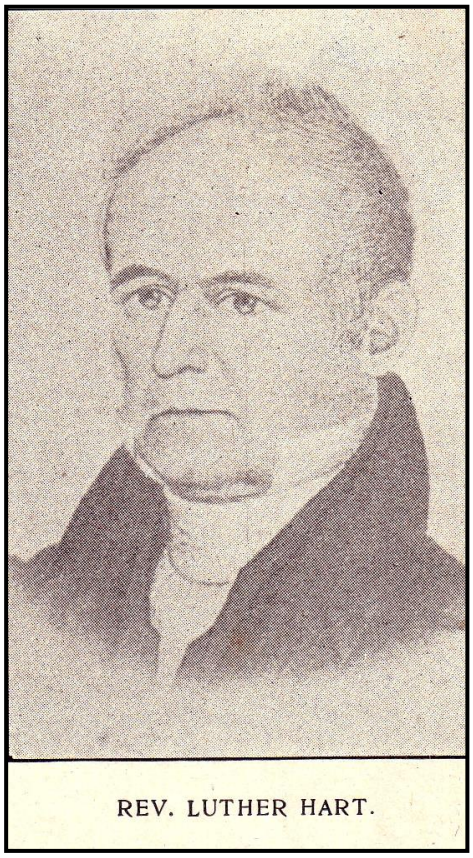
The Hart of Faith

A guiding voice from the past for today's times

Selected sermons of Reverend Luther Hart
Plymouth Congregational Church 1810 to 1834



REV. LUTHER HART.

Volume 1

by Daniel A Sanford
2007

Dedicated to
My wife Rae E (Yarrison) Sanford
My sons Ray and Dan
My mothers Caroline E (Blake) Sanford and Lititia C (Stratton) Yarrison
My fathers in heaven Burton L Sanford and Raymond E Yarrison

And especially
My Heavenly Father

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the Connecticut State Archives for granting me permission to publish their collection of Reverend Luther Hart's sermons.

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Daniel A. Sanford
2007

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How I met the Reverend Luther Hart

I grew up in the 1950's and 60's. My mother, a life long member of the First Congregational Church of Plymouth, CT, insisted that all her children went to Sunday School. I was, and in some ways still am, a bare foot child. I thought that this was at best an imposition, but mom insisted, so we went.

Regular school was a chore, and bore, for me, more so as a teen in high school. The only subject I was any good at was history, I still love history. Sunday school and church in general gradually faded away, I was working, going to trade school and also started dating my wife. I had more important things to do.

It was the 60's, hippies, flower power, folk and heavy metal music. It was also the beginning of the new age of self awareness. Alternate, "New Age" religions and beliefs were main stream. Witch's, Self Divinity, even Satanic worship are acceptable to society but Christian religion was "not cool" Going by today's news it seems that Christians are still "not cool." As with most people, we go through life's stages. I was bordering on the fence of "higher power," but no idea of what it was and the total belief that this is it, no higher power or guiding light, we die and that's it.

My wife and I were both brought up in the church and were married in the same church on August 6, 1971. I was in the Navy and was on my way to Naval Air Station Miramar in San Diego, CA. with my new bride. My military pay, a whopping $60.00 every two weeks, living off base, with a wife, apartment, utilities, etc. Need I say that there wasn't much left over. I remember that there were times that we made due with almost nothing. We even had the power cut off once, so I had more important things to do.

For reasons that are personal, I became disenchanted with most organized religion. I have found that most traditional religions were only interested in money, politics and adapting, if necessary rewriting, the bible to accommodate their opinions. There is only the "Gospel ministries" that hit closest to the old time religion. For a long time I was not even interested in religion, I still had other more important things to do.

In 1988 my mother started looking into the Sanford family genealogy and I got the bug. I would spent countless hours pouring over town hall files. Most of the older records are hand written. I had to learn how to read old handwriting. Believe me when I say that I thank God that there are word processors, my hand writing also is almost impossible to read. Probate records, copies of wills, births, marriages and deaths all hand written, all different styles of writing needing to be transcribed.

During that time I had become computer literate, starting with an 8088's and upgraded whenever financially possible. It helped with the genealogical research. I was now able to scan old documents into a picture file, and then enlarge to help read what was written.

By the summer of 2006, my mother had been the church historian for quite a few years. She asked me if I could do something with early church records because she found it hard to answer requests sent to the church for births, marriages and deaths from the early records. I went with her to look at what they had.

I am now in my fifties. My belief system has come full circle. I believe in God and his son Jesus Christ but the drive was still not there. Something was missing and I did not know what it was. Mom showed me what was in the church archives. They had photo copies of the early church records and I knew that all that was needed was a simple data file. We looked at what else they had. There in the archive box's were eleven hand written,

hand bound documents. I looked at them and found out that they were sermons that Reverend Luther Hart had written.

Each had the date and town where he had given them. They looked interesting so I was allowed to borrow them. Growing up in the church, I, like all people, saw the list of ministers who preached in the Plymouth Congregational Church, most have pictures or drawings of each. I never noticed them, but we went into the sanctuary and there he was. Underneath the drawing was Reverend Luther Hart 1811-1834, a face for the name.

I started reading the first sermon numbered 15. This man started talking about how anything done for the body and not for the soul is a wasted effort. Reading further, I knew that I had to show my mother but she has a hard time so I would transcribe it. The more I transcribe, the more I believed that this man's words and thoughts were timeless and needed to be brought to the public.

As said before, the computer age is wonderful. A search of the web, gave me some of the reverend's history. It also gave me the Connecticut State Archives. Someone, in the past had the generosity to donate over 400 of his hand written sermons to the archive. It is with their permission, I will be able to bring to the public more of Reverend Harts sermons.

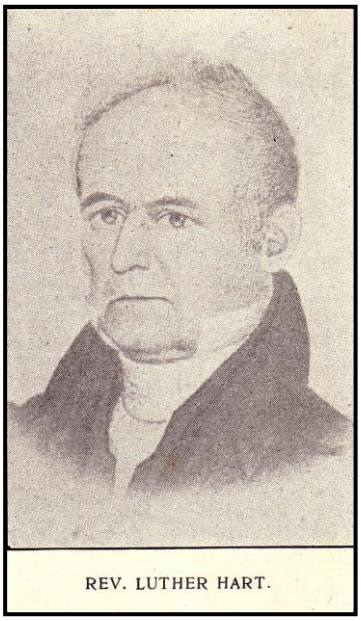
I say that I believe, I do believe, but there needs a recap of my life. I had a religious upbringing. I had doubts and tribulations that drove me from the church. In the interim, I learned to read old hand writing, learned computers and like history.

Before I was asked to look at the church records, I wanted to believe with all my heart, but did not know if I did. I finally said to God, "I admit that I don't know what I feel but I will open myself to your will." Shortly after that these sermons fell into my lap. Every thing I had been learning and doing has led me to this task. I was being prepared all my life for the blessing and privilege of bringing Reverend Hart to you.

The reverend said, when talking about when Jesus said "render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's," that talents we have are God's. We need to render unto God our talents. You can not present me with anything that will convince me that there is not a guiding God. I have no more important thing to do than this.

Reverend Luther Hart

There is very little known about the day to day life of Luther Hart so all I can give you is some bare facts and second hand accounts.



REV. LUTHER HART.

MRS. LUTHER HART.

Luther Hart was born July 27, 1783 in Goshen, Ct to David and Hanna (Hudson) Hart. He attended Yale Seminary and was graduated in 1807, of which institution he was afterwards a fellow. He taught at the Litchfield Academy for a year. Luther began to study to become an ordained minister in 1808, as part of the first class of the Andover Seminary, being taught by the Reverend Ebenezer Potter, of Washington, Connecticut. He graduated in 1809.

The Plymouth Congregational Church was called by many names, but in 1810 they were called "The Church of Christ in Plymouth." According to church records, Vol. 3 pg 20

"June 11th 1810
At a meeting of the members of the Church of Christ in the Town of Plymouth duly notified – Signed Deacon Camp Moderator –
Voted to give Mr. Luther Hart A Call to take the Pastoral Charge of this Church – voted that Deacon David Smith Samuel Camp Jacob Hemingway Esq. Requested to present this vote to Mr. Hart and Request his answer. Voted to adjourn this meeting until the Society Meeting on this. Shall close - - Lake Potter Scribe"

The three met with Luther and, after careful consideration, on August 13, 1810 he responded,

"To the Church of Christ in Plymouth

Dearly beloved in the Lord
Having on the eleventh day of June AD 1810 received A Call to settle among you in the work of the gospel ministry and having deliberated on the same with serious and prayerful attention I have concluded to comply with your request – wishing that grace and peace may be multiplied unto you. I remain Gentlemen with sentiments of due respect and esteem your humble servant and brother in Christ.
Luther Hart"

He was ordination was on September 5, 1810 as pastor of the Church of Christ in the Town of Plymouth, Connecticut. The reverend came to Plymouth when it was at his ordination that he found that it was common to have a "sideboard" with different libations. Luther did not abide intemperance so he soon put a stop to this practice and liquor was banned from all church functions. He also gave sermons on "temperance."

In Plymouth he met Minerva Potter, born 1790 to Daniel and Martha (Mumiston) Potter in Plymouth, Ct. They were married in Plymouth on September 18, 1811. Unfortunately they did loose their only child, Luther Potter Hart on Aug, 28, 1829. He was 17 month old. Minerva became the proper minister's wife and was well respected in the community. It is recorded that Minerva, even after Luther's death, was active in the community and was well respected for her works.

The Reverend was known to preach against the secret society of the Masons as was the sentiment of the day that they were secretly in league with the devil. The ironic thing is that the cemetery behind the church has a grave stone adorned with Masonic symbols.

A town leader, Eli Terry Jr. pushed for rules and regulation on how the church would handle known Masons. The church adopted regulations and any person who was a mason and wanted to stay a member of the church had to swear an oath, renouncing the Masons.

The church records show that Eli Terry Jr. brought many intemperate and immoral persons before the congregation for judgment. Reverend Luther Hart would be the moderator for these "trials" before the congregation. If found guilty, the person would have to confess to and ask the forgiveness of the church. Once recorded as forgiven, the person was now able to rejoin the congregation. This practice of public confessing was later changed by Reverend Hart to just appearing before the Deacons. This continued until the turn of the 1900's when it went out of favor.

Luther Hart died while he was preaching a revival April 25, 1834. If anyone had a choice of their appointed time of death and what you are doing at the time, I feel that the Reverend crossed over doing what he felt was the most important thing in life, preaching for the awakening of all the un-renewed. The only outright humor you will see in this book is that I hope that he did not just finish the famous sentence, "If this isn't the truth, may God strike me dead!"

During his ministries he wrote down his sermons and hand bound each. Each sermon being numbered, annotated where and when he gave each sermon. A side note, the titles

given in this book are my addition. This way you will know the general subject of that sermon. The Plymouth Church has 11 of these, earliest number 15 and latest numbered 770. The State Archives of Connecticut have over 400 of these bound sermons but sadly most of the sermons from 1 to 99, 400 to 599, 700 and above are missing and most must be lost. Sermon 770 was dated September 1822, since he died in 1834, there must have been far more than this. What a loss to the world.

In an attempt to bring him to life and let you know some of his feelings, I have created an interview with Reverend Hart based on some problems of the day and will use quote from his sermons for his answers. There will be mixing due to him covering a subject in several sermons. His words though will not be taken out of context. The quotes will be taken from the complete sermons included in this book so you will be able to see in what context.

My hope is that you get the same delight and inspiration from his words as I have. I truly believe that he is a guiding voice from the past.

1930's WPA project was to record every gravestone in Connecticut – Plymouth, CT.
616-9 Old cemetery in behind the Church pg 87 Gravestones present 1935

Hart, Luther Potter, son of Reverend Luther & Minerva, died Aug, 28, 1829, age 1 yr 5 mo
Hart, Reverend Luther, born July 27, 1783, died April 25, 1834
Hart, Minerva Potter, wife of Reverend Luther , born Jan 2, 1790, died Feb 12, 1882

An interview with the Reverend

Today, it is the custom to base our life on what the physical world presents us. We are constantly being told, by television, news media, politicians and all other means of public communication, what we should do, think and say. We are constantly aware of political correctness, don't say this or that because one might offend.

Reverend Luther Hart was a man who was most concerned with a spiritual renewal and your eternal life. He would constantly be aware of the tragedy of dying with out a rebirth and preach of our potential loss. This interview is meant to give the reader a basic understanding of the philosophy of a man, who in his time, had over 400 active members in his church and also frequently preaches at neighboring towns.

There are a lot of people that do not believe in the existence of the eternal soul, that this life is the only existence that we have. What would you say to those people?

Luther – Before God induced him with a soul, Adam was complete in his form, the machinery was perfect, but as inactive, as useless, as mean as the dust of the ground. But as soon as life is kindled, as soon as the entrance of the soul excites the pulsation of the heart, and invigorates the nerves. Then he is fit for action, then he assumes his dignity.

If my soul were not immortal, I would pray for instant death. My soul would escape from these sorrows, and find refuge in everlasting insensibility. I would say, I might well say to my Maker at death, now I sleep in the dust; then shall seek me in morning, but I shall not be. If in this life we have hope, we are of all "beings" most miserable"

God has not created the body of man without giving him air to breath; nor his eyes without furnishing objects of sight. For every natural appetite there is an object of gratification and can God have been less bounteous to a soul? Is that dignified principle which constitutes all our worth, doomed to abstinence and poverty, disappointment and death?

It is the soul which stamps upon us intelligence and humanity. Such dignity belongs not to dust and ashes. So unimportant are these vile bodies of flesh and clay that our Savior left them entirely out of view when he asked the question in a text, "What shall a man give?"

The excellence of its nature is apparent from a part that a soul of man is necessary to his animal existence. A body without a soul; what is it but a lifeless inactive mass of flesh, fit only for the coffin and the grave! What is death but the departure of a soul, and what is the residue, but a lump of clay.

The impression that most people have of your era is that the sermons were filled with "Hell-fire and brimstone" to scare people into the faith. Most of you sermons talk about sinners but there is little of burning in hell. Why is that?

Luther - It is impossible to frighten men into religion. You cannot frighten them into a conviction of any truth. There can be no solid and proper belief of the truth, without the full and sober exercise of reason. But you command the full exercise of reason, when the whole soul and body are agitated with fear. But even though one should rise from the dead, and not frighten us by his appearance, his testimony respecting the eternal world, would not of itself overcome the obstinacy of our unbelieving hearts.

The same disposition which induces men to desire more evidence than the bible contains, would endure them to demand the testimony of another and another, and even of all who have ever departed this life. If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one, or several thousand million rose from the dead. If a degree of evidence fully sufficient for the proof of a fact, will not gain our belief, a 100 degrees of the same evidence will not do it.

How then can we be saved?

Luther - . The Almighty is absolutely opposed to our salvation except we receive it as a free gift from him. He will forever exert his power against our procuring it any other way. It is infinite condescension that he will permit us to reach heaven at all; then surely it belongs to him to mark out the path. His way is the best way. While it humbles the sinner, it prepares him to relish the blessedness of heaven which without humility would be to bring a plane of indescribable torment. All that Christ asks of us is to accept of what he has done, and more freely offers, and be thankful. This is all the mystery of conversion, to despair in ourselves, and regain through hope in Jesus.

You must be moved by the power of God only. But I cannot describe those joys or sufferings. Language is inadequate. Yet you must be influenced by argument and reason. You must be persuaded to preserve your limbs, although I cannot describe to you the anguish of a broken bone.

You can take a motion to obtain salvation though you cannot comprehend its blessedness; and to escape the pains of hell though you cannot comprehend the full measure of its woe. None but the Christian can form any idea of the loss of heaven, for none but he has ever tasted of its joys.

It is not indeed our righteousness, it is only counted to us for righteousness. No man is holy, only as he is made so by Christ, and that which Christ forms in us cannot be called absolutely and exclusively ours. When a sinner is converted, he is justified not because there is anything good in him, which he can call his own, but because Christ sees in his heart his own image which by divine grace he had planted there. Christ sees nothing in humbled soul which he himself did not plant it.

Through the ages, men have surfaced saying that this cause or that is Holy and the will of God. They have claimed divine revelation, a vision or a dream. How do we know what the will of God actually is?

Luther - The will of God it to be performed by man, no further then it is made known, and the Sacred Scriptures contain all that God has been pleased to reveal concerning his and our duty. The will of God is not to be learned from dreams, visions, impulses, and new revelations. Every truth which is necessary for us to know, may be found in that Sacred volume which is complete in all its facts, and to which if any man shall add, God shall add to him all the plagues which are written in it.

Dreams and sudden impulses, if relied on as pointing out the will of God are but fruitful sources of enthusiasm and delusions. To do the will of God then is to perform all that he has commanded in his word. And all his commands their made known respect either our hearts, or our conduct.

Love is the fulfilling of the law; for he who cordially loves God and man will necessarily be a practical Christian. Love is an active principle. It secures obedience to the law of God. It is the will of God that our faith should not be merely speculative, for with the heart, man beliveth unto righteousness. In short it is the will of God that we should be born again; not of blood, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God – that we should be renewed in the spirit of our mind, putting off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and putting on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

The whole will of man must be in subjection to the will of God. We must do the will of God as well by our inward, as by our outward exercises. In short it can be performed only by being Christians and by living like Christians.

I have a personal question. You know my background and questioning of my religious beliefs, how did I return to religion and God?

Luther - The only answer that can be given is that the good Shepherd himself went after you and brought you back. For had you not been brought, you never would come back.

You came into the world with your faces set towards hell, and you never would have stopped, if he had not gone after you and brought you back in his arms. All this is virtually expresses in the text, which says For ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned.

It is not affirmed actively that ye returned, but positively, ye are returned: not actively, Ye came back yourselves but possibly, ye are brought back. No sinner ever came back to the fold, of his own accord. And no one ever will come unless he is brought.

Some scholars have gone on record stating that the bible is nothing but a book of tales that were created or borrowed from other cultures. They say that since there has not been actual proof found of Jesus that even he may have been a collection of ideas rather than a real person.

Luther – The saved penmen, could have no endearment to record the events mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures had not those events taken place; for they knew when writing their several histories, that they were exposing themselves to persecution and death. And they suffered martyrdom, not for recording falsehood, but for recording the truth. Men could not possibly exist together in society if they were not compelled, as it were by a law of their nature, and by particular circumstances which they cannot alter, to speak the truth.

The world would soon go to ruin if all human testimony were henceforth to be laid aside as amounting to no proof in any case what ever. We have just as conclusive evidence to believe there is such a place as London, as if we had seen it with our own eyes. And yet the whole of this evidence is derived from the testimony of others. We acknowledge that the testimony of some men whose interest or passions would lead them to falsify the truth, but there are cases in which the very worst of men could have no temptation to relate and record a falsehood.

With all the miracles described in the bible, why aren't there miracles today to show people that God does exist?

Luther - If we grant that three quarters of those who publicly profess Christianity, are down right hypocrites or even knaves, still the remainder, collected from all the churches with which we are acquainted, would far exceed all the miracles which Christ wrought while on earth: and the conversion of this remainder we may justly consider as so many miraculous effects of divine agency.

A "New Age" religion involves channeling, messages from the dead and even the occult is commonly accepted. Can we gain a better vision of what it is like in heaven from these studies?

Luther – A messenger from the dead could say no more than what is said in the scriptures. The same God who dictated the scriptures would not suffer him to reveal more than the bible contains. God intended it for a perfect book. Accordingly all that it is any importance for us to know; and it is manifest he would not suffer any unimportant communications to be made.

What greater or more momentous truths can be related by any tongue than are recorded in the Sacred Scriptures. An angels tongue could not express were these with more perspienity and force. Or if it could it would be of no service for us to listen; for in that case the angel must employ something more forcible than human languages; but mortals cannot understand the language of another world. If the revelation of more and different truths had been necessary, they would have been revealed to us as the Sacred Scriptures were by the pen of inspiration; for it would be preposterous to suppose that God would raise so many millions from the dead as on that hypothesis would be necessary to give intelligence from the other world to all the inhabitants of this in every age.

Your words are bold and you have a strong religious conviction. Why is this?

Luther - It is for the Christian only to triumph over death. He may look with bold face on any evil which can befall him in this life, and on death, for it his last enemy. But the wicked have nothing which can rationally allay their fears. All before them in the eternal world is dark and dreadful and every thing which notifies them that their departure is at hand, fills them with alarm.

Wicked men are often disheartened at a view of approaching troubles. But he who puts his trust in the living God need fear no disasters; for let him be assailed by adversity, the Lord will soon appear for his deliverance or will give him grace to bear the cross with resignation.

True religion will discover itself in the open countenance and bold resolutions of those whom it actuates. It makes a man take his stand both as to sentiment and practice. The truly righteous heartily despise the idea of conforming ones actions and opinions to those of the world, for the sake of avoiding censure.

They will show their boldness in strenuously opposing the current of vise and damnable doctrines which aims its whole force at the destruction of all religion. The righteous will

not be afraid reprove those who need rebuke, even though by administering it they should incur the ill-will of the guilty.

No boldness is so effectual to drive away all fear from the soul, as that which religion inspires, for it not only has everlasting basis, but is tempered with prudence, affability and kindness. It does make a man daring only to boast of his courage. It does not induce him to climb a steeple only to surprise and pain others by a recital of his dangerous exploit. Nor does it make him prodigal of his blood and life, that he may gain the reputation of a hero.

No all the arts of his boldness will bear the inspection of his conscious. The motives which govern him and make him resolute while others shrink from danger and from the eye of good men are virtuous as well as officious. And under the influence of such motives, he can wake and sleep, sleep and wake fearless of harm for God is his defense.

End of the interview.
Daniel Sanford

What is a man profited, if he gains a whole world and lose his own soul?
Sermon 15

This sermon is the first that is still around. A copy of the original is in the back of this book. This is the sermon that I transcribed first and it is the one that really got me interested in the Reverend.

In this sermon, he takes the simple but very complicated question from Mathew 16:26 "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul. He shows that we very freely and with little thought, sell our soul for a very small price. He shows that not only is there a soul, but gives the consequences of loosing ones soul.

The thought that the same dilemmas we experience today existed not only in his time but the advice he gives us is as applicable today as it was then. There is no reason that it should not be because, at least to me, proves that the gospel lessons are timeless.

My view is that God gave all of us free will. We must all chose our moral and spiritual paths. It was proven that forcing your opinion and values on someone that does not agree will only harden their heart and strengthen their resolve to do what they want. See sermon 338 on "Brought back to the fold" Reverend Hart addresses just that issue.

With our free will comes the consequences of the action. The Reverend states, in this sermon that a young life lost is like crushing an acorn. Not only do you loose the acorn, but you loose the mighty oak it could have become. At the final judgment, there will be an accounting for the lost life and the potential that was also lost. No harder judgment can be dealt on this earth.

The sermon puts forth the idea that we sell our soul at a very cheep price, a half truth here, a look the other way, in all our actions we give away our most precious possession. We lavish such attention to our mortal bodies to such a point that we have disease's related to self starvation for nothing other than vanities sake.

Contemplate the price that you have put on your own eternal happiness. Please enjoy Sermon 15 and I know that you will come away with at least a better value of your soul.

Daniel Sanford

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