

Should Catholics Drink the Tea?: Reflections on the Tea Party Movement in Light of *Gaudium et Spes*

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This article seeks to fill a gap in Catholic literature by reflecting on the extent to which the Tea Party movement can be understood as consistent with Gaudium et Spes (GS). First, the article provides an overview of the Tea Party movement and its core ideological principles: intense individualism, emphasis on negative human rights, limited government, fiscal responsibility, low taxes, and laissez-faire capitalism. Next, the article offers a brief description of the contextual and ecclesial background of GS and reviews its key themes. The article then assesses the extent to which the ideological principles of the Tea Party movement are supported by GS, concluding that although there are points of partial resonance between the ideology of the Tea Party and GS, the former is largely inconsistent with the vision outlined and articulated by the latter.

Keywords: political theology, *Gaudium et Spes*, Tea Party, Catholic social thought

Introduction

IN December 2007, supporters of then Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul gathered in Boston to commemorate the Boston Tea Party and air grievances against a perceived expansion of the federal government.¹ Since that time, a sundry but powerful grassroots force known as the Tea Party movement has emerged on the landscape of contemporary American politics. The movement is widely understood to

¹ Yuri Maltsev and Roman Skaskiw, *The Tea Party Explained: From Crisis to Crusade* (Chicago: Open Court, 2013), 12: vii, 31–34. The author would like to thank Richard R. Gaillardetz, PhD, Joseph Professor of Catholic Systematic Theology at Boston College, for his comments on an earlier version of this manuscript.

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have helped the Republican Party win a majority in the US House of Representatives in the 2010 midterm elections,² and has continued to exert political influence through sympathetic elected officials and ongoing grassroots activism.³

In the wake of the Tea Party's rise, much work has been done to try to better understand the makeup of the movement's membership. Multiple studies have revealed that the Tea Party is disproportionately made up of politically conservative white evangelical Protestants⁴—a reality that is perhaps unsurprising given the movement's self-described "strong belief in the foundational Judeo-Christian values embedded in [America's] great founding documents."⁵ At the same time, however, these studies also reveal that 33 percent of white American Catholics agreed with the Tea Party in 2011, and 22 percent of the movement identified as Catholic in 2012.

Given these statistics, many commentators have assessed the extent to which membership in the Tea Party movement is consonant with Catholic faith. John Gehring has argued that "the Tea Party's anti-government rhetoric and emphasis on individualism chafes against Catholic notions of solidarity and a vision for economic justice that seeks to balance personal rights with social responsibilities."⁶ In contrast, Samuel Gregg has made the argument in his book *Tea Party Catholic* that Catholic faith and Tea Party membership are compatible.⁷

Although Gehring, Gregg, and others support their respective positions with frequent references to various documents from the Catholic magisterium, there has yet to be a sustained critical reflection on Tea Party membership and Catholic faith that takes as its primary point of reference the

² Lisa Lerer and Alison Fitzgerald, "Tea Party Wins House for Republicans, Wants Rewards in Congress," BloombergBusiness, November 4, 2010, <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/stories/2010-11-04/tea-party-wins-house-for-republicans-wants-rewardsbusinessweek-business-news-stock-market-and-financial-advice>.

³ M. J. Lee, "Wall Street Frustrated at Tea Party," Politico, October 3, 2013, <http://www.politico.com/story/2013/10/government-shutdown-wall-street-tea-party-97734.html>.

⁴ Brian Montopoli, "Tea Party Supporters: Who They Are and What They Believe," CBS Interactive, Inc., December 14, 2012, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/tea-party-supporters-who-they-are-and-what-they-believe/>; Pew Research Center, "The Tea Party and Religion," Pew Research Center, February 23, 2011, <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/02/23/tea-party-and-religion/>.

⁵ Tea Party, "About Us," Tea Party, <http://www.teaparty.org/about-us/>.

⁶ John Gehring, "The Tea Party and Catholic Social Teaching Don't Mix," *U.S. Catholic Magazine*, December 21, 2011, <http://www.uscatholic.org/teaparty>.

⁷ Samuel Gregg, *Tea Party Catholic: The Catholic Case for Limited Government, a Free Economy, and Human Flourishing* (New York: Crossroad, 2013). This book features a foreword by Michael Novak.

Second Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, hereafter referred to as GS).⁸ This is surprising, since GS has shaped how postconciliar Catholic moral theology and social ethics engage the world.⁹ Thus while it has been helpful to use postconciliar resources as “ethical coordinates”¹⁰ for reflecting on the Tea Party, a robust critique of the Tea Party by the Catholic community that involves more direct engagement with the document that is foundational to postconciliar Catholic moral theology and ethics seems warranted.

Given the fiftieth anniversary of GS in 2015 and the Tea Party movement’s ongoing presence in American politics, it is an ideal time to reflect on the Tea Party movement in light of GS. This article will assess the extent to which core tenets of the Tea Party movement are consonant with the teachings of GS.¹¹

I. The Tea Party Movement

The Tea Party is a diverse movement that incorporates people of various political beliefs and convictions. At the same time, however, the movement has coalesced around several core principles. These principles include, on a general level, an intense individualism and an emphasis on negative individual rights,¹² and have in turn supported particular commitments to the concepts of limited government, fiscal responsibility, “low taxes, and free markets.”¹³

⁸ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from GS are taken from Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: Sixteen Basic Documents* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 2007), 163–282.

⁹ Joseph A. Selling, “Gaudium et Spes: A Manifesto for Contemporary Moral Theology,” in *Vatican II and Its Legacy*, ed. M. Lamberigts and Leo Kenis (Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2002), 149, 158.

¹⁰ Kenneth R. Himes, “Globalization with a Human Face: Catholic Social Teaching and Globalization,” *Theological Studies* 69, no. 2 (2008): 269.

¹¹ This approach is generally inspired by James T. Bretzke’s discussions of “fundamental values” and “root paradigms.” See James T. Bretzke, “A New Pentecost for Moral Theology: The Challenge of Inculturation of Ethics,” *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2003): 250–60; Bretzke, “Cross-Cultural Ethics in a Context of Pluralism & Multiculturalism: Teaching Where Religion and Ethics Intersect” (paper presented at the New England Maritime and Mid-Atlantic Regional Convention of the American Academy of Religion, New Brunswick, NJ, March 15, 2012), <https://www2.bc.edu/james-bretzke/BretzkeTeachingCrossCulturalEthicsPaperRegionalAARMarch2012.pdf>.

¹² Gehring, “The Tea Party and Catholic Social Teaching.”

¹³ Maltsev and Skaskiw, *The Tea Party Explained*, 4.

Intense Individualism

One of the defining aspects of the Tea Party movement is its strong belief in a particular myth of American individualism. As far back as Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, individualism—generally understood as autonomous self-reliance—has been recognized as central to the fabric of American society and self-understanding.¹⁴ Yet, as Aaron Barlow observes in his book *The Cult of Individualism: A History of an Enduring American Myth*, individualism is a dynamic concept the particular understanding of which is dependent upon—and therefore unique to—different subcultures within a society.¹⁵ Based on this insight, Barlow draws on the work of David Hackett Fischer to describe how the legacy of individualism espoused by so-called Borderers or Borderlanders shaped a type of individualism that continues to animate the self-understanding of many American conservatives and has found particular expression in the Tea Party movement.¹⁶

In his book *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America*,¹⁷ Colin Woodard explains that the Borderer culture of Greater Appalachia (see [figure 1](#)¹⁸) was

founded in the early eighteenth century by wave upon wave of rough, bellicose settlers from the war-ravaged borderlands of northern Ireland, northern England, and the Scottish lowlands...[who] transplanted a culture formed in a state of near-constant warfare and upheaval, characterized by a warrior ethic and a deep commitment to personal sovereignty and individual liberty.¹⁹

Given this cultural context, Barlow says that “the Borderer vision of individualism starts within each [Borderer], with faith in the person and in God. It next moves, in a spreading circle, to family, to friends, and only then to others in the broad realm of human interaction.”²⁰ Barlow further recognizes that Borderer individualism also came to be heavily invested in the notion that

¹⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 482–83.

¹⁵ Aaron Barlow, *The Cult of Individualism: A History of an Enduring American Myth* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013), xi, 19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4, 8.

¹⁷ Colin Woodard, *American Nations: A History of the Eleven Rival Regional Cultures of North America* (New York: Penguin Group, 2012).

¹⁸ Colin Woodard, “A Geography Lesson for the Tea Party,” *Washington Monthly*, November/December 2011, http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/magazine/november-december_2011/features/a_geography_lesson_for_the_tea032846.php?page=all.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; cf. Jane Smiley, “Jane’s Bingo! Award for Most Informative Book of 2006,” *Huffington Post*, December 29, 2006, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jane-smiley/janes-bingo-award-for-mos_b_37415.html.

²⁰ Barlow, *The Cult of Individualism*, 140.

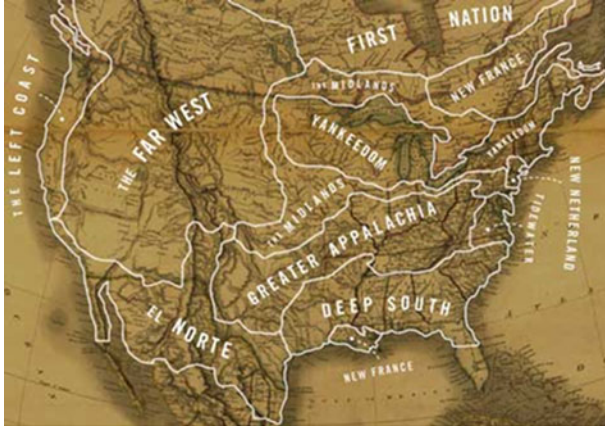


Figure 1: Map of US Cultural Regions

Map by Sean Wilkinson, Sean Wilkinson Design (cf. footnote 18)

individuals are largely if not solely responsible for their own achievements.²¹ Finally, both Barlow and Woodard point out that Borderer individualism has historically been manifested in conservative political ideologies.²²

While the legacy of Borderer culture and understandings of individualism continue to be strongest in Greater Appalachia, Woodard observes that this ideology also finds sympathy in parts of the Deep South and Tidewater regions. Woodard attributes this reality to the fact that these three regions—together known as the “Dixie bloc”—have several cultural and historical similarities, including religious background (“Private Protestantism”), struggles immediately following the Civil War, and ideologies with respect to the civil rights movement.²³ Woodard also notes that Borderer individualism resonates in the contemporary Far West because of the strongly libertarian ethos in the region since its settlement.²⁴ Given that the four regions that have been most open to Borderer individualism have a history of supporting the type of conservative, quasi-libertarian political ideology from which the present Tea Party movement has emerged, it is not surprising that 85 percent of the House Tea Party Caucus comes from these four regions.²⁵

Although it is true that the legacy of Borderer individualism thus serves as a common thread in the fabric of the Tea Party movement, it must also be

²¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

²² *Ibid.*, 21–22, 57; Woodard, *American Nations*, 193–94, 299–301, 305–7.

²³ Woodard, *American Nations*, 200, 263, 304–6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 251–53; Woodard, “A Geography Lesson for the Tea Party.”

²⁵ Woodard, *American Nations*, 251–53, 306–8; Woodard, “A Geography Lesson for the Tea Party.”

pointed out that the legacy of Borderer individualism in the United States is not monolithic. Rather, this ideology has developed variations that have, over the course of time, affected American political conservatism in different ways. In particular, the individualism of the American thinker Ayn Rand has developed into a distinct brand of Borderer individualism and has been especially influential in the Tea Party movement.

Ayn Rand (1905–82) was a Russian intellectual who moved to the United States in 1926 and pursued an eclectic writing career that included works in literature, philosophy, theater, and film.²⁶ Throughout her life, and most especially in her works *The Fountainhead*, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal*, and *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand developed a philosophy known as “objectivism.”²⁷ As outlined by Rand, objectivism essentially rests on four pillars:

1. Reality exists as an objective absolute—facts are facts, independent of man’s feelings, wishes, hopes, or fears.
2. Reason (the faculty which identifies and integrates the material provided by man’s senses) is man’s only means of perceiving reality, his only source of knowledge, his only guide to action, and his basic means of survival.
3. Man—every man—is an end in himself, not the means to the ends of others. He must exist for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself. The pursuit of his own rational self-interest and of his own happiness is the highest moral purpose of his life.
4. The ideal political-economic system is laissez-faire capitalism. It is a system where men deal with one another, not as victims and executioners, nor as masters and slaves, but as traders, by free, voluntary exchange to mutual benefit.²⁸

Thus Rand describes the characteristics of objectivism as follows: “1. Metaphysics: Objective Reality 2. Epistemology: Reason 3. Ethics: Self-interest 4. Politics: Capitalism.”²⁹

Since the height of Rand’s career in the 1960s, various authors have commented on the ways in which objectivism—especially its emphasis on individual rights, rational self-interest, and laissez-faire capitalism—has generally influenced American conservatism and libertarianism.³⁰ In addition, Rand’s

²⁶ Ayn Rand Institute, “A Brief Biography of Ayn Rand,” Ayn Rand Institute, http://www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_ayn_rand_aynrand_biography.

²⁷ William R. Thomas, “What Is Objectivism?,” The Atlas Society, http://www.atlassociety.org/what_is_objectivism.

²⁸ Ayn Rand, “Objectivism,” Ayn Rand Institute, <http://aynrandlexicon.com/lexicon/objectivism.html>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ E.g., Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Mimi Gladstein, *Ayn Rand*, ed. John Meadowcroft, vol. 10 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

philosophy has tacitly shaped the way Tea Party members understand individualism. For example, former Republican vice presidential nominee Paul Ryan—a Catholic recognized as a “Tea Party darling”³¹—stated: “The reason I got involved in public service, by and large, if I had to credit one thinker, one person, it would be Ayn Rand. And the fight we are in here, make no mistake about it, is a fight of individualism versus collectivism.”³² Matt Kibbe, former president of FreedomWorks, a conservative political organization that supports the Tea Party movement, cited “faith in supremacy of individual liberty” as one of the similarities to be celebrated between Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged* and the Tea Party movement.³³ Thomas A. Bowden, a legal analyst at the Ayn Rand Center for Individual Rights, provocatively declared that in order to strengthen its cause “the tea party [*sic*] must anchor its work in Ayn Rand’s understanding that all schemes that sacrifice the individual to society are morally wrong.”³⁴

Thus both Borderer culture and Randian objectivism have influenced the Tea Party movement’s understanding and vision of individualism. In particular, these ideologies have helped inspire a notion of individualism that concomitantly sees each person as largely beholden and subject to few (save family and voluntary associations) and believes that personal success is essentially disconnected from that of social structures or other members of society. Yet because the individual freedoms at the heart of such individualism are often rhetorically and ideologically connected to the notion of individual rights, this adherence to intense individualism has in turn significantly influenced how the Tea Party understands individual rights.

Individual Rights

The theory of individual rights as classically understood contains both positive and negative aspects—that is, a person has both the positive right to support in the procurement of life’s basic necessities and the negative right to

³¹ Josh Lederman, “Paul Ryan, Tea Party: A Match Made in Heaven,” Huffington Post, August 13, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/13/paul-ryan-tea-party_n_1772290.html.

³² The Atlas Society, “Paul Ryan and Ayn Rand’s Ideas: In the Hot Seat Again,” The Atlas Society, April 30, 2012, <http://www.atlassociety.org/ele/blog/2012/04/30/paul-ryan-and-ayn-rands-ideas-hot-seat-again>.

³³ E.g., Matt Kibbe, “A Movie for the Tea Party Movement,” Forbes.com, April 12, 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/mattkibbe/2011/04/12/a-movie-for-the-tea-party-movement/>.

³⁴ Thomas A. Bowden, “The Tea Party Will Fail—Unless It Fully Embraces Individualism as a Moral Ideal,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 21, 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2011/0121/The-tea-party-will-fail-unless-it-fully-embraces-individualism-as-a-moral-ideal>.

enjoy fundamental freedoms. Within this framework, the intense individualism espoused by the Tea Party movement can be recognized and understood as ardently affirming and advocating negative individual rights, often to the devaluation of positive individual rights.

In his article “To Help Save America, Tea Partiers Must Fully Embrace Individual Rights,” Ari Armstrong, for example, describes the principle of individual rights as “the moral truth that each individual should be free to live his life as he sees fit (the right to life), to act in accordance with his own judgment (liberty), to keep and use the product of his effort (property), and to pursue the values and goals of his choice (the pursuit of happiness).”³⁵ Congressman John Culberson (R-TX), an original member of the Tea Party Caucus in the US House of Representatives,³⁶ declared that the “most sacred right as Americans” is the right “to be left alone.”³⁷

FreedomWorks identifies only the following rights as being historically “very important” to political institutions: “The right to make contracts, and to purchase and hold property...The right to defend oneself and one’s bodily integrity...The right to privacy...The right to equal treatment, due process, and a fair trial.”³⁸ Although members of the Tea Party movement do generally seem willing to recognize positive rights for those who earn them (see below on Social Security and Medicare), it can generally be said that the Tea Party movement is characterized by an imbalanced emphasis on negative individual rights to the detriment of positive individual rights—a reality perhaps best captured by the Tea Party movement’s adoption of the Gadsden flag, with its warning “Don’t Tread on Me.”

Limited Government

Since its inception, the Tea Party has advocated for “constitutionally limited” government. The movement has sought to restrict the intervention of federal (and state) government in private and public life to a level

³⁵ Ari Armstrong, “To Help Save America, Tea Partiers Must Fully Embrace Individual Rights,” *Objective Standard*, August 20, 2010, <https://www.theobjectivestandard.com/2010/08/to-help-save-america-tea-partiers-must-fully-embrace-individual-rights/>.

³⁶ Janie Lorber, “Republicans Form Caucus for Tea Party in the House,” *New York Times*, July 21, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/22/us/politics/22tea.html?_r=0.

³⁷ Glenn Kessler, “How Unpopular or Popular Is Obamacare?” *Washington Post*, September 25, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/wp/2013/09/25/how-unpopular-or-popular-is-obamacare/>.

³⁸ FreedomWorks, “Civil Liberties,” FreedomWorks, <http://www.freedomworks.org/issues/civil-liberties>.

consistent with strict “‘originalist’ versions of constitutional interpretation” analogous to religious fundamentalism.³⁹

On the one hand, the seeds of the Tea Party’s call for limited government can be found in the aforementioned Borderer individualism, which saw government as largely “the opposite of individualism, the representative of attempts to take way a person’s freedom of action in favor of an amorphous ‘common good’...[that] suppresses family and favoritism, basic building blocks of society and culture, in favor of a mythological and impossible equality.”⁴⁰ At the same time, however, the flame of the Tea Party’s resistance to large government has been fanned by particular developments in recent American politics. These include, but are not limited to, the perceived “big government” tendencies of George W. Bush,⁴¹ the relatively libertarian political agenda of Ron Paul,⁴² political conservatives’ disillusionment over the 2008 election of President Barack Obama and Democratic majorities in the House and Senate,⁴³ the Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009,⁴⁴ and President Obama’s 2012 campaign remarks in Roanoke, Virginia, pointing out how others—implicitly the government—support the systems that allow individual Americans to prosper.⁴⁵

Thus, energized by both fundamental ideological commitments and particular political circumstances, the Tea Party movement has argued that the federal government has exceeded its constitutionally established powers in many respects, and so has opposed many federal government initiatives intended to procure positive individual rights. Although the most obvious example is probably the movement’s zealous opposition to the Affordable Care Act,⁴⁶ other recent examples include repeated refutation of President Obama’s

³⁹ Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 48–49; Andrew Sullivan, “The Tea Party as Secular Fundamentalism,” *The Atlantic*, July 2, 2010, <http://www.theatlantic.com/daily-dish/archive/2010/07/the-tea-party-as-secular-fundamentalism/185190/>.

⁴⁰ Barlow, *The Cult of Individualism*, 20–21.

⁴¹ E. J. Dionne, “Political Heartstrings Torn between Individualism and Community,” MacNeil/Lehrer Productions, August 20, 2010, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics-july-dec12-dionne_08-20/.

⁴² Maltsev and Skaskiw, *The Tea Party Explained*, 46–47.

⁴³ Skocpol and Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, 5–6.

⁴⁴ Maltsev and Skaskiw, *The Tea Party Explained*, 58–62.

⁴⁵ Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President at a Campaign Event in Roanoke, Virginia,” July 13, 2012, The White House, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/07/13/remarks-president-campaign-event-roanoke-virginia>.

⁴⁶ FoxNews.com, “Tea Party Rallies in Washington against ObamaCare,” FOX News Network, March 24, 2012, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2012/03/24/tea-party-rallies-in-washington-against-obama-care/>.

campaign remarks,⁴⁷ and the movement's influence in passing legislation to cut food stamps under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).⁴⁸

Although the Tea Party movement has thus voiced strong displeasure about its perceived expansion of the US government, it is worth pointing out that 62 percent of Tea Party members believe that the government programs of Social Security and Medicare are "worth [their] costs."⁴⁹ In view of this apparent contradiction, it has been pointed out that more than half of those in the Tea Party benefit from these programs and/or have a family member who does.⁵⁰ In addition, many in the Tea Party believe that beneficiaries of these entitlement programs have earned the assistance that they receive.⁵¹ Given the characteristics of Borderer individualism and Randian egoism that animate the Tea Party, it is not entirely surprising that Tea Party members would relax their call for limited government when they or their families receive an entitlement that they have justly earned. In sum, the Tea Party generally calls for limited government partly moderated by its members' personal and immediate relational interests and a particular desire to "countenance public spending on the 'underserving.'"⁵²

Fiscal Responsibility

Closely related to the Tea Party movement's call for limited government is its demand that government exercise "fiscal responsibility." According to the Tea Party Patriots, this "means not overspending, and not burdening our children and grandchildren with our bills."⁵³ According to

⁴⁷ Barlow, *The Cult of Individualism*, 186; TeaParty.org, "We Did Build It: Small Business Owner Taunts Obama Motorcade," TeaParty.org, August 19, 2012, <http://www.teaparty.org/we-did-build-it-small-business-owner-taunts-obama-motorcade-12447/>; Devin Dwyer, "Iowans' Message to Obama: 'We Did Build This,'" ABC News, September 1, 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/09/iowans-message-to-obama-we-did-build-this/>; "Obama Sux—President Gets Eye-Opening Greeting at Airport," Freedom Outpost, September 3, 2012, <http://freedomoutpost.com/2012/09/obama-sux-president-gets-eye-opening-greeting-at-airport/>.

⁴⁸ Ron Nixon, "House Republicans Pass Deep Cuts in Food Stamps," *New York Times*, September 19, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/20/us/politics/house-passes-bill-cutting-40-billion-from-food-stamps.html>.

⁴⁹ New York Times/CBS News, "Polling the Tea Party," *New York Times*, April 14, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2010/04/14/us/politics/20100414-tea-party-poll-graphic.html?ref=politics&r=0#tab=3>.

⁵⁰ Skocpol and Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*, 59–60.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Philadelphia Tea Party Patriots, "About," Philadelphia Tea Party Patriots, <http://www.philateapartypatriots.com/About.html>.

the Philadelphia Tea Party Patriots, the movement has been especially concerned about the growing federal deficit; in a 2010 Gallup poll, for example, members of the Tea Party movement identified the federal debt when asked to name the most serious “threats to the future of the United States.”⁵⁴

Given this concern, the Tea Party movement has been at the center of two deficit-related “brinkmanship” events. The first occurred in 2011, when Tea Party-backed lawmakers opposed raising the federal debt ceiling—the legislated amount that the US government is authorized to borrow in order to meet its legal responsibilities—without offsetting spending cuts and a vote on a balanced budget amendment.⁵⁵ The second occurred in 2013, when congressional Tea Party members again helped push the US government to within hours of default with their insistence that any increase in the federal debt ceiling include corresponding spending cuts and a vote on a balanced budget amendment.⁵⁶ Although this second debt ceiling showdown was overshadowed by efforts to defund and/or delay the Affordable Care Act,⁵⁷ the Tea Party’s ongoing opposition to raising the debt ceiling demonstrates the movement’s resolute commitment to its understanding of governmental fiscal responsibility.

Low Taxes

In the minds of many Tea Party members, “a more fiscally responsible government will take fewer taxes from our paychecks.”⁵⁸ Given this, and the movement’s emphases on individualism, negative rights, limited government,

⁵⁴ Jeffrey M. Jones, “Debt, Govt. Power among Tea Party Supporters’ Top Concerns,” Gallup, July 5, 2010, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/141119/debt-gov-power-among-tea-party-supporters-top-concerns.aspx>.

⁵⁵ Wes Barrett, “Tea Party Slams Boehner and Ryan on Debt Ceiling,” Fox News Network, May 9, 2011, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2011/05/09/tea-party-slams-boehner-and-ryan-on-debt-ceiling/>; Tom Cohen, “Budget Debate Shifts to Raising Debt Ceiling,” CNN, April 18, 2011, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/POLITICS/04/17/us.budget.debate/>.

⁵⁶ Dana Davidsen, “Cruz: Use Debt Ceiling Debate for Leverage,” CNN, October 6, 2013, <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2013/10/06/cruz-use-debt-ceiling-debate-for-leverage/>; Michael Needham, Tony Perkins, and Chris Choccola, “Use debt limit to balance budget,” Politico, January 15, 2013, <http://www.politico.com/story/2013/01/why-the-debt-limit-must-be-used-to-force-a-balanced-budget-086244>.

⁵⁷ Julie Vaughn, “Setting the Record Straight: Debt Ceiling and Continuing Resolution,” Montgomery County Tea Party, October 8, 2013, <http://www.mcteparty.org/setting-the-record-straight-debt-ceiling-and-continuing-resolution.html>; FoxNews.com, “Obama Signs Bill Ending Partial Shutdown, Raising Debt Ceiling,” Fox News Network, October 17, 2013, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2013/10/17/senate-begins-vote-on-budget-bill-boehner-pledges-house-wont-block-it/>.

⁵⁸ Tea Party Patriots, “About the Tea Party Patriots.”

and fiscal responsibility, the Tea Party movement is thus also defined in part by a persistent call for low taxes. As expressed in the movement's acronym TEA, an abbreviation for "Taxed Enough Already," the Tea Party generally believes that "taxation is a burden on productive people,"⁵⁹ and has consistently fought to abolish existing taxes and resist the imposition of higher taxes (both real and perceived).

For example, members of the Tea Party have petitioned to abolish the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the personal income tax, while "Tea Party favorite" Congressman Jim Bridenstine (R-OK)⁶⁰ introduced a bill that would repeal the Sixteenth Amendment, which enables the federal government to collect personal and corporate income taxes.⁶¹ In addition, Tea Party movement leader Grover Norquist engineered the Taxpayer Protection Pledge,⁶² by which 100 percent of the Tea Party Caucus in the 112th Congress—as well as 85 percent of Republican senators and 97 percent of Republican members of the House of Representatives—pledged to "oppose any and all efforts to increase the marginal income tax rate for individuals and business" and to "oppose any net reduction or elimination of deductions and credits, unless matched dollar for dollar by further reducing tax rates."⁶³ Finally, although the proposed federal "cap-and-trade" climate change bills of 2009 were market-based policy mechanisms, members of the Tea Party movement labeled the policies as a tax and opposed them as such.⁶⁴ In sum, the Tea Party movement is defined in part by its firm commitment to low taxes, which is manifest in its stringent opposition to real or perceived tax increases and its efforts to abolish particular existing taxes.

⁵⁹ Maltsev and Skaskiw, *The Tea Party Explained*, 65.

⁶⁰ FoxNews.com, "Tea Party Favorite Bridenstine Defeats Incumbent Sullivan in Oklahoma Primary," FoxNews.com, June 27, 2012, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2012/06/27/tea-party-favorite-bridenstine-defeats-incumbent-sullivan-in-oklahoma-house/2014>.

⁶¹ Sheryl Kaufman, "Congressman Jim Bridenstine Files Bill to Repeal 16th Amendment (Income Tax)," United States Congressman Jim Bridenstine, <https://bridenstine.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=223>.

⁶² Tim Dickinson, "Grover Norquist: The Billionaires' Best Friend," *Rolling Stone*, November 9, 2011, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/grover-norquist-the-billionaires-best-friend-20111109>; Natasha Montague, "U.S. Senate Tea Party Caucus," Americans for Tax Reform, January 27, 2011, <http://www.atr.org/u-s-senate-tea-party-caucus-a5800>.

⁶³ Americans for Tax Reform, "The Taxpayer Protection Pledge Signers—112th Congressional List," Americans for Tax Reform, <http://s3.amazonaws.com/atrfiles/files/files/091411-federalpledgesigners.pdf>.

⁶⁴ James M. Taylor, "Tea Party Protests Lindsey Graham on Cap-and-Tax," The Heartland Institute, March 4, 2010, <http://heartland.org/policy-documents/tea-party-protests-lindsey-graham-cap-and-tax>.

Laissez-Faire Capitalism

In addition to—and perhaps as a result of—the movement’s intense individualism, commitment to negative rights, advocacy for limited government, demands for fiscal responsibility, and call for low taxes, the Tea Party is characterized by a resounding faith in and fervent commitment to laissez-faire capitalism, understood as unfettered free markets devoid of government intervention. The Tea Party Patriots assert:

Free market economics made America an economic superpower that for at least two centuries provided subsequent generations of Americans more opportunities and higher standards of living. An erosion of our free markets through government intervention is at the heart of America’s current economic decline, stagnating jobs, and spiraling debt and deficits. Failures in government programs and government-controlled financial markets helped spark the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. Further government interventions and takeovers have made this Great Recession longer and deeper. A renewed focus on free markets will lead to a more vibrant economy creating jobs and higher standards of living for future generations.⁶⁵

Given this firm commitment to laissez-faire capitalism—along with an aversion to government economic intervention—the Tea Party movement has protested and resisted numerous instances of federal involvement in the economy. Examples include opposition to the auto bailouts of 2009 and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, as well as harsh criticism of a \$535 million loan guarantee to the solar company Solyndra Corporation.⁶⁶ In addition, the Tea Party movement and its members’ understanding of laissez-faire capitalism is generally opposed to the unionization of labor and largely refuses to acknowledge ethical dimensions to human work.⁶⁷ Toward this end, the Tea Party movement has sponsored efforts “outlawing public-sector unions, expanding antiunion right-to-work laws, and gutting regulations that protect the pay, benefits, and safety of construction workers, airline employees, and other workers.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Tea Party Patriots, “About the Tea Party Patriots.”

⁶⁶ Maltsev and Skaskiw, *The Tea Party Explained*, 57–64.

⁶⁷ Charles Postel, “The Tea Party in Historical Perspective: A Conservative Response to a Crisis of Political Economy,” in *Steep: The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party*, ed. Lawrence Rosenthal and Christine Trost (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012), 33.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 33–34.

II. *Gaudium et Spes*: Context and Development

Gaudium et Spes is widely recognized as charting a new course for the church's engagement with the world. David Hollenbach, SJ, points out that prior to Vatican II, the Catholic Church was largely suspicious of the external world and saw modernity as a threat to both established Christian beliefs and "the Christian community's self-understanding."⁶⁹ In response to the perceived threat of modern society, the preconciliar church adopted a generally defensive posture, maintaining "a stance of resistance to almost all of the movements characteristic of modern society and culture."⁷⁰

It was against this backdrop that the conciliar tradewinds sought to bring the church into more positive dialogue with modern society and culture.⁷¹ And on December 4, 1962, at the Second Vatican Council, Cardinal Léon Joseph Suenens intervened to advocate for a revision of the council's trajectory of ecclesial self-understanding, arguing that the church should fruitfully engage with the wider "modern world."⁷² This vision was supported the next day by Cardinal Giovanni Montini, who later, as Pope Paul VI, instructed the council's second session to explicitly take up the issue of the church's relationship to the world *ad extra*.⁷³ An initial schema was subsequently developed during the Council's first intercession toward this end, and after several revisions which notably included input from lay advisers, the final text was promulgated as *Gaudium et Spes* by Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ David Hollenbach, "Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*)," in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth R. Himes et al. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 269.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 268.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 269.

⁷² Leo Joseph Suenens, "La 33a Congregazione Generale (4 Dicembre 1962)," in *Il Concilio Vaticano II Primo Periodo 1962-1963*, ed. Giovanni Caprile (Rome: La Civilita Cattolica, 1968), 2:247. Lois Ann Lorentzen, "Gaudium et Spes," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, ed. Judith A. Dwyer (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 407.

⁷³ Giovanni Battista Montini, "La 34a Congregazione Generale (5 Dicembre 1962)," in Caprile, *Il Concilio Vaticano II Primo Periodo 1962-1963*, 251-252. Pope Paul VI, *Insegnamenti Di Paolo VI*, Vol. 1 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1964), 183-184; Lorentzen, "Gaudium et Spes," 407.

⁷⁴ John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 161-64. For an extended review of the development of *Gaudium et Spes*, see: Evangelista Vilanova, "The Intersession (1963-1964)," in *History of Vatican II, Vol. III: The Mature Council: Second Period and Intersession, September 1963-September 1964*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), 402-415; Norman Tanner, "The Church in the World (*Ecclesiae Ad Extra*)," in *History of Vatican II, vol. IV: The Church as Communion: Third Period and Intersession, September 1964-*

GS begins with a preface (§§1–3) that contains the famous opening from which the document gets its title: “The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, and the joys and hopes, the grief, and anguish of the followers of Christ as well” (§1). In opening thus, the document establishes the church’s “deep solidarity” with all humanity (§1) as a foundation upon which the council can credibly “address...all humanity” (§2) in order to offer its distinct insights about “the destiny of nature and of humanity” in “service to humankind” (§3).

The introduction (§§4–10) develops the preface by teaching that the church “carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (§4). Toward this end, the introduction makes general observations about the state of humanity. The document is then divided into two parts: “The Church and the Human Vocation” (§§11–45) and “Some More Urgent Problems” (§§46–90). Thus, part 1 of GS essentially constructs a Christian theological anthropology that provides the foundation for the consideration of particular challenges in part 2.

III. *Gaudium et Spes*: Key Themes

Although GS contains a multitude of motifs, perhaps the most fundamental theme of the document is the need for the church to be involved in the world. This concept is significant not only because it anchors the vision and trajectory of GS, but also because—in light of the reluctance of the preconciliar church to engage with the world—it represented an important change in the church’s understanding of itself and its mission.

To encourage proper engagement with the world, GS also emphasizes the theme of human dignity. In particular, the document claims that every person is endowed with intrinsic dignity, since each is created in the image and likeness of God (§12) and “called to communion with God” (§19). Yet while the document insists on the dignity of each individual, it also repeatedly affirms that “human beings are social by nature” such that “the betterment of the person and the improvement of society depend on each other” (§25). Thus the document asserts that human dignity is inextricably connected to social

September 1965, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 269–386; Gilles Routhier, “Finishing the Work Begun: The Trying Experience of the Fourth Period,” in *The History of Vatican II, vol. V: The Council and the Transition, the Fourth Period and the End of the Council, September 1965–December 1965*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, vol. V (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 122–176; Peter Hünermann, “The Final Weeks of the Council,” in *The History of Vatican II, vol. 5: The Council and the Transition, the Fourth Period and the End of the Council, September 1965–December 1965*, ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, vol. V (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 386–426.

life, and that protecting the dignity of individuals requires, among other things, protection of the common good (§26), procurement of social justice (§29), and promotion of solidarity among all persons (§32).

Another theme that appears throughout GS is the recognition of human “rights and duties [that are] universal and inviolable” (§26). These rights are understood to have both positive and negative aspects that respectively “protect some form of human freedom or liberty” and “claim for each person the positive assistance of others in fulfilling basic constituents of human well-being.”⁷⁵ In particular, the document cites as examples the positive right to “everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, and shelter” (§26), and the negative right to be free from “social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights” (§29).

In recognizing positive and negative rights, GS points out that “the growing complexity of modern situations makes it necessary for public authority to intervene more frequently in social, cultural, and economic matters in order to achieve conditions more favorable to the free and effective pursuit by citizens and groups of the advancement of people’s total well-being” (§75). In other words, GS recognizes that governments may need to intervene in particular social conditions in order to protect individual human dignity by securing the intrinsic positive and negative human rights of all.

To guide intervention by public authority in the various spheres of social life, the document calls for a prudential understanding of “the relationship between socialization and personal autonomy” (§75). In particular, GS notes that individuals have “the obligation to render to the state whatever material and personal services are required for the common good,” while “governments should take care not to put obstacles in the way of family, cultural, or social groups” (§75). In addition, “citizens...either individually or in association, should take care not to vest too much power in public authority nor to make untimely and exaggerated demands for favors and subsidies, lessening in this way the responsible role of individuals, families, and social groups” (§75). In sum, GS can be said to reiterate the Catholic social teaching principle of subsidiarity, which calls for the lowest possible but highest necessary level of government intervention needed to protect the common good.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Manuel Velasquez et al., “Rights,” Markkula Center for Applied Ethics, <http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision/rights.html>.

⁷⁶ The principle of subsidiarity had previously been referenced and developed in the following papal encyclicals: Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1931), §§76–87; Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1961), §§41–67, 122–77; Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1963), §§140–41. For a helpful overview of

Guided by this expression of subsidiarity and the understanding that economic activity is intimately related to the common good (§66), GS reproaches economic ideologies that categorically emphasize either individual freedom or government regulation to the exclusion of the other. Rather, GS calls for economic arrangements that prudentially balance individual freedom and state control: “Growth is not to be left solely to a kind of mechanical course of the economic activity of individuals, nor to the authority of government. For this reason, doctrines which obstruct the necessary reforms under the guise of a false liberty, and those which subordinate the basic rights of individual persons and groups to the collective organization of production must be shown to be erroneous” (§65).⁷⁷

Based on these anthropological, political, and economic frameworks, GS goes on to articulate a moral framework for “human work” that insists that “it is unjust and inhumane to organize and direct it in such a way that some of the workers are exploited” (§67). In addition, the document affirms that “the entire process of productive work, then, must be accommodated to the needs of the human person and the nature of his or her life” (§67). In support of this, the document insists that workers have a basic positive right to safe working conditions and just wages (§71), the ability to unionize (§68), and “sufficient rest and leisure to cultivate their family, cultural, social, and religious life” (§67). In no case, the document declares, can the “so-called laws of economics” be used to justify any violation of these positive rights involving human labor (§67).

In sum, it can be said that GS calls the church to be intimately involved with all aspects of the modern world. Animated by its distinctly theological anthropology, the document calls for the protection of individual human dignity through the procurement of each person’s intrinsic positive and negative human rights. In addition, and based on humanity’s fundamentally social nature, GS further recognizes that individual dignity and intrinsic human rights are inextricably connected to society and its various structures. In view of this, GS eschews economic arrangements that absolutize either individual freedom or government control, but instead acknowledges that the protection and promotion of human dignity and rights may require government intervention in various aspects of society, including, but not limited to, the economy.

To guide the discernment about ideal social organization and appropriate government intervention, the document implicitly proposes the principle of

this concept, see Thomas Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 89–92.

⁷⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965).

subsidiarity. Based on its understandings of the human person and economic systems, GS furthermore articulates a theology of work that seeks to affirm and uphold the intrinsic dignity and positive human rights of all workers. It invites all people of faith and goodwill to engage in prudent, respectful, and ongoing sociopolitical dialogue animated by commitment to principles that proceed from the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

As the preceding historical, structural, and thematic overview makes clear, GS provides a touchstone for Catholic engagement with the modern world. Given this role of GS, it seems curious that a sustained reflection on Catholic involvement in the Tea Party movement that makes GS its primary point of reference has yet to be published. Although this may be due to the perception that postconciliar Catholic Social Teaching (CST) provides a more developed framework within which to consider the Tea Party movement,⁷⁸ it seems logical that a comprehensive Catholic reflection on the Tea Party movement should at some point directly engage with the document that is recognized by Catholics as “normative for the continuous development of the discipline commonly referred to today as ‘Christian ethics.’”⁷⁹

IV. The Tea Party Movement and *Gaudium et Spes*

Having identified the core principles of the Tea Party movement and the key themes of GS, we can now assess the extent to which the major ideological commitments of the Tea Party movement are supported by GS.

Intense Individualism

The Tea Party movement is characterized in part by an intense individualism that sees each person as generally beholden and subject to few (save family and voluntary associations) and believes personal success to be essentially independent of social welfare or others’ flourishing. When this anthropology is considered through the lens of GS, however, it is clear that neither aspect of the Tea Party movement’s individualism is consonant with the rich theological anthropology of GS.

As outlined above, one of the central themes of GS is the fundamental dignity of the individual (§12). At the same time, however, GS recognizes that “by their innermost nature men and women are social beings” (§12). Guided by this foundational insight, the document constructs an anthropology that recognizes that human dignity has both personal and social

⁷⁸ Richard R. Gaillardetz, pers. comm., December 2013.

⁷⁹ Selling, “*Gaudium et Spes*,” 158.

elements. GS also points out that “the fact that human beings are social by nature indicates that the betterment of the person and the improvement of society depend on each other” (§25). Although GS goes on to assert that the family “constitutes the basis of society” (§52) and acknowledges the types of voluntary organizations valued by the Tea Party movement (73), GS identifies “the political community” and “life in society”—two types of association generally excluded by Tea Party individualism—as inextricably related to “our innermost nature” and the ability of each individual to achieve the fullness of human flourishing (§25; cf. §12).

In addition to recognizing the synergism between individual and society, GS insists that individuals have a fundamental responsibility to protect and promote others’ welfare and the common good. For example, GS asserts that the social nature of humanity means that no one can “indulge in a merely individualistic morality” that remains unconcerned with the welfare of society (§30). Rather, the document maintains, “all must consider it their sacred duty to count social obligations among their chief duties today and observe them as such” (§30). The precedent for this, the document points out, is Jesus’ life and ministry, wherein he “clearly described an obligation on the part of the daughters and sons of God to treat each other as sisters and brothers” (§32). Thus while members of the Tea Party movement would probably not give an unqualified yes to Cain’s infamous question “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9), GS emphatically declares that we are in fact called to care for all of our brothers and sisters.

In sum, GS affirms the Tea Party movement’s emphasis on the importance of the individual and voluntary associations and the responsibility to family. At the same time, however, GS fundamentally challenges the Tea Party movement’s insistence that personal success is possible without that of the community, and that individuals have little or no moral responsibility to protect and promote the welfare of all others and that of society. Thus, in light of GS, the Tea Party movement’s intense individualism represents only a partial, and critically insufficient, understanding of what it means to be fully human.

Individual Rights

As already noted, the Tea Party movement’s intense individualism is closely connected to its understanding of individual rights. In particular, the Tea Party movement passionately affirms and advocates for negative individual rights largely to the exclusion or outright denial of positive individual rights. As GS affirms both positive and negative fundamental human rights, the Tea Party movement’s understanding of individual rights is incompatible with GS.

GS affirms “the sublime dignity of human persons, who stand above all things and whose rights and duties are universal and inviolable” (§26). In its articulation of these rights, GS includes the negative individual rights “to choose their state of life and set up a family...to act according to the dictates of conscience and to safeguard their privacy, and rightful freedom, including freedom of religion” (§26). At the same time, however, GS recognizes that certain positive individual rights are intrinsic to each human person. These include “all that is necessary for living a genuinely human life: for example, food, clothing, housing,...the right to education, work, to [one’s] good name, to respect, [and] to proper knowledge” (§26).

Here, it is important to recognize and affirm that the existence of these positive individual rights does not necessarily “imply a ‘preferential option’ for Big Government,” as some politically conservative Catholics would maintain.⁸⁰ At the same time, however, the document’s description of subsidiarity (§75) shows that GS—like the full tradition of CST—recognizes a legitimate role for government intervention when positive individual rights are not secured through other, less coordinated means. Given the ways in which the Tea Party has affirmed government efforts to protect certain negative individual rights but opposed other initiatives to secure compromised positive individual rights, the movement’s understanding of individual rights is thus inconsistent with the way GS presents individual rights.

Limited Government

As mentioned above, the Tea Party advocates for the lowest possible level of government intervention in public and private life. This advocacy is consistent in part with the presentation of the role of government in GS, but it does not reflect GS’s full account of the role of government. On the one hand, GS does insist that governments should not unnecessarily obstruct the freedom of individuals, families, or free associations in society, and cautions citizens not to depend excessively on the government for “favors and subsidies” (§75). On the other hand, GS recognizes a positive role for government and appropriate government intervention that conflict with the Tea Party movement’s vision of categorically limited government.

As described, GS espouses an understanding of subsidiarity that affirms the need for government intervention in public and private life when positive individual rights and/or the common good are compromised (§75). As the Tea Party calls for the lowest possible level of government intervention and

⁸⁰ George Weigel, “Reactionary Liberalism and Catholic Social Doctrine,” *First Things*, June 1, 2011, <http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2011/06/reactionary-liberalism-and-catholic-social-doctrine>.

does not simultaneously recognize that the highest level of government is legitimately needed to protect positive rights and the common good, the movement embraces an imbalanced notion of subsidiarity that is inconsistent with the teachings of GS.⁸¹

Fiscal Responsibility

As pointed out above, one of the hallmarks of the Tea Party movement is its promotion of fiscal responsibility, which it essentially understands as prudent government spending. Although GS does not explicitly address governmental fiscal responsibility, it does invoke the virtue of prudence with respect to public spending. In §52, for example, the document asserts that those “who unhappily lack the blessing of a family should be protected by prudent legislation and various undertakings and assisted by the help they need.”⁸² In addition, the document’s invocation of subsidiarity relies on prudent reasoning to discern appropriate government intervention (which, in many cases, entails public spending).

As the Tea Party’s call for fiscal responsibility recommends the prudence that GS asserts should guide all government intervention, we must admit that GS theoretically supports this element of the movement’s ideology. It is important, however, to emphasize the qualifier “theoretically,” since, as noted, the Tea Party and GS arrive at partially conflicting prudential judgments about what constitutes an appropriate level of government intervention. In practice, then, some public spending that many Catholics would judge prudentially acceptable—possibly even necessary—with reference to GS would likely be criticized as fiscally irresponsible by many members of the Tea Party movement. In sum, although GS theoretically supports the Tea Party’s call for fiscal responsibility, the document would probably not support all Tea Party interpretations of what this constitutes in practice.

Low Taxes

The Tea Party movement, as noted above, is in many ways defined by a basic aversion to taxation and a constant struggle to lower if not abolish many existing and perceived taxes. Although taxation is not a primary focus of GS, the document’s brief treatment of the topic and general economic paradigm show that, as in the case of other elements of Tea Party ideology, GS can be said to support part—but not all—of the movement’s perspective on taxation.

⁸¹ Gerald J. Beyer, “What Ryan Missed—What Catholic Social Teaching Says about Solidarity and Subsidiarity,” *America Magazine*, June 4, 2012, http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=13455.

⁸² Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*.

In §30, “Need to Transcend an Individualistic Morality,” GS declares that “the best way to fulfil one’s obligations of justice and love is to contribute to the common good according to one’s means and the needs of others, and also to promote and help public and private organizations devoted to bettering the conditions of life.” Based on this assertion, the document goes on to condemn those “who make light of social laws and directives and are not ashamed to resort to fraud and cheating to avoid paying just taxes and fulfilling other social obligations.” At its most basic level, this condemnation of those who seek to avoid paying just taxes affirms that some taxes are, in fact, just. Given that even Tea Party members who seek to eliminate the IRS recognize a need for at least some taxation, it seems that GS and the Tea Party movement agree on this point.⁸³

Where proponents of GS and members of the Tea Party would likely diverge, however, is in the assessment of what constitutes just taxation. In the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas asserts that justice “consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor” (II-II, q. 58, a. 1). When this standard is considered in light of the affirmation in GS of both positive human rights and an ethic of subsidiarity, and of the Tea Party movement’s relative denial of these realities, GS does not seem to support Tea Party members’ narrow assessment of what in practice constitutes just taxation. In sum, then, although both the Tea Party and GS recognize the possibility of just taxes, Tea Party members are likely to have a narrower understanding of what constitutes just taxation than those who are guided by GS.

Laissez-Faire Capitalism

As outlined above, the Tea Party movement is firmly committed to laissez-faire economics in a way that causes it to resist government intervention in the economy, and the unionization of labor. With respect to government involvement in the economy, here as in certain other cases, GS affirms part—but not all—of the Tea Party’s ideology. In §65, the council fathers insist that with respect to economics “the voluntary initiatives of individuals and of free associations should be integrated with state enterprises and organized suitably and harmoniously.” The document also asserts: “[Economic] development [should neither] be left to the almost mechanical evolution of economic activity nor to the decision of public authority. Hence we must denounce as false those doctrines which stand in the way

⁸³ Todd J. Gillman, “Ted Cruz Launches Effort to Abolish IRS, but Tax Experts Call Him Confused,” *Dallas Morning News*, June 9, 2013, <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/politics/headlines/20130609-ted-cruz-launches-effort-to-abolish-irs-but-tax-experts-call-him-confused.ece>.

of all reform on the pretext of a false notion of freedom, as well as those which subordinate the basic rights of individuals and of groups to the collective organization of production.” Thus, GS supports what the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) would later call “a ‘mixed’ economic system,” which prudentially balances individual freedom with government intervention.⁸⁴ GS offers both qualified support for the Tea Party movement’s call for free markets and condemnation of some members’ efforts to absolutize a market that denies the possibility of legitimate robust government intervention.

Although GS shows certain connections with the Tea Party’s perspective on free markets, the same cannot be said of the movement’s aforementioned disinterest in recognizing a moral dimension of work, or its resistance to workers’ unionization. As noted above, GS §§67, 68, and 71 establish support for the positive rights of humane working conditions, productive work, and jobs that respect the needs of the person for “family, cultural, social, and religious life.” In sum, GS can be understood to challenge Tea Party claims that, based on the inviolability of the free market, there are no moral dimensions to human work, such as the positive right of workers to unionize.

V. Conclusion

On August 29, 2015, Republican presidential candidate front-runner, Donald Trump, worked to win over Tea Party voters at a campaign rally in Nashville, Tennessee.⁸⁵ Five years after the movement helped shape the 111th US Congress, it is thus clear that the Tea Party remains relevant to American politics. Likewise, an assessment of the Tea Party in light of GS is as important now as when the movement first began.

The foregoing analysis has shown that GS does not support the Tea Party’s particular understanding of and emphasis on intense individualism. In addition, it has become clear that the Tea Party movement’s disproportionate emphasis on negative rights represents an incomplete understanding of individual rights vis-à-vis GS. My analysis has further established that the Tea Party movement’s basic understanding of government is disharmonious with the way that GS understands the institution.

Although the Tea Party movement and GS have different understandings of individualism, rights, and the role of government, both theoretically share a

⁸⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, §131.

⁸⁵ M. J. Lee, “Donald Trump Courts Tea Party at Nashville Straw Poll,” CNN, August 29, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/08/29/politics/donald-trump-tea-party-nashville/>.

similar perspective with respect to fiscal responsibility. As was pointed out, however, this agreement is largely theoretical, since the Tea Party in practice takes a much narrower view of what constitutes responsible government spending. Similarly, while both Tea Party members and those guided by GS would likely affirm the need for just taxation, the former would probably take a more restrictive position than the latter about what constitutes just taxation in practice. Finally, while both the Tea Party movement and GS affirm a legitimate role for free markets in the economic sphere, GS does not support either the Tea Party's unqualified endorsement of laissez-faire capitalism or the concomitant philosophy of work devoid of positive rights and related moral principles.

In conclusion, there do appear to be certain points of limited resonance between the core principles of the Tea Party movement and the key themes of GS. At the same time, however, it is eminently clear that many if not most of these similarities are qualified at best, and that the overall framework of the Tea Party's ideology is largely inconsistent with that of GS. Thus it is difficult to see how anyone who seeks guidance from GS in its entirety could also support, or identify as a member of, the Tea Party movement.