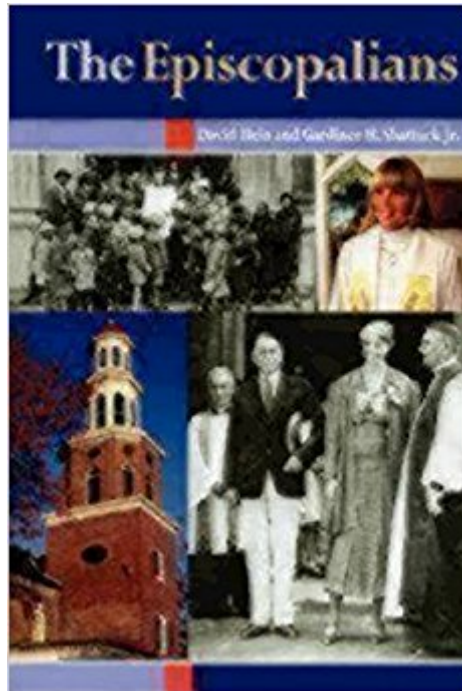




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The Episcopalians



Synopsis

The story of Episcopalians in America is the story of an influential denomination that has furnished a large share of the American political and cultural leadership. Beginning with the Episcopal Church's roots in sixteenth-century England, *The Episcopalians* offers a fresh account of its rise to prominence. Chronologically arranged, it traces the establishment of colonial Anglicanism in the New World through the birth of the Episcopal Church after the Revolution and its rise throughout the nineteenth century, ending with the complex array of forces that helped shape it in the 20th century and the consecration of Gene Robinson in 2003. The authors focus not only on the established leadership of the church but also to the experience of lay people, the form and function of sacred space, the evolution of church parties and theology, relations with other Christian communities, and the evolving ministries of women and minorities.

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Customer Reviews

As a recently confirmed member of the Episcopalian Communion, I was quite happy to find this new volume from The Greenwood Press series on denominational studies, an excellent successor to the American Church History Series (1893-1897). While there have been innumerable works on American religious denominations in the interim (including the constantly revised "Handbook of Denominations in the United States"), this series allows for a deeper and richer look into the history, evolution and specific theologies and practices of the major American denominations. "The Episcopalians" is divided into two parts, namely a history of American Anglicanism/Episcopalianism

by chronology, and a biographical history of the major leaders and luminaries in the Church's North American odyssey. Beginning with the antecedent Church of England and its relationship with the expanding Colonial Church, the story progresses through the tribulations of the Anglican Communion during and following the American Revolution, when the inevitable "split" from the Mother Church nearly destroyed the well-established (but "Bishopless") American parishes. With the final post-Independence reorganization of the church into the present day Episcopal Church in America, there followed the trauma of the Civil War, with its attendant near-schism over the issue of slavery (which, in contradistinction to other major American denominations, actually never occurred). History does not paint a very flattering picture of the Southern Churches, many of which were strong opponents of Emancipation; however, the Church survived, albeit wounded and suffering, as was the Nation. Excellent chapters on the post-war social and intellectual/theological changes and conflicts follow, including the church's involvement in Missionary work, the Anglo-Catholic ("Oxford Movement") controversy, the exodus from city to suburbs following World War II, the Civil Rights Movement, ecumenism, and ending with an excellent conclusion that clearly illuminates the issues facing the American church today (women in the clergy, the Charismatic Movement begun in the 1970's, homosexual lay and clerical conflicts down to the present controversy over the ordination of a Gay Bishop in New Hampshire). There follow excellent biographical sketches of essentially all of the main players and luminaries who have influenced and guided the ever-evolving American Episcopalian Church within the broader worldwide Anglican Communion. These were especially valuable to me, as many individuals who were pivotal in the life of the Church are today little known or forgotten, and deserve their rightful place in the story of the church that was, at least in America's Revolutionary beginnings, the closest thing to a "National Church" that our Country has ever had, and which clearly played a pivotal role in the lives of many of our Founding Fathers and their historic roles in creating the beginning of "The Great Experiment" of American Democracy. I highly recommend this book to any and all, Episcopalians or otherwise, as an excellent picture and example of the relationship between America's secular and religious histories, which are clearly deeply and irrevocably intertwined in our Country's past, present and future.

Hein and Shattuck have written a highly readable and inclusive book on the history of the Episcopal Church from the early days at Jamestown, Virginia to the present day. They have divided the book into two sections; the first section covers the broader history of the church while the last section offers mini-biographical sketches of many influential men and women in the Episcopal

Church. Before it became the Protestant Episcopal Church, it was originally the Anglican Church, under the control of the Church of England before the American Revolution. The Episcopal Church is still part of the worldwide Anglican Communion, but no longer under direct control from England. The Anglicans were better established in parts of the southern colonies like Virginia than they were in New England, which was by and large inhabited by colonists who have been labeled either as Puritans or Separatists, those who either had cut off connections with the English Church or wanted to purify its teachings. With Britain's defeat after the American Revolution, American Anglicans had to struggle to survive as a vibrant, active denomination, eventually reorganizing into the Protestant Episcopal Church during the 1780s and 1790s. The Episcopal Church, like many other denominations, has faced many challenges both external and internal. The Civil War briefly divided the church along sectional lines, social and economic conditions challenged the church to respond to those in need, leading to increased activism on the part of many church leaders, and contentions between conservative theology and more liberal, modernist views have threatened the unity of the church. Such issues included the infallibility vs historical criticism of the Bible, leadership roles for women and blacks in the church, as well as the more recent debates over the issue of homosexuality. Throughout this book we also learn about many important leaders in the church including ministers, bishops, missionaries, educators and lay people. This second section of the book, which is somewhat longer than the first, provides these numerous mini-biographical portraits of influential men and women in the church's history. Many of these individuals I had never heard of, so for me it was quite an education. I suspect many Episcopalians would enjoy learning about some of these leaders who have shaped our church from colonial days to the present. Personally, I would have liked the first section on the overall history of the church to have been longer. I felt some topics and periods in the church's history were a bit too brief or summarized, like the church during the Civil War period. Other than this minor complaint, this was an excellent book and the authors deserve our thanks. Their research was thorough and their bibliographic section is also great in terms of providing a useful listing of other books and sources on various periods in the church's history.

How do you characterize a denomination that is doctrinally indifferent, liturgically lush, culturally elite, politically conservative, socially liberal, and which Thomas Merton once described as little more than an "atmosphere"? Hein and Schattuck have risen to the challenge with this lively, well-balanced and readable book. Part One is a history, beginning with the denomination's Anglican origins in Henry VIII's divorce and tracing its American development up through its election of an

openly gay bishop in 2003. It is never quite made clear whether this influential denomination, which has furnished a disproportionately large share of American political and cultural leadership, is actually leading or merely blowing with the wind. This question arises not only with the denomination's vanguard positions on contraception, civil rights, ordination of women and gays, but in its perennial reluctance to address the difficult issues attendant to its Anglican origins, such as William Cobbett addresses in his history of the Reformation in England. Part Two, the largest part of the book, offers a stunning list of biographical profiles, including Robert E. Lee, J.P. Morgan, George Whitefield, and many less-known churchmen, women leaders, and missionaries. Recommended for general readers. Despite one or two historical reservations, a darn good read.

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