



Sacred Causes: The Clash of Religion and Politics, from the Great War to the War on Terror

By Michael Burleigh

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Beginning with the chaotic post-World War I landscape, in which religious belief was one way of reordering a world knocked off its axis, *Sacred Causes* is a penetrating critique of how religion has often been camouflaged by politics. All the bloody regimes and movements of the twentieth century are masterfully captured here, from Stalin's Soviet Union, Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy, and Franco's Spain through to the modern scourge of terrorism. Eloquent and persuasively combining an authoritative survey of history with a timely reminder of the dangers of radical secularism, Burleigh asks why no one foresaw the religious implications of massive Third World immigration, and he deftly investigates what are now driving calls for a civic religion to counter the terrorist threats that have so shocked the West.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In a dazzling display of erudition, British historian Burleigh completes his two-volume chronicle of the interaction between religion and politics in Europe from the French Revolution to the present. The first book, *Earthly Powers* (2006), took the story to World War I, concentrating on the battle for and against secularization in the 19th century, while this installment carries the story to the present. Though best known for his books on Germany, including the prize-winning *The Third Reich* (2001), Burleigh's remarkable breadth of knowledge is manifest in his trenchant analysis of the role of religion in a number of European countries and the Soviet Union. He thoroughly reviews totalitarian attacks on religion and its misuse by Nazis, Fascists and Communists. Burleigh's opinions are forceful, especially when he condemns a prevalent "fantasy view" of Ireland that is blind to the "gangsters of the Provisional IRA" who are responsible for "bullying, intimidating and killing others." He colorfully criticizes "politicians in Western democracies [who] treat high office as pigs regard their troughs." Burleigh also upbraids critics of Pius XII, claiming that the controversial pope actually did a good deal to save and shelter Jews during the Holocaust. Use of odd words such as "erastianism" and "soteriological" detract from what is otherwise a rewarding example of intellectual history. (*Mar.*)

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From [Booklist](#)

For at least a century, observers of European culture have been noting the decline, or even the death, of organized religion; today, one constantly hears references to a "post-Christian" Europe. Perhaps so, but as Burleigh makes clear in this engrossing and rather disturbing work, the religious impulse remains strong, although it has often reasserted itself under the guise of secular political movements. Through an examination of that meeting ground between religion and politics, Burleigh has attempted to explain European history over the past 90 years. This is an ambitious, wide-ranging effort that demands that readers have a prior knowledge of the broad currents of recent European history. With a pungent, often humorous writing style, Burleigh recounts the toxic results of totalitarian movements demanding acceptance as virtual secular religions. He scathingly attacks the established churches for their timid responses to fascism due to their fear of socialism. His views on the threats and challenges posed by the massive influx of Muslim immigrants is both timely and balanced. *Jay Freeman*

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Review

"Michael Burleigh's *Sacred Causes* is one of the most important books of the decade." (Amanda Foreman, *The Observer*)

"A clever, honest and often funny analysis of the confrontation throughout the 20th century between religion and politics." (*The Economist*)

"Dazzling. . . . A rewarding example of intellectual history." (*Publishers Weekly*)

"A fascinating chronicle." (*The Wall Street Journal*)

"It is a tribute to Mr. Burleigh's intellectual passion that . . . he manages to challenge and enlighten." (Adam Kirsch, *The New York Sun*)

“Michael Burleigh writes well about the woolly, messianic religiosity of Nazism in particular.” (Tony Judt, The New York Times Book Review)

“Burleigh has a talent, reminiscent of Paul Johnson, for digging up long-forgotten historical episodes.” (The American Conservative)

“Impressive. . . . Burleigh’s book deserves the widest possible readership.” (Max Hastings, The Sunday Times)

“Compelling. . . . For all his acerbity, this author remains a humane presence throughout his book.” (Noel Malcolm, The Sunday Telegraph)

“A magnificent history of the 20th century. . . . A terrifically entertaining book.” (Dominic Sandbrook, The Daily Telegraph)

“History is rarely rendered in such thrilling breadth, with such wit or with such terrible topicality.” (Rod Liddle, The Spectator)

“Burleigh’s book is epic in its range...refreshingly unjudgemental. . . . This brilliant book proves that history has no end.” (Simon Heffer, The Literary Review)

“Beautifully written, fearlessly outspoken, full of superb portraits of heroes and monsters, Sacred Causes is an exuberant tour-de-force.” (Simon Sebag Montefiore, The Evening Standard)

“Burleigh’s study of secular hubris may well be judged to be the most significant work of history published this decade.” (Alex Butterworth, The Observer)

“Sacred Causes is most useful where it uncovers the hidden roots of 20th-century totalitarianism.” (John Gray, The Guardian)

“Wonderful. . . . Sacred Causes is a challenging history book with the power to scandalise its readers.” (The Financial Times)

“Brilliant. . . . A powerful indictment of our uneasy times.” (JG Ballard, The Observer)

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