

THE SPIRITUAL UNDERPINNINGS OF NATURE-BASED LEADERSHIP

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The whole world of nature is a theater representative of the glory of the Lord.
(AC 3,000)

Abstract: Eighteenth Century Swedish scientist, philosopher, and theologian, Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) adopted a central philosophical tenet—that the entire natural world comprises a series of physical symbols that correspond to a deeper spiritual reality. That is, nature embodies all lessons of life’s physical and spiritual essence. I will explore reflections on how, likewise, our natural world offers powerful truths applicable to living, learning, serving, and leading. I have found inspiration, solace, and illumination in the natural world, written more indelibly, powerfully, and succinctly than any management text could possibly encapsulate. Thus, I present Nature Based Leadership conceptually, and propose creating a Nature Based Leadership Institute.

Emanuel Swedenborg believed that there is a perfect alignment between the spiritual and natural world, and that all observable *effects* in the natural world arise directly from correspondent *causes* in the spiritual world. Because of this spiritual reality, what often appears to be mere *coincidence*, when seen more deeply, can be regarded as *correspondence*. In this paper, I will begin by speaking about how *correspondence*—not just coincidence—led me uncannily to the presidency of Antioch University New England. And then, I will attempt to illustrate how New Church teachings, especially the science of correspondences, can be enormously useful in digging out precious lessons on leadership.

I begin with a single example of remarkable alignment: Urbana University, which I led for the five years prior to my AUNE role, originated in 1850 as a Swedenborgian university. That I would lead a Swedenborgian institution rises to the level of *correspondence*. I will explain.

¹ Rev. Dr. Ray Silverman provided guidance and expertise relative to the Swedenborgian and theological dimensions.

True to Swedenborgian doctrine, I believe that nature's lessons, when understood spiritually, can be applied broadly to every aspect of our lives. This, of course, is nothing new. When the Lord walked on earth, He used the imagery of the natural world (seeds, rocks, rivers, mountains, etc.) to teach lessons about spiritual reality. Seeds that are sown on good ground are like truths that are received by genuinely good people; the sunshine that opens flowers is like the love that opens hearts; a mountain that cannot be moved is like a faith that cannot be shaken.

These are perennially true spiritual principles. Leaders, then, can learn valuable spiritual principles that are already embodied in ecosystem patterns; they can study and benefit from a careful observation of processes that have operated since life first emerged from the primordial soup.

This concept paper, then, presents the nascent study and practice of Nature Based Leadership. Encompassing a term appearing increasingly in both scientific outlets and common media, I propose applying the lessons of *biomimicry* to the art and science of leadership.

I have been President of Antioch University New England since July 1, 2013. AUNE is a small, niche, graduate university (1,100 students: 1/3 doctoral and 2/3 master's), one of five campuses of Antioch University (based in Ohio). This is my third university presidency (Urbana University and University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF)). My AUNE budget is one-thirtieth the size of UAF's. Our AUNE "campus" is a single building—a re-purposed late nineteenth century furniture factory. My eighth university, this is my smallest. However, this is clearly my BIGGEST job! So much is at stake at this institution that is superlatively purpose-driven and passion-fueled. Horace Mann, Antioch's founding president (1852), said to the first graduating class in Yellow Springs, Ohio, "Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity!"

This concept paper on Nature Based Leadership presents five elements:

- My own life-long passion for nature
- Relevance of Emanuel Swedenborg
- *Correspondence* in my life / career
- Six Lessons in Leadership from Nature
- Some thoughts about creating a Nature Based Leadership Institute

LIFE-LONG PASSION FOR NATURE

My maternal grandmother introduced me to nature through her flower gardens. Under her tutelage I learned and appreciated the old standards: petunia; zinnia; marigold; four o'clock; cleome; snapdragon. My mother worked with me as I collected seeds from grandma's plantings and sowed them late winter indoors for spring out-planting. Mom occasionally presented me with the pre-packaged starter boxes that required only punching holes in the covering plastic, watering as needed, and placing on an indoor windowsill. I still recall the thrill of seed-germination, the magic of seedling elongation, and the joy of transplanting outside. My reward proved both visual and tactile, with hands in the soil, nurturing and cultivating the live, growing products of my care. I thrill yet today some six decades hence as I tend our perennial gardens.

My Dad immersed our family in the natural world via picnicking, hiking, camping, hunting, and fishing. Without realizing it, I was learning the lessons and wonder of nature. I was stocking the mental library references that I turn to now as I reflect more and more on Nature Based Leadership.

That set of experiences instilled an abiding love of forests; mountains and rivers; sunrises/sunsets; seasons/storms/patterns/processes; nature's beauty/power/fury; and places/maps. I am a creature and product of those formative experiences that Swedenborg refers to as "the celestial things of infancy and childhood" (AC 1450).

RELEVANCE OF EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

Eighteenth century Swedish scientist, philosopher and theologian, Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) wrote numerous books revealing the inner, or symbolic, meaning of the Bible. Followers of Swedenborg's teachings established the Swedenborgian Church (the New Church movement) in 1787. Famous Swedenborgians include Helen Keller, Andrew Carnegie, and John Chapman (AKA Johnny Appleseed). Robert Frost grew up a Swedenborgian: "What is my philosophy? That is hard to say. I was brought up a Swedenborgian. I am not a Swedenborgian now. But there is a good deal of it that's left with me. I am a mystic. I believe in symbols."²

² Marguerite Beck Block, *The New Church in the New World* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968), 399.

Relevant Tenets of New Church teachings include:

- The entire natural world represents a series of physical symbols that correspond to a deeper spiritual reality.
- Nature, when studied deeply and interpreted correctly, embodies all lessons of life's physical and spiritual essence.
- The term *correspondence* regards Divine Providence as universal: "Divine Providence exists in every least thing... nothing, however small, exists that has not been foreseen and provided for accordingly" (AC 2694:3). This applies to every moment of our lives.
- *Correspondence* is not coincidence. It is the harmonic alignment of happenings in space and time, occurring only with purpose, meaning, and intent. In other words, nothing is *accidental*.
- Thus, what appears to be mere *coincidence* is actually *correspondence*.

CORRESPONDENCE IN MY LIFE AND CAREER

Is correspondence real, or is it just coincidence? Although I can't say for sure, when I look back upon my life, it seems to me that there is an invisible Providence in all things. In other words, my life and career seem to have taken a route (an amazing route) that I could not have imagined, designed, dared, or repeated. Has anybody ever said to you, "Oh, if only I were 20 again"? I don't want to see 20 again! Robert Frost observed, "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood . . ." and "Oh, I kept the first for another day! Yet knowing that way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back." *Way* has provided well for me. I would not care to trust a repeat performance. Another choice; a different path? No, given another chance (20 again), I could only have chosen less fortuitously; less serendipitously. I don't want to risk another chance!!!

Given another chance, how could I possibly repeat the good fortunes of people, place, and time that led me to my present situation? I offer five such uncanny alignments:

(1) I completed a two-year forestry program that had started the fall after my high school graduation, right in my hometown in central Appalachia. I was a first-in-family college attendee. My family could offer no financial support to begin my forestry studies at a four-year institution. Maryland had

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no public university offering a bachelor's degree in that field. *Coincidence or correspondence?*

(2) The founding director of the community college forestry program, a West Virginia University (WVU) doctoral graduate, modeled the new program after the WVU forestry bachelor's degree, and he worked closely in doing so with folks at WVU's forestry school.

When time approached for me to transfer into the WVU forestry program as a junior, that university reneged on the negotiated agreement, refusing to accept my full credit load. The founding director stood on principle, finding instead, in the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, an esteemed institution willing to accept all of my Allegany Community College credits. Way changed to way and altered the course of my life/career in ways I cannot fathom. *Coincidence or correspondence?*

(3) As a certifiable introvert, I entered forestry school, in part, because I loved nature and had no inclination to work with people. One of my professorial mentors/heroes at SUNY ESF had spent sixteen years in Franklin, Virginia with Union Camp Corporation (UCC), a multi-national Paper and Allied Products Manufacturing firm with forest-based operations in Virginia, North/South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and Alabama. When he learned that UCC recruiters were coming to SUNY ESF to interview Paper Science Engineering soon-to-be graduates, he pulled some strings to have them meet this impending Forestry graduate. The net result? The company invited me to a formal interview on-site in Franklin, Virginia. After a day's interaction with Woodlands Division personnel, the Director of Community Relations (a unit that dealt with people!) met Judy (my wife of now 44 years) for dinner prior to our next morning return flight to Syracuse.

That evening Chris said to us, "Steve, if the folks in Woodlands do not offer you that position, I have a job for you in Community Relations." I wondered if he had confused me with another person! Instead, he had seen in me qualities and abilities I never knew were there. He saw deeply into my future. He planted a seed of realization and belief that has since flourished. Woodlands offered the forestry job and I accepted. Way led on to way. *Coincidence or correspondence?*

(4) In July, 2008 I found myself at Urbana University (UU), a small, private liberal arts institution in west-central Ohio. As an invited applicant for President, I had never heard of the New Church, Emanuel Swedenborg,

or Urbana University, founded in 1850 as a Swedenborgian university, the nation's first. I had served previously at only large public universities, yet there I was, responding to an invitation that I apply for the UU presidency.

Imagine my surprise when I discovered that Johnny Appleseed, a devout Swedenborgian, played an instrumental role in enabling the original gift of land for establishing UU. Contrary to Johnny's general reputation as a resolute conservationist, Appleseed actually performed as an "accidental" conservationist. He was first and foremost a Swedenborgian missionary, supporting his mission work by collecting apple seeds from western Pennsylvania cider presses, trekking west with bags of seed into the frontier, and cultivating seedling nurseries in Ohio in advance of the first serious waves of settlers. He sold or bartered seedlings to settlers, generating the means to fund his mission work.

The alignment of my core beliefs and Johnny Appleseed's story was uncanny. In 2008 I was the nation's only forestry-trained university president, leading a university enabled, in some real measure, by Johnny Appleseed! Not only that, but I learned that the basic philosophy and tenets of the Swedenborgian faith were in alignment with my own belief that the natural world offers illustrations of powerful truths applicable to living, learning, serving, and leading. I discovered full alignment along multiple fronts. I find inspiration, solace, and illumination in the natural world. I have believed for some time that the lessons of leadership and life are written in nature more indelibly, powerfully, and succinctly than any management text could possibly encapsulate. And this position at Urbana University, especially with its Swedenborgian heritage, seemed to be a confirmation that I was on the right track. Way leads on to way. *Coincidence or correspondence?*

(5) I went to UU thinking it my last position before retirement, but May 3, 2012 changed that. While completing an after dinner walk, within a block of our home, my wife and I were mid-street at a crossing when the driver (with revoked license) of a two-ton SUV (invalid tags) ran a stop sign, plowing into us. The driver threw it into reverse and exited the scene with tires squealing. The impact sent us flying tens of feet. We were soon headed toward the hospital in dueling ambulances. Later, after we recovered, a neighbor who had been mowing her lawn and glanced up when we were airborne observed, "You were caught by angels."

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Bernard Malamud, author of *The Natural*, spoke through his lead character, “We have two lives to live; the life we learn with and the life we live after that.”³ This is our “second” life, spawned by the deep wisdom of reflection and introspection during recovery. I realized then that Urbana University had suffered for too long in a fiscal spiral, attributable to insurmountable risk factors (e.g., rural location, very low endowment, non-selective enrollment, heavy dependence on tuition and fees, weak governing board, poor alumni support, etc.).⁴ Although I relished UU’s Applesseed heritage and its Swedenborgian roots, we began looking for another capstone university experience.

Antioch University New England *called* and we responded. This new / second “life” is more purpose-driven and passion-fueled—clearly, a *calling*. Looking back on this experience, we now consider the SUV-induced transformation a part of the Lord’s miraculous leading, a Divine permission that allowed us to move on to a position of greater service. Way leads on to way. “Nothing is permitted except for the end that some good may come from it” (AC 6574:5). *Coincidence or correspondence?*

LESSONS OF LEADERSHIP IN NATURE

While the lessons of leadership in nature are innumerable, I have chosen to focus on just six (I could have chosen many more.) This concept paper sets the stage—this set of six examples is just a beginning.

Lesson 1: the complementary forces of *humility* and *inspiration*

I offer a first-hand metaphor for learning, living, and leading. The University of Alaska Fairbanks sits on a bluff overlooking the broad Tanana River valley, stretching to the central Alaska Range some 70 miles to our south. The Range extends west from there 125 miles to Denali (Mount McKinley), North America’s tallest at 20,237 feet, high enough to remain cloud-capped much of the time. Only occasionally could we see it from campus, appearing far to our southwest. We moved to UAF late June and

³ Bernard Malamud, *The Natural* (Harcourt Brace and Company, 1952), 237.

⁴ In less than a year after my departure, Franklin University acquired Urbana University.

by mid-August had still not seen the peak. We had guests coming from the East Coast and planned a special treat. We drove to the entrance of Denali National Park, hopped into a friend's small plane that evening, and flew to Kantishna, a small gravel airstrip on the north side of Denali, 90 miles beyond the Park's entrance. We enjoyed great views of the Park and clearly saw and appreciated the lower flanks of The Mountain during the flight. We overnighted at the lodge near the airstrip.

I awoke early, hoping for clear skies, and saw no clouds. From the lodge and airstrip Denali hides behind 3,000 foot Mt. Quigley. I would need to climb Quigley to see whether The Mountain would present a view. We grabbed a quick breakfast and headed out to the Quigley trail-head, ascending Quigley's north shoulder. My eagerness spurred me upward, outpacing my colleagues, who eventually turned back to the lodge. That countryside is all above timberline, giving me clear views to the plains stretching without end to the north. I gazed back toward the airstrip, watching it shrink to miniature status. I felt smug, full of myself. Here I was climbing Quigley, trekking into the heavens, commanding a very impressive view-scape. Quite an accomplishment, I thought! As the trail began to flatten near the summit, watching my feet to secure firm footing on the cobbled surface, I felt a strange sensation, as though someone were watching.

Not realizing I now had a full view to the south, I stopped, turning my attention to that direction. My heart pounding, I saw only gleaming white with my level gaze. My eyes slowly following that white wall upward, my head tilting ever more toward the vertical, there stood the most magnificent sight of my life, before or since. McKinley rises 18,000 feet from the valley in front of me to its summit. Three and one-half vertical miles of rock, glaciers, and glory towered in the late morning sun.

Stunned, I felt two emotions, the first total humility. In a few seconds I had gone from the arrogant satisfaction of "climbing" Quigley, to the full realization that I had done nothing. Competing, I felt absolute inspiration. I stood before The Mountain, grasping slowly what might be, what could be, what perhaps lies ahead. Inspiration to reach beyond my grasp; to celebrate every accomplishment, but know that always more lies ahead.

No, I will never summit McKinley. I *will* continue climbing "mountains," metaphorically. I will embrace humility and seek inspiration. *Humility* and *Inspiration*—try leading without them!

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A wise leader knows that humility is the place where inspiration happens:

When real humility is present in a person he surrenders all power to think or do anything by himself and abandons himself completely to the Divine, and in this condition draws near to the Divine. (AC 6866)

The most ancient people were internal, and although they sensed the external things of the body and the world, they cared not for them; for in each object of sense they perceived something Divine and heavenly. For example, when they saw a high mountain, they perceived an idea, not of a mountain, but of elevation, and from elevation, of heaven and the Lord. (AC 920)

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3)

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (Matthew 5:8)

Lesson 2: learning to read the lessons of the seasons

Here in New Hampshire we annually live in the midst of Autumn Glory. Tourists visit from all over the world to view the spectacular result of a simple natural process. Trees translocate manufactured sugars from the leafy canopy to winter storage in the roots, leaving behind the colorful pigments. The aggregate rich colors carpet our hills and mountains, beckoning to all who might enjoy nature's palette. This transition season affect brings to mind Ecclesiastes 3:1–8, which inspired the 1965 song by The Byrds (Pete Seegar lyricist):

To everything there is a season,
and a time to every purpose under heaven,
A time to be born, and a time to die
A time to sow, and a time to reap.

The words reach beyond the meteorological seasons, expressing a truism that, indeed, applies to every thing! Every life, business, enterprise, position, program, career—has its own seasons. These are emblematic seasons that portend; that signal change; and that call for preparation and action. Imagine a leader who cannot sense, appreciate, and understand the lessons written in the seasonal cycles in all endeavors—in every thing!

A wise leader knows that every organization and every person in the organization goes through changes of state; such a leader is able to adapt to those changes:

The seasons of the year, which are spring, summer, autumn, and winter, and also the times of the day, which are morning, noon, evening, and night, correspond to so many states in heaven. (AC 9387)

Lesson 3: knowing our place in the world

Robert Service, a British poet, story teller, and balladeer who spent several years in the Yukon gold fields at the turn of the Twentieth Century, offers a powerful metaphor for living and leading in his poem “Security”⁵:

There once was a limpet puffed with pride
Who said to the ribald sea:
“It isn’t I who cling to the rock,
It’s the rock who clings to me;
It’s the silly old rock who hugs me tight,
Because he loves me so;
And though I struggle with all my might,
He will not let me go.”

Then said the sea, who hates the rock
That defies him night and day:
“You want to be free—well, leave it to me,
I’ll help you to get away.
I know such a beautiful silver beach,
Where blissfully you may bide;

⁵ Robert Service, *Collected Poems of Robert Service* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1940); Security, pp. 680–682.

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Shove off to-night when the moon is bright,
And I'll swing you there on my tide."

The limpet is a creature of the intertidal zone, anchored to rocks to enable feeding as the tidal ebb and flow deliver nutrient- and micro-organism-rich waters for filtering and feeding. The ballad continues as the limpet takes advantage of the sea's offer, beginning a perilous and frightening journey "on the laughing sea."

But when she got to the gelid deep
Where the waters swish and swing,
She began to know with a sense of woe
That a limpet's lot is to cling.

Eventually, through several stanzas of treacherous adventure, the sea delivers our limpet friend to the sandy beach:

So down she sank to the sandy bank
That clung to her under-side.

That clung so close she couldn't breathe,
So fierce she fought to be free;
But the silver sand couldn't understand,
While above her laughed that sea.
Then to each wave that wimpled past
She cried in her woe and pain:
"Oh take me back, let me rivet fast
To my steadfast rock again."

She cried till she roused a tax-crab
Who gladly gave her a ride;
But I grieve to say in his crabby way
He insisted she ride inside
So if of the limpet breed ye be,
Beware of life's brutal shock;

Don't take the chance of the changing sea,
But—cling like hell to your rock.

The poem, "Security," is a parable—a lesson for life, infinite in its application. Try leading without knowing your place or recognizing your anchorage/your own rock. Try managing and inspiring without appreciating what is critical, what is reality, and what is unchangeable. Rocks come in the form of ethics, character, integrity, fidelity to truth, and all else that constitute the *higher road*.

A wise leader knows that an organization of any kind must be based on rock-solid principles, chief of which are the necessity of faith and the importance of love:

In the Word, a rock corresponds to faith, and a mountain corresponds to love. (LJP 137)

A wise man built his house upon a rock" (Matthew 7:24)

Lesson 4: understanding limitations and potential

I draw this lesson from my doctoral research, a field-research-based examination of the relationships between key soil-site variables (direction of exposure or *aspect*, slope steepness, slope position, slope shape, soil depth, and others) and forest productivity in the Allegheny Hardwood region of NW Pennsylvania and SW New York. If a forest finds itself on a west-facing, convex upper slope, forget about high productivity! At the other extreme, a forest on an east-facing, concave lower slope can perform superbly. Soil-site conditions establish environmental potential. Although individual species' adaptability varies across site conditions, the site itself places absolute limits on potential.

Now, try leading without knowing both *limitations* and *potential*—of our people; our organization; our operating environment.

The wise leader understands that people are uniquely adapted for different pursuits and endeavors. This is comparable to the various (yet complementary) uses that are served by many parts of the human body:

Uses in the heavens are likewise in all variety and diversity, and in no case is the use of one wholly the same as, and identical with the use of another; so neither is the happiness of one the same as, and identical with the happiness of another. Furthermore, the delights of each use are innumerable, and these innumerable delights are likewise various, and yet conjoined in such order that they mutually have regard to each other, like the uses of each member, organ, and viscus, in the body, and still more like the uses of each vessel and fiber in any one member, organ and viscus; each and all of which are so associated together that they behold their own good in another, and thus in all, and they behold all in each. From this universal and individual aspect they act as one. (*HH* 405)

Lesson 5: knowing your own purpose in life

From John Maxwell's *Daily Reader*: "A friend of the poet Longfellow asked the secret of his continued interest in life. Pointing to a nearby apple tree, Longfellow said, 'The purpose of that apple tree is to grow a little new wood each year. That is what I plan to do.'" The friend would have found a similar sentiment in one of Longfellow's poems:

Not enjoyment and not sorrow
Is our destined end or way;
But to act that each tomorrow
Find us further than today."⁶

Imagine leading without knowing what motivates and fuels us—what enables and encourages us to add a little wood each year.

A wise leader knows that every person must have a sense of purpose, a meaningful use to perform. This especially applies to leaders who must be clear about their passion and purpose:

Nothing whatsoever in the world has been created without a useful purpose and thence a useful effect, thus from use for use. (*SE* 3574)

⁶ John C. Maxwell, *The Maxwell Daily Reader* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc. 2007), 420.

“I have come to kindle a fire!” (Luke 12:49)

Lesson 6: understanding and appreciating the perspective of others

Traveling along New England’s winter roads, I often see resident hawks (very often Red-Tailed) perched on trees and utility poles, where fields and grassy rights of way provide perfect habitat for rodents and clear hunting for these magnificent birds of prey. I marvel at these incredible hunters. My mental lens characterizes the birds as beautiful, fearless, noble, regal, capable of effortless (and enviable) soaring, and as symbols of enduring freedom. How different through the eyes of a foraging mouse! The rodent appreciates none of what I see. To the mouse the hawk is threatening, dangerous, preying/stalking, ruthless, diving, and is a symbol of death. It’s the same bird, yet each characterization is real to the observer.

Also, think about New England’s forests through two human lenses—separated by four centuries. The Old World’s early colonists found the forested landscape dark and foreboding, foul and repugnant, evil, disease-infested, and as home to savages.

Today we see woods of wonder (e.g., autumn’s splendor), an escape from work-a-day lives, a destination and not an obstacle, a place to reflect and renew, and as a source of solace and comfort.

An absolute truth in business, life, and politics, just as in nature—where you stand depends upon where you sit. Or, where you fall in the food chain! Try being a leader without knowing and respecting where others sit. Know where you fall in life’s food chain!

A wise leader knows that people will see things differently, often based on their spiritual state at the time. People who think externally will think about visible effects and outcomes in the physical world. But people who think spiritually will look for a corresponding spiritual cause:

The natural person sees from the point of view of the effect, but the rational person sees from that of the cause. (AC 3533)

The teaching about charity, that is, how to live, was the chief teaching in the ancient churches. That teaching united all churches and so made one out of many. For they recognized as members of the church all those whose

lives showed the good of charity and called them brothers, however much they otherwise differed in truths, what are today called matters of faith. One taught another about truths, and this was one of their charitable deeds. Also they did not take it amiss if one failed to accept another's point of view, knowing that each person accepts truth only to the extent that he is in a state of good [i.e. according to his state of consciousness]. (NJHD 9)

SOME FINAL REFLECTIONS: TOWARD CREATING A NATURE-BASED LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

I'll begin this conclusion with selected quotes from *The Nature of Leadership*, a relatively new (1998) and unique kind of business book.⁷ *The Nature of Leadership* contains exquisite photos by Dewitt Jones, combined with inspiring interviews, quotes, and narratives compiled by bestselling authors Dr. Stephen R. Covey and A. Roger Merrill.

Come forth into the light of things, Let Nature be your teacher. (William Wordsworth)

Nature is man's teacher. She unfolds her treasures to his search, unseals his eye, illumines his mind, and purifies his heart; an influence breathes from all the sights and sounds of her existence. (Alfred Billings Street)

If you will open yourself to the natural environment, the people around you, and timeless principles, you will find personal and specific answers to the leadership challenges and opportunities you face. (The Sundance Promise)

I began to recognize that there are powers out there that are much greater than you. There are forces out there – natural laws, if you will. And if you don't make the conscious decision to live by those laws, there are going to be painful consequences. (Hyrum Smith)

⁷ Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, and Dewitt Jones, *The Nature of Leadership* (Salt Lake City: FranklinCovey Co., 1998), 128.

These quotes suggest recognition by many that a certain *leadership character*, one steeped in an understanding of nature, exists. To these beautifully articulated teachings we would add that a genuine leader not only understands the laws of nature, but also sees nature as a reflection of deeper laws—the laws that govern the human spirit. In this light, all the laws of nature become parables about human spirituality.

Here are some of the central lessons of leadership contained in nature:

- It is the ecosystem, not just the individual, upon which we collectively depend.
- Spiritual maturation is requisite to becoming a better and more complete leader.
- Leading draws strength and wisdom from basic truths, all of which find their correspondent expression in things natural.
- A leader serves others; not self.

So, where do these reflections lead us? I've discussed my personal basis for adopting the notion of Nature Based Leadership. Now, what might we do to help businesses, governmental officials (elected and agency), NGO leaders, citizens, and others better comprehend our individual and collective place in nature, and the lessons for living, learning, serving, and leading expressed in nature? How can we refine the concept of Nature Based Leadership (NBL), develop curricula, and provide educational programs and venues for learning, exchange, and exploration?

We have created a Nature Based Leadership Institute (NBLI), providing a nexus for scholarship, practice, learning, demonstration, and inspiration. Based at Antioch University New England, the Institute will establish a virtual faculty (scholars affiliated by distance) and Practice Advisory Board (leaders already embracing and practicing the tenets of Natural Leadership). The Nature Based Leadership Institute can focus learning, stimulate

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thinking, and inspire action. We can learn from nature ways to improve our lives, enhance our leadership, and, perhaps, save our species from itself.⁸

In all of this, the teachings of the New Church can serve as a spiritual compass, showing us how to derive lessons from nature that will not only preserve but also ennoble the human race.

We are not born for our own sake; we are born for the sake of others. (TCR 406) □

⁸ The NBLI will develop reciprocal partnerships with other entities addressing allied interests. For example, Antioch University New England collaborated with multiple firms, NGOs, and universities to conceive and deliver the April 2015 “Risk and Value Creation Forum: Finance Innovation Aligned with Nature’s Strategies,” in San Francisco. I presented “Nature Based Leadership: Lessons for Risk Mitigation and Value Creation.” The Antioch University (the broader five-campus system in which AUNE resides) Leadership and Change PhD program is another strong (and, in effect, internal) ally. Conservation Psychology is a rapidly emerging field that encompasses related concepts, principles, and science allied to NBL. Antioch University New England stands at the epicenter of Conservation Psychology. One of the field’s founders, on the faculty at AUNE, co-led with an AUNE colleague the fall 2015 launch of the nation’s first graduate certificate in Conservation Psychology. We’ll follow in 2016 with the first graduate degree in the field. We are involving conservation psychology scholars elsewhere as a virtual faculty.