

Christian dating (and defining) in the digital age

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October 16, 2013

[Christian Mingle](#) wants to help God help you. The dating site's motto comes from Psalm 37: "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart."

Christian Mingle reflects a move from broad dating pools like Match.com to niche markets of personal preferences and identities. Christian Mingle's goal is to help singles "make new friends or to find a life-partner that shares similar values, traditions and beliefs." My guess is that more log in for the latter.

One way to consider Christian Mingle historically is to look at how American rationales for marriage have changed over time. There was an age when economic considerations dominated Christian marriage. Farms needed hard-working women who could bear lots of children. Then there was the rise of marriage for love. Alongside a rising middle class, [Henry Ward Beecher preached](#) that "the great doctrine of love ... is declared to be the heart and substance of Christianity." For many, love morphed into the defining feature of both marriage and faith. In the 20th century, those who switched from the King James to another Bible translation found that love had even replaced "charity" in 1 Corinthians 13, the now-called "love chapter."

Another way to think about Christian Mingle is through consumer culture. For only \$29.99 a month (or \$13.99 with a six-month "commitment"), one can find a sweet friend for Saturday night who will then join you Sunday morning to praise the sweet savior. American Christians have not always folded their faith into capitalism so seamlessly. There was a time when evangelicals opposed the theater and pushed for businesses to be closed on Sundays. But then there were Gilded Age Christian merchants like [John Wanamaker](#) who built urban department stores and placed Christian art in them during the holiday seasons. Now we have In-N-Out Burger, which gives you a side of Bible verses whether you order the meal deal or not.

And then there is who and what Christian Mingle defines as *Christian*. The history of who is Christian (or the right kind of Christian) is long and complex. It has often included issues of doctrine and culture. It has also involved how individuals form corporate and composite bodies (whether in civil societies, churches or procreated bodies of babies).

British Puritans and Separatists who ventured to colonial North America did so in part because they did not consider the Church of England genuinely Christian. Then in the 19th century, a series of “evangelical” alliances arose in which various Protestants tried to work together for missions and to combat Catholics and Unitarians. In the 20th century, fundamentalists created a doctrinal list of what defined the faith; after World War II it was being “born again” that took priority. While it was never illegal for a fundamentalist to marry a modernist, the devout certainly frowned upon it.

Christian Mingle offers another window into how some define Christianity today. The website’s “Statement of Christian Faith” declares that “the basis of our faith is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Lord and Savior of the world and God’s written Word, the Bible.” Of Jesus, they believe in his “deity... His virgin birth, His sinless life, His miracles read more.” The last two words link to a page with several more paragraphs, touching on biblical inspiration and once again the virgin birth.

Christian Mingle defines Christianity in other ways as well. You can join as either “a man seeking a woman” or “a woman seeking a man.” Then this gated heterosexual community asks a series of questions to identify its users: first height, eye and hair color, ethnicity, education and occupation; then questions about smoking, drinking, marital status (“married” is not an option) and children now and hoped for.

It is not until question 10 that any religious particularities come up. Categories include “Presbyterian” and “Catholic,” “Apostolic” and “Seventh-Day Adventist,” “Southern Baptist” and “Baptist.” Those left out include Mennonites, Rastafarians and Mormons. (Though the site’s parent company, Spark Networks, also owns similar sites aimed at Latter-day Saints.)

All these declarations and categories add up to a Christian community that is heterosexual, concerned with social behaviors, and indebted to aspects of fundamentalism that join well with conservative Catholicism.

Who establishes the parameters of Christianity? We tend to focus on outspoken church leaders, media outlets and politicians. But sites like Christian Mingle do this as well. They are important not only for how they merge faith with other social forces and factors, but also for how they connect bodies to other bodies—bodies from which American churches are made.

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