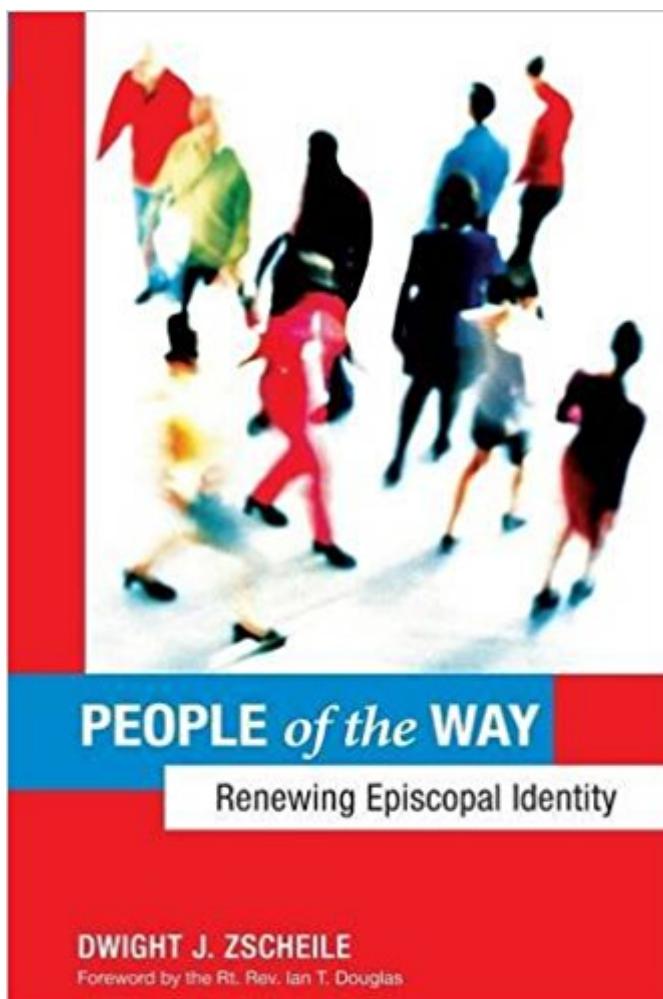


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# People Of The Way: Renewing Episcopal Identity



## **Synopsis**

There is a renewed conversation about identity and mission in American Anglicanism today, based on the recognition that the church's context in the U.S. has dramatically changed. The legacies of establishment, benefactor approaches to mission, and the "national church" ideal are no longer adequate for the challenges and opportunities facing the 21st century church. But if the Episcopal Church is no longer the Church of the Establishment and the benefactor model of church is dead, what is the heart of Episcopal mission and identity? Scholar and Episcopal priest Dwight Zscheile draws on multiple streams of Anglican thought and practice, plus contemporary experience to craft a vision for mission that addresses the church's post-establishment, post-colonial context. With stories, practices and concrete illustrations, Zscheile engages readers in re-envisioning what it means to be Anglican in America today and sends readers out to build new relationships within their local contexts.

## **Book Information**

Paperback: 160 pages

Publisher: MOREHOUSE PUBLISHING; Later Printing Used edition (May 1, 2012)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0819220906

ISBN-13: 978-0819220905

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.4 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 3.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 33 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #645,248 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #193 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects > Protestantism > Episcopalian #129698 in Books > Religion & Spirituality

## **Customer Reviews**

Dwight J. Zscheile is an Episcopal priest and Professor of Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN. He is co-author, with Craig Van Gelder, of *The Missional Church in Perspective*; editor of *Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation* and associate priest at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in St. Paul.

As a life-long almost 70 year old Episcopalian, I have not known why the church I love is withering. This book explains the problems and poses some great ideas for solutions. The idea is to focus

again on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, on Jesus and building the community of Christians. He includes some wonderful ideas and helps. A good read for concerned Episcopalians who want to keep the love and wonder of our worship but be relevant for todays world.

With the many "reforming and reshaping" efforts in the Episcopal Church (and many other denominations), there is an abundance of written verbiage and theorizing about how to salvage what so many value and feel is sadly slipping away, Dwight Zscheile, being a relative newcomer to the church, has written a tremendously insightful and comprehensive look at how traditional faith forms are at odds with the time and culture (especially in the USA). But he does not leave this examination on the sociologists' floor; he provides an excellent summation and linkage of these studies, but always puts it into the context of what is hopeful and positive to those who are willing to try and move forward from current realities, and not simply hold-on-to-what-is-dear-at-all-costs. His own experience as an assisting congregational priest, as well as that of his work as a scholar and seminary professor, add details of specifics and new potentials which will be of great value to those in many contexts and environments. This book is not only good and valuable reading, but a source of hope and potential in the morass of contemporary "morality." Get it.

This book was for a study group at my local church. Zschiele's ideas exploring new avenues of mission beyond some of the established, set ways of the church piqued my interest, but some of the early chapters going over church history were a little colorless in my mind. It felt a bit as if I was reading a thesis or college paper within those chapters. I would recommend the book to other Episcopalians who are interested in renewing or reviewing their methods of carrying out Christ's mission within the context of church growth and discipleship. This book did take a look "outside the box" so to speak, and for that it is worth a look.

Most people of good will want to participate in healing the troubles of our world. Some find that a spiritual community enhances individual effort. So, they meet in a place, maybe church, temple, mosque, living room, store front. But, much energy is spent in the rent, lumber, tiles, gold, offices, costumes, political posturing, ego inflating..... WAIT! What happened to our original healing mission? Many crumbling buildings needing endless money to fix. Still many unmet needs in every neighborhood. Many idle hands with more than their share of worldly goods. Mother Earth needing massive cleanup. Do we continue as is or try something new? Zscheile (pronounced shyly) boldly suggests examining the early Christian communities and their struggle to survive in a hostile world,

without bricks and mortar. Their ministry was to spread a revitalizing message, about a loving God, eternal life in the spirit, the need for humility and compassion and service to one another. The author suggests that our Christian communities need radical redirection in this direction rather than trying to bolster up the established structure, which is not working. He speaks specifically to Episcopalians, but can be applied to all formal religious groups in my opinion. We need to articulate our faith clearly, roll up our sleeves and walk together on the Way of peace, justice and healing. This is our precious ministry. A great book for discussion. Inspiring in these times especially, to see the possibility of deepening my faith in everyday ministry to neighbor and the earth.

The theme and conclusions are just what the Episcopal Church needs. The author's statement that "we are slaves to sin and evil" makes one wonder about his spiritual maturity, however. He makes a gratifying case that the Episcopal Church is best equipped to deal with theological diversity and then drops a snide put down of Deists. Gaffes like these and his authoritarian tone made me want to stop reading several times, but I'm glad I didn't. It's a good book.

This book describes what it means to be a Christian in renewal today. We need to be people of the Way of Jesus, not a people of doctrines and creeds. The early Christians were called followers of the Way, Episcopalians will need to become followers of the Way, rather than of doctrines, creeds or particular traditions or rituals. I love the way the author pursues this theme.

This is the book about The Church that I have been waiting for. Zscheile walks us through what was, what is and what will become of things if the Episcopal Church [read any main line denomination] doesn't make some significant changes about "mission." And what will become of things is sputter, fizzle, byebye. I think this book will become the "go to" book for parishes and individuals who are serious about The Church shifting gears and making a difference in the world. Roger Bowen, retired Episcopal priest, working with the Diocese of Haiti

Interesting history of Episcopal Church and what it stands for. If you are thinking about joining the Church it's a wonderful book to read. My church is currently reading a chapter during the week with a group discussion each Sunday. It leads to a very thoughtprovoking discussion. I think it's bringing us closer as a Church.

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