon all of Nova Scotia as well as the New England colony of Henry’s birth.

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<sup>1</sup> All previous quotes were from The Journal of Henry Alline. I didn’t include them earlier because I was building to this reveal. Hopefully it worked. Alline’s entire journal is also available for free at [canadiana.ca](http://canadiana.ca)

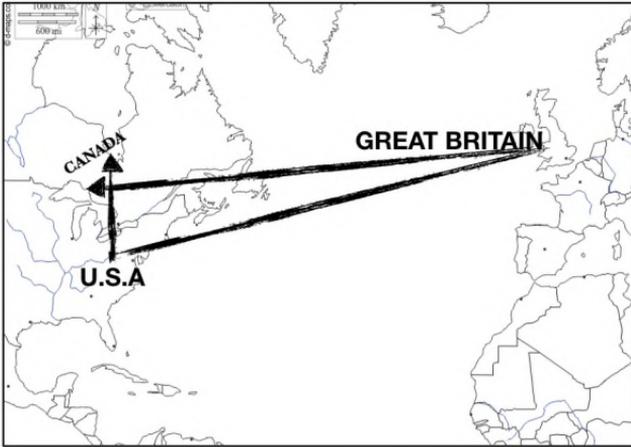
## POWER

This chapter on power is about noting the unique dynamics that defined the early Canadian world. All stereotypes have origin stories and none of them are so pervasive to this place as the myth of the polite Canadian. Like all stereotypes, the secret to its success is rooted in its connection to a truth. Canadian power dynamics have some unique characteristics that have blended and softened over time into the polite Canadian meme. Going back through history reveals the character behind the caricature and the relevance that has for the development of Canadian Christianity.

John Webster Grant speaks of Canada as part of an Atlantic triangle of influence that helps explain the culture. The three points of the triangle are Britain, the U.S.A. and Canada. The last of those three would be the most passive recipient of the beliefs and culture of the other two. However, as we will come to see, there were moments when Canadian ideas were able to traverse the Atlantic Ocean and cross the American border and stimulate genuine change across the pond and south of the border. For the most part, Canadian culture borrows heavily from American and British/European sources and our look at Canadian Christianity needs to begin by taking that seriously.

Canada is the proud child of the largest and most influential empire the world has ever seen. It also shares an undefended border with the largest and most influential republic the world has ever seen. Despite the fact that the aforementioned Empire and Republic actually went to war against each other on a few occasions, Canada was able to somehow navigate those cataclysmic tensions and remain intact. Not only that, but it somehow remained independent from both as well. How was this seemingly miraculous feat achieved? That answer to that question changes generationally, but the foundation upon which those changes rest is Canada's strange relationship to power: A relationship that is neither American nor British, and we forget that at our own peril.

I began this chapter noting that if Canadians know one



The Atlantic Triangle of Influence. Drawing by Author

thing about themselves it is that they are not American; but that's not entirely true is it? We are much more American than we may care to admit and historically the Republic has been the more dominant of our two main influences.

If you doubt the accuracy of what I am saying just think back to a time when you were watching an American TV show and it referenced a Canadian city. It kind of gives you a bit of a thrill to hear a Canadian city mentioned on an American show doesn't it? Or think about when someone talks about a famous athlete or celebrity and how quick we are to say, "Did you know that he or she is Canadian?" Don't feel bad, we all do it. Granted this kind of evidence won't stand up to any kind of academic critique, but it gets to the point I am making. In this chapter on power, I think it is important to talk about the birth of America because the Republic's understandings of power have impacted Canadian views. We need to see how we have inherited and altered the British and American definitions of power. Therefore, we begin in the time the Republic overthrew the power of the Empire.

In this chapter we are going to look at the following:

1. The American Revolution and revolutionary theology
2. The legacy of Henry Alline and early Canadian Evangelicalism
3. Issues with revivalism in Canada
4. Protestantism's arrival in Canada

5. Canada's interesting relationship with power
6. Canada: A nation of losers
7. Early Black Canadian Christians
8. Early Canadian Christianity
9. To cope or to conquer?

## **REVOLUTIONARY THEOLOGY**

In 1776, the 13 American colonies declared independence from Great Britain and officially crossed over into rebellion. There were several prominent Nova Scotians who, like the Alline family, had been born and raised in the newly-rebellious colony of New England. This collection of merchants and farmers were influential and desired the maritime stronghold of Nova Scotia to join in the overthrowing of King George's government. Several trips to various rebel bases to meet none other than General George Washington had tremendous potential to align the people of Nova Scotia with the rebellion. These families even proposed that Washington invade, an offer he considered but eventually refused.

There were numerous valid complaints about the colonial government that could have won the province over to the revolutionary side. Many Nova Scotians retained close family and business connections to the colonies that would only sweeten the deal. Not to mention the fun and excitement at the idea of building a government by, and for, the people. Nova Scotia's loyalty hung in the balance and, in the early days of the rebellion, popular sentiment seemed to be sliding toward rebellion. However, by the final year of the Revolutionary War, sentiment had shifted decidedly back in the King's favour. That raises the questions: what happened and what does this have to do with Canadian Christianity or Henry Alline?

I don't want to overstate the case but there has been some good scholarship done by American Revolutionary historians to show the role of religion in providing some language for the Revolution. After all, the British Empire was a Christian Empire

(a theme we'll return to again) and any colony that desired to overthrow such an Empire must question its allegiance to God. This was the Empire that had bested the Catholic Empires of Spain and France, this was the Empire that legislated only Protestants could sit on the throne, this was the Empire that gave birth to the anti-Catholic Church of England (are you detecting a certain anti-Catholicism? Good, you should have by now), this was the empire that raised up Protestant heroes like John Foxe, John Bunyan, and John Wesley (ironically, all of whom were considered enemies of the Church of England at one point or another).

However, it was another John—Jonathan Edwards—that has the most relevance to the topic at hand. His famous revivals throughout the 13 colonies influenced countless lives and made him a religious superstar throughout the Empire. He, and his much more charismatic contemporary George Whitefield, were able to catch theological lightning within a colonial bottle and create a somewhat uniquely American expression of faith. Such expressions were more emotive and dramatic and personal than even the most expressive versions back across the pond. This was colonial American faith and it was so successful that historians of the period call Whitefield America's first national celebrity. Given America's ongoing love affair with celebrities, I hope you are sensing the depth of his influence over the American colonial psyche.

Not only did the teachings of Whitefield and Edwards convict individual persons, they also contained compelling and emotive theology that brought low the institutions of the old world and elevated the importance of the individual in matters of salvation. There were numerous other reasons for the Revolutionary War but such ideas can clearly be seen in there as well. Whitefield spent his revivalist career in America and Scotland and his Calvinism created churches with strong senses of destiny and religious language for their separatist nationalism. In the case of America, such nationalism revolved around celebration of the individual that made rejection of the

Empire not only palatable but necessary. Britain had erred and, like the Israelites of old, become complacent in faith; it was time for the faithful in the New World to take over.

## THE IMPACT OF HENRY ALLINE

Whatever your thoughts are on such theological matters, the point is that Edwards and Whitefield made theological arguments that influenced countless American Christians. Quebec's French Catholicism rendered such Protestant arguments irrelevant but why weren't the good Protestants of Nova Scotia swayed? The Apostle of Nova Scotia might offer an answer. Alline was raised in the theologies of these men and their Calvinist teachings go a long way to explain the young Henry's conviction of personal sin. However, Alline was also self-educated and he was unable to reconcile the character of the loving God he believed set him free from damnation with the harsh doctrines of Edwards' Calvinism. To Alline, God was a gracious and loving Lord who offered salvation to all creatures but, in His divine grace, also granted humans the ability to make the decision for themselves. That more nuanced and positive view of the human role in salvation resonated with the neutral Yankees of Nova Scotia.

Alline was so good at communicating to his fellow American-born colonists that historians credit him with inspiring Nova Scotia's Great Awakening. The differences between the Nova Scotia and New England Awakenings boils down to theology. The style and result of both were strikingly similar but Alline never utilized Edwards' *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* approach. He was so adamantly opposed to Calvinism that many of the early Maritime Baptist churches, themselves staunchly Calvinist, considered Alline an embarrassment due to his theology. These later 19th century churches decided to downplay Alline's influence, even though most traced their origins to his Awakening. This is why many Canadians have heard little about this influential preacher.

However, Alline's influence remains crucial for two very

important reasons: 1) Nova Scotia's isolated communities and rugged geography aided its neutrality throughout the revolution. Those who wanted to raise a concerted effort to overthrow the British simply could not get enough people together. Alline, on the other hand, was able to unite people together from the Minas Basin to the Bay of Fundy and over to the South Shore with such effectiveness that a concerted intellectual stream can be detected by the time of his death; 2) historians have convincingly argued that the Great Awakening was instrumental in preserving Nova Scotia's neutrality in the Revolution.

As the war dragged on, Maurice Armstrong argues Nova Scotians viewed Alline's revivals as a "retreat from the grim realities of the world...an escape from fear and divided loyalties." This is a theme we are going to see again in the next chapter because the harshness and isolation many of these colonists experienced was alleviated most effectively by travelling preachers like Alline. He gave, in Armstrong's words: "self-respect and satisfaction to people whose economic and political position was both humiliating and distressing"<sup>2</sup> as well as an alternative theological paradigm to Edwards' and Whitefield's America. Alline's legacy was that he brought revivalism without the addition of Republicanism. He ensured that Colonial American theology in Atlantic Canada remained faithfully wed to the first part of that title, and only flirted a little with the second part.

And that is how the Apostle of Nova Scotia received his second nickname: the first Nova Scotian. It was in Alline's ability to somewhat ignore or re-invent the New England traditions (like Calvinism) in which he was raised that made him able to create theology that suited his Nova Scotia home. It had similar language, it had similar enthusiasm, it had similar disregard for existing religious institutions (more on that later in this chapter), but it did not follow familiar New England teachings.

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<sup>2</sup> M. W. Armstrong, "Neutrality and Religion in Revolutionary Nova Scotia," *New England Quarterly* (Mar. 1946), 50-61.

This gave it an almost innovative appeal to these early colonists. The so-called Nova Scotia Yankees “turned to a religious rather than a political figure in their search for guidance on the many distressing problems produced by the war...Religious values that were specifically ‘Nova Scotian’ in character were beginning to emerge.”<sup>3</sup>

Such intellectual trends were completely ignored in the rest of the world but that also provides an important element of Alline’s influence. Henry was just as comfortable eschewing British ideas as he was the ideas of New England. Although we don’t know much about rural Nova Scotia during this time, the lack of international attention made it quite easy for Henry and his New Light followers (as they came to be known) to jettison any Old World thinking that they didn’t care to appropriate. Nova Scotia’s Great Awakening looked like Edwards’ Great Awakenings but contained within it teachings that rejected rebellious American sentiments and created a dominant religious climate just British enough to stay neutral.

If Canadian culture is a blending, and rejecting, of European and American ideologies into something that is a mix of both and neither than 18th century Nova Scotia might be the birth of Canada. And if Henry Alline is largely responsible for popularizing such sentiments then he might be more than the First Nova Scotian, he might be the first ever Canadian.

That’s right, the first Canadian was born in America.

## ISSUES WITH CANADIAN REVIVALISM

I want to introduce you to another person who will help us segue into a discussion on the nature and definition of power. The term would come to mean very different things depending on location. The United States and Canada have historically different interpretations of power due, in large part, to the historic journeys of these two similar but separate

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3 Stewart, Gordon & Rawlyk, George. *A People Highly Favoured of God: The Nova Scotia Yankees and the American Revolution*. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1972), 79-80.

nations. Often Canadian Christians fail to take such differences into account and among such oversights is the desire of some Canadian Christians for revival.

Revivalism in Canada has always been a beast of a different stripe when compared to America. For those who think that evangelical-style revivals might jump start the present-day Canadian Church I offer the following as the first of a few cautionary tales you will encounter in this book.

In May, the year before Alline died, an Irish Anglican living in New York was told of a clerical position opening in Nova Scotia. In August of 1787 the Bishopric of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick (a separate political identity from Nova Scotia since 1784), Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, and Quebec was given to Charles Inglis. The 53-year-old would occupy this seat for the remaining 29 years of his life. Beginning in 1758, Inglis had served in Delaware and then New York until his loyalty to the Crown made his presence in the newly formed United States impossible.

During the war, Inglis lost an estimated \$84,000 worth of property (that's in *18th century dollars*), one of his churches was burned by rebels, and he had been made a widower twice (his wives died of natural causes, can't blame the revolution for that). He left it all behind and preached his inaugural sermon at St. Paul's Halifax on October 28, 1787. Inglis began his bishopric in a land that was technically loyal but looked, from his vantage point at least, entirely too American. The man's personal experiences with the Revolution didn't equip him to handle Nova Scotian revivalism with much charity.

Although evangelical, the Baptists destined to hold such sway over Nova Scotia were also counted among Alline's detractors. Even though Alline and his New Lights are largely credited with bringing Baptist Churches to prominence, the man's theology was anything but Baptist. He didn't care about people's thoughts on child Baptism and believed all such arguments to be carnal and not spiritual. His already mentioned anti-Calvinism also did not enamour him to the Baptists. While

his New Light communities and much of his evangelical style remained, his teachings and influence began to recede shortly after his death. The Baptists provide examples of those who were both evangelical and pro-revival, but still anti-Alline.

Inglis is an example of someone who was staunchly anti-revivalist and opposed to evangelicalism; and there were plenty more like him as you'll see. I bring this up because the New Lights and Alline would eventually be overshadowed by the Baptists in Atlantic Canada. It would take the research of later historians, working years after his death, to reclaim Alline as the father of Atlantic evangelical Christianity. The stories of Alline, the Baptists, and Inglis help explain Canada's more complex attitude towards revivalism.

While Canada has enjoyed revivals throughout its short history, Canadian revivalism as a mobilizing and unifying force simply doesn't have legs. True, there have been explosions of revivalism periodically in the nation's brief history (as we'll see) but the only denominations able to create longevity from such events are the ones who turned passion and excitement into order and organization. Alline created an experience of the heart and it won the day for a while, but it was the Baptists' ability to create an organization of the head that made them the victors in the end.

Historic figures like Bishop Charles Inglis also explain why Canada is a land in which revivalisms are measured much more modestly than some might think. The head of Nova Scotia's established church (the Church of England was established by the British government to be the only official church recognized in the land) failed to see Alline or his New Lights as anything other than "enthusiastics" who seemed too American in their manners. Such people and their practices constituted a threat to both the established English church in the colony and the colony's loyalty to the Crown. While Inglis remained oppositional to these travelling revivalists for the duration of his career, it should be noted that his rancor did not trickle down to

the colonists in the pews.

This unique tension between official power and actual power must remain in your mind. Since inception, Canada has been a child of Empires (French and then English) and Empires are nothing if not organized. Governors always sought precision and yet the governed were comfortable evading official rules they deemed ill-fitting. Despite having the massive resources of the Empire at their disposal, officials like Inglis often found the implementation of their desires infuriatingly ignored. These early Canadians were able to side-step undesirable Imperial wishes without ever stepping into—or even admiring—the revolutionary spirit of America. Early Canadians founded a land that genuinely respected institutions of the Old World while still enjoying some exciting New World innovations. Balancing such tensions created a new nation even as it created some new problems as well.

From the Protestant Christian perspective, this tension created one of the many identity issues that plague Canadian Christianity to this day. Canadian evangelicals looked too conservative to American innovators but they also looked too enthusiastic for the tastes of the Imperial guard who actually had power in Canada. This strange balance is unique to Canada and strengthens the argument that sudden and dramatic outpourings of the Spirit have limited effect here. Controversial (or heretical) as that may sound, let me place this statement in a historical context to further explain what I mean and why this is so important to the Canadian dynamics of power.

## **PROTESTANTISM COMES TO CANADA**

The French were the first substantive European presence in Northern America and they entered into numerous arrangements with the Indigenous people already living here. Despite the awareness of the evils of colonialism present today, the missionaries and merchants that built Nouveau France simply lacked the ability to force conformity onto the original inhabitants. I am not arguing that oppression didn't occur, but

that is a more 19th century issue due to the material advancement this nation experienced during that time. The Jesuits desired conversion but also took the time to learn about the cultures, languages, and rituals of the people they were evangelizing. In the cases of Fathers Jean De Brebouf and Gabriele LAlemant, some even died horrible deaths alongside the people whom they had grown to love.

Some of the Indigenous people early missionaries encountered accepted Christ as a new God, while others simply added the carpenter of Nazareth to an existing pantheon. Still others rejected Christianity outright, as a tool of a foreign invader. Those who accepted Catholic teachings tended to do better financially and became skilled with European technology and conversant in European language and culture. Those who remained more suspicious and remote lived in much the same fashion as before. The French government had uses for all of them and saw little point in aggravating such relations unless they threatened economic gains, which they rarely did. Forts were constructed and the timber and fur trades brought unbelievable wealth both to France and to the rugged lands such trees and animals called home. The relationship was so mutually beneficial that it came to the attention of the British. The British used their massive Atlantic naval presence and expelled a tremendous amount of energy to overthrow French claims.

After a long and complex struggle, the final battle between the English and the French was settled within earshot of Quebec City. In a battle on the Plains of Abraham that took less time to complete than the length of an average sitcom episode, the British finally took Quebec and the St. Lawrence from the French. They also recognized that Nova Scotia was the gate to this new land of opportunity, and the British were not going to allow potentially traitorous French Catholics to occupy such valuable real estate.

Henry's family moved north because, from 1755-1764, the British government was kicking French Catholic inhabitants out of Nova Scotia. The Expulsion of the Acadians (as this came to be

known) freed up large tracts of land for loyal, English-speaking, Protestant colonists. Many Acadians died while others headed south to French lands in Louisiana (these Acadians, would become the “Cajun” population that remains to this day). While the Great Upheaval (another name it was given) in Nova Scotia was brutal, it also serves to highlight the strange clemency Britain displayed in other parts of the colony.

### **CANADA'S INTERESTING RELATIONSHIP WITH POWER**

The origin story of Canada took place in the age of Empires, of which the British Empire was one among many. However, new ideas were gaining traction and Canada, as a newer version of a nation, was more amenable to the novelty of modern era diplomacy. While people groups have always conquered other people groups, the modern age was the first to genuinely view peaceful cohabitation between differing groups as a possibility.

Obviously, the ongoing wars of the modern period reveal the failure of people to genuinely treat peace as a virtue but that is not the point. Philosophers, political theorists, satirists, and authors had provided language and critiques for the unchecked love of violence they argued was normative of former, and less civilized, ages. Such teachings, along with the practical obstacles of the land itself, explain what is unique about Canada: the conquerors didn't force the conquered to become like them.

The Articles of Capitulation from 1759 and the subsequent Treaty of Paris in 1763 made it law that the inhabitants of Quebec (which encompassed both present day Quebec, south-western Ontario, and significant amounts of Michigan and Ohio) could maintain their property, language, and even their Catholic religion (Acadians of Nova Scotia and some others excepted) as long as they sent their wares to the British.

This chapter begins in 1760 because that decade saw massive change as well as solid continuity. 1760 was the first decade of British rule but it also was the 16th consecutive decade of French inhabitation. In such upheaval and stability, we see a microcosm of all the other shifts and changes we are going

to explore in this book. Historically, even the most potentially cataclysmic changes tend to bring with them a sense of the old and familiar which has made them more palatable.

This land was handled with kid gloves when it first came over to British hands. By 1760 French Catholics had been transformed, with the swipe of a pen, into subjects of the British Protestant Crown. However, they also had rights that protected all that was important to them and that was very reassuring. With the exception of the Acadians, the power and might of Britain did not translate into tyranny and that had a lasting and beneficial effect on the people.

What Henry Alline was able to do for American-born, non-revolutionaries in the Maritimes, the Catholic priests were able to do for their French adherents farther up the St. Lawrence. Imperial policies toward British North America struck a balance that gave people freedom and autonomy as long as the colony remained profitable.

British North America came into being in an age of empires but also in an age of revolutions. America's success inspired the peasantry of France to revolt against their clergy and nobility. Since the Catholic Church was decimated in the French Revolution, French Canadian clergy would remain forever suspicious of revolutionary America. These priests and leaders literally thanked God for a British Empire that protected their faith through the rule of English law. The British were so good to the French that many historians have wondered why similar attitudes were not adopted for the English of the 13 colonies. Arguably, that would have prevented the Revolution from ever happening in the first place.

Thanks to British policies, Catholicism would remain the dominant form of Christianity in Canada. The unintended consequences of such policies also gave rise to the most violent, divisive, and formative threat in the Canadian story. I am going to leave that ominous statement hanging for now, but rest assured we will unpack that more later in this chapter.

No Canadian Protestant church has ever been as large or

as influential as the Catholic Church and that is something many Canadians tend to overlook. It also offers another explanation why revivalism has always been more of an American event than a Canadian one. Revivalism in the past few hundred years comes out of Protestant movements that made few inroads into Catholicism.

The origin story of America is one of adventure and thumbing noses at the powers that be and revival fits beautifully within that narrative. The more successful America became, the more influence its ideas garnered around the globe. The American story was quickly romanticized throughout Europe (even in England itself) and it became an admired nation where anyone could become anything; the notable and strange exception is that its closest neighbour and friend retained a much more nuanced perspective.

As the New World of America literally broke free from the Old World, the land that would become Canada forged another path, one that maintained Old World connections while building relationships with the New. America's audacious rejection of Empire necessitated its governmental inventiveness but that is not part of the Canadian story. Early Canadians chose a path more interested in peace and stability than innovation and political upheavals. John Quincy Adams, Alexis de Tocqueville, and the like had less pull over cities like Quebec, Montreal, or Halifax than they did in capitals like London, Paris, or Washington. These orators and champions of modern democracy meant even less in the lands of the Huron, Iroquois, and Hudson Bay fur trappers. That is not to say that early Canadians were ignorant of American philosophers and statesmen, but it is to say that cheap rent, low taxes, and fertile land proved more compelling than political philosophies.

Power dynamics across the globe were shifting as well in cataclysmic ways. The collection of Old World empires was collapsing into New World revolutionary and democratic states. These proto-Canadians were attempting to find their way in such messy and exciting times and they were attempting to

do so as a collection of loyal(ish) Roman Catholics, Revivalist New Lights, Calvinist Baptists, fragmented Presbyterians, and overwhelmed Anglicans. But this chapter is not about rivalry (that's coming next); this chapter is about power. In order to continue our understanding of early Canadian culture we have to introduce the United Empire Loyalists and discover the most important and painful element of Canada as it pertains to power.

Canada, my gentle reader, is a nation of losers.

### **A NATION OF LOSERS**

Now, if you are Canadian, I am sure that doesn't feel too good to read (I didn't enjoy writing it) but allow me some time to defend my position. In order to make my point, I need you to perform a simple action. Please put this book down, stand up, turn 180 degrees, and then take several steps away from the place you are currently residing (if you are in public you are excused from this exercise for obvious social reasons). Once you have completed that action, return to the book and continue reading.

Done? Good, you have now physically enacted the birth of English-speaking Upper Canada.

Upper Canada is a story of people who had to turn their back and walk away from all that they had known and begin again in a new land. This is not the story of the neutral New Englanders of Nova Scotia nor the faithful French Catholics of Quebec, this is the saga of the United Empire Loyalists (UEL) of what would come to be known as Ontario. This is as close as English Canada gets to a dramatic origin story (the 16th century French have a good one but we've already covered how that turned out). While the British had a strong Anglophone presence in Atlantic Canada, the province we call Ontario was destined to have even greater influence over the course of this nation. That is why we must look to the UEL to complete our picture of Canadian power dynamics.

It is a complex relationship because of the inhabitants' experience with loss. From the various First Nations people, to

the French on the Plains of Abraham, to the Acadians allowed to remain in Nova Scotia, to the intake of British Loyalists in the wake of the Revolutionary War, Canada was predominantly filled with those who know what it means to lose. For all the rhetoric of British Imperial superiority, the lived experiences of those who called British North America home was one of defeat and humiliation, and that impacted the goals these people set for themselves.

By way of illustration I offer you this coin created a few decades after the period we are currently exploring (see image). This is the coin of the Loyal and Patriotic Society of Upper Canada. It was minted during the War of 1812 as a token of patriotism for those who had served in the war. Money was collected for the families of soldiers who had been killed or wounded and Anglican Rev. John Strachan (a character we'll meet in the next chapter) was one of the architects of this noble social outreach. These were given to soldiers and civilians alike who had served meritoriously on the field of battle or in their care for fellow Upper Canadians. I want you to note the imagery on the coin. The script is "Upper Canada Preserved" indicating the thwarting of America's ambitions during the 1812 war (the other side features a garland of leaves like those

given to ancient Greek athletes and states: "For Merit. Presented by a Grateful Country"). A body of water bisects the coin and while there is some debate amongst Canadian scholars as to which body of water this represents, the point is that the water indicates the border between America and Upper



Picture of the Loyal and Patriotic Society of Upper Canada Medal. Images from [fortyork.ca](http://fortyork.ca)

Canada. On the American side is the Eagle, wings open and

clearly ready to pounce. On our side is an industrious beaver, minding its own business and literally too engrossed in the work of chewing a tree to be aware of the imminent danger. Thankfully for our hapless woodland creature, the great Lion of England sits nearby ever vigilant and on guard. Were it not for the Lion, clearly the beaver would be carried away by the aggressive bird of prey. This coin shows the condemnation of American aggression, the celebration of Upper Canadian industry, and the protection of England. More to the point, this is Upper Canadians at their most patriotic; self-identifying as a defenseless (though hard-working) animal clearly at the mercy of America were it not for the British. Once again, this was on a coin specifically minted for, and dedicated to, patriotism. That is what I mean by humbler goals.

In the years immediately following the Revolution, those who had remained loyal to the British Crown found their homes in the newly birthed republic less than inviting. The War of Independence (and the later 1812 conflict as well) was more of a civil war than an international one. I bring that up because civil strife produces a different psychological impact. A civil war feels differently because it isn't an invasion from beyond, it is a betrayal from within.

Imagine with me for a moment: you and I are neighbours but are on opposite sides of a volatile ideological issue that has turned into war. If I snitched on you to the government and cost you land, money, freedom, or even the lives of some of your loved ones, you will likely retain some hostility towards me. If your side won the war and my side lost, it would also be likely that you would use your newfound success to exact revenge on me. I am not saying that you would do that, gentle reader, I am just saying that is exactly what happened to thousands of Loyalists who, in the late 1700s, found themselves on the losing side of a revolution.

These Loyalists, like you did a moment ago, turned their backs on home and walked north to the remaining British lands of Quebec, hoping to find a better life within the Empire they

had sacrificed to defend. Although the records are spotty and the numbers are debatable, a conservative estimate is that around 14,000 Loyalists left the former colonies, forcing the British Government to split the French Catholic Quebec into two parts: Upper and Lower Canada. The former would house the English-Speaking, largely Protestant refugees from the States, while the latter would retain a French-Speaking Catholic heritage. This is the start of Ontario and it was peopled with losers from the Revolution just as Quebec was peopled with the French losers from the Plains of Abraham.

So potent is this memory that numerous Canadian cities have statues of the UEL in their downtown cores and numerous churches possess UEL graveyards to commemorate the lives of those who helped create Canada. While

Americans enjoy the

patriotic artwork of George Washington crossing the Delaware to begin the war against the tyrant King George, Canada has artistic representations of beleaguered and exhausted families dragging their meager possessions northward looking anything but dignified or victorious. A true juxtaposition between the two nations if ever there was one.



Photo taken by Author at Dundurn Castle, Hamilton.

## EARLY BLACK CANADIANS

Included within those UEL was another group all too familiar with the losing side of history: Black freed slaves who desired to flee from America. The numbers and experiences of the Black UEL of Niagara were largely the same. Thanks to the records of St. Mark's Anglican Church in Niagara, we are able to ascertain the names and many of the experiences of the Black UEL who settled on the peninsula.

One such story comes from the 1790s about a free man given the name of Peter Martin. Peter was born into slavery but was stolen from his owner and sold again. He escaped and returned to his original owner, Colonel John Butler of the famous Butler's Rangers. But here is where the tale gets interesting. Under British law, any slave who escaped and sought sanctuary under the Crown, had to be set free. Therefore, Peter was set free but his children had never been stolen so the law didn't extend to them. According to St. Mark's baptism registry from 6 January 1793, Peter's daughter Jane, was baptized and she was listed as "daughter of Martin, Col. Butler's Negro."

The British abolished slavery thanks to the evangelical beliefs of William Wilberforce, a fact that was utilized by numerous colonial Anglican churches throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century denominational rivalries to show moral superiority over America. For now, the UEL and the Black UEL provide more examples of those who had lost so much and were attempting to re-build in another land. Sadly, despite the arguments of Anglican clergy, such shared experiences of loss were unable to breed equality between Black and white UEL. Skin colour kept many Black UEL from benefitting in the same ways as their white fellow Loyalists.

Charles Inglis was among the 30,000 UEL who landed in Atlantic Canada rather than Upper Canada. Their arrival cemented the neutrality of Alline's period into a loyalty that had been purchased on the battlefield. The Atlantic UEL, like their Upper Canadian counterparts, had suffered to remain British. Thanks to them, the Maritimes would remain a naval stronghold

for the British Empire on the North American continent.

As many as 10% of those who fled to Atlantic Canada were Black as well. The Black UEL helped clear land and build Shelburne as well as starting Birchtown (named in honour of General Samuel Birch of New York, who had issued the certificates allowing them to emigrate). The climate and geography didn't allow for the plantation style of the southern United States and those UEL who had "servants for life" (their polite way of saying slave) often sent their slaves into other warmer climates. While technically free, the treatment of these Loyalists was also anything but equal. As time went by, many built successful lives in Atlantic Canada and men like Inglis baptized many of the Black loyalists and welcomed them into the Anglican fold. However, most were unable to pay the pew fees of the more exclusive churches and so became adherents of the New Light, Baptist, and Methodist churches that were growing throughout the colony, much to the annoyance of Inglis.

Quickly, the social structures of British colonial life ensured that only the wealthiest of Black loyalists could even entertain the notion of entering into white circles of influence. For the vast majority the new life in the old colony created numerous obstacles. Many had issued petitions requesting land and permanent settlement but were coming up against what can only be called institutional racism. However, evangelical philanthropists remained committed to development and the colony's connection to the Empire opened up opportunities not available in America. In 1808, the British Empire established a nation of freed slaves designed to be self-governing. The British government did this, in part, to thank Black subjects who had fought for the Crown in the Revolutionary War. Thus was the nation of Sierra Leone created and the Black UEL of Atlantic Canada were among those invited to apply for relocation there. Colonial authorities, overestimating the freedom the Black UEL felt, estimated 100 colonists might be interested; 1200—nearly half of the Black UEL population—applied.

Those who remained in Atlantic Canada found ways to

build new lives along with, and apart from, their fellow colonists. When Baptist preacher David George brought his message of equality, he did not find a warm welcome within the white community of Shelburne. Concerns grew that such teaching might encourage the servants to jettison their feelings of inferiority and so he was banished to the woods outside of town. George was a freed slave and focused most of his preaching on the motif of freedom that took Alline's similar thinking to an even more personal conclusion. Eventually, he was gifted  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre of land and began his own church in Shelburne that was popular across racial divides. However, when he baptized a white couple, the woman's family became incensed and the remainder of his days George would face obstacles due solely to his skin colour.

In Birchtown, a maimed former slave who went by the name of Moses Wilkinson led a Methodist community and inspired at least 2 Black circuit riders. Anglicans of Brindley Town could claim Joseph Leonard as their preacher. Ultimately, the evangelical and somewhat anti-institutional land created by Alline allowed space for Black loyalists to create their own churches, independent of interference from their white fellow colonists. In the words of Dorrie Phillips, these churches were "the one place they felt autonomous, where they could express their depth of feeling and their hope of salvation. It alone was pure and holy and offered a refuge."<sup>4</sup>

## EARLY CANADIAN CHRISTIANITY

The stories of the Black UEL are important and illuminate two important factors for Canadian Christianity. The first is to dispel the myth that Canada was always more progressive in matters of race than America. In one sense that is true as the British Empire outlawed slavery much earlier than the States. In a more accurate sense, the small collection of stories above also demonstrate the substantial obstacles Black people had to—and have to—contend with in Canada.

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<sup>4</sup> Dorrie Phillips, "Early Years of the Black Loyalists." *Loyalists in Nova Scotia*. (Hantsport: Lancelot Press, 1983), 76.

The other reason returns us to my earlier ominous comment about the violent internal conflict within the Canadian story. While there have always been tensions between Black and White Canadians, such tensions have not been as formative to Canada as they have been in America. The more dominant conflict in Canada has always been the English/French divide. The treaties of the 1760s guaranteed French Catholics inherent rights in the British system, but the arrival of the UEL to Quebec throughout the 1780s and beyond put such rights to the test.

The thousands of UEL streaming into Quebec believed the British government owed them compensation and resources for the losses they had experienced due to their loyalty. Chief among such concerns were materials for rebuilding homes, lives, farms, and churches.

Tales of woe and hardship at the hands of Revolutionaries are woven throughout the UEL narrative and some of the most condemning have to do with the treatment of clergy and churches. The Anglican Rev. John Stuart's church was plundered and "turned into a tavern...in ridicule and contempt, a barrel of rum was placed in the reading desk."<sup>5</sup>

History would name Stuart the "Father of the Upper Canada Church" but that only came to be so because of his experience of profound loss. Stuart's journey into Canadian Christian history began when his family, including three small children, eventually found America so unpleasant that they made their way north to Quebec. It took them three weeks but, once they arrived, Stuart also found securing a job problematic. He noted there were only three Anglican parishes present and those that were there had "Pastors...which are Frenchmen." He would take various jobs in order to make ends meet before heading west to a newly forming Loyalist garrison in Cataraqui (near Kingston, ON) in August of 1785. He would provide numerous records of the state of religion throughout the territory in those early days.

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<sup>5</sup> The quotes in this section are all found from sources in William Canniff, *The Settlement of Upper Canada*, (Belleville: Milka Screening, 1971), 260-5.

Pleasantly he would note that the Mohawk Village on the Grand Bend River possessed “700 souls...with an elegant church in the centre; it has a handsome steeple and bell, and is well finished within.” More common were his comments about the scarcity of both religion and civilization among the various Mohawks he encountered as well as some UEL settlements. His is only one among numerous stories of Protestant clergy overcoming hardships to make it to British territory and begin the arduous task of re-building churches and communities.

Anglicans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, Quakers, and a collection of other smaller sects arrived; names like Ogilvie, Stuart, Addison, Langhorn, Wyner, Turner, Holts, Wiem, Schwerderger, Myers, Weant, McDowell, McDonell, Smart, Noxen, Leavens, Hicks, Sand, Lossee, Tuffey, Heck, and Bowman entered into the rolls of newly forming Canadians. I could go on and on about the various UEL names and the places that they founded and part of me wants to do that. However, the more pragmatic part of me recognizes that lists don’t make for good reading (I mean, I can’t think of too many people who love reading the Book of Numbers) so I will wrap this up by focusing on some of the themes of these various Protestants.

At the risk of over-simplifying the diversity to be found within Protestantism, there are a few themes that can be detected in most of them. First is a desire to be removed from French oversight. Frequently throughout the words of these people is the rejection of a Romish (their word for Catholic) and French government and the demand for a British system of representation.

Next, is the centrality of finding land and structures for the preferred style of worship. The Baptists of Thurlow were jubilant when their small house of worship was finally completed. The chapel completion was a point of pride because it “was mainly built by each member going to the place and working at the building, from time to time.” Others, like the Quakers, had less need for formal structures, who preferred being “far removed from the busy haunts of men,” and took

more time to construct their first Meeting House. In each group, whatever their respective attitudes to sacred space, was a desire to build a community of faith after their own consciences (this is something that we will see again in a future chapter).

However, the most important theme was interpreting the losses each new citizen of Upper Canada had faced. For Anglicans and Presbyterians, loss was framed within the biblical narrative of Israel in which only a small remnant of the faithful were called to rebuild God's chosen nation. They, along with Baptists and the Methodists, pointed to the life of Jesus and reminded their adherents that his "loss" on the cross was actually the moment of salvation. These UEL Protestant clergy preached that the people were not abandoned by God. Rather, they were tasked with a new and holy endeavour by God. The treatment many of the people in the pews had endured at the hands of their former brothers proved that the new United States was a violent, disrespectful, and debauched place. The struggles of their new homeland were to be greeted with thanksgiving and praise because each person hearing such sermons was chosen of the Lord. Despite the losses these Christians had faced, they were asked "if God is for us, who can possibly be against us?"

Such theology reframed loss as a spiritual blessing to be sought after, not avoided, by the faithful. The UEL had received God's blessing, not His wrath; they hadn't been beaten, they had been spared. They had been emancipated from their own hostile Egyptian homeland—a land that abused them for their fidelity. They had been guided through the wilderness (literally) and replanted in the new Canaan. John Stuart is once again useful as he wrote the following to a friend: "How mysterious are the ways of Providence! How short-sighted we are! Some years ago I thought it a great hardship to be banished into the wilderness, and would have imagined myself completely happy, could I have exchanged it for a place in the City of Philadelphia—now the best wish we can form for our dearest friends is to have them removed to us." That, gentle reader, is the power of loser theology.

While America saw their victory over the British as evidence of God's blessing, UEL theology argued the exact opposite. They saw in the formation of the United States just another example of human guile the Bible time and again condemned as fool-hardy and antithetical to the Gospel. The UEL believed their land was a purer land, free from the violence that birthed America. They gave thanks to Providence and laughed at their own inability to see what was right in front of them. They transformed the countless and terrible deprivations, travels, assaults, deaths, fear, and losses they endured into a faith that condemned triumphalism as a false god.

Early Canadian Christians—Catholic and Protestant—were losers, and from that they built an identity that took pride in an industrious faith. A faith that, much like their carpenter Messiah, valued working hard with one's hands. A faith that, like St. Paul, saw beatings, imprisonments, torture, and rejection as indicators of true faith. A faith that was more peaceful, more God-honouring, and closer to the heart of Jesus. A faith that winners like poor America were unable to participate in. Over time, these early UEL ministers and leaders transformed the Revolutionary War into the moment of America's spiritual undoing. They transformed the collections of struggling losers in their folds into the recipients of God's richest blessings. A uniquely Canadian theology was beginning to form and at its heart was a belief in the sacredness of being a loser.

That could be a solid ending to this section, but I don't want to overstate the benevolence in such thinking or argue that Canadian faith was actually more peaceful. Within these teachings lay problematic and violent themes as well. Like the Israelites of old, there was much work for the UEL Protestants to do on behalf of the Kingdom. Like the Promised Land of Moses' time, their new home was also populated by ungodly giants: French Catholics. And like the days of Joshua, many Protestants saw removing these French Catholics as the only way to purify the land for God. This birthed the French and English antagonism that has been a defining trait of Canada and

Canadian Christianity and has caused so much damage to the nation and to countless churches therein.

## TO COPE OR TO CONQUER?

Canadian-born historian and Duke Divinity professor Kate Bowler has an amusing way to demonstrate the differences between her homeland and the American nation she now calls home. On her Twitter account she posted the following:

*One fun example of why Americans privilege a wildly confident and individualistic story about themselves comes from the difference between the American and Canadian constitution.*

*American: life, liberty, pursuit of happiness*

*Canadian: peace, order and good governance*

*There's a lovely example in a lecture by Robert Fulford about how Americans assume everything must be CONQUERED and not, say, coped with. He writes about a Canadian book by Judylyne Fine called 'Your Guide to Coping with Back Pain.'*

*When the same book was acquired by an American publisher, it was re-titled 'Conquering Back Pain.' So Robert Fulford concludes:*

*'[T]here, in a grain of sand, to borrow from William Blake, we can see a world of differing attitudes. Our language reveals how we think, and what we are capable of thinking. Canadians cope. Americans conquer. Canadian readers of that book will assume that back pain will always be with them. Americans will assume that it can be destroyed, annihilated, abolished, conquered. Americans expect life, liberty, happiness, and total freedom from back pain. Canadians can only imagine peace, order, good government, and moderate back pain.'*

*When things get really hard, we must calibrate our expectations to our reality.<sup>6</sup>*

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6 KatecBowler Twitter account. Post from 9/28/20.

I once saw a sign that read “One day, Canada will take over the world, then you’ll all be sorry” and, while meant as a joke, that somewhat gets to my point. We are known for, and take some pride in, an apologetic culture. While Canadians might not be suspicious of control or even dominance, there is an inherent issue with triumphalism. Unlike our neighbours to the south, Canadians do not have a dominant national creation myth and that reality has, in Dr. Bowler’s words, calibrated our expectations.

We have no revolution, we have neutrality.

We have no founding fathers; we have loyal losers.

Even though there have always been more Catholics, Protestants have the administrative advantage.

This is a land that seems incapable of overt acts of power. Yet Canadians are also enculturated in American ideologies and definitions of power in very pervasive ways. This is a problem when we cross-pollinate our definitions of success with America’s or even Britain’s. If we conflate our stories, theologies, and culture with these more obviously victorious nations without seeing inherent differences, we set ourselves up for failure. We don’t have the same stories, so we can’t have the same definitions either.

This chapter on power has sought to show the origins of Canada as a creation of the modern nation state in relation to the Atlantic triangle of influence. Compared to America and Britain, Canada was the weakest of the three. It had the least amount of people, it was the least developed, its influence was largely as passive recipient rather than proactive agent.

It still had little to call its own in the way of unique culture or thought. However, as I hope you have been seeing, the seeds of the unique expressions of Canadian religious culture were there even if they had yet to bloom. In the next chapter, we will focus more on the internal character of Canada and pay less attention to its relation to the other nations in the triangle. However, as you will come to see, the triangle would never really leave this land that has always retained a connection to both the old and

new worlds.

This is a nation built by British and American immigrants, innumerable and unique Indigenous people, French Catholics and English Protestants, Black and White UEL losers. Such a collective possessed humbler and simpler goals because that was all that was available in those early days. If they were quiet, the authorities pretty much left them alone to build a new life in their rugged and isolated world. Many of these people found life better when they simply put their head down and got to work. Since all had experienced humiliating loss, they found comfort in a belief that such loss was integral to a deep and abiding faith.

It would not be until the land began to industrialize that such mentalities would change. What did remain even during those later changes was a detectable attitude of suspicion regarding power. Such sentiments were not necessarily held by those in power, but even they had to contend with the accepted critiques of their fellow Canadians. Even the powerful in Canada acknowledged the suspicions around power and success because, in many ways, it was too triumphalist, and too American. Thus, a Canadian may not know what he or she is but historical precedent dictates that he or she not be American. This is not a land that embraces the conqueror's heart, this is a land that applauds the virtue to be found in coping.

## RESOURCES

Nancy Christie. *Transatlantic Subjects: Ideas, Institutions, and Social Experience in Post-Revolutionary British North America*. McGill-Queen's University Press: Montreal and Kingston, 2008.

- A sweeping book that covers the transatlantic nature of early Canadian culture. Christie also introduces the idea that Canadian independence is not a slower moving form of American revolutionary spirit. That is a theme that will be covered in greater depth in the next chapter of this book.

John Ralston Saul. *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada*. Toronto: Penguin, 2008.

- Among the many contributions of this book, Saul argues that Canadian culture came from blending the policies of other nations with the Indigenous influences of this land.

Gordon Stewart & George Rawlyk. *A People Highly Favoured of God: The Nova Scotia Yankees and the American Revolution*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1972.

- An insightful collection of writings that argue for the importance of religion in forming early political attitudes in Nova Scotia.

Malcom Gladwell. *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants*. New York: Little, Brown & Co., 2013.

- Gladwell's book creatively elaborates on themes, not necessarily the history, of the loser/underdog mentality touched on in this chapter. This Canadian author captures the surprising good news of being overlooked and not considered in a variety of ways. He doesn't cover Canadian history per se but the title of the book should let you know that the famous biblical

story features large in his thesis. It is an inspirational series of ideas that should fill Canadians with hope and maybe even a bit of pride at our overlooked status.

David Borys. *Cool Canadian History*. Podcast. Available anywhere you get your podcasts.

- Billed as a “wild, wacky, weird, wonderful and downright dark stories in Canadian history” this podcast is well-produced, well-researched and insightful. It gives the audience many points to ponder and actively combats numerous false myths about Canada. This podcast also covers topics related to the church frequently and, while critical, is also fair in such treatments.

### **1 IDEA**

From inception, Canada possessed a nuanced appreciation of power; our narratives of success have been humbler than both the British and American definitions. Anti-authoritarianism in Canada is not just a product of recent culture, but needs to be understood as an ongoing development of historical ideologies before it can be properly addressed.



# New Leaf Press

amplifying innovative Canadian voices

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