
William Booth

1829-1912

Catherine Booth

1829-1890

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William Booth was the founder of the Salvation Army. He was born in Nottingham, England, and married Catherine Mumford in 1855. They worked together in their joint desire to help fight the poverty that surrounded them.

William Booth was no stranger to poverty even in his childhood. His father died when he was only 14 and the family was near destitution as a result. He served as a pawnbroker's apprentice, which exposed him to the direful plight of the poor, resulting in his hatred of the effects of poverty.

William became a Christian at 15, and his potential as a preacher became noticed while he was yet a teenager. His passion to help the down-and-out brought him into the streets, where the people who needed most to find hope in Christ were to be found. He later became a traveling Methodist evangelist, but returned to the streets as his primary ministry.

His exposure to poverty and his experience on the streets of London's slums led him to found The Salvation Army.

Catherine was born in Ashbourne, Derbyshire. She was a thoughtful child from a strong Christian family. She is said to have read the Bible cover to cover eight times by the time she was 12 years old. When 14 years old she became seriously ill and spent a lengthy time convalescing and reflecting on her beliefs, including the problems alcohol caused society. This would foreshadow her later work to address the problem.

William and Catherine met when he came to preach at her Methodist church. She began to help him in his ministry and, following a three year engagement, they were married in a simple ceremony. Even on their

honeymoon William continued to preach because they both believed it was important to be used by God.

They had eight children, and adopted a ninth. Seven of their children became well known preachers, all of whom also published hymns.

William led the fight against prostitution in London, which involved 13 to 16 year old girls who became trapped in the trade while seeking relief from poverty and hunger. His campaign resulted in legislation against “white slavery.”

The Salvation Army led to the formation of the USO, which operates 3,000 service units for people serving in the armed forces.

Catherine’s concern about the ill effects of alcohol led to development of The Salvation Army’s alcohol rehabilitation program, which has now helped people for 100 years.

The focus of The Salvation Army from the very beginning has been to help the poor, the homeless, the hungry and the destitute. William and Catherine took their mission to the streets, and met the needs where the needs existed rather than remaining in a pulpit to minister to a traditional congregation. He once asked her, referring to the streets of London, “Where can you go and find such heathen as these, and where is there so great a need for your labours?”

William Booth took the fight for Christian belief to those who most needed hope. He said, “While women weep, as they do now, I'll fight; while little children go hungry, as they do now, I'll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight; while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, while there remains one dark soul without the light of God, I'll fight-I'll fight to the very end!”

William Booth cautioned us about the trends he saw in both society and religion: “I consider that the chief dangers which confront the coming century will be religion without the Holy Ghost; Christianity without Christ; forgiveness without repentance; salvation without regeneration; politics without God; and Heaven without Hell.”

In 1860 Catherine began to also preach publicly and, by her success, she changed her husband’s view about the potential of women ministers. The

Salvation Army would become an advocate of sexual equality in the ministry, leaving a legacy of an expanded role for women in churches far beyond The Salvation Army. She was an agent for social reform, and advocated better conditions and pay for women. She is remembered by the Salvationists as “The Army Mother.”