

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

reviewed by [Marèque Steele](#) in the [February 2, 2000](#) issue

This book journeys into what, for many Western readers, are the uncharted waters of Eastern Orthodoxy. Frederica Mathewes-Green writes as an active lay person 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, emerges through her use of narrative, bringing a sense of immediacy and relevance to her faith. Her church's Sunday morning liturgical service provides the thread which binds these narratives together. She opens the book by bringing the reader to the church to watch her husband prepare for the service. The reverence and care which are taken with respect to each aspect of this preparation and in the service itself reflects awe and gratitude toward God, which is sealed with each kiss upon the vestment, each phrase uttered, each icon venerated.

Interwoven with the account of the liturgy 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 world view. The author invites the reader to consider the unfolding not only of the liturgy, but of her life. She takes us with her on a trip to the thrift shop which becomes an incisive commentary on Western society's rampant consumerism and self-centeredness. Among her other insights, she warns of the propensity in many Western churches to conform to a market mentality in their attempt to make their churches 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 occasionally leads her to an excessively critical view of the Protestant world she has left behind without a correspondingly critical eye turned to her new tradition: "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, although not without some merit, are disturbingly general and inaccurate if applied to Western traditions across the board.

If one is looking for an academic assessment of Orthodoxy, it would be best to look elsewhere. But this book gives the reader an almost palpable sense of the taste and texture of Orthodoxy as practiced in North America and the insights of an author who shares generously of herself and the joy of her faith.