

The Role of Religion (or Not) in the Tea Party Movement: Current Debates & The Anti-Federalists

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The Tea Party is known most for its positions related to economic and fiscal issues, and its emphasis on limited government and adherence to the Constitution. However, there is an ongoing debate both within the movement and among its observers about the role of social and religious issues. With the increased convergence of Republican and Tea Party supporters following the 2010 elections, will the latter issues now come more into the forefront? Were they relegated merely for tactical reasons or is the movement indeed more libertarian than it is conservative? This paper will explore why religious and social issues have not been the focal point of the Tea Party, and whether this phenomenon is likely to remain going forward. I will consider the intersection of religion and politics in this grassroots social movement by examining: 1) major Tea Party organizations, 2) key Tea Party documents, 3) prominent movement figures and 4) key 2010-2011 poll findings.¹ The debates of the current day will then be compared with those that took place between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists, touching on important questions related to the role of government and religion in America.

In my analysis of the Tea Party movement, I will draw from a variety of sources to seek a broad understanding of the movement, while acknowledging that there is no one “monolithic” Tea Party, and no one designated leader. As Scott Rasmussen and Douglas Schoen in *Mad as Hell* explain, “at its core, the movement remains a diffuse, grass-roots phenomenon” (Rasmussen and Schoen 2010, 166). Furthermore, just as its structure is difficult to define because of the horizontal nature of the movement, its positions are also more complex than can be explained by one policy document or one organization’s mission statement. It is possible however, to offer some broad observations: first and foremost, the Tea Party movement is concerned with minimizing the size of government, particularly how much money government spends, and maximizing the ability of individuals to act freely. As one Tea Party activist interviewed by Jill Lepore in *The Whites of Their Eyes* said, “Government is for the post office, and to defend our country, and maybe for the roads. That’s all” (Lepore 2010, 44). Furthermore, as Dick Armey and Mark Kibbe, founders of the Tea Party organization Freedom Works, wrote in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, “The American values of individual freedom, fiscal responsibility and limited government bind the ranks of our movement” (Armey and Kibbe, 2010). The Tea Party has a strong libertarian element in its philosophy, representing a rejection of the status quo of establishment politics.

¹ The analyses in this paper focus on the timeframe leading up to the 2010 mid-term elections through fall 2011.

Tea Party Organizations

In my review of six key Tea Party organizations I found minimal attention to social or religious issues. First I looked at Tea Party Nation, the for-profit company which “trains activists in multiple states, has helped organize rallies, and spends millions of dollars to air issue ads” (Good, 2010). The welcome message on its website homepage invokes faith-based language and rationale, describing itself as a “group of like-minded people who desire our God-given individual freedoms written out by the Founding Fathers.” However, it goes on to describe its priority issues as “Limited Government, Free Speech, the 2nd Amendment, our Military, Secure Borders and our Country” (*Tea Party Nation*, 2011).

Second, Tea Party Patriots, “the movement’s largest membership organization” acknowledges but then unequivocally distances itself from social issues (Good, 2010). The “philosophy” statement of the Tea Party Patriots states: “As an organization we do not take stances on social issues. We urge members to engage fully on the social issues they consider important and aligned with their beliefs” (Tea Party Patriots Mission Statement and Core Values, *Tea Party Patriots*, 2011). A third organization, Tea Party Express, which is a political action committee, includes no issue or policy statements. Instead its focus is on its endorsements, which did in 2010 include social conservatives such as Delaware U.S. Senate candidate Christine O’Donnell, but also Scott Brown, who is now a Massachusetts Senator and who has presented himself as a moderate on social issues (Endorse 2010, *Tea Party Express*, 2010). Fourth, in Freedom Works, a major grassroots organization that was instrumental particularly early on in the movement, I found little that could be interpreted as reference to social issues, other than its general advocacy for “individual freedom” (Our Mission, *Freedom Works*, 2010). Fifth, in the case of Americans for Prosperity, I found a strong, and even technical, focus on economic and fiscal policy. Social or religious issues are totally absent. Finally, in the National Tea Party Federation I found an organizing platform in pursuit of the general objectives of “Fiscal Responsibility, Constitutionally Limited Government, and Free Markets” (*National Tea Party Federation*, 2011).

While there is no one dominant Tea Party organization, review of these major ones clearly shows that social and religious issues are not given priority attention by leading Tea Party groups. However, this lack of direct attention should not be dismissed as a lack of concern or support for the issues. Lisa McGirr, a professor of history at Harvard, believes that the Tea Party uses a kind of code to talk about social values: “When they talk about returning to the values of the Founding Fathers, they are talking about life as a social issue” (Zernike, 2010). For example, in establishing the House of Representatives’ Tea Party Caucus – another important organizational vehicle that focuses on fiscal responsibility, adherence to the Constitution and limited government – Rep. Michele Bachman (R-MN) issued a statement about the importance of espousing “the timeless principles of our founding,” a vague sentiment that could easily apply to moral values as well as economic and governmental issues (Bachman to Start House Caucus,

2010). Moreover, while Tea Party organizations seem to be focused on issues other than gay marriage and abortion, it is important to consider how the Tea Party's alignments interact with social conservatism. As Rasmussen and Schoen explain, "Adding to the complexity, the movement is affiliated with many conservative special interest groups that have only marginal ties to the broader Tea Party movement—especially those groups working on traditional social conservative issues like abortion or school prayer, which have rarely been the focus of Tea Party political activity" (Rasmussen and Schoen 2010, 166). This explains the above statement by Tea Party Patriots which strongly urges their members to engage on social issues – showing a clear sympathy with conservative social issues and causes – but makes clear their own agnosticism on the issue and directs political activity elsewhere.

The degree to which Tea Party organizations will continue to eschew a values-driven agenda is unclear. Since the 2010 election, the messaging has been shifting, "both from the inside and outside, with more faith groups using tea party-type language, and some groups like Texas-based TeaParty.org and the Iowa Tea Party bucking the movement's traditions by embracing social issues as part of their stated agendas" (Jonsson 2011).

Tea Party Documents

A review of the key foundational Tea Party documents shows that social issues are mostly absent. Notably, the "Contract from America," a major Tea Party document that was the idea of Houston-based lawyer Ryan Hecker, does not mention social, religious or family-values related issues. It advocates on behalf of "individual liberty, limited government, and economic freedom," citing ten specific points, only two of which – "Protect the Constitution" and "Restore Fiscal Responsibility & Constitutionally Limited Government" – are not exclusively financial in nature (thecontract.org, 2011). This is not done without intention. As Hecker explains in a 2010 *New York Times* article:

We should be creating the biggest tent possible around the economic conservative issue. I think social issues may matter to particular individuals, but at the end of the day, the movement should be agnostic about it. This is a movement that rose largely because of the Republican Party failing to deliver on being representative of the economic conservative ideology. To include social issues would be beside the point. (In Zernike 2010)

The Independence Caucus questionnaire, which many Tea Party groups used to evaluate candidates in the 2010 elections, posed 80 questions, which are almost entirely on the role of government, taxes and federal budgeting. However, the last section of questions relates to "personal character and standards" and poses a moral test akin in some ways to the religious tests which, as we will see later, Anti-Federalists supported. The request that candidates pledge not to "commit any act which would raise a reasonable question as to your individual moral character;

including breaking marital vows” seems to stray from the libertarian leanings of the overall Tea Party movement (80 Vetting Questions, Independence Caucus, 2010).

Another key document is a letter from 17 state Tea Party leaders and gay conservatives sent to Republican legislators following the 2010 elections urging them “to concentrate on foundational Tea Party principles--smaller government, lower taxes--and to sidestep divisive social issues like abortion and gay rights” (Eichler 2010). This letter, which is particularly illustrative of the debate between Tea Party and Republican party leaders reads:

This election was not a mandate for the Republican Party, nor was it a mandate to act on any social issue, nor should it be interpreted as a political blank check...Already, there are Washington insiders and special interest groups that hope to co-opt the Tea Party's message and use it to push their own agenda – particularly as it relates to social issues. We are disappointed but not surprised by this development. We recognize the importance of values but believe strongly that those values should be taught by families and our houses of worship and not legislated from Washington, D.C.. (Tea Party Letter to Republicans, 2010)

Here again, we see a clear choice and directive to de-prioritize social issues, this time one that is focused on keeping the Republican victory in the 2010 elections, which included many Tea Party politicians, from derailing the movement’s core objectives.

Tea Party “Leaders”

Analyzing the views of the Tea Party’s prominent figures is complicated given that these figures claim not to be leaders of the movement at all. As two of the “non-leaders” have pointed out, “The tea party movement has blossomed into a powerful social phenomenon because it is leaderless—not directed by any one mind, political party or parochial agenda” (Armev and Kibbe, Wall Street Journal, 2010). Some of the Tea Party figures are also leaders in the Christian conservative movement, while others are not. Certainly Tea Party favorites, Sarah Palin, Senator Jim DeMint (R-SC), Congressman Mike Pence (R-IN) and Congresswoman Michele Bachmann (R-MN) are known for their pro-life and pro-traditional marriage political views.

Palin stirred controversy in 2010 when she dismissed notions that America is not a “Christian nation”. She said: "God truly has shed his grace on thee -- on this country. He's blessed us, and we better not blow it." She went on to invoke the Founding Fathers: "Lest anyone try to convince you that God should be separated from the state, our founding fathers, they were believers” (Waters 2010). For Palin, there is no doubting the Christian roots of the nation and the responsibility that creates to legislate based on Christianity. DeMint is similar to Palin in his views on religious and social issues. Interestingly, he has made a connection between a limited government and reliance on God. In an appearance on the *Christian Broadcasting Network* DeMint said: "People are seeing this massive government growing and they're realizing that it's

the government that's hurting us. And I think they're turning back to God...is our salvation and government is not our salvation and in fact more and more people see government as the problem" (Sharlett 2010).

Another Tea Party favorite, Michele Bachmann, is also not shy about raising issues related to values and religion. In a February 2011 speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) where Bachmann urged the Republican party not to neglect social issues, she said, "As important as these distressing economic concerns are, we would be wise to recall that there are other threats that loom as well." Mike Pence, at one time a Presidential hopeful, has made points, like Bachmann, about economic problems being urgent, but not eclipsing social problems, which he says "remain important in a way that blurs the distinction between social and economic issues" (Will 2010). Rick Perry, another past Republican Presidential hopeful, who in August led by 21 percentage points among Tea Party supporters over Mitt Romney, Bachmann and others, is also known to have strong socially conservative views (Jones, 2011). For example, in summer 2011 Perry convened a controversial event called, "The Response: a call to prayer for a nation in crisis." In a video posted to the event's website, Perry said: "As an elected leader, I'm all too aware of government's limitations when it comes to fixing things that are spiritual in nature. That's where prayer comes in, and we need it more than ever" (Memoli, 2011).

One Tea Party commentator wrote in *The Washington Post* about the fact that many of the Tea Party's leaders are strong social conservatives, saying: "Palin, DeMint, Pence...and Bachmann are social conservatives. We, social conservatives, are leading the Tea Party in the court of public opinion" (Sekulow 2010). So why then does the Tea Party movement not prioritize these issues organizationally or in major position statements? The same writer then went on to discuss what he sees as a tactical choice to prioritize economic over religious issues: "Sure, the focus on issues may be a bit different now, but that's because we are a more sophisticated, diverse movement that understands when economic times are tough, people want to shake things up" (Sekulow 2010). In late 2011 we saw Bachmann and others rejecting a strong social conservative stance and instead opting for a position that promotes tolerance and de-emphasizes the role of religion in politics. Herman Cain, still another past Republican Presidential hopeful and Tea Party favorite, commenting on the role of Presidents and the issue of abortion has said, "it's not the government's role or anybody else's role to make that decision ... it ultimately gets down to a choice that that family or that mother has to make" (CNN 2011).

Bachmann and Cain have clearly shifted their approach to social issues depending on the political moment, but in contrast, Dick Armey, a major Tea Party figure, has never presented himself as a social conservative at all. He has discussed the question of issue prioritization. In an interview with *The Christian Science Monitor*, Armey commented in the following way on the matter of social issues: "the fact of the matter is there is sort of a question of first things first priorities. If we lose this nation, if it falls into insolvency, then all of these issues pretty well fall by the wayside too, don't they. So I think there is a setting of priorities" (Cook 2010). Armey is clearly aware that social issues are important to many within the movement, but he does not see them as the mobilizing factor. In *Give Us Liberty*, a Tea Party "manifesto" written by Armey and

his colleague Matt Kibbe, there is little attention to social issues. Kibbe has said there is no official Tea Party position on social issues (Cook 2010). In a similar vein, Ralph King, co-chairman of the Ohio Tea Party Patriots and signatory to the above-mentioned post-election letter to Republicans, explained: "When they were out in the Boston Harbor, they weren't arguing about who was gay or who was having an abortion ... I look at myself as pretty socially conservative. But that's not what we push through the Tea Party Patriots" (Smith and Tau, 2010).

King, Arney and Kibbe are examples of Tea Party leaders who may be social conservatives in disguise. But some are not social conservatives at all. United States Senator Scott Brown (R-MA) is a moderate on social issues and was endorsed by Tea Party organizations during the 2010 election². Donald Trump, who as a short-lived Presidential hopeful was courting Tea Party support, has been known to be pro-choice and fiscally conservative, but to boost his political pursuits reversed his position and declared himself to be pro-life (Reinhard 2011). Mitt Romney, who has also flip-flopped on the abortion issue but is generally known to be moderate in his views on social issues, has at times polled better among Tea Party supporters than "any other GOP presidential candidate" (Jonsson 2011).

We see from this analysis a mixed picture when looking at some of the most visible figures associated with the Tea Party. Some are strong social conservatives; some are less concerned. Some are happy to invoke religiously motivated issues; some rarely do. Many have made a tactical choice to avoid them. The writer and political commentator Dick Morris explained that while "social concerns still exist and are held deeply throughout the country, economic and fiscal issues have gripped the hearts and minds of Republican voters and candidates, pushing the social questions aside. This preference for economic and fiscal questions over social issues is not a top-down decision of the Tea Party leadership" (Morris, 2010). In fact, it is reflective of the rank and file of the movement, picking up on a populist sentiment, which brings us to our next section on polling data.

The Tea Partiers Themselves: 2010-2011 Polling Data

There have been a variety of polls looking at the demographics of the Tea Party and what grassroots members of the movement believe, particularly the question of whether they are social as well as economic conservatives. When all of the survey findings are taken into account together, what emerges is a complex movement that is not able to be easily labeled or identified.

Starting with pre-2010 election polls, I looked at the *New York Times/CBS* survey conducted in April 2010. As Lara Brown of Villanova University points out, the findings here show that "although more conservative (traditional may be a better descriptive) than the public as a whole, the Tea Party is not the religious right" (Brown 2010). Their priorities are clear. When asked what the most important problem facing the country is, 52% named the economy or jobs while

² It should be noted that Scott Brown has distanced himself from the Tea Party in recent months, declaring himself to be first a Republican. Perhaps because he has been targeted by the Tea Party crowd for his support of certain policies?

only 5% named abortion. When asked directly about social issues, only 32% believed that abortion should not be available, while 45% believed it should be available under stricter conditions, and 20% believed it should always be available. Only thirty-nine percent of Tea Partiers identified themselves as evangelical or born-again Christians (The New York Times/CBS Poll, 2010).

In contrast, some surveys taken since then show the Tea Party to be more conservative on social issues and more in line with Republican party members in that regard. For example, the American Values Survey conducted in September 2010 by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) found that nearly half (47%) of those who consider themselves part of the Tea Party said they were part of the religious right. Nearly two-thirds (63%) said abortion should be illegal in all or most cases. They were largely Republican partisans, with more than three-quarters saying they identify with (48%) or lean towards (28%) the Republican Party (American Values Survey 2010). This differs slightly from the composition at the time of *The New York Times/CBS* poll, where 18% said they always vote Republican and 48% said they usually vote Republican. While the overall number of Tea Partiers leaning Republican is similar in both, the strength of the identification clearly increases in the PRRI survey.

The most recent poll on Tea Party member views was conducted by the Pew Research Center between August 2010 and February 2011. Similar to PRRI, in surveys conducted between August and September Pew found that Tea Party supporters “tend to take socially conservative positions on abortion and same-sex marriage” (Clement and Green 2011). Unlike registered voters who are closely divided on same-sex marriage (42% in favor, 49% opposed), a majority of Tea Party supporters opposed it (64%). Pew finds similar perspectives as PRRI, although it draws slightly different conclusions, particularly on Tea Party identification with the Christian right. The PRRI survey proclaimed as its lead title that “nearly half of the Tea Party movement also identify with the Christian conservative movement” (American Values Survey 2010). Pew found that nearly half of Tea Party supporters (46%) had not heard of or did not have an opinion about “the conservative Christian movement sometimes known as the religious right,” while only 42% said they agree with the conservative Christian movement. They concluded then, with a more nuanced finding than that of PRRI: “most people who agree with the religious right also support the Tea Party. But support for the Tea Party is not synonymous with support for the religious right” (Clement and Green 2011). Pew also found that “Tea Party supporters closely resemble Republican voters as a whole on [social] issues” (Clement and Green 2011).

The fact that the more recent polls indicate stronger Tea Party support of socially conservative positions is due in part to the impact of the 2010 elections and Tea Party supporters being forced to choose between the Republican or Democratic party. The phenomenon of third party adherents being absorbed by one of the larger two parties is nothing new. For example, in the case of Ross Perot, many of his ideas and supporters were integrated into the Republican

party following his failed bid for President³. However, in the case of the Tea Party, the data indicates that this explanation is not entirely adequate. A Gallup poll conducted in April 2010, the same month as *The New York Times/CBS* Poll, found that a solid 49% of Tea Party supporters identified as Republican, 43% Independent and 8% Democrat (Saad 2010). In *The New York Times/CBS* 2010 poll itself, a full 65% leaned Republican. There certainly was some moving over to the Republican party by Tea Partyers during or after the 2010 election season, but many were in fact Republicans in early 2010. As David Campbell and Robert Putnam argued in an August 2011 *New York Times* article, “the Tea Party’s supporters today were highly partisan Republicans long before the Tea Party was born, and...in fact, past Republican affiliation is the single strongest predictor of Tea Party support today” (Campbell and Putnam, 2011).

The above data, though not entirely conclusive, does seem to indicate that a sizable element of Tea Party members were always Republicans, and that by choosing to identify with the movement they were putting their emphasis on economic and not social issues, thereby rejecting the Republican party’s “hot button” issues agenda of recent decades. As a *Christian Science Monitor* article observed, “While such issues may be of interest to many Tea Partyers, they are not at the forefront of Tea Party activism” (Knickerbocker 2010).

Debates in 2011 surrounding funding of Planned Parenthood drew new fault lines. Some say the extent to which this issue has been pursued by the Republican-dominated House of Representatives, which includes many Tea Party Members elected in 2010, “shows that the Tea Party is just a new incarnation of the traditional ‘values’ driven Republican” (Jonsson 2011). However, others say that it simply shows the “demographic overlap that exists between social conservatives and the Tea Partyers” (Jonsson 2011). It is not entirely clear. The debate about religious and social issues within the Tea Party has been robust and even now continues to unfold. What is clear is that it is a mistake to see this movement and its supporters as not interested in social and religious issues. While the Tea Party has until now been focused on the role of government particularly as it relates to fiscal issues, this may not be the case forever. Now we will see how these current debate relates to historic ones.

Anti-Federalists and Federalist Debate on Religion and the Role of Government

The nature of the arguments in support of the Constitution by the Federalists, and against it, from the Anti-Federalists mirror in many ways the debates stirred by the Tea Party movement today. The Federalists constructed a federal system of government that retained the states, derived its authority from the people, and as is stated clearly by James Madison in *Federalist #10*, was best able to address the problem of clashing “factions” through an extended national sphere. The Federalists certainly set up a system whose checks and balance put limits on the new

³ Perot’s concern regarding term limits, for example, was incorporated into the Congressional Republican’s 1994 “Contract With America.” See Jelen, Ted, ed. (2001) *Ross for Boss* (New York: SUNY Press).

federal government, but from the perspective of the Anti-Federalists this system looked like consolidated governance and even a return to “universal empire” (Ketcham 1986, 20). The Anti-Federalists preferred a system that emphasized more strongly individual and states’ rights, responding to what they saw as the Federalists’ “enlarged federal government and the enhancement of executive power with a call for the protection of private and individual rights through a Bill of Rights” (Kramnick 1987, 60-61). On issues related to religion, the Federalists did not create a “Christian nation,” as Sarah Palin and others might assert, but rather fostered a “multiplicity of sects” in what John DiIulio has aptly termed a “godly republic” (DiIulio 2008, 29). They prohibited religious test for office out of a conviction that “liberty requires the unrestrained exercise of the conscience” (Sheehan and McDowell 1998, 314). In contrast, the Anti-Federalists were social conservatives who supported religious tests for office and believed a republican system required homogenous religious beliefs, which at that time would have meant Christian beliefs.

There was certainly cross-over and exchange between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists, but I would argue that the modern Tea Party activists have more in common with their Anti-Federalist forebears than the Federalists they more often invoke when referring to our “Founding Fathers”. Tea Party rhetoric often refers to the Constitution – whether it be Michelle Bachman’s Congressional Tea Party caucus calling for “adherence to the constitution” or Contract From America’s entreaty to “Protect the Constitution.” However, this is often done without a nuanced understanding of how these current views relate to the historic debates around ratification of the Constitution. It should be noted, though, that this is a common mistake. The Anti-Federalists may have been formally defeated, but many of their ideas have become part of our American political philosophy and are playing out today in the Tea Party, even though they are not generally recognized or identified. As Saul Cornell explains in *The Other Founders*, “If the structure of American government was crafted by the Federalists, the spirit of American politics has more often been inspired by the Anti-Federalists” (Cornell 1999, 1).⁴

Anti-Federalist thought can be seen in the Tea Party, particularly in its emphasis on states’ rights. The Anti-Federalists emphasized state government, which they believed provided an “appropriate arena in which the diverse interests of different localities could be reconciled, whereas shifting authority to a more distant government and weakening the state would destroy the representative character of American institutions” (Cornell 1999, 74). Interestingly, the 2011 proposal to defund Planned Parenthood put forward by House Republicans, including Tea Party-identified Members, involved giving Title X money directly to the states to distribute to the health groups of their choice, rather than having funding go through the federal government (Somashkhar, Sandyha and Rucker, Philip 2011). The Anti-Federalists’ deference to states derived from their apprehension of a powerful national government. “Suspicious of

⁴ Future research might explore how Federalists such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison co-opted Anti-Federalists themes and approaches into their efforts, and conversely how the Republican party today is doing the same with Tea Party perspectives and ideas.

centralization” and the notion of “localism” ran throughout Anti-Federalists thought (Cornell 1999, 1). They preferred a small republic. As Brutus said in his 1787 *New York Journal* article:

The territory of the United State is of vast extent ... is it practicable for a country, so large and so numerous as they will soon become, to elect a representation, that will speak their sentiments, without their becoming so numerous as to be incapable of transacting public business? It certainly is not. In a republic, the manners, sentiments, and interest of the people should be similar. (Kaminski and Leffler 1989, 5)

In the Anti-Federalists’ vision of a small republic, religion played a strong role. As Herbert Storing explains in *What Anti-Federalists Were For*, “many Anti-Federalists were concerned with the maintenance of religious conviction as a support of republican government” (Storing 1981, 22). A key Anti-Federalist theme was “the need to promote civic virtue through the public protection and promotion of religion” (Storing 1981, v. 4, p. 246). And this kind of sentiment is certainly seen in the views of Bachmann, Palin and others. The essay, “A Proposal for Reviving Christian Conviction” described the Anti-Federalist belief that civil institutions are dependent on religious sanction, pointing to the way in which legislators “call in the aid of religion” and claimed that “in no form of government whatever has the influence of religious principles been found so requisite as in that of a republic” (Storing 1981, v. 5, 126). These views were in direct contrast to Madison’s perspective as expressed in the *Federalist #10*, where he stated clearly that “neither moral nor religious motives can be relied upon as adequate control” of society (Rossiter 1961, 81). In fact Madison believed religion was a key contributor to the threat of factions he was so concerned with: “A zeal for different opinions concerning religion, concerning government, and many other points...have, in turn, divided mankind into parties, inflamed them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to co-operate for their common good” (Rossiter 1961, 79).

One of the major ways in which the Anti-Federalists promoted their views on religion was through support for religious tests, believing that the “rights of the people to legislate on matters of public morality took precedence over the right of conscience” (Cornell 1999, 57). The author of the anti-federalist essay, “A Friend to the Rights of the People” commented on the danger of discarding all religious tests as the Federalists were proposing. He said,

But will this be good policy to discard all religion? It may be said the meaning is not to discard it, but only to shew that there is no need of it in public efforts; they may be as faithful without as with – this is a mistake – when a man has no regard to God and his laws nor any belief of a future state; he will have less regard to the laws of men, or to the most solemn oaths or affirmations; it is acknowledged by all that civil governments can’t be well supported without the assistance of religion.” (Storing 1981 v. 4, 242)

In opposing the Federalists' prohibition on religious tests, the Anti-Federalists, in an ironic way, weakened individual rights and envisioned a broad role for religion, but their purpose was actually to counter what they saw as a Federalist assertion of federal power, the "power to regulate religious beliefs in general" (Storing 1981 v. 1, 64). This points to the pairing of small government and a moral society. The Anti-Federalists' believed, as one notable leader, William Petrikin, put it, "that religious tests helped promote virtue" and so they opposed a federal move that would limit their use (Cornell 1999, 109). While the Tea Party does not support religious tests (although the Independence Caucus does promote a litmus test on values), they have recognized the importance of religion both in their supporters' lives and in the movement, such as in DeMint's comments above where he discussed Tea Partyers' rejection of the overreach of the federal government and embrace of God, not government, as their salvation. Interestingly, Petrikin actually recast the argument about religious tests in a way that resonates with DeMint. Petrikin believed that "religion had often served as a check on rulers by providing a basis for popular resistance" (Cornell 1999, 109). Indeed, Tea Partyers today have made the pursuit of small government a values-laden mission. As John Mark Reynolds wrote in *The Washington Post* "On Faith" blog, "When government grows too large, it saps the strength of other parts of society. High government spending and the taxes needed to pay for them are a moral issue" (Reynolds 2010).

In the end, the Anti-Federalist preference for a strong role for a particular religion – their version of Christianity – did not win the day. This could be interpreted as simply that they lost and the Federalists, with their vision of pluralism, ultimately won. This is only partly true. As DiIulio explains, most Anti-Federalists "were willing to compromise: Madison and the Federalists could have their large republic with diverse economic interests (including urban manufacturers) and a multiplicity of sects (including non-Christians and nonbelievers) so long as the national government was constitutionally forbidden from interfering with states' rights" (DiIulio 2008, 44). The Anti-Federalists were proponents of both federalism and individual rights, with a strong concern for individual liberty. Their legacy remains the Bill of Rights, a key vehicle for limiting the power of federal government. They believed first and foremost that "the national government proposed by the Constitution was too strong and too centralized" (DiIulio 2008, 42). One of their chief critiques of the Federalists was related to the heavy burden of national taxation. This is why, like the Tea Party of today, they were willing to relegate their views on religion in favor of a cause they thought more important: the protection of freedom from a consolidated government. The Anti-Federalists may have also believed that they were ultimately achieving their goal anyway: because in a context where government's role is minimized, the possibility for the more localized, virtuous existence idealized by the Anti-Federalists could perhaps emerge.

Conclusion: Less Government, More Virtue

The foregoing analysis reveals what has been a real tension within the Tea Party movement about whether to engage fully on religious and social issues. Many in its ranks and among its prominent figures are in fact social conservatives or hold those types of views, but they have left those battles to other organizations or relegated them for tactical reasons. The post-mid-term 2010 elections period, leading into the pre-2012 Presidential campaign season, has raised new debates and new shifts are taking place, but to what end is still not clear. Angie Maxwell, a political scientist at the University of Arkansas who studies Tea Party demographics, has looked at the controversy in 2011 regarding funding of Planned Parenthood. For some Tea Party members, defunding Planned Parenthood "is the perfect thing to push for, because it shows fiscal conservatism, and it's also not funding one of the social issues that you so adamantly want control over" (Jonsson 2011). It seems, in essence, to promote a fundamental Tea Party and Anti-Federalist goal: less federal government and more virtue. However, some, like Scott Brown view it in a different way. They saw this initiative as "going too far" by delving into the social issues that the Tea Party has generally stayed away from, and which can lead to a large role for the federal government (Jonsson 2011).

The potential for the Tea Party to begin directly taking on moral issues may challenge its wide tent, but there are ways to make sense of it ideologically. As the president of Americans for Tax Reform, Grover Norquist, has said, "The reason why social conservatives and economic conservatives can play well together ... is the guy who wants to go to church all day just wants to be left alone. So does the guy who wants to play with his gun all day, and the guy who wants to make money all day" (Hennessey 2010). The Planned Parenthood funding situation is an example of how the Tea Party can engage on social issues in a way that can be interpreted as libertarian in character. However, should the Tea Party decide to promote a strong federal role in ending abortion or prohibiting gay marriage it will have to wrestle with the longstanding friction between libertarian and conservative views – the tension between believing in small government while also supporting government action to legislate public morality. They would not be alone.

The Anti-Federalists were melding libertarian and conservative philosophies in the 18th century. As Storing explained, "they saw no inconsistency between liberty of conscience and the public support of the religious, and generally Protestant, community as the basis of public and private morality," even if they ultimately focused their energies elsewhere (Storing 1981 v. 1, 23). The Republicans revived this seemingly incongruous marrying of political perspectives in the 20th century and have pursued it with zeal in recent decades. But the Tea Party rose to power in part because of their narrow economic focus – their refusal to engage in the messy business of religion and politics. Should the Tea Party choose to take up religious and social issues in the 21st century, they will need to find new ways of navigating them that preserve the "less government, more virtue" model, lest they quickly become indistinguishable from the Republican party from which they have sought to differentiate themselves.

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