

16 October 2016 - Saint Brother Solomon



CANONIZATION OF BROTHER SOLOMON LE CLERCQ

16 October 2016

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1) BROTHER SOLOMON: «TEACHING UP TO THE END" – A TEACHER MARTYR, WITH YOUNG PEOPLE AT HEART

He was a teacher and educator, often of disadvantaged children. He was also the bursar of a large college and then General Secretary of his Congregation. Nicolas was born in 1745, the gentle, reserved son of a family of merchants in Boulogne-sur-Mer Boulogne, a major port on the northern coast of France. He grew up in a family that was well-off and numerous, and which held to solid religious principles. His mother was ever present and full of joy, giving comfort and security. His father was upright and honest in his business as a dealer in food and wines, besides owning two salt beds near Rochelle.

Perhaps the reason why his parents chose to send him to the Lasallian school was because it excelled in teaching calculus, precisely in order to make that discipline available to the children of traders and artisans in the XVIII century. His father had attended the same school and held it in high esteem and appreciation. These were precious days for the growing boy, who was fascinated by the big book about «God's heros» which he preferred to adventure stories. During his years in school, he absorbed the daily example of the serious devotion of his educators, and thus they prepared the ground for the development of his future vocation. He finished school at sixteen and began his apprenticeship. With an eye on the family business, he was first sent to Devres, not far from Boulogne, and then to Paris for work experience. There he found himself in the midst of the tumult of the capital city. It was characterised by hostility towards religion, and the young people (such as those with whom he lodged in the pension Vessette) were out of control. Because of this, there grew in him a rejection of the disorders of social life and an increasing desire to find fulfilment.

He returned home and expressed his determination. «I want to be like my teachers, the Brothers, following them in their piety, their austerity and their service to young people."

It was a call to be different, similar to that of St Benedict, and he entered the novitiate at the age of twenty-one. His happiness at having finally found the right path to the end is evident in the many letters he wrote to his family whom he regarded as a great gift from heaven. He became a teacher at the age of twenty-three, first in Rennes and then in Rouen. Now fully occupied as a teacher, he sometimes had classes of up to 130 pupils, to whom he taught "reading, writing and calculus" from morning to evening. Some of them, like those in Maréville, were difficult teenagers, sent to the school for re-education. At some personal cost, he learned how to get through to them by tenderness, kindness and authority. He exchanged his natural timidity for a joyful, healthy approach, and he was concerned not only to teach them but also to accompany them patiently, while fully aware of the limited viewpoints of their old established families.

At the age of 27, he made final vows and a few months later he became Director of Novices. This new post involved the delicate and difficult work of discerning and supporting future religious. Guided by his profound understanding of the Lasallian constitutions and Rule, he initiated them into the constant practice of virtue in the course of the one year of the novitiate. It was a time of asceticism, when he was happy at having chosen «the essential» as opposed



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to the meaningless life offered by the world with its rush for material things and riches which fade.

The main features of his spirituality were his understanding that he was and wanted to be the humble instrument of grace, his daily efforts to choose what was right, with the strong support of the sacraments, his devotion to the Sacred Heart and to Mary and his trust in Providence. At the age of 32, we find him in Maréville in charge of a big educational complex, with around 1,000 students, including 150 "difficult" boys committed by the courts, plus a novitiate and a Community of 40 Brothers. He did a small amount of teaching, but his main work was that of administration. He was responsible for looking after a number of buildings, animals, vineyards and orchards belonging to the property, seeing to the provisions, maintaining the structures, negotiating with the farmers and tradesmen. It represented a sudden change in his life which brought him back to the affairs of the world, and he was strengthened by the balanced judgement he had learned from his father. He was guided by the one main idea of eternal salvation, which inspired everything, even when he was up on the scaffolding supervising the building works.

Nine years later, he was sent to Melun to teach mathematics in the scholasticate, the teacher training centre for the Brothers. He stayed there for five years. His good sense, simplicity, discretion and great ability were evident to his students, who appreciated his intelligence and skill in synthesising things and admired his perfect handwriting.

During the General Chapter of 1787, he was appointed to the delicate role of secretary. He did not go unnoticed by the Superior General, who recognised in him an attentive and wise observer, with a skill in making interventions and relating to those in authority. He appointed him as his personal secretary. Two years later, the French Revolution exploded and became increasingly anticlerical. Brother Solomon continued to do his work for a higher court of law. Like many of the Brothers, he refused to take the oath of allegiance to the state. Religious congregations were abolished, and the Brothers' schools were closed. They were driven from their houses and reduced to total poverty. Those who could went back to their families. When Solomon met Father Clorivière, a Jesuit, he discussed with him his idea of transforming religious institutes during times of persecution into what would later be known as secular institutes, living out their vocation in the world. Just before his time of trial, he made a retreat in the forest of Senart.

Brother Salomon and the Brother Superior General did all they could to ensure the dignity of the Brothers. The Revolution was at its height, and it suspended all individual rights in the name of democracy and equality. The Constitutive Assembly did try to introduce legislative compromises, but the Paris municipality inflamed people's minds. When the Prussians were at the gates of Paris, violence broke out and was also expressed in the press. Many religious suffered because of it. In his last letter, dated 15 August 1792, Brother Solomon remained calm before the storm and was more worried about his family and the Brothers than about himself. «We bear with joy and gratitude the crosses and afflictions that come our way. As for me, I do not seem to be worthy to suffer for Him, since up to now nothing bad has happened to me, while there are so many confessors of the faith who are in difficulty." A few hours later, he was arrested by a squad of about fifty men, along with 166 "refractory" priests



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and religious. He was imprisoned in the Carmelite Convent in Paris. Having been interrogated during the night, he spent his final days without any food. Brother Abraham, who was in prison with him, managed to escape and to tell people about the last hours that were spent as though in a Lasallian retreat of spiritual exercises developing detachment from material things in preparation for martyrdom. On 2 September, they received the final order to take the oath to the Civil Constitution. After that, they were taken out into the garden in two successive waves at the usual time for their fresh air break. They were met by their killers, joined by hired assassins, who killed them with swords and guns. Some of them were praying. Their bodies were thrown into the well or buried in mass graves dug in the garden.

They were beatified on October 17, 1926, by Pope Pius XI, as a group of 191 victims of the massacres of September, 1792. Brother Salomon was the first Lasallian martyr, and he was followed by three other Brothers who died during those years in the prison ships of Rochefort. They were beatified in 1995.





2) THE TESTIMONY OF LIFE, THE MIRACLE AND THE RELEVANCE OF HIS MESSAGE – Interview with the General Postulator, Br Rodolfo Meoli, FSC

Brother Rodolfo Cosimo Meoli, Postulator General of the Brothers of the Christian Schools: is the most appropriate person to draw a profile of Brother Solomon, 224 years after his martyrdom.

A gentle and reserved young man, fascinated by the heroes of God rather than by the great adventurers; with strong, caring and wealthy parents living their faith ... Brother Solomon, a former student of the Brothers in France in 1750, entered the novitiate at 22, and a year later, he was given the poorer and disadvantaged children even with classes of 130 children, including the most turbulent sent there by the police. He guide them with firmness and tenderness, he knows how to scrutinize hearts. For these virtues he will be named Director of novices, and even called later on to help the Superior General, Brother Agathon, as secretary.

Guillaume Nicolas Louis Le Clercq was the son of wealthy merchants. A quiet boy who loved being with the family, a big family, with the father and the mother still present in educational matters of, parents morally rich in faith and fair in their professional activities. Maybe that's why Bro. Solomon joined the Lasallian school oriented towards the strengthening of mathematics, which provides modern and sustainable tools in the business world. The family and the school have a decisive role in its discernment of Nicolas to choose a way of life.

As said before, the Le Clercq were very pious parents, and they had a special devotion to Our Lady, honored in Boulogne, a seaside town, with the title of Our Lady of Good Back, protector of sailors. Their house was next to a Capuchin monastery. The father was close to the Franciscan spirituality. In in the archives of the Brothers of the Christian Schools of France, in Lyons, there is an ivory crucifix of Le Clercq family before which they prayed the evening. It was in the garden of the house has taken root and developed the religious vocation of Brother Solomon. At school the age, the influence of the brothers was such that eventually led her choice.

What are the traits that can be learned from his letters or other documents collected?

Letters folded, jealously kept mainly by his sister Rosalie which manifest a sensitive soul, fair, sincere and always serene. We have also the testimony of his first biographer who introduced us to his character, which describes the quiet, somewhat shy, docile to the stimulus of educators, constantly engaged and supported by a strong will. These qualities have made him a popular person by his superiors, which designate him early to great responsibilities.

How did we get to know his heroic virtues?

Here too, we must read his letters and first biographer. The letters amply reveal his deep spirituality. They helped his biographer to reconstruct the virtuous habits he has gradually



strengthened over the years he served the young and the Institute. The life of Brother Solomon ended with the heroic act of martyrdom not as an accident, but as the result of his total gift to God and adherence to the spirit of the Institute.

His martyrdom in France and a miracle in Venezuela are those the ways of Providence?

Brother Solomon was arrested and imprisoned in the Carmelite convent of Paris, reorganized as a prison, with several other companions. He was killed by the sword with 166 other priests and religious in the garden of the convent.

The miracle of September 6, 2007 in Venezuela in favor of a five year old daughter, took place while his two sisters and a brother, were in a family hostel founded by Mons. Rafael Febres Cordero, a Lasallian. While she was reading, she was bitten on her left foot by an unidentified animal. The hematoma spread through her leg and the girl started bleeding gums and nose. Rushed to a Caracas hospital, she was treated 53 hours later with a serum against snake bite. Preparations were made for the amputation of the leg to limit the damage elsewhere. Meanwhile, in the church of Sabaneta near her home children and neighbors begun their prayers before the little statue of Blessed Brother Solomon, well known and revered in that area. Unexpectedly, the hospital indicator numbers returned to normal. On September 11, it is completely discharged in good health and sent back home.

This story as a whole tells the love of children, the universality of the Church and the relativity of time in God's plans.

But 224 years after his martyrdom and his canonization: what is the message?

It is twofold: First, Brother Salomon gives us a lesson of great integrity and loyalty with the options taken, even at the sacrifice of his life. And God only knows how necessary it is today to live with integrity and loyalty in a world where it has become normal to trample rights unscrupulously against our conscience, against others and against God, for mere interest and profit ... Secondly, there is another message that Solomon Brother proposes to Christian teachers and consecrated persons in general: to be witnesses of Christ, whatever the cost. "The world, you know, needs more witnesses than teachers," said St. John Paul II. The world today needs more than ever loyalty, consistency, justice, generosity, altruism even at the cost of your own life. Brother Solomon is that all.

The importance of Christian education is still often criticized. How to keep it alive without accepting shortcuts on Christian values? What Lasallian strategies it takes to get there?

We hardly need to stress the importance of education in general today. It is clear that this emergency is found in all latitudes. A fortiori, that of Christian formation. We cannot analyze here and deepen that mater, but the frightening phenomenon of de-Christianization of the West is in front of everyone. Today we would like to have tens of La Salle, of Calanz, of Don Bosco and many other saints educators to try to pick up the thread of its contents... The impoverished Catholic education is at risk nowadays ...

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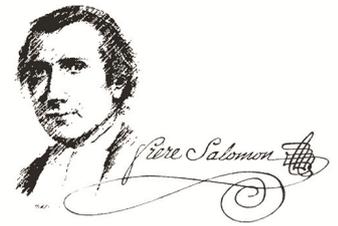


What relic will be brought to the altar during the Vatican celebration?

We do not have relics of Brother Solomon in the true sense of the term, such as parts of his body of usually called "*first class relics*". We opted for the donation of a handwritten letter from Brother Solomon. Of his 139 letters, all handwritten: 65 are addressed to his sister, 11, to her parents, 38 to his father after the death of his mother. There are others sent to other brothers, sisters, nephews. All are kept in the archives of the Brothers in Lyons (France). This is the most precious inheritance.



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3) THE LASALLIAN WORLD: CHARISM, WORKS AND BORDERS

The Brothers of the Christian Schools are devoted to human and Christian education of youth, especially the poor.

The Brothers are religious, consecrated lay people, today nearly 4,000 worldwide in 77 countries on 5 continents, among others, Pakistan, China, Cambodia, Vietnam, South Sudan, Eritrea, Myanmar, Niger, Togo, Palestine, Lebanon ... with 976 educational institutions: schools of all levels, including agricultural centers, remedial schools, public schools and more than 70 universities. More than 92,000 teachers, men and women, offer educational programs to about one million of children, young people and adolescents.

This religious congregation was founded in 1682 in Reims by St. John Baptist de La Salle (France 1651-1719), "touched by the human and spiritual distress of the children of artisans and the poor", to give them an education free schools.

Among the brilliant insights of this saint: the implementation of the role of the teacher at school with the simultaneous method, teaching in the mother tongue instead of Latin. Emphasis on practicality and pragmatism, with anticipations as the Calais Nautical Institute and Saint-Malo or accounting courses in areas used by most active companies, the prohibition of corporal punishment ... All this produced innovative methods in schools today considered the origin of the subsequent developments of modern pedagogy as normal schools for teachers training. In addition, De La Salle created also Sunday schools for young workers, and the first correctional homes or reformatories, and even boarding schools, the first, sheltered Irish nobles in exile.

The Institute, suppressed during the French Revolution, was restored by Napoleon and from that time, it has increased exponentially, so that the first 160 brothers became nearly 17,000 in 1966 ...

The 1904 secularization of laws that led to the send suppression of the Institute and the closure of hundreds of Catholic schools, causing a diaspora that scattered the Institute in the world. The highest number of Brothers is reached in 1966 but the crisis of vocations, common to so many orders and congregations, led to a gradual decline. However, it has been possible to maintain the Lasallian institutions by involving in their management a large number of lay educators, men and women.

Now that public education is generally guaranteed to all, the Brothers are experiencing other ways to continue the work with needed young people as did their Founder, reaching out, outside of schools, giving new answers to the problems of youth in developing countries, in the suburbs of major cities, in refugee camps.



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4) "EDUCATING THE YOUNG GENERATION AT ANY COST" – A saint martyr, a great gift for the Institute and the world. Interview with the Brother Superior General Robert Schieler, FSC

Brother Solomon, a model and a witness for De La Salle and the world. An example that challenges today, every educator, on total surrender to God serving the young, the poor, till the end. The meaning of the canonization and timelessness of the message given by Brother Solomon even 224 years since his martyrdom is explained by the Superior General of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Brother Robert Schieler:

A Christian martyr is a man or a woman murdered precisely because of his fidelity to the grace received in baptism and because of his personal commitment to Jesus, made at the time of confirmation. With the canonization he is presented as a model and a witness to the whole Christian community. For the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Brother Solomon is a clear reminder that our particular response to baptism and confirmation is a continuous and progressive dynamic that could lead others, in particular circumstances, to despise us and kill us.

What is the relevance of his testimony in light of the current challenges of the world?

Brother Solomon was an ordinary man who became Brother of the Christian Schools. As such, he was a minister of God and ambassador of Jesus Christ. He did not know that his wish to live together with the Brothers, to promote the glory of God through the apostolic ministry of Christian education, would be the direct cause of his murder. Today, unfortunately, we are still fighting in many wars and Christians are often the target of a terrible violence. As Brother Solomon, let us remember Msgr. Romero of El Salvador, Kayla Mueller, a volunteer killed in Aleppo (Syria) and lately, father Jacques Hamel in France, all representatives of many Christians who are still killed because they bear witness to the Kingdom of God.

You call into question today poverty and challenges. What answers are in place?

Today, in the footsteps of our Founder and patron saint of all teachers John-Baptist de La Salle, the Brothers of the Christian Schools and many Lasallian partners announce the Gospel to children and young people, especially the poor and excluded, through the apostolic ministry of Christian education in the world: in Scampia (Naples), to Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, indigenous children in Guatemala ... They offer hope and Christian education through an educational community network. Nearly 1 million children in 80 countries - Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, non-believers, all safely, in fraternity and solidarity to learn to grow.

Religious and prophets: your communities currently in the world are prophetic communities, as said by th Pope Francis?

All Lasallian schools are required to host the educational community by proclaiming the Gospel, knocking down walls, building bridges of dialogue, respect and brotherhood. These



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are the objectives of our centers. For those who are economically comfortable and for those counted among the poor and oppressed; these centers should be a sign of prophecy, joyful witnesses of God's Kingdom. Every student, parent, teacher, collaborator and their brothers and sisters all are invited and encouraged to meet the challenges of the Gospel in different local contexts and cultures, churches and religions. Jesus, Saint John Baptist de La Salle, Brother Solomon and many others, show us the way.



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5) FROM SAINT JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE TO OVER 160 SAINTS, BLESSED AND VENERABLES

The seed planted in Rheims (France) over 300 years by St. John Baptist de la Salle gave 14 saints to the Church, 150 Blessed and 8 Venerables. Many martyrs from France, Mexico, Vietnam, Guatemala, Colombia.... Thousands of extraordinary figures of men and educators. Among others, **Brother Raphael Rafiringa**, a pagan who became a Catholic leader, able to keep to the end of 1800 the whole Church in Madagascar; **Brother Exupérien Mas**, whose ranks gave out more than 300 priests and religious, hundreds of Christian families, founder in France of what will eventually be the first Catholic Union. In Ecuador, in the late nineteenth century, the wise and passionate dedication of Brother Miguel Febres Cordero for his boys, from primary to high school and cadets of the Academy, fostered the publication of more than 100 textbooks adopted in other countries Latin America.

Brother Scubilion Rousseau, is happy to settle in 1833 with two Brothers in the island of La Réunion in the Indian Ocean. He stayed there for 34 years, as a teacher and defender of the weak and the slaves whom he brought to Christ fighting for their emancipation, ratified in 1848. It is known as "the apostle of the slaves."

Brother Nymphas-Victorin Arnaud, exiled twice from France in 1905 and from Cuba in 1961. During his 56 years in Cuba he had an overwhelming apostolic activity: he founded the Catholic Federation of Cuban youth, the Catholic University Focolare, a movement of the Roman Catholic family and the Association Hall. Many priestly and religious vocations that have arisen in Cuba in those days came from the institutions founded by this Brother, who obtained civil and highest religious titles. He was named Knight of the National Order of Merit Carlos Manuel de Cespedes (in 1945), received honorary doctorate from the University of Santo Tomás Villanueva (in 1951), received the Cross *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* (Vatican, 1953), and also received the Cross of the Legion of Honor (France, 1955).

In Italy, **Brother Teodoreto Garberoglio**, founder of the House of Charity, an Institute of Arts and Crafts today in Piedmont, very popular in professional training.

Brother Angelino Guiot, who dare challenging the SS to save its Jewish students in the last war in Rhodes and many other stars who according to the prophet Daniel "Those who teach justice and virtue will shine like stars throughout the eternity" (Dn 12,3).



6) LASALLIANS AT THE FRONTIERS: "STOPPING VIOLENCE BY TEACHING FRATERNITY" – SOME EXAMPLES OF RESPONSES BEING MADE BY THE BROTHERS AROUND THE WORLD

Lebanon: In the ‘Fratelli Project’, the De La Salle and Marist Brothers are giving help to 70 refugee boys from Syria and Iraq fleeing from the war. The aim is to prevent the loss of a whole generation of displaced children. The project is led by Miguel and Andreès, a sixty year old Catalan Marist and a thirty-two year old Mexican De La Salle Brother. Working with them are a Lebanese security man and five local teachers and volunteers. The children receive lessons in literacy, mathematics and English in the former Marist school, which had been occupied by the military but part of which was recently returned and renovated.

Guatemala: Support is being given to provide university education for young native people who live in conditions of extreme poverty in rural areas. Historically, they have been deprived of access to education, health care and the opportunity to improve their standing in society. The [residenza lasalliana](#) provides them with the possibility of attending the state university, including food and lodging, for studies especially in engineering, law, agriculture and business administration. Their families contribute according to their means, sometimes by giving the produce of their land, such as maize, fruit and vegetables, to feed them.

Colombia: The Project Utopia, in the campus of the Lasallian University of Bogotá, trains young people in various branches of agrarian engineering, not just the technology but also managerial and leadership skills. It has been operating for five years and can boast of tangible results in what is a complex situation. The students come from various rural areas of the country, notably from those ravaged by the guerrilla warfare, drug trafficking and poverty. The projects brings together quality education, rural development, local independence, secure food supply and peace-building.

In the USA, the “San Miguel Schools”, are called after the first Brother from the Americas to be canonised (in 1984). The network gives hope via a human and Christian education to children at risk in poor backgrounds. They offer extended classes to small groups of students, providing academic work, religious studies and life experience to students of all faiths and cultures. No fees are charged. Families give what they can. The schools support their pupils after they leave. The first school was founded in 1993 in Rhode Island. Today there are eleven San Miguel schools in California, Montana, Tennessee, Illinois, Washington and New York.

Balgo, Australia, is a small desert town with a population of about 500 aborigine people who have lived in the area for 50 thousand years. The Brothers arrived there in June 1984 and started the **Luurnpa Catholic School** to meet the educational needs of boys aged 3 to 17. Most of the pupils do not speak English, and classes are taught with the help of aboriginal assistants, which ensures a link between the school and the community. Alongside the Brothers, newly graduated Lasallians do volunteer work for one year, acting as older brothers and sisters to the boys. In 2009, the Kutjungka Commercial Training Centre enabled students

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aged 14 to 17 to receive professional training. Since 2009, those who want to continue their studies can do so in La Salle College Middle Swan, Perth, which is twinned with Balgo school.

Eritrea The Agricultural Industry School of Hagaz was founded at the request of the Ministry of Education. It is located in an area of semi-desert, which is the ideological home of “*jihad*” and it stands as a model of peaceful co-existence. The agreement with the Ministry means that the student body must comprise Christians and Muslims from the nine ethnic groups with a minimum of 35% girls. They are all boarders and pay no fees. Besides being a school, it is a training centre for agriculture, developing agricultural projects and exploring the water tables all around. They produce wine, eggs, milk and dairy products, jams and vegetables. 120 tons of pear jam are distributed to feed children in clinics and hostels. Currently the school is offering specialist programmes of 2 years and 3 years in botany, soil and water conservation, zoology and agro-mechanics. The years of war and the current lack of peace have led to a great loss of any opportunity for development and growth in what is one of the poorest countries in the world.

Scampia, Naples The Casa Arcobaleno was started in 2006 to give children a second chance and greater hope by supporting them during their years of education as they move towards adulthood. It offers them a variety of programmes and life-styles which are creative healthy and concrete. The initiatives include support during their studies for the *licenza media*, workshops on violence in general, courses in photography, literacy programmes for Romanians, tutoring, art symposia, integration of minorities and summer work in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

