

Like other communes, the commune of Rome embraced two major social groups: the people (*il popolo*) and the city nobility (*nobiles viri*), who possessed wealth, provided protection as mounted soldiers (*milites*), and were crucial in 1143 in declaring independence from the pope and establishing the commune. Rome, too, and uniquely, had barons, a smaller group of powerful families that rose rapidly around the middle of the thirteenth century, who laid hold of vast territories (*castra* and *casali*) thanks to a family member elected pope, such as Benedetto Caetani (Boniface VIII). As the barons pulled away from the commune—often struggling against one another, like the Colonna and Orsini—the lesser nobility made common cause with the *popolo* (i.e., all the other socio-occupational groups). The commune, too, had a well-running, sophisticated government with elected officials and an efficient bureaucracy noted for its civic services, making it “one of the strongest and best organised communes in all Italy” (217). In this setting, Maire Vigueur traverses the milestones of medieval Rome: the city’s struggles with neighbors (Tivoli, Albano, Tuscolo, Viterbo), the *renovatio senatus* of 1143, the tribuneship of Cola di Rienzo, the radical turns his leadership took in invoking the imperial ideal and Rome’s special destiny, and the denouement leading to the surrender of the commune’s independence to the popes in 1398.

The author ends with a fresh perspective on the unique *mentalité* of Rome’s communal period (particularly before the popes’ departure for Avignon) in its appreciation of Rome’s ancient traditions; its embrace of artistic innovations in marble, mosaics, frescoes, and pavements; in the wondrous creativity of medieval Rome, as seen in the Romans’ love of color, polychromy, and ornamentation; in the appropriation of noble ruins to illustrate their prestige, “the best way of paying homage to the beauty and value of the ancient artistic patrimony” (334); and in the brilliance and legacies of its indigenous artists—Rusuti, Torriti, and Cavallini. In this richly detailed, comprehensive picture of communal Rome we welcome a work that restores the city’s historical significance while bringing the rich colors and contours of its medieval period back to life.

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Machiavelli’s Gospel: The Critique of Christianity in “The Prince.”

William B. Parsons.

Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2016. x + 276 pp. \$85.

The relation between religion and politics is a crucial and recurrent theme in Machiavelli’s political thought. It is also a perennial item of debate among his interpreters. Most agree that he sees paganism as an instrument of rule, but there is less agreement on his attitude toward Christianity. After reviewing several modern interpretations (ranging from the Straussians to Pocock and Skinner, and ending with Nederman and Viroli),

the book states the thrust of its argument: Machiavelli is a “destructive founder, intent on securing a new world for his unchristian principles. His attack on Christianity, Christian politics, and Jesus Christ himself . . . is the most important part of this plan” (8). It further argues that *The Prince* is a thoroughgoing “critique of Christian politics” (for example, in its discussion of armed and unarmed prophets in chapter 6) and Christian virtue (as in its reframing and redefinition of charity, faith, and mercy in chapters 15–18). Machiavelli criticizes Christianity as a religion that teaches humility, meekness, and otherworldliness, through which it has “disarmed heaven” and made men “effeminate.” He offers the ancient pagan model of education as a remedy. Most important, the prince should have no other object but the art of war and its orders and disciplines. Thus the contrast between the “Prince of War” and the “Prince of Peace.”

That Machiavelli launches a devastating critique of Christianity is well known; what is novel in the book is the close textual readings of *The Prince* in its comparisons of its teachings to those of the Gospels. Parsons offers interesting and informative observations about the way in which these two texts impinge on one another. In the process, the book touches upon fundamental themes traditionally affiliated with interpretations of Machiavelli’s politics and thought. Thus it discusses the question of Machiavellian *virtù* and its meanings, the question of the new prince and the new principality, and the question of Christianity as a system of belief and of the Catholic Church as an organization of power, and their relation to the papacy as a temporal principality. Finally, the book points to the importance of Machiavelli’s method, one in which Machiavelli privileges action over belief, and the analysis and evaluations of the actions of various individual leaders, statesmen, and generals. It is well known that Machiavelli privileges particular historical examples over general rules or precepts. The book highlights these individual descriptions, and makes comparisons between particular events narrated in *The Prince* and those narrated in the Christian sacred texts. Machiavelli’s use of the biblical texts—his reframing of the biblical stories to render them useful to his political enterprise—is seen as “blasphemous” (51) and “impious” (55), though no equivalent language is employed when Machiavelli makes similar paradisiacal re-descriptions of the ancient pagan texts. On the other hand, in the *Discourses* the greatest innovators are those that found religions.

In his discussion of the religion of the Romans, Machiavelli makes it very clear that he sees religion as an instrument of rule used by princes and statesmen. It performs several beneficial functions: it educates people into the community; it provides social cohesion; and it organizes, energizes, and spurs men to action. Most recognize that in Machiavelli religion is a necessary cement that connects the people to the prince. Where fear of God is lacking, fear of the prince is necessary. Thus the greater the fear of God, the more secure the prince becomes. The point is to join the two kinds of fear together such that the former redounds to the power of the prince. All of which presents the problem of Christianity: given its otherworldliness (“my kingdom is not of this world”) can it be reformed to make it useful to the this-worldly interests of political power? Not

as long, Machiavelli believes, as the Catholic Church as a temporal and political institution continues to exert its influence, both politically and culturally. In the same work, Machiavelli imagines a Christianity interpreted, or reinterpreted, in such a way that a Christian may fight for and defend his country, that the love of God and the love of country are not opposed, a Christianity that would re-paganize the modern world, one in which the “things of this world” are paramount. Such a reinterpretation would lead to the splintering or to the diminution of the international character of the church, and to its subordination to the interests of the principality or of the republic. Machiavelli sees a difference between Christianity as the religion founded by Jesus and the Catholic Church as an organization of power. In the first he recognizes the purity of its intent (unrealizable), though he condemns its reality and practice; in the second he sees merely a corrupt form of political rule legitimated by the first.

In any case, this book is a well-written, well-organized effort to uncover the textual sources of Machiavelli’s understanding of Christianity. It offers a close and nuanced reading of the relevant texts. Whether or not one agrees with its perspective or with its conclusions, it is an excellent piece of scholarship.

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“Ego Quirina”: Testamenti di veneziane e forestiere (1200–1261).

Fernanda Sorelli, ed.

Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Venezie; Testi 1. Rome: Viella, 2015. xciv + 240 pp. €32.

Le commissioni ducali ai rettori d’Istria e Dalmazia (1289–1361).

Alessandra Rizzi, ed.

Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Venezie; Testi 2. Rome: Viella, 2015. 258 pp. €30.

These editions are the first to appear in the new series Testi (Texts), published by the Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Venezie, which has a long history of publishing important sources on the history of Venice and the Veneto as well as the Trentino, Friuli, and the Adriatic. It also produces the journal *Archivio Veneto*. The volumes speak to what have traditionally been two largely separate approaches to the history of Venice: the first, represented here by Sorelli’s edition of women’s wills from the first half of the thirteenth century, focuses on the city of Venice itself, the *dominante*, while the second, as evidenced by Rizzi’s edition, examines Venice and its relations with its subject territories, the *dominio*, both on the mainland and overseas. Similarly, the two volumes offer source material for two different kinds of history writing: the wills edited by Sorelli serve primarily as sources for a study of the social, and to a lesser