

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

By Kathleen Norris

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Acedia & Me: A Marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life By Kathleen Norris

View our feature on Kathleen Norris's *Acedia & Me*.Kathleen Norris's masterpiece: a personal and moving memoir that resurrects the ancient term *acedia*, or soul-weariness, and brilliantly explores its relevancy to the modern individual and culture.

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 daily tasks. Even as she struggled, Norris recognized her familiar battle with acedia. She had discovered the word in an early Church text when she was in her thirties. Having endured times of deep soul-weariness since she was a teenager, she immediately recognized that this passage described her affliction: sinking into a state of being unable to care. Fascinated by this "noonday demon," so familiar to those in the early and medieval Church, Norris read intensively and knew she must restore this forgotten but utterly relevant and important concept to the modern world's vernacular.

Like Norris's bestselling *The Cloister Walk*, *Acedia & me* is part memoir and part meditation. As in her bestselling *Amazing Grace*, here Norris explicates and demystifies a spiritual concept, exploring acedia through the geography of her life as a writer; her marriage and the challenges of commitment in the midst of grave illness; and her keen interest in the monastic tradition. Unlike her earlier books, this one features a poignant narrative throughout of Norris's and her husband's bouts with acedia and its clinical cousin, depression. Moreover, her analysis of acedia reveals its burden not just on individuals but on whole societies— and that the "restless boredom, frantic escapism, commitment phobia, and enervating despair that we struggle with today are the ancient demon of acedia in modern dress."

An examination of acedia in the light of theology, psychology, monastic 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 important.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
Starred Review. In this penetrating theological memoir, Norris (*The Cloister Walk*) details her relationship with acedia, a slothful, soul-weary indifference long recognized by monastics. Norris is careful to distinguish acedia from its cousin, depression, noting that acedia is a failure of the will and can be dispelled by embracing faith and life, whereas depression is not a choice and often requires medical treatment. This is tricky ground, but Norris treads gingerly, reserving her acerbic crankiness for a section where she convincingly argues that despite Americans' apparently unslothful lives, acedia is the undiagnosed neurasthenia of our busy age. Much of the book is taken up with Norris's account of her complicated but successful marriage, which ended with her husband's death in 2003. The energy poured into this marriage, Norris argues, was as much a defiant strike against acedia as her spiritual discipline of praying the Psalms. Filled with gorgeous prose, generous quotations from Christian thinkers across the centuries and fascinating etymological detours, this discomfiting book provides not just spiritual hope but a much-needed kick in the rear. *(Sept. 16)* ""
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From Booklist
Starred Review The lacuna in Norris’ published life, following the phenomenal impact of The Cloister Walk (1996) and Amazing Grace (1998), was due, she now reveals, to the death of her husband, and to acedia, a profound form of apathy. Akin to depression, acedia, or the “noonday demon,” was counted among the original “eight bad thoughts,” but the term fell out of use. Norris believes it’s time to reclaim it. Delving, as she loves to do, into early Christian texts, and illuminating the wisdom of the monastic tradition, Norris, a superb storyteller, careful synthesizer, and brilliant interpreter, presents the “peculiar history” of acedia and chronicles her own battles with this particular “soul-sickness.” Her personal stories are truly moving and instructive, but the most arresting and resonant aspect of this engrossing extrapolation is Norris’ theory of social acedia as the explanation of our inaction in the face of so much violence and injustice. We abhor bloodshed, prejudice, and greed yet feel powerless to stop them. Norris’ fascinating inquiry casts our predicament in a new light and maps a course out of this “enervating despair.” Reading this strongly argued, paradigm-altering work may be the first strike against the demon it portrays. --Donna Seaman

About the Author
Kathleen Norris is the award-winning, bestselling author of **Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith**; **The Cloister Walk**; and **Dakota: A Spiritual Geography**. Her poems have appeared in **The New Yorker**, in various anthologies, and in her own three volumes of poetry. She divides her time between South Dakota and Hawaii.

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