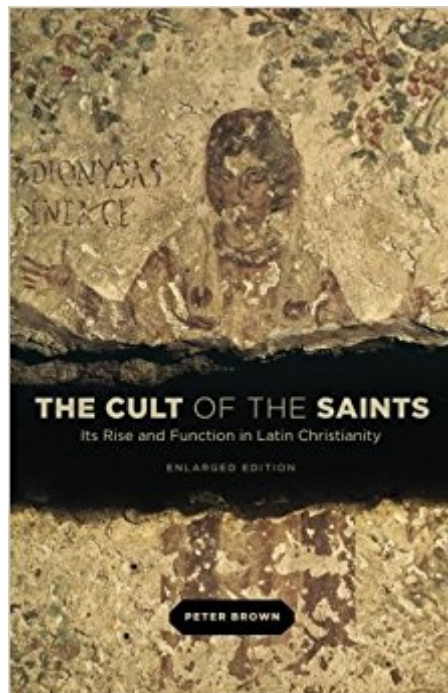




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The Cult Of The Saints: Its Rise And Function In Latin Christianity, Enlarged Edition



Synopsis

In this groundbreaking work, Peter Brown explores how the worship of saints and their corporeal remains became central to religious life in Western Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. During this period, earthly remnants served as a heavenly connection, and their veneration is a fascinating window into the cultural mood of a region in transition. Brown challenges the long-held idea of religion that separated the religious practices of the sophisticated elites from those of the superstitious masses, instead arguing that the cult of the saints crossed boundaries and played a dynamic part in both the Christian faith and the larger world of late antiquity. He shows how men and women living in harsh and sometimes barbaric times relied upon the holy dead to obtain justice, forgiveness, and power, and how a single sainted hair could inspire great thinkers and great artists. An essential text by one of the foremost scholars of European history, this expanded edition includes a new preface from Brown, which presents new ideas based on subsequent scholarship.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“Brilliantly original and highly sophisticated.” (Praise for the previous edition Library Journal)

Peter Brown is Philip and Beulah Rollins Professor of History emeritus at Princeton University. He is credited with having created the field of study known as late antiquity.

Everything that Peter Brown writes is worth reading. As always this short book is marked by his lucid prose. Brown treats this subject with a sympathy and understanding that is often missing in works touching on religious beliefs out of touch with contemporary western thought. He presents a very convincing exposition of why the cult of the saints was so prevalent and enduring in Late Antiquity and in the development of western Christendom. Highly recommended.

Peter Brown is an outstanding example of a scholar who has deep knowledge of his subject and writes in a clear and accessible style. I am finding the new additions of Peter Brown's books (with updated bibliographic etc.) very useful.

Brown's plunge into exploring the socio-cultural-spiritual conditions that not only engendered but gave burgeoning life to the cult of the Christian dead in Late Antiquity is a curiously succinct but often astonishing work. It remains, over 30 years since its publication, something of a benchmark for many scholars in terms of encapsulating this particular aspect of the nascent veneration of saints, and it's still easy to see why. With probative insights expressed in confident, often elegant prose, Brown overturned many of the long-held --and fundamentally flawed-- theses upon which general scholarly understanding of the origin of the cult of the saints had been predicated. Chief among these errant ideas was the notion that the so-called "worship" of the holy departed was directly borrowed from and/or patterned after the ancient Roman cults of gods and of deified heroes, in particular. Brown marshals lucid and nearly incontrovertible evidence demonstrating that veneration of the saints emerged instead from religious impulses and environments that were distinctly and uniquely Christian, and very much at odds with popular pagan practices and imperial theological predilections -- particularly in view of the symbiotic relationship that existed between the cultic celebration of an individual saint's hagiography and the organized reverence for their physical remains. Again, Brown is focused here upon the various factors that first occasioned and then nourished early saint-cults, so the reader will encounter no treatment of the much more complex and convoluted saga of the later medieval relic-trade. Look elsewhere for that fascinating story. Brown also does not assemble exhaustive historical details and examples that one might expect to find in a work that seeks to provide comprehensive scientific data for every theory proffered. Readers who desire meticulous information about which saints were venerated where by which churches and at what specific dates may be disappointed. This is not a documentary work --much less a proof-textual endeavor-- as much as it is a theoretical one. Brown seeks to enter the genuine spiritual and cultural mindsets of those who first felt compelled to gather sacred remains and bring

"the living dead" from ostracized realms at the margins of Late Ancient society and make a prominent place for them in the increasingly flabbergasted pagan cities and towns, indeed at the very nexus of civilization. Though Brown's work in this matter might come across as too impressionistic and ponderous at times for the average lay reader, the book should not be too dense or arid for university-level researchers, and Brown's conclusions are powerful and compelling. They resonate even today for those interested in this fascinating and controversial element of Christian history and practice. For any serious student of Late Antiquity, this concise and penetrating little classic remains a "must."

This might be considered a great primer for those who wish to introduce themselves to the world of historical theory as pertains to the classical world. While Mr. Brown does feel that it is better to approach this world before submersing oneself in the traditional mode of learning through Greek and Latin, he does manage to be a scamp in his unique approach to this field. Begone Gibbons. Of course some may find that while his approach is unconventional, many of his theories have been advanced by Christian apologists throughout the past century. They have come to many of his conclusions be different. That said there is little to quibble about and the notes alone are worth the price of the book. The style of writing is at times pedestrian and may feel daunting to those readers who have not attuned their ear to the sounds of academia. Since this book was written for the general, or thereabouts, public, it is a drawback. The reader must truly want to delve into this period. Let us be thankful that there are still scholars who find merit in studying the world of "dead white males" or females.

Peter Brown's style is exquisite. He has imbibed the ethos of the late-antique nobility he writes about. There are (from our perspective) gains and losses as the invisible patrons (the saints) supplant visible ones. And while the loss of "horizontal" power in paganism is replaced with vertical authority, we ought to be broad-minded enough to see the gains as well as the losses there. Reconciliation between eternally warring strata of society is a real accomplishment, and is somewhat achieved through the cult of the saints. Not to be missed is Brown's description of demon-possession. Again, we carry our prejudices with us if we think that one labelled as possessed is thereby ostracized or oppressed. The very opposite is the case.

I read this on an on-line subscription library (ScribD), then decided to keep a copy in my own e-library for reference. The author provided a focus by having a hypothesis of his own, and this

means neglect of some alternative explanations, but the historical account seems pretty complete. Also, supporting a hypothesis makes the data more interesting and easier to evaluate than an allegedly impartial story-telling.

Peter Brown is the foremost historian in the world for late antiquity. Fr. Augustine Thompson, OP, who actually studied under Peter Brown, is the foremost authority for the early medieval period. So if you are interested in either of those time periods, you should look into either of these historians. This is a great read for anyone interested in learning about the saints and their history with the Church and society.

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