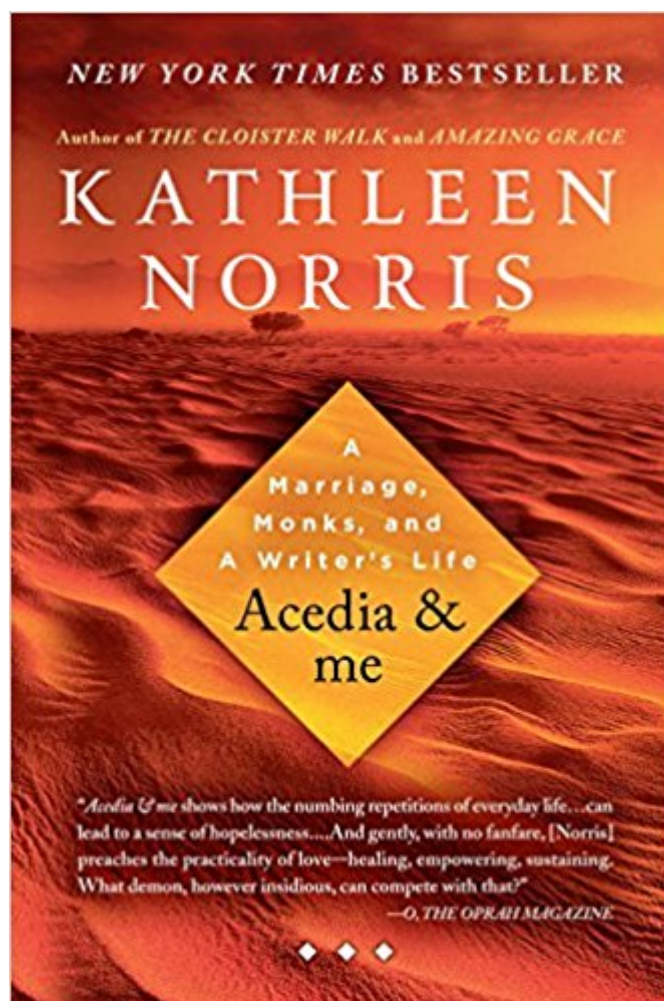


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# Acedia & Me: A Marriage, Monks, And A Writer's Life



## 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

Norris's magnificent spiritual memoir of acedia (a complex cousin of depression) gets an uneven audio treatment. At times, Norris's straightforward and monotonous delivery doesn't do justice to the aching beauty of her prose. However, there is a powerful simplicity to having Norris relate her own story, especially since even the most dramatic sequences—such as when her husband disappeared and planned to kill himself—are rendered without the overwrought *Sturm und Drang* that other narrators might attempt. Her performance is generally dispassionate, her most animated moments not when she is describing her own spiritual journey but when she incisively critiques the

narcissism of American culture. The final disc contains a PDF of Norris's commonplace book of favorite quotations on acedia, ranging from early church sages like Anthony the Great and Norris's beloved Evagrius to F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ian Fleming. A Riverhead hardcover (Reviews, June 9). (Sept.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

**\*Starred Review\*** The lacuna in Norris's 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's 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's 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 --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I read Kathleen Norris' book *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* several years ago, and it was life affirming and life changing for me. When I became aware that she had written this book some time ago, I added it to the list of books I wanted to read. I have always been turned inward. The glass is half empty is the way I naturally see things. I am sensitive to the brokenness all around me and within me. It is much harder for me to have hope, to see how things can be fixed. I have always wanted to be different, outward oriented and exuberant, rather than shy and melancholy. I didn't know what acedia was exactly. All I knew is it was somehow related to depression which covers a vast spectrum of the human condition. At one time, I thought depression just meant a person was sad and having difficulty finding joy and needed cheering up. Sometimes it is that. I learned it could be much more than that when I was trying to encourage someone I loved who was suffering from clinical depression. He was unable to form cognitive thoughts. He had undergone voluntarily

commitment to a mental hospital, shock treatments and a decade long search for medication that would help which he eventually did find. I believe there is a predisposition toward clinical depression in my family. I have learned from Kathleen's book and from my own personal experience of talking with people that depression is epidemic in our country. I can not tell you how helpful Kathleen's book *Acedia & Me* has been to me. It has given me things that I am finding help me with my own struggles with depression. I can not tell anyone else that her book will be helpful to them. But I am writing this review in the hope that the book will be helpful to someone. The title *Acedia & Me* points to Kathleen's lifelong struggle with what she calls acedia. She also was for many years the care giver for her husband who had a long struggle with clinical depression. Norris pulls together in this book wisdom from monks in the fourth century to psychiatrists in the twenty first century as well as what writers of great literature and poetry have written. It contains an immense wealth of references to other books and material. Kathleen's lived experience with acedia and depression, the years of research that went into writing it, and her skill as a writer combine to make this a valuable resource.

Part memoir, part theological rumination, *Acedia & Me* is at once poignant and perceptive in its analysis of the daily struggles and victories borne by Kathleen Norris and her husband, David Dwyer. She reminds us that ancient and medieval peoples were just as smart as we postmoderns (and often smarter). Not bound by the shackles of scientism, the Desert Mothers and Fathers were able to see more clearly the temptations that "bad thoughts" (like acedia) represent. Likewise, they drew wisdom from their experience of wrestling with their own demons, a wisdom which can help us combat the listlessness and despair we sometimes experience in our own lives. Can't wait to read her other books!

This book is dense, and difficult to get into, but well worth the effort it takes. Kathleen Norris' exposition on acedia was an eye-opener for me. I had never heard of acedia before reading this book, so it contained a wealth of new information for me. Ms. Norris uses her own experience with acedia, beginning in her teenage years, as well as drawing material from the ancient desert Abbas and Ammas and other sources through the ages. Even after reading the book, I find it difficult to define acedia. It is more than depression, more of a soul sickness. In this book it is more than once referred to as a refusal of joy. You not only do not care, you don't care that you do not care. It's something that I have not experienced in my life - yet - and hope to never experience. Yet, it seems that there are many people out there who have this affliction. For those people, and those who love those people, this book is an invaluable tool to understanding acedia. For those lucky enough not to

know anyone with acedia, it is still a worthwhile read, imparting a wealth of information on a relatively obscure topic.

Acedia and depression are not easy topics. I give Kathleen Norris credit for even broaching the subject of "the noonday demon." She has touched on the topic in other works -- works that I would unequivocally give five stars to. She IS one of my favorite authors. I am GRATEFUL that she has written this book. I use it as a reference and refer others to it. If anything, it assures those on a spiritual path that they are not alone when assailed by apathy, indifference, neglect of daily duties. But it's exhausting to read. I'm sure it's the subject.

Like it but it is little more dense than previous work I've read of Kathleen Norris. Acedia seems like a condition/feeling/experience that one has to look at with side glances to tackle. I've had to approach reading this book that way - read in fits and starts and be a little prepared for feeling down as I both am challenged by my own feelings and grapple with what acedia is and how to wrestle with it.

I have read every book in or out of print on the subject of depression and its spiritual implications in the life of a Christian. In the author's case she was dealing with poor health and dealing with her emotionally ill spouse. This is the only book which gave a meaningful approach to stress, anxiety and depression in one's life, especially when there seems to be no respite and one's prayer life suffers as a consequence. I found it comforting, as no other book on the subject, however learned either in psychology or theology or both. It is also useful to any writer or artist whose work suffers due to life upheavals or mental anguish; showing that it can be endured as a mysterious detour, not a failure, in one's vocation.

very good read. Learned a lot . great guide through the desert fathers on this theme interwoven with authors personal struggle and memoir which keeps it lively and current. good blend of theology, spiritual growth, poetic insight. the struggle against failings the reaching for God and virtue. inspiring..

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