

Discovering a Pilgrim's Progress

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INTRODUCTION

Like many little girls, I was vaguely familiar with the title *Pilgrim's Progress*—but only because I had read and reread *Little Women*. Because I did not really even know what Bunyan's work was about, I didn't realize Alcott had used his text as a framing device for her own story, nor did I recognize that she had drawn upon his metaphors to illustrate her own moral lessons (Sicherman 2010, 13–36). To eight-year-old me, *Pilgrim's Progress* was, quite simply, a story the March sisters had made into a game. And yet, as I think back, I realize I was drawn to *Little Women* because the idea of female pilgrims engaged in a journey of becoming (changing!) appealed to me.

Although Alcott's work does not contain Bunyan's overt message of Christian conversion, she recognized and thus used the universal themes woven throughout his allegory: despair and joy, failure and success, surrender and commitment, fear and faith, stagnation and progression, trials and blessings, embracing and resisting temptation, and, perhaps most importantly, the possibility of personal change and discovery. Bunyan and Alcott's works continue to be read because the very essence of their stories will always resonate with modern readers.

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS: CHRISTIAN OR CHRISTIANA?

As a young college student, I decided to read *Pilgrim's Progress*. I had intended to do so for years—but since my to-read list seemed to grow exponentially, I had never managed to do so. Within moments of opening the book, I became lost in Bunyan's powerful and dramatic allegory; I

understood its appeal. I did not read about Christian, I walked with him. Like thousands and thousands of readers before me, I could relate to the heavy burden he carried on his back (whether that burden be defined as fear, sin, doubt, lack of confidence, guilt, anger, personal weakness, or failure) as he struggled to become someone better. I, too, could relate to the solitude one faces as the reader encounters her own slough of despond; I could visualize the personal battles I had and would fight. And thus I loved the hope Christian's final victory gave to me; I, too, could conquer. I, too, could become sanctified (the process of attaining Christian perfection through the grace of God).

When his (our) journey came to an end, I discovered, with some surprise, a second part to the book—the pilgrimage of Christiana, Christian's wife. "Wait a minute!" I thought to myself. "There is a woman in this story? Why hadn't the March sisters played the part of Christiana rather than Christian?" I felt both intrigued and perplexed by this mystery. Indeed, why had Alcott ignored the female pilgrim in a story about young women discovering their own journeys?

As I began reading Christiana's story—the sequel to *Pilgrim's Progress* that Bunyan had published six years following the dissemination of Christian's experience—I got it. I read about her, but I didn't walk with her. Her story seemed to lack something; it did not resonate in quite the same manner that Christian's had. Why was it, I asked myself, that I, like millions of women before me, including Louisa May Alcott and her slightly fictional Jo March, related to Christian more than Christiana?

In some ways, Christiana's pilgrimage mirrored Christian's—both departed from the City of Destruction, on foot, in search of the Celestial City. They encountered similar places and peoples and sought the same destination. Christiana, however, did not leave her home suddenly, nor did she travel alone; from the beginning, her four sons and a neighbor named Mercy accompanied her. Shortly after they commenced their journey, a man named Mr. Great-Heart joined the small group to provide guidance, instruction and protection, the implication being that such necessities could only be provided by a male figure.

Christiana's battles were tempered, in comparison to Christian's, and typically the men in the group fought them (other pilgrims joined her little company along the way); she never faced the loneliness and fear Christian had encountered regularly. In addition, her group traveled at a relaxed pace; it took years rather than days for them to complete Christian's same journey. As Margaret Olofson Thickstun (1986) has observed, "[i]n the second

part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan's interest shifts from the desperate flight of the sinner to the more leisurely progress of the church-fellowship, from the individual to the family, from the male to female" (440). Christian emerges from his story as a hero, whereas Christiana is described in her's as a hero's wife.

As I completed the book, I felt a bit empty inside—my own sense of female rootlessness, sharpened by my inability to see myself in a story about a woman's spiritual pilgrimage, left me feeling disappointed and perhaps a bit crushed. I longed to feel connected to stories about religious women; usually, I couldn't find accounts by or about females. When I did, as in the case of Christiana, I could not find *myself* in the contexts provided. Something seemed to be lacking, something both powerful and fundamental. Who was Christiana, really?

It took several years before I could answer that question, before I could understand why, as Kathleen Swaim (1990) has noted, "readers have not accorded the second part [of *Pilgrim's Progress*] the welcome of the first," in many cases "disregard[ing] the fact that part II exists" (388).

BECOMING A HISTORIAN

While I was immersed in the process of developing historically conscious eyes, it occurred to me that Christiana would not have told her story in the same way John Bunyan had. Our life experiences, our worldviews, our cultures, our feelings and our perceptions shape the way we tell and read stories; whether wittingly or unwittingly, we often weave ourselves into the very narratives we compose. Writing, then, is an act of creation and a means to self-discovery; it is a form of history making.

When John Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim's Progress* in the late seventeenth century, Gerda Lerner (1997) explains, religion infused life with purpose and was the means through which earnest seekers of salvation sought to establish their identities, both as individuals and in relation to God. Writing and reading about pilgrimages enabled individual transformation but also established a community of believers who could share a common experience and a similar commitment. In addition to writing his own spiritual autobiography, Bunyan wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*, a fictional volume that became an invitation for the spiritually curious to embark on their own quest for salvation.¹

Part I of *Pilgrim's Progress* was initially published in 1678; six years later, perhaps in the attempt to tell a complete tale, Bunyan added a second part to the book: the story of Christiana's pilgrimage. This addition,

or sequel, can be viewed as both progressive and dismissive. On the one hand, Bunyan's focus on Christiana's journey can be seen as a reminder that women as well as men are spiritual pilgrims. The salvation story, then, becomes inclusive rather than exclusive. *Pilgrim's Progress* reflects the nuances of the human experience by detailing the journeys through which men, women and children embrace the process of becoming.²

And yet, from the title page itself, it becomes clear that Bunyan is not quite the feminist we may have hoped he was: *The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to That which is to come The Second Part. Delivered Under the Similitude of a Dream Wherein is set forth The manner of the setting of Christian's Wife and Children, their Dangerous Journey and Safe Arrival at Desired Country*. Before even reading the first page of Part II, one's attention is drawn away from female experience—Christiana is not Christiana the pilgrim, but rather the wife of Christian. Although Christian is not literally present during Christiana's journey (he has already arrived in the Celestial City), his memory is ever present—all rejoice to meet the wife of the famous pilgrim. For characters in the narrative as well as readers, her identity and story become the means through which one can gain greater insight into his identity and story.

Certainly Bunyan's theology—including his views about women and men—seeped into and infused his stories. Members of the Puritan faith considered women the weaker sex, and thus believed they needed the protection and guidance of male figures.³ In Bunyan's mind, Margaret Olofson Thickett (1986, 444–45) has suggested, Christiana could not develop spiritual independence as Christian had; she instead had to rely on male protectors and mediators. Their spiritual, physical, and intellectual strength enabled her to complete her journey. As a result, readers never really get to know Christiana; she remains an undeveloped character.

Because until recently women's stories were so rarely told, especially in religious contexts, generations of readers either skipped Christiana's story for the more important, more interesting and more meaningful story of her husband or read it believing that it accurately depicted female religiosity. The process of "selective remembering," historian Gerda Lerner (1997) has explained, "has taught both men and women that women did not contribute to the making of civilization in their own right" and has thus "deprived both women and men of the ability to construct a truthful picture of the past" (205–6).

Bunyan's views in both volumes may capture how Puritan men and women were taught to think about women, but the more I thought about

the two stories, the more I wondered how women's religious history would change if writers and readers, believers and unbelievers, scholars and an interested public started with the assumption that women's thoughts and experiences are as relevant as men's. In other words, I asked myself, how might our understanding of pilgrimage narratives broaden, deepen, and be enriched if we believed that women's experience was central to those narratives, that is, that they too were engaged in personal transformations. As a historian, as a woman, and as a pilgrim in the process of becoming, I wanted to understand Christiana's story as she would tell it. I wanted to discover my (our) roots.

RETHINKING THE PAST

My exposure to the historian's craft taught me to look through multiple lenses, to seek texture and meaning in all human lives, to recognize interdependency and overlap as well as separation, to be conscious of the forgotten, and to question my questions. It should not be surprising, then, that I eventually began to think about Christiana's journey in different ways. The chasm that had once divided my pilgrimage from hers slowly disappeared; I found a particular appeal in her story as I considered it from an entirely different angle.

Christian's journey has a rather rapid and dramatic quality; the intensity and the swiftness draws readers in, almost suggesting that faithful pilgrims can be transformed quickly. In this context, pain and trials are limited to a brief moment. Notwithstanding all of the verisimilitude of Christian's story, the overarching message of the first half of *Pilgrim's Progress*—event rather than process—has a fictional tone that could provide false comfort to one hoping for instant relief. Although Christian is making a difficult trek, there is something about his story that seems, well, easy.

As I thought about Christian in this new light, I no longer saw obvious parallels between my story and his. I could not become transformed, perfected, sanctified, in a matter of days. His story lacked development and nuance.

Christiana's narrative, on the other hand, no longer seemed to be an adventure story about a hero but, rather, a human journey that necessarily took shape over time. She moved forward step by step, not in isolation, but with a community of believers. Her pilgrimage involved sacrifice, growth, failure, love, temptation, pain, hope, exciting adventures, and mundane routines. It actually looked a lot like my life.

True, Christiana was lost in Christian's shadow—but as a historian, I could challenge the stark omissions that existed in the telling of her story. I began to think about how she might have told her story differently

and about what her version of the account might reveal about being a female pilgrim. I sifted through the layers of evidence in my mind. Why had Christian made the journey alone? Readers are informed in part I that his wife and children were unfaithful, indeed, unwilling to leave the sinful world behind, at the time of his departure. But why? What attributes did Christiana have before becoming a religious seeker? Why had she refused to go with Christian? Was she a nursing mother? Was she responsible for the care of elderly parents? How did she handle her husband's abandonment and how did she provide for and raise four small boys alone? A very interesting, indeed a very appealing story could emerge from answering these questions—one that many women could relate to, and that all readers might find revealing.

I also thought about ways Bunyan could have approached the theme of faith in Christiana's life. She clearly must have had some sort of conversion experience that resulted in her decision to make a rather treacherous journey with her young sons. She does so with confidence, despite her awareness of the extreme difficulties that lay ahead. Certainly Christiana displays charity through her willingness to let her young friend, Mercy, join her family on their journey, and shows careful pastoring of her as she moves from hope to belief.

What might be said of Christiana's spirituality, I wondered. It is clear that she is prone to dreaming. Was this common? Uncommon? What might be gleaned about female relationships with the divine from her visionary nature? What about the courage she displays in the context of an attempted rape. What pain, guilt and fear does she experience—indeed, how did women deal with sexual crimes at that time?

Certainly Christiana experiences loneliness as she carries her heavy burdens. But she also displays great patience. She has to move slowly since she waits on others, rather than just moving ahead herself. As strangers join her group of pilgrims, she has more mouths to feed and more people to look after. I wondered what kind of time and attention she has to devote to daily chores, such as caring for sick children and mending clothing. How does she sacralize the mundane—in what ways does she find beauty, indeed the divine, in the ordinary? Clearly she is selfless. She wants to serve and lift those around her. Rather than leaving people behind, she invites them to join her. She lives the gospel.

I became convinced that Bunyan had failed to develop a most interesting character; much could have been learned about spiritual pilgrimages, about the human experience, from Christiana's life had he written it differently. Hers is a story of process, of conversion and sanctification; she

embarks on an epic but worthwhile journey that is both individual and communal. Her life involves family and friends; she works to develop herself but she also gives of herself. As I thought about her from this new perspective, I realized I preferred Christiana to Christian. I could in fact relate to her. I had just needed to know her story, rather than the stereotypes that clouded Bunyan's vision and thus limited his own creation.

The emptiness I had always felt, indeed the rootlessness, or lack of connection to something larger, dissipated slowly as I learned to challenge the omissions in Bunyan's text that had bothered me so much. Recognizing the nuances of the fictionalized Christiana's story marked the beginning of my own pilgrimage. I hoped that as a budding historian I could find the real story of Christiana's pilgrimage and in the process, discover my own story.

CATHERINE LIVINGSTON GARRETTSON

It should come as no surprise that I decided to become a historian of women and religion; I wanted to explore how females lived, thought about, and expressed their own faiths. Indeed, I wanted to transcend the Bunyanesque tendency to make women appendages to males' stories. I wanted to approach women's intellectual and spiritual worlds on their own terms.

Influenced further by the work of scholars such as Ann Braude, who convincingly argues that women are central to the story of religion in America, and Catherine Brekus (2007), who suggests that it is time to shift the plot so women can become a part of the larger narrative of religious history, I decided to focus my dissertation on female religiosity in the context of nineteenth-century revival movements.

Like many dissertators, I began my research as a hunter/gatherer—an exhilarating and sometimes frustrating experience. For months, my daily routine became rather predictable: I worked in an archive from morning until evening (this entailed a lot of travel!). Often, I was the only patron in a small and usually chilly reading room. Every morning I placed my laptop to my left and situated the day's primary sources to my right. With each manuscript I perused, some collections authored by the prolific and others limited to a few pages, I hoped for legible handwriting; as all historians know, the attempt to decipher poor penmanship can consume large quantities of time. And yet I still loved every archival moment. I typically became so engrossed in the material that I forgot to eat lunch.

Notwithstanding the occasional tedious document, or even when I developed what I will call an archive headache—a fuzzy feeling that results from the strain of reading faded documents for extended periods of

time—I never felt lonely or isolated or bored. Human life surrounded me as detailed in diaries and letters and other manuscript sources. I became immersed in, as well as a part of, past worlds; I became acquainted with the intricacies of human lives—I could even touch the very paper they had touched and see the words they had written. Beautiful. Invigorating. Spiritual. I became one with the past; I developed something akin to friendship—the kind that crosses time and space. As a result, I found incredible significance in my work.

And yet, despite a number of interesting finds, my questions and thoughts remained in an embryonic stage for several months. Although I continued taking notes on important details—details I hoped would prove to be as relevant as I thought they might be—I occasionally questioned whether I really knew what I was doing. I had yet to discover the manuscript that could pull my ideas together and open my mind to the possibilities inherent in my project.

At the recommendation of a friend, I decided to take a short research trip to the Methodist Archives at Drew University. To my delight, I encountered several sources that helped my amorphous ideas take a more decided shape. I could finally see my project evolving into something more concrete! Nonetheless, I still lacked a story that could serve as the core of my work. I longed to find a real Christiana, a woman whose life journey, or religious pilgrimage, reflected the process of spiritual becoming—the very meaningfulness that so many people across time had found by discovering religious beliefs and practices that resonated with them.

Late on a Friday afternoon, a mere two hours before the archive closed for the week (and I would return home), the friend who had suggested I conduct some research at Drew walked past me in the reading room and said, “You should look at the Garrettson family papers; you might find Catherine Livingston Garrettson interesting. I doubt they will be exactly what you are looking for, but I would imagine you could glean a gem or two from her diaries.”

For a brief moment I debated about whether I should request a new collection since I already had more documents before me than I could possibly finish prior to the archive’s closing. But I found I could not dismiss the idea; something inside of me (one could call it curiosity, spiritual guidance, destiny, or a meticulous personality) pushed me to request the Garrettson papers.

The archivist set a rather large box in front of me; I looked up at the clock (tick, tick, tick) and sighed. Why had I requested this collection? As I

lifted the flap of the box, I saw thousands of pages staring back at me. I did not know where to begin; I could not possibly even skim the surface in the ninety minutes that remained before closing.

Nonetheless, I pulled the first folder from the box and began to read; my eyes could not move fast enough. I glanced through the next folder, and then the next, and the next. Every page I saw fascinated me. There she was; here was my dissertation, my *Christiana*, the account of a personal pilgrimage I had been hoping to find. I wanted to do a cartwheel or at least clap my hands in delight. I knew I had just made an important, perhaps even a personally defining, discovery. In the back of my mind, I began to plan another trip to Drew University. I had to know more about this woman's life.

CATHERINE LIVINGSTON GARRETTSON AS BIOGRAPHY

Before returning to Drew, I spent countless hours becoming acquainted with secondary sources that discussed the prolific Catherine Livingston Garrettson, a woman who began documenting her religious life shortly following her conversion in 1787. Catherine continued to write in her diary through her ninety-seventh year; she wrote her last entry a few months prior to her death in 1849 (Garrettson Family Papers 1760–1885).

I learned that Catherine's exhaustive manuscript collection, which amounts to more than two thousand pages of writing, includes fifteen diaries that are composed of separate pages stitched together into books of different shapes and sizes. Each diary is bound with what appears to be wallpaper remnants. The paper Catherine used is in excellent condition, and the brown ink she wrote with is usually quite clear. Her collection also contains 450 letters, an autobiography, a dream journal, several brief biographical sketches about family members and friends, as well as two short histories of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Rhinebeck, New York. In addition, the collection contains a handwritten biography that her daughter, Mary Garrettson, wrote in the 1860s or 1870s.

Given the daunting abundance of materials that reveal Catherine's inner and outer religious life, and by extension, provide a window into female spirituality in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, one would assume that this collection has been used (or "mined") by various scholars to provide a deeper and richer view of women's religious history in early America. Not so. Catherine's story is, perhaps, as underdeveloped as was *Christiana's*. As Diane Lobody (1990, 5) has demonstrated, Catherine's writings have been perused for a number of different projects, but few of

these have focused directly on her experiences. Most commonly, biographers of her husband, the Methodist itinerant preacher, Freeborn Garrettson, or historians interested in the elite Livingston family, have turned to her writings to find and detail information about the men in her life. Her papers, then, have been valued for what they say about them, rather than what they reveal about her. Quite simply, her autobiographical accounts have been examined for details that enrich or substantiate the biographies of male others.⁴

During the late nineteenth century, several confessional historians of Methodism compiled memorials about pious women (an extremely popular genre at the time) who could serve as role models of what Joanna Gillespie (1985) calls the “exemplary female life” (197–98); many authors included a brief biographical sketch about Catherine in their volumes. In these works—considered literary staples for evangelical readers—authors told stories to define how a faithful woman should live, while also implying that female stories are valuable because they validate the work men are doing in the church.⁵ Abel Stevens (1866), for example, authored a compilation of female biographies for the centenary commemoration of Methodism. It implicitly encourages its audience to read the book from a male-oriented perspective, although his introduction proposes that his work is addressing female agency in a religious context (Stevens 1866, 5). The text itself focuses on the personality and contributions of John Wesley and explains how he worked with and related to women in the context of Methodism. The women’s stories validate Wesley’s story. Indeed, those selected for inclusion typically describe individuals who were “the associates, correspondents, or co-labourers of Wesley, Whitefield and Asbury” (Stevens 1866, 5).

Although Catherine did not know Wesley personally, her story was likewise included in Stevens’s book because of her connections to prominent men both within and without the church. In explaining why she is included in his volume, the author notes that Catherine’s “maiden name is one of the most conspicuous in the history of the Republic, while her matron name is one of the most historic in the Church; Catharine Livingston, later CATHARINE GARRETTSON, one of the best regarded friends of Asbury, and the wife of a man who was a chief founder of Methodism from Nova Scotia to North Carolina” (240). Clearly, the identities of Catherine’s father and husband guaranteed her an acknowledgment in history, and her association with prominent men and women (as a result of her family connections) validated her importance for Stevens.

In addition to highlighting Catherine’s noteworthy social connections, Stevens also describes the physical aspects of the Garrettson home in great

detail. This is followed by a paragraph that focuses on the character and contributions of Freeborn Garrettson, as well as another brief quip about the prominence of Catherine's father. By the fifth page of *her biography*, Catherine's story is finally introduced, although descriptions of her husband continue to dominate—she is, Stevens explains, a lady “undazzled by the brilliancy of her sphere, [who] chose the companionship of Garrettson in the way to heaven, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of the world for a season” (246). As I read these words, I suspected Catherine would have described her pilgrimage in different terms.

The biographical details that actually focus on Catherine highlight particular elements of her decision to become a Methodist and underscore her deep piety once she embraced that faith. Writing as a providential or apologetic historian, Stevens (1866) asserts that Catherine's conversion was inevitable. Her maidservant, he explains, was divinely inspired to discuss Methodism with Catherine. Consequently, Catherine read some of Wesley's sermons in connection with the Bible. This “led her into those deep things of godliness by which her eminently holy life was always afterwards distinguished” (244).

Stevens tells Catherine's conversion story so that it fits the traditional trope; for example, after experiencing conversion, she faced the temptations that come to those of her social position. Distressed by the abundant evidence of her remaining weaknesses, she decided to avoid anything that distracted her from spiritual development. Because Stevens framed her story in this way, he could make Catherine an ideal model of Christian womanhood.

Rather than explaining how such spiritual changes took place in Catherine's life over time, Stevens quickly shifts the focus of the biographical sketch to hyperbolic praise. He fails to develop the story of Catherine's pilgrimage; instead, he idealizes her character into flatness. Endless adjectives are used to describe this “ministering angel” who blessed the lives of family and friends. So pious and pure, Stevens's Catherine does not “perform an action, or speak a word, or manifest a temper, not in harmony with her Christian profession” (247).

As I reflected upon the work of Stevens and his contemporaries, it occurred to me that they idealized and limited Catherine in much the same way that Bunyan had limited and idealized Christiana. Their accounts reveal more about popular stereotypes about female spiritually and Catherine's connection to prominent men than they do about her personal pilgrimage.⁷ Their depictions of “holy womanhood” lack the verisimilitude—indeed, the layers, patterns, and textures of religious life—that ade-

quately describe Catherine's experience, as I suspected she would describe it. They had hidden her story within her own biography.

By the late twentieth century, scholars began to place Catherine within the broader context of Methodist history and women's religious history, but in most cases, they too explored her writings in an attempt to illustrate something other than her story. Rosemary Radford Reuther and Rosemary Skinner Keller's (1986) compilation of primary source documents about women in early America, for example, includes three of Catherine's letters as models of women's evangelicalism, whereas Doris Andrews's (2000) dissertation on late-eighteenth-century Methodism in the Mid-Atlantic states relies on Catherine's writings to demonstrate the development of Methodist popular appeal. More recently, Catherine has become one of many examples used to illustrate larger themes in books about topics such as the formation of Evangelical culture following the American Revolution, the impact of dream interpretation on identity formation, and evolving conceptions of family within the Methodist faith.⁸

Although Diane Lobody has made Catherine's spirituality the centerpiece of her dissertation as well as articles she has authored, she has not considered the longevity of Catherine's spiritual experience; her work only looks at her life during the eighteenth century. Catherine's full story in all its complexity is hinted at but never really detailed or examined.

CATHERINE LIVINGSTON GARRETTSON AS AUTOBIOGRAPHY

On my first return trip to Drew, I spent the four-hour drive reflecting on the ways historiographical material about Catherine, including works that simply mention her or include her as an example of a broader theme, shifted my thoughts back to Christiana: I sensed that an important story has been hidden by stereotypes and other people's individual or collective histories deemed more important than her own. I thus became increasingly anxious to read the two thousand pages of manuscript material that documented her life; I longed to understand Catherine's story as she told it. I wanted to ask the same kinds of questions about her that I had asked about the journeys depicted in *Pilgrim's Progress*. With Christiana, I could only speculate about what her "real" story might be, but with Catherine, I could probe and search and discover. I believed she could emerge as the complex protagonist of her own story, rather than being relegated to the role of a stereotypical female antagonist in someone else's story.

I entered the archive and requested the material that would become so familiar over the ensuing months. As the Garrettson Family Papers were placed

before me, I opened the box, almost reverently, and removed the first folder. I could sense that I was embarking upon something important and meaningful. Catherine's words drew me in immediately; I had entered the interior world of a female pilgrim engaged in the process of becoming perfected through the grace of her savior. It did not take long for me to discover that her story hinges on conversion, on deep personal change, and an intense commitment to sanctification.

The more I read from Catherine's diaries, the more I recognized that she saw herself as a spiritual pilgrim on a quest for sanctification. Her desire to attain this state of being is the overarching theme of everything she wrote (indeed, the reason she kept a spiritual diary); it defines the very essence of her religious life. She describes sanctification as the purpose of her spiritual journey, indeed of all life journeys.

As I reflected on Catherine as a spiritual seeker, it occurred to me that she began to find herself while perusing Wesley's works. Their combination of the experiential and the intellectual seemed to appeal to her. Why, I wondered? How did Wesley's writings speak to her educated mind as well as to her spiritual cravings? What drew her in and reoriented her thinking? Was this the beginning of her pilgrimage? Or, from its inception, did the very act of seeking something in Wesley suggest a new journey to her, one directed toward sanctification?

Numerous biographers have noted Catherine's initial exposure to John Wesley's works, but as I read her words—a reflection of her own sense of theology—I realized they had failed to connect her conversion to his teachings about sanctification (which made me question if they had really spent time reading her diaries). I wondered more and more why Wesley's words had resonated with Catherine and how they corresponded with her own readings of the Bible. What conversations had she engaged in with her servant, and why had those conversations resulted in this woman sharing Wesley's sermons with Catherine? Had Catherine felt gaps in her own religious upbringing? Enough so that she, an elite and wealthy woman, would seek spiritual direction from a household servant? Indeed, what was it about Wesley's writings that made Catherine willing to forsake her social status, and even the respect and support of her family, by converting to Methodism? In doing so, she severed familial bonds and created social gaps that became difficult to bridge. What was it about sanctification that Catherine found so appealing, appealing enough that she would forsake her former identity to create a new one? And why not sanctification in a different tradition? Why Methodism? To understand Catherine, I concluded, it is essential to understand sanctification, both as defined by Methodist leaders and as understood by her in

her own personal contexts. Could her understanding of sanctification be evidence of female agency? Perhaps even a reflection of identity formation?

Catherine's interest in and commitment to sanctification placed her within a visionary and mystical world. The dreams and visions she recorded are laced with details and descriptions that she believed pointed her back to the importance of sanctification, to the pilgrimage she was so determined to complete. And, her powerful and passionate relationship with Christ hinged on her desire for personal sanctification. By looking through the new lenses created by her embrace of sanctification as a personal goal, she recreated her worldview in increasingly spiritual and personal terms.

A belief in and commitment to sanctification also marked Catherine's spiritual connection to Freeborn Garrettson; she believed God led her to him and told her to marry him. These feelings were confirmed further by dreams both had. Together, the two pilgrims created a life in which temporal and spiritual intersected. As spiritual equals, they worked together to create a family unit focused on the quest for sanctification. They believed their commitment to this doctrine made them better spouses and better parents to their daughter, Mary. It seemed to me that their belief in and desire for sanctification infused their approach to every role they assumed.

Catherine shaped her worship practices, both private and public, by her belief in sanctification. The books she chose to read, her prayers, her scripture study, and her devotional writing focused on her desire to become a better pilgrim. She grappled with her weaknesses and her strengths and sought further knowledge and growth in grace. Her beliefs, indeed, her desire to become sanctified, also resulted in her deep commitment to public worship and charitable causes. Catherine participated, organized, and assisted. She defined sanctification as the unification of heart, mind, and spirit—as something one did but also something one became. She believed it could bring spiritual beauty and power into her life.

Sanctification, it seems, was, to Catherine, both an individual journey but also a means to connect oneself to a community of believers. She became an evangelist to family members and friends; she wanted to help others find and understand sanctification. For these reasons, she also created social networks with other women. They wrote letters to one another about their spiritual experiences and grappled together as they sought to understand theology and spiritual communion. Thus, her devotion to her own progress toward sanctification enabled Catherine to administer to others. It encouraged sharing and building and loving. As I read her diary entries, it became clear to

me that she willingly helped shape the journeys of those who surrounded her even while struggling to define her own spiritual progress.

Catherine's growing understanding of sanctification helped her sacralize the ordinary moments that comprised much of life; as a result, she came to see God as a part of her daily existence, and she became increasingly convinced that all things have the potential to be spiritual. Simply stated, she did not limit religion to the Sabbath. It was the central element of her everyday life. Her religious experiences were shaped and motivated by her inner quest for sanctification, not simply by exterior elements of religious practice.

When Freeborn passed away, Catherine's understanding of sanctification was woven throughout the intense pain and the powerful comfort she felt as she prayed for peace. At this time, she became particularly frenzied about her own spiritual state; she believed sanctification would permit them to be reunited in heaven, and she pleaded with God to make her worthy to be with her husband again. She wanted to be pure. She wanted to be sanctified, to be worthy of heaven on her own passing. She wanted it now.

As Catherine's own mortality drew to a close, she concluded that sanctification was more than a powerful moment of purified change; it was a daily process through which her life had been shaped and reshaped over time. She died believing her pilgrimage would end successfully—that her quest for sanctification could reach fruition.

I read every word Catherine wrote and thus spent much time considering the differences between event and process, between the moment of conviction and the lifelong commitment to transform because of that conviction. I contemplated the plethora of ways she wove sanctification into and around her life. I dreamed about her. I thought about her. I talked about her. I visited her home. Her gravesite. Her church. During this time, her world became my world. As I ruminated, it occurred to me that every word Catherine wrote depicts her growing sense of what it means to be sanctified, indeed what it means to be engaged in a process of becoming. Providential historians had missed the complexity of her experiences, the beauty that made her story so real. They described what they considered to be an ideal woman, but by so doing, had missed the power and meaning of her life—which reside in her being a woman in the process of becoming, not a woman who had already become. By idealizing her every move, they made her unknowable to the real women and men who read her biographies. These writers had failed to note that she was impatient as well as committed. That she was

dramatic and prone to depression as well as steady and joyful. They failed to see that she could be overzealous. They noted her successes but ignored her struggles. They talked about her faith but overlooked her doubts. They focused on finding rather than exploring the meaning Catherine found in seeking. They talked about her being rather than her becoming. As a result, they had fictionalized the factual and simplified the complex. The beauty and reality of Catherine's life, of her spiritual pilgrimage, of her deep commitment to sanctification, are in the endurance and commitment she displayed, despite the weaknesses and failures and doubts that plagued her.

Perhaps Catherine's story was extraordinary because it was so ordinary.

CONCLUSION

Because I spent a lot of time with Catherine, her thoughts and feelings and ideas seeped into my consciousness and shaped my thoughts, not just about her, but about women's place in history and about my own worth. She became more than a part of my dissertation, or a current book project, or even a historical friend (sometimes, as a historian, one spends more time with those who are dead than those who are alive); she became a guide, a mentor, and a comforting presence. I found that by studying her life, I began to find answers to my own questions; indeed I began to find myself.

Perhaps it is slightly arrogant and even crazy to say that Catherine wrote her diaries for me, but as I sat in the Methodist library at Drew University, there were times when her very words seemed to be answering questions that had perplexed me for years, when she seemed to address the pains and concerns and fears that plagued me. Through her I felt connected to the past (and thus more connected to my own present), both historical and spiritual, in ways I cannot possibly begin to describe. Yes, I will say I had moments when I truly felt Catherine had written directly to me.

Catherine's story, then, seems to be one of those incredible stories—so unique and yet so common that it is filled with universal themes that speak to all people. The stark differences between her life and that of her reader are overshadowed by the more meaningful commonalities that bind human lives together. Her story teaches the importance of life pilgrimages, of learning to shift one's thinking from event to process. She teaches each of us how change affects us as well as those we love. She exemplifies how we can reshape ourselves to fit into new worlds, particularly as we struggle to withdraw from the comfort of the old. She teaches patience, commitment, and endurance.

Jo March. Christiana the Pilgrim. Catherine Livingston Garrettson. So different. And yet so similar. They taught me how to become a historian. They taught me how to become a pilgrim. They taught me how to become a woman who values her past, present, and future. And they remind me that all of those roles are still in the process of being refined.

I went to Drew University seeking a story about a female journey. And I found it. But by the time I had finished my dissertation, I realized the journey I had been discovering was my own. Jo March. Christiana the Pilgrim. Catherine Livingston Garrettson. And Rachel Cope. We were the sequels to *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

NOTES

1. In 1666, John Bunyan published his spiritual autobiography, titled, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, or The Brief Relation of the Exceeding Mercy of God in Christ to his Poor Servant John Bunyan*. Bunyan wrote this book while serving a twelve-year prison sentence in the Bedford gaol for preaching without a license.

2. For details about how *The Pilgrim's Progress* influenced readers, see Smith (1966).

3. Although Puritan women had long compiled memoirs about their religious lives, publication and thus public dissemination of female accounts did not become common until the early national period of American history. Often compiled and published posthumously by clergymen and devout male church members, these narratives—"literary staples" for evangelical readers—were drawn from the journals, diaries, and correspondence of Protestant women. By highlighting the experiences they considered most noteworthy, clergymen created and then perpetuated a pattern for pious womanhood rather than exploring women's stories on their own terms.

4. For examples, see Simpson (1954) and Dangerfield (1969).

5. For examples, see Bouy (1893) and Disosway (1861).

7. For a discussion about the telling of female stories within Methodism, see Mack (2008, 19–28).

8. For examples, see Sobel (2000), and Lawrence (2011).

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