

Amazing Grace
A Vocabulary of Faith

Kathleen Norris
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Kathleen Norris thinks in language. This book is organized as essays on several words associated with faith, words like Trinity, Creed, Salvation, Hell, Apocalypse, and Amazing Grace. It reads kind of like the *Syntopicon* of the *Great Books of the Western World*.

As with any work on this subject, this book is also an accounting of the author's struggle with faith, organized, faith, and the faithful. In the Preface the question is asked that was asked of my dad: "How can you believe this stuff? How can you find good where I see only prejudice, sexism, evil? I don't understand."

Later in the book, someone says of a particular religious attendance, "If you don't ascribe to all that crap, you have no business being here!"

Well, let me depart for a moment and address that question. Who made prejudice and sexism evil? No, really, you have to answer the "who" question before you know who you believe. I'm not saying that those things and many other violations of modern social norm are not evil, I'm just wondering who decides. "Where is that written?" Then we can talk about whether "who" is good or evil or not, and from that we can make sense of what we want to believe and nonsense of what others believe.

Back to the book. The author participates in a Protestant Church and in a Benedicting Monastery where she is an oblate. Having been raised in the faith, gone off, and come back like so many do, she participates with interest in the various practicalities and mysteries of it. She does not sit back in judgement, she participates, struggles, and ponders.

She branches off into other variations on faith (e.g. Pentecostals), the need for unlearning and relearning that many of the serious faithful have done and is honest about what attracts and frightens her (i.e., something and "revival-style theology: 'only believe that God loves you, or he'll send you to hell forever.'")

If sexism is evil to one friend, feminism is to another and thus we have the concepts that divide us.

I like the pastor who said of church, "I have no idea why people are there on any given Sunday; it seems a miracle to me." The "desire to worship," she says, "is in itself a significant form of belief." "Ambivalence is a sacred emotion." And so forth. Witticisms, some also hilarious.

Idolatry - blech. Everything that is not church is idolatry. Whatever.

There are several chapters on "Conversion."

"Jesus is the hardest part of the religion to grasp." I agree with that.

"We live in the only culture in human history that has equated truth with factuality."