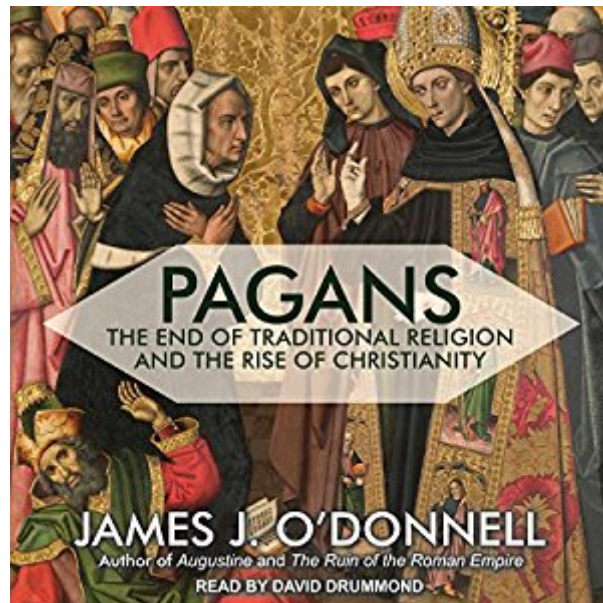


The book was found

Pagans: The End Of Traditional Religion And The Rise Of Christianity



Synopsis

Pagans explores the rise of Christianity from a surprising and unique viewpoint: that of the people who witnessed their ways of life destroyed by what seemed then a powerful religious cult. These "pagans" were actually pious Greeks, Romans, Syrians, and Gauls, who observed the traditions of their ancestors. To these devout polytheists, Christians who worshiped only one deity were immoral atheists who believed that a splash of water on the deathbed could erase a lifetime of sin. Religious scholar James J. O'Donnell takes us on a lively tour of the Ancient Roman world through the fourth century CE, when Romans of every nationality, social class, and religious preference found their world suddenly constrained by rulers who preferred a strange new god. Some joined this new cult, while others denied its power, erroneously believing it was little more than a passing fad. In Pagans, O'Donnell brings to life various pagan rites and essential features of Roman religion and life, offers fresh portraits of iconic historical figures, including Constantine, Julian, and Augustine, and explores important themes - Rome versus the east, civilization versus barbarism, plurality versus unity, rich versus poor, and tradition versus innovation - in this startling account.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It is a curious book. The first two chapters held marginal interest and I almost put the book down. Somewhere in the third chapter (An Eloquent Man), it suddenly picked up and became a fascinating read. So, what this historical piece covers is this transformation of Rome from a wide-open field of religion to one that is dominated by Christianity, and eventually dissolves the empire. It lays out the

habits and rituals of old Rome, and how it slowly became a different atmosphere. For those trying to conceive how the Roman Empire came to an end.....I would suggest to start with this book. As for the read? Well....you need to have some interest in the period (Roman era), the track of the Christian religion, and history. I might also suggest a brief read over the leadership of Rome prior to taking on this book because various names get mentioned and you need some insight. Overall, I think the book probably needed a better edit of chapter one/two, but it does hold your interest as you get deeper into the book. I also think that chapter ten (Constantine) probably deserves an entire book by itself, with O'Donnell opening up a lot of insight to the Constantine era (more than I ever knew). A great read for the Roman era.

There was a great deal of information and obviously extensive research but it didn't make for interesting reading. I skimmed through a good part of the book. There were too many anecdotal stories to the point that it was difficult for me to follow the subject of each chapter.

Very interesting book. It carefully slides between the start of Christianity and the presence of paganism. The read was full of interesting issues the people of early times had just to survive in their culture. pete

Enjoyed this book immensely. I would like to have had more detail, but it does effectively show the transition from other religions to what some call paganism to what some call christianity.

I enjoyed the historical information and characterizations of the movers and shakers of Rome and the Christian Church as it became an established institution in the third to the fifth century AD. The tone however is at times sneering rather than scholarly.

For anyone who has ever wondered what the religious life of the civilized world was before and after Christianity this is a book well worth reading.

I discovered that the history presented by Hollywood, or through secondary education, is limited in scope simply because they seek easy answers. This book is obviously written by an expert. And what he has to say about the creation of paganism is extremely fascinating.

O'Donnell has the scholarly credentials to provide a comprehensive account of the displacement of the traditional religions of the Mediterranean and near-eastern world by the Christians who subsequently labeled those religious cultures (and later non-Christian religions) as "pagan." This is not that comprehensive treatment. It does, however, offer a fair amount of insight into the weakening traditions that fell out of favor, as well as a corrective to some of the dubious history of struggle between Christianity and the losing traditions. The book's tone, particularly the first half of the book, which seeks to put the reader in the time and mind-set of the classical religious culture, is rather easy-going. This has the benefit of making for quick and often amusing reading, but also undermines the seriousness of its treatment at times. The book's first half does succeed in giving the reader an improved sense of what "religion without a history" may have been like for contemporaries, but otherwise seems disjointed. The book's second half, "The History of Paganism," is more interesting: Not because it provides a detailed history of the religions preceding or competing with early Christianity (it doesn't and disclaims doing so), but rather because it explains how the notion of "paganism" arose as defined by Christianity. Put differently, the subject matter is not a history of traditional, non-Christian beliefs, but rather how Christianity came to define the notion of paganism. At times, this is a bit too clever in approach. That being said, O'Donnell has a fine grasp of the development of Christianity in calculated opposition to a supposed pagan alternative, and provides many nice insights into the Christian mythology developed. One would expect no less from the author of a definitive, three-volume treatment of Augustine, as well as the well-regarded "The Ruin of the Roman Empire." In sum, this is not exactly the book that I expected on purchase, and I think that it suffers somewhat from tone and lack of a sustained argument of theme --- but it is an interesting read and offers many smart observations about Christianity's displacement of classical/traditional religions.

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