

Develtere spends almost no time discussing the role of foreign direct investment (FDI) in alleviating poverty. He cites the case of Repsol as the role model for appropriate transnational corporate (TNC) behavior. Tell that to President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner of Argentina, who nationalized Repsol's YPF SA in April 2012 and the late President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, who on July 24, 2012, threatened Repsol against taking any action against Argentina. I would emphasize that foreign direct investment provides tax revenues and job creation! A quick look at the *World Investment Report 2012* reveals the positive impact of the \$1.5 trillion in FDI that took place in 2011: \$904 billion were greenfield projects of which developing and transition countries received 55 percent, sub-Saharan Africa received \$37 billion, Latin American received \$211 billion, and LDCs received \$33.3 billion. Foreign affiliates of TNCs support 69 million jobs. Transnational corporations have signed Corporate Social Responsibility Codes and set supplier codes for Social and Environmental performance standards. I could go on.

Overall, the book is worth a read. I would also suggest that his next edition include a subject index.

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As If God Existed: Religion and Liberty in the History of Italy

Maurizio Viroli

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Why is the first commandment God gives to Moses on Mount Sinai, “I am the LORD your God: you shall have no other gods before me”? One reason could be that God is fully aware of our tendency to worship natural and man-made creations rather than the Creator behind them all. There seems to be a deep-seated human tendency to pantheism and idolatry that, if left unchecked, is bound to disappoint by leading us away from our natural end and eternal happiness. This same jealous God has also left us free to create rivals for his love, thus setting up an apparently inevitable battle between his will and ours.

One of these creations is the political regime, and the worship of it is called political or civil religion, which has taken on innumerable forms throughout human history, including in the context of our secular liberal democracies. Where the ancient Greeks and Romans had their various gods that, at often whimsical turns, protected and punished the city, we have our own gods and the first in the pantheon is surely the god of liberty. Who among us Americans has not praised freedom as a God-given blessing and harshly criticized the deprivation of it by tyrants? It is a part of our DNA, starting with the Declaration of Independence and the long litany of abuses perpetrated by King George III. Depriving someone of his or her liberty is the very definition of injustice in the modern age, no matter whether one is a conservative or liberal, religious or secular.

Our outrage at this injustice, however, is often compromised by our devotion to gods other than that of liberty. One rival is the god of equality and his brother the god of tolerance. Sometimes the god of technology (Bill Gates and Steve Jobs are his prophets) wins out, sometimes it is the god of fame and success. Additionally we would be remiss to forget about the Johnny-come-lately god of multiculturalism, who commands that our ethnicity is our destiny.

What makes these gods different from previous ones is that they take the shape of moral principles or ideas, which are more abstract than the gods of old that had poetry, temples, and sacrifices to make them more concrete. Can one express devotion to, live and die for, an idea? What kind of a people or a nation would result from this devotion to liberty? These are some of the problems discussed in Maurizio Viroli's *As If God Existed: Religion and Liberty in the History of Italy*.

A professor of politics at Princeton University and of political communication at the University of Italian Switzerland in Lugano, Viroli has previously written on Italians such as Niccolò Machiavelli and Silvio Berlusconi. In his latest work, Viroli examines the attempts to create a religion of liberty in three historical epochs: the free republics of the late Middle Ages, the nineteenth-century *Risorgimento*, and the antifascist *Resistenza* of the twentieth century. According to its Italian adherents, this religion of liberty expressed the authentic spirit of Christianity found in the Gospels but has been largely opposed by the institutionalized Roman Catholic Church, which desires above all to maintain control over the beliefs of the Italian people and has done so by collaborating with all sorts of monarchs, despots, and totalitarian rulers when it suited its temporal interests.

This is not a new, particularly subtle, or even well-researched claim. Centuries of anti-Catholic propaganda have numbed European senses to such attacks. By now they are old hat, and it is hard to imagine Viroli's book convincing anyone who knows even a minimal amount of Church history. It would have been a much more interesting book if he had actually studied what the Catholic Church said about human liberty during these different epochs, for it is far from a uniformly antagonistic stand. If this book is any indication, the old Gnostic, Catholic Church-squashes-true-Christian-freedom myth remains influential, at least among the intellectual class. That Pope Benedict XVI recently completed a three-volume work on the life of Jesus to combat this tendency to oppose the historical, real Jesus with the Jesus taught by the Catholic faith is further proof of its resiliency.

It is quite obvious that neither Viroli nor any of the heroes of his tale have much use for Catholic dogma or theology and are therefore hard pressed to understand how all we know about Jesus has been passed on to us as the deposit of faith by the same Catholic Church. As much as some may despise the institutional Church, there simply would be no Christianity without it. There have been and will always be abuses of power, partial interpretations of Scripture, and other serious abuses and mistakes, but to think that we would all be much freer individually and socially if the Church renounced all its authority and external trappings is childishly ridiculous. If you think people are currently confused or ignorant about long-standing and well-developed theological and philosophical truths, try removing the source of that tradition and you will see just how incoherent our beliefs can really be.

It is strange that a book so critical of the Catholic Church would promote religion of any kind, but this is perhaps the paradox at the heart of modern-day Italy, which remains Catholic in name but with little understanding of why it is so. “We’re Catholic,” they seem to say, “but we don’t like all the rules and obligations; what we really want is a church without a demanding God, dogmas, priests, or sacraments”; that is, not a church but a revved-up social club. Many Italian (and other European and American) Catholics call themselves Catholics because they have always been so, not necessarily because they remain convinced of the truth of the faith, and their politics reflects it. For Viroli and his allies, the real threat to political freedom comes from Catholic dogma, but their solution is, in a way, to make each man a church/pope/magisterium unto himself. Rather than resulting in a flowering of human liberty, the decline in belief in Catholic dogma has gone hand-in-hand with a decline in civic spirit.

Accordingly it seems that a new religion of liberty is needed to provide political life with something that neither an *areligious* nor an *irreligious* freedom can provide, that is, something to live and die for. Viroli appears to be aware of the problem. He could have asked: What prevents liberty from becoming license or the following of mere whims and material comforts? Or to put it another way: Is there anything moral about a people dedicated to the pursuit of their individual self-interest? Are they even a people? To resolve the problem, what kind of political, religious, and civil arrangements inspire devotion to the *patria* that is fervent and humanistic at the same time?

Unfortunately, Viroli never gets around to dealing with these questions directly. He spends far too much time and energy quoting and praising those who attacked the Catholic Church and its plague upon Italy, all in the name of freedom. Perhaps this is due to his taste for Machiavelli, but it is unlikely to win many converts today, so few of whom even know what the Church is or teaches. Such defenders of freedom want to invent a god (i.e., the welfare state) that tells them to live as they please with all their needs provided for them, but it is clearly an intellectual creation that cannot and does not command much devotion, let alone respect. Worse still, it enervates people of all political and social virtue, killing the very notion of self-government. It is likely that political figures such as Silvio Berlusconi will continue to thwart Viroli’s noble intentions because they can always promise to an unchurched, herdlike people the ease of material comforts and continual entertainment.

Religion has always been a political problem in Europe, partly because of its entanglement with temporal affairs but more so due to the diversity of religious opinions and disagreements within Christendom itself. The Reformation and the Enlightenment were attempts to disentangle spiritual and temporal authority that succeeded to varying degrees in Europe, America, and beyond. In those places where the experiment has worked best, free enterprise has often been an integral factor in channeling religious passions to socially productive ends. Nevertheless, religion and politics remain intertwined and intractable aspects of human nature that can be complained about, ignored in polite company, but never quite overcome. The relevant question for an examination of religion and liberty in Italian history is not whether Italians can act “as if God exists” or not. The question

should be which false gods have replaced him. No one knows if or when Italy will ever become a true nation after all these failed attempts. In the meantime, it would help if the politicians stopped acting like secular priests and liberalized the economy.

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