

**AN ESSAY ON THE EPISCOPATE
OF THE PROTESTANT
EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649054275

An Essay on the Episcopate of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America
by Hugh Davey Evans

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IN THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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PHILADELPHIA:
HERMAN HOOKER, CORNER OF CHESTNUT AND EIGHTH STREETS.
1855.

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PREFATORY NOTICE.

SEVENTY years ago, our ancestors put themselves to much trouble, in order to obtain the Episcopate. They acted wisely. Many and great are the blessings, for which they and their posterity have been indebted to that Divine institution. Still, it may be doubted whether either they duly considered, or we, their posterity, duly consider the full meaning of the institution. It is owing to this, that there have been, at various periods, controversies among us, as to the extent of the authority which belongs to Bishops. It seems to the writer, that an historical examination of the subject would be the best means of settling such controversies, and perhaps of preventing similar questions arising in future. That which our fathers desired was not a mere name, but a real thing, an office having certain functions. An historical inquiry into the nature of the office, would seem to be the true mode of ascer-

taining its powers and duties. The task which I have undertaken, is not an inquiry into the Divine right of Episcopacy, or its necessity to the being or well-being of a Church. These things have been abundantly discussed. Some remarks on a quite different subject seem to be more needed, in the present state of our Communion. The present inquiry relates to the law on the subject of the Episcopate, as it is understood in the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States; without much regard to the question whether that law be right or wrong, considered with reference to the original principles of Church government. This is the task which I have undertaken. It cannot be performed, except through the medium of historical inquiry.

In an article which I formerly wrote, for a periodical work, I spoke of the subject in words like these :

“The American Church acknowledges and acts upon the great principle of the Divine origin of Episcopacy. But in connexion with that principle, she also holds, and has practically carried into effect, another, probably to its fullest extent. This is, that in all but the essentials of Episcopacy, Church government is under the control of human law. The particu-

lar forms of the human part of her institution have undoubtedly been developed by herself, and have grown out of the position and circumstances, in which she has been placed. These, again, have themselves grown out of her history, and the events through which she has passed. In this particular, she is by no means singular; the same being true of every Church which has ever existed, and being, in fact, a thing necessary to the permanence of the government, and the well-being of the Church.

“But the American Church has developed her government into a form never before seen; because, in truth, her position and circumstances are different from those of any other Church, which has ever existed; and they are so, because her history has been different from that of all other Churches.”

Still entertaining these opinions, and perceiving that there is, at this moment, no question pending of a personal or party, character, connected with the matter, I have been induced to make an effort for the diffusion of information, which I have reason to believe is much needed.

HUGH DAVEY EVANS.

College of St. James,
Wash. Co., Md., June 13, 1855. }

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