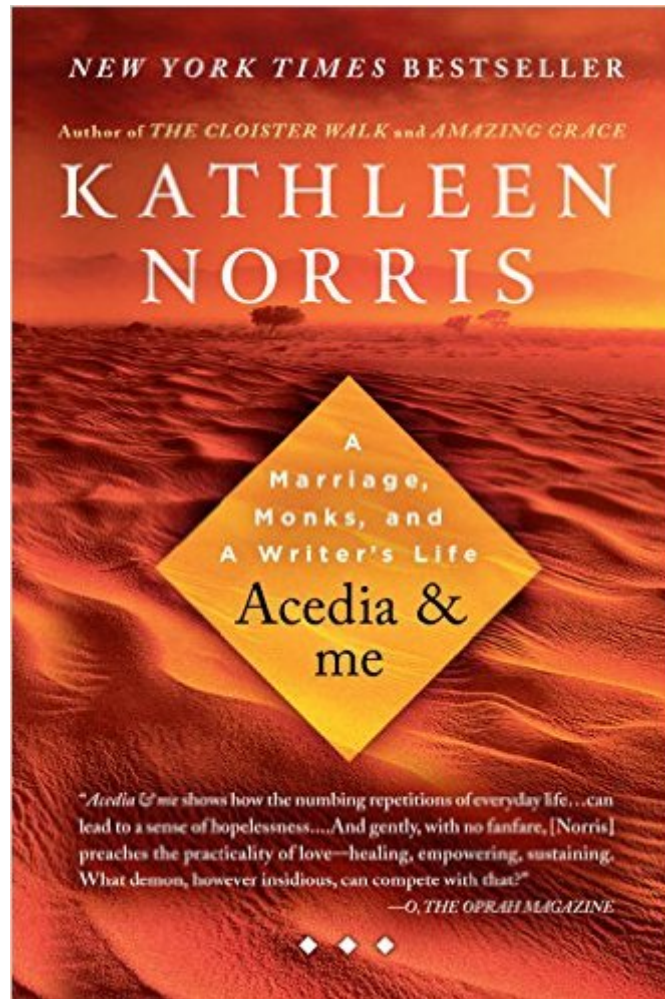


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Acedia & Me: A Marriage, Monks, And A Writer's Life



Synopsis

The extraordinary New York Times bestselling masterpiece from "one of the most eloquent yet earthbound spiritual writers of our time (San Francisco Chronicle). Kathleen Norris had written several much loved books, yet she couldn't drag herself out of bed in the morning, couldn't summon the energy for her daily tasks. Even as she struggled, Norris recognized her familiar battle with acedia, a word she had discovered in early Church text years earlier. Fascinated by this "noonday demon", so familiar to those in the early and medieval Church, Norris knew she must restore this forgotten but important concept to the modern world's vernacular. An examination of acedia in the light of psychology, spirituality, the healing powers of religious practice, and Norris's own experience, *Acedia & Me* is both intimate and historically sweeping, brimming with exasperation and reverence, sometimes funny, often provocative, and always insightful.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In Chapter XV of *ACEDIA & ME*, Kathleen Norris assembles quotations from august personages in a "Commonplace Book" on the subject. The "temptation to acedia" quote is plucked from the trappist Michael Casey's book, *FULLY HUMAN, FULLY DIVINE: AN INTERACTIVE CHRISTOLOGY*. That excerpt begins just as sternly, "The vice of noninvolvement is said to be endemic in the Western world. The acediac is a person without commitment, who lives in a world characterized by mobility, passive entertainment, self-indulgence, and the effective denial of the validity of any external claim." That is quite an indictment and one that ought to be both conceded and argued: we are all susceptible to feeling, as Charles Baudelaire did, "weary...of this need to live

twenty-four hours every day" but we also, in the course of living, experience productive and highly optimistic times. Nearly everyone's life is a mixture of ups and downs. Norris herself wrote the bestsellers *THE CLOISTER WALK*, and *AMAZING GRACE*. She also remained married to the same man, David J. Dwyer, until his death in 2003. So, Casey's definition of an acediac as someone who would leave creativity to others and who is without commitment seems too stringent to apply to her. Yet, Norris has written *ACEDIA & ME* because she recognizes in herself a stubborn tendency to sink into lethargy, boredom, detachment, apathy, and other facets of acedia. In a sense, this book is a form of therapy for her as she considers the subject from many perspectives. She consults the works of desert monks Anthony the Great and Evagrius. She compares and contrasts acedia and clinical depression and analyzes the psychological and psychiatric approaches to these related but not selfsame states of being.

Acedia is a spiritual and psychological state of temptation that is characterized by--and here I am throwing figurative darts against a lexical dartboard--sloth, "spiritual torpor," ennui, apathy, laziness and maybe sadness. It's described by John Cassian, a fourth century monk, as among the "eight principle faults that attack mankind." These eight faults later become the seven deadly sins; you can guess which one was dropped (or, more accurate, merged with another). Being knocked off the Big Seven list meant being relegated to the edge of oblivion, and but for occasional later references there it may have remained. Kathleen Norris's book, *ACEDIA & ME*, revives the dormant concept for further reflection. Despite Cassian's suggestion that acedia is among the "faults that attack mankind," this state of temptation or spiritual paralysis has been largely associated with the contemplative life, especially the lives of hermits. It was often new monks and hermits that were hit by acedia; after the initial euphoria of monastic life would pass, the rigors of the life, the repetition, the sameness, and the sense of physical confinement, would invariably become oppressive. Because this boredom with the spiritual life would often hit midday, acedia became known as the "noonday devil." The temptation for the young monk would be to give in to the "noonday devil" and so leave the contemplative life. Despite the historical association with the religiously contemplative life, as Norris points out, acedia can afflict the spiritual life of the average person. One might argue that a writer's life isn't so average, but Norris confesses how acedia has been much more than writer's block in her life.

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