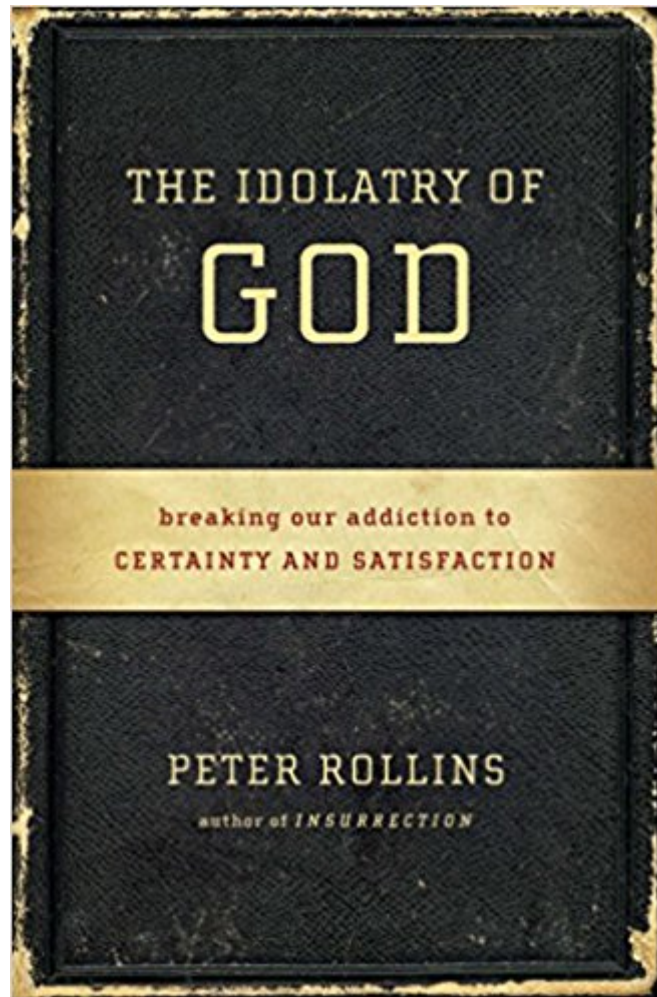


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The Idolatry Of God: Breaking Our Addiction To Certainty And Satisfaction



Synopsis

Theological firebrand Peter Rollins asserts that mainstream Christianity reduces God to an idol, made in our own image, for the purpose of providing certainty and satisfaction. You can't be satisfied. Life is difficult. You don't know the secret. Whether readers are devout believers or distant seekers, *The Idolatry of God* shows that we must lay down our certainties and honestly admit our doubts to identify with Jesus. Rollins purposely upsets fundamentalist certainty in order to open readers up to a more loving, active manifestation of Christ's love. In contrast to the usual understanding of the "Good News" as a message offering satisfaction and certainty, Rollins argues for a radical and shattering alternative. He explores how the Good News actually involves embracing the idea that we can't be whole, that life is difficult, and that we are in the dark. Showing how God has traditionally been approached as a product that will render us complete, remove our suffering, and reveal the answers, he introduces an incendiary approach to faith that invites us to joyfully embrace our brokenness, resolutely face our unknowing, and courageously accept the difficulties of existence. Only then, he argues, can we truly rob death of its sting and enter into the fullness of life.

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Customer Reviews

If I truly respect him, I must betray him. The timing for this new book was apropos, as this time of year often brings about criticisms and examinations of Rollins' concept of "atheism for Lent", where one endeavours to give up God for these forty days by focusing on the writings of Nietzsche, Marx, etc. To me, the most interesting reading can be found in the comments sections of various blogs

and counter-blogs in the, shall we say, folk-theologian circles. The irony particularly arises in the at-times blind reactions of the Devout in such ways that they betray the intentions of the Teacher. The Devout spit, curse, and defend to the bone the sanctity of what they consume from the table of the Teacher from those they believe to be Detractors, but in doing so they nullify the message through their words and attitudes. I find this especially prevalent in those who align themselves with more post-modern, deconstructionist thinkers, often in the emerging conversation. Their leaders teach the necessity of being critical and subverting the norms of any given theology and shaking of the ritualistic dead faith of the previous generation, and many scarf it down as pure gospel because it inadvertently justifies the pain and dissatisfaction they have with "mainstream/evangelical" Church. So they simultaneously defend a theology that if truly enacted would lead them to a place where they critique the new message as well as the old, rather than jumping on a new bandwagon for the sake of tribal identity. Specifically in terms of "atheism for Lent", I get it. I think.

I should start by saying that I am a long time fan of Peter Rollins, familiar enough with his work that I refer to him as Pete in casual conversation with peers. While this publication may not damage my high opinion of him, I feel as if he let me down this go-round. While this book is a great source for deep thought and self-reflection, it falls short in terms of its resolutions, ironically and perhaps intentionally so. The content is minimal, relying heavily on redundancy and stories that most current Rollins fans will have heard on numerous occasions. The breakdown from my perspective: This book has a very promising beginning. From the start, Rollins does an excellent job of critiquing the external while simultaneously causing extensive internal reflection. His verbal punishments of modern religion as the ultimate source of happiness are liberating on their own, while his observations of the paradoxical and elusive nature of self-satisfaction provide a good ole fashioned gut-check. In a nutshell, his premise is that satisfaction cannot be attained whilst being pursued through external means. He establishes this train of thought by personifying our innate sense of lack (Original Sin), our natural restrictions (Law), and that object which we seek to fulfill said lack (Idol). In this manner he is able to demonize Christianity as we know it (as well as any religion) by painting it as just another product which falsely promises to provide the certainty and satisfaction we long for. Like I said, very promising beginning. However, where I would have to part ways with Rollins is in his attempted resolution.

What if Christ does not fill the empty cup we bring to him but rather smashes it to pieces, bringing freedom, not from our darkness and dissatisfaction, but freedom from our felt need to escape them?

That is one of the questions Peter Rollins asks in this book. When we imagine God as the being designed to satisfy our longings we are simply conjuring up an idol. The author has some radical things to say to capture the reader's attention and stimulate serious thought: * Religious hymns become little more than advertising jingles, and the clergy come to resemble slick salespeople presenting their god-product to the potential consumer. * Instead of God being that which fills the gap at the core of our being, the God testified to in Christianity exposes the gap for what it is, obliterates it, and invites us to participate in an utterly different form of life, one that brings us beyond slavery to the Idol. * The Idol robs us of the type of pleasure that we could have if only we were able to free ourselves from the false promise that something would render us complete. * The Good News of Christianity: You can't be fulfilled; you can't be made whole; you can't find satisfaction. The book provides a devastating critique of many of the practices of contemporary Western Christianity, arguing that the "God" we are trying to "sell" is an idol in our own making. Although I struggled with many of the author's arguments and felt threatened by others, I was impressed by the degree of insight which they contained. However, when it came time to suggest ways of addressing the "idolatry", the author seems to step off the rational path into Alice's Wonderland.

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