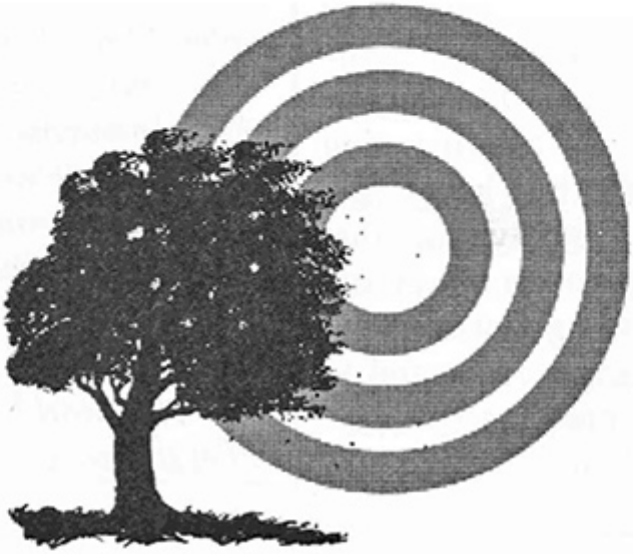
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"When the wind blows, you hear the rustle of the leaves, but you do not see the wind--whence it comes or whither it goes--and so it is with everyone born of the spirit. With the eyes of the flesh you can behold the manifestations of the spirit, but you cannot actually discern the spirit."

The Urantia Papers, 1602

REPRINT

"The Inner Life Challenge"

by JOAN BATSON MULLINS

The Inner Life Challenge

by Joan Batson Mullins

Imagine you're about to embark on a much anticipated voyage. It's a glorious day and everything is in order. You unfurl the sails and are ready to get underway. But nothing happens. Your ship doesn't move forward. You wait, you drift around in circles, and you wait some more. There's something holding you in place: tethers submerged that must be hoisted up from the deep. This is one of the profound challenges of the inner life.

As more and more of us are looking to the inner life in order to "increasingly grow in the ability to *feel the presence of God*" [1733], we find that great spiritual minds have engaged in this quest long before the Urantia Papers. One of these was Francis Fenelon of the seventeenth century, who wrote a book entitled *The Inner Life*.

"If you really look into the state of things between God and your soul, you will find that there are certain limits beyond which you refuse to go in offering yourself to Him... We move continually in a vicious circle round self, only thinking of God in connection with ourselves, and making no progress in self-renunciation, lowering of pride or attaining simplicity. Why is it that the vessel does not make way? Is the wind wanting? No; The Spirit of Grace breathes on it, but the vessel is bound by invisible anchors in the depths of the sea. The fault is not God's, it is wholly ours. If we will search thoroughly, we shall soon see the hidden bonds which detain us. That point in which we least mistrust ourselves is precisely that which needs most distrust." *Spiritual Letters of Archbishop Fenelon.*

I find that this excerpt adds fresh insight into the following two passages in the Urantia Papers: "Mind is your ship, the Adjuster is your pilot, the human will is captain. The master of the mortal vessel should have the wisdom to trust the divine pilot to guide the ascending soul into the morontia harbors of eternal survival. Only by selfishness, slothfulness, and sinfulness can the will of man reject the guidance of such a loving pilot ..." [1217] "Almost every human being has some one thing which is held on to as a pet evil, and which the entrance into the kingdom of heaven requires as a part of the price of admission." [1802]

Perhaps we are anchored and we don't even know it. Could we be circling around a self-seeking desire? The rich man standing before the Master was confronted with his pet evil, a decision he wanted to avoid. Is this what happens when we try to free our ship and push forward to the great goal of human existence—to achieve communion with God within us? In order to free ourselves we must make decisions. "Man consciously grows from the material toward the spiritual by the strength, power, and persistency of his own decisions;..."[1282]

Perhaps we are anchored and we don't even know it. Could we be circling around a self-seeking desire?

"The success of your Adjuster in the enterprise of piloting you through the mortal life and bringing about your survival depends not so much on the theories of your beliefs as upon your decisions, determinations, and steadfast *faith*." [1205]

Is the Wind wanting?
Or is the fault wholly ours?

Before we examine the next quote from the Urantia Papers, keep in mind its uncommon use of the word "differential." One definition is as a "gear permitting the rotation of two shafts at different speeds, used on the rear axle of a car to allow different rates of wheel rotation on curves." Think of our choice/decision/determination acting as the differential that modulates the speed and amount of our human capacity to receive the limitless amount of God's spiritual presence that is always available.

"The determiner of the differential of spiritual presence exists in your own hearts and minds and consists in the manner of your own choosing, in the decisions of your minds, and in the determination of your own wills. This differential is inherent in the freewill reactions of intelligent personal beings, beings whom the Universal Father has ordained shall exercise this liberty of choosing. And the Deities are ever true to the ebb and flow of their spirits in meeting and satisfying the conditions and demands of this differential of creature choice, now bestowing more of their presence in response to a sincere desire for the same and again withdrawing

themselves from the scene as their creatures decide adversely in the exercise of their divinely bestowed freedom of choice. And thus does the spirit of divinity become humbly obedient to the choosing of the creatures of the realms." [150]

In other words, the more we increase our rate of choosing God's will, the more God rushes in to fill that desire. And the same is true in reverse: our insincerity restricting the free flow of God's presence. Therefore, it is our "freewill reactions" minute by minute, thought by thought, decision by decision, that determines our spiritual progress, stagnation, or regression.

"The fluctuations of the Father's presence are not due to the changeableness of God. The Father does not retire in seclusion because he has been slighted; his affections are not alienated because of the creature's wrongdoing. Rather, having been endowed with the power of choice (concerning Himself), his children, in the exercise of that choice, directly determine the degree and limitations of the Father's divine influence in their own hearts and souls. The Father has freely bestowed himself upon us without limit and without favor."[46]

I have found that some resentments—and ones I thought I had already forgiven—are like barnacles, they must be periodically powered-off with God's love and guidance.

Releasing the Invisible Anchors

So the Wind is not wanting, and we have some choices, decisions and determinations to make in order to get underway. One of our decisions may be to do a thorough search for the invisible anchors of our pet evil. Besides the obvious pet evils, Fenelon has suggested that we look at what we most trust in ourselves. I trust my forgiving nature, but when I honestly search my heart I find a cargo-hold of resentments. The Urantia Papers point out that "Your inability or unwillingness to forgive your fellows is the measure of your immaturity, your failure to attain adult sympathy, understanding, and love. You hold grudges and nurse vengefulness in direct proportion to your ignorance of the inner nature and true longings of your children and your fellow beings. Love is the outworking of the divine and inner urge of life. It is founded on understanding, nurtured by unselfish service, and perfected in wisdom." [1898]

We may need to search our hearts that we are not holding on to any resentments—that we have forgiven everyone, and then "maintain a conscience void of offense." [1736] I have found that some resentments—and ones I thought I had already forgiven—are like barnacles, they must be periodically powered-off with God's love and guidance.

"Jesus taught that sin is not the child of a defective nature but rather the offspring of a knowing mind dominated by an unsubmissive will. Regarding sin, he taught that God *has* forgiven; that we make such forgiveness personally available by the act of forgiving our fellows. When you forgive your brother in the flesh, you thereby create the capacity in your own soul for the reception of the reality of God's forgiveness of your own misdeeds." [1861]

Adventuring on the High Seas of Soul Struggle

Once we are out of the harbor, we enter into the high seas of soul struggle. Here is where we must learn not to resist the leading of Spirit, not to try to go our way, but God's way. Here is where many of us are stuck, constantly going off course choosing our own will, not trusting God, deciding by our own human nature, giving in to temptation, indulging in selfishness, laziness, immaturity, and emotional reactions. Here is where we learn the difference between wholehearted desire to do the will of God and our halfhearted efforts.

"Never forget there is only one adventure which is more satisfying and thrilling than the attempt to discover the will of the living God, and that is the supreme experience of honestly trying to do that divine will." [1732]

At some time, we may find ourselves surrounded by a dark night—where we lose our footing and tumble into the sea. As we're sinking into the lower depths of our human nature, if we but implore with a Godward glance, the Universe Mother Spirit will reach down into the isolating blackness and help us get back onboard.

"The religion of the spirit means effort, struggle, conflict, faith, determination, love,

loyalty, and progress.....Tradition is a safe refuge and an easy path for those fearful and halfhearted souls who instinctively shun the spirit struggles and mental uncertainties associated with those faith voyages of daring adventure out upon the high seas of unexplored truth in search for the farther shores of spiritual realities as they may be discovered by the progressive human mind and experienced by the evolving human soul."[1729]

On the high seas of soul struggle, we may often feel we have lost our bearings. A mist clouds our contact with our Pilot and it seems that we are separated and drifting. At these times: "The Father is not in spiritual hiding, but so many of his creatures have hidden themselves away in the mists of their own willful decisions and for the time being have separated themselves from the communion of his spirit and the spirit of his Son by the choosing of their own perverse ways and by the indulgence of the self-assertiveness of their intolerant minds and unspiritual natures." [64] At first glance we may dismiss this quote as not pertaining to us because of the word "perverse." But the word "perverse" is used several times in the Urantia Papers, let's look at a definition: "1. Directed away from what is right or good and 2. Obstinately persisting in an error or a fault; wrongly self-willed or stubborn." This sounds more like me. So now by the choosing of my own self-willed and stubborn ways, I separate myself from God in that moment since I am not choosing God's will.

Jesus said: "The will of God is the way of God, partnership with the choice of God in the face of any potential alternative. To do the will of God, therefore, is the progressive experience of becoming more and more like God, and God is the source and destiny of all that is good and beautiful and true." [1431]

How can I stay in partnership with my Pilot so that I can follow His directions to stay on course rather than making alternative choices based on my own self-seeking will? We sometimes drift a long time, praying that this is the way or that is the way, should we do this or that, wishing for some clear sign from our Pilot of what to do. The Urantia Papers offer these admonitions:

"How long will it take the world of believers to understand that prayer is not a process of getting your way but rather a program of taking God's way, an experience of learning how to recognize and execute the Father's will?" [1946] "You must not regard co-operation with your Adjuster as a particularly conscious process, for it is not; but your motives and your decisions, your faithful determinations and your supreme desires, do constitute real and effective co-operation." [1206]

Inner Life Communion

The inner life challenge is the continuous process of making spiritual decisions that will open the gateway to God consciousness. Do not imagine the inner life challenge is confronted and overcome in some dramatic breakthrough. The great battle is more often won or lost, day by day and minute by minute in the arena of the human mind. And it is here, in the *present moments* of our daily living, where we are most challenged in our inner lives.

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We have spiritual weapons to fight the good fight: prayer, meditation, worship, loving service, and living faith. These are not precisely defined or systematized in the Urantia Papers and so we are on our own to discover through our personal experience how to use these instruments to harmonize with Divinity.

Spiritually fragrant individuals have written about how they pray, meditate, serve, and worship. There are many methods and practices that are interesting to investigate. Some practices get you to a place of deep relaxation, some to a state of non-thinking oneness, some to a blissful feeling, and on and on. I have personally tried many such methods and occasionally use techniques for relaxing, quieting the mind, feeling positive, etc. However, keep in mind that these practices are but means to an end and not the end itself: personal communion with God.

Those of us who feel we do not have adequate knowledge of the best way to meditate, to serve, to worship, to discern God's will, to use our faith, or to control our wandering minds and emotions - who believe there may be some technique we're missing or something we haven't learned yet: Know that

we have all we need packed into our *desire*!

And what is your desire in this moment? Are you desiring God supremely—more than anything else? Do you trust all else will be added? Even in regard to your own thoughts, if you desire to share your inner life with God—God will teach you how. If you are willing, God will add his partnership to your thinking process. Sharing the inner life with God, unbroken communion, living faith, constant renewing of our mind—these ideas are held out to us and they become our ideals once we grasp for them. These spiritual ideals will take us to Paradise if we don't stop trying. But, make no mistake, what's required for success is our wholehearted desire. We must want to be in communion with God more than anything else. "Every sincere attempt meets with certain success." And this wholehearted desire will propel us to do what it takes: control our thoughts, have a pure mind, love our enemies, do God's will. In addition, we get so much celestial help because God desires us. "The Father desires all his creatures to be in personal communion with him." [63]

Even though we know that our contact with God within us is on the superconscious level, how often do we look for results or a pleasurable feeling of some kind. And when we don't feel changed, do we get discouraged and halfhearted—letting ourselves regress into material mindedness?

"Man does not achieve union with God as a drop of water might find unity with the ocean. Man attains divine union by progressive reciprocal spiritual communion, by personality intercourse with the personal God, by increasingly attaining the divine nature through wholehearted and intelligent conformity to the divine will. Such a sublime relationship can exist only between personalities." [31]

"The doing of the will of God is nothing more or less than an exhibition of creature willingness to share the inner life with God—with the very God who has made such a creature life of inner meaning-value possible." [1221]

These two quotes above are rich with truths to ponder, but let's just look at the aspect of God being a person we relate to, a teacher, parent, friend. The word reciprocal means an alternating back and forth, an interchange. Such a progressing personal relationship is a deepening, growing-more-closer communion; becoming more God-like by wisely, wholly conforming our human will to his divine will. By sharing with God what's going on in our inner life from where we are now to where we are spiritually striving, we stretch to do it—think it—God's way: the way of truth, beauty, goodness, and love; the way of Jesus.

Jesus taught friendship with God, as a friendship shared with a loving parent. A faith-based relationship with a partner who lives within your superconscious mind, yet who can become more divinely real to you than anyone you know, "the very Source of reality." "God is literally and eternally present in his universe of universes. He inhabits the present moment with all his absolute majesty and eternal greatness."[35] *God lives in the present, and is contactable in the present.* So if your mind is stuck regretting the past or worrying about the future, you won't be available for communion with God. Even if you are off whimsically reminiscing the past and gaily fantasizing about the future, unless it has spiritual value that you are meaningfully sharing with God, you're on your own in that moment. Perhaps that's one reason why the revelators say work is our greatest blessing; it's present time thinking when we are working, and something we can do in partnership with God. When we are on a nature walk it is easier to be in the present moment—sharing with God the beauty we are experiencing. We need to try to keep our thoughts in the *present*, connected to God. "It is forever true: The past is unchangeable; only the future can be changed by the ministry of the present creativity of the inner self." [1221]

Jesus said: "Did you ever sincerely endeavor to talk with the spirit of your own soul? Such a thing is indeed difficult and seldom yields consciousness of success; but every honest attempt of the material mind to communicate with its indwelling spirit meets with certain success, notwithstanding that the majority of all such magnificent human experiences must long remain as superconscious registrations in the souls of such God-knowing mortals." [1475]

Even though we know that our contact with

God within us is on the superconscious level, how often do we look for results or a pleasurable feeling of some kind. And when we don't feel changed, do we get discouraged and halfhearted—letting ourselves regress into material mindedness? Remember our spiritual growth is unconscious; have faith that it is effective.

"The divine spirit makes contact with mortal man, not by feelings or emotions, but in the realm of the highest and most spiritualized thinking. It is your *thoughts*, not your feelings, that lead you Godward. The divine nature may be perceived only with the eyes of the mind. But the mind that really discerns God, hears the indwelling Adjuster, is the pure mind. 'Without holiness no man may see the Lord.'All such inner and spiritual communion is termed spiritual insight. Such religious experiences result from the impress made upon the mind of man by the combined operations of the Adjuster and the Spirit of Truth as they function amid and upon the ideas, ideals, insights, and spirit strivings of the evolving sons of God." [1104]

There are those of us who feel we are overextended with the demands of life without a moment to spare. Again, our *desire* is all we need to make the time throughout the day for prayer and worship.

"One of the great troubles with modern life is that man thinks he is too busy to find time for spiritual meditation and religious devotion." [2077] "Believers must increasingly learn how to step aside from the rush of life—escape the harassments of material existence—while they refresh the soul, inspire the mind, and renew the spirit by worshipful communion." [1739]

What if you were to sit down right now and formulate an "idea-decision" to rework your daily schedule to find time for several short spiritual retreats throughout your day? These are the little bridges built into the day to help you return to God's way, in case you were getting caught up with the material side of life. "All nonreligious human activities seek to bend the universe to the distorting service of self;..." [67] Our commitment to keeping our appointed times for prayer and worship will be in proportion to the extent that we are convinced of their necessity and value in our quest for self-mastery. "Man can never wisely decide temporal issues or transcend the selfishness of personal interests unless he meditates in the presence of the sovereignty of God and reckons with the realities of divine meanings and spiritual values." [1093]

Prayer is desire for God. Try sprinkling the day with desire moments for God; raising our thoughts to God as often as possible. Desire for God's will. Desire for Jesus to live through us. Desire for spiritual insights. Desire to love God wholeheartedly. "... that man yearns for God that results in universe ascension." [1217]

Here are a few gem-passages on communion: "The ideal prayer is a form of spiritual communion which leads to intelligent worship. True praying is the sincere attitude of reaching heavenward for the attainment of your ideals." [1618] "Prayer...does so often dig out larger and deeper channels wherein the divine bestowals may flow to the hearts and souls of those who thus remember to maintain unbroken communion with their Maker through sincere prayer and true worship." [2066] Of Jesus: " The secret of his unparalleled religious life was this consciousness of the presence of God; and he attained it by intelligent prayer and sincere worship—unbroken communion with God—and not by leadings, voices, visions, or extraordinary religious practices." [2089] "Prayer led Jesus up to the supercommunion of his soul with the Supreme Rulers of the universe of universes. Prayer will lead the mortals of earth up to the communion of true worship." [1621]

"What if you were to sit down right now and formulate an "idea-decision" to rework your daily schedule to find time for several short spiritual retreats throughout your day? These are the little bridges built into the day to help you return to God's way ..."

The Loving Service Response

Unselfishly thinking of others' needs and serving them is a more effective path to communion with God than is meditation. "The contact of the mortal mind with its indwelling Adjuster, while often favored by devoted meditation, is more frequently facilitated by wholehearted and loving service in unselfish ministry to one's fellow creatures." [1000] Now we can better understand how Mother Teresa became a saint. Not that we

need to go to Calcutta, or even our nearest inner city (although we may be led to bring spiritual light to those in darkness there). Mother Teresa tells us that her spirituality grew from trying to love and serve each person as if they were Jesus in disguise. "Jesus often took his apostles away by themselves for short periods to engage in meditation and prayer, but for the most part he kept them in service-contact with the multitudes. The soul of man requires spiritual exercise as well as spiritual nourishment." [1000]

Some may be thinking that it would be easier to love and serve a sick person in obvious need than to love that narcissistic backstabbing coworker who engages in one-upmanship at every meeting. But what an opportunity to practice the loving service response! And what a spiritual exercise and an inner life challenge to respond to personal injury with love. It's a spiritual victory to be able to choose the Father's way of unconditional love as your attitude toward that coworker; returning indignities with a kind word and a sincere prayer for the errant child of God. Jesus inspired a watching universe with his loving and merciful intercession for the soldiers who were nailing his hands. When we swallow our pride and return evil with goodness, we follow Jesus in the loving service response that will change the world.

"Jesus portrayed conquest by sacrifice, the sacrifice of pride and selfishness. By showing mercy, he meant to portray spiritual deliverance from all grudges, grievances, anger, and the lust for selfish power and revenge. And when he said, 'Resist not evil,' he later explained that he did not mean to condone sin or to counsel fraternity with iniquity. He intended the more to teach forgiveness, to 'resist not evil treatment of one's personality, evil injury to one's feelings of personal dignity.'" [1590]

Even in the ordinary interactions of our daily lives, loving service is an ideal state of mind. From this mainspring we can attentively respond with effective devotion. The loving service response is other-directed, without seeking any reward, and that includes the reward of praise and the good opinion of others. It is subtle, but we've been issued that danger warning about pride, and we must keep our vigilance.

Loving service involves our duty to God the Supreme, which is one of action—unselfish love in action. "Love is the desire to do good to others." [648] Our duty to the Supreme is actually doing the love-work, carrying it out to completion and going that second mile, with no thought of recognition or even self-congratulations, but with a universe mindedness toward doing our part in furthering the realization of the Supreme—whose nature depends on our sistering/brothering of humankind.

Faith Connects us to the Power of God's Love

"Faith is the open door for entering into the present, perfect, and eternal love of God." [1545]

Faith plays an important role in our high seas drama of the challenge of the inner life. Faith is our sail; it is a gift from God. Faith makes it possible to connect to the power of God's love, and progress toward our spiritual destiny—to find God within and be like Him.

Even in the ordinary interactions of our daily lives, loving service is an ideal state of mind. From this mainspring we can attentively respond with effective devotion.

How is it possible to approach self-mastery, to love and serve unselfishly, to have a pure mind, to enjoy the peace of Jesus, to be led by the Spirit, to experience unbroken communion with God? ... Faith makes it possible. However, our faith potency too often lies dormant because we hardly use it. "Few persons live up to the faith which they really have."[556] Of the woman who simply touched Jesus's garment in order to be healed: "Her faith was of the sort that laid direct hold upon the creative power resident in the Master's person." [1698] Her faith connected her to the power of the love of God. And the Urantia Papers tell us that "Never before Jesus was on earth, nor since, has it been possible so directly and graphically to secure the results attendant upon the strong and living faith of mortal men and women... Likewise, today, while his absence prevents such material manifestations, you should refrain from placing any sort of limitation on the possible exhibition of his *spiritual power*." [1700] Said Jesus: "How long ere you learn that the works of faith come not forth at the bidding of doubting unbelief?"... "Question not my Father's power of love, only the sincerity and reach of your faith. All things are possible to him who really believes." [1757]

The reality and power of the love of God is there, we just need to unfurl our faith-sail to reach out for it. And when we do, we are promised that anything is possible. But we must hoist up our faith-sail high and full to make real headway in spiritual progress..."man's thoughts, wisdom, ethics, and ideals will never rise higher than his faith, his sublime hope. And all such true faith is predicated on profound reflection, sincere self-criticism, and uncompromising moral consciousness. Faith is the inspiration of the spiritized creative imagination." [1459]

Let's take a brief look at the teachings of Jesus in regards to faith and our inner life challenge of doing the will of God: "The kingdom of heaven consists in these three essentials: first, recognition of the fact of the sovereignty of God; second, belief in the truth of sonship with God; and third, faith in the effectiveness of the supreme human desire to do the will of God—to be like God. And this is the good news of the gospel: that by faith every mortal may have all these essentials of salvation." [1585] To me that third essential means: *Desire to do the will of God—more than you desire anything else — and have faith that it works!*

Jesus states that the gospel is both our desire to do God's will and the joy of realizing, on ever deepening levels of faith, what it means to be cherished by the Father: "... this gospel of the kingdom—the supreme desire to do the Father's will coupled with the supreme joy of the faith realization of sonship with God..." [1931] As we get better at trusting God and pausing to choose his will, we more closely follow Jesus' way of "...ever deferring his slightest wish to the will of the Father in heaven and his daily life of implicit trust..."[1555], and we can more fully enjoy the benefits:

"The peace of Jesus' mind was founded on an absolute human faith in the actuality of the divine Father's wise and sympathetic overcare."[1954] "The peace of Jesus is, then, the peace and assurance of a son who fully believes that his career for time and eternity is safely and wholly in the care and keeping of an all-wise, all-loving, and all-powerful spirit Father. And this is, indeed, a peace which passes the understanding of mortal mind, but which can be enjoyed to the full by the believing human heart."[1955] "When my children once become self-conscious of the assurance of the divine presence, such a faith will expand the mind, ennoble the soul, reinforce the personality, augment the happiness, deepen the spirit perception, and enhance the power to love and be loved." [1766]

Joy is the back door to faith. Joy is inherent in existence. [312] Therefore, joy is within our nature if we just look for it. While we are still learning how to tap into our wellspring of faith, we do know how to prime the pump by thinking joyful thoughts: Think of one thing that you are grateful for; thanking God leads to worshipful assurance. Think of what it really means to have God's wise and loving overcare; to have God as our coach, our counselor, mentor, friend. Thus, the joy of gratitude is one way to activate our faith realization; the faith that connects us to the power of God's love. And the love of the Father is made real to us as we give our love to others. [1289]

Jesus Onboard

"Though the Master is absent as a material being, he is present as a spiritual influence in the hearts of men. By going away from the world, Jesus made it possible for his spirit to live alongside that of his Father which indwells the minds of all mankind." [1700] "The coming of the Spirit of Truth purifies the human heart and leads the recipient to formulate a life purpose single to the will of God and the welfare of men." [2065]

We are assured of a successful journey because of our whole-souled desire to do God's will, to surrender every aspect of our lives in trust to God, to daily renew a pure mind and heart, to love and serve others with "a new... startling affection," and to glide joyfully across the water as if already a member of the faith corps of universe service with sights set on the destiny shores of an ever-expanding spiritual reality. Our supreme desire is bringing about "the change of mind by faith—the new birth ..." [1545], and our ship is being transformed with light radiating from Jesus, who is now with us at the helm —leading the way.