



For the Union of Evangelical Christendom: The Irony of the Reformed Episcopalians

Allen Guelzo

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American Episcopalians have long prided themselves on their love of consensus and their position as the church of American elites. They have, in the process, often forgotten that during the nineteenth century their church was racked by a divisive struggle that threatened to tear apart the very fabric of the Episcopal Church. On one side of this struggle was a powerful and aggressive Evangelical party who hoped to make the Episcopal Church into the democratic head of "the sisterhood of Evangelical Churches" in America; on the other side was the Oxford Movement, equally powerful and aggressive but committed to a range of Romantic principles which celebrated disillusion and disgust with evangelicalism and democracy alike. The resulting conflict—over theology, liturgy, and, above all, culture—led to the schism of 1873, in which many Evangelicals left the church to form the Reformed Episcopal Church. *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom* tells this largely forgotten story using the case of the Reformed Episcopalians to open up the ironic anatomy of American religion at the turn of the century.

Today, as the Episcopal Church once again finds itself enmeshed in cultural and religious crisis, the remembrance of a similar crisis a century ago brings an eerily prophetic ring to this remarkable work of cultural and religious history.

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