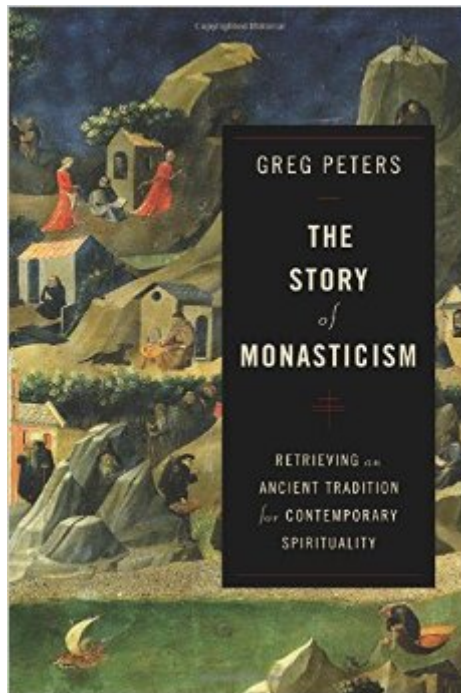


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The Story Of Monasticism: Retrieving An Ancient Tradition For Contemporary Spirituality



Synopsis

Some evangelicals perceive monasticism as a relic from the past, a retreat from the world, or a shirking of the call to the Great Commission. At the same time, contemporary evangelical spirituality desires historical Christian manifestations of the faith. In this accessibly written book Greg Peters, an expert in monastic studies who is a Benedictine oblate and spiritual director, offers a historical survey of monasticism from its origins to current manifestations. Peters recovers the riches of the monastic tradition for contemporary spiritual formation and devotional practice, explaining why the monastic impulse is a valid and necessary manifestation of the Christian faith for today's church.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Greg Peters is a Benedictine oblate, an Anglican pastor, and an academic who teaches medieval and spiritual theology. His book, *The Story of Monasticism*, is about the history of Christian monasticism, and reactions to it, from the first century C.E. to the present time. Peters also explores possible implications of monasticism for today's Christianity, including evangelicalism. Peters seems to argue against Protestant misconceptions of monasticism, particularly the misconception that monastics were cloistered spiritual elitists who did little to help the outside world. Not only did many monastics set up institutions that helped the vulnerable, Peters contends, but they also aimed to instruct laypeople on how to live a spiritual life, through words, publications, and example. Although Peters is arguing against misconceptions that can probably be identified as Protestant, Peters also holds that historic Protestantism was not thoroughly opposed to monasticism. Prominent

Protestant founders maintained that monasticism was acceptable, as long as it expressed gratitude to God for salvation as opposed to trying to attain salvation, and expressed repentance. I was particularly interested in reading this book to learn more about the origins of Christian monasticism. Peters's discussion on this topic did not disappoint, although there were occasions when his arguments were a bit of a stretch. Peters was arguing that certain ideas of monasticism are present in the Bible: the Nazirite vow and other vows in the Torah, contemplation of God in the Hebrew Bible, leaving one place to go to another (i.e., the desert) for a religious purpose, and Paul's reference to people who abstained from sex for spiritual purposes in I Corinthians 7.

The Story of Monasticism is a book by Greg Peters which presents a robust historical survey of monasticism, its place in the Christian tradition, and an evaluation of whether monasticism has a relevant voice for today. I believe that Peters does an excellent job at presenting the historical survey of monasticism and of demonstrating that, from very early on in the history of Christianity, it has held an important place in the function of the church. I am less optimistic about the continuing necessity of monasticism than Peters is, but after reading his book I have a new appreciation for the monastic life if some traditional pitfalls can be avoided. Peters starts off by offering this definition of monasticism, . . . monasticism refers to those who intentionally live alone or in a community under a rule of life and vows that give shape to their daily routine and shared mission in life. I think this definition is sufficient for the current discussion and will be how I use it in evaluating the book as a whole. There are additional elements that I would like to discuss (such as motivation) but perhaps those should be reserved for specific orders within a monastic tradition. I was glad to see that the history of monasticism occupies a large portion of the book. This is my main area of interest since I am not convinced of the necessity or even the mandate for the monastic life in scripture. This is a point of departure from Peters but one that should not stop you from reading this book if you are also unconvinced. The presence of the monastic phenomenon in church history is a compelling enough reason to read this and educate yourself on the important role that it has played.

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