Sacred Causes Religion and Politics From The European Dictators to Al Qaeda by Michael Burleigh
Harper Press 2006.

Michael Burleigh is that rara avis among historians, a man whose grasp of detail is enormous but who is sufficiently self-confident of his own opinions to marry the two rather than masking his true feelings with the facts.

Sacred Causes is a magisterial tour through the history of the 20th century, looking at the way religion has influenced political trends for good, such as with the collapse of the Communist bloc, and for ill, such as in Fascist Italy and Germany. He includes an excellent chapter on the Northern Ireland Troubles, and his final chapter, on Europe after 9/11 is a deeply depressing and disturbing prognostication on the sort of future in Eurabia, as he dubs it, that few people in their right minds would wish to be alive to witness.

Burleigh writes powerfully throughout, and on occasions bitingly, developing his thesis carefully and convincingly; the reader is left disturbed by the way in which religion has frequently failed in its primary task, to heal, and made a deeply negative contribution to the societies in which it held authority and influence. The book ends with the common contemporary themes, post 7/7, of the harm caused by multi-culturalism and the likely damage that will be caused to Western societies by Islamic nihilists.

You may not agree with every aspect of Michael Burleigh's views, but only someone who made up their mind before reading Sacred Causes could fail to be convinced by his overall thesis.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh