The Baptismal Ecclesiology of *Holy Women, Holy Men*: Developments in the Theology of Sainthood in the Episcopal Church

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In 2009, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church approved a new liturgical resource, *Holy Women, Holy Men*, adding over one hundred commemorations to the calendar. A list of criteria approved in 2006 guided the work of the committee that produced this resource. The baptismal theology of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer informs these criteria and the range of figures added to the calendar in 2009. In turn, this leads to a qualitatively different view of holiness than that represented in the calendars of other churches, including the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England.

**Introduction**

The charge to the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, the committee that developed the new liturgical resource *Holy Women, Holy Men*, was to enrich the calendar with commemorations that “reflect our increasing awareness of the ministry of all the people of God and of the cultural diversity of the Episcopal Church, of the wider Anglican Communion, of our ecumenical partners, and of our lively experience of sainthood in local communities.”

*Lesser Feasts*

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and Fasts, the resource that preceded Holy Women, Holy Men, was itself a significant enrichment of the calendar. As we consider the baptismal ecclesiology informing this further expansion of commemorations of sainthood in the church today, we begin with a brief overview of the development of the sanctoral calendar in the Church of England and the Episcopal Church.

**Part One: Commemoration in Anglicanism and the Episcopal Church**

The sanctorale in the first English Book of Common Prayer, in 1549, was a drastic pruning of the English versions of the medieval Western calendar. Not only did the reformers criticize the practice of invoking saints to ask their prayers and favors, they also were concerned about practices on holy days. As official holidays, these commemorations had a significant economic impact. Moreover, in their polemic against liturgical abuses, the reformers claimed that people were spending holy days in carousing and partying and that there was little devotional or other religious effect of the commemorations.²

Hence the 1549 Prayer Book included only commemorations based in Scripture: apostles and evangelists, as well as two Marian feasts, Purification and Annunciation. All Saints’ Day was the only non-scriptural feast retained.³ The 1552 Prayer Book added four holy days to the calendar: George, Lammas Day (a harvest festival), Laurence, and Clement. But unlike the other commemorations (which appeared in red typeface on the calendar) the 1552 book provided no propers for these holy days, which were listed in black typeface. Nine

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² *The Calendar*, Prayer Book Studies IX (New York: Church Pension Fund, 1957), 7. Hereafter referred to as PBS IX.

years later, at the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth I, sixty-four additional “black-letter days” were added, also without propers.  

This was essentially the calendar of the prayer book in use in the American colonies: biblically based red-letter days with propers for liturgical commemoration, and sixty-seven additional black-letter days without propers. In 1789, when the Episcopal Church was founded after the American Revolution and an American prayer book adopted, all black-letter days were eliminated from the calendar. Thus it remained until the middle of the twentieth century.

The Standing Liturgical Commission of the Episcopal Church began work on the calendar in 1945 by studying recent calendars developed in other churches of the Anglican Communion as well as the calendars of Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. The result was a calendar issued for study in 1957 with ninety-four new black-letter days. Among the criteria for inclusion was historical authenticity. For the Reformation and post-Reformation periods, only English and American Anglicans were included.

One year later, the commission published a companion volume, also for study, with a proper collect, Epistle, and Gospel for each commemoration. In 1964 the General Convention approved a revised calendar with twenty-three additional commemorations, this time for trial use, published in a volume entitled Lesser Feasts and Fasts. From 1964 until 2006, the

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4 PBS IX, 8–10. The 1552 book dropped Mary Magdalene. The 1561 calendar added the biblical feasts of Visitation and Transfiguration and two additional feasts of Mary, Nativity and Conception.

5 The following feasts are on the 1789 calendar: Conversion of St. Paul (Jan. 25), Purification of Virgin Mary (Feb. 2), St. Matthias (Feb. 24), Annunciation of V. M. (March 25), St. Mark (April 25), St. Philip and St. James (May 1), St. Barnabas (June 11), Nativity of St. John Baptist (June 24), St. Peter (June 29), St. James (July 25), St. Bartholomew (Aug. 24), St. Matthew (Sept. 21), St. Michael and All Angels (Sept. 29), St. Luke the Evangelist (Oct. 18), St. Simon and St. Jude (Oct. 28), All Saints’ Day (Nov. 1), St. Andrew (Nov. 30), St. Thomas (Dec. 21), St. Stephen (Dec. 26), St. John the Evangelist (Dec. 27), Innocents (Dec. 28).

6 PBS IX; for “Principles of the Present Proposals,” see 35–38.


8 The Calendar and the Collects, Epistles, and Gospels for the Lesser Feasts and Fasts and for Special Occasions, prepared by the Standing Liturgical Commission of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America (New York: Church Pension Fund, 1963). For an introduction explaining the commission’s work, see The Calendar and the Collects, Epistles, and Gospels for the Lesser Feasts and Fasts and for Special Occasions, Prayer Book Studies XVI (New York: Church Pension Fund, 1963). In addition to the liturgical texts, the Prayer Book Study includes introductory
triennial General Convention approved additional commemorations, from as many as ten to as few as none, at each convention.

Most of the additions came via proposals from individuals and dioceses. In 2003, General Convention called for a wide-ranging revision of *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*.\(^9\) The Calendar Committee began its work by establishing principles for revision. Then, over the next six years, this committee studied calendars from other churches in the Anglican Communion, from Rome and the Orthodox, and from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the United Methodist Church. The committee also invited recommendations from historians and other scholars and from representatives of African American, Asian American, Latino/ Hispanic, and Native American ministries in the Episcopal Church. This revision process resulted in a remarkably expanded calendar that includes commemorations of prominent individuals and those less well known. Although not explicit in the revision process, we argue that the baptismal ecclesiology of the Episcopal Church is a formative influence on the new calendar in *Holy Women, Holy Men*.

**Part Two: The Emergence of a Baptismal Ecclesiology in the Episcopal Church**

The development of *Lesser Feasts and Fasts* was part of the larger work of prayer book revision that culminated in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, the first American book to make a significant departure from the liturgies we had inherited from our sixteenth- and seventeenth-century forebears in the British Isles. Arguably the most revolutionary of those changes was the shift to a baptismal ecclesiology. The prayer book defines baptism as “full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church.”\(^10\) The baptismal rite includes a “Baptismal Covenant,” which begins with an interrogatory form of the Apostles’ Creed and continues with five questions asking the candidates to commit to living a life of faithful Christian worship, service, and witness. Since 1979, the Baptismal Covenant has become essays, biographies of the newly proposed commemorations, and a chart comparing the Episcopal Church proposal to the calendars of several other churches of the Anglican Communion as well as the medieval Sarum rite and the 1960 Roman calendar.

\(^9\) Resolution 2003–A100.

part of the vernacular of the Episcopal Church, a familiar text used not only in liturgy but also in mission statements, on websites, and in other ways to express our understanding of the ministry to which God calls all Christians through their baptisms.

Louis Weil, who served on the committee that drafted the 1979 baptismal rite, explains the significance of this emphasis on baptism: “In recent decades we have been involved in the often painful process of moving from a model of church life dominated by clergy to one based upon the significance of the baptized community as the common ground of Christian identity.”11 In this baptismal ecclesiology, all Christians are commissioned for ministry through their baptism. Thus the Catechism in the 1979 Prayer Book states that “the ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.” The ministry of the laity, who are named first in the list of ministers, is to represent Christ and the church, to bear witness to Christ, to carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world, and, finally, to participate in the life, worship, and governance of the church.12

As we have studied Holy Women, Holy Men, we have found that a baptismal ecclesiology likewise provides significant underpinnings for this calendar.

Part Three: The Guidelines for Continuing Alteration of the Calendar

A useful means for understanding how baptismal ecclesiology informs this calendar revision is by looking at the “Guidelines and Procedures for Continuing Alteration of the Calendar of the Episcopal Church” in Holy Women, Holy Men.13 The introduction to the principles of revision states, “The Church is ‘the communion of Saints,’ that is, a people made holy through their mutual participation in the mystery of Christ.” The introduction further identifies the present church as a pilgrim church that commemorates those “who were extraordinary or even heroic servants of God and of God’s people for the sake, and after the example, of their Savior Jesus Christ.”14 In this

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12 BCP, 855.
14 Holy Women, Holy Men, 742.
rationale for commemorating the faithful departed we find complementary notions of sanctity. The whole people of God, mutually participating in the life of Christ, are rightly understood as members of the communion of saints. At the same time, there exist exemplary members of the people of God singled out for liturgical commemoration. This view is consistent with the baptismal ecclesiology of the Episcopal Church that understands baptism as the necessary sacrament for enabling Christians to perform “the reconciling ministry of Christ in the world.”

The influence of baptismal ecclesiology on the development of this calendar is more explicit in the principles of revision. We begin with the second principle, “Christian Discipleship,” that situates any commemoration as “the completion in death of a particular Christian’s living out of the promises of baptism. Baptism is, therefore, a necessary prerequisite for inclusion in the Calendar.” Although it is not a tremendous surprise that baptism is stipulated as a minimum requirement for inclusion on the calendar, we draw attention here to the idea that all Christians are called specifically to live out their promises of baptism. In an Episcopal context, this is understood to include the promises currently made by candidates and reaffirmed by the baptized in the Baptismal Covenant of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. At the same time, it must be noted that there are non-baptized people on the current calendar, notably Alexander Goode of the Dorchester Chaplains (February 3). There also are numerous New Testament figures on the current calendar for whom we have no indication of Christian baptism. Some of these figures have been commemorated since the earliest editions of the Book of Common Prayer, including John the Baptist (June 24), the Virgin Mary (August 15), and the apostles. Others are more recent additions such as Cornelius (February 7), Anne and Joachim (July 26), and Lazarus (July 29). Whether commemorated for centuries or only recently having been added to the calendar, these are people for whom we have no record of baptism (though presumably the apostles were baptized). We find here a tension between the baptismal ecclesiology informing the development of Holy Women, Holy Men and the presence of non-baptized Christians on this calendar.

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16 BCP, 304–305.
The third principle of revision concerns “Significance.” The commemorated ought to have been “extraordinary, even heroic servants of God and God’s people for the sake, and after the example, of Jesus Christ.” This notion of heroic service is one common to other traditions that commemorate saints, notably Roman Catholicism. But *Holy Women, Holy Men* also expands the forms of activity that may be worthy of commemoration, including “people whose creative work or whose manner of life has glorified God, enriched the life of the Church, or led others to a deeper understanding of God.” It is based on this principle of inclusion that we find in the calendar writers, composers, and artists like Christina Rossetti (April 27), Bach, Handel, and Purcell (July 28), and Andrei Rublev (January 29). Here too is the reason for an emphasis on those who have built up churches either locally or nationally, like Robert Hunt, the first chaplain at Jamestown (April 26), or V. Samuel Azariah, the first Indian Anglican bishop (January 2). And because significance worthy of commemoration includes leading others to a deeper understanding of God, this calendar includes theologians and apologists like Karl Barth (December 10) and G. K. Chesterton (June 13).

The purpose of including such a wide range of categories and people is to show forth “Christ’s presence in, and Lordship over, all of history; and [to] continue to inspire us as we carry forward God’s mission in the world.” This principle of significance dovetails well with a baptismal ecclesiology that understands all the baptized as commissioned to perform Christ’s ministry. By virtue of the grace of baptism, all the people of God can manifest Christ’s work in the world. All the baptized are commissioned as agents of God’s mission. Those commemorated might be exemplary in their particularly noteworthy service in God’s mission, but on an anthropological level they are no different from any other baptized Christian. They might have rendered heroic service but not because they were singled out to receive spiritual graces or supernatural assistance outside of the sacrament of baptism. Here we suggest we can find a specific point of divergence from traditional Roman Catholic theologies of sanctity.

The centrality of baptism as the defining marker of a Christian, and not membership in a particular ecclesial community, explains the

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18 *Holy Women, Holy Men*, 743.
20 *Holy Women, Holy Men*, x.
high frequency of non-Anglicans on the new calendar. If the goal is to remember those from across the body of Christ as exemplars, and not just predominantly clerical or monastic representatives of a specific tradition as in Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy, then the calendar will include names that are not immediately recognizable and some that may come as surprises. This brings us to the fourth principle of revision, “Memorability,” which emphasizes that this calendar commemorates those whom the Episcopal Church in the early twenty-first century deems worthy. But such commemoration is not restricted to members of the Episcopal Church. Rather, in striving to remember as inclusively as possible, the Episcopal Church should, in the words of Thomas Talley, remember those “whose memory may have faded in the shifting fashions of public concern, but whose witness is deemed important to the life and mission of the Church.”

Thus *Holy Women, Holy Men* has the example of dedicated laywomen: former Secretary of Labor under Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Frances Perkins (May 13), and Anna Cooper and Elizabeth Wright (February 28), pioneering African American educators and Episcopalians. These women were peripheral to the memory of the Episcopal Church until the publication of *Holy Women, Holy Men*. But in a church dedicated to the notion that all forms of life are arenas in which the mission of God may be advanced by the baptized, the inclusion of Perkins, Cooper, and Wright has a clear logic to it.

We find this logic reiterated in the fifth principle of revision in *Holy Women, Holy Men*, “Range of Inclusion.” Here it is made clear that “attention should also be paid to gender and race, to the inclusion of lay people (witnessing in this way to our baptismal understanding of the Church), and to ecumenical representation.” One of the reactions many people have to this calendar initially is a dizzying sense of the vast array of people included. Some have accused *Holy Women, Holy Men* of trying to be all things to all people, or of being guilty of a solipsistic political correctness. We argue that there is a deep logic to the inclusion of lay Christians from a wide range of backgrounds and cultural contexts like Thurgood Marshall (May 17), Catherine Wink-
worth (August 7), Fanny Crosby (February 11), Frederick Douglass (February 20), and William Mayo, Charles Menninger, and their sons (March 6). The deliberate inclusion of laity representative of various professions is a clear articulation of the Episcopal Church’s teaching that all Christians are empowered for ministry on the basis of their baptism alone. Any baptized person whose work is an exemplary sign of God’s ongoing mission in the world in turn can be a candidate for inclusion on the calendar of the Episcopal Church.

The current version of Holy Women, Holy Men is in trial use. The Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music is evaluating responses and is to make recommendations to the next General Convention of the Episcopal Church in July 2012. Since the calendar itself is in a process of revision and formulation in this trial period, we can describe Holy Women, Holy Men as an “in process” document of baptismal ecclesiology. As such, the seeming presence of inconsistencies or flaws in the current forms of the calendar (such as the inclusion of questionable figures like John Muir, W. E. B. DuBois, or the Dorchester Chaplains) is informed by the baptismal ecclesiology that frames the formation of this calendar. That is, baptismal ecclesiology understands the church as necessarily adaptive to local circumstances. In local contexts, the most appropriate forms of ministry as church must be discerned and defined over time. In a similar way, the shape of the calendar of the Episcopal Church will contain flux as commemorations of certain people are tested and either approved or denied through the open, democratically representative process of the church’s triennial General Conventions.

Part Four: Two Observations about the Nature of Holy Women, Holy Men

Given the preceding analysis of Holy Women, Holy Men, there are two observations about the nature of this calendar that stand out. The first is the superabundance of commemorations found in this calendar. Certainly, the Episcopal Church is not the only ecclesial body to witness a significant expansion of its calendar of commemorations in recent decades. In many ways, the expansion of commemorations in the Episcopal Church mirrors the even greater expansion of canonizations and beatifications in the Roman Catholic Church under the pontificate of John Paul II.24 What distinguishes the expansions of

the calendars in these two church bodies are the ecclesiologies from which they emerge. Within the Episcopal Church, the seemingly ever broadening category of who comprises the saints of God as reflected in its calendar emerges from its alignment with the core concept of baptismal ecclesiology.

The broadening of the calendar of commemorations has implications at the level of the local congregations. Individual congregations that choose to commemorate people on the calendar, typically in weekday services, will have to carefully select the commemorations used. It was not the assumption of the designers of *Holy Women, Holy Men* that every commemoration be celebrated in every church but that worshiping communities choose those most suitable to them. This sensibility mirrors that of the Roman Catholic calendar, in which multiple commemorations appears on many days with the understanding that different communities of the global church will choose different saints to celebrate.

The second observation to make about *Holy Women, Holy Men* is that the category of holiness promoted in this calendar is of a different quality from that of commemoration in Roman Catholicism or even other churches of the Anglican Communion such as the Church of England. In both Roman Catholic and Church of England ecclesiologies, ministry emerges out of a sphere of activity separate from baptism, coming as ordination by bishops for a specific ministry. This view of a select (and historically male) body as specially equipped to do God’s work in the world as ministry results in turn in calendars that are predominantly populated by clerics, religious, and martyrs. These calendars certainly do not represent the de-hierarchical perspective at the heart of the Episcopal Church’s baptismal ecclesiology. Holiness in the Episcopal Church, then, does not come as a separate gift of the Holy Spirit that only a few may attain, but rather is an implicit quality of all the people of God made possible by virtue of the sacrament of baptism. This indeed is a significantly different conception of holiness as applied to those commemorated liturgically but it is entirely consistent with the developing baptismal ecclesiology of the Episcopal Church.

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