

# TROUBADOUR

The Newsletter of St. Francis House, New London, Connecticut



and Photographs of the Re-Construction Project

Center

Section: In Memory of Dr. Linda Powell Pruitt, TSSF

Eastertide 2013

Vol. 15, No. 1

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## GENTLE PERSONALISM: PROMISE AND CHALLENGE

by Anne Scheibner

When we started planning this spring's Clarification of Thought series on Education we asked, "What is the educational role of Clarification of Thought itself for us here at St. Francis House?" Do we do this 3 hour session every other week because we have thought for 15 years that that is what communities formed in and inspired by the Catholic Worker tradition "ought" to do? If it's different from simply having a series of interesting speakers on important topics, what makes it different? How does our being an intentional Christian community matter? Having been here since 1998 I often serve as the "corporate memory" of the House and because I felt moved by these questions, I undertook to do some digging into the origins of the whole idea of Clarification of Thought. It was during this exploration that I became much more aware of how the philosophy of "personalism" underlies the whole concept of Clarification of Thought and I began to think about the implications for public education.

First of all, some clarification of terms: Personalism has nothing to do with individualism. Individualism is the idea that the individual is the arbiter of values and choices. Personalism is the philosophy developed in France by Emmanuel Mounier and others during the early 20th century in response to the split of "left" and "right" emerging in the political sphere and in the Church. Its central affirmation is the existence of free and creative persons. But it does not seek to define "the person" as the basic unit in a system. Personalism's basic assumption is that a person is not definable i.e. you can know Anne Scheibner or rather you can name observable characteristics, but you cannot define an "Anne Scheibner". Personalism rejects the whole idea of "systems" because systems reduce thought and action to automatic distributors of solutions and instructions. In a personalist universe, there is one reality which we both know and are also fashioning from within: "Present everywhere, it is given nowhere," as Emmanuel Mounier says in his short but incisive book "Personalism." It is this incessant creation of situations, life patterns and institutions which is the core of the personalist universe. Mounier thought that it would probably be more helpful to speak of "personalisms" rather than one philosophy of "personalism" because he thought, for example, that there could be agnostic as well as Christian personalists and that it was worse than pointless to try to condense, combine or otherwise systematize them.

For those of us trying to live out our lives as disciples of Jesus who are part of the Catholic Worker network of communities, this way of thinking is important because it so grounded Peter Maurin who came to this country from France in the 1920's. In 1932 he met Dorothy Day and their engaged conversations evolved into the Catholic Worker. Many in the Catholic Worker experiment with truth starting with Peter Maurin and many others including Martin Luther King, Jr. have found that personalist philosophy undergirds in a helpful and seamless way an articulation of the journey of Christian discipleship. This articulation is expressed in the idea that the purpose of human existence is to change the heart of its heart and then to radiate over the world to effect the reign of God on earth. As Mounier observed, the secrecy of the heart in which the transmutation of the universe is decided by personal choice is the inviolable domain which no one can judge and of which nobody knows, not even the angels, but God alone.

So what do we do in Clarification of Thought that aims to be what Peter Maurin called for as "Round-Table Discussions"? First of all, Clarification of Thought is not a lecture although each session starts with a presentation by someone who has thought and prayed deeply about the subject at hand. Peter Maurin would have assumed each presenter was steeped in Catholic social teaching and the papal encyclicals and indeed when Emmett Jarrett, Ken Leech and Ed Rodman framed our conversations such was the case. But no matter who our presenters are, each person who participates in the discussion is clarifying from within their own personalist universe and seeking to be ready for the work of discipleship i.e. to be love incarnate in the world as our gifts and talents and communities enable us. And in the eclectic mix of people whose backgrounds include the court room (from both sides of the bar), homelessness, college classrooms, the military, we keep, as Peter Maurin said, "trained minds from becoming academic" and "untrained minds from being superficial." Some of our friends have been coming to Clarification of Thought at St. Francis House for fourteen years. It is like a river; you can never enter the same place twice. And the people asked to lead the discussions help us "learn... how a path can be made from things as they are to things as they should be."

What are some of the implications of this way of thinking and working for public education? We could begin by giving up thinking about education as a "system." In their controversial statement on the economy back in the 1980's the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops declared, "The economy is made for people and not people for the economy." We need a similar declaration about education: Educational opportunities are made for people - including the very youngest - and not people to fit into an educational system. The "success" of education should be judged on the development over at least a twelve year period of each particular human being and not on standardized test scores aggregated for a school.

Perhaps at this stage in U.S. history we should get rid of schools as outmoded means of social control and industrial era education and instead develop community learning centers for Round Table Discussions for persons of all ages. We definitely could get rid of history and social studies text books which put forth one narrative view as if it were universal. Students at New London High School come from families which speak over eighty different languages. What a rich global source of educational potential is here locally! What we need are persons/teachers

trained to engage with persons/students to learn from their experience which includes their families and the economic and political matrix of the community.

As Peter Maurin so trenchantly observed, "The future will be different if we make the present different." And the current insanity of public education as a system will continue so long as our teachers and young people keep being put in an impossible system with the rest of us expecting different results and thereby colluding in their failure to thrive.

Anne Scheibner lives and works at St. Francis House. She has been involved in clarifying her thought on education since being a high school student at Williams Memorial Institute here in New London (Class of '65) and attending Ivan Illich's Center for Alternatives in Education in Cuernavaca, Mexico in 1970.



### **American Personalism, The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. And The Implications for Public Education**

By Norm Faramelli

The European Personalism of Emmanuel Mounier and Peter Maurin influenced the Catholic Worker movement in the United States. But there was a earlier brand of Personalism in this country that was centered in Boston University, a Personalism that deeply influenced the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr.

All of us know of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement. Fewer know that he received his doctorate at Boston University, and even fewer know that King went to Boston University (BU) to study with Edgar S. Brightman, a major exponent of Boston Personalism- a movement that began in the 1880s at BU.

American Personalism (or Boston Personalism) was based on the idea that all of reality could be best understood in terms of personal relations. Its two central tenets were:

1. God is Personal, and
2. Each person is created in the divine image and possesses inherent value, worth and human dignity that must always be respected.

King did not need to go to BU to learn that; he

already knew those principles from his Black Church experiences. King noted that Boston Personalism gave him the necessary "metaphysical foundation" to move forward. In King the Black Church experience and Boston Personalism were merged and integrated to the great benefit of all.

At BU, King was impressed with the social justice and pacifist stances of some of his professors. Although King never claimed to be a pacifist, it is clear that the practice of non-violent resistance (akin to pacifism) was central to his life and work as well as to the entire Civil Rights Movement.

With regard to public education, King saw the inequities in racially segregated schools, but he realized that racial integration alone would not suffice. It was necessary that each child be treated as a person created in the divine image. Each child has inherent value and worth and his/her dignity must always be respected. This must be the foundation of a creative public education system. Without that foundation, the children will be severely short-changed. No amount of educational reforms will work unless that foundation is firmly established.

The Rev. Norm Faramelli is an Episcopal priest whose varied ministries have included teaching at Boston University. He and his wife Lucie were present at St. Francis House for the discussion of Personalism and he asked Anne afterwards if she knew of Dr. King's connection to the topic. She invited him to share this connection with the *Troubadour* readership.



NOTE: Dorothy Day wrote on the cover of the 1961 edition of Peter Maurin's *The Green Revolution: Easy Essays on Catholic Radicalism* the following:

"Peter's teaching was simple, so simple, as one can see from these phrased paragraphs, the *Easy Essays*, as we have come to call them, that many disregarded them. It was the sanctity of the man that made them dynamic." May all those working for the beatification of Dorothy Day remember and include Peter in that effort. These excerpts can be included here because, "The contents of [*Easy Essays*] are not copyrighted. The text may be reproduced by anyone in any desired form. May it be done for the greater honor and glory of God and the furtherance of the lay apostolate to which the author's life was devoted."

## Excerpts from Peter Maurin's *Easy Essays*

### Prostitution of Education

To educate  
is to elevate.  
To elevate  
is to raise.  
To raise wheat on a piece of land  
is to enable  
that piece of land  
to produce wheat  
instead of weeds.  
To raise men  
from the animal state  
is to educate men.  
The teaching of facts  
without understanding  
is a prostitution  
of education.

### Program

The purpose of the Catholic Workers' School  
is to bring Catholic thought  
to Catholic workers  
so as to prepare them  
for Catholic Action.  
Besides presenting Catholic thought  
to Catholic workers  
The Catholic Workers' School  
Presents a program of Catholic action  
Based on Catholic thought.  
The program of the Catholic Workers' School  
is a three-point program:

1. Round-table Discussions
2. Houses of Hospitality
3. Farming Communes.

### Round-Table Discussions

We need Round -Table Discussions  
To keep trained minds from being academic.  
We need Round-Table Discussions  
To keep untrained minds from being superficial.  
We need Round-Table Discussions  
To learn from scholars  
How things would be,  
If they were as they should be.  
We need Round-Table Discussions  
To learn from scholars  
How a path can be made  
From things as they are  
To things as they should be.

# It happened!



Lou and Ted take the measure of the chapel wall prior to demolition. Below: Marykate finally gets to take a mini-sledge hammer to the task....



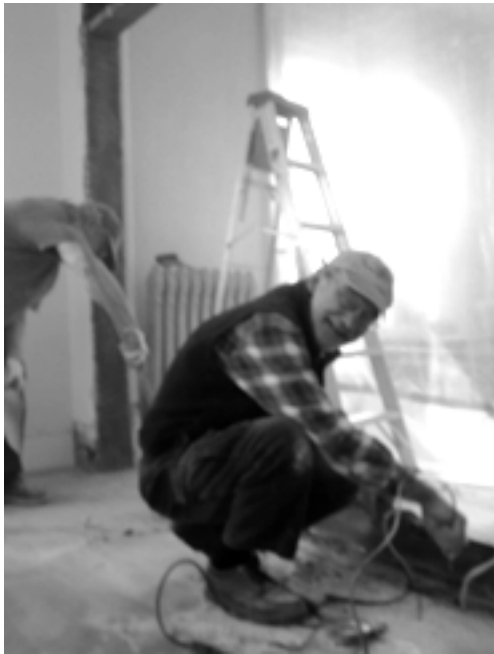
Above: When we acquired 30 Broad St. in 1998, this front room had been made into a kitchen with the bay window sectioned off as the breakfast nook. That wall came down and the space became the chapel and the room next to it became the living room/parlor. Right: The new chapel with the wall replaced by sliding curtain panels. Left to right: Deacon Ellen, Len, Janet and Anne after Morning Prayer.



# The Re-Construction Project

For years we have thought about taking down the wall between the chapel and the living room. Clarification of Thought gatherings in the Chapel have often been severely constricted by the lack of space. But we also wanted to be able to keep the chapel and living room spaces separate. What to do? Back in 2003 Ted assisted Arthur in the renovation of Victory House. Since then Ted has gone on to do countless projects with Homeless Hospitality and Arthur has been hard at work in urban agriculture and youth work with FRESH, New London.

This time Ted headed up the wall demolition and Arthur came to help (below).



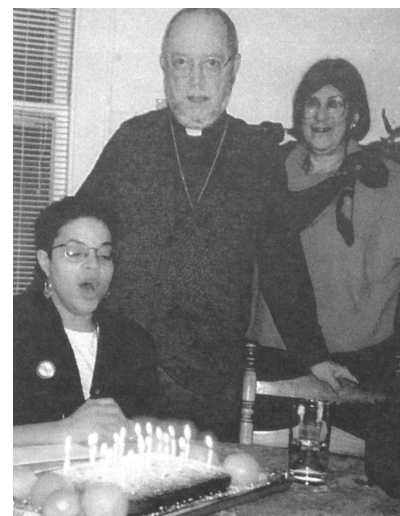
Bill and Ted discover the original floor was still there underneath the wall.



We thought we were going to make something new. What we discovered once the wall was out was the original design i.e. two parlor rooms open to each other! So now we can have film/TV shows with a larger group as well as expanded space for Clarification of Thought. Our heartfelt thanks to everyone who helped with this project and especially to Ted Olynciw who has once again so generously contributed to renewing and maintaining St. Francis House.



Reflections by Anne Scheibner  
at the Eucharist of the Resurrection  
in Thanksgiving for the Life of  
**Dr. Linda Celeste Powell Pruitt, TSSF**  
February 23, 1952 - March 7, 2013  
St. John's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Virginia



Linda and I met in New York City when we were both in our twenties. She had a West 14th Street loft. It was on the third floor and had no buzzer; the key got put in a sock and thrown out the window down to the sidewalk to admit visitors! We were both part of the engaged and creative women's community. I went to her one woman show - she had a beautiful voice - one of her many possible vocational paths. And she was part of a Black women's theater group which developed plays on issues such as Food. That group "got it's act together and took it on the road" performing in San Francisco and other places.

While she was in Washington, DC working on her doctorate she would take a break to come out to the rectory at Ascension, Silver Spring, to play with our children. (She also enjoyed Emmett's home cooking!) Those relationships with Nate and Sarah have been mutual and life long. Linda visited every school they ever went to - elementary, middle and high school - and never missed a graduation. Last year Nate wrote a paper for a philosophy course in feminist linguistics on racial identity. That paper was not about "others"; it was done from the inside, a reflection on his and his family's experience - not bad for a white boy! And also last year Linda asked Sarah to paint her portrait. Sarah didn't actually start art school officially until this year, but that quite extraordinary painting is over in the Parish Hall so you can all see it at the reception.

Linda was a founding board member of St. Francis House in New London, CT where I have lived and worked for the last 15 years. The community there gathered for Morning Prayer the day before I left to come here and offered the *Litany at the Time of Death* for Linda. I asked Deacon Ellen to lead the litany because I was sure I would not be able to get through it even though it was my regular morning to lead Morning Prayer. (One of the many things Linda and I had in common was our conclusion that we should not be ordained because we were too prone to weep in the presence of the Eucharist!) We had a period of reflection afterwards and Deacon Ellen, who now serves on our board, shared the fact that she first came to St. Francis House some 13 years ago because she was an elementary school teacher and wanted to hear Linda Powell speak at one of our Clarification of Thought evenings. That same year she told Paul who has now been resident at SFH for some 4 years that he should come check out St. Francis House. It is those kinds of webs of relationships that Linda was so part of weaving. And even I was unaware until that morning what a role she had played in the making and sustaining of the House.

Cancer is the form that crucifixion takes in our age. It is the "C" word - the one that no one wants to talk about. Linda bore that cross with an unyielding determination that often was difficult for those of us who tried to walk with her on the Way. The veil of the universe of friendship and of friendship's conversation - has been rent. May she rest in peace and may she continue to pray mightily and lovingly for all us as she always has.



*Top left:* Linda and Sarah at Teachers College, NYC in 2000

*Top right:* Birthday at SFH

*Left:* Linda (seated center) with the Episcopal Urban Caucus board in 2002

*Right:* Cof T with Paul and School Supt. Julian Stafford in 2000



## Broad Street Blues

by Paul Jakoboski, TSSF

A year ago I wrote a reflection subtitled “A chapter in my life with lung cancer.” This is an update.

My health has been a struggle to maintain on a consistent, day-to-day basis. Feeling passable never lasting more than a few days and never, it seems, as long as a week. The only constant, as they say, is change. This kind of change itself is tiresome and wearing. The good days are overshadowed by the constant return to health challenges. I begin to see this in terms of suffering, a term that always seemed archaic, even biblical. The recurrent search for causes amongst innumerable variables. The fatigue thwarts any sense of progress. This is how my cancer is lived out on a daily basis over the past years.

In the midst of this effort I have come to learn that I cannot plan very far ahead. I cannot count on feeling well enough for a commitment a week away or even a few days. Some commitments I make and just hope that I’ll be well enough to deal with situation, as best I can. Some days I just feel better and go with it. It’s on those days that I have come to understand a sense of joy. This has become my response, living in the present, without dwelling on the past or future or even letting it into my consciousness. In the present I focus on the many aspects of life I tended to ignore in my previous lifestyle. Now I listen. To my body, to what it is telling me, to the sounds just before sunrise, to my breath as I fill my lung without pain or restriction and find joy in each of these. It is with this joy I begin my day, focused on the present moment with appreciation and awe. I am humbled by having a sense of what being in right relationship with the creation is like.

My health continues to improve gradually, but noticeably — if I pay attention. I continue to be a student of this new lifestyle. Prayer and contemplation have a much greater place during the course of a day, as does study. I’m able to live out my rule to a much greater extent. Joy and happiness arise from a greater conscious awareness of the beauty and awesome aspects of life itself.

Faced with the week ahead I spend more effort working to discern what I am being called to do with what I used to consider limitless energy and now must face the desire to act, but without the personal energy resources to achieve the goals. Discerning what is most important and trying to anticipate the amount of self-participation I will be able to contribute is very challenging. Striving to live in closer accordance with my true self (living my rule) in the

supportive environment of an intentional community, St. Francis House is bringing a deeper joy and happiness that is an outcome of the suffering and health challenges of the past few years. Being in a counter-cultural environment, trying to model a lifestyle different from the consumeristic materialism of our current society, to live in accordance with what Jesus really meant by the Sermon on the Mount, has brought the deeper joy. Living my Third Order rule has helped me rise above the debilitating effects of cancer so prevalent in our community and enriched my ability to be joyful, loving and humble. The St. Francis House community, family, and friends are the catalysts that sustained me throughout my trials and enabled me to achieve what I would not have been able to do on my own. My wife, Wendy, the other core members contributed the unconditional support that is so necessary to the sustaining of life, the gift of love.

As I was living through my cancer situation of the past three years, I was not alone in the process of going through a spiritual transformation. Both Wendy and Anne were going through tremendous growth changes in their lives that were at least as transformational as mine was, with partners dying and lifestyle transitions that were as complete as possible. Yet living in community supported us all through what each of us was going through. We received outside assistance as needed, but by and large were able to grow with the situations as they presented themselves. Out of our commitment to community, to each other, and to our principles we were able to become something greater, each of us in our own way.

Together we succeeded in becoming spiritually transformed as a result of our shared experiences. We did not anticipate these changes when coming together for this experiment in truth. Although we all began as seekers and continue to do so we are recognizing the process that brought us thus far and are refining and changing that dynamic process as I write. The secret is not a formulaic epiphany that comes and is statically implemented; it is a dynamic process of following principles and the wisdom of those who came before us.

Pray for us as we continue in this experiment in truth and seeking.

Namaste,  
Paul

Paul and Wendy moved to St. Francis House in 2009 during Emmett’s time of chemotherapy. Paul’s article in the Eastertide 2012 *Troubadour* was entitled “An Enlightening Close Call or How I Spent my February and March.” It is available on our website.



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*Center Section:*

The Re-Construction Project

**SAVE THE DATES !**

**CLARIFICATION OF THOUGHT  
FALL/WINTER 2013**

***"BIO-TECHNOLOGY AND  
GENETIC ENGINEERING"***

September 13, September 27

October 11, October 25

November 8, November 22

December 6, December 20

5:30 Evening Prayer, 6:00 Supper

7-8:30 Round-Table Discussion



