

## Salt of the Earth

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“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.” (Matthew 5:13)

On my way to the 1988 National Student Championships in São Luiz do Maranhão (Brazil), the bus that our team was traveling broke down. We were in the middle of nowhere. It was a very arid area and there weren't very many cars going by. The coaches (the particular bus I was riding was taking the swimming and track and field teams) decided that the best thing to do would be to push the bus till we found a gas station. So, we spent the next two or three hours pushing the bus. We took turns between teams. We would work hard uphill and coast downhill. We finally arrived at a little village on the side of the road. You have to keep in mind that we were in the middle of the poorest region of a third world country. There wasn't very much in the little village. After pushing a full size bus for so long we were all very hungry. So, we asked the villagers where the restaurant was. They pointed us to a tent and said that we would find something to eat there. The “waiter” showed us to our table (one and only long table with one bench on each side of the table). There was no menu because they only had one dish: carne de sol. Carne de sol is a traditional way of preparing meat consisting of saturating the meat with salt and then hanging it on a clothesline to “soak up” the sun (thus the name carne de sol, or sun meat). When salted, meat can last for a long time without having to be refrigerated, which is ideal for the remote, poor villages of northeastern Brazil. Back 1988, all I was thinking about was how hungry I was and how good that carne de sol tasted. Today as I look back at the salted meat hanging on the clothesline under the midday sun, our Lord's statement about being the salt of the earth becomes much more vivid to me.

In Matthew 5:13, the Lord Jesus Christ is describing the function of every member of the kingdom of God. We are to preserve the earth. We are to keep it from becoming completely putrid. We are to do that even under the most adverse situation just as the salt that was in that meat preserved it even under the midday sun of equatorial Brazil. Salting the earth is not the individual Christian's job only but also the job of the Church as a whole. To the Church were given the keys of the kingdom in the proclamation of the gospel and the duty to occupy this earth till our Lord Jesus Christ comes back. The Bible Presbyterian Church has taken this calling very seriously as evidenced by its interaction with the broader culture. I did not find any place where it explicitly stated that one of the objectives of the Bible Presbyterian Church was to impact and redeem culture. To tell you the truth, the Bible Presbyterian Church's biblical position of ecclesiastical separation is perceived by outsiders as an excuse to abandon the cultural environment that we live in as belonging to the Devil.<sup>1</sup> As matter of fact, even yesterday somebody joked about my turning in a blank page for this article because, according to this

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<sup>1</sup> If this perception is based on the fact that the Bible Presbyterian Church has refused to rub shoulders with unbelief and has called Christians to live godly lives, then it is a true perception. However, this is something to be proud of. We cannot salt the earth by being just like the world.

person, the Bible Presbyterian Church hasn't done much to redeem culture. However, even a cursory examination of the history of our denomination demonstrates that in practice the Bible Presbyterian Church has salted the earth and continues to do so.

The Bible Presbyterian Church from its inception has had an evangelistic zeal. Our BP forefathers took the Great Commission very seriously. Missions at home and abroad have been a priority in the history of our denomination. What better way to redeem our culture and impact it for the Lord than to fervently present the redeeming Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ to the masses? Throughout its history the Bible Presbyterian Church has done that. For the first 46 years through the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions and more recently also through the Presbyterian Missionary Union, missionaries have been sent to the far corners of the world and of this nation to proclaim the only message that can redeem culture by redeeming the basic unit of culture: the individual. Within the last two years, new efforts have been made on the part of the Presbyterian Missionary Union to reach cultures that cannot be reached by traditional missionary efforts. PMU created the Venture Guild International, which will bring Christian professionals into countries that would be otherwise closed to the gospel. Is this going to impact the culture of those countries? Of course it will. The Bible Presbyterian Church, through these two approved agencies, has salted the world.

Besides missions, the Bible Presbyterian Church has sought to interact with culture through its educational agencies. Shelton and Highland Colleges were set up not only to train men for the gospel ministry, but also to educate Christian men and women to be responsible members of society at large. This desire to prepare men and women for a life of service was evident in Shelton's motto "Training Christian warriors." Shelton College succeeded in preparing warriors to fight for the testimony of Jesus Christ. While preparing to write this article, I searched the World Wide Web to see if I could find one or two things about Shelton College. I was pleasantly surprised when my search returned hundreds of hits! Shelton graduates are serving as pastors, seminary teachers, elementary, middle, and high school teachers, doctors, lawyers, local leaders, fathers, mothers, etc. Highland College also has helped salt the earth although on a smaller scale. How many of our Bible Presbyterian ministers have had Dr. John Battle or Dr. Howard Carlson for a teacher? They are both graduates of Highland College. Thus, as we endeavor to salt the earth in our ministries, Highland College is indirectly working through us. The Bible Presbyterian Church has also salted the earth through its approved seminaries. In the beginning through Faith Theological Seminary and now through Western Reformed Seminary and Cohen University and Theological Seminary, the Bible Presbyterian Church has sought to train its ministers and lay leaders according to the highest standards of biblical scholarship.

Perhaps the most well documented area in which the Bible Presbyterian Church impacted culture is the area of politics. In preparing for writing this article I read countless issues of the *Christian Beacon* from the 1960's and 70's. Issue after issue related the political activism of the leaders of the Bible Presbyterian Church. From rallies in Washington, D. C. to summoning then Senator John Kennedy to appear before the executive committee of the American Council of Christian Churches, the *Christian Beacon* presents a picture of a denomination that was intrinsically involved with the political affairs of this nation. A particular issue caught my eyes because it had been in the news recently. On issue # 16, volume 24, published on Thursday,

May 28, 1959, the Christian Beacon denounced the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan as a KGB agent. At the time of publication, the article did not seem to have been taken seriously. However, in 1999 a 1074-page book was published in Germany proving that the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan was indeed a KGB agent. The BP leadership was not only attempting to influence culture, but it was doing it in a way that was ahead of its time.

The Bible Presbyterian Church has not only impacted the “secular” culture, but also the ecclesiastical culture. In 1941, Dr. Carl McIntire together with Dr. Robert Ketcham were very instrumental in founding of the American Council of Christian Churches. The ACCC was founded to promote biblical Christianity and to stand in opposition to the National Council of Churches. The Bible Presbyterian Church was also a vital part in founding the International Council of Christian Churches in 1948. For years the ICCC contended for the faith once delivered to the saints all over the world. In addition to its role in the founding the American and International Councils of Christian Churches, the Bible Presbyterian Church has sought to impact the ecclesiastical culture through yearly resolutions approved at its stated synod meetings. From Bible translation to ordination of homosexuals, the Bible Presbyterian synods throughout the years have dealt with these issues in a biblical and God honoring way.<sup>2</sup>

Another way that the Bible Presbyterian Church has endeavored to redeem our culture is through its publications. In the late 1980’s Fundamental Presbyterian Publications was founded to publish works of Bible Presbyterian men or works of interest to the Bible Presbyterian Church and the Church in general. Throughout its almost two decade history FPP has brought to our attention issues that other publishing houses haven’t. They also have encouraged our Bible Presbyterian youth to write essays on very important topics through its yearly youth essay contest. Nevertheless our rich publishing tradition goes further back than the founding of FPP. For years, the Christian Beacon was the periodical of choice among Bible-believing Christians. One could find editorials and reports on every major issue in the land. In addition to that, Dr. Carl McIntire wrote and published several books such as *The Death of a Church*, in which he recounts the struggles of the Presbyterian Church with apostasy. In more recent years Sharon Backus has written and published invaluable books in the area of nouthetic counseling such as *Running the Christian Race*. This book is a great help for parents whose children have been labeled ADD/ADHD. Through these publications, and others like them, the Bible Presbyterian Church has salted our culture.

Besides the efforts of the denomination as a whole, individual Bible Presbyterian churches and ministers have sought to impact their communities. For example, 32 years ago the Tacoma Bible Presbyterian Church established a kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade school with the express purpose of leading children to Christ and raising responsible citizens. In its 32 years of history, Heritage Christian School has educated close to 500 students, who have gone out and impacted their sphere of influence. Or, we could consider the counseling ministry of the Grand Island Bible Presbyterian Church, where for eight hours on Tuesdays<sup>3</sup> Dr. Kevin Backus, Rev. Mark Turner, and others dedicate their time to help the church family and the community at large. We could also mention Reverend Paul Durand’s book ministry. For years now Rev. Durand has faithfully managed The Truth & Grace Resource Services where we can find great

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<sup>2</sup> For Bible Presbyterian resolutions go to <http://bpc.org/synod/resolutions/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> The counseling ministry continues all week, but all recurring appointments are scheduled for Tuesdays.

books on Reformed theology, home schooling, history, biographies, etc. Through his recommended reading list Rev. Durand is impacting our culture and salting it. In the Northwest Presbytery, Rev. James Huff diligently keeps our churches aware of political and religious issues that we must pay attention to. He doesn't have to do that, yet he faithfully informs us so that we, in turn, can exercise our citizen duties and salt our communities. These are but a few examples of what individuals have been doing in the Bible Presbyterian Church to impact the community they are in.

The Bible Presbyterian Church has a rich history. Sometimes we get so caught up in the problems that we have had as a denomination that we forget the good things we have done. Dr. Howard Carlson preached a sermon at the 54<sup>th</sup> General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church convened at Grace Bible Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio and in that sermon he said the following:

Why Bible Presbyterian? Our history has shown us the way, both good and bad. Our exemplary centrality and vigor have shown us that we have what is needed for the future. Our size is strength in the sense that we have little to drag with us into the future.<sup>4</sup>

When I look back at our history, I see a church that has had its fair share of struggles. However, I also see a denomination that has been actively interacting with culture and endeavoring to redeem it. Dr. Carlson also said,

Our Fathers were very wise in the direction they gave to our Church. They placed our agenda in the very forefront of the day's controversies. To illustrate; on the new property of the Suncoast BP church there is a swimming pool. One of the pool tools left by the previous owners was an automatic pool vacuum cleaner. This particular model has a nasty habit of moving into a corner of the pool bottom and running in circles. That corner gets clean, but the rest of the pool remains dirty. Many denominations approach truth and society in a similar manner – in a corner. Our Church fathers sought, biblically, to clean up the whole "pool" of church and society and not just a corner. We have been an activist group, vocal and involved in the central controversies of the day. Was that wise? Was it biblical? Would a future similar course justify a positive answer to the question of the evening, "Why BPs?" Can BPs be a blessing to the entire nation and church? Will the next generation of our church be content in the comfort of cleaning just a corner?<sup>5</sup>

May the Lord enable our denomination to continue to clean all the corners of this earthly pool.

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<sup>4</sup> Carlson, Howard. Why Bible Presbyterian. Cincinnati, OH: 1990.  
<http://www.bpc.org/who/whybpc.html>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.