

At the Corner of East and Now, by Frederica Mathewes-Green

reviewed by [Marèque Steele](#) in the [October 11, 2000](#) issue

This book journeys into what, for many Western readers, are uncharted waters. Frederica Mathewes-Green writes about Eastern Orthodoxy as an active layperson and wife of an Orthodox priest. A recent convert from Protestantism, she enthusiastically champions Orthodoxy, underscoring its unique place in the Christian faith. The author's journalistic style, drawn from her experience as a columnist and radio commentator, brings a sense of immediacy and relevance to her faith. Her church's Sunday morning liturgical service is the thread which binds her narratives together.

Mathewes-Green begins the book by bringing the reader to the church to watch her husband prepare for the service. The reverence and care which mark each aspect of this preparation and the service itself reflect an awe and gratitude toward God which is sealed with each kiss upon the vestment, each phrase uttered, each icon venerated. Interwoven with the liturgical service are explanations of the meaning of the rituals, stories from the author's own life, anecdotes from the ancient church and observations of Western culture. These are more than concrete illustrations of Orthodox thought; they are glimpses into how the author's faith has transformed her life and worldview.

When Mathewes-Green takes us on a trip to the thrift shop, it becomes an incisive commentary on Western society's rampant consumerism and self-centeredness. She warns of the propensity of many Western churches to conform to a market mentality in their attempt to be more appealing, allowing the values of the culture to shape them.

With the zeal of a convert, she unapologetically maintains the supremacy of the Orthodox faith as a continuation of the early church. Her enthusiasm, however, occasionally leads her to an excessively critical view of the Protestant world she has left behind, without casting a correspondingly critical eye on her new tradition. For example, she writes: "While a theologian in the West is one who has acquired intellectual understanding of religious theory, in the East a theologian is one who has approached a union with God and been flooded with light. . . . In the West an

artificial division between head and heart resulted in a separation of theology from personal transformation, in Orthodoxy they remain united." Comments such as these are disturbingly general and inaccurate if applied to Western traditions across the board.

At the Corner of East and Now gives the reader an almost palpable sense of the taste and texture of Orthodoxy as it is practiced in North America, rather than an academic assessment of this tradition. What the reader gains is the insight of an author who shares generously of both herself and the joy of her faith.