

The Roots of the Salvation Army

The Booths, Methodism, and Female Ministry

William and Catherine Booth yearned to rescue all the souls rushing to hell. Their encounter with holiness and revivalism convinced them that staid formality would crush any attempt to save souls and that the silence imposed on women could only harm their cause. The Booths' impatience with conferences and committees disposed them to fashion the Army with a strict order of command. The tambourines, music-hall tunes, uniformed preachers, and ecstatic services of the Salvation Army caused a sensation among believers and nonbelievers alike. The Army quickly grew to include thousands of officers and soldiers, but its origins may be traced to William and Catherine Booth, whose influence and power remained decisive well into the twentieth century.

The movement the Booths founded was shaped by their own religious and personal concerns. Their commitment to Methodism and their disenchantment with its rules and restrictions shaped the theology and practice of the Christian Mission and the Salvation Army. Their encounter with revivalism and holiness theology influenced how they evangelized. Equally important were William's and Catherine's family backgrounds, class position, and the evangelical partnership they forged in their marriage.

Among the most significant and groundbreaking features of the Salvation Army was the unusual prominence and authority of women. Catherine Booth was the decisive intellectual and practical influence on this unique status Salvationist women enjoyed. She exemplified a new model of Christian womanhood, articulating a new approach to female

ministry and creating an influential career as an evangelist. As well as formulating the Salvation Army's egalitarian policies, she served as an inspiration to thousands of young women who preached under the aegis of the organization. She built on a foundation laid by radical, plebeian Methodist women early in the century and demonstrated the continued significance of that tradition for women's rights advocates even until the last decades of the nineteenth century. Her assertion of women's *right* to preach the gospel disrupted a powerful sphere of masculine privilege while opening a reconsideration of women's spiritual and practical authority. Her theology and her own preaching had a profound effect on the beliefs and practices that were to distinguish the Salvation Army from its contemporaries and that would gain it a large following as well as sustained criticism. The Salvation Army's history must begin with the religious culture, theological concerns, and individual lives of William and Catherine Booth.

CATHERINE'S METHODIST CHILDHOOD

Catherine Mumford Booth was born in 1829 at Ashbourne, Derbyshire. Her father, John Mumford, was a coach builder, a skilled artisan. He and his wife, Sarah Milward Mumford, were members of a Wesleyan Methodist chapel where John was a lay preacher. Religion was at the center of young Catherine's life, and she shared this intense faith with her mother. Mrs. Mumford, wishing to shield her daughter from worldly influences, allowed few friends and no frivolous pastimes. She carefully oversaw her daughter's education. Catherine attended school briefly, but in 1843 she was confined to bed with curvature of the spine and fell ill soon after with consumption. During those years of enforced solitude, Catherine read widely, especially theologians like Charles Finney and John Wesley as well as spiritual biographies. By age twelve she had read the Bible cover to cover eight times.¹ She was a serious, devout child. Her cousin asked her one Sunday to guess the price of her new boots, and Catherine was mortified by her own failure to refuse her cousin's game.²

In her 1847-48 diary, written when she went to Brighton in an attempt to recover her health, Catherine recorded her moments of despair crossed with feelings of faith. A letter from her mother "made me weep tears of joy as soon as I had read it; . . . she is the dearest earthly idol of my heart but now she is dearer still."³ She longed for her mother and knew her mother missed her; still she hoped God would enable her mother "to lay her child upon the altar of thy cross and say thy will be done."

She also reflected that her loneliness provided an important discipline. Since their separation, “I draw more from the Fountain.”⁴ Later, she wrote, “I have felt much cast down at the thought of being from home when I so much need its comforts and away from my Dear Mother; . . . we shall soon meet again and after all our meetings and parting on earth we shall meet to part no more in Glory.”⁵

The firm and enduring faith that infused Catherine’s and Mrs. Mumford’s lives set them apart from the men in their lives. Mrs. Mumford expressly chose a husband who shared her religious convictions, and his skill should have promised her a secure place in a community of respectable artisans. But John Mumford lost his faith in the early 1840s. He began to drink heavily, and his subsequent irregular employment caused his family considerable economic difficulty. His wife and daughter, moreover, worried about the state of his soul. In February 1848, Catherine wrote in her diary, “My dear father is a great trial to us.”⁶ Over the following decades, he stopped drinking for short periods, but sobriety never lasted. On her 1869 death certificate, Sarah Mumford was listed as a widow, although John Mumford lived another twelve years; this entry on her death certificate suggests that they did not live together during the later years of their lives.⁷ Catherine’s only sibling, John, born in 1833, emigrated to the United States in 1849. She never mentioned him in her diary and only rarely in her correspondence. Her infrequent comments make it clear she counted him among the unsaved. He signed the pledge and declared himself saved several times, but he always fell away again and took to drink.⁸ Catherine’s ardent belief in the faithfulness and righteousness of women, which she expressed so frequently in her later writings, was first apprehended in her own family.

The emotional tenor of this mother-daughter relationship corresponded to nineteenth-century evangelical expectations. Mid-nineteenth-century evangelicals elevated motherhood and intensified the importance of the mother in a child’s spiritual life. Mothers were often regarded as the most powerful guides to piety. One evangelical in the United States, writing in 1836, proclaimed that of all those who bring souls to Christ “none have higher claims than mother.”⁹ Similarly, Susan Warner’s *Wide, Wide World* (1850), a bestselling novel of its day, articulates a “feminine theology” in which the mother’s love is the earthly example of God’s love and heaven is imagined as the place of the final reunion of mother and daughter.¹⁰ This novel, the only one Catherine ever mentioned in her extensive correspondence, expressed a theology and an emotional

universe similar to the one young Catherine described in her journal. That theology not only encouraged a particular emotional relationship to one's mother but made motherhood singularly important, a power that could potentially displace patriarchal authority. Although the church's doctrine and regulations excluded women from office and determined what a mother could teach, it did allow mothers a unique and instrumental role in the creation of a community of the faithful. Sectarian Methodist women preachers were often called "Mothers in Israel," a name that linked the domestic and spiritual while celebrating pious mothers as nurturers, protectors, and guides. The absence of a masculine equivalent emphasizes that this was a role only women could fill.¹¹

In the Mumford family piety and righteousness were female virtues. Methodism offered women an unusual opportunity to exercise these virtues in institutional ways. All Methodists joined classes, where members prayed aloud and spoke of their spiritual experiences. Members could advise each other on spiritual difficulties and benefit from hearing the testimony of others. The Wesleyans encouraged women to sing, pray, testify to their experiences, and eventually to lead classes.¹² The class meeting was an important starting point for Catherine. When she was seventeen, her class leader insisted that she overcome her excessive timidity and begin to pray aloud in class meetings. Methodists not only spoke to believers but sought out the unregenerate. When she was still in her teens, Catherine began to speak and to correspond with her cousins and friends, trying to lead them to religious conviction.¹³ The high degree of women's participation in Methodism's formal structure, the importance of individual testimony, and the emphasis on converting others gave Catherine confidence in her own ability to speak in public and in the general efficacy of women's prayers and testimonies.

Methodist women provided Catherine with examples of female preaching and public ministry. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, argued that women were forbidden to preach as a rule but exceptions could be made for women with an extraordinary calling. A number of Methodist women, notably Mary Bousanquet Fletcher, Sarah Crosby, Mary Barritt Taft, and Ann Cutler, preached to female and mixed audiences with great effect during the later decades of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth century. Ann Cutler (1759–1794) was from a poor Lancashire family engaged in cottage industry. Her biographer wrote that "as she laboured with her hands, she would retire twelve or fourteen times a day for a few minutes of scripture reading and prayer."¹⁴ Her

preaching, sharp, loud, and direct, was credited with bringing many souls to salvation.¹⁵ Mary Barritt (1772–1851) received encouragement from Ann Cutler and began itinerant preaching in the Yorkshire Revival of 1792. She married Zachariah Taft in 1802 and preached with him at his Dover Circuit. The Dover Methodists were appalled by her activities and her husband's unwavering support of her work.

This controversy foreshadowed what was to come. The Wesleyan Connexion, the organizational body of this branch of Methodism, forbade preaching by women in 1803. This decision hastened the creation of the Methodist sects, including the Primitive Methodists and Bible Christians and others that supported women's ministry. These sectarians promoted apocalyptic fervor and emotional revivals over the orderly practices of institutional religion. They organized all-day gatherings where, instead of listening to sermons, participants spoke of their spiritual experiences each in turn. Female preaching was associated with these revivals. To the elite leadership of the Wesleyan Connexion these women, drawn almost exclusively from the laboring classes, were deeply offensive. Their direct, unadorned vernacular speech, emotional fervor, and independence were hardly examples of appropriate feminine decorum and submission. And their activities were outside the control of the male chapel administration.¹⁶ Nevertheless, many were drawn to the sectarian Methodists. At least six women preached in Derbyshire, where the Mumfords lived during the 1820s.¹⁷ The particular religious culture in which Catherine was raised helped to shape her intellectual and social life by providing examples of laboring people creating their own religious language and practice. Because Methodist women enjoyed an unusual degree of spiritual authority within both domestic and public realms, Catherine had an important foundation for her own work. She strived to revitalize that legacy throughout her life.

CREATING AN EVANGELICAL PARTNERSHIP

In 1851, a controversy broke out among the Wesleyans that was to have a profound effect on the subsequent careers of Catherine Mumford and William Booth (see Figures 1 and 2). The debate concerned the exercise of Connexional authority and discipline. Jabez Bunting, president of the Connexion, said, "Methodism hates democracy as it hates sin."¹⁸ Yet many doubted that the Connexion's regulations and structure worked in the best interests of the members. This problem became acutely evident in 1842, when Methodist James Caughey arrived in England from

the United States and commenced work as an itinerant preacher. Many were impressed with his ability to effect conversions with his revivalist preaching, and he was soon a household name among English Methodists.¹⁹ The Wesleyans' governing body, however, disliked his irregular methods and asked the Americans to call him home. Two days later, superintendents were forbidden to hire Caughey or any other itinerant who worked outside the Connexion's discipline.²⁰ Many Methodists believed these decisions meant that the desire for rules and orders had surpassed the hunger for souls. Discontent lingered. Finally in 1849, an anonymous author published the "Fly Sheets," a series of pamphlets denouncing the leadership as slothful, tyrannical, and indifferent to what the Connexion required in order to grow and prosper. When investigators failed to discover the authors, the leaders expelled three prominent men believed to be responsible. Many laypeople thought to be sympathetic to the authors were also expelled.²¹

Catherine was living in Brixton, a suburb of London where the Mumfords had moved in 1845. She was dissatisfied with the Wesleyans at Brixton, finding them cold and formal, unlike the ardent believers she once knew. She later recalled, "I can remember often leaving chapel burdened at heart that more had not been achieved of a practical character."²² Instead of using prayer meetings to help people on the verge of a decision, Brixton Wesleyans conducted meetings in an orderly, half-hearted fashion, and people were left to find their own way. Not surprisingly, her sympathies lay with Caughey and his associates. Her quarterly ticket of membership was denied in 1852.²³ She soon joined the Reformers, a loose body of men and women who had also left the Wesleyans because of this controversy and who wanted a more democratic structure with more zealous members. This move occasioned her first meeting with William Booth.

William Booth was born in 1829 at Snenton, a suburb of Nottingham. Less is known about William's early life than about Catherine's because no diaries or letters from that period of his life have been found. His mother, Mary Moss, was the daughter of a laborer and hawker. She worked as a domestic servant until she married Samuel Booth in 1824. He made a living at a variety of trades, including work as a nailer and builder. Samuel Booth apprenticed his son William to a pawnbroker in 1843. This apprenticeship represented a certain move up the class ladder for the family. In 1843, Samuel Booth died leaving his widow dependent on her son for support.²⁴ Little is known of the family's religious life. William joined a Wesleyan chapel and was fully saved at age

fifteen. He began to preach in the streets of Nottingham soon after. Like Catherine, William found ample opportunity among the Methodists to develop his considerable preaching skills.

In 1849, William moved to London, where he again worked for a pawnbroker. In a letter to a friend in Nottingham written shortly after his arrival in London, he wrote:

Our shop is uncommonly pleasantly situated no shop in Nottingham the equal to it; . . . we have prayers every evening. We gather round the table and sing a hymn. Master then reads a chapter and afterwards prays, all this is to me very agreeable. . . . Far away am I removed from the Society in which I was so delighted with never a friend with whom to hold sweet communion yet my trust is in the bleeding Lamb both now and evermore I am determined to stand by the cross.²⁵

William soon became active in a London Wesleyan chapel. Influential Methodists began to notice this energetic and devout young man. The Reformers required preachers for their new chapels and offered to engage William as a full-time preacher for 20 shillings a week. William agreed.

William and Catherine were serious Christians, their religious convictions informing every aspect of their lives. Their sense of religious purpose is revealed in a letter Catherine wrote to William just before their engagement in 1852. "If you feel satisfied on these two points, first that the step is not opposed to the will of God and secondly that I am calculated to make you happy come on Saturday evening and on our knees before God let us give ourselves afresh to Him and to each other for His sake, consecrate our whole selves to His service, *for Him to live and to die*."²⁶ The relationship was a romantic one, and they wrote long, detailed, and loving letters during their frequent separations. In 1855 Catherine wrote, "I dreamt about you last night. I thought I was reading to you sitting on your knee, and you looked into my eyes with a look of unutterable affection and drew me tightly to your bosom. The book of course was quickly lain aside and with a full heart I returned the loving clasp most warmly."²⁷ William expressed similar sentiments. He wrote to her, "I was dreaming in the night that you came into my room before I was out of bed, etc."²⁸

The years of William and Catherine's engagement, 1852–55, were times of constant struggle. During these years they formed a partnership, based on a shared commitment to evangelization, that would characterize their relationship for the rest of their lives. Together, they debated theological questions, strived to find a place for William where his preach-

ing could flourish, and considered the position women ought to occupy in the church. William wished to find a religious body where he could train for the ministry and establish himself as a preacher. His arrangement to preach for the Reformers at Walworth Chapel soon proved unsatisfactory. The Reform leadership retained too strong a hold on the chapel for William to be able to exercise what he saw as his proper authority.²⁹ Catherine approached the Rev. Dr. David Thomas of Stockwell New Chapel where she had begun to attend services. He suggested that William study for the Independent (Congregational) ministry under the Rev. John Campbell. William strongly objected at first, protesting that he was too strongly attached to the Methodists to consider such a change. He also objected to the Independents' Calvinist doctrine of election.³⁰ Catherine convinced him to consult with several Independent ministers; they convinced William that many of their clergy did not endorse a Calvinist theology. Yet once he began to study with the Rev. John Campbell, he discovered that these disagreements were in fact too significant to ignore, and he broke off his studies.³¹

William was then invited to take the Spalding, Lincolnshire, circuit by a group of Reformers.³² The position was difficult; the circuit required that he sometimes give eight sermons a week at several chapels scattered over a twenty-seven-mile area.³³ The leaders offered him a salary of £52 a year, informing him that another man gladly offered to serve the circuit for less. William eventually managed to settle for £70 a year. He still thought that insufficient to support a wife, and he despaired of ever being able to marry Catherine.³⁴

Leaving that Connexion in February 1854, he entered a small class of students studying for the Methodist New Connexion ministry under the Rev. Dr. Cooke. Little study was required, and William was left free to preach in London chapels and even to travel to other circuits. Very successful tours in such places as the Potteries and Newcastle-upon-Tyne enhanced William's reputation as a revivalist.³⁵ Catherine rejoiced in his successes, yet she was equally sharp in her criticism when she believed his revivals were improperly managed. "What a wretched policy, to leave Newcastle just when the work is at its height and yet I presume it will be so, and after all this trying *you* must abandon at least half the results to chance, or somebody little better as far as human instrumentality goes."³⁶

During these years, Catherine lived in Brixton with her mother. She continued to read avidly, to teach Sunday School, and occasionally to write for Methodist periodicals. She took up the study of the piano, which

she detested, because William wished that his future wife could play.³⁷ She also shared in the running of the household, which was no small task when her father brought in no income. She and her mother struggled to make ends meet, renting out rooms and practicing every economy they could.³⁸ Catherine considered going out as a domestic servant when their troubles were particularly pressing.³⁹

Her letters to William are full of ideas and comments on his difficulties and achievements. She initiated his brief period of study with the Independents, and she continued to offer counsel on his career.⁴⁰ One thing she urged consistently and energetically was study. When he decided to begin with the Methodist New Connexion, she wrote, "I am pleased you are trying to arrange with Mr. Cook [*sic*], *nothing* could give me greater satisfaction than for you to *study* under the direction of such a man."⁴¹ A few months later she wrote, "I am sorry to hear you talk of '*trying*' to be a student once more and if you fail giving it up forever' don't say I will *try* but "I *will* be one." . . . So far from my regretting that you will have your days under your own control I *am glad* because I trust it will help you to gain application."⁴² When this advice did not generate the desired result, Catherine responded with more specific suggestions:

You generally enjoy a room to yourself; could you not rise say by 6 o'clock every morning and convert your bedroom into a *study*; . . . after breakfast and family devotion could you not again retire to your room and determinedly apply yourself to it till dinner; . . . don't let little difficulties prevent its adoption; . . . everything depends upon it in the future, you could not sustain your position in that circuit without it, much less rise to a better, which I have no doubt you will, *if you study*.⁴³

Catherine began to develop an interest in writing sermons. She took notes for William on sermons she heard and sent them to him. She marked up books she was reading, sermons by Finney or works on teetotalism, and sent them to guide him in his studies.⁴⁴ She also suggested sermon topics and appropriate scriptural passages. William responded enthusiastically. "I want a sermon on the Flood, one on Jonah, and one on the Judgement. Send me some bare thoughts; some clear startling outlines. Nothing moves people like the terrific."⁴⁵ For the rest of her life, Catherine advised William and not always gently. In 1856 she wrote her mother describing a service where William "excelled himself and electrified the people." William added, "I have just come in the room where my dear little wife is writing this precious document and snatching the paper have read the above eulogistic sentiments. I just want to say that the very same

night . . . she gave me a certain lecture on ‘blockheadism’, stupidity etc and lo’ she writes to you after this fashion. However she is precious . . . with all her eccentricities and oddities.”⁴⁶

While she read theology, learned to write sermons, advised her future husband, and managed her household, Catherine began to reconsider the position of women in the church. She started to articulate a theology that she would continue to develop and refine for the rest of her life. Catherine faced significant restrictions. Despite her evident skill and knowledge, Catherine, like her husband, had little formal education. The heavy demands of her household always precluded any sustained, formal study. Moreover, autodidacticism was increasingly devalued as Methodism grew and established new standards for the ministry. The title of *Reverend* distinguished the ministers from the lay preachers and evangelists, and only those who had received a formal education could hold the highest positions of authority. Catherine encouraged William to study knowing that the enhanced value placed on such credentials made it necessary as well as knowing that it excluded those without such opportunities, like herself.⁴⁷ By mid-century most Methodists accepted that scripture forbade women’s preaching, and the female preachers who were so important in early sectarian Methodism were rarely seen.⁴⁸ Yet in the face of formidable restrictions placed on Methodist women and the pressing claims of her domestic life, Catherine began to reconsider the significance of female ministry.

RETHINKING THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

In 1852, shortly after her engagement, Catherine wrote William, “I only desire to be (if God spares me) your ‘helpmate’ and *companion*, in fact *One* with you. My remarks on the position and character of my sex were not in the *least personal*, I fear nothing for myself, but my heart often aches and weeps over ‘hurt of the daughters of my people’ and I often make their cause a matter of supplication to the ‘God of Heaven.’”⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Catherine was convinced that the church had wrongly denied woman her rightful place, and she began to expand and clarify her interpretation of the position of women.

The Rev. Dr. David Thomas, the minister Catherine had asked to help William gain admission to study for the Congregational ministry, preached a sermon on women on April 22, 1855. He suggested that

woman's moral and spiritual nature was weaker than or inferior to that of man. Catherine wrote a letter of protest.⁵⁰ The letter displayed both the limits of her formal education and Catherine's potential as a writer and a polemicist. Her grammar was inconsistent, and she made many spelling errors but her argument was clear and forceful.⁵¹ There is no recorded mention of a reply to her letter. She began with an apology and an assertion of the rightness of her own views.

Dear sir, you will doubtless be surprised at the receipt of this communication and I assure you it is with great reluctance and a feeling of profound respect that I make it. Were not for the high estimate I entertain of both your intellect and your heart, I would spare myself the sacrifice it cost me, but because I believe you love *truth* of whatever kind and would not willingly countenance or propagate erroneous views on any subject I venture to address you.

She argued that no one could speak of women's natural capacities because they have yet to be seen. A woman's education, "even in this highly favoured land," has been "such as to cramp and paralyze rather than to develop and strengthen her energies and calculated to crush and wither her aspirations after mental greatness. . . . [It] has been more calculated to render her a serf, a toy, a plaything, than a self-dependent reflecting intellectual being. Christianity offered women equality. Women and men suffer the same penalties and enjoy the same hopes for eternity. "In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female but they are both *one* and the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit is no less to the handmaidens than to the servants of the Lord." Catherine did not comment on how this reasoning might affect women's work in the church but instead proposed that devaluing women made them inferior mothers. Women, she wrote, would influence the next generation. Only when they were no longer "indoctrinated from the school room, the press, the platform and the *Pulpit*, with self-degrading feelings and servile notions" would "the fountain of human influence become pure."

That same month, Catherine also wrote to William, sending him a copy of the letter to the Rev. Dr. Thomas with a request for his thoughts. William replied,

From the first reading I cannot see anything in them to lead for one moment to think of altering my opinion. You combat a great deal that I hold as firmly as you do—viz. her [woman's] equality, her perfect equality, as a whole, as a being. But as to concede that she is a man's equal, or capable of becoming man's equal, in intellectual attainments or prowess—I must say that is contradicted by experience in the world and my honest conviction. . . .

I would not stop a woman from preaching on any account. I would not encourage one to begin. You should preach if you felt moved thereto: felt equal to the task. I would not stay you if I had the power to do so. Altho' I should not like it. It is easy for you to say my views are the result of prejudice; perhaps they are. I am for the world's salvation; I will quarrel with no means that promises help.⁵²

He had just completed his first year of service with the Methodist New Connexion, and a few weeks later he would attend the annual Conference to receive his assignment for the following year and, he hoped, permission to marry.⁵³ Yet, Catherine would not simply acquiesce in his views.

She wrote an impassioned response to William's letter. In this letter she never fully articulated what she envisioned for Christian women, yet she clearly wanted women to enjoy a wider sphere of action even if its precise outline were indistinct. Catherine argued that scripture contained no clear injunction against women holding positions of public, religious authority. She brought forward women like Miriam and Deborah to show that God had chosen women to prophesy and to lead. And, Catherine argued, women's position was enhanced in the New Testament. In Christ, "there is neither male nor female and while outward resemblance of the curse remains, in *him* it is nullified by *love* being made the law of marriage. . . . Who shall call subjection to such a husband a curse?"⁵⁴ She cited the work of Adam Clarke, the Wesleyan preacher and several times president of the Wesleyan Conference, in whose biblical scholarship she found an important source of support for women's preaching and prophesying in the church.⁵⁵ With more such men, Catherine wrote, "we should not hear very *pigmies* in Christianity reasoning against holy and intelligent women opening their mouths for the Lord in the presence of the Church."⁵⁶

Still, Catherine remained concerned primarily with women as wives and mothers, just as in her letter to the Rev. Dr. Thomas. The church's restrictions on women were especially pernicious, she argued, because women became less able mothers. "If what the writers on physiology say be *true* and experience seems to render it unquestionable, what must [be] the effects of neglected mental culture, of the inculcation of frivolous *servile* and self-degrading notions into the minds of the Mothers of Humanity?"⁵⁷

Catherine believed the necessary change would come from women themselves. "I believe woman is destined to assume her true position, and exert her proper influence by the special exertions and attainments of her *own sex*; she is to struggle through *mighty* difficulties too obvi-

ous to need mentioning, but they eventually dwindle before the spell of her developed and cultivated mind.”⁵⁸ She declared, “Who shall dare thrust women out of the Church’s operation or presume to put *my* candle which *God* has lighted under a bushel?”⁵⁹ And she noted, “I solemnly assert that the more I think and read on the subject, the more satisfied I am of the true and scriptural character of my own views.”⁶⁰ Yet such confidence and self-assertion remained difficult to balance with the subjection she believed was also her duty. She wrote to William, “Perhaps sometime with thy permission (for I am going to promise to *obey* thee before I have any intention of entering such work) I may write something more extensive on the subject.”⁶¹ The uneasy balance of self-assertion and subjection remained a difficult one, but for the next few years Catherine’s efforts were focused on managing William’s religious career, not her own.

In June 1855 Catherine and William married, and for the next two years, the couple traveled. The Methodist New Connexion had assigned William to work as an itinerant evangelist. This was a highly unusual step. His salary of £100 exceeded the usual £68 paid a to circuit preacher, but, more important, his work was outside the usual Connexional practice.⁶² Typically, men in his position were assigned to a circuit and were not expected to preach outside it. A substantial number of Connexional leaders regarded his success as justification enough for his unusual assignment.⁶³

William’s theology and preaching were deeply influenced by revivalists in the United States, particularly James Caughey and Charles G. Finney. These preachers proclaimed in dramatic, emotional language that sinners must find salvation or expect to suffer the eternal torments of hell. They stressed the need for holiness, which was the presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart, mind, and will of the penitent.⁶⁴ The revivalists incited preachers to implore congregations to seek salvation immediately. William was such a preacher, and his labors were counted a great success. The *Methodist New Connexion Magazine* described his work at Hull. “In the evening the chapel was filled, and the extraordinary ministry of the preacher produced an effect which we trust will not soon be effaced. . . . Appropriate and vivid illustrations, and the appeals for an immediate decision were heart-searching. . . . Many signs, groans, and heartfelt responses were heard throughout the congregation.”⁶⁵

Catherine traveled with William when she could. She eagerly reported their triumphs to her parents. From Sheffield in October 1855, she wrote, “The work progresses with mighty power—everybody who knows any-

thing of this society are astonished and the months of gainsaying are stopped. God's son is glorified and precious souls are being saved by scores. 440 names have been taken and tomorrow is expected to be a mighty day."⁶⁶ Although she rejoiced in the conversions achieved through William's preaching, moving from place to place and living in rented rooms was not easy, especially with a growing family. Her first child, Bramwell, was born in 1856. Anticipating the birth of their second child, Catherine wrote to her mother, "I have shed many tears about it, I can assure you, perhaps it is wrong. I will try to be more resigned. If we had a home it would not be so bad but these lodgings are such a bore. We are not very comfortable here besides getting twenty six shillings a week out of us."⁶⁷ In 1857, the evangelistic tours ended when the Conference assigned William to preach in a regular circuit. Although many members of the Conference supported William's evangelistic work, others found the large, enthusiastic crowds who attended his services, professing conversion, an unwelcome deviation from the usual, orderly Methodist practice.⁶⁸ Debates between those who favored orderly services that would build a stable congregation and those who yearned for zealous preaching that sought the lost wherever they might be had long divided Methodists. This debate contributed to the schism among Wesleyans in 1851 as well as to the earlier development of the plebeian Methodist Connexions. Revivals, including William Booth's, were associated with a loss of respectability. To some, revivals brought disorder, even licentiousness, as well as the unscriptural presence of female preachers. The Booths regarded the formal practices and regulations, including the restrictions placed on women, as worldly brakes on the full exercise of the Holy Spirit.

But William dutifully went to his assigned circuit at Brighouse, a small town near Bradford in Yorkshire. The Booths found it cold and unwelcoming. "The people don't seem to take to us, the services don't succeed as we expected and many things seem to indicate that Wm is out of his place," Catherine wrote. She continued to hope that William would soon be assigned to full-time evangelistic work, despite the practical difficulties presented by such a life. She wrote to her mother that while Brighouse "is unquestionably much easier, it is far less congenial."⁶⁹ Catherine gave birth to their second son, Ballington, at Brighouse. The baby was baptized by Caughey, who continued to preach independently in England. The birth was difficult and aggravated Catherine's chronic spinal problem.⁷⁰

In 1858, his four-year probation complete, William was called to the Methodist New Connexion Conference to be ordained. He hoped to find

a new sphere of labor for his preaching, but again he was assigned to a circuit. He was sent to Gateshead, a town of about fifty thousand inhabitants near Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Catherine wrote her mother, “The chapel is a beauty—seats they say a thousand. . . . They [are] such nice folks. I feel just like anyone liberated from prison getting from that hated Brighthouse.”⁷¹ The Booths remained at Gateshead until 1860.⁷² They were a great success. In 1858, 92 members were listed on the chapel register. By January 1860, 224 names were listed.⁷³

WOMEN’S RIGHT TO PREACH

The years in Gateshead were especially important for Catherine. She gave birth to two daughters, Catherine in 1858 and Emma in 1860. Her domestic responsibilities were heavy. William’s salary allowed Catherine to engage one general servant, but she found herself plagued by the difficulty of finding a trustworthy and diligent girl who could meet her exacting standards. One servant, in any case, could relieve her of only a certain amount of domestic labor and the care of four small children.⁷⁴ Catherine found motherhood difficult and demanding. She wrote her mother in 1858 that her two sons got “into more trouble every day.” “I feel so unfit to struggle with [Bramwell]. . . . You know how nervous and impatient I am. I feel sometimes ready to lie down and die with dissatisfaction with myself. I fear I am not doing my duty to him as I ought.”⁷⁵

The Booths believed in a strict discipline, which included corporal punishment. William whipped Ballington at age two when he awakened in the night crying.⁷⁶ When William was away on one preaching tour, he told Catherine to inform Bramwell “that if he does not obey and set his brothers and sisters an example in this matter he must be prepared not only to lose his dog but to live in the attic when I am at home, for I will not see him.”⁷⁷ The Booths’ strict discipline was typical of nineteenth-century evangelicals, but it also occasioned considerable anxiety for William and Catherine, who regarded the success of their child-rearing practices as essential to their children’s salvation.

During these years, Catherine first publicly articulated her position on female ministry and commenced her own preaching career. These two important steps were occasioned by the evangelistic tour of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer. In 1835, Mrs. Palmer (1807–1874) began a women’s meeting in her home in New York City; it was called the Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness. This meeting grew to include men and became

a center for holiness advocates. Soon she began to address larger audiences. Mrs. Palmer's preaching followed a style considered to be modest and respectable in a woman: she never appeared without her husband, and, rather than speaking from behind the pulpit, she came forward and often walked down the steps of the platform before addressing her audience. The dramatic conversions effected by her preaching convinced many in the holiness movement that female preaching was part of God's plan.⁷⁸ The *Wesleyan Times* reported on one 1859 service in Newcastle: "Mrs. Palmer now modestly walks within the rail of the communion, not to preach according to the modern acceptance of the term, but simply to talk to the people, which she does with all the gracefulness of an intelligent and well-educated Christian lady."⁷⁹

Mrs. Palmer's writings, including *The Way of Holiness* (1843) and *Faith and Its Effects* (1849), made her well known to a wide audience, including the Booths. Catherine told her mother Mrs. Palmer's books "have done me more good than anything else I have ever met with."⁸⁰ In 1859, when Mrs. Palmer began a four-year preaching tour of England with her husband, Catherine enthusiastically followed her progress.⁸¹

Both the revivalist and the holiness movements originated in the United States. These two movements were intertwined, drawing on similar theological sources, and they developed within a transatlantic context. British and U.S. evangelists read each other's literature; toured both countries; adopted each other's music, preaching techniques, and strategies; and influenced the direction of theology and practice in Britain and the United States. Catherine wrote William, "In America (that birthplace of so much that is great and *noble*) tho' throwing up as all such movements do, much that is absurd and extravagant and which *I* no more approve than you, yet it shows that principles are working and inquiry awakening."⁸² The Booths' place in this transatlantic evangelical culture engaged them with ideas and practices that were outside the mainstream of English Nonconformity at mid-century. It opened up a whole range of new possibilities for evangelical work.⁸³

This theology formed a fundamental part of the movement the Booths would found, as we will see in Chapter 2. But in the late 1850s, the reappraisal of the role of women created by holiness theology was critical to Catherine Booth's understanding of female ministry. Revivalists like Finney and Caughey encouraged women to speak at meetings and to pray before mixed audiences. Women in the United States took up these opportunities in a number of ways. Mrs. Palmer's ministry remained within a tradition that the revivalists deemed highly acceptable for a woman.

Others, including Amanda Berry Smith and Antoinette Brown, established independent preaching careers and created a new model for female ministry.⁸⁴ These innovative women were important to Catherine's growing conviction that the restrictions placed on women were unscriptural and damaged women as well as the church.

As Nancy Hardesty has shown, this theology admitted a reconsideration of the injunctions against female preaching that went unquestioned in other denominations. First, the shift away from original sin as the permanent and principal state of the human condition lessened the burden of Eve's sin. Original sin had long been used by theologians to justify women's subjection. Second, this interpretation of conversion relied heavily on a reading of the Acts of the Apostles, where women figured prominently, particularly at Pentecost, where women as well as men received the gifts of prophesy. Third, holiness theologians justified deviating from a literal reading of the Bible when a greater good was served. As ardent temperance advocates, for example, they did not use communion wine. This willingness to reinterpret scripture opened the way for reconsidering women's position. Lastly, the presence of the Holy Spirit could be used to justify unconventional behavior. Advocates of holiness found they could not refuse the prompting of the Holy Spirit even when it moved a woman to kneel and pray for the souls of drunkards in the middle of a saloon or to speak and preach in church.⁸⁵

Not everyone shared Catherine's enthusiasm for the holiness and revivalist movements. Shortly after Mrs. Palmer's arrival in England, several pamphlets were published condemning her ministry. The Rev. Arthur Augustus Rees, a former clergyman of the Church of England, was in 1859 the minister of the Bethesda Free Church in Sunderland, an independent congregation of about one thousand members.⁸⁶ He published his pamphlet, *Reasons for Not Co-operating in the Alleged "Sunderland Revivals,"* in order to explain to his congregants why he had shunned this woman's preaching and to warn them against her meetings. The pamphlet opened with quotations from the poets, beginning with these sentiments from Milton's well-known passage:

For contemplation he, and valour formed,
For softness she, and sweet attractive grace.
He for God only, she for God in him

Rees continued with Lord Lyttleton:

Seek to be good, but aim not to be great,
A woman's noblest station is—Retreat;

Her fairest virtues fly from public sight,
 Domestic worth,—that shuns too strong a light.

Finally, Rees called on Shakespeare.

‘Tis beauty, that doth oft make a woman proud;
 ‘Tis virtue that doth make them most admired;
 ‘Tis modesty that makes them seem divine.
 A woman impudent and mannish grown,
 Is not more loathed than an effeminate man.
 Women are as roses, whose fair flower
 Being once displayed, doth fall that very hour.⁸⁷

These poetic citations and a barb written in Latin illuminated the vast differences between the culture of Rees and that of the revivalists.⁸⁸ Rees was an educated man; his clerical authority was derived from his familiarity with elite literary culture as well as scripture. The revivalists, while they studied the Bible and evangelical biblical commentary, believed their fervor and faith to be the origin of their spiritual power. Neither Catherine nor William had any interest in or knowledge of the kinds of literature that Rees regarded as eminently suitable to buttress his arguments.

The injunctions of St. Paul against female preaching formed the substance of Rees’s argument. He insisted that these were explicit and universal. “It does not refer to those only who claim to be inspired, but to all; it does not refer merely to acts of public preaching, but to all speaking.”⁸⁹ Underlying his interpretation of St. Paul, however, was a desire to uphold the distinction between a masculine public sphere and a feminine private sphere, which characterized mid-Victorian gender relations. Women must not speak publicly, Rees argued, because “their station in life demands modesty and humility, and they should be free of the ostentation of appearing so much in public as to take part in the public services of teaching and praying.”⁹⁰

Christ’s charge to Mary Magdalene could not be used to justify women’s preaching because that was a private message. Women could teach their children at home or even address groups of women because such activities did not take women out of their rightful, feminine sphere. For women to act in the public sphere would be to usurp the authority of men, which they were forbidden to do. That prohibition was grounded in nature, according to Rees, because Adam was formed first. Women’s subjection was extended by God because woman was “the door through which ‘sin came into our world and all our woe.’” Thus, women were “under a denser cloud of suffering and humiliation.”⁹¹

Even if good were to come of women's preaching, Rees contended, female preaching was wrong in principle and generated much evil during revivals. The second half of his pamphlet detailed the adverse effects of revival meetings. He criticized the noise and excitement generated by the emotional preaching, and he questioned the conversions that occurred in such a setting. How, he asked, could true and false conversions be distinguished when the only evidence came from those who admitted to being so recently unregenerate and would mistake any emotional experience for assurance of salvation? Rees's criticism of revivals buttressed his denunciation of women's preaching because it occurred within this disorderly, emotional setting.⁹² The association of revivals with female preaching and the consequent disorder was not new, and it continued to plague the Booths for the rest of their lives.

Catherine, enraged, wrote to her mother, "I am determined that fellow shall not go unthrashed," and she then realized her earlier ambition of writing something more extensive on the position of women in the church.⁹³ Her pamphlet, *Female Teaching: or, the Rev. A. A. Rees versus Mrs. Palmer, Being a Reply to a Pamphlet by the Above Gentleman on the Sunderland Revival* was published in December 1859, just a few days before the birth of Emma, her fourth child.⁹⁴ The pamphlet was a far more ambitious project than her earlier, personal writing on the subject had been. For the first time she distinctly advocated women's preaching.⁹⁵

Catherine's defense of women's preaching rested on two lines of argument. She considered Christian women's place in the order of things and closely examined specific scriptural texts that addressed women's prophesy. She began with a consideration of creation. She cited the first creation story, Genesis 1:27-31, in which God created male and female together and gave them dominion over the earth. The subordination of women occurred later, as a punishment for her transgressions. Thus women's subjection was neither natural nor eternal. "If woman had been in a state of subjection from her creation, in consequence of natural inferiority, where is the force of the words, 'he shall rule over thee', as a part of her curse?"⁹⁶

Like Rees, she believed women's nature was different from men's. Unlike the reverend, Catherine maintained that such differences especially fitted women for preaching.

Making allowance for the novelty of the thing, we cannot discover anything either unnatural or immodest in a Christian woman, becomingly attired, ap-

pearing on a platform or a pulpit. By *nature* she seems fitted to grace either. God has given to women a graceful form and attitude, winning manners, persuasive speech, and, above all, a finely-tuned emotional nature, all of which appear to us eminent *natural* qualifications for public speaking.⁹⁷

Women, Catherine recognized, were also bound by a social order put in place after the Fall. God had decreed distinct spheres of labor for men and women and had subjugated women to their husbands. But, Catherine maintained, these injunctions did not preclude female ministry.

Will [Mr. Rees] inform us why women should be confined exclusively to the kitchen and the distaff, any more than man to the field and the workshop? Did not God, and has not nature, assigned to man *his* sphere of labor, "to till the ground, and to dress it?" And, if Mr. Rees claims exemption from this kind of toil for one portion of his sex, on the ground of their possessing ability for intellectual pursuits, he must allow us the same privilege for women.⁹⁸

Catherine attested that the curse did not place women in subjection to men as beings but only to their husbands. Neither an unmarried woman nor a widow "is subject to man in any sense in which one man is not subject to another; both the law of God and man recognize her as an independent being."⁹⁹ Even for wives, their subjection was mitigated by Christ. Although woman and man shared in the Fall, woman had brought Christ into the world with the aid of no man. The resurrected Christ first appeared to a woman, Mary Magdalene, and charged her to spread the news. This public duty was given to her because her faith was so much greater than that of the men. "One was probably contemplating suicide, goaded to madness by a conscience of reeking with the blood of his betrayed and crucified Master; another was occupied in reflecting on certain conversations with a servant maid; and the rest were trembling in various holes and corners, having all forsaken their Master, and fled."¹⁰⁰ The resurrection did not remove the curse. Rather, it redeemed women "in a moral sense" and ought to have dispelled any belief in the spiritual superiority of men.¹⁰¹

Catherine devoted the body of her pamphlet to examining the Biblical passages that Rees and others used to justify excluding women from the pulpit. For Catherine, this was undoubtedly the core of the debate. If female preaching were forbidden in scripture, she could offer no possible justification for the practice. Catherine used what she termed a "common sense" interpretation of scripture. On the one hand she considered passages in relation to the whole Bible, and on the other hand she considered the historical context of each passage.

She first considered two passages from Corinthians, frequently cited to justify prohibitions on women's preaching.

Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head. (1 Cor. 9:4-5)

Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. (1 Cor. 14:34-35)

The first passage, she argued, was intended to instruct women in how they must dress when they were preaching. It did not forbid the activity itself but only inappropriate behavior for men or women. The second passage must harmonize with the first, and therefore it could not forbid the practice. Drawing on several theologians, Catherine asserted that the Greek word translated as "to speak" was more precisely translated as to chatter or to prattle. The passage could not refer to women's preaching because the women were asking questions, albeit in a disorderly manner, seeking to learn, while preachers were themselves the teachers. Lastly, the passage did not refer to all women generally but to the women of Corinth only.

She also discussed a third passage.

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first then Eve. (1 Tim. 2:12-13)

Catherine argued that the passage could not possibly mean that a mother could not teach her children or even a wife instruct her husband if he were unregenerate. This passage was not intended to prohibit all teaching but only the usurpation of authority from men. She supported her position by citing the prophecy of Joel, "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophecy" (Joel 2:28), which was echoed in Acts 2:17. The Old and New Testaments told of women prophets and preachers whose work must have been in harmony with divine injunction. Priscilla, Junia, Phoebe, Persis were all, she noted, described as helpers, prophets, and fellow laborers in the gospel. Just like the men, they were recognized as leaders in the early church by the very theologians who silenced women.¹⁰² Christian women had long followed the example of these Biblical women and, Catherine asserted, with significant results. She closed her pamphlet with a warning: on the day of account the misinterpretation of scripture may be found to have resulted in "loss to the church, evil to the world and dishonour to God."¹⁰³

Catherine's pamphlet was not hermeneutically original. She relied heavily on other Biblical scholars and quoted them at length, particularly the work of Adam Clarke. Clarke had converted to Methodism under the influence of John Wesley. His formal education was not extensive; he worked first as a local and later as a regular preacher. He always exhorted his congregations to seek conversion and sanctification. He rose to be president of the Wesleyans three times, in 1806, 1814, and 1822. He was also an assiduous scholar, publishing translations from the classics and other languages and highly regarded Biblical commentaries.¹⁰⁴ As a Methodist, Catherine would certainly have valued Clarke's work, and his scholarship added an important weight to her argument. Much of her argument was similar to that in the existing literature on women's ministry. Hugh Bourne's *Remarks on the Ministry of Women* (1808) and Luther Lee's *Women's Right to Preach the Gospel* (1853) employed arguments similar to Catherine's.¹⁰⁵ Another Methodist, the Rev. Robert Young, wrote *North of England Revivals: The Prophesying of Women* (1859) to defend Mrs. Palmer against her critics. His Biblical argument was similar, although, like Mrs. Palmer, he advocated a limited sphere for women.¹⁰⁶

Yet Catherine's pamphlet was exceptional, and her argument had significant consequences for the position of women. The mere fact that it was written by a woman was unusual. Catherine wrote her parents, "It is pretty well-known that a *Lady* has tackled him [Rees] and there is much speculation and curiosity abroad it seems. . . . I should like to have given him more *pepper* but being a Lady I felt I must preserve a becoming dignity! I suppose his pamphlet is deemed unanswerable by some. Bah! I could answer a dozen *such* in my way."¹⁰⁷

The most innovative and ultimately significant aspect of Catherine's thinking was her assertion that women's preaching was a part of the natural order. Women in various Protestant traditions had justified their public preaching by limiting the kinds of authority women could acquire through their activities. Mrs. Palmer published *The Promise of the Father; or a Neglected Spirituality of the Last Days* in 1859 to defend her own work. She put forth a different justification of her own activities.¹⁰⁸ Her book began, "Do not be startled, dear reader. We do not intend to discuss the question of 'Women's Rights' or of 'Women's Preaching', technically so called. . . . We believe woman has her legitimate sphere of action, which differs in most cases materially from that of man; and in this legitimate sphere she is both happy and useful."¹⁰⁹ Women, in her interpretation, did not possess any particular right to preach but could only prophesy under the prompting of the Holy Spirit. "Women who speak

in assemblies for worship under the influence of the Holy Spirit assume thereby no *personal authority* over others. They are instruments through which divine instruction is communicated to the people.”¹¹⁰ Only when God spoke through them, when they were vessels of the Holy Spirit, might women preach. It would seem, however, that the Holy Spirit never prompted women to take positions of leadership in the church or in society as a whole. Female preaching would not threaten the social order or imbue women with an undue sense of personal authority. Mrs. Palmer’s argument was by no means unique; similar arguments had been used by many women since the Reformation.¹¹¹

Catherine certainly agreed that the Holy Spirit must call women to preach. However, this call was not, in her view, any different than a man’s call. A Christian was one who was filled with the Holy Spirit and acted in accordance with God’s will. Preaching, in Catherine’s view, could be both the rational and systematic exegesis of scripture and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; it was both institutional and spontaneous. Preaching that was both inside and beyond the institutional church was a radical claim for a woman, and it had complex consequences for the women who took up Catherine’s call.

Unlike Mrs. Palmer, Catherine harmonized women’s social subordination with spiritual authority albeit in ambiguous ways. She clearly stated that any qualified woman had *the right* to preach “independent of any man-made restrictions.”¹¹² Yet women must preach as women, remaining bound by obedience to their husbands, who could refuse to allow them to preach. She did not regard the Holy Spirit as a force that would enable women to transcend the limitations of gender. This understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit differed from that of members of other prophetic movements, including the Quakers. Quaker women, especially during the movement’s early years, believed that they ceased being limited by worldly restrictions when filled with the light of God. Phyllis Mack argues that when a Quaker woman preached, “this light or voice or conscience, was catapulted from the depths of her soul, through layers of temperament, appetite and habit, finally bursting through the individual’s outer layer—her social status, her physical shape, her gender—to unite with other Friends in prayer, to enlighten strangers in the public arena.”¹¹³ Catherine, however, believed that gender could not be transcended in this life, or perhaps even in the next.¹¹⁴

Catherine refused to justify women’s preaching by claiming that women were the weak, the foolish, or the low who would confound the wise. Deborah Valenze has demonstrated that many sectarian Methodist

women preachers embraced these images and used them to buttress their claim to preach. Catherine, however, was proud that she was more widely read than many Christians, and she gladly used her knowledge and eloquence in her own defense.¹¹⁵ She reported to William that after preaching one evening, “I had a very good test afforded me to try my humility, by a good brother who could scarcely put *three words* together praying very earnestly that God would crown my labours seeing that He could bless the *weakest* instruments to his service. You will smile and so do I but it did me good. Why should I not be willing for the weakest and most illiterate to count me among the weak things of the world.”¹¹⁶ Catherine cherished her dignity and eloquence. She rejected the disorderly, loud style that she believed did not depend on clear, theological reasoning and an appropriate feminine demeanor. One woman she heard preach “is a regular Primitive Female preacher, she puts off her bonnet and shawl and goes at it like a *ranter*; says some good things but without order or arrangement and shouts til the people jump again.”¹¹⁷

Although the style of that Primitive Methodist woman was less common by the 1860s, by which time the sectarians had distanced themselves from revivals and “sensationalism,” Catherine’s objection was not simply about preaching style.¹¹⁸ The difference lay in Catherine’s justification of women’s preaching. She always insisted that Christian women possessed the right to preach and that this right was based on their natural capacities and qualities. Therefore, she did not justify her claim by placing herself outside of social convention and order but rather proclaimed her right to preach as a part of the contract between God and humanity as expressed in the Bible. In one letter to William, she noted that Deborah “seems to have been supreme as well in *civil* and in *spiritual*” matters.¹¹⁹ Similarly, she never employed the prophetic language of Revelation as did many nineteenth-century visionary women, including Joanna Southcott, leader of a millenarian movement between 1801 and 1814, and Mother Ann Lee, founder of the Shakers. She did not regard herself as a singular prophetic figure but as a dutiful Christian wife and mother. Women’s preaching, Catherine argued, could be sustained within a conventional gendered social order in an institutional church committed to vigorous soul saving.

HER MINISTRY BEGINS

When Catherine wrote her pamphlet proclaiming women’s right to preach the gospel, she had not yet taken up preaching. She was still a

shy woman who spoke and prayed aloud only with difficulty. Her domestic responsibilities were heavy, and William's career was not yet established. Her health was never strong, and her back gave her pain throughout her life. When she did begin to preach, it was occasioned by the mundane struggles of her life. Her struggles and her response to them reveal that her particular class and social status were exceedingly important to her interpretation of women's preaching as well as providing opportunities for her to establish a preaching career. In 1857, she and William went to see a "popular female preacher," and she was encouraged by William's enthusiasm and buoyed by the possibility of earning 10 shillings per lecture. She wrote her parents, "I only wish I had begun years ago if I had only been fortunate enough to have been brought up amongst the Primitives I believe I should be preaching now, you laugh! but I believe it the cares of a family and the bother of a house and *servants* now preclude any kind of labor that requires much study but I don't think lecturing on temperance would require much."¹²⁰

A few weeks later, she reported to her mother that she had addressed a meeting of the Band of Hope, a children's group promoting temperance and Christian living, and would shortly address both a female audience and a mixed audience. She was eager for success: "*First* to do good, 2ly to gain something towards meeting the extra expenses my delicate health occasions to my husband 3ly to be able to do something towards educating my children and 4ly tho' not least to be able to make some little return for all your kindness past and present, are these not worthy motives?"¹²¹ These financial considerations were part of the daily reality of Catherine's life. Both Catherine and William were children of artisans unable to maintain even a tenuous place in that community. Her letters frequently mentioned both her mother and her mother-in-law's financial worries. Like most daughters of the artisanal class, Catherine was educated to support herself and to contribute to the household. While her father's inability to support the family made her contribution a pressing necessity, she was keenly aware that a woman's labor was essential to the survival of a household. Hence, the financial struggles that led to her preaching career were very much a part of the ordinary course of life.¹²² In contrast, a middle-class woman of her generation could not have engaged in waged labor without the loss of her gendered class status. It was therefore possible for Catherine to regard preaching as an eminently suitable course of action, practically as well as theologically, in ways that a middle-class woman like Mrs. Palmer did not. She relished

her work, writing to her parents, “I felt quite at home on the *platform*—far more than I do in the *kitchen*.”¹²³

She began to preach on occasional Sundays after William had spoken. In August 1860, she wrote her parents,

I had a splendid congregation on Sunday night, I took the pulpit very much against my own desire but in compliance with the general wish, Wm opened the service for me and I spoke exactly an hour from the Prodigal Son, I was very much agitated and did not get a moment’s liberty the whole service in fact I felt very much discouraged but I have heard nothing but the greatest satisfaction expressed by the people.¹²⁴

She enjoyed the novelty of her work, writing her mother, “I have never seen my name in print except on bills on the walls, and then I have had some difficulty to believe that it really meant *me* however I suppose it did and now I never shall deem anything impossible anymore.”¹²⁵

Her independent career began in earnest in the autumn of 1860, when William fell ill and left the circuit to recover at a hydropathy clinic. She took his place. She wrote him, “Last night my preaching went well. It was by far the best effort I have made. I spoke an hour and a quarter with unwavering confidence, liberty and pleasure to myself, and if I may judge, with blessing to the people.”¹²⁶ She needed to succeed for financial reasons. She reassured her husband, “If money fails, I will try and get some more. I will get up some lectures and charge so much to come in, and with such an object in mind, I could do far beyond anything I have done and the people would come to hear me I know.”¹²⁷

Her situation was made worse when, just after William left, all the children fell ill with whooping cough. The nursing and general household work were trying. Her problems were not always recognized by the Connexion. “But I cannot give my time to preparation unless I can afford to put my sewing out. It never seems to occur to any of them that I cannot do two things at once, or that I want *means* to relieve me of the one while I do the other! . . . What I do, I do to the Lord. Still I am conscious they are the partakers of the benefit and ought not to forget our temporalities as they do!”¹²⁸ She summed up her situation when she wrote to William, “I must try to possess my soul in patience and do *all* in the kitchen as well as in the Pulpit to the glory of God—the Lord help me. I will attend to the Jacksons’ accn’t as soon as I get some money.”¹²⁹

The Booths’ remarkable arrangement met with little resistance. The Bethesda chapel Leaders Meeting minutes recorded “its cordial thanks to Mrs. Booth for the addresses delivered in the chapel Sunday last which

it has no doubt will be productive to good and earnestly hopes that she may continue in the course thus begun in which we unitedly pray that the blessing of God may attend her and crown her labours with success.”¹³⁰ The Methodist New Connexion Conference minutes contain no reference to Mrs. Booth’s activities. The press, however, did note this unusual arrangement. A *Wesleyan Times* article titled “A Minister’s Wife Preaching for Him!” described one service. “Mrs. Booth officiated for him on Sunday evening last, in Bethesda Chapel. The lady grounded her discourse on ‘strive to enter in the strait gate’ etc. and the large audience which had congregated to hear sat with evident interest listening to her chaste and fervid eloquence for upwards of one hour.”¹³¹ Catherine’s preaching was also described in the secular press. She was amused by one description. “I am represented as having my husband’s clothes on! they would require to be considerably *shortened* before such a phenomenon could occur would they not?”¹³²

As Catherine commenced her preaching career, she attained entire sanctification. Catherine was converted at age sixteen and joined the Wesleyan chapel, but she became convinced that she had not reached the spiritual state God required of her.¹³³ She was filled with a sense of her own unworthiness, writing in February 1861, “Oh I cannot describe I have no words to set forth the sense of my own utter vileness, the rebellion of my heart against God has been awful in the extreme, it is because His mercy endureth forever that I am not in hell.”¹³⁴

She was guided in her struggle by Mrs. Palmer’s writings and that “precious book,” *The Higher Life*.¹³⁵ She wrote her mother that “I struggled through the day until a little after six in the evening,” when she and William began to pray together. After a long prayer, William said,

“Don’t you lay your all on the altar?” I replied, “I am sure I do.” And he said, “Isn’t the altar holy?” I replied in the language of the Holy Ghost, “the altar is most holy, and whatsoever toucheth it is holy.” Then said he, “Are you not holy?” I replied with my heart full of emotion and some faith, “Oh I think I am.” Immediately, the word was given to confirm my faith. “Now ye are clean through with the word I have spoken unto you.” And I took hold, true with a trembling hand, and not unmolested by the tempter, but I held fast the beginning of my confidence, and it grew stronger, and from that moment I have dared to reckon myself dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ, my Lord.¹³⁶

This experience provided her with a newfound confidence in the righteousness of her work, and the doctrine itself became an important part of the theology of the movement the Booths would found.

LEAVING THE METHODISTS

The Booths' work in Gateshead was a success. The congregation grew substantially, William's reputation was enhanced, and Catherine commenced her own successful career. The Booths were, nevertheless, discontented. Both fervently believed William's talents were being squandered because the Methodist New Connexion Conference was reluctant to allow work beyond the conventional labor of a circuit preacher. Catherine had been highly critical of the Conference for some time. In 1856, while on a revivalist tour, she had commented to her parents, "The cold, apathetic money-grubbing spirit of some preachers and leading men are a constant thorn in [William's] side, oh for a church of earnest, consistent, and soul-saving men but alas! such is *not* the Methodist New Connexion!"¹³⁷ In 1857, William consulted Caughey, who was traveling through England on a revivalist tour, about how best to proceed in the face of the Conference's limitations and regulations. Caughey advised him to wait until he was ordained and then to consider working outside a denomination. Caughey believed there was ample opportunity for him in both England and the United States. Catherine compared Caughey's situation with William's. "[Caughey] is not handcuffed or shackled by conferences or annual committees he can go where he likes and stop as *long* as he likes and I know some one else who will do so bye and bye unless those who oppose get out of the way."¹³⁸

The Methodist New Connexion, of course, did not regard its practices as shackles but rather as necessary discipline and order. The Conference had allowed William to work as an itinerant revivalist for several years. Clearly a substantial body of Connexional leaders were not satisfied with that arrangement. When the Conference assigned William to a regular circuit, it was following the usual practice.¹³⁹

In 1861, his assignment at Gateshead complete, William was sent to the Newcastle circuit. He reached an agreement with the people that allowed him to continue as a circuit preacher as well as to work as an itinerant evangelist. He was to be the superintendent of the circuit, giving a portion of his labor to the circuit and the rest elsewhere. He would be paid according to the time he spent with the circuit.¹⁴⁰ Members of the Newcastle circuit, however, became disillusioned with the practical realities of this arrangement and complained to the president of the Conference. The president wrote to William in July, noting that these complaints "revealed the astounding fact that he had not preached once in the Circuit and had no appointment on the plan extending to October

27th.” The president promptly instructed William to “take your circuit according to our rules and usages” and added that the situation would be laid before the Annual Committee for their consideration.¹⁴¹

The Committee resolved that when William had “entered the ministry of the Methodist New Connexion he engaged to conform to its rules and regulations and on these terms alone he was received into its ministry. . . . The Committee decrees Mr. Booth guilty of a strange dereliction of duty.”¹⁴² He was instructed to begin his duties in Newcastle immediately. If he failed to do so, he would be replaced. William protested. He wrote to the Committee,

The arrangement was agreed to unanimously by a Special circuit meeting and at the last Quarterly Meeting after working it for some time. I informed friends that if they were dissatisfied I was perfectly willing to retire but they preferred to abide by it for the year and I can only account for your letter the supposition that some officious person had unofficially written to you on the subject. . . . You asked me to tell you frankly what I intend to do. . . . But once again I say that I intend to be an Evangelist if that be possible. . . . My first impulse was to resign but I cling to the idea that my connexion with the Conference might be retained. Another year without sacrificing my convictions, and I thought the arrangement made with the Circuit secured. In this hope I find from our letter that I am mistaken, and that no place is open to me by which I can work out those convictions and retain that Connexion. One or the other I must give up. The former duty to God and souls I cannot forego, and therefore painful, intensely painful is the act I must adopt the latter, and place my resignation in your hands.

I do this after much prayerful deliberation. I know I am sacrificing and I know that I am exposing myself and those I love to loss and difficulties but I am impelled to it by a sense of duty to souls to the church and to God. Were I to quail and give up the fear of the difficulties that appear just now to be in my path, I feel sure that I should in future reproach myself with cowardice in the cause of my Master, and that even those who differ with me in opinion would say that I was not true to the professions made in the Conference when I said, “I had offered myself to the Lord for this work if I went forth without a friend and without a farthing.”¹⁴³

With a fervent conviction of their singular commitment to God’s service, the Booths left the Methodist New Connexion. They never again worked under any human authority except their own. Catherine expressed no regrets. She wrote her parents,

I am sick of the Methodist New Connexion from *top* to *bottom*, I have lost all faith in its ministry and I see nothing in it but a slow consumption. . . . I cannot believe that it is right for my husband to spend another year plodding round this wreck of a circuit preaching to 20 or 30 or 40 people when the

same amount of cost to himself he might be preaching to thousands and bringing hundreds of wanderers into the fold of Christ. Wm is *afraid* he thinks of me and the children and I appreciate his love and care but I tell him God will *provide* if he will only go straight on the path of duty.¹⁴⁴

The Booths had already established a strong reputation as revivalists. The broad community of evangelicals welcomed their labor. They commenced a series of revivals across England. Over the next four years, they preached in Cornwall, Wales, the Midlands, and the north.¹⁴⁵ They preached together. Catherine reported to her mother from St. Ives in October 1861, “We had the chapel packed and hundreds went away.”¹⁴⁶ Their preaching provoked opposition that Catherine seemed to relish.

When [the Wesleyans] come to invite Mr. Booth, he will politely tell them that he cannot come if his wife is forbidden to help him! or else accept their invitation and announce me just as usual as a matter of course, and then what will become of the rules and usages and what a predicament for the chairman of the district. Next to the glory of God and the salvation of souls I rejoice to be a thorn in the side of *such* persons.¹⁴⁷

She also took pleasure in the warm reception she often received, despite official condemnation of her work. “The common people in their simplicity used to ask, ‘why can’t we have Mrs. Booth too?’ Poor things, it is their ignorance you know!”¹⁴⁸ In 1864, William again fell ill. Catherine began to preach on her own, a practice she continued for the rest of her life.

The years of itinerant preaching were difficult. The Booths’ income was small and irregular, and by 1864 they were £85 in debt.¹⁴⁹ The birth of Herbert in 1862 and Marian in 1864 only added to their difficulties. William and Catherine were frequently ill. In January 1862 Catherine wrote her mother,

I don’t know what is the matter with me but I am sick and ill all day just as tho’ it was the first three months with me. Sometimes I think that I miscarried when I was so ill and that I am now beginning again and sometimes I think the child is dead and that is what is making me so poorly. . . . I hope all will be well, what I feel most is the useless life I am living, I do hope it is not a fresh beginning, I am ready to die at the prospect of another nine months as the past. Pray for me I need patience.¹⁵⁰

To make matters more difficult, the Wesleyans, the Primitive Methodists, and the Methodist New Connexion barred itinerant revivalists from their pulpits; these regulations severely restricted where the Booths could preach.¹⁵¹ They took to holding services in rented buildings, in-

cluding circuses, a dancing academy, and various halls. Still, their expenses often exceeded their income.¹⁵² Finally, in 1865 both Catherine and William received invitations to preach in London. It quickly became clear that London's vast population offered ample opportunities for evangelical work and their efforts would be welcomed by London's evangelical community. They could settle their six children in a stable home. Catherine quickly established a strong reputation in London, and speaking invitations fully occupied her time. Many women later recalled the importance of her example as they began their own careers. The Booths had settled on the path that would lead them to establish the Christian Mission and subsequently the Salvation Army.

Catherine's later description of the decisions that prompted her to begin her preaching career, however, emphasized her passivity and reluctance. The tensions and ambiguities her preaching caused remained the focus of the two stories she recounted about how she first began to preach. In the first, she described how she eagerly anticipated hearing a "much-honoured minister" preach, but on her way to chapel she looked up "at thick rows of small windows above me, where numbers of women were sitting, peering through at the passers-by or listlessly gossiping with each other." It was "suggested to my mind with great power" that she would be acting more like her redeemer if she spoke with these women instead of enjoying the service herself. "I knew I had never thus laboured to bring lost sinners to Christ, and trembling with a sense of my utter weakness, I stood for a moment, looked up to heaven, and said, 'Lord, if thou wilt help me, I will try,' and without stopping longer to confer with flesh and blood, turned back and commenced my work."¹⁵³ After speaking to several of the women, she convinced a forlorn woman to admit her into her home so that she could speak with the woman's drunken husband. The woman told Catherine that despite her best efforts, the deathbed pleas of their daughter, and the misery and poverty it created, her husband would not give up drink. Catherine read him the parable of the prodigal son. He wept and prayed with her and soon promised to sign the pledge. In this story, Catherine emphasized both her reluctance and fear and the enormous power she could assume when she acted according to God's will. She assisted the wife and daughter's quest to stop the husband's drinking, and thus she implicitly aligned women's interests with God's will.

In her second story, Catherine recounted how she sat in the minister's pew listening to William preach, "not expecting anything in particular." She suddenly felt the presence of the Holy Spirit compelling her to go forward and speak. She resisted.

And then the devil said, "Besides you are not prepared. You will look like a fool and will have nothing to say." He made a mistake. He overreached himself for once. It was this word that settled it. "Ah!" I said, "this is just the point. I have never yet been willing to be a fool for Christ. Now I will be one!"

Without stopping for another moment I rose from my seat and walked down the aisle. My dear husband was just going to conclude. He thought something had happened to me and so did the people. We had been there two years and they knew my timid bashful nature. He stepped down and asked me, "What is the matter, my dear?" I replied, "I want to say a word." He was so taken by surprise that he could only say, "My dear wife wishes to speak," and he sat down. . . . But oh, how little did I realise how much was then involved! I never imagined the life of publicity and trial that it would lead me to, for I was never allowed to have a quiet Sabbath when I was well enough to stand and speak.¹⁵⁴

She told the congregation she had willfully refused God's prompting her to speak, but she would no longer do so. Her story turned the suppression of women into an evil act; instead of doing God's will those who silenced women were in league with the devil. Still, only her desire to obey God's will could bring her forward to speak. Her defiant claim of women's right to preach did not translate into confidence in her own abilities. She emphasized the pain and loss she endured and the disruptive consequences of her following the dictates of the Holy Spirit.

Her two accounts of the inception of her preaching career describe neither the financial difficulties that were so pressing when she began to preach nor the scriptural passages that inspired her. Instead, she emphasized that obedience was a struggle and that her spiritual assertion came at great cost. The tension between authority and obedience characterized the movement she and her husband would found. Salvationists assumed their place within a strict hierarchy and expected the prompting of the Holy Spirit to guide their soul-saving work no matter how unconventional it might be. Order and discipline were intertwined with spontaneous preaching and ecstatic bodily conversions. The resulting tension had particular consequences for women. But in 1865, Catherine and William Booth were simply evangelical partners, intent on settling in East London to preach to the heathen masses.

The Salvation Army was the creation of two individuals whose life experiences and beliefs shaped the movement's theology and practices. Catherine Booth's class background and her ardent belief in holiness and revivalism gave her a unique perspective on women's preaching and a career that made her a prominent and influential public figure. William Booth's experience with the Methodist New Connexion convinced him

to work independently, free of the restrictions imposed by governing bodies and settled congregations. Their evangelical partnership offered many advantages. They shared a commitment to revivalism. The unusual sight of a husband and wife sharing a platform drew audiences during their itinerant years and helped them to meet many other evangelicals. Later, when William Booth struggled to find financial support for the Christian Mission, Catherine's preaching helped fund the Mission and support the Booth family. Of course, the Salvation Army was not simply the Booths' creation. The larger social and religious context would also shape the direction of this new movement, which began in the streets of London.