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POLITICAL THEOLOGIES:
PROTESTANT-CATHOLIC-ORTHODOX
CONVERSATIONS
Power to the People

Orthodoxy, Consociational Democracy, and the Move beyond Phyletism

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Introduction

I had the privilege a few summers ago of going on retreat to Vatopedi Monastery on Mount Athos, the ancient spiritual center of Orthodoxy.¹ Up some stairs from where the church and refectory were located, in a passageway the monks constantly traversed, were two clocks. One was marked “worldly”/cosmic time, keeping Greenwich Mean Time—a chronological order universalized as a result of contingent historical procedures developed mainly to serve the interests of industrial and imperial expansion and efficiency.² The other clock marked the time that determines the practices and life of the monastery and that was changed regularly according to a combination of the rhythms of nature (notably, the movement of the sun) and the liturgical calendar. This monastic, liturgical time is referred to on Athos as “Byzantine” time—revealing both its local and traditional character. To catch the ferry or arrange to meet someone, one has to operate on worldly time; to eat or worship (two dimensions of the same event at the monastery), one has to know the time set within your monastery, which, as St. Benedict tells us, is a school for the Lord’s service. Such was my schooling that, for all the contingency and abstraction of worldly time, it still felt more “real” than the local time, despite the materiality, sociality, and concreteness of the latter.

As well as the problem of how to live faithfully at the intersection of two time zones—one eschatological and the other earthly—Vatopedi illustrates
the problem of how to live in overlapping and intersecting political spaces. Mount Athos is an anomaly that incorporates and disrupts key aspects of political order as it emerged in Europe since the tenth century. Each monastery is a self-governing polity, and governance of the mountain as a whole is overseen by a council of representatives of the twenty monasteries whose jurisdiction overlaps and must be negotiated with both its titular ecclesiastical ruler, the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, and the modern sovereign power responsible for Mount Athos within the post-Westphalian international order, the Greek nation state. In its national administrative structures, Greece locates responsibility for Mount Athos within the Foreign Ministry. The three different forms of monastic life practiced on the island (in the monasteries, the scetes, and the cells) add further differentiation and variation. Most of the monasteries are “Greek”—although they welcome monks and guests of all nationalities—but there are also the “foreign” monasteries of Russia, Serbia, and Bulgaria, at which, nevertheless, “Greek” monks may also reside (even if this is far less common today). Mount Athos can thus be said to represent an ongoing form of what John Milbank calls “complex space”: That is, in contrast to the bounded nation state with a single law and indivisible source of rule, which at the same time is unbounded in the exercise of its sovereign will within its own borders, complex space entails overlapping jurisdictions in which the sovereign authorities of the pope, parliaments, kings, dukes, doges, and various forms of self-governing corporation are interwoven with each other and span disjunctive spaces.

In this essay I will reflect on the twin problematics Mount Athos presents us with—that is, how to live faithfully at the intersection of two time zones and how to live in overlapping and intersecting political spaces—in the context of thinking about the relationship between Christianity and democracy. These reflections will serve as a prelude to some constructive suggestions for ways in which Orthodoxy might faithfully conceptualize its relationship to democratic politics in liberal states characterized by religious and moral plurality. But first let me say a word about democracy.

**Defining Democracy**

Democracy means collective self-rule by the people for the people, rather than rule by the one, the few, or the mob. This definition raises the question of who and what constitutes the people and thence what is the nature
and form of this self-rule. Many accounts of democracy conceive of self-rule as an extension of individual autonomy. Popular sovereignty is derived from the sovereignty of the individual and is considered indivisible and singular. Legitimacy is premised on each individual having an equal say in the decisions that affect everyone. This “say” can be organized in a variety of ways; hence, there are debates about different ways of organizing collective self-rule. The adjectives “representative,” “deliberative,” and “direct” placed before the term “democracy” denote different forms of organizing collective self-rule and constituting individuals into a people. However, by conceiving of collective self-rule as an extension of individual autonomy, what is lost from view is the intrinsic relationship between collective self-rule and the forms of association in which the art of ruling and being ruled is learnt and performed. And thence the ways in which the people as a whole is constituted through different forms of association coming into relationship with each other and the negotiation of their different interests and visions of the good in the formation of a common life—this common life being what constitutes the people qua people.

We can begin to see that there is a paradox in the conceptualization of democracy in modern political thought: Democratic citizenship is seen as an expression of individual autonomy but its performance and defense are in great measure dependent on participation in a group. Without being embedded in some form of association, the individual citizen is naked before the power of either the market or the state and lacks a, if not the, vital means for his or her own self-cultivation. The relationship between Christianity and democracy encapsulates the triadic tension between market, state, and community within which the individual is located. State and market processes are seen to limit, challenge, and provide alternatives to those derived from religious obligations and identities, yet in an increasingly deinstitutionalized and atomized society religions provide one of the few corporate forms of life available for mobilizing and sustaining the ability of individuals to act together in defense of their common interests and in pursuit of their common objects of love.

An alternative approach to the relationship of democratic thought to individual autonomy—one that helps us address the paradox just outlined—begins with the relationships between individuals. If democracy is the rule of the people by the people, then at its most basic level it demands relationships between people. Without some kind of meaningful relationships between people there are just individuals, and an atomized and disaggregated
crowd, whether at a local, national, or transnational level. If one is to begin with relationships, then one has to take seriously the arenas or forms of social life through which individuals develop and sustain relationships over time and in which they learn the arts of ruling and being ruled. This starting point for thinking about democracy is not in opposition to individual liberty but in recognition that individual liberty depends on and is mediated by multiple forms of association. Much political theory has moved beyond the sterile dichotomies between “liberals” and “communitarians” to take seriously the symbiosis between individual freedom and communal formation in democratic politics.

The dark side of thinking about democracy by beginning with relationships, the side that rightly worries liberals, is the way in which such a beginning can lead to an emphasis on the collective taking precedence over and oppressing the individual. At a minimal level, the emphasis on relationships, and the necessary particularity of such a beginning point, is felt by some to threaten universalistic and egalitarian conceptions of citizenship. Beyond this normative concern, and as Tocqueville and Montesquieu observed, there can be despotism of the people as well as that of a despot. Beyond even the problem of democratic despotism are those forms of political order that inherently subordinate the individual to a collective vision of peoplehood, as is the case with nationalist, fascist, state socialist, and state communist regimes. Polities characterized by one or another of these regimes may include democratic elements, but the constitution of the demos as a political community is substituted for some other, supposedly prepolitical species of peoplehood such as the ethnos or Volk. However, beginning with relationships between individuals can challenge collectivist, homogenous, and monistic conceptions of peoplehood and popular sovereignty. In these accounts a different set of adjectives come to the fore as ways of describing the organization of rule by the people for the people. The adjectives used foreground how relationships between individuals take multiple forms and the complex rather than simple nature of social and political space.

**Sovereignty, Christianity, and Consociational Democracy**

One conception that begins with relationships and allows us to make sense of the kind of complex space Vatopedi represents can be called “consociationalist.” Consociation is a term derived from the work of the early
seventeenth-century Dutch Protestant political thinker Johannes Althusius. While literally meaning “the art of living together,” the broader meaning of consociationalism denotes the mutual fellowship between distinct institutions or groups that are federated for a common purpose. In contrast to the likes of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Hegel, Althusius allows for the pluralization of political order so as to accommodate and coordinate the diversity of associational life, whether economic, familial, or religious. In his account, to be a political animal is not to be a citizen of a unitary, hierarchically determined political society. Nor is it to participate in a polity in which all authority is derived from a single point of sovereignty (whether of the general will or the Leviathan). Rather, it is to be a participant in a plurality of interdependent, self-organized associations that together constitute a consociational polity. Mount Athos is a clear example of such a polity. The singularity of each is constitutive of the commonwealth of all. In such a compound commonwealth, federalism is societal and political rather than simply administrative. In contrast to constitutional federalism as a way in which to limit sovereignty, as exemplified in the dominant interpretations of the US Constitution, which leaves undisturbed the indivisibility of political sovereignty, consociationalism envisages a full-orbed confederalism whereby sovereignty is distributed across distinct corporate entities. For Althusius, sovereignty is an assemblage that emerges through a process of mutual communication between consociations and their reciprocal pursuit of common ends. Unity is premised on the quality of cooperation and relationship building and is not secured through either legislative procedure, the singular nature of sovereign authority, or the formation of a unitary public sphere premised on a homogeneous rational discourse.

The consociational approach is not as alien as may first appear. The theories of Hobbes, Carl Schmitt, and Giorgio Agamben are one thing; historical practice is quite another. As Mount Athos illustrates, the medieval Gothic order did not wholly disappear with the advent of the “Westphalian” order of nation states. Rather, it was displaced and redescribed so that forms of political community became relocated and renamed as “economic” or “social.” For example, the joint stock trading company—the early modern archetype of the contemporary capitalist firm—was an explicitly political community based on the concept of the corpus politicum et corporatum or communitas perpetua that went back to Roman law. The paradigmatic example of the early modern mercantile republic was the East India Trading Company, which, as a colonial proprietor,
did what early modern governments did: erect and administer law; collect taxes; provide protection; inflict punishment; . . . regulate economic, religious, and civic life; conduct diplomacy and wage war; make claims to jurisdiction over land and sea; and cultivate authority over and obedience from those people subject to its command.7

This could be a description of Halliburton in Iraq, mining and oil companies in the Congo, or even any number of company towns in the US. Yet the nature of such companies as political and sovereign institutions is either viewed as anomalous or it is denied. Such entities are labeled as economic, not political. However, contrary to how it is presented in political and economic theory, legal and political pluralism is the norm rather than the exception in contemporary societies. As the political theorist James Tully argues, most nations are in fact “federations of more or less self-governing and overlapping political associations with somewhat dissimilar legal and political ways.”8 Sovereignty is an assemblage that opens up different conditions and possibilities for agency depending on where one is located.

In the realm of theory, it is as variations on a consociational conception of sovereignty that we can make sense of a theologically and philosophically diverse yet interlinked tradition of political reflection. If Althusius is its progenitor, a key mediator is the German legal historian Otto von Gierke and those he influenced, notably the English Pluralists (John Neville Figgis, and the early work of G. D. H. Cole and Harold Laski).9 While there were substantive differences between them, the English Pluralists advocated a decentralized economy based on the noncapitalistic principles of cooperation and mutuality and proposed a radically confederalist and politically pluralist conception of the state.10 Sovereignty was not something that could be appropriated by a single agency or institution. Rather it emanated from the complex and divided governing powers that compose the body politic.

A further strand of consociationalist thought can be identified in the sphere sovereignty of the Dutch Neo-Calvinists Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd.11 For various complex reasons, Kuyper does not explicitly name Althusius as an antecedent. However, he was clearly aware of his Dutch Calvinist forebear, and the conceptual debt is striking.12 Kuyper and Dooyeweerd envisaged the independence of distinct spheres—notably, family, education, and work—as expressions of the sovereign will of God.
Each sphere was said to have a relative autonomy and specific character that needed to be respected by other authorities. Derivatively, specific consociations (such as a university or school) within each sphere had their own integrity and autonomy that was not to be usurped by a higher authority. Government had a role in ordering and protecting the general good but it did not have the authority to interfere with or determine the character or telos of each sphere. In turn, the state was bounded by the sovereignty of other spheres.

It was in the Netherlands that notions of sphere sovereignty overlapped with and found a parallel expression in the emergence of Catholic Christian Democratic thinking. Central to this current were the philosopher Jacques Maritain and the development, from Rerum Novarum (1891) onwards, of Catholic Social Teaching (CST). Bryan Hehir gives a full outline of CST and its development in this volume, but the consociational aspects of CST are worth sketching in further detail. Maritain argues for a genuine plurality and a consociationalist conception of civil society as a way of limiting the power of the state and the market. Maritain describes the plurality of civil society as “an organic heterogeneity” and envisages it as being constituted by multiple yet overlapping “political fraternities” that are independent of the state. Maritain distinguishes his account of a consociationalist political society and economic life both from fascist and communist ones that collapse market, state, and civil society into a single entity and from collectivist and individualistic conceptions of economic relations. Crucially, civil society constitutes a sphere of social or “fraternal” relations that has its own integrity and telos but that nevertheless serves the defensive function of preventing either the market or the state from establishing a monopoly of power and thereby either instrumentalizing social relations for the sake of the political order or commodifying social relations for the sake of the economy. Within this sphere there can exist multiple and overlapping and, on the basis of subsidiarity, semiautonomous forms of institutional life and association—forms that are not reducible to either a private or voluntary association. Indeed, in contrast to his overall theological framework, Maritain’s account of a consociationalist body politic overturns the kind of divisions between public and private at work in, for example, the thought of John Rawls and late-modern liberalism more generally. The consociational approach exemplified in Maritain’s work was a rival to and eventually displaced the “throne and altar” authoritarianism that informed a figure such as Carl Schmitt. In a very different context we
could speculate about a parallel development in Russian political thought that drew on Orthodox theology. I am thinking here of the work of Vladimir Soloviev and Nicholas Berdyaev.

Animating the Christian consociationalist tradition, of which the Pluralists and Neo-Calvinists and Catholic Social Teaching are a part, is the sense that we participate in a cosmic order that can disclose to us some measure of meaning and purpose. It is this cosmic social imagination that distinguishes the Christian consociationalism of Figgis, Kuyper, and Maritain, amongst others, from their secularist confrères, notably Emile Durkheim and the political theorist Paul Hirst. It is my contention that one way Orthodoxy might think about its relationship to democracy is via some account of consociational democracy—an account that takes the church qua church seriously. A consociational conception of democracy prioritizes the relationship between distinct but reciprocally related consociations (or communities or forms of life together) as the best way to generate the collective self-rule of a people conceptualized as a non-natural political community.

Such a conception chimes with a central aspect of modern Orthodox theology: An emphasis on the centrality of the Trinity. With a renewed emphasis on the Trinity in contemporary Western theology, good order comes to be seen not as the result of the exercise of sovereign will. Instead, good order is constituted through participation in right relationships as encountered and empowered through participation in the perichoretic communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In place of images of political rulers (emperors, kings, or lords), music, drama, and dance become more common analogies for the nature of God. In such accounts God is no distant sovereign but both loving Creator and intimately and vulnerably involved in creation through the ongoing work of the Son and the Spirit. In the light of this kind of God, monarchical, absolute, and indivisible claims to political sovereignty that override the freedom and dignity of the one, the few, or the many are revealed as in opposition to the divine nature and the true order of being, which is one of harmonious difference in relation. Likewise, humans are not monadic individuals but persons in relation with a status above and beyond any immanent social, economic, or political claims upon them. But before simplistically (and naïvely) turning the Trinity into a social program, an eschatological note of caution must be sounded. And for this I turn to a theologian not often cited in contemporary Orthodox theology: Augustine of Hippo.
Augustine’s eschatology can be read as a response to both Constantinian triumphalism (marked by an expectation of progress until the Church would overcome the world and universally display heaven’s glory in history) and Donatist separatism from the world (wherein history is orientated toward regress or a movement away from God). In place of both these polarities, Augustine reestablishes a Pauline eschatological perspective through his conception of the two cities. For Augustine, the city of God is an alternative, yet coterminal society to the earthly city. These two cities are two political entities coexistent in time and space and thus part of this noneternal age or saeculum. Within this framework human history is secular (rather than neutral): That is, it neither promises nor sets at risk the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is established, if not fully manifest, and the “end” of history is already achieved and fulfilled in Christ. On this account, political authority is not neutral (it is either directed toward or away from God) and the saeculum (the time between Christ’s ascension and his return) is open, ambivalent, and undetermined. Thus the Church can reside in this age in its structures and patterns of life as relativized by what is to come, and therefore see them as contingent and provisional.

R. A. Markus argues that Augustine’s eschatology warrants positing an autonomous secular sphere that is neither wholly demonic, sinful, or profane, nor wholly sacred, either for the pagan or the Christian. However, this seems an overstatement that does not keep in play the dynamic relationship between the earthly city and the city of God within the saeculum. Markus is right insofar as the saeculum is an ambiguous time, a field of wheat and tares, neither wholly profane nor sacred. However, it is not autonomous—Christ’s sovereignty holds sway over all that happens in this age. The saeculum constitutes a single reality or realm, ruled by Christ, and this reality is the mutual ground on which the city of God and the earthly city coexist. Eric Gregory helpfully summarizes this conception of the secular as follows:

The drama of the secular lies precisely in the human capacity for good or evil, rather than in some autonomous tertium quid that is delivered from moral or religious significance. The “secular” refers simply to that mixed time when no single religious vision can presume to command comprehensive, confessional, and visible authority. Secularity . . . is interdefined by its relation to eschatology. This definition does not deny the Christian claim that the state remains under the Lordship
of Christ, providentially secured in its identity “in Christ.” But it does claim that the secular is the “not yet” dimension of an eschatological point of view.21

Citizenship is the currency that the city of God and the earthly city share within the mutual ground of the saeculum. Citizens of both cities seek peace; however, in the earthly city peace is achieved through the imposition of one’s own will by the exercise of force. For Augustine, the only true society and true peace exists in the city of God. With Aristotle, Augustine can say that humans are naturally social animals who find fulfillment in a polity of some kind. But against Aristotle and much other political thought, he argues that the political societies we see around us, and thus the form citizenship takes in them, are neither natural nor fulfilling, because they are fallen and oriented away from the true end of human being—communion with God—and toward their own prideful, self-destructive ends. So Christians would be fools to try and unfold a “Trinitarian” blueprint for society. Rather, for Augustine, politics in the saeculum is about enabling a limited peace that is on the one hand shorn of messianic pretensions and on the other not given over to demonic despair. A democratic and consociational political space is, I contend, a necessary condition for keeping in check messianic forms of political program (whether by the church or any other “party”) and dystopian underinvestments in the good of political order.

Building on Augustine, we should be deeply suspicious of any project of salvation or human fulfillment through politics, and alert to the temptation of rendering the prevailing hegemony as “natural” or ontologically foundational.22 All political and economic formations and structures of governance are provisional and tend toward oppression, while at the same time, whether it be a democracy or a monarchy, any political formation may display just judgments and enable the limited good of an earthly peace through the pursuit of common objects of love. Moreover, “the better the objects of this agreement, the better the people; and the worse the objects, the worse the people.”23 Thus, while existing on a spectrum, there is a difference between the Roman Empire and a band of brigands.24 No political formation is neutral, but one can be better or worse, rather than simply good or bad. As Markus puts it: “Being imperfectly just is not the same thing as being unjust.”25
A consociational conception of democracy makes possible the affirmation of: (1) an eschatological vision of the saeculum (not collapsing pursuit of the Kingdom of God into pursuit of penultimate goods in common); (2) the Church as a distinct community of belief and practice; (3) the possibility of a common life between different communities within a specific earthly polity; and (4) the need for a genuinely pluralistic or complex space in order to hold in check the formation of anti-Christic and idolatrous monopolies of power. How so?

First, nonviolent, participatory, and grassroots democratic politics is a vital means through which to ensure that the state and market recognize that humans have ends and vocations beyond political and economic life, and that the role of the market and the state is to serve humans, not vice versa. It thereby helps prevent democracy from becoming a “thinly disguised totalitarianism.”

Second, a consociational, pluralistic body politic provides a context in which the Church learns to listen to others and put people before program. For the Church, listening is the constitutive political act. Through listening and responding to the Word of God, the Church is assembled as a public body—the ekklesia—out of the world. This initiatory act of listening forms the body of Christ. In being called out, this body is then enabled to participate in God’s hearing of the world, and so it can both discern the truth of the world and know itself truthfully. Listening to others through involvement in democratic politics both presumes a common life (no listening takes place in contexts of violence or social atomization) and is an act that intends and embodies such a life. Thus listening not only constitutes the Church but is itself a primary form of faithful witness within political life as it embodies and points to the reality that in Christ all things were made and all things are reconciled and therefore a common realm of meaning and action is now possible. Involvement in a consociational and participatory democratic politics is one way of listening to the world and thereby becoming the people of God and being a faithful witness.

Third, as well as being a way of bearing witness, of listening to and encountering the other in political and economic life, democratic politics is a vital way in which the Church learns to tell the truth about itself as such practices foster the humility and penitence necessary to hear God and neighbor. Listening is a therapy for the self-love or pride that is the attempt to secure oneself outside of relationship with God and pursue illusions of
self-sufficiency in relation to both God and neighbor. By contrast, listen-
ing inoculates the Church against developing false securities, because in
listening one has to deal with the world as it is. In listening, one must take
seriously who is before one and attend to the situation rather than prede-
termine what to do in accord with some prior agenda, ideology, or strategy
of control. When I listen to someone I encounter them neither as a statistic
nor a stereotype but as a human being, as one who bears the image of God
with all the density and complexity being human entails. In sum, listening
is vital to deepening one’s moral conversion in relation to God and others,
and thus one’s ability to reason rightly about what is the just and truthful
judgment to be made with these people, at this time, in this place. In order
to know what is true, we must first listen. In certain configurations, demo-
cratic politics is one such way of listening well.

**Ecclesiology and National Identity**

A consociational account of democracy contests perhaps the most funda-
mental theological challenge modern democratic thought poses: the
immanent attempt to ground a moral political life. This constitutes the ref-
usal of eschatology or rather the historicization of eschatology and thence
the absolutization and divinization of the finite. If this time is all there is,
then politics has no limits as it has to bear the full weight of human meaning
and possibilities. The problem is not totalitarianism but the totalization of
politics as such, which leads either to an overinvestment in political proj-
ects as programs of salvation or an underinvestment that despairs of any
meaningful political activity being possible. In contrast, when politics is
understood to be an activity in the *saeculum*—that time between Christ’s
ascension and his return—it is freed to bring about a limited but never-
theless meaningful peaceableness. Vatopedi Monastery, with its daily and
yearly round of worship, embodies the great gift of Christianity to poli-
tics, which is time, and in particular the relativization of historical time.27

Christians have time to hope and live in a time when change is possible
and in which past and present are connected in the communion of saints.28
At the same time, as Stanley Hauerwas has forcefully argued, Christians do
not have to establish regimes to control the time so as to determine the
outcome of history; rather, they can live out of control because the fulfill-
ment of history is already inaugurated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
A Christian vision of time as history, as open to redemption and as ful-
filled in the *eschaton*, undergirds a theological apologetic for democratic politics understood as a finite and contingent activity that has limits but also significance beyond the immediate needs and vicissitudes of the moment. The kind of Augustinian eschatology sketched above disqualifies any absolute claims of a political sovereign to shape human life and reasserts the need for the pluralization of political space as reflective of the complex nature of this time between Christ’s ascension and *parousia*. The complexification of political space is theologically necessary so as to hold open the existence of times and spaces that are not subject to political control. On this account, the status of the Church as a *res publica* is based on its vocation to bear witness within the political order to an order and rule that is over and beyond this or that spatiotemporal order.

On this account, any idea that there can be a Christian society or nation needs to be treated with suspicion, like any project of salvation or human fulfillment through politics. Here the witness of Mount Athos points both to a profound problem within Orthodoxy and, paradoxically, to what faithful witness might entail in relation to this problem. Here I am talking about *phyletism*—that is, the move beyond ecclesial autocephaly to national churches whereby national and religious identity become synonymous, such that to be Greek is to be Orthodox and, conversely, for a Greek to attend a Russian or Romanian Orthodox church is to participate in a foreign or alien entity. *Phyletism* was condemned as a heresy at the Synod of Constantinople in 1872. Yet it was the failure to address it through the proper upholding of an eschatological tension and something like a consociational vision of political authority that prepared the way for the emergence of ethnoreligious nationalism throughout much of the Orthodox world in the twentieth century. Having spent time in Russia, Armenia, Romania, and Kosovo, I’ve encountered the phenomenon of ethnoreligious nationalism first hand. We see the ongoing legacy of ethnoreligious nationalism on Mount Athos where, since 1989, certain monasteries have been converted into nationalist enclaves. At the same time, I’ve met the antidote. Men like Fr. Sava and the other monks of Decani Monastery in Kosovo who protected Albanians from racist Serbs and then, in turn, protected fearful Serbs from vengeful Albanian militias. And some monasteries on Mount Athos are polyglot *entrepôts* drawing together the faithful from all over the Orthodox world in common worship—albeit only of men. What these faithful monasteries witness to in a fragile and often broken way is that, after Christ, the Church should be *the* paradigmatic people:
That is, it is to be that body—the people of God—which is to be the training ground for that time when creation is fulfilled and when people from every nation shall be reconciled in Christ. That it is so often not should be a source of lament and a goad to pursue deeper faithfulness.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Father Demetrios Bathrellos for comments on an earlier draft, and in particular for helping me unravel some of the complexity of Mount Athos.

2. The actual word used was kosmic. I have translated this as “worldly” in keeping with certain New Testament usages. The term “world” (kosmos) in the New Testament can denote either the unified order of created things, understood as a neutral description (John 17:5, 24; Rom. 1:20; 1 Cor. 4:9), or the worldly system that is hostile to God’s good order (John 15:18–19; 17:14–16; 1 Cor. 1:20, 5.10). In New Testament Greek a number of variations on these two basic connotations can be discerned. For example, Paul Ellingworth identifies six variations: (1) the universe; (2) the earth; (3) human beings and angels; (4) humanity as a whole; (5) humanity as organized in opposition to God; and (6) particular groups of human beings. See Paul Ellingworth, “Translating Kosmos ‘World’ in Paul,” The Bible Translator 53, no. 4 (2002): 414–24. See also David J. Clark, “The Word Kosmos ‘World’ in John 17,” The Bible Translator 50, no. 4 (1999): 401–6.

3. It should be noted that in reflecting on Mount Athos I am not thereby holding it up as necessarily the normative form of Christian life. There are many aspects of Athonite monasticism as an ongoing, all-encompassing form of life that are theologically problematic: most notably, the exclusion of women. Rather, like any other “real existing” embodiment of Christianity, its very existence deserves and may provoke theological reflection.

4. The term “association” is used here in a generic way and encompasses both voluntary and nonvoluntary (rather than involuntary) forms of association. For a discussion of the distinction between voluntary, nonvoluntary, and involuntary, see Mark Warren, Democracy and Association (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 96–103. There are, of course, extensive debates about: (1) how to distinguish various forms of associative relationship such as contractual, covenantal, and corporate; (2) the corporate personality of groups as these relate to the state; and (3) what happens to different forms of social relations within processes of modernization stemming from Tönnies’s distinction between Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesellschaft (society/association). These sociological distinctions echo a distinction in Roman law between societas (partnership/voluntary association) and universitas (a corporation with a
common identity and that is capable of common action) brought to prominence in political theory by Michael Oakeshott. Important as these debates and distinctions are, for the purposes of this essay, a generic use of the term association suffices.


6. Althusius, *Politica* I.1. It is probable that Althusius derived his use of the term from Cicero (*De Re Publica* 1.25–27), although in Cicero’s usage its meaning is restricted to the legal bond for the organized conduct of public life rather than an all-encompassing term for social and political relations. See Thomas Hueglin, *Early Modern Concepts for a Late Modern World: Althusius on Community and Federalism* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1999), 79.


14. Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism*, 169–71, 186–95. A parallel distinction is made by Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), §§ 94–96, as a way of distinguishing a Christian corporatist vision of politics from fascist ones. On the Christian account, corporatist and personalist forms of civic association and economic organization are precisely a means of preventing the subsuming of all social relations to the political order.


16. It could be suggested that a consociational vision of democracy has, within the context of Orthodoxy, unfortunate echoes of the *millet* system used in the Ottoman Empire. However, against such a connection, consociational democracy is precisely an anti-imperial measure as it normatively refuses any single hegemonic group or discourse as able to determine the public sphere and is precisely a means to ensure a meaningful plurality of associations is maintained so as to prevent any single group from monopolizing control of political authority.

17. This is to summarize what I take to be Oliver O’Donovan’s reading of Augustine in *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).


22. From the writing of Genesis as an alternative creation *mythos* to the Enuma Elish, to the refusal to bow the knee to the Roman emperor as the Pantocrator, to the Barmen Declaration, it is a foundational political insight of Christianity to deconstruct and offer an alternative to any instance of *cosmopolis*: that is, the writing of the political order into the cosmic order so that a historically contingent form of political rule is inscribed with an immutable character and posited as inevitable and “natural.”


25. Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 44. It is important to note that defining Augustine’s conception of justice in the earthly city as “imperfectly
just” is itself problematic. Augustine argues in *City of God* XIX.23–27 that true justice does not exist without true piety. The implication of this is that knowledge of justice is not possible outside of knowledge and worship of God through and in Christ. Thus the order found in Rome, or any other instance of the earthly city, is not just. However, this does not mean its order is wholly evil—it is an earthly peace. But this earthly peace should not be viewed as on a continuum with the just order of the city of God. For a detailed examination of Augustine’s conception of the relationship between justice and the “justice” of the order found in the earthly city, see Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 27–114.