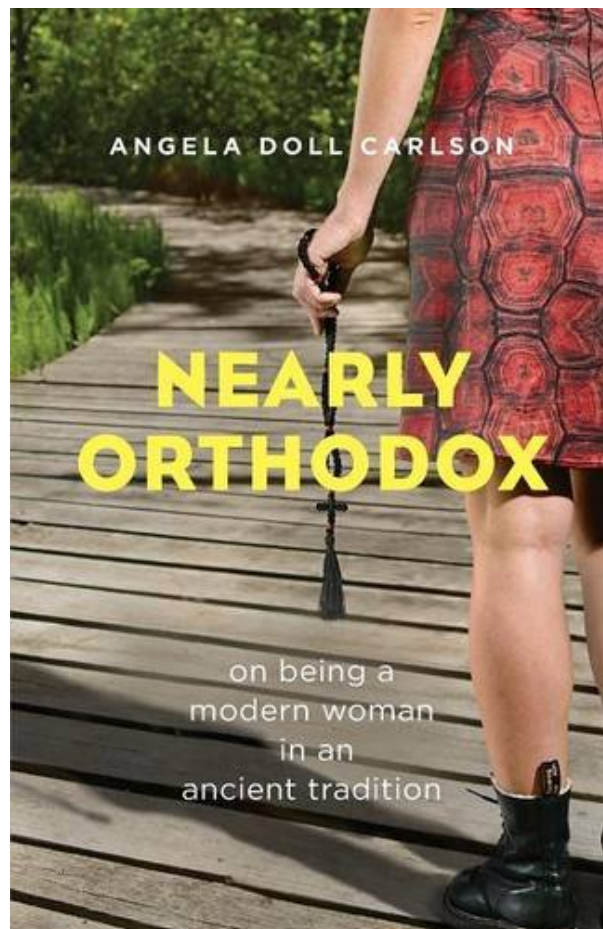
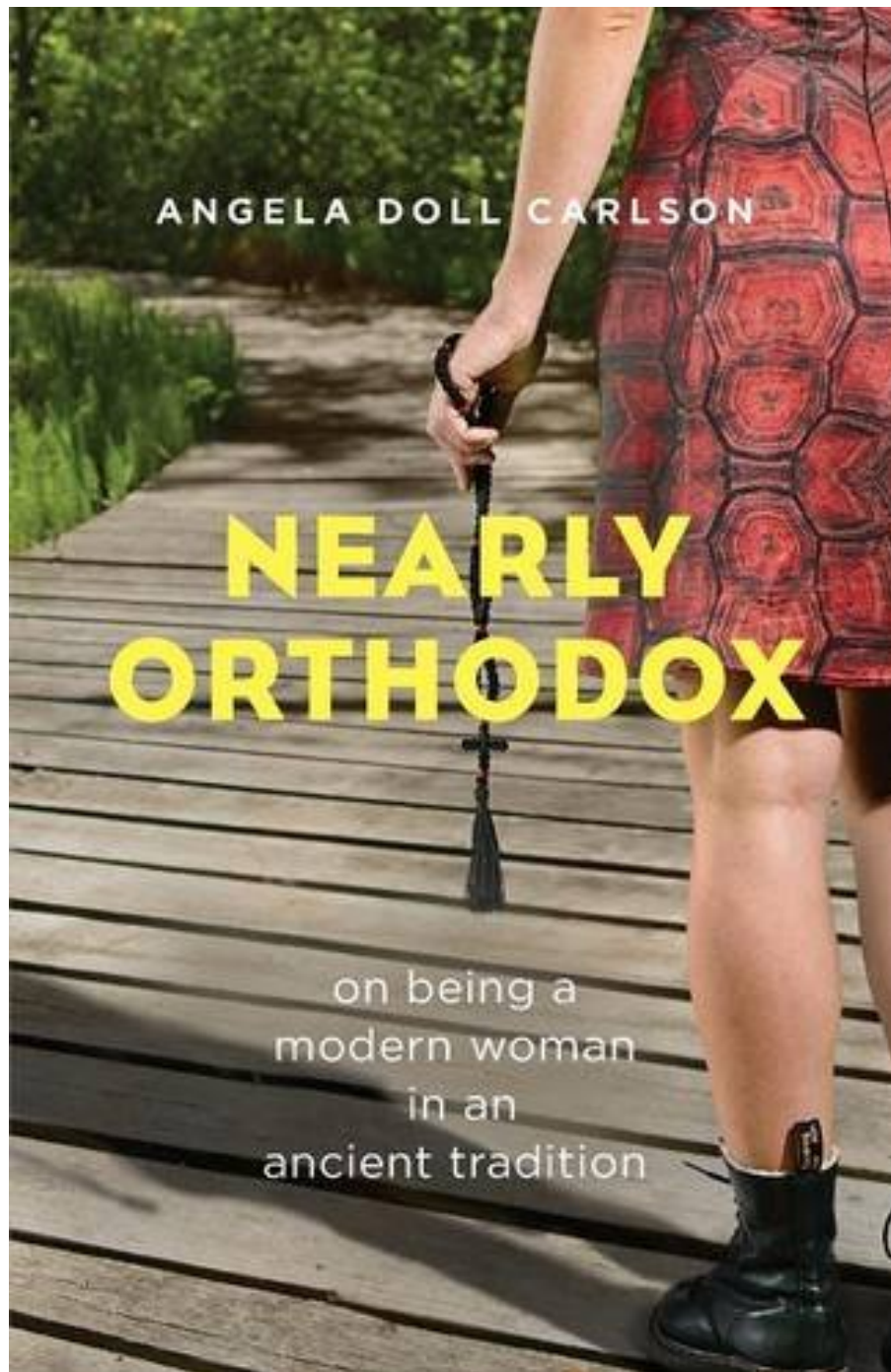


NEARLY ORTHODOX: ON BEING A MODERN WOMAN IN AN ANCIENT TRADITION BY ANGELA DOLL CARLSON



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Review

With uncommonly keen insight born of uncommonly keen honesty, Angela Doll Carlson has given us an uncommon pilgrim's journey, one that might actually serve, comfort, and assist other pilgrims along the way.
--Scott Cairns, author of *Short Trip to the Edge* and *Idiot Psalms*

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Because [this writer] is a poet, her deeply felt and unsparingly described progress as a seeker resounds with freshness. There is some extraordinarily authentic writing here, some insights of profound simplicity and truth, . . . a story penetratingly painful but revelatory. She tells us that Orthodoxy settled into her, soul and skin. And we believe her.

--Luci Shaw, author of *Scape: Poems*, and *Adventure of Ascent: Field Notes from a Lifelong Journey*; Writer in Residence, Regent College

I love reading stories like Carlson's because they remind us to recognize faith as a long journey, as something that continues ever on....Angela Doll Carlson's is just one voice among many, but a voice attesting to a unique and somewhat mysterious tradition. Like this book, Orthodoxy is a journey of beauty and poetry, weaving and wrapping its way throughout all of one's life.--Amy Gentile Englewood Review of Books

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From Catholic schoolgirl to punk rocker to emergent church planter, Angela Doll Carlson traveled a spiritual path that in many ways mirrors that of a whole generation. She takes us with her on a deep and revealing exploration of the forces that drove her toward Orthodoxy and the challenges that long kept her from fully entering in.

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Engrossing memoir!

By Anna

I'm wary of conversion stories. Depending on what stage the convert wrote them in, they can be a bit too triumphalist or naïf for my tastes. Angela Doll Carlson's book, *Nearly Orthodox*, does not suffer from either of these.

Some converts enter the church enthusiastically and zealously. Angela entered it with trepidation.

It's important to have stories from converts who made the choice to convert even if they had reservations. Sometimes we can get too caught up on the aesthetics of Orthodoxy; since many other Christian expressions do not offer the richness that come part and parcel with an Orthodox service so those things can be appealing to inquirers who feel that something is missing from their current practices. However, Orthodoxy can seem severely outdated or politically incorrect, causing inquirers to curb their enthusiasm (I mean, we have actual patriarchs).

However, it is evident from the pages of her book that her desire to know and serve God is strong. In here are stories about growing up Catholic; Angela's punk rocker years; the side trip to Protestantism; marriage and family life; and vignettes on being an inquirer, then a catechumen, then finally her conversion. Angela puts her story out there in a vulnerable way that I can't help but admire.

This is an absorbing read. I would recommend this book especially to inquirers or catechumens who have reservations about how strange Orthodoxy can be, and to those who feel they might not fit some sort of expected "convert" mold.

17 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

A wandering soul connects ancient Faith..into the wandering modern world...

By RK Barberg

Coming from similar background stories as the author: Catholic to Protestant to Orthodoxy, I found myself, again and again, in several chapters; particularly her struggles with divorce, relationships, husband and children; the journey into Orthodoxy. Carlson took three years to convert and her "wait" described throughout the book FINALLY gave a breath of fresh air in honesty and raw transparency; that making any change is not at ALL full of sunburst and rainbows, that truth - in churches - is somewhat lacking in a dose of reality. Keep in mind, this IS HER story; may not be yours BUT one can relate, one SHOULD relate-for we are all coming from many areas to seek the ONE thing needful. Her gorgeous poetic writing intertwined within the mysteries of the church and her journey are welcoming and soothing. I highly recommend this book for those starting on or well into the journey, because-after all-aren't we all -- we still have our race to finish.

16 of 18 people found the following review helpful.

A Book About The Struggle

By Benjamin Cabe

Nearly Orthodox, written by Angela Doll Carlson, is an honest look into the murky waters of everyday life where the vestiges of faith and family and feeling are often lost to the mud. The book takes on a personal tone as Carlson lays bare her struggles as a cradle Catholic, emerging Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox inquirer. She writes about family life, the divorce of her parents, and the death of her grandparents. About punk rock, rebellions, tattoos, cigarettes and first kisses. And pain and tears and healing. Carlson's narration of her own pain and shortcomings are her offering to a hurting world—outstretched, like arms on the cross, to bridge the gap of formality and break the barriers of apathy. Through her introspective approach, Carlson weaves intricate themes into this highly autobiographical account of her conversion to Eastern Orthodox Christianity. But the book is not exclusively about dogmas or rules or even about a single point in time when she decided to convert to the faith; it is about stories. About having been somewhere, being somewhere, and going somewhere. About navigating the tempestuous seas of life. About the struggle and the wounds and the heartache. And yet, a book about hope and healing and life.

Each chapter is composed of verbal snapshots of Carlson's life, all of which contribute to the main point of the section. The overall meaning of each chapter, however, is not black and white, shrouding the simple profundity of this piece in description and metaphor: a profundity that is sensed and not spelled out. As a result, this book may very well frustrate you; but if you let her words speak through the metaphor, the result will lure demony figures from the shadows of your soul into the light of acknowledgement and propel you into the search for healing.

It should be noted that this book, though autobiographical, is not chronological. Within the confines of a single chapter, Carlson may talk about her childhood and then jumps forward to her second year as a catechumen in the Orthodox Church. Oftentimes this takes the form of a simple line break and other times the lines flow right up against one another. She often speaks about one aspect of a situation only to revisit it a hundred pages later—all the while slowly revealing more of who she is. It is kind of like a distant image slowly coming into focus; and the ending picture is quite artfully composed. After an initial shock concerning the non-linear nature of this book, I adjusted to the format and wound up enjoying its layout and appreciating its meaning.

Alongside the massive jumps of time between stories, Carlson brushes up against a number of theological themes as she wrestles with the ancientness of Eastern Orthodoxy and the modernness of her own womanhood. She talks about feminism, Mary, women in the Church, and motherhood; the body, the nous, and the Jesus prayer; about veneration and communion of the saints, icons, and taking a saint's name. She even touches on confession, fasting, and closed communion—communicating the similarities, as well as the differences, between the Eastern and Western approaches. And she talks about trying to keep everything balanced. About searching, and failing, to ground her identity in something.

Two-thirds of the way through the book she finds herself stuck in an area familiar to many of us who have travelled the road to Orthodoxy: turning interest in the faith, isolated in the rational mind, steeped in the newness of the ancient tradition, a living practice. About living instead of looking, struggling instead of coasting, walking instead of standing still. It is not until the end of the book that she really tells us why she was interested in the Orthodox Church in the first place. The last 20 pages of the book are devoted to what moved her from mere interest in Orthodoxy to the feeling that her conversion was absolutely necessary. She writes,

"It was the unchanging nature of Orthodoxy that drew me in from the start." (257)

"It was the mystery that drew me in, The promise of healing . . ." (268)

Particularly striking is her explanation of where she found herself near the end—which many of us have experienced as just the beginning—of the journey.

"I was only nearly orthodox, no longer Catholic, never Protestant, living in the muddle middle, walking towards the Mystery." (270)

I appreciated the rawness of this book; the stories, the pain, the struggle. I would highly recommend it—and yet I am torn because some Protestants may not understand it based on the fact that her worldview was shaped Catholic, never Protestant, and is now Orthodox. Even still, I would recommend it—especially to women who are looking, struggling, searching. Carlson is completely open: she talks about anxiety and worry and self-consciousness in this intersection of ideas, collision comfort and confusion, and ‘muddle middleness’ of life. Wherever you may find yourself, this is a tremendous book; one that will speak particularly to the modern woman.

May God help us all to continue walking towards the Mystery.

Review originally published on www.BenCabe.com/blog

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