



Earthly Powers: The Clash of Religion and Politics in Europe, from the French Revolution to the Great War

Michael Burleigh

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In this masterful, stylish, and authoritative book, Michael Burleigh gives us an epic history of the battles over religion in modern Europe. Examining the ways in which politics and religion have influenced each other over the last two hundred years, he reveals that throughout history the two realms have interacted in complex and sometimes lethal ways -- just as they still do today. The overall effect was a widespread increase in secularism and a demystification of the power of politics.

With dazzling scope, Burleigh encompasses the philosophies of the Enlightenment and the influence of thinkers like Maistre and Bonald and Lamennais, painters like Zoffany and David, the Catholic Emancipation hero O'Connell, as well as the pseudo-religious aspects of Marxism. While the nineteenth century saw the replacement of the confessional by the liberal state, it also saw the birth of ideological fanaticisms that would achieve enormous power in the twentieth century. As the state began to colonize areas of existence where it previously hadn't ventured, it laid the foundations for both the soft totalitarianism of the modern bureaucratic welfare state and the more sinister police states of Communists and National Socialists. The most violent and repressive of these systems mimicked many of the functions of religion. Although liberalism was eventually restored to the continent in 1945 and 1989, many of the themes that Burleigh highlights here, notably the need for civic religions, have assumed a terrible relevance as Europe reacts to the threat of Al Qaeda.

Earthly Powers is a magisterial history that sheds new light on the momentous struggles between church and state, from the French Revolution to the totalitarian movements of the twentieth century. Written with astonishing breadth and sophistication, this is a uniquely powerful portrait of one of the great tensions in modern history, one that continues to be played out on the world stage today.

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