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Transactional Leadership at the Start of Transformative Times: John J. Zubly's Opposition to the Stamp Act in Georgia

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Abstract

Aim: *This study examines John J. Zubly's views on leadership by looking at his sermon on the repeal of the Stamp Act.*

Methods: *The study draws on primary and secondary sources, including James MacGregor Burns' theories on transformational and transactional leadership, to explore Zubly's thinking.*

Results: *Like many other prominent Whig-Loyalists, Zubly remained torn between his support for more liberty for the colonies, his desire for order, and his allegiance to Great Britain.*

Conclusion: *Despite his accomplishments and leadership, Zubly's moderation and reliance on transactional leadership proved insufficient in dealing with tumultuous times and rapid change.*

Recommendations: *Moderates facing revolutionary situations and tumultuous times would note that the middle ground often shifts. If they remain inflexible or unaware of change, these leaders will often find themselves out of power or irrelevant, especially if they rely on transactional leadership.*

Keywords: *John J. Zubly, transactional leadership, American Revolution, Whig-Loyalists, Loyalists*

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Introduction

Throughout history, leaders have often encountered the differences between implementing change and creating lasting transformations. Burns (2003) noted that transactional leaders often want to "substitute one thing for another, to give and take, to exchange places, to pass from one place to another." Pointing to the Founding Fathers of the United States as an example, Burns insisted transformational leaders desire "basic alterations in entire systems—revolutions that replace one structure of power with another" (Burns, 2003, 24).

During revolutionary times, transactional leaders, even those who ally themselves with transformative forces, often get left behind, including the moderate royalists and the Girondists during the French Revolution and the Kadets, Social Revolutionaries, and the Octobrists during the Russian Revolution (Burns, 1978). Many transactional leaders tried to find a middle ground between the two conflicting sides during the American Revolution. Among these leaders were the Whig-Loyalists, who stood against the Stamp Act and other policies approved by Parliament. However, despite opposing British policies, these leaders opposed American independence (Benton, 1969).

This study will examine Dr. John J. Zubly, a Calvinist minister from Georgia and a prominent Whig-Loyalist, and his sermon after the repeal of the Stamp Act. Despite offering the sermon a decade before American independence, Zubly revealed much about his thoughts on politics, theology, and leadership, setting the stage for his stormy course during the Revolution.

While largely forgotten today, Zubly ranked as one of colonial Georgia's most prominent social, religious, and political figures. On September 17, 1775, John Adams wrote to his wife Abigail about the Georgia delegation to the Second Continental Congress, signaling Zubly for special attention. While he had reservations about a minister sitting in Congress, Adams praised Zubly as a "Man of Learning and Ingenuity" who spoke several languages. Adams found Zubly to be "a Man of Zeal and Spirit, as We have already seen upon several occasions" (Butterfield, 1963, 280-281). Adams captured much of what made Zubly one of the most important figures in Georgia during the American Revolution. Those characteristics made Zubly the leading pamphleteer in Georgia during the Revolution, and his publications garnered attention across the colonies (Miller, 1982).

Born in Switzerland and basing himself in Savannah, the capital of the fledgling colony of Georgia, Zubly burst onto the political scene during the 1760s, criticizing the Stamp Act and weighing in on religious and political issues. However, while embracing Whig positions, Zubly ultimately opposed American independence, most notably during his brief stint in the Second Continental Congress. In opposing the rising tide toward independence, Zubly quickly lost his popularity in Georgia. Despite his efforts to avoid taking sides, he was forced into exile and, finally, became a Loyalist, supporting the British attempt to squelch American independence. In the summer of 1781, a few months before the final British defeat at Yorktown, Zubly died, a largely forgotten figure (Miller, 1982).

Zubly confronted the same problems many transactional leaders encountered during transformative and revolutionary times. Despite his leadership and willingness to support change, including his opposition to the Stamp Act, the rush of events left Zubly behind. Looking at Zubly will offer lessons on how transactional leadership responds to rapid transformation. By focusing on Zubly, this study will show that the Whig-Loyalists were transactional leaders who, despite their occasional successes, proved ineffective when faced with the transformational forces of the American Revolution. During his time on the public stage, Zubly embraced transactional leadership strategies, pursuing incremental and minor change instead of transformation, ensuring he would be left behind as events moved forward.

Despite the passage of two and a half centuries, American politics of the 1760s and 1770s serves as a distant, if not perfectly reflective, mirror of our times. The Revolutionary Era witnessed massive demographic changes, including increased immigration, an explosion of new and not-always-reliable media outlets, changes in trade policy and economics, questions about the national debt and taxes, divisive politics, and other elements that mirror American life in the first quarter of the 21st century. Understanding how Zubly and other transactional leaders operated during the early phases of the American Revolution can serve as a roadmap for contemporary leaders—and hopefully, offer some insights on which pitfalls they should avoid.

Review of Literature

Scholars have increasingly drawn their attention to the Loyalists in recent years. While the term covers many political perspectives, on the whole, Loyalists were residents of British North America in the 1760s and 1770s who "maintained their allegiance to the British crown" (Wood, 1991, 176). Admittedly, Zubly was an outlier in the Loyalist ranks. He personified the select group that Benton (1969) portrayed as Whig-Loyalists in many ways. Benton examined nine Whig-Loyalists in his study, but he ignored Zubly and, for that matter, intellectual and political figures in the Lower South who embraced similar values and policies. Benton found the Whig-Loyalists opposed British colonial policy during the 1760s and 1770s but did not support American independence or American military efforts against Great Britain.

While Zubly has not been the subject of a full biography, Miller (1982) offered an excellent overview of his life and thought in a collection of the Georgia Loyalist's published writings. Hawes (1989) focused more on Zubly's life in her introduction to the journal that Zubly kept during the last decade of his life. Georgia historians have focused on aspects of Zubly's life, with Martin (1977) describing his move to America, Daniel (1935) reviewing his writing, and Locke (2010) examining his political activity before the Revolution. There are excellent reasons why Zubly never garnered the attention of a biographer. Zubly faced exile during the American Revolution due to his adherence to the British crown. Supporters of the American Revolution attacked Zubly's main plantation in Georgia, destroying much of his property and papers, including throwing most of his library into the Savannah River (Miller, 1982). As such, much of Zubly's letters have not survived, though copies of his sermons, pamphlets, essays, speeches, and other public writings have been preserved.

If Zubly has garnered little in the way of attention from biographers, his religious leadership has drawn more notice. In his review of Loyalist religious thought, Frazer (2018) examined more than 180 pastors and ministers in the colonies who opposed the American Revolution and focused on five religious leaders, including Zubly. Frazer found Zubly to be an outlier compared to the other religious leaders, identifying him as the only "non-Anglican among the key Loyalist clergy" (Frazer, 2018, 32). Frazer painted Zubly as a Whig-Loyalist, as defined by Benton.

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"Although several of the Loyalist ministers opposed the early controversial British actions, Zubly is the only one who wrote extensively as a Loyalist," Frazer noted (Frazer, 2018, 33).

Like Zubly and the Loyalists, transactional leadership is usually painted in a negative light, especially when compared to transformational leadership. In his seminal study of leadership, Burns found transactional leadership "occurs when one person takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things" (Burns, 1978, 19). Explaining that transactional leadership can arise in a host of settings, Burns painted it as a "bargain" between two parties. "A leadership act took place, but it was not one that binds leader and follower together in a mutual and continuing pursuit of a higher purpose" (Burns, 1978, 19-20).

While unaware of the concept of transactional leadership, several prominent Loyalists embraced rhetoric championing it (Derby, 2024). Bernard Bailyn (1974), one of the leading historians of the Revolution in recent times, found Thomas Hutchinson, a Massachusetts Loyalist, possessed a "calculatingly pragmatic approach to politics" (Bailyn, 1974, vii) that did include moral questions or aspects of transformational changes. In his recent biography of James Wright, Brooking (2024) argued that the colonial leader and longtime royal governor of Georgia had a similar mindset to Hutchinson.

Parliament passed the Stamp Act, a tax on printed materials in the American colonies, which had to be paid for in British currency instead of colonial money. Supporters of the tax pushed to use the revenue raised from it to fund the British military presence in the American colonies. Bullion (1982) examined the debates over colonial taxation and the role of George Grenville in supporting the proposal. Johnson (1997) also shed light on Greenville's rationale for and role in passing the Stamp Act. Thomas (1975) placed the passage of the Stamp Act in the greater context of British politics following the end of the Seven Years' War.

The Stamp Act prompted fierce and dramatic opposition across the colonies. Morgan's and Morgan's (1995) look at the Stamp Act ranks as a classic work on the American Revolution. Ellefson (1962) and Miller (1972) offered considerable insights into Georgia's reaction to the Stamp Act.

Sermon on the Repeal of the Stamp Act

While the Stamp Act did not produce the dramatic and often violent resistance that could been in other colonies (Miller, 1972), almost every leader in Georgia opposed the measure (Ellefson, 1962). Zubly, at the time a minister in Savannah, was no exception, and on June 25, 1766, he offered a sermon on the repeal of the Stamp Act. The sermon would have two editions published in Savannah and appeared in Charleston and Philadelphia (Miller, 1982). In the sermon, the first of his major statements on the issues that defined the American Revolution, Zubly displayed his support for what we now define as transactional leadership and, in many ways,

Zubly turned to the Book of Joshua as a biblical example for Great Britain and the colonies to emulate, noting that ancient Israeli tribes almost descended into civil war despite being "the same people, united by the same ties, natural religious & political." Thankfully, "some men of moderation" reminded the various tribes about their longstanding ties. "It was not at all probable that those meant to separate their interests from that of the whole stock, who had given such signal proofs of their attachment to the rest," Zubly preached. Turning to contemporary events, Zubly told his listeners there was "some parallel between the case of Israel and what was lately our own" (Miller, 1982, 33-34).

Citing several books in the Old Testament as proof of the perils of political disorder, Zubly stressed that economic calamity accompanied this type of chaos. "When there is no hire for man or beast, it is a plain sight that business is at a stand, and every stagnation of this kind threatens the very vitals of a country," Zubly insisted. "This calamity falls heaviest upon the lower and middling class of people, who make up the body and the most useful part of every nation" (Miller, 1982, 37). Zubly went through various economic sectors, including trade and agriculture, maintaining that prosperity collapsed during chaotic times.

Zubly left no room for doubt that he feared a civil war more than anything else. "War among brethren, intestine feuds and civil wars as they are called, of the worst evil are the worst species," he said before citing a biblical verse Abraham Lincoln turned to almost a century later. "Union of minds and interests is the real strength of any nation, a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand" (Miller, 1982, 38-39). Zubly called on his listeners to reject rebellion while also urging them to resist tyranny. "Oppression and rebellion are both wicked, and may become by a righteous judgement of God a scourge to one another," Zubly said before bemoaning the economic consequences he assigned to both. "Confusion and disorders are the natural effects of all this….in those day there is no hire for man nor beast, no peace to him that goes out nor comes in, and every man is against his neighbor" (Miller, 1982, 40-41).

In contrast to the dark scenario he presented of civil war, Zubly said God offered "a very signal divine blessing" when nations experienced "peace, plenty, and liberty." Zubly pointed to the economic blessings of people working together in harmony. "The labourer and husbandman should now be employed, the fields should be cultivated, and in the land that lay desolate, and almost uninhabited, in the land that was without man or beast, fields should be bought again for money, and there should be hire for men and beast." Zubly insisted these men "should no longer be a disunited nation, but unite like the heart of one man" (Miller, 1982, 41-42).

Warming to the theme, Zubly called prosperity divinely ordained. "The order and economy of the whole creation speaks aloud the kind designs of God to man," Zubly maintained. He said God offered "plenty instead of famine, the dew of heaven and rain in due season instead of drought." This prosperity would be "durable" and "the days of their mourning should be at an end" (Miller, 1982, 42).

Despite the turmoil over the Stamp Act, Zubly claimed that God showed "his loving-kindness" to "the British nation." Zubly praised British political institutions and leaders, including King George III and colonial legislatures, as blessed by God. While he may have been born in Switzerland and opposed the established church, Zubly rejoiced in his status as a British subject. "By descent or incorporation, we are now all Britons," Zubly declared. "Let Britain's interest be ever dear to is all." Zubly instructed his listeners to "pray for the prosperity of the nation, for in her prosperity you shall prosper." Calling on Great Britain to act as a "tender parent," Zubly wanted colonists to act as good children. "Let us never fail to act to the part of truly dutiful children" (Miller, 1982, 44-45).

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Zubly ended his sermon by praising the repeal of the Stamp Act and calling for "cheerful obedience to the laws of the realm, and on all occasional approve ourselves worthy subjects of the best of kings." The minister stressed the "very essential difference between liberty and licentiousness" and called for closer adherence to Christian values. Zubly praised Christianity as a "benevolent institution" that "nears a friendly aspect to civil government, and does not in the least diminish the natural or civil rights of the subject." Indeed, Zubly found Christianity and good government closely linked. "We cannot be good Christians unless we are also good subjects and good members of the community." Zubly closed by calling both Jesus Christ and the king saviors. "We look for a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us by faith and holiness be daily preparing for the same," Zubly said. "There the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest" (Miller, 1982, 46-49).

Zubly and Transactional Leadership

While not garnering as much attention as some of his later works, Zubly's sermon on the repeal of the Stamp Act has received some attention from scholars. In his survey of the American Revolution in Georgia, Coleman (1958) noted that "Zubly said that nothing which happened in British America was more deserving of public thanksgiving to God, to King, and to Parliament." While Zubly opposed the Stamp Act and praised resistance to it, he also "favored obedience to the laws of Parliament and respect for the Crown," as he argued, "that Christianity taught rulers to consider the good of their subjects, and that subjects must be good citizens as well (Coleman, 1958, 24)." In his study of the half-century that Georgia was a British colony, Coleman (1976) only briefly touched on the "The Stamp Act Repealed" sermon by Zubly, noting the minister argued "American liberties had been upheld" while being "careful to point out the difference between liberty and licentiousness (Coleman, 1976, 251)."

A decade before he edited most of Zubly's major publications, Miller (1972) offered his take on the sermon on the Stamp Act's repeal. "In this piece the conservative preacher reminded Georgians that the Bible counseled forgiveness," he wrote. "Zubly called on all Georgians to join in the thanks to the crown for repeal" and "repent of the excesses of liberty that were really licentiousness and put to flame every faction and party," including the Sons of Liberty who were the most confrontational opponents of the Stamp Act (Miller, 1972, 328).

In his look at the clergy and the American Revolution, McBride (2016) examined Zubly's writing, including his sermon on the repeal of the Stamp Act and found the Georgia minister staked out the middle ground. "What separated Zubly from most of his ecclesiastical counterparts is that he tempered his condemnation of the policy with a warning against an even worse potential fate than taxation without representation: war," McBride noted. McBride stressed Zubly's fear of civil war stood at the core of his sermon, portraying it as a "relatively conservative celebration of the colonists' 'victory,'" which "established Zubly as Georgia's premier, and only, Revolutionary pamphleteer (McBride, 2016, 90-91).'"

While not among the most studied of Zubly's works, his sermon on the repeal of the Stamp Act offered insights into that preacher and his support of what we now call transactional leadership. Zubly embraced the core of transactional leadership as defined by Arenas (2019). "Transactional leadership maintains organizational stability through regular social exchanges, leading to goal achievement for both leaders and their followers," Arenas found. "Additionally, the leaders enter into agreement with followers to reward or take corrective action based on expected behaviors and performance" (Arenas, 2019, 3). Throughout the sermon on the repeal of the Stamp Act, Zubly championed those principles. Indeed, during parts of the sermon, Zubly came close to declaring transactional leadership practices as divinely inspired, two centuries before the concept was identified.

Even as the Revolution rushed forward, Zubly remained committed to the principles he displayed in the 1766 sermon. In his study of the Whig-Loyalists, Benton (1969) found this group of American leaders tried to claim the middle between the Tories, who opposed the Stamp Act on economic and not constitutional grounds, and the Whigs, who would eventually become Patriots and opposed the Stamp Act and employed extra-constitutional measures to do so. Standing between these two groups, the Whig-Loyalists were "uncompromisingly opposed to the Stamp Act as being unconstitutional" even as they kept that opposition "limited to constitutional means." The Whig-Loyalists therefore opposed mob action against royal officials and colonial legislatures exceeding constitutional boundaries in their opposition to the Stamp Act (Benton, 1969, 80).

Zubly remained committed to those principles, even as the Revolution continued to evolve. Having walked on the political stage, Zubly continued to publish pieces on politics. In 1769, Zubly's *An Humble Enquiry Into the Nature of the Dependency of the American Colonies upon the Parliament of Great-Britain* examined Parliament's role in taxing the colonies. The Georgia minister argued that laws made without citizen consent were unjust, even as he fell short of arguing Parliament had no authority over the American colonists (Miller, 1982, 51-52).

Even well into the middle of the 1770s, Zubly continued harping on those points. In *The Law of Liberty*, a sermon preached to the Georgia Assembly in 1775, Zubly continued to criticize British policies while also standing against American independence. "The Christian law of liberty, Zubly explained, meant that conscience alone governed men in dealings with their political rulers; it forbade men from giving unquestioning obedience to their government; it condemned arbitrary uses of power; it assured rulers and ruled alike that God would ultimately judge their actions and intentions," wrote Calhoon (1973, 181) about *The Law of Liberty*.

Despite his opposition to American independence, Georgia selected Zubly to take part in the Second Continental Congress. During his short tenure representing Georgia in Philadelphia, Zubly made his positions clear. "I came here with 2 Views," John Adams recorded Zubly saying in October 1775. "One to secure the Rights of America. 2. A Reconciliation with G. Britain (Butterfield, 1962, 1964)." Zubly continued to showcase his Whig-Loyalism, refusing to support violent resistance to the British government. Some Gentlemen think all Merit lies in violent and unnecessary Measures," Zubly said (Butterfield, 1962, 201).

Zubly doubled down on his rhetoric on October 12 as he weighed in on trade, showcasing his hopes to reconcile with Great Britain and stressing the importance of commerce. "Trade is important," Zubly said. "We must have a Reconciliation with G.B. or the Means of carrying on the War. An unhappy day when We shall." Zubly also said he opposed any efforts to break away from the royal government. "A Republican Government is little better than

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Government of Devils. I have been acquainted with it from 6 Years old," Zubly said. "We must regulate our Trade so as that a Reconciliation be obtained or We enable[d] to carry on the War. Cant say I do hope for a Reconciliation, and that this Winter may bring it. I may enjoy my Hopes for Reconciliation, others may enjoy theirs that none will take Place (Butterfield, 1962, 204)."

As Congress continued to move towards independence, Zubly bowed out, leaving Philadelphia in November after serving two months. Continuing to oppose independence, Zubly attempted to defend the middle ground, even as it rapidly vanished under his feet. The new government in Georgia confiscated his land and banished him from the fledgling state, forcing him into exile. After the British drove American forces out of Savannah at the end of 1778, Zubly returned to his hometown, still maintaining his previous positions until he died in 1781 (Miller, 1982).

Conclusions

In his study of the motivations of the Loyalists, Brown (1965) captured the essence of the problem that Zubly and his fellow Whig-Loyalists faced. Brown portrayed Zubly as "a consistent Whig until actual independence was the issue," and even found the Savannah clergyman to be "Georgia's leading Whig pamphleteer." Despite this, Brown insisted, "Zubly may well illustrate the Loyalists' fatal weakness: too many worked against the essential Loyalist cause, and when opposition to grievances became a movement for independence, it was too late (Brown, 1965, 244)."

Zubly and other Whig-Loyalists failed to evolve, even as their constituents evolved, growing increasingly open to American independence. Zubly's refusal to change his positions, even as the middle ground he tried to claim fell from under his feet, hints at some of the problems transactional leaders face in transformative times. "The role of transactional leaders may be limited, potentially hindering innovation and long-term growth," noted Dong (2023, 24). As the example of Zubly and other Loyalists shows, transactional leadership proved ineffective for the opponents of the American Revolution (Derby, 2024).

During his stormy career in the public square, Zubly always stood out as something of an outlier: a Swiss intellectual in colonial Georgia, an opponent of republics sitting in the Continental Congress, a dissenting minister standing with the mostly Anglican Loyalist clergy, and a man who went his own path during the Revolution, willing to swear allegiance to the new government of Georgia but not to the congressional government in Philadelphia (Coleman, 1958). Despite all that, with his attempts to claim the political center, Zubly's time on the political stage shows what often happens to transactional leaders in transformational times.

Zubly always held onto his faith, even during the dark times. However, as he clung to the rapidly eroding middle ground between the Patriots and the British, ground he first stakes out in his sermon on the repeal of the Stamp Act, Zubly could be pardoned if his mind mulled over those haunting words that Christ told St. John to write to the Church of Philadelphia in the third chapter of *Revelations*. "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot/ So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

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