

Correspondence

Correspondence between Florence Stapleton and Leo Zonneveld in Planning the Thomas Paine Colloquium

Following a visit on Saturday, April 4, 1987, made by Leo Zonneveld and two friends, Bonnie Corso and Lisa Sperling, to New Rochelle, New York, where they were given a tour of the Thomas Paine Cottage by Florence Stapleton, Leo and Florence began a correspondence. Excerpts follow.

Florence to Leo – May 3, 1987

The paper you sent me drawing the bond between Teilhard de Chardin and Paine brings out a deeper value of the Patriot's mind than I realized.

Leo to Florence – May 26, 1987

There is the human mind, co-partner, co-operator, co-creator with the universal mind.

Florence to Leo – August 20, 1987

The opportunity you presented the Association [Thomas Paine National Historical Association] through me yesterday and confirmed this morning of placing Thomas Paine before the world via the United Nations – is overwhelming!

But this is too great an opportunity to honor such a great friend of mankind to miss. I shall inform the President of our Association and advise Marina Kaufman [Friends of the University for Peace Foundation, New York] and Mr. Ostrowski [Krzysztof Ostrowski, Executive Secretary of the United Nations 1986 International Year of Peace and Peace Research Section] of your proposal, viz: to call together six or seven 'Painites' to give addresses (30 minutes) at the U.N. on a date to be selected late November (after 11-17) through December, 1987 – the 250th anniversary year of Thomas Paine!

Knowing, as you do, that, though a recent President, I am not on the Executive Committee; that we are an all-volunteer group without great financial resource, but which has extraordinary heritage spiritual as well as actual documents from the founders of 1906. You are courageous to call me!

Little people are sometimes called to do great things. Thanks for the opportunity to try.

Leo to Florence – August 28, 1987

[There is] a possible opening to hold a Colloquium on Thomas Paine – provided we can do it before the end of the year!

Attached I am sending you some briefing material on the Teilhard Conference in 1983, from which you can see the format and scope of this first Conference. With a bit of luck and support from the Almighty, Paine may become the second visionary in the series ...

If you think you can get 7-10 people together to speak on Paine and his work for peace for a date in October/November in the United Nations Headquarters then I will inform the whole network that the Colloquium is on. It will be held under the auspices of the UN University for Peace and my small organization called the United Teilhard Trust and supported by the UN Peace Studies Unit, led by Mr. Ostrowski.

I will care for the infrastructure of the whole event, if you like.

P.S. Bonnie will help you! [Bonnie Corso, then representing the United Teilhard Trust]

Florence sent an outline of the program to Marina Kaufman and to Krzysztof Ostrowski, but they did not reply. Florence became temporarily discouraged.

Florence to Leo – August 31, 1987

I have had no response ... and consider the prospect closed.

This is rather a heartache, but well worth the thought. With time and expertise it could be an extraordinary event. Friends of Thomas Paine, past and present, are very generous with their time and talent to honor a man who has been so enormously ignored.

Leo interceded and the prospect for a Thomas Paine Colloquium was not closed. It gained a distinct focus.

Florence to Leo – September 1, 1987

Your letter of August 28 arrived today ... It brings the background I needed to understand your 'vision.' Peace must be the central theme. Although peace is the ultimate goal for his Religion de la Liberté, for his

daring battles of words and actions to tear down the enemies in church and state that have enslaved mankind – it would take devoted research and development throughout his writings to establish the theme. As you see by the suggested titles on my list of speakers, controversy is the element dominant. The great humanist is seen as a rebel (ironic!) – for the causes of equality and peace among men. Even I have never thought of his contributing to peace as a central expression. I don't think of numerous passages in his writings such as near the end of Common Sense: 'Let the names of Whig and Tory be extinct and none other be heard – than good citizen – resolute friend – virtuous supporter of the rights of mankind.' Through many of his pages – ! The Maritime Contract [Maritime Compact,1800] stands out ... Could we but have time to write and invite these speakers and many not listed if they could consider this subject: Paine, Apostle of Universal Peace.

The list of speakers was confirmed; the venue was secured; and the Thomas Paine Colloquium was on!

Florence to Leo – July 14, 1988 (after the event)

Le 14 juillet 1988: Could this be the beautiful day, the hour longed for? For one July 4 and 14 symbolize events of giant proportions precipitated by the pen of one man. Time had found him and the elements were there! When will time find me? Am I destined to fulfill my longing to tell you and Bonnie what your visit at the Museum did for me one spring day in 1987!