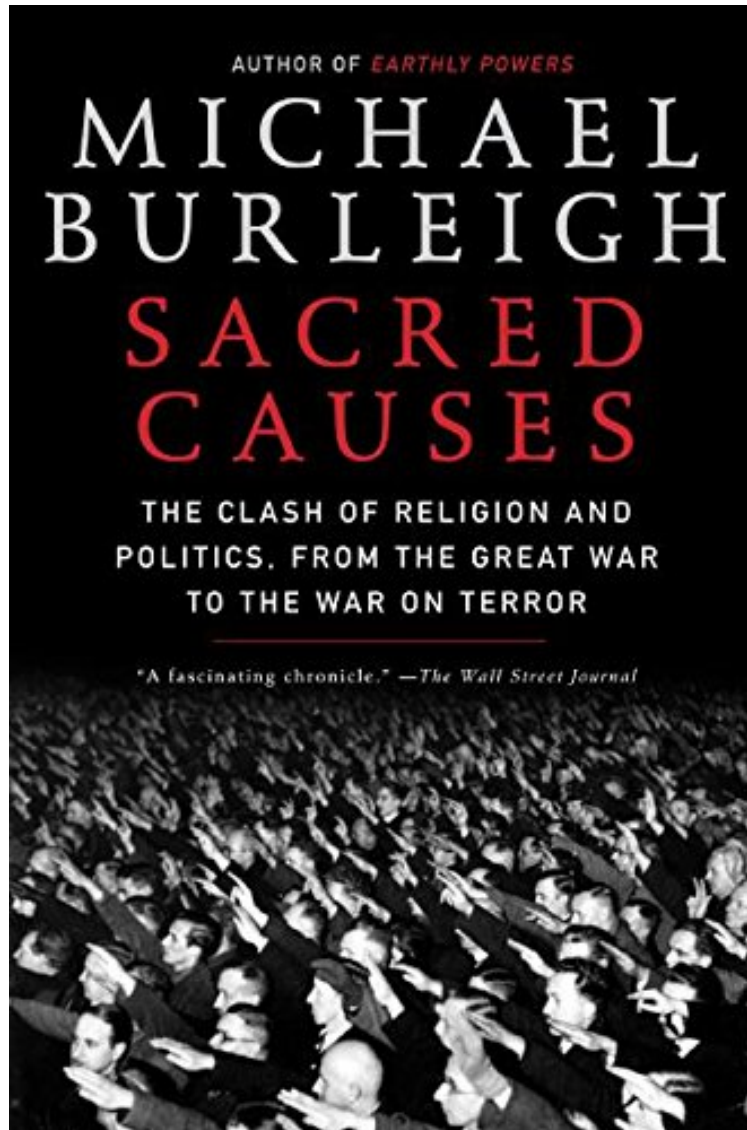


Sacred Causes: The Clash of Religion and Politics, from the Great War to the War on Terror

Michael Burleigh

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Michael Burleigh : Sacred Causes: The Clash of Religion and Politics, from the Great War to the War on Terror before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sacred Causes: The Clash of Religion and Politics, from the Great War to the War on Terror:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Erudite Synthesis; Not PC. By Charles Michael Burleigh is a noted European historian, primarily known for a synthesis approach that blends intellectual, cultural and hard history,

frequently with a heavy focus on religious and moral elements. Sacred Causes, along with its earlier companion, Earthly Powers, aspires to a synthesis of religion and politics in all of Europe, from the French Revolution to now, with a primary focus on political religions, ranging from Jacobinism to Islamism, that are the abusive exploitation of the human religious sentiment. Sacred Causes covers the 20th Century, from World War One to the modern day. Much of this is well-covered ground, of course, but Burleigh brings a few new things. First, he is not anti-religious in anything, he is pro-religion, but at a minimum, he is pained by the facile and ignorant views of the role of religion in European history, and does his best to correct those views. Second, his intellectual sweep is so broad that he is able to illuminate many of his topics, even those that are commonplaces such as the religious aspects of Bolshevism, with new, or at least rarely expressed, insights. Sacred Causes concerns itself heavily with the response of the organized Christian churches to 20th-century political religions. Much of this is actually not very interesting, because it tends to get bogged down in the names of people who were obscure then and are more obscure now (tempered with occasional discussions of people still relevant today, like Dietrich Bonhoeffer). Burleigh does his best to tease out, country by country, the net effect of these interactions between the organized Christian churches and the political religions in each country, but it does tend to make the readers eyes glaze over. However, one particular thread, going throughout the book, on the organized Christian churches, maintains interest very well. Burleigh discusses at numerous points, each time relevant to the immediate subject matter, the role that Pius XII played in the years around World War II, both in general and with respect to the treatment of the Jews. Burleigh naturally rejects the constant libel of Pius XII, pointing out (as is not disputed) that after the war Pius was generally regarded very positively for his efforts at diplomacy, his condemnation of Nazism balanced with efforts to prevent damage to the national churches, and his active role in saving Jews from destruction. In the 1960s, with the active connivance of the anti-religious left, Communist governments planted lies, produced plays, and generally began a media campaign in an orchestrated attempt to undermine the Catholic Church's role in captive Eastern Europe. This took on a life of its own and is today's Black Legend. Burleigh's approach is weary to this, not because he is tired of the topic, but because he knows that few people have the intellectual heft or interest in learning the truth or the facts, but would rather get their facts from what everybody knows or mendacious tracts by James Carroll, today's Jack Chick. Burleigh's approach gives Pius his due, with appropriate hindsight criticism, but leaves no doubt that Pius was hardly the Hitler ally today's anti-Catholics portray him as and Burleigh is not afraid to draw the parallel between yesterday's Communist and today's libertines, both eager to discredit the Catholic Church for its opposition to their programs for their version of the New Man. Other chapters cover topics that are not well known in the States. For example, there is significant discussion of Irish Protestant/Catholic relations, shot through with a bitter tone of a pox on both your houses. Burleigh touches on Mexico, with its little-known history of violent and murderous anti-clericalism; and Spain, with its better known internal trials. The second half of the book then focuses on religion under Communism, the role of religion in the collapse of Communism, and completes with a short but pessimistic view of the ability of Europe's Muslims to come to an accommodation with a Europe weakened by the death of Christianity and the rise of relativistic multiculturalism. One thing that strikes the modern reader is the high level of political discourse possible prior to the 1960s. For example, German society in the 1930s was full of discussion about the path forward. Max Weber is quoted as giving an extemporaneous lecture on duties to the state, in a Berlin bookstore, citing obscure verses from Isaiah from memory and using them as the central focus for a complex discussion of how to act. In counterpoint to this, the era featured numerous prophetic charlatans, a la David Koresh, using their messiah status mostly to get their disciples to sleep with them, combined with not-complex-thinking-at-all by gutter street fighters of Right and Left. We today are left with the latter two, but unfortunately have lost the first mode of discussion. In any case, this book is not a light read. It's easier to read with some other reference works at hand or some familiarity with the details of 20th-century European history. But it's worth reading, because the synthesis performed really adds much to any existing knowledge of the period.

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Sacred and Profane By Giannuzzo This is an interesting book. The first 6 chapters constituting more than 1/2 of the work are excellent. Burleigh's thesis is the uneasy relation between church and state in Europe. While Burleigh is clearly a conservative, he is not simply an apologist for the right. He is extremely critical of the Franco regime in Spain but he also points out the atrocities of the supporters of the Republic. He is also critical of the conservative Catholic Hierarchy in Spain which used the triumph of Franco to dominate Spanish society, those French Catholic Prelates who supported Vichy and the mainline Protestants in Germany who were less critical than they should have been of Hitler. He shows how the Nazis and Fascists attempted to use the indigenous religions to strengthen their own stranglehold on society. He documents the atrocities and tyrannies of the Communists where ever they took control. His treatment of Pius XII and the holocaust is, I believe, masterful. I have read three other books on the subject and this is the best. His aim is not to hold Pius beyond criticism, but to show him for what he was, a good man in an impossible situation. Any fair minded reader will recognize the attempt to label Pius as "Hitler's Pope" for the propaganda that it is. The book is not without its flaws. Because of the diffuse nature of the subject matter, Burleigh is sometimes all over the lot. His digressions can be distracting. In addition, he takes the opportunity from time to time to settle old scores with his left wing academic rivals. This is understandable given the dominance and stridency of the left in the universities but this too is distracting. The last four

chapters were a disappointment to me. He's trying to cover too much ground in too little space. The presentation becomes confusing. One doesn't get a clear understanding of why European Society secularized so quickly. Probably Burleigh should have written a third volume (his first was titled "Earthly Powers") to cover this topic. One last point. This book was the subject of a hatchet job by the historian Tony Judt who wrote a book review for the New York Times. The review was completely out of line with other reviews, and absolutely unfair. What Judt failed to disclose was that Burleigh had written a somewhat negative review of Judt's own book, "Postwar". This was clearly payback. When confronted with this Judt claimed he was unaware of Burleigh's prior review. This is preposterous. No historian reviewing the work of a rival could possibly not know of that rival's own review of his own book. Didn't he ever hear of Google? Judt's denial and the Times' assignment of this review to him are the height of mendacity. All in all, a book not without its flaws but a valuable work nevertheless. 4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Amazing Intelligence and Bravery by Burleigh By Fernando Villegas "Sacred Causes" is the best of an already powerful opus by Mr Burleigh. In this case, his work is not only enormously enjoyable because of his talented writing, dry humor and harsh judgements, but also because it illuminates full areas of European history to date somewhat obscure or even worst, distorted. Certainly his documented exposition and analysis about the labor the Catholic church did during Nazi age wipe aside the obdurate and solid prejudice about a pope, a church, a clergy and a constituency supposedly and massively thrown in the arms of Hitler. Great are also the examinations - though already vastly done in other works by Burleigh - of the sentimentaloid, supposedly scientific and thoroughly false tenets, in any sense, of Nazi and fascist doctrine, if doctrine is not a too much strong and decent name for the cluster of imbecilities sustained by them. Almost the same and even more can be said of Communism and his leaders, as seen by this historian. A very very great book in this and much else. Burleigh is a man of great intelligence and bravery, indeed.

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. Eloquently 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.

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.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. 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 Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved. 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*)