Whatever one may mean by “political theology,” or even whether, as Stanley Hauerwas questions,\(^1\) there can be such a thing as political theology, it is fair to assert that the discussion on these themes has followed primarily a Protestant-Catholic trajectory. The post-Communist situation has thrust the Orthodox into these debates, though there appears little evidence in the literature of any mutual influence between the centuries-long Protestant-Catholic conversation and that emerging within the Orthodox world. It was this lack that we hoped to address at the Patterson Conference, “Christianity, Democracy, and the Shadow of Constantine,” sponsored by the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University.

The question of the relation of Christianity to democracy is especially acute in the post-Communist Orthodox countries. Although Orthodox theological engagement with modern liberalism is evident in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russia, it was in relation to the existing imperial structures and was interrupted by the Communist Revolution. The traditional Orthodox countries are now not empires, and even though one sees movements toward totalitarianism within some of these Orthodox countries, there is no way for the Orthodox countries to avoid engagement with the challenge of modern political liberalism. Even in Greece, where church-state relations have been a national public issue since Greece’s liberation from the Ottomans in the early nineteenth century, the complicated relation to the European Union manifests how an East-West divide shapes Orthodox thinking on the political. There is not an Orthodox

\(^1\)
Church in the world that would disavow democracy, but they do argue that the particular shape of church-state relations is not uniform and must take into account a nation’s particular religious history. Fr. Capodistrias Hämmerli supports this claim, drawing on the now landmark case of *Lautsi v. Italy*, and shows how most of the twenty countries participating in Italy’s appeal to the case were traditional Orthodox countries. Kristina Stoeckl further elucidates this East-West rhetoric by analyzing the discourse on human rights in the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Although the ROC supports human rights, it advances an understanding of human rights that counters that of the Western liberal tradition. In effect, it uses a Western notion to claim a diametrical opposition between East and West by arguing for a particular Eastern notion of human rights and, by extension, of democracy. In so doing, it forms alliances with Western conservatives, with whom the ROC shares an antiliberal rhetoric. It is unclear to what extent the ROC influences the Russian state or particular legislation; but Vladimir Putin is using Russia’s Orthodox history and cultural traditions in order to forge a new East-West ideological divide. In this sense, the ROC’s own ambivalence toward modern Western liberalism indirectly contributes to such seemingly un-Christian legislation as the laws against “gay propaganda.”

Given this new global reality, it is timely for a new ecumenical discussion to occur where Protestant and Catholic theologians reflect on these questions in light of both the Orthodox situation and Orthodox sources; and, conversely, where Orthodox theologians reflect on the unprecedented global reality within Orthodoxy in dialogue with the already-existing debate among Protestants and Catholics. This theological exchange occurs, of course, in light of the larger discussions within political philosophy about the relation of religion to the state, society, and culture.

Mount Athos is to many the heart of the Orthodox world, and Luke Bretherton appeals to what some refer to as the holy mountain and the experience of living between liturgical and “worldly” time as a bridge to the consociational model of democracy, which pluralizes political sovereignty across different overlapping associations. He argues that Orthodox should think about politics in terms of consociational democracy, which he connects to Orthodox understandings of the Trinity and eschatology. Thinking in consociationalist and eschatological terms would further help the Orthodox resist the temptations of *phyletism* and ethnonationalism because it would challenge the claims to undivided sovereignty by any worldly political authority or association.
A seminal moment within the Roman Catholic tradition regarding its relation to liberal democracy is Vatican II, and Mary Doak writes on the Council’s description of the Church as a “sign and instrument” of divine-human communion and ties it to the Orthodox teaching on theosis, arguing that Catholics can learn from the Orthodox how to better show Catholic social thought’s rootedness in central Christian teachings. Orthodox teaching on communion can help resist globalization, rampant individualism, and social atomism, while helping to promote justice and inclusion. In continuity with this theme of divine-human communion, or theosis, Eric Gregory identifies the need for both East and West to better relate the world-affirming incarnational dimension of political theology to redemption history and the awareness of sin. The Orthodox are often accused of overstressing the former, leading to uncritical alliances with political institutions, while political Augustinians tend to over stress the latter, leading to pessimism about earthly politics. Gregory calls on both traditions to think about the importance of political action in time as a way of navigating the dialectic tensions between political confidence and pessimism.

One of the most challenging, if not basic, questions Orthodox theologians must confront is the compatibility between the Orthodox tradition and liberal democracy. Perry Hamalis argues for such a compatibility through highlighting the affinities between Orthodox thinkers and Thomas Hobbes on the dynamics of death. Orthodoxy and the liberal tradition founded on Hobbes both see the modern political order grounded in the dynamics of death, and Hamalis argues that such a notion allows for a bridge between disparate traditions in ways not possible with the theological notion of divine-human communion.

Nathaniel Wood focuses our attention on late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Russia, where one sees one of the few substantive debates on liberal democracy within the Orthodox tradition prior to the post-Communist situation. As Wood illustrates, the notion of divine-human communion was central to this discussion. He further argues that Russian theologians, such as Sergius Bulgakov, viewed the secular liberal order through the lens of divine-human communion in a way that was critically appreciative, as such an order allows for a divinization of the created order in freedom, and not through force. Finally, Emmanuel Clapsis, like Doak, sees the Orthodox understanding of the Church in terms of the Eucharist as enabling it to act as an agent for promoting human solidarity and communion. While the pluralism of liberal democracies has posed a challenge
to the ways in which the Church has functioned within traditional Orthodox countries, members of Eucharistic communities—Church—should engage as connected critics, promoting solidarity and communion within the public sphere, while testifying also to the limitations of the age and to the world’s eschatological future.

These theological discussions on political theology are ultimately haunted by the shadow of the Emperor Constantine’s conversion to Christianity (312 CE), which has left its indelible stamp on Christian thinking of the political; his shadow even extends to the pre-Constantinian era, as it is impossible for scholars of Christianity to interpret the pre-Constantinian Christian response to the question of the political without being cognizant of what occurred after Constantine. In the fourth century, Constantine’s turn to Christianity was simultaneously the constitution of a dualism in Christian political theology between Constantinianism and pre-Constantinianism that continues to haunt Christian theological reflection on the political.

At the time of Constantine’s conversion, Christians were not yet the majority within the Roman Empire and it was not necessarily inevitable that they would succeed in Christianizing the Roman Empire. In hindsight, it is clear that the emperor’s conversion facilitated this Christianization and, in the process, forged a new relation of the still-evolving institutional Church to the imperial state, as well as to the culture and traditions of Roman civilization. To say that what emerged was a caesaropapist model would be inaccurate and would better describe tsarist Russia after the eighteenth-century tsar Peter the Great. Even after Constantine, Christians maintained a pre-Constantinian critical distance between church and state. One way to interpret the well-known model of *symphonia*, enshrined in Justinian’s *Sixth Novella*, is to see the “established” Church, even with all of its growing privileges, as distinct from the state. From the fourth century up until the fall of Constantinople, there are numerous examples, including writings of patristic thinkers, monastic protestations, and emperor-bishop squabbles, that testify to the continuation of a pre-Constantinian Christian consciousness as a community distinct from the political. If “Constantinianism” is meant to characterize an absolute accommodation of the Christian Church to the state, then that does not describe the post-Constantinian Roman Empire; and, in fact, one would be hard-pressed to find a moment in Christian history where this Christian consciousness is ever
eviscerated. Inasmuch as Constantine’s shadow looms large over Christian political discourse, so does that of Augustine. As Peter Kaufman demonstrates, even though Augustine made use of state power against the Donatists, unlike the state, the Church is a community that restores sinners and combats pride through its stories and memories.

One might be more sympathetic to the charge of “Constantinianism” if it pointed to the kinds of possibilities opened to the Christian Church as a result of Constantine’s conversion, and the kinds of exclusions it enabled. It would be difficult to dispute that after Constantine, the Christian Church suffered from the temptation of using state power to advance what is determined to be Christian objectives, and this temptation plagued the Christian Church even during the formation of the modern nation state. The use of state power ultimately leads to the violent exclusion of not simply those who are not Christian, but those who might interpret Christianity differently. Constantine also opened the door for state power to influence the institutional life of the Christian Church, to the point, as Timothy Barnes has proven, of the election of the archbishop of Constantinople being determined by the will of the emperor, even if the latter did not formally meddle in the official process of electing him. During the later years of the Empire, James C. Skedros describes how “Orthodoxy” transitioned from being a theological concept to one appropriated as “political Orthodoxy” in order to affirm a superior political and cultural identity over and against Latin Christians and the Ottomans, in a way that is similar to Vladimir Putin’s appropriation of Orthodoxy against the liberal West. Constantine did enable new ways of envisioning the relation of Christians and the institutional church to the political, which Christians have not been able to resist even up to our current moment.

The greatest challenge to this symphonic model was the emergence of modern political liberalism, which has as one of its core principles the separation of the state from the church. Even though there always existed Augustinian voices attempting to remind Christians that they are a community distinct from and in critical relation to the political, the history of Christian political theology in both the East and the West has been one form or another of Justinian symphonia in which the Church feels it is justified to use the power of the state to advance Christian objectives, and where the state makes use of the institutional church and appropriates Christian discourse to advance the interests of the state. Modern politi-
cal liberalism challenged that relationship, but not without resistance from the Christian churches. Eventually, one sees the growing Christian acceptance of democratic structures, from Walter Rauschenbusch’s Social Gospel to Vatican II’s affirmation of democracy. As detailed by J. Bryan Hehir, the Catholic Church has had and continues to have a complicated relationship with democracy, even if it now unequivocally supports democracy. The complication entails the liberal presuppositions that seemingly structure modern democratic institutions, processes, habits, attitudes, and modes of subjectification. It is fair to say that given the Ottoman and Communist occupations of traditional Orthodox countries, the Orthodox have not had the luxury to confront the challenge posed to Christianity by modern liberalism, except for a strain of political thinking in nineteenth-century Russia. Up until the fall of communism, one cannot detect a vociferous critique of democracy by Orthodox thinkers. In fact, Orthodox Christians in the diaspora seemed to thrive within the European, American, and Australian democracies within which they found themselves. Even if ambivalent, there seemed to be an emerging Christian consensus around democracy; it appeared as if Constantine’s shadow had finally receded.

As the Christian world was making its peace with modern liberal democracy, and as secular liberal political philosophers from John Rawls to Jürgen Habermas were finally conceptualizing a way for religion to participate in the public sphere, Christian theologians started to critically examine the relation between Christianity and democracy. Theologians from the movement known as Radical Orthodoxy argued that the presuppositions of modern liberal political philosophy are antithetical to those inherent in a Christian participatory ontology. Hauerwas has been one of the most vocal critics of the Christian accommodation to liberal political philosophy, arguing, in part, that the Christian endorsement of any particular structuring of the political is still a form of Constantinianism insofar as such an endorsement tends toward absolutizing the political. There are even nontheologians who would indirectly agree with Hauerwas, such as Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, and Giorgio Agamben, insofar as they interpret the “secular” as simply an extension of Christianity and, thus, of some form of Constantinianism, even if Hauerwas would interpret the secular as a distortion of the Christian Gospel. There is a strange and ironic alliance between certain Christian theologians and nontheologians in rejecting the categories of the “secular,” “public square,” and “liberalism.” The
question of Christianity’s relation to democracy has returned to the center of Christian political theology, and in this discussion, Constantine’s shadow once again looms large.

We are living in an age where just as it seemed there was increasing acceptance for the role of religion in the public square, Christians started again to question their relationship to modern liberal democracy, and non-Christian thinkers started to question their relationship to the secular. The state of the question is a state of confusion, which makes the question of religion and politics, of political theology even more urgent. Although the tide of the academic discussion has shifted toward imagining that religion should participate in the public sphere, the liberal left is on the defense globally. What remains to be seen, especially in Orthodox countries, is whether what will emerge will be a distinctive Christian politics or a resurgence of rightist, exclusionary politics.

The conference from which this book emerges would not have been possible without the generous support of Solon and Marianna Patterson, whose generous gift has endowed the Patterson Conference Series on Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue. Words simply cannot express our gratitude for their unwavering support of the work of the Orthodox Christian Studies Center at Fordham University. The conference was also funded by grants received from the Archbishop Demetrios Chair in Orthodox Theology and Culture at Fordham University (which was graciously established by Mary and Michael Jaharis through the Jaharis Family Foundation, Inc.), the Kal- linikeion Foundation, the Virginia H. Farah Foundation, members of the Orthodox Christian Studies Center Advisory Council, the Interdisciplinary Center for Hellenic Studies at Stockton University, and the Michael G. and Anastasia Cantonis Chair of Byzantine Studies at Hellenic College and Holy Cross. We are also thankful to Gregory Tucker and Nathaniel Wood, graduate students at Fordham University, for the editorial and administrative work that facilitated the production of this volume. Finally, we would like to express our thanks to the indefatigable Valerie Longwood, who has taken the Orthodox Christian Studies Center to another level.

Note

1. When we mention particular authors, we are referring to their essays for this volume.