

## WHO FOUNDED THE SALVATION ARMY?

By  
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Who founded The Salvation Army? sounds like a silly question. Surely it was William Booth. Or was it William and Catherine Booth?

Traditionally, Salvationists have regarded William Booth as “The Founder” of their Army and Catherine as its “Mother”. But traditions change and it is quite common today to regard this husband and wife team as The Salvation Army’s joint founders.

Which is correct? Or are they both correct in different ways?

In the strictest sense William Booth was *the* founder of The Salvation Army. In 1865 he began the mission that developed into The Salvation Army. See my *The General: William Booth* (vol. 1:349-56 and vol. 2:13-38), Catherine’s *Reminiscences* (manuscript pages 765-74) or one of the other major Booth biographies for details of this.

Catherine clearly says in her *Reminiscences* that she was not involved in that particular work in the early stages, perhaps for the first year or so of its development. She was busily conducting services in other places, which at that time was the family’s main source of income. In her *Reminiscences* she said, “I knew nothing of the beginning of the work, but from the descriptions [William] gave me and some of the members of the household who went down to see it. Every moment of my time and all the strength I possessed was fully taken up by my own work at Islington.” And soon after the meetings in Islington she conducted a series of services in Kensington (manuscript pages 769 & 775). In other words, she was not the founder of the Mission that became the Army, nor was she even a helper in its early days.

However, there is no doubt that by the time that Mission became The Salvation Army Catherine Booth had had considerable influence over its development. For example, women were allowed to lead and preach, and alcohol was strongly frowned upon. The first may not have occurred without Catherine’s influence, and the second may not have been as strongly emphasised without Catherine. Catherine certainly helped form William Booth’s Christian Mission into The Salvation Army, with certain distinctives. In that sense she can be seen as the joint founder of The Salvation Army.

It would, however, be a mistake to suppose that the Army was Catherine Booth’s “baby”. It was much more the progeny of William Booth. He was the dominant force in its birth and development.

In the strictest sense, then, William was *the* Founder of The Salvation Army. But in another sense, he and his wife Catherine can be seen as joint Founders of that Army.

Thank God for both of them.

### **Bibliography**

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