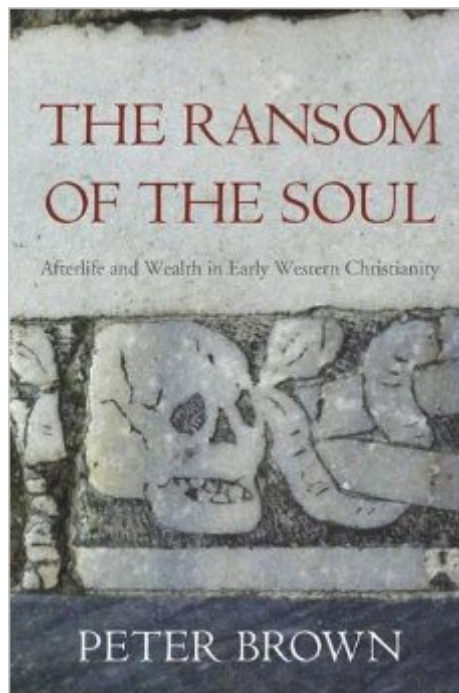


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The Ransom Of The Soul: Afterlife And Wealth In Early Western Christianity



Synopsis

Marking a departure in our understanding of Christian views of the afterlife from 250 to 650 CE, *The Ransom of the Soul* explores a revolutionary shift in thinking about the fate of the soul that occurred around the time of Rome's fall. Peter Brown describes how this shift transformed the Church's institutional relationship to money and set the stage for its domination of medieval society in the West. Early Christian doctrine held that the living and the dead, as equally sinful beings, needed each other in order to achieve redemption. The devotional intercessions of the living could tip the balance between heaven and hell for the deceased. In the third century, money began to play a decisive role in these practices, as wealthy Christians took ever more elaborate steps to protect their own souls and the souls of their loved ones in the afterlife. They secured privileged burial sites and made lavish donations to churches. By the seventh century, Europe was dotted with richly endowed monasteries and funerary chapels displaying in marble splendor the Christian devotion of the wealthy dead. In response to the growing influence of money, Church doctrine concerning the afterlife evolved from speculation to firm reality, and personal wealth in the pursuit of redemption led to extraordinary feats of architecture and acts of generosity. But it also prompted stormy debates about money's proper use—debates that resonated through the centuries and kept alive the fundamental question of how heaven and earth could be joined by human agency.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

All you really need to know is that Peter Brown has a new book out. He's one of the few living historians whom the term magisterial suits, and this new book is up to his awesomely high

standards, a few editorial lapses aside. Nobody else illuminates the passages from antiquity to the middle ages so brilliantly, nobody else seems to grasp the deep strangeness of the high antique, and nobody else brings this period to life so vividly and with such a sense of the currents through which those transformations continue to shape our lives. And he writes beautifully too.

I have read the comments about this brilliant book and in terms of their regard for this doyen of late Roman history as it leads into early medieval history with particular emphasis on Christianity, his books and lectures are the *ægo-to* areas for anyone wishing to probe deeper into the subject. If you use the Kindle format that I used for my reading you will encounter Brown's very short synopsis of the themes that he will cover in the forthcoming sections. He will elaborate at length on these themes. By the end of this book you will be an expert on very late Roman Christian history as well as that history morphs gently into very early medieval Christian history. It is a challenging yet smooth sail: your captain knows these waters exceptionally well.

This was for me an enlightening look at how Christians of the Latin world between 250 and 650 viewed the afterlife. The author shows the part donations for prayers for the dead played in the attitude of the faithful. I thought the book might give me some insight into the development of the idea of purgatory, but that comes a little later than 650.

This book by Peter Brown explores the way wealth influenced early Christian beliefs about the afterlife. As is usually the case with Brown's books, the *Ransom of the Soul* is written very well and full of useful footnotes. Brown's analysis of Julian of Toledo was really interesting. This book is not as exhaustively researched like Brown's other books, but still the *Ransom of the Soul* is an interesting analysis of the afterlife and wealth.

Peter Brown performs at his peak in this work. Early Christianity offers great insights into our modern understanding of death, dying, and the after life. Peter weaves historical documents and modern narrative into an easy read. Axios! Axios! Axios!

Peter Brown is always magnificent.

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