



# Raise Your Voice

*'If she have the necessary gifts and feels herself called by the Spirit to preach, there is not a single word in the whole Book of God to restrain her, but many, very many, to urge and encourage her.'*

**Catherine Booth**



**GOD'S DESIGN FOR  
GENDER EQUITY**

A Bible study from creation to Jesus, and beyond.

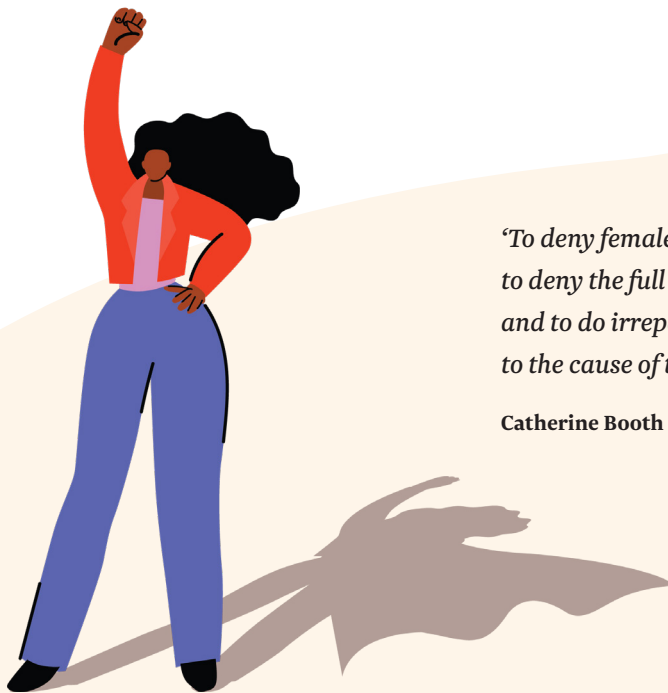


# Chapter 1

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## Why Our Women Lead: The Legacy of Catherine Booth

by Lt-Colonel Liz Gainsford



*'To deny female ministry [is]  
to deny the full grace of God  
and to do irreparable harm  
to the cause of the kingdom.'*

**Catherine Booth**

### Let's start

William and Catherine Booth founded The Salvation Army on 2 July 1865 and from its early days women were involved in all forms of ministry, including preaching—something that was almost always reserved for men in those days. Despite the strongly-held practices and beliefs of their time, Catherine 'believed that women were pre-eminently fitted for leadership in the moral sphere.'<sup>2</sup> William took some convincing on this point, even stating that it was over this topic that Catherine and he had their 'only serious lover's quarrel'<sup>3</sup>, but eventually he agreed to women in ministry.

Even before marrying William, Catherine wrote this to him in a letter: 'May the Lord, even the just and impartial one, overrule all for the true emancipation of women from the swaddling bands of prejudice, ignorance, and custom, which, almost the world over, have so long debased and wronged her'.<sup>4</sup>

In The Salvation Army, our women lead. This heritage of freedom sits squarely on the shoulders of Catherine Booth—it was her remarkable intellect and sense of calling that made way for women in our mission. It is because of Catherine that the Army largely stands apart within evangelical Christianity in our full inclusion of women as preachers and leaders.

Today, we continue to build on Catherine's legacy as we raise our voices together.

### Let's read

*Galatians 3:26–29*

*You are all God's children through faith in Christ Jesus. All of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Now if you belong to Christ, then indeed you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise.*

## Let's discuss

- What words that jump out at you from this passage? (perhaps you would like to circle them)
- What does it mean to you when it says 'you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise'?
- Why do you think verse 26 says 'you are all God's children'?
- If you were to make a list like verse 28 today, of those who have traditionally been 'in' and those who have been considered 'out', who would you include?

## Let's dig deeper

Catherine strongly believed in 'egalitarianism'—the view that all people are created equally and should be given equal rights and opportunities. The Army continues to be 'egalitarian' in its beliefs about gender roles to this day (see sidebar: Two Big Words that Define Christian Women).

But Catherine grew up in a time when most of society, and especially the church, had a patriarchal worldview: the belief that men are born to be in charge, and God ordained men only as leaders and preachers. Large parts of the church still hold on to the belief in patriarchy. These churches call themselves 'complementarian'.

Alyssa Roat in her 2019 article for Christianity.com sums it up like this:

*Complementarianism and egalitarianism are theological views on the relationship between men and women, especially in marriage and in ministry. Complementarianism stresses that although men and women are equal in personhood, they are created for different*

*roles. Egalitarianism also agrees that men and women are equal in personhood but holds that there are no gender-based limitations on the roles of men and women.<sup>5</sup>*

Catherine was truly a trailblazer in being able to see beyond gender hierarchies in a world that was fully immersed in them. Although she did spend time addressing problematic passages from scripture that were (and continue to be) used as to why women must not lead or preach (like 1 Corinthians 11:4–5 and 1 Timothy 2:12–13), she also spent time highlighting the 'positive witness of the Bible for women in ministry'.<sup>6</sup>

These include the many women mentioned in both the Old and New Testament who prayed, preached and ministered in various ways: women like Deborah, Miriam, Priscilla, Junia and Phoebe.

Catherine spoke about the emphasis and special treatment that Jesus gave to women, specifically his commission to Mary Magdalene in Matthew 28:9–10. Catherine saw that Jesus was intentional in making his first public appearance after the resurrection to a woman, as, 'a woman had been blamed for being the first in transgression, so to set the record straight, as it were, she is the first to know about the atonement for such transgression.'<sup>7</sup>

Catherine liked to speak of Acts 2:16–18 where Peter promised the people that 'your sons and daughters shall prophesy'. This is the fulfilment of Joel 2:28–29, and shows the Holy Spirit does not discriminate, but is for all people: male, female, Jews, Gentiles, slaves or free.

### Neither male nor female

The book of Galatians was written by Paul after his first missionary journey around Asia Minor. Upon arriving in Antioch he received a report that the church in Galatia had fallen into 'error' or false teaching. Paul had played a part in establishing the church in Galatia, so had strong relationships

with the converts there, which is probably why his tone in the letter is quite strong. Charles Swindoll would go as far to suggest that ‘Galatians exhibits Paul at his angriest’.<sup>8</sup> The letter speaks directly into the first really big controversy that plagued the early church: the relationship between Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles. This was an important topic for Paul and a great concern for him.

In the lead-up to Galatians 3:28, Paul stresses that ‘you are all God’s children through faith in Christ Jesus’ (v26). The fact is that even today not all are equal. When I lived in Tanzania I met Musa. Musa was a young girl who lived in The Salvation Army’s Matumaini School for children with disabilities, and then in our girls home, Mbagala. The reason she was taken in by The Salvation Army was because when she was born her father had wanted a son and so he left Musa in a field outside the village that was known to have poisonous snakes in it. He thought that if she was bitten and died then he would no longer have the shame of having a daughter. Musa was bitten by a snake but survived by having her leg amputated. So now, not only was she a girl, but she was also a disabled girl—a double curse in the eyes of her father.

This view of males being more valuable or superior to females was also prevalent during the time Paul was writing to the Galatians. A common Jewish daily prayer of the time said, ‘Blessed be God that he did not make me a Gentile; blessed be God that he did not make me ignorant (or a slave); blessed be God that he did not make me a woman’ (Tosefta Berakoth 7:18).<sup>9</sup> Paul, in Galatians 3:28, turns this verse on its head. Basically he is saying: everything you have ever known about race, class, and gender is wrong now that you have come into a loving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Catherine Booth puts it this way: ‘Cast off all bonds of prejudice and custom, and let the love of Christ, which is in you, have free course to run out in all conceivable schemes and methods of labour for the souls of (all).’<sup>10</sup>

She believed that matters of racial, status, and sexual distinctions were the result of the fall and a sign of sin. Likewise, the abolition of these distinctions was the great sign of redemption.

In other words, gender inequality is the result of the fall, but dismantling inequalities is a sign of redemption.

## Let’s discuss

- Are there any roles in the church you believe are only for men, or only for women? What are they and why do you think they are gender specific?
- What has been your experience of women leading in the church?
- What does Galatians 3:28 say to you about gender equity, and how might that change our perspective in today’s world?
- Are there subtle ways we may be held back from bringing all of ourselves to Christ’s service because of gender expectations?
- Share about a woman who has inspired you within your church and why...

Catherine wrote, ‘If this passage does not teach that in the privileges, duties, and responsibilities of Christ’s kingdom, all differences of nation, caste, and sex are abolished, we should like to know what it does teach!’<sup>11</sup>

## Final thought

*‘For Catherine the equality of women “was not a mere practical dispute...” that women should be used for ministry because there were not enough*

*men to fill the pulpits or supply the missionary quotas. No, this was a theological matter, at the heart of which was this question: “Are women and men being faithful to the biblical version of the kingdom of God, in which all the gifts, talents, energies, and abilities of all the people, female and male, are used in the service of the church for the sake of that kingdom?” Is the church living out in faithful witness the implications of Galatians 3:28? Catherine understood (this) as a biblical mandate for ministry, not just a salvation promise.”*

**Roger J. Green in his book *Catherine Booth: A Biography of the co-founder of The Salvation Army***

## Further reading

In 1859, Catherine Booth wrote the pamphlet ‘Female Ministry: or Woman’s Right to Preach the Gospel’. This became not only a defining moment for The Salvation Army, but for women in ministry. You can find out more and read the pamphlet in this article: ‘Equally Called, Equally Appointed and Equally Serving’.

Roger J. Green in his book *Catherine Booth* provides us with a helpful overview of Catherine’s arguments and teaching around women in ministry. It’s available at the BCM library!

## Two Big Words that Define Christian Women

There are two big words that most of us have never heard of, but that largely define the roles of women in the church: ‘egalitarian’ and ‘complementarian’. You don’t have to remember these words—but it’s good to know how they have influenced what it means to be a man or woman of faith.

Catherine grew up in a time when most of society, and especially the church, had a patriarchal worldview: the belief that men are born to be in charge, and God ordained men only as leaders and preachers.

It was Christian women like Catherine—and New Zealand Christian leader Kate Sheppard who won the vote for women in Aotearoa—that began to change our assumptions about who was born to lead. Many of our foremothers fought to raise their voices, and changed the way society viewed patriarchy. Today, in theory at least, most people in our culture would say we believe women are equal to men and have just as much right to hold positions of power and authority.

However, large parts of the church still hold on to the belief in patriarchy: that men, by virtue of their gender, are the ones ordained for leadership. In 1988, the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood re-branded patriarchy and gave it the name ‘complementarianism’<sup>12</sup>—emphasising not the power imbalance between men and women, but that genders are created differently and made to complement each other.

Complementarian churches believe that because men and women are different, they should fulfil different roles: men are created for the public spheres of power, and women are created for the domestic spheres.

However, as N.T. Wright points out, ‘I think the word “complementary” is too good and important a word to let that side of the argument have it all to themselves.’<sup>13</sup>

To be egalitarian doesn’t mean we have to deny the differences between men and women. But it means we are not defined by those differences. It means women can bring their own unique leadership giftings to the body of Christ. And, equally, men are given permission to express themselves as carers in the domestic world.

In that way, to be egalitarian, is to be truly fulfilling the complementary nature between genders.