



Hurstville 1905
New Church



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society June/July 2026

What Is Religion?

Rev. HyunJin Yang

“Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard...” (Exodus 2:23-24)

A Christian's Crisis in the Workplace

Few years ago, one of the church members back in South Korea talked to me about challenges that he often faced as a Christian in his workplace. I offer his story here as a small window into what it means to live a faithful and distinctive Christian life out in the world.

The gentleman's story was this: he tried to live honestly and righteously as best as he could do according to his devoted faith to the New Church, but there were times when his genuine endeavour was mistaken by others especially at his workplace as simply trying to appear righteous and morally superior to others. When he was trying to live out his life of faith in Christian virtues such as integrity, it came off to others as mere posturing.

Moreover, he realized his work life could become much harder if his coworkers collectively perceived him as acting morally superior to them. He spoke to me about spiritual dilemmas that his seniors at the company might force him into, for example, by telling him, 'Just do and act as we ask, and don't go by what you believe to be 'your good, religious conscience.' As I listened to him, it was clear that his concerns were all too real. And yet, he was still committed to the way that he believed he ought to live in his good faith.

The Meaning of the Word Religion

It may be rather a big turn, but my conversation with him made me wonder: *"What is religion? What is it about religion (beginning with regarding Christianity as religion) that holds its people in such determination, even when they face with what is obviously unfair, or something we can call 'a persecution' on their faith?"*

I started pondering: “What is religion?” “What does religion even mean? So, I looked into the etymology of the word ‘religion’ in Latin. Here is what I’ve found among a couple of different explanations: The English word religion comes from the Latin word *religio*. The prefix *re* means “again”, and *ligo* or *ligare* means “to bind” or “to connect.” Putting them together, religion originally carries the idea of “reconnecting again” or “binding again.”

This inevitably leads us to the next question: “then, who is the One that we are to be reconnected with again? The answer is pretty obvious. Isn’t it? It is God, the Lord Himself.

Meantime, defining religion as a process of “binding us back to God” also opens up another aspect for perspective: “what do then we turn around from to reconnect with the Lord?” Religion in its root meaning presupposes an idea that there is something that we must turn around from, since it suggests an idea of “turning back” to the Lord. If we were to delve into this question, the problem of sin would enter the picture. It would be enlightening just to consider the etymology of the word *sin*, as well.

Stories of Reconnecting with the Lord

But here, I would like us to stay focused on the idea of reconnecting with the Lord. Let’s turn to a few stories from the Word that align closely with this theme. In these stories, the people find themselves in great—and often desperate—need of turning back to enter into a renewed relationship with Him. In the parable known as the Prodigal Son, for instance, we read:

“I perish with hunger!” (Luke 15:17 NKJV).

This may directly speak for times like when we stand alone and raw with our short-sightedness, weakness, and even mortality. At other times, it represents us when we suddenly awake to a deeper sense of our sin or ignorance in which we have been immersed but now desperately wish to escape. It is in these moments that we find ourselves longing for a deeper spiritual reality from within and realizing that we do so by turning back to the Lord and entrusting ourselves to His lead. And this is wonderfully captured in the following words of the Prodigal Son as follows:

“I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.” (Luke 15:18 NKJV).

As we are well acquainted with how the parable ends, the son is warmly welcomed back into the father’s house. There, it becomes clearer that its theme is about our reconnecting with the Lord.

This also echoes back with a story of the children of Israel in their affliction under slavery in Egypt. We read in Exodus 2:23, 24:

“Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning...”

Their cry—born from a painful awareness of what their lives could have been instead of the suffering—suggests their regret and an acknowledgement of the need for change. Here we may see its great semblance with the Prodigal Son’s cry: “I perish with hunger!” and with how it precedes his reunion with the father.

It is same for the children of Israel: Their outcry in suffering and in a state of awareness marks the beginning of a whole new journey of their life which gradually unfolds as they are led out of the land toward Canaan, the promised land. As a whole, the story depicts their entering into a renewed relationship with the Lord. It wonderfully embodies what it means to connect with the Lord again.

The Force of Binding Us again with the Lord

No doubt that the reunion of people with the Lord or the restoration of that relationship is one of the most central themes running through the Word. This theme is essentially embedded in the word *religion* itself, rooted in the Latin word, *religio*, combining *re-* (again), and *ligare* (to bind or to connect), as discussed.

An important reminder, though, is that behind all of this work is the Lord. Looking through the two stories above may strike us into thinking that it is our cry and our endeavour that initiate the work of binding us back to the Lord, accomplishing what religion is about. Reflecting the Korean parishioner's workplace crisis and asking, "*What is it about religion that hold its people in determination in the face of challenges?*" can leave us with the same impression. That is, it can appear as though our reaching out, our cry in suffering, and our daily struggle to live a distinctively Christian life are what makes 'religion' possible.

While it will always be our part to desire to know the Lord's truths and endeavour to live by them daily, the truth behind every aspect of this spiritual work is the Lord Himself. We read this powerful statement in *True Christian Religion* n. 142:

The divine power and activity meant by the Holy Spirit are generally speaking, reformation and regeneration, which lead to renewal, quickening, sanctification and justification. And these lead to purification from evils and the forgiveness of sins, and ultimately salvation.

This is the series of virtues which the Lord produces in those who believe in Him, adapting and making themselves suitable for Him to be received and dwell in them. This is done by means of the Divine truth, and in the case of Christians by the Word; for this is the one and only means which allows a person to approach the Lord, and allows the Lord to come in to the person.

Consider the continuous endeavour overflowing into our minds, that enlightens us and lift our thoughts. Consider that inner force—or love whose source is often so hard to explain—which prompts us to resist and endure through hardships and what we may call persecution. What else can we think of these except that these are from the Lord, and these are the inner force flowing from the Lord that is not ours to begin with but given to us in our mutual effort of inviting and trusting the Lord and the power of His truths.

Isn't that what we mean by religion and Christianity as our faith and religion?

P.S. I recently preached on the topic of “Christianity as Religion”, where I also emphasize on what makes Christianity special and unique as religion. You can tune into watching it here: <https://youtube.com/live/HLQJFSd8BPg>

Highlights of the Month (New Church Day Service June 21st)

This year's New Church Day theme was, 'With God, we are capable,' with the children's talk on 'God wants you to be able.'

In this service, we reflected on our partnership with the Lord as the central message for the New Church. We acknowledged that any idea diminishing our vision of walking with the Lord as the heart of our Christian life—any idea damaging the truth that we walk with God, and that with God we are capable—is a threat to our spiritual life.

We questioned whether thoughts like these ever crop up in our minds: 'I would rather let God work it out for me,' or 'I would rather just settle for 'God is good all the time.' While these appear to be easy, convenient remedies,

we asked: "do they really make us strong?" "Do they actually work when we find ourselves in the most challenging times?"



Potluck Lunch

A congregation of 19 people joined potluck lunch, following the service. As always, we had a plenty of food, desserts, and refreshments.

The Red Dragon Reenacted

We will anonymously agree that the best moment at the luncheon was when the seven headed, red dragon raided in the Richard Morse Room and ran down the feast (not really!). It was Michell and Angela, along with their kids, who pulled off the surprise in the red-dragon costume that their mother, Margaret Heldon, crafted thirty years ago (1997!)

It was unplanned, making it more delightful to witness.



It is just great that our gathering for spiritual food and its appreciation was followed by a great feast of food and fellowship.



What's Coming Up Beyond Our Regular Services?

Married Love [Conjugal Love] Monthly Reading Group, Beginning in July

It is exciting to announce that we will begin a brand-new, monthly reading group on *Married Love*, traditionally known as *Conjugal Love* in July. The basic format of the reading group will be simple: individually read each month's reading and meet (either in person or virtually) once a month to discuss it. We will meet during the last week of the month with the exact date and time to be announced soon.

It is important to note that this reading group is not just for married couples! Everyone is invited, married or single. If you are not quite sure of what to expect, you can visit the link below. The link provides a basic introduction to the idea of married love and includes a collection of useful articles related to the topic.

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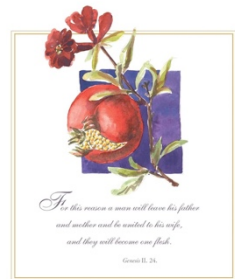
<https://newchurch.org/explore/relationships/marriage/>

If you like to be part of the reading group, please feel free to contact HyunJin at pastor@hurstvillenewchurch.com or call him.

What Is *Married Love*, by the way?

Married Love is one of the Writings for the New Church, which is dedicated to exploring the spiritual origin of truly married love. The book invites us to see, for example, how a husband and a wife become more deeply united as they both turn to the Lord together, and how their mutual commitment can gradually transform their marriage into a truly married love.

Married Love



EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

We are also told that in the heart of this love lies “innocence, peace, tranquility, inmost friendship, complete trust, a mutual desire of the mind and heart to do the other every good” (ML 180).

The book also discusses various challenges to true married love and offers practical and spiritual insights for nurturing a lasting, joyful marriage.

Newchurchbooks.com offers the description of the book as follows:

The idea that marriage is forever is a familiar one. For centuries it has been written about in poems and sung about in songs. Married partners who have tenderly loved one another intuitively know that the same God who brought them together will keep them together—forever.

And yet, in a world filled with confusing messages about romance, love, and sex, the promise of a fulfilling marriage that will last forever seems to be more of a romantic dream than a spiritual reality.

Nevertheless, this dream is real. And it is available to each of us—in this moment—to the extent that we strive to keep the commandments.

Quarterly Doctrinal Class (2nd Thursday of Every Three Month)

Starting July, our doctrinal classes are moving from monthly to quarterly to make room for a new monthly reading group. That means, the next class after the July class will be in October.

For this month's class, we will take some words such as “water,” “bread,” and “darkness” that are often used in the Word and explore how they speak to or corresponds to a deeper spiritual reality. Imagine reading these words simply literally alone every time it appears in the Word. It would not make any sense for our spiritual life.

For those who attended last month, it will be another opportunity to build on our previous discussion about how Scripture speaks most often through apparent truths and, at times, naked truths.

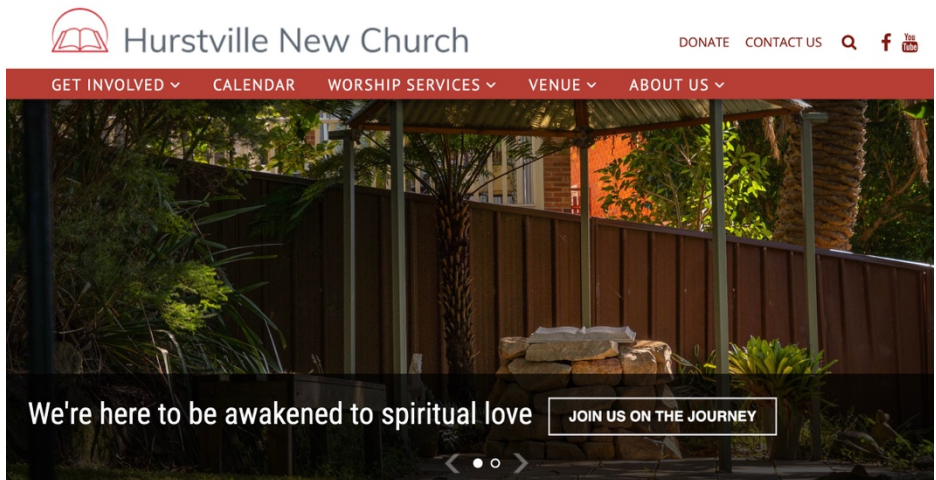
The class takes place at Baringa at 11:00 a.m., followed by BYO lunch.

Donations to Kogarah Storehouse

We are now collecting donations to the Kogarah Storehouse until mid-July. Items for collection are 1) canned and boxed food items, 2) non-perishable snacks, cereals, and grains, 3) Toiletries. Small or big, little or large, it will make a difference for those in need of those!

Society News

Hurstville New Church Website Refresh



Hurstville New Church website refresh has now been completed.

The image above is a snapshot of the homepage and shows what visitors will see when they first arrive at the site.

Our church website URL has not changed. It is still same: hurstvillenewchurch.com

Also, anyone trying to access the website through alternative addresses such as hurstvillenewchurch.com.au, hurstvillenewchurch.org.au, and hurstvillenewchurch.org, will be automatically redirected to the main domain name, hurstvillenewchurch.com.

The website looks a lot alike other General Church websites, but it has been further developed and streamlined in two goals in mind: be simple and optimize user-friendly experience for visitors (meaning don't overload people with too much information).

HyunJin, Dylan Johnson, and Murray Heldon were on the development team, Dylan being the main developer. Dylan incorporated a range of design features that make the website easy and intuitive to navigate for visitors. This becomes more impressive considering the limitations and constraints under which he had to develop the site. He himself also took many of the photographs that now serve as the face of the website.

Overall, the website has come together wonderfully. If you have a chance, please take a look. You can also find links to our social media pages, including Facebook and YouTube, right on the homepage.

Pastor's Travel Report

Canberra Visit (May 7)

I visited Heulwen and Barrie Ridgway on May 7 in Canberra, which was my first visit since August last year. Jennifer, an old friend of Rev. Roslyn Taylor, joined us.

We had a formal service, including the Holy Supper at a small chapel (see an image below). It was a lovely, an hour-long worship service.

Lunch at the cafeteria followed, where we caught up on various subjects and enjoyed getting to know Jennifer, who joined us for the day. Look forward to my next visit in the second half of the year!



The Asian/Australian Clergy Meetings in Tokyo

The regional clergy meetings this year took place in Tokyo, Japan, on May 12-14.

On the first day, we arrived at the hotel and spent the rest of the day like an orientation session, catching up or getting acquainted.

The second day and the third day were the meetings, and the next day was a local sight-seeing day for those who could stay on.

We had ministers from five different countries: the United States, South Korea, Japan, Australia, and China. A language barrier was expected between four different language speaking ministers—English, Japanese, Korean, and Chinese. But it was just amazing to see how we made it all work. Some used translators on their mobile phones; some translated for others. Most importantly, we tried to be understanding. No one rushed another or jumped in out of frustration. We just worked together to work it out.



Birthdays!

Happy Birthday to July: James Kermond, Babbette Horner and Danita Horner

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