

Does Christ Teach You to
Church Shop?

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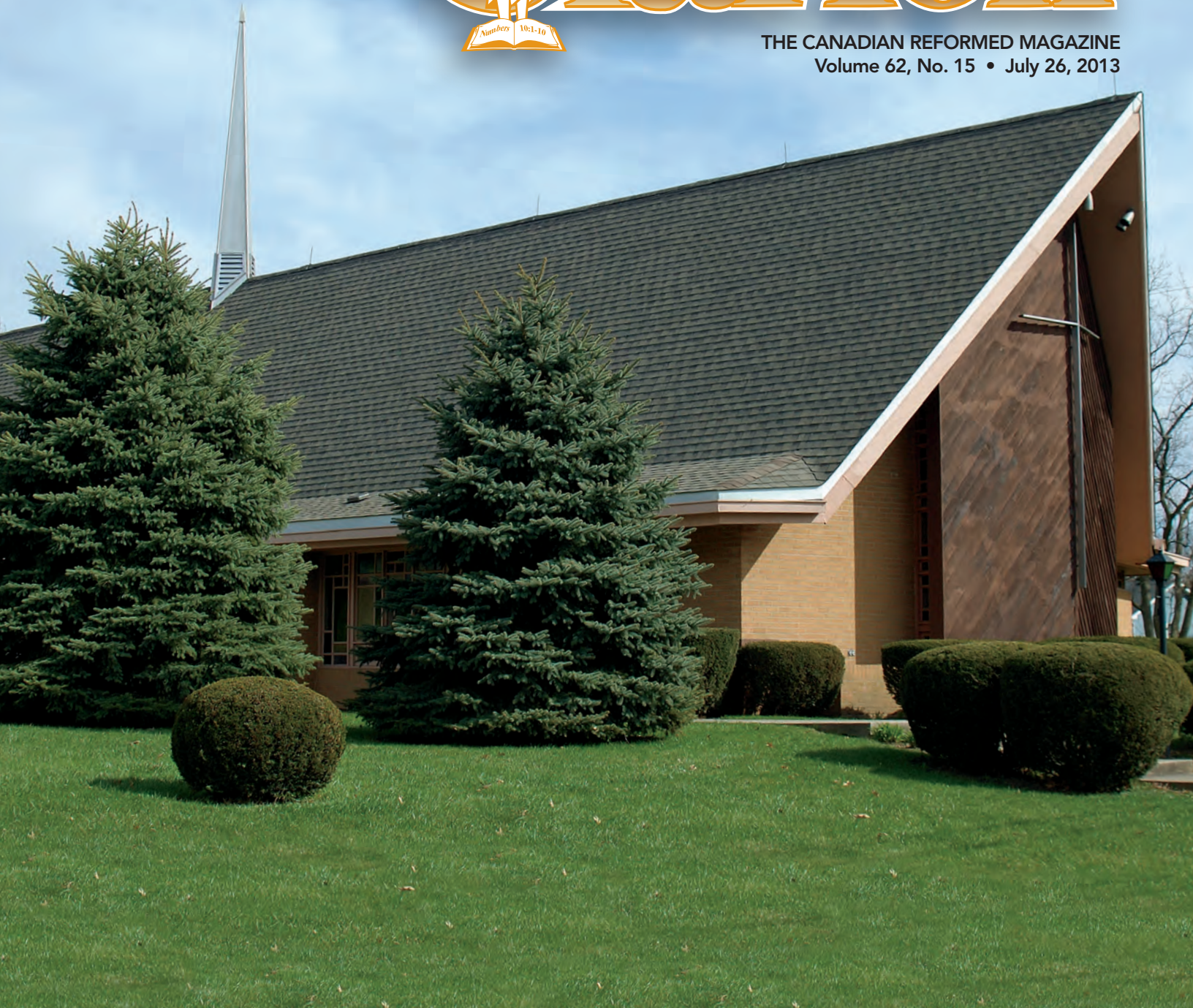
Not Sustained

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Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
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**SINCE THE CHURCH BELONGS TO CHRIST,
WE NEED TO SUBMIT TO HIM**



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Does Christ Teach You to Church Shop?

Church is about how you best serve Christ

This is how it might happen. You have a certain niggling, sinking feeling because you don't see Br. X in church as often as you used to. At first, you are not even sure that your feeling is correct. After all, people do get sick. Or maybe he has a girlfriend in another congregation. Maybe he is out of town due to work. Maybe. . .? However, some time later the grapevine feeds you some information. Apparently, Br. X is also worshipping at the New Hope Christian Fellowship.

New Hope is a recent church plant in your area. It's quite successful, too. In a few years it's already drawing hundreds of people, and more are joining every month. New Hope's senior pastor is a dynamic man who preaches in a way that grabs people's attention and connects to their lives. New Hope has a band, and they sing all the well-known praise and worship choruses. Doctrinally, New Hope might be described as a Reformed-Baptist-slightly-Charismatic congregation. In other words, they emphasize sovereign grace, reject infant baptism, and are at least open to spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.

Not wishing to rely on the unreliable grapevine, you speak to Br. X directly. He confirms that, yes, he is attending New Hope Christian Fellowship. Moreover, he doesn't see anything wrong with it because, as he reports, "I've never felt so spiritually alive in all my life." How should you to respond to a statement like that?

What's church shopping?

The fictional scenario described above falls into the category of what is commonly called church shopping. Of course, different people mean different things when they use this phrase. So, what exactly is church shopping? After all, fruitful discussions begin with clear definitions.

Let's begin with what church shopping is not. Let's say someone discovers that he is part of an unfaithful church, that is, a church that does not "govern itself according to the pure Word of God" (BC 29). For some time he tries to bring about positive change, but all his efforts are systematically stymied. There will come a point when this believer will seek out a faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's not called church shopping. At least, it *shouldn't* be called church

shopping. That's called seeking a faithful church, along the lines of Articles 28 and 29 of the Belgic Confession.

However, the situation is quite different when someone does belong to an earnestly faithful yet admittedly imperfect church of Christ. If, while belonging to such a congregation, someone starts checking out, and worshipping in, another church due to various personal circumstances or preferences, then he may very well be engaging in what is commonly called church shopping.

Why?

What motivates people to begin shopping for another church? Recently I spoke to a group of youth from some Ontario CanRC congregations. Youth generally have a pretty solid finger on the pulse of ecclesiastical life. Together we agreed on the following list of eight reasons, in no particular order, that people begin church shopping:

- They want to avoid admonition or discipline
- They want a fresh start because of bad experiences in their present church
- Friends or family members start worshipping elsewhere
- Looking for a boy- or girl-friend
- Looking for more relevant, "talk-to-me-where-I'm-at" preaching
- Feel more at home in worship atmosphere elsewhere because it's more casual, more upbeat, and has praise and worship music
- Just feel more spiritually alive in the other church
- Slipped into a (hyper-)critical view of their own church to the point of seeing negatives almost everywhere

Although this list is certainly not exhaustive, it does cover some of the common reasons that people start attending other churches. At the same time, this list does not precisely pinpoint what is often at the heart of the issue: the growing centrality of *my desires* with the communion of saints. In other words, pulsating through the various reasons for going to another church there is a steady beat of "I like. . .," "I want. . .," and "I prefer. . ."

The tricky part, though, is when the desire of "I" seems to be pious. Turning back to the scenario above, if "I" want

to be more spiritually alive than ever before, that must be a God-pleasing thing, right? Well, that's an excellent question, and it deserves a thorough, biblical answer. So, let's work through this one step at a time.

Whose church is it?

Even though we casually speak of "my church," or "our church," we all realize that the church belongs to Jesus Christ. He bought the church with his own precious blood (Acts 20:28). Therefore, the church belongs to him (Rom 16:16); it is even his very own body (Eph 5:23, 29; Col 1:24). We also confess this in the Apostles' Creed ("a holy, catholic, *Christian* church) and Lord's Day 21 ("gathers, defends, and preserves *for himself*"). For this reason all members of the church must be emphatically and genuinely Christ-centred.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

What is "church shopping"? Why would one "church shop," and is it ok? These are questions addressed by our guest editor, Dr. Jason Van Vliet, in this issue's editorial.

In his article "Not Sustained," Rev. Klaas Stam writes about the classical exam process for men entering the ministry. He outlines and discusses both the preparatory and the peremptory exams. We also have the first of three articles from Dr. Arjan de Visser reviewing *The Mission of God* by Christopher J.H. Wright.

From the federation comes a report on the fortieth anniversary of Eben-Ezer Christian School – Chatham opening its doors. There is also an Education Matters column, this one by Mr. Arthur Kingma, focusing on the reading of books. What are you reading, and how do you choose?

Issue 15 wraps up a four-part meditation series by Rev. Matthew VanLuik. We also bring our readers a Canticle and a Letter to the Editor. In addition, we have a Mission News insert.

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The challenge arises, though, when this biblical teaching has to be applied consistently. When a desire to worship in another church arises, is that truly because Christ directs you to go there? Some people will readily respond, “Yes, I feel in my heart that Christ is calling me to go elsewhere.” But how can this “calling” be verified? What if this “calling” comes up from me rather than down from Christ? After all, our hearts are highly skilled at deceiving us (Prov 28:26; Jer 17:9). So, instead of relying on our fickle hearts we should turn to Christ’s faithful Word, the Holy Scriptures (1 Pet 1:10-11).

For example, the Word of Christ clearly speaks of an *everlasting* covenant that the Lord establishes from generation to generation (Gen 17:7). And the Spirit of Christ also confirms that the promises of the new covenant extend to the children of believers (Acts 2:39). So, would the same Christ, who affirms the inclusion of believers’ children in the covenant of grace, turn around and direct someone to worship in a church which excludes young children from that covenant of grace? That would mean that Christ is contradicting himself, which is, of course, impossible (Heb 13:8).

Moreover, when someone begins worshiping elsewhere and says, “I’ve never felt so spiritually alive in all my life,” other questions need to be asked such as: “But what are your actions doing to your brothers and sisters in the congregation to which you belong? Are they being edified by your sporadic attendance?” If we’re truly focused on Christ, that’s a pressing question because it is precisely Christ who taught us to “love your neighbour as yourself,” and our spiritual siblings in our own congregation are among some of the closest neighbours that we have.

In short, the point is this: since the church belongs to Christ, we need to submit to him, as he reveals his will in his Word, in all that we do. It’s one thing to speak of Christ; it’s another to truly submit to him.

A catholic church

However, someone will surely object, “Yes, but the church of Christ is catholic. We sing that every Sunday. So, whether I worship in one federation or another, whether CanRC or New Hope, it all comes down to the same thing. Together, we’re all part of the catholic church of Christ.” Yet speaking about the catholicity of the church in this way is not the way that Christ speaks about catholicity. The catholic church is gathered from all nations, not composed out of all denominations. A quick glance at Psalm 2:8, Matthew 28:19 and Revelation 7:9 confirms that catholicity has to do with Christ calling his people from many different ethnic backgrounds. It does not mean that all the different ecclesiastical streams eventually flow into one, big, catholic river.

A holy church

In addition, the holiness of Christ’s church is often misunderstood. For many the holiness of the church is located

specifically in how well the members of the church obey the Ten Commandments or the Great Commission. Following this approach, if there are sins of money or mouth in the church, or if members are not sufficiently excited about evangelism, then the church is no longer regarded as holy.

To be sure, disobedience against God’s commandments and a lack of desire to spread his gospel are serious and sinful matters. However, if we begin by locating the church’s holiness within her members, we start in the wrong spot. The holiness of the church begins with Christ. He makes his people “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6; 1 Pet 2:9; Rev. 1:6). To put it succinctly, to be the holy church of Christ means that Christ sets us apart to be different than the world and devoted to him.

Yes, we are to be different than the world, also in the way that we view church membership. In the world, if a certain membership serves you well, you keep it. If it doesn’t serve you well, you take your membership elsewhere. For example, if being a member of the local YMCA suits your fitness plans, so be it. But if joining the local racquetball club works out better for you, you can always switch your allegiance. No problem. That’s your prerogative. Just remember, though, that your membership in the church is something holy, something different, something set apart. Church is not about what serves you best. Church is about how you best serve Christ (Mark 10:43-45).

Church involves matrimony, not the mall

We often mention it, but how often do we meditate on it? To be part of the church of Christ is to be involved in a marriage relationship to no one less than the eternal Son of God. If you contemplate that revealed truth for a while there is something deeply disturbing about the term “church shopping.” The church has everything to do with the most gracious and glorious marriage of all time. Witness the affirmation of the Apostle Paul in the middle of that well-known passage on Christian marriage in Ephesians 5:22-33, “This is a profound mystery – *but I am talking about Christ and the church*” (v. 32). In other words, if you’re talking church, then you’re talking marriage. At least, if you’re talking the way the Spirit of Christ speaks, then to be involved in the church is to be involved in a marriage.

So, since church involves marriage, is it even proper to speak of church and shopping in one and the same breath? Shopping is one thing, marriage is quite another. The psychology and practice of shopping has no place, whatsoever, within the holy bond of matrimony. This already applies to earthly, time-bound marriages. It applies all the more to the heavenly, eternal marriage.

Shopping has its proper place. If you need some mammon for your daily existence, by all means go to the mall and shop. However, being of member of Christ’s church is something quite different. It’s holy. It’s holy matrimony with God’s own Son. And within marriage the operative word is love-filled faithfulness, not shopping.





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Home at Last

(Parable of the Prodigal Son, Part 4)

“We had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

(Luke 15:32)

In the parable of the prodigal son, the younger brother took the inheritance from his father and went to a foreign land. After he squandered all his money in wild living, in desperation he found work taking care of unclean pigs.

In this situation his thoughts go back to his father’s home. There the hired men and women never went hungry and they enjoyed security. He begins to realize what a fool he has been to leave home and strike out on his own. Being young and foolish, he thought he could manage without his father. He left home thinking that he could satisfy his deepest needs by pursuing the material things of this world. How wrong he had been, for now he is completely abandoned in this world and there is nowhere to turn in his greatest hour of need. Jesus says that the young man now comes to his senses and remembers how good it was in his father’s home. At home his father always supported him and provided for all his needs. If he had remained at home he would not have ended up in this miserable situation with the pigs.

Cornelius Plantinga writes in *Engaging God’s World* that we often long to go back to a time when we felt peace or security in our life. It is not uncommon for us to speak about the good old days with nostalgia. We

think that if only we could go back to that place, then life would be good again. And yet we can never recreate those memories. If we go back to the place of those wonderful memories, it is never quite like we thought it was. We are disappointed because it does not give us the same feeling or the same sense of fulfillment that we had in the past. We seem to be pursuing an elusive goal.

Now this young man remembers how good it was in his father’s house and he longs to return home. Can reality ever live up to his memory? He decides to return and is even willing to go back as a hired hand. But when the father sees him at a distance, he comes running to meet his son and throws his arms around him and kisses him. After everything he has done to his father, the son never expected such a homecoming. In his love the father takes him back, even though he is not worthy.

Immediately the father commands that the best robe be given to him, and a ring be put on his finger—likely to indicate that he belongs to the family. He commands that sandals be placed on his feet and the fattened calf – which is reserved only for very special occasions – be killed. He comes home, chastened and ashamed because of what he has done, but to his astonishment his father throws a

great feast because he says, “This son of mine was dead and is alive; he was lost and is found.”

The son is home at last, and what a homecoming it is! Jesus told this parable to reveal the kind of Father we have in heaven. Jesus teaches that we will never be disappointed in our longing for our heavenly home. In fact, we cannot even begin to imagine what it will be like when we finally enter into the home of our Father. Remember, Jesus told his disciples that he goes to heaven to prepare a place for them in his Father’s house.

Our hearts will never find rest in earthly or material things. We will only find rest when we turn our hearts to our Father in heaven. When we come to the Father in Jesus Christ, he welcomes us into his home with open arms. We do not deserve this because we have been such good children, but he welcomes us because he has purchased us with the blood of Christ. Therefore on that day when we enter into the glory of God’s eternal kingdom, we won’t be disappointed. With our heavenly Father all our longing will be satisfied, and we will find eternal rest. So we may pray as the early Church father Augustine once did: “O Lord, you made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”





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Not Sustained

It happens now and then that students or candidates flunk their classical exam. Well, we have a fancy name for this: we say that the examination was not *sustained*. This means that the person examined did not provide enough evidence to support his request. Let's say that someone wanted to be eligible for a call from one of the churches. To determine whether he is capable of doing this work, he must be examined and must demonstrate that he is able to do perform this task.

(I am not referring here to the fact that every candidate must show piety of life. To determine this is really a task of the candidate's home consistory. The candidate must present an attestation regarding his conduct and life. He must be blameless and this is where his consistory plays an important role.)

After the hurdle of the first examination has been taken the student who is now a candidate must seek to receive a call from one of the churches. Vacant churches are usually eager to find a suitable candidate for the ministry, especially when there are a high number of vacancies.

After a call has been received and accepted, the candidate must undergo a final examination in the classis where his congregation resides. The candidate does not dare to breathe until this second examination is sustained.

Why two exams?

Why are there *two* exams for a candidate? Two things should be made clear. First, if a call is accepted within the classis that declared the candidate eligible, the candidate need not be examined again. At least, this is the opinion of some; the church order speaks of two exams. This may lead to some confusion which, I fear, is causing some problems for candidates and delegates alike.

For, second, there is an important difference between the two examinations. They each have their own name. The first exam is called a *preparatory* exam. The second examination is called a *peremptory* exam. You can find this distinction stated in Article 4B1 and 5A1b of the church order. Unfortunately, the church order does not clarify what is meant by these terms.

Once during a peremptory exam in which I had to ask about doctrine and creeds, I first asked a candidate what the word "peremptory" means. He didn't have a clue. Undaunted, I asked the delegates to classis if anyone knew? Nobody answered, not even one of the ministers. Therefore I said, "If nobody knows what we are doing here, why don't we all just go home?"

I did not intend this as a joke, but everybody laughed, more or less. It seems to me that we need to become clearer about these examinations. I am also convinced that the students need to be better prepared, either by the Seminary staff or the Deputies ad examina. When students in growing numbers cannot sustain their examinations, something is wrong with the system. Perhaps students need a few dry runs before they are plunged into the white-water rapids of major assemblies.

The preparatory exam

The first examination is called the *preparatory* exam. The name itself already suggests that another examination will follow in due time. What is preparatory by nature, *demand*s a finishing touch. So, yes, there will be another delightful exam. . . but more about that later. The fun never ends.

What is the purpose of the preparatory examination? It is the exam which opens the second decisive step in a student's life, his presentation to the churches. The first step was reporting for duty at the Seminary. The second is seeking the approval of the major assembly. Sustaining this exam, he will be eligible for a call.

At this preparatory exam classis must focus on two items only. First, has the student properly finished his studies and does he have a basic understanding of the ministry? Second, is he able to preach a soundly-Reformed sermon? I use the word "soundly" because classis should be able to *hear* it if the sermon is scriptural and thus is Reformed. After all, the delegates are not anesthetized.

It is of great importance that classis determines if a student can preach the gospel well. Of course, the student is still a rookie, and there is always much to improve upon, but the student's prime focus in the preparatory

stage, is to *preach* properly. Here the man must show promise and the churches must show patience.

Delegates will concentrate on two questions when it comes to the sermons: did the student stick to the text and did he weave into his textual sermon the teaching of Scripture as we summarize it together in the confessions? We need to hear a textual and Reformed sermon. Then we can say: this person is indeed prepared to solicit and entertain calls from the churches and classis *recommends* him as candidate.

Here I also have a question: should a student not have to give more evidence that he can preach than just in one sermon proposal? This is step one, and if he stumbles here, the way to ministry is blocked. Why not ask a student to present *three* sermon proposals at his preparatory exam? New Testament, Old Testament, and Catechism sermon. Then the emphasis has come to lie in the proper place. How all this is to be arranged practically, I leave to your imagination. Delegates and students may have to book a hotel to preserve sanity and dignity.

The peremptory exam

Then, if a candidate has received and accepted a call, the final examination takes place in the classis where the calling church resides. This second examination is final. By now, after a time of practical training and especially of preaching, the second and last step may be taken. Therefore in the peremptory examination only one sermon proposal is needed and the focus lays not so much on doctrine but on *practice*. The question is now, “Does the candidate have a good understanding of what is expected of him in the ministry?”

That is why the peremptory examination covers *more* subjects. Besides the sermon proposal and the knowledge of Scripture, doctrine and creeds, the focus is on diaconiology (the daily office work of the pastors) such as catechism teaching, pastoral visitation, ministry to the infirm and aged, etc. Also, matters of ethics and discipline are discussed, as well as visitation. What is needed is to discover if the candidate has good “time management” skills. How should a minister prepare young couples for married life? What is required to prepare and conduct a funeral? How will he meet the needs of the aged? Are special classes to be held for those new to the faith, and how will a minister guide the evangelism projects as well as promote the mission work? What responsibility does a minister have as delegate to a major assembly? How are consistory meetings to be chaired?

These are some important areas that a peremptory exam should cover. Is this being done? Just to be clear, the word “peremptory” coming from the Latin, means definitive, final, and authoritative. The first exam showed

CALLED

Called by the Maranatha CanRC of Surrey, BC:

Brother Ben Schoof

Called by the Covenant CanRC of Grassie, ON:

Rev. P. Feenstra

of Grand Valley, ON.

DECLINED

Declined the call to the Launceston FRCA, Tasmania:

Rev. J. Slaa

of Smithers, BC.

CHURCH NEWS

that he is eligible for call. The second exam shows that he can be ordained as minister. For the student: oh, what a relief it is!

A word of encouragement

Students are extremely nervous when it comes to the ecclesiastical exams. I remember how nervous I was. I felt like chop suey. The 1960s in the Dutch ecclesiastical scene was not easy. Many issues were divisive topics that were being hotly debated in the federation and the classical exams were a favorite opportunity to grill a candidate. Students, I know, have this inordinate dread that they may say something “unreformed.” We became experts at evading questions. Nobody really trusted the examiners, because the word on the street was that they were out to get you. Untrue, of course, but still dreadful.

I had done so many exams over a relatively short period of time that I was sick of the very thought of more. Little did I know that at my first classis as a delegate and member I had to participate in examining another proponent. Evaluating my part in the exam, one senior minister remarked, “The candidate passed; the examiner failed.” Thanks a million, pal. That’s been the story of my life.

Enjoy your ecclesiastical examinations as candidate and delegate. Should your exam not be sustained, don’t give up. Breathe deeply, cry briefly, and gird up your loins. Nose to the grind stone. Stiff upper lip. Get over it, already. Perhaps there will be another day when your exam is sustained. And if not, the knowledge you have acquired will benefit you your whole life through.

Remember always that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who equips and calls young men through his church to serve in the ministry. A student must do his part, and study hard, believing that the Lord will open the way. Failing an exam does not mean you have flunked in life. Accept his direction and find another place where he is served.





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The Mission of God

by Christopher J.H. Wright (Part 1)

It can be confusing to keep theologians apart if they have the same family name, especially if they are from the same country and the same denomination. In the Reformed tradition, for example, we have two Bavincks and two Schilders. In the contemporary Anglican world we have the phenomenon of two Wrights. Many readers of *Clarion* will be familiar with the name N.T. Wright, the well-known Anglican bishop and New Testament scholar. In this article I want to introduce you to another Wright, an Anglican clergyman as well (though not a bishop), and an Old Testament scholar. His name is Christopher J.H. Wright.¹

Wright is International Director of the Langham Partnership International, a group of ministries founded by John Stott in 1974. Wright is also a leader within the Lausanne movement and delivered one of the main speeches at the Lausanne III conference in Cape Town (2010). He has written several books, including *The Mission of God* (2006) and *The Mission of God's People* (2010). His theological views have been influenced by John Stott but he seems to be cautiously moving away from some of Stott's positions (more about that later).

The book *The Mission of God*² is a massive book of more than five hundred pages. It has become a standard work in the field of biblical theology of mission. It is expected that the book will be a textbook at evangelical seminaries for the next few decades. Since the book is going to influence the thinking of the next generation of ministers and missionaries in the broader evangelical movement, it is important to take note of what Wright is saying. An additional reason to do so is that that Wright's theology of mission suffers from important weaknesses. As I hope to demonstrate, it would not be good if Wright's approach was swallowed hook, line, and sinker.

In this article I will attempt to summarize the book. In the next two articles I will mention some positives and discuss a number of key concerns. I need to mention that I have benefited from listening to a review of Wright's book

by Dr. Gary Millar at the 2013 Gospel Coalition conference in Orlando, Florida.³ I also found helpful comments in Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert's *What is the Mission of the Church?*⁴

Mission as God's work

Summarizing a densely written book of more than 500 pages is a tall order. I apologize in advance to the reader if this summary is going to be a bit dense as well. I will attempt to highlight only the most important aspects of the book.

First, as the title of the book indicates, Wright emphasizes that *mission work is God's work*. Wright gives the following definition of mission: "Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation" (p. 22-23). This definition represents a popular emphasis in current missiological thinking: We should not think of mission work in the first place as the work of the church. We should rather think of mission work as the work of God, and we should keep in mind God is already at work in the world. The church is called to participate in that work. (Of course, the important question will be: What is God believed to be doing in the world? More about that later.)

One more comment regarding Wright's definition: You will have noted that he formulates a purpose of mission work. The definition says that the purpose of God's mission is "the redemption of God's creation." That is a broad purpose which allows Wright to include socio-political action and environmental care as part and parcel of mission work. (I'm tempted to comment, but let's first complete the summary of Wright's book.)

Second, Wright says that *God's mission is holistic*, in the sense that both spiritual and physical needs are addressed. Per consequence, mission is everything that Christians do to address the world's spiritual and physical needs. This is

an important move! Classic Reformed theology would agree that Christians have a task in this world, a task which includes social action and caring for the environment. However, this would not be called mission work. In classic Reformed theology, mission work is defined in terms of the spreading of the gospel for (1) the salvation of individuals and (2) the planting of the church. Wright, following John Stott, takes a broader approach. He thinks of mission work as the church “through the combined engagement of *all* its members . . . applying the redemptive power of the cross of Christ to *all* the effects of sins and evil in the surrounding live, society and environment” (322, italics as in original). In other words, mission can be anything ranging from evangelism to social involvement and protection of the environment. In Wright’s opinion, all these aspects are important and we should not say that any one is more important than the other (in this respect he differs from John Stott who would have said that the proclamation of the gospel is the most important part of mission work).

Being a blessing

Third, Wright believes that *mission work is more about being a blessing than about being sent*. He suggests that the Great Commission of Matthew 28 has played too important a role in thinking about mission. In this respect Wright is once again a follower of John Stott who said similar things in his book *Christian Mission in the Modern World*.⁵ Like Stott, Wright warns against overemphasizing the aspect of “sent-ness” in mission. He warns against becoming “obsessed” with the great mission imperatives, such as the Great Commission (61). Instead of understanding mission primarily as *being sent* into the world, Wright would like to see mission being understood as *being a blessing* to society. In this respect he considers the calling of Abram (Gen 12:1-3) to be a key passage. Abram was sent to Canaan and the goal was that the nations would be blessed through his presence and his intercession for them. Wright makes the remarkable suggestion that the calling of Abram in Genesis 12 is more worthy to be called “the Great Commission” than Matthew 28:18-20. Quote: “It would be entirely appropriate and no bad thing, if we took *this* text as ‘the Great Commission.’ Certainly it is the biblical foundation on which the text in Matthew is based that is usually elevated to that role” (214, italics as in original).

Fourth, Wright suggests that *some Old Testament events or* **Christopher J.H. Wright**



motifs should play a more important role in our understanding of mission. One such event is the Exodus, which Wright refers to as “God’s model of redemption.” This has implications: Rather than seeing forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God as key aspects of redemption, Wright suggests that we should look at the Exodus in order to determine the character of redemption. He argues that the redemption which the Israelites received through the Exodus had political, economic, social, and spiritual dimensions. It was a holistic kind of salvation. He concludes: “So although the exodus stands as a unique and unrepeatable event in the history of Old Testament Israel, it also stands as a paradigmatic and highly repeatable model for the way God wishes to act in the world. . . .” (275). In other words, God’s mission is still the same: He wants to bless people politically, economically, socially, and spiritually. Thus, mission work should focus on all these aspects. Another Old Testament theme which Wright takes to be “paradigmatic” is the Year of Jubilee, which he calls “God’s model of restoration” (300).

Fifth and finally, Wright’s book is an effort to prove that *the Bible should be interpreted by using a missional hermeneutic*. There is more about mission in the Bible than just a few “mission texts.” The whole Bible should be understood from a missional perspective! After all, Wright argues, God is a missionary God, a God who is on a mission. Therefore, God’s Book must be interpreted from a missionary perspective. Wright calls this approach a “missiological hermeneutic of Scripture” (26). This does not mean that each and every text in the Bible is saying something about mission. The idea is rather that a missional perspective can function as a kind of a map to help us find our way through the Bible, help us understand where God is going with the world.

In the following articles we will evaluate this important book.

¹ Incidentally, both Wrights will be speaking at a conference on “A Missional Reading of Scripture,” organized by Calvin Theological Seminary (Grand Rapids) in November 2013. See <http://calvin-seminary.edu/academics/continuing-education/missional-reading/>

² Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative*. IVP, 2006.

³ Workshop at The Gospel Coalition, Orlando, April 7, 2013 by Dr. Gary Millar, entitled: “A Biblical Theology of Mission: An Evaluation of Chris Wright”

⁴ Kevin DeYoung & Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making sense of social justice, shalom, and the Great Commission*. Crossway, 2011.

⁵ John R. W. Stott, *Christian mission in the modern world*. (London: Falcon, 1975), 29.





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Canticle

Pergamum

Revelation 2:12-17

1. These are the words of him who has the sharp - ened two - edged sword: "I
2. "Yet this I have as my com - plaint: You have there 'Ba-laams's' friends who
3. "Let him who has an ear give ear and lis - ten to the word. The

know you live where Sa - tan reigns, and yet you serve the Lord. Though
in - fil - trate my chos - en church and world - li - ness de - fend. They
Spir - it speaks to ev - ery church: Pay heed un - to the Lord! To

days were hard and life ex - treme with Chris - tians put to death, you
coun - sel you to com - pro - mise and live a - gainst my word. Re -
him who o - ver - comes I give the bread of an - cient fame. I

kept the faith and ho - noured me with ev - ery fad - ing breath.
pent, there - fore, or I will come with my de - stroy - ing sword.
al - so give a smooth white stone in - scribed with his new name."

Text: Revelation 2: 12-17; vers. George Ph. van Popta, © 2012
Tune: Henry Hiles, 1867

ST. LEONARD
CMD



We Will Glorify

Eben-Ezer Christian School – Chatham is in a small community amongst an enthusiastic, supportive atmosphere, who would like to fill the position of Principal/Teacher, the Lord willing.

“We Will Glorify!” has been sung so many times over the last forty years for various Christmas or Easter Programs at Eben-Ezer Christian School Chatham that it seemed to be our “signature song” – therefore very fitting to use, as our theme for a wonderful celebration. We have been blessed to teach our covenantal children over the last forty years when Eben-Ezer Christian School Chatham first opened its doors in 1973.

Eben-Ezer Christian School Chatham hosted over 250 people over the course of an evening on Saturday, June 1, serving up a pig roast with all the trimmings and hot dogs for the kids (big kids too) provided by our PTA! All were able to tour the school and see the many wonderful changes and remember with fondness those things that remained the same. Four generations were able to enjoy the festivities as there were activities for the children hosted by some of our senior students and young peoples, while some of the older alumni and their families just wanted to chat and catch up. God was so good to us he even stayed off the impending rain!

While some joined us later in the evening and some had to leave after dinner, we were treated to an evening of celebration by former alumni and current students. Our Masters of Ceremony, Doug Beintema (class of '90) and Gerald Hutten (class of '93), opened the evening with prayer and reading of Psalm 86:8-12. We focused on verse 12, “I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your Name forever.” Our MCs were the perfect choice and on point with their humour as they introduced various gifts and talents from alumni spanning from the graduating class of 1976 to the current students today.



“Flash mob” - some alumni and a few current students singing “Thy Word Is A Lamp Unto My Feet”

We were treated to musical talents, a skit highlighting the history of Eben-Ezer, reminiscing with former students, as well as calling up hand picked couples who had young babies or “baby bumps” as the sample of the *future* of Eben-Ezer. These parents or parents-to-be received a little T-shirt for their little ones stating “Eben-Ezer Christian School graduating class of 2027. “. . .Also current students of Eben-Ezer Christian School Chatham were asked, voluntarily, to state in just a few sentences “Why Christian Education Is Important.” Four of these students were picked to read their statements at the program, which summed up beautifully, from their young hearts, answers to that question. I think I can safely say one of the highlights of the night was that of a “flash mob.” In the program the title read “Miss Niewold’s Favourite Song.” This did not mean much to most in the audience, but it did to some of the former students. Former alumni Stephen DeBoer (class of '99) came up and said a few words to introduce the song. He quoted Psalm 119:105 “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.” He then said, “It is the concept that if you



(From left) Mike Veenema (with daughter Amelia), Rick and Rachelle Holsappel (w/ daughter Kaylee) and baby bump, next Natasha and Mike Vanderveen (w/ newborn daughter Emma) – a sample of the future of Eben-Ezer Christian School

stay faithful to God's Word you will be able to achieve *service to God*, that's what Eben-Ezer Christian School – Chatham did for me and everyone here. A school that remained faithful to the Word that has provided that lamp for us." With that he started to play the song "Thy Word Is A Lamp Unto My Feet and a Light Unto My Path." After playing it through once – one former student, Bradley Vandergaag (class of 2011), stood up alone in the middle of the audience and started to sing the first two lines of the song; he was then joined by two more alumni students in the audience and then four more alumni and a few more alumni and so on, until the current grades 5-8 joined in for the last verse. A very surprised audience did not know what was happening, but I was told that many had tears or goose bumps from this performance because it was heartfelt by our youth. The lyrics were very appropriate for the night.

Our school theme this year was "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil 2:4). With this theme in mind, we felt it appropriate to have a collection in the evening that would benefit not ourselves, but a cause near and dear to the hearts of our students as this year they were able to donate, create, and put up a billboard sign for the Right To Life on a local highway as well as participate (senior students) in the March for Life – Ottawa in May. With this collection, we were able to give our local Right To Life – Kent over \$580.00!

Finally, as the Chairman of the Board, Rob Vanderveen, said a few words and closed the evening, the current

Eben-Ezer students came up to sing their "signature" song – "We Will Glorify!" It was very moving for the last verse as the students lined themselves in the aisles and the audience was asked to join in. We pray our voices were music to his ears as our King of kings.

After our program ended we were treated again by our PTA for coffee, cake, and wonderful fellowship. We have felt the blessings for forty years here at Eben-Ezer Christian School in Chatham with the evidence of wonderful staff, supportive parents and members, and eager to learn students! We pray for continued blessings for many years to come. Our little school stepped up to the challenge because "Eben-Ezer ... Thus far has the Lord helped us" (1 Sam 7:12).

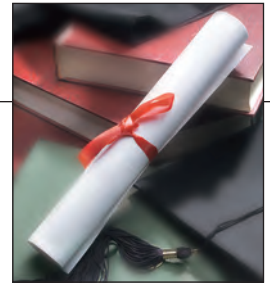
Did I mention that we are looking for a Principal/Teacher?



(From left) Current students Amanda Baker, Dylan Heyink, Tori-Beth Beintema, and Alex deBoer portraying some original students from the past in a skit – Recognize any names?



At the BBQ – Teresa Bergsma chatting with former student Sara Lyn Low with original student Anita (Koster) Bos and Bep Ravensbergen looking on.



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Hey, What Are You Reading?

If novels came with ratings on them like movies do, then life for the Christian parent would be so much easier. It would be easier for the twelve-year-old son or daughter too. He or she would simply not buy it if it had a 14A or an R rating. The parent could simply say: G-rated novels you can choose and read on your own; PG novels are novels that you may read if I read them too and if we then talk about them. The 14A, 18A, and the R-rated novels you may not read. To the fifteen-year-old daughter, the parent could say: Since you are old enough, you can read any 14A novel without my knowledge; but you may not read any 18A or R-rated novels. Rating novels sounds like a simple, workable solution, but is it a real solution? Most Christian parents will realize that parental responsibility extends beyond the accepted Canadian movie ratings. The very fact that novels are not rated may actually be a good thing for Christian parents. Without this rating system, parents need to talk to the child about the novels which they are reading. That talk is good; it's a necessity. Christian parents must take a serious and active role in guiding their children in reading novels.

Many sons may not want to read novels, but they should. They should visit worlds beyond their personal experiences so that they grow in understanding of their own culture or of other cultures. They need to see how others struggle with good and evil, how conflicts or issues in society can break one down, how individuals need the surrounding love of friends or a community to build them up, or how people in this life who live without the gospel struggle, grope, cry out with none to provide real peace. The son or daughter who loves to read will learn the effects of a previous government's philosophy, will gain a deep insight into the hardships of war, of rebellion, of slavery, of being a Jew, of being bullied, or of experiencing a life-changing illness. That son or daughter can also read about pioneers who succeeded and of those who didn't, about the realities of medieval life, about the need to sacrifice during times of recession

or depression, about the mental struggles of a soldier in battles or as a veteran, and about a budding love relationship that blossoms into marriage, into family building, and into real-life issues. So many worlds can open up to the son or daughter that parents can become scared. Parents can fear ill effects. Parents can become overwhelmed. Parents can then easily over react.

Parents must be active readers

Over-reaction to the literature that a son or daughter reads often stems from a lack of parents' pro-action. Concurrently, over-reaction to their choice of literature can also stem from a lack of parents preparing themselves for this stage and for their tasks in this stage. Christian parents should prepare themselves so that they feel and are capable to guide their children in the reading process. The father should go beyond Louis L'Armour, Clive Cussler, and Zane Grey; the mother should read books beyond those published by Bethany House or Tyndale Press. Mom and dad should read literature that their son or daughter will likely read before he or she gets to them. Parents must be active readers. They should read a variety of genres too. The more they read, the more they will feel prepared to guide their children in their growth of reading.

Worldview

The task of guiding children in their reading starts earlier than checking which books the tween or teen is reading. It begins even before the parents read with their three-year-old child on the sofa or on his bed. It involves establishing a solid Christian or Reformed worldview in the family. That worldview must be developed between husband and wife. That worldview is obviously different from the present post-modern anything-goes view, from the gospel of individualism, or from the escapism into

nirvanas, spiritualisms, drugs, occult, or other religions. The Christian worldview is a positive one, one that explains troubles, brokenness in life, the heart of darkness, the joys of light, the place of mankind in this world, the reasons for different cultures in this world, and the hardships that Christians may face in this present world. It invokes the need for humble obedience, for authority, and for redemption, not in a saviour of this world, but in the one and only Saviour. It kindles disgust for sinful behaviours of man. It provides the basis for discussions about literature. It stimulates growth in faith. A husband and wife would develop this worldview as they study God's Word together,

Children need knowledgeable parents, parents who are steeped in Scripture, who can model reading, and who can incite meaningful discussions about the readings

but also as they discuss the novels that they read. They should discuss why the novel was a good read, what the message is, whether or not the author provides a message fitting with Scripture or with a Christian world view. Doing this regularly will provide context for the soon-to-be teen who will be reading along-side mom and dad. And if dad is not a reader, he should still listen and dialogue with his wife about the books she reads. And if both parents aren't readers, they really should put away excuses – we all have them – and urge each other to read. At first it will be difficult, but the enjoyment will come. Children need knowledgeable parents, parents who are steeped in Scripture, who can model reading, and who can incite meaningful discussions about the readings.

Choosing books to read

Like the watching of movies, the reading of novels is a serious business. It is not simple entertainment. Choosing a good novel may be difficult enough. Judging a book by its cover isn't good enough. Covers are designed and written to sell the book. Looking for an author's name may be a good way to begin, but an author may differ from his earlier to his later novels. Using the best-sellers' list is also not the best criterion, since the best-seller list is often influenced or generated by media. So how do parents choose novels?



Parents should firstly admit that they will pick up a novel because of the cover, the write-up on the back cover, because of the intriguing title, because they know the author, or because someone (not necessarily in their church) recommended it. Perhaps they recently read a praising review of it. Although we are Reformed Christians, we still choose novels according to much the same criteria that our non-Christian neighbours use. We too may lean against a shelf in Chapters or in Coles and sample a few pages just to see if it intrigues or if the language is aesthetically sound. Once we have selected and purchased the novel, or once we have taken it out of our local library, we unlock its secret world as we nestle into our recliner and read. If parents pick up novels in this manner, so will the emerging readers.

Careful reading

Choosing the novel, however, is not the most difficult for parents. More important is the watchful and careful reading of it. In their book, *Literature through the Eyes of Faith*, Susan Gallagher and Roger Lundin acknowledge that to answer the question, "How am I supposed to read this book?" is not any simpler than to answer the question, "How am I to love my neighbour?" There is no magic formula; we learn to read novels "through experience, through triumph and struggle." On the one hand, we read for enjoyment. We enjoy the beautiful language, the believable characters, the complexity of plot, and the revelations of vistas yet unknown. On the other hand, we evaluate what we are reading with eyes of Scripture. Is

the author endorsing a Christian worldview where sin and evil are truly and properly portrayed as sin and evil, and where good as the Bible speaks of it, is portrayed as good? Does the novelist call her readers to endorse unchristian lifestyles? Peter Leithart, in the book *The Christian Imagination, Revised and Expanded Edition*, suggests that parents ask themselves questions while reading or after they have read the novel, questions like: Do I wish to submit to this author? Is the pattern of desire that this book encourages healthy or unhealthy? Does the writer present models that may be imitated or negative models as warnings? Will my involvement with the world and its Creator be enriched by seeing the world as the author wishes me to see it? By asking and by dialoguing about these big questions, parents are practising Christian discernment. By doing this regularly with each other and with their grade-school children, parents are teaching their budding teens to read critically, thinkingly, and Christianly.

***There is no magic formula;
we learn to read novels "through experience,
through triumph and struggle."***

A parent and a teen should have the courage to put away a novel that is trash. Dr. Deanna Smid, an English professor at Redeemer, would rather use the word *obscene*. What makes a novel obscene? She provides a complex answer (I hope that I paraphrase her accurately): Firstly, a poorly written book is obscene. If the language is stilted, if the dialogue is unnatural, if the characters are undeveloped caricatures, or if the novel is preachy, overly sentimental, or sensational, the novel is obscene. Secondly, a novel can also be obscene not because it depicts sin, but because it depicts human sin in order to encourage the human practice of it. Thirdly, it can be obscene not because of an occasional crude word, but because it uses profanities and blasphemies as normal or proper speech for man, especially when he is angry or shocked. Trashy or obscene novels should have no places in our Christian homes.

Conclusion

Especially in the Christian community, parents should do all they can to promote reading. Since Christians are disciples of the Word, reading should have a

major priority in our homes. Bibles should be open books in our homes, not dust collectors. Quality magazines should be lying beside the living room chairs or couch. Children's literature and novels should be available at all times. Even though a Christian home cannot have all "safe" books, it can and should have a safe atmosphere in which to read books. That safety is developed by providing children and teens with good novels. It is developed by providing them with an open, trusting relationship in which novels are discussed. Talking about what was good in the novel or what wasn't good would be a good place to start. Discernment is developed in homes where parents and kids openly dialogue about a Christian worldview and how the novel that they read builds or breaks down that worldview.

Having rated literature is not the way to go. Having a perfectly censored and safe library where kids can simply read with their minds turned off is not the way to go either. Having electronic gadgets in living rooms, family rooms, and even in bedrooms (I certainly hope not) is not the way to go either. Having non-electronic rooms, having non-electronic times, having comfortable places to sit, having opportunities to dialogue are all ways to go. Searching for and enjoying the beauty of a well written piece of literature is the way to go.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Arthur Kingma akingma@echs.ca

C



Re: *Lonely Singles*

The story under Readers Forum (Vol. 62, No. 12: June 14, 2013) indicates to be about being single or being alone, without a partner. It soon becomes clear, however, that it is more about feelings of loneliness that are expected to disappear with “someone special in your life.” This story is followed up with positive words of advice and encouragement, but will the feelings of loneliness stop?

Ups and downs in feelings and concerns about what others may think can easily be understood. Just recall your own teen years of doubts, unless you have erased them as too difficult to face. Feeling lonely in a crowd often results in withdrawal and in being alone, which further compounds the issue. The reason is that a feeling is purely subjective and not a reasonable, realistic fact. Generally speaking, negative feelings cause negative actions which in turn result in negative feelings. On the other hand, positive actions cause positive feelings which in turn stimulate positive actions. Therefore, to feel better means to act in a positive way. In other words, to stop negative feelings and to stop negative behaviour means to get involved in positive actions.

Loneliness can easily partner with boredom and idleness. These quickly wear down the defenses against sin, Satan, and self. “Idleness is (indeed) the devil’s workshop.” Being alone, lonely and inactive often appears to be more comfortable than fighting natural urges of feeling sorry for oneself. The ultimate comfort, however, is to acknowledge that one belongs with body and soul to the faithful Saviour Jesus Christ and not to the self. He gave us the Comforter to make each one of us share in Christ, in his suffering and resurrection, as well as in all his benefits and gifts. It is Christ-in-us that makes us able to do whatever it takes to deal with what we are faced with. Scripture shows that Christ is in us, and by the Spirit of God we are sons of God and more than conquerors (Rom 8).

One of Christ’s benefits the Holy Spirit shares with us is the church. As a mature member of Christ’s community can a believer ever be alone? Having been chosen and

placed by him in the community of saints means not only that all do jointly “have communion with him and share in all his treasures and gifts,” but also that “everyone is duty-bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit and well-being of the other members” (LD 21 and text references).



Based on experience I like to add this concrete advice for lonely singles: get involved in that community, do your God given duty and participate in everything, whether it suits you or not. You’ll be surprised that in due time, when you least expect it, God will put your life partner on your way, if that is his will. That partner is only “special” because it is God who brings you together. So in trust be prepared to serve and to learn to be committed to each other, for what God brings together cannot be severed. Therefore, rather than looking inward, reach out not only in prayer but in your daily activities among God’s people. For example, be involved in not only young men or women Bible study societies, but take a friend along and be guests at men or women societies as well. Help out in other activities such as building construction, renovations, or cleaning as well organizing sport activities or congregational picnics. Above all, don’t say that this or that is not your kind of thing. Create new habits, get out of your comfort zone and drop your facade. Dare to be who and what you are, a convinced believer in Christ’s comfort zone who takes responsibility for the consequences of all actions, good or bad. Reformed people believe in change, forgiveness, and renewal. They repent daily and they renew their faith every week. If necessary, a clean start without biases in another congregation may be helpful. Remember, “The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it” (1 Thess 5:24). Not you. So be active, ready, and alert.

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*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.
Submissions need to be less than one page in length.*