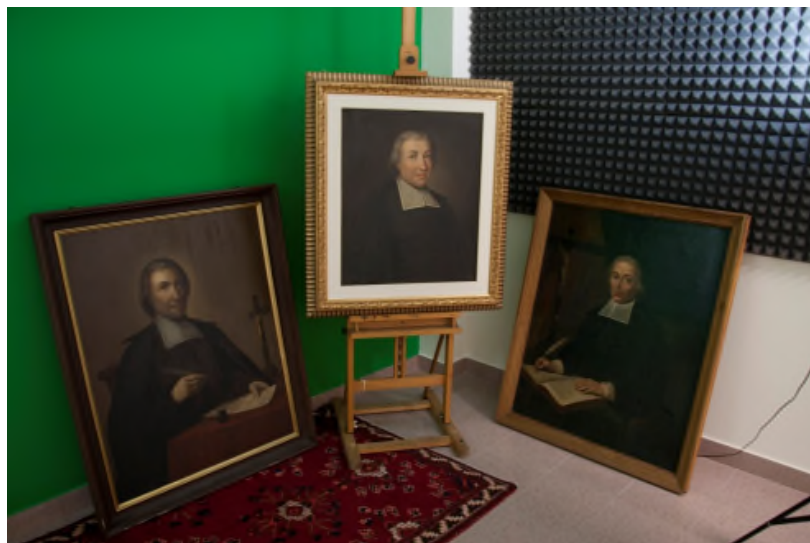




**Lasallian Iconography Project for the 21st Century**

***A HEART, A COMMITMENT, A LIFE***  
***JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE***  
***(1719-2019)***



**Service of Lasallian Research and Resources**  
**Rome 2017**

*That his image be not only before our eyes,  
but that it be above all in our hearts*

Br. Philippe, *Circular 269*, p. 10

## **A. Introduction**

When John Baptist de La Salle died in Rouen on 7 April 1719, his incipient group of Brothers of the Christian Schools was conducting 21 schools in France and one in Rome. In the three hundred succeeding years his two great works were to be consolidated in spite of historical vicissitudes: the community of the Brothers and the network of Christian schools.

- We Brothers, since the beginning of the Institute, have venerated the figure of our Father and Founder and this veneration has been transmitted to all Lasallians. Moreover as our *Rule* (2015) states, in its constitution 160, La Salle remains for us an example of abandonment to God, fidelity to the Church, creative apostolic intent and unlimited commitment to the evangelization of youth. His life is our most outstanding example of fidelity to God and his plan of salvation by means of Christian education.
- “Lasallian” schools today are present in 77 countries on five continents and serve around one million students of all educational levels. We speak now of a Lasallian Family, animated by more than ninety thousand men and women dedicated to education, following the charism of the Holy Founder. Born into French culture at the end of the old regime (second half of the seventeenth century), Lasallian experience is now to be understood from its multicultural and even multi-religious character. There has been a long process of inculturation initiated by the French Brothers from the same foundational moment.

We are convinced that the charism of the Founder is still alive and is actuated every time Christian educators become aware, in the light of faith, of the educational needs of young people, especially the vulnerable. That is why the charism goes beyond the limits of the Institute and becomes a possible proposal for any educator who wishes to turn his/her work into an ecclesial ministry at the service of Christian education.

What has been the Institute's perception of the person of John Baptist de La Salle across the three hundred years that separate us from his physical disappearance? What do we need to understand from that itinerary to reread the iconography - and perhaps the iconology - that we have produced as an Institute from the beginning and which today we need to renew in the context of the 21st century?

We present a minimal historical reference of the Institute that provides a frame of reference for the available Lasallian iconography, its origin, evolution and trends.

## ***B. A minimal historical reference***

### *b.1 The Founder and the first Brothers of the Institute*

John Baptist de La Salle organized, around 1679<sup>1</sup>, a first community of teachers dedicated to the school from morning to night - with them he started the Institute.

Many abandoned it in the first period and others arrived convinced that something new was being born. With them, La Salle formed the first charismatic community, with a deep spiritual imprint, as and how its protagonists have witnessed to it. They together made decisions about community organization and school work. With it La Salle came to experience ups and downs in the consolidation of the *Work of God*. Abandoning himself thus into the hands of Providence with twelve of his Brothers he sealed his commitment for life in 1694. Three of those Brothers of the first community - Jean Jacquot, Antonio Partois and Gabriel Drolin - survived the death of the Founder and collaborated with his testimony to preserve the memory of the nascent Institute.

As of 1694 we could say that a second generation of Brothers begins to emerge, who will continue to know firsthand the Founder. They too will be formed by the first Brothers. There was already a memory of the beginnings, an exercise of remembrance and reaffirmation, as also an internal regulation of the community, a school manual and a particular way to work in the schools. All this continued to be updated year after year, responding to the challenges that the community encountered in its internal life and in its school work. This community, different from the foundational one, is the one that comes to experience the crisis of 1712. Thirty-eight of them will be present in the lists of communities of 1717 (Loes, 2003, p. 67).

As of 1712 a third generation emerges, heir to the crisis and that will no longer have the same type of permanent relation with the Founder. Supported by the founding Brothers, they will witness the definitive approval of the *Rules*, the *Conduct of Schools* and the manuals for use in schools. They will choose the first Brother Superior - Barthélemy - and, after the death of the Founder, they will welcome the memories of the first Brothers. This generation will be crucial for understanding and making known the Founder to the upcoming generations of the eighteenth century. An example of this is the influence exerted by Br. Ireneus as Director of Novices and Assistant - he will die in 1747.

### *b.2 The Institute maintains the recent memory of its Founder*

Br. Barthélemy takes charge of diffusing the first image of the Founder among the Brothers. It is question of an engraving made from a mortuary drawing by Du Phly, an esteemed artist from Rouen (see CL 49, p.39).

The first Superior General dies the year after La Salle and is succeeded by Br. Timothée (1720-1751), who will promote the process for obtaining *Letters Patent* from King Louis XV and the *Bull of Approbation* of Pope Benedict XIII. In his time will be written the first three biographies of La Salle: Bernard (1721-1723), Maillefer (1724) and Blain (1733). Maillefer

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<sup>1</sup> The *Bull of Approbation* affirms: "... that the year of the Lord one thousand six hundred and eighty ..." (1907, p.3). It means that 1680 was taken as the date of the beginning of the Institute, regardless of whether later history records the first school of Rheims in the Parish of St. Maurice in 1679 (see CL 7, Blain, p. 167). That is why Br. Irlide, Superior General, announced the celebration of the second centenary of the Institute in his *Circular* of January 6, 1880.

will reissue his work in 1740 due to disagreements with the Brothers. It is in this period also when the Brothers of the first generation are dying, but not before leaving the testimony of their life with the Founder, amongst them especially Br. Gabriel Drolin, who returns from Rome after 26 years.

From the post-mortem painting of Du Phly an engraving, called "Crêpy", will appear in certain copies of the *princeps* edition of the *Rules and Constitutions* of 1726, approved by Pope Benedict XIII, and in the frontispiece of the *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* in 1730 (see CL 49, page 48). Elsewhere, the biography of Blain will use an engraving of La Salle, denominated "Scotin", that will be one of the masterpieces of all Lasallian iconography (CL 49, 65). Scotin will emerge from the first painting of Léger which, next to the mortuary portrait, would be the two iconographic pieces produced with the Founder "from life".

The Superiors of the Institute in the second half of the eighteenth century will be: Br. Claude (1751-1767), Br. Florence (1767-1777) and Br. Agathon (1777-1798). The Institute will need at this time to ensure its legal stability and its educational recognition. The Founder is, without a doubt, the person of reference. The publication of the *Twelve Virtues of the Good Master* in 1785, written by Br. Agathon, in a certain way confirms an advance in the understanding of Lasallian thought: for this the author has reread the tradition of the Institute in the light of the Christian pedagogy of the French eighteenth century.

However, these were difficult times and the strong opposition of the Jansenists and the Philosophers contributed, with the advent of the French Revolution, to the suppression of the Institute in 1792.

### *b.3 The Institute resumes its course*

During the French Revolution, Pope Pius VI appoints Br. Frumence, Director of the house of San Salvatore in Rome, as Vicar General - he will take the lead in the restoration of the Institute until 1810.

From 1802, when Bonaparte permits the opening of the Christian Schools in France, the Institute's authorities take charge of reorganizing communities and schools, thus ensuring the full restoration of the mission "as in times past." The Superiors of that period are Br. Gerbaud (1810-1822), Br. Guillaume-de-Jésus (1822-1830) and Br. Anaclet (1830-1838). These are almost thirty years of recovery and also progress in pedagogical reflection.

The Brothers publicly defend simultaneous teaching in opposition to mutual-Lancastrian teaching which had been explicitly proposed by the educational authorities. Already at that moment, the Brothers will begin to feel the weight of the centralism of the French national educational system. At the same time, they edit the *Conduct of Schools* several times, especially in 1838, as a result of the work of a General Committee of the Institute - and to respond to new legal requirements - they offer pedagogical responses concerning the use of memory, attention to students' needs, emulation, written work, and the study of history and geography (see CL 67, pp. 121-123).

In this period the "virtuous M. John Baptist de La Salle, canon of Reims" (*Preface* to the 1838 edition of the CS: CL 67, p 127) remains the fundamental inspiration not only of the *Rules* but also of the *Conduct of Schools* - the Brothers want to see him raised to the altars. In fact, on April 22, 1836, the Institute obtains a first authorization to open the ordinary process

in Paris on the reputation for holiness, the virtues and miracles of the Servant of God John Baptist de La Salle (*Collection of Documents*, 1905, p. 1). This will usher in a new stage in Lasallian iconography.

#### *b.4 The pathway to the altars*

Br. Philippe is the Superior General between 1838 and 1874. During his long term the Institute will grow from 2,700 to 11,570 Brothers, working in 1,002 schools: 268 schools will be found outside France: 98 in Europe, 26 in Asia, 44 in Africa and 101 in America (*Précis of history*, 1935, p. 117).

In 1840 the Founder is declared *Venerable*. From that moment, and until his beatification (1888), the Institute will be responsible for disseminating to the public the image of the Servant of God in order to create popular devotion. In addition it will seek to obtain the miracles indispensable for his official glorification by the Church (CL 49, 24). The Institute therefore needs to choose an image that faithfully represents the Founder. Thus, in 1882, the Superiors decide that the second picture prepared by Léger is to be the official Institute portrait (see CL 49, p. 122). Other proposals enjoy less favour on the part of the Brothers, but they also influence the production of a new iconography of the Founder.

Perhaps a milestone in this itinerary of understanding of the image of the Founder is the biography written by Ravelet, published on the occasion of the beatification of La Salle in 1888. It brings together an abundant iconographic representation of the Founder that refers us to the religious mentality of the French 19th century.

#### *b.5 Iconographic profusion of the late nineteenth century*

During the last 26 years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Institute experienced difficult times due to the development of the educational laws of France. The Superiors of that time will be: Br. Jean-Olympe (1874-1875), Br. Irlide (1875-1884), Br. Joseph (1884-1897) and finally Bro Gabriel-Marie (1897-1913).

During this period, the Institute suffers the consequences of French Republican anticlericalism; In fact, the set of the Ferry-Globet Laws (1879-1889) will declare public education to be secular, neutral and universal. The Brothers will be expelled successively from the public schools. This situation will force them to strengthen their pedagogical heritage and create a network of free schools - primary, secondary and technical - sustained economically with the support of families and patronage. They will also work with lay teachers and collaborate in their pedagogical training. Outside France, the Brothers will begin their first steps in university education. In this context the Venerable John Baptist de La Salle arrives at the altars as Blessed (1888). The Institute produces an abundant bibliography on Christian pedagogy. This effort represents a point of arrival of the thought harvested over two hundred years of sustained work in the school.

It is important to note that French society at that time was living a severe spirituality in opposition to rationalism and atheism. Piety was seen as encompassing the suffering Christ and the reparation of the merits of passion. Pain and suffering reinforced practices of asceticism and penance (cf. Clolvy, 2001: p. 124). Lasallian iconography will reflect this sensitivity. On the other hand, it will lose the unity maintained from previous centuries, opening itself to a flowering of new representations and concepts concerning the Holy

Founder (CL 49, p 198). The expansion of the Institute will make La Salle a universal character and his image will be represented beyond the canons determined by the centre of the Institute – based on French culture.

The Institute will be abolished in France in 1904 and with this measure the Brothers will reinforce their presence in countries where communities already exist or in the creation of new foundations. It is a new moment of expansion of the Institute. Thanks to the *Bulletin of the Christian Schools* born in January 1907 it is possible to appreciate the effort made by the Institute to understand itself based on its new international itinerary, having its Mother House in Lembecq-lez-Hal (Belgium) until 1936 and from that date onwards in Rome.

#### *b.6 John Baptiste de La Salle: Saint*

Finally, on 24 May 1900 La Salle is proclaimed Saint by Pope Leo XIII. Images, engravings, medals and statues are multiplied in his honor. It is a moment of glory for the Institute - it had been worth all the effort invested. And it will also be the door to new processes of sainthood in the Lasallian family.

Already in Paris, the sculptor Oliva had made a statue of *La Salle legislator* for the interior courtyard of the Rue Oudinot Generalate. A smaller copy, made by the same sculptor in 1890, is to be found in Rome, Block C (cf. CL 49, p. 313). But the monument of Falguière in the Place Saint-Sever in Rouen (1875) will be the work that will inspire Aureli to produce the statue of the Holy Founder which since 1904 is in the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome (see *Bulletin*, May 1908, No. 3, p.173) and which will be a milestone of Lasallian iconography throughout the world. It will represent *La Salle educator* with children.

#### *b.7 From Holy Founder to Universal Patron of Educator*

Br. Gabriel-Marie resigned as Superior General in 1913 and was replaced by Br. Imier-de-Jésus, who will occupy the post from 1913 to 1923. During World War I (1914-1918) the Brothers fight on both fronts. Schools located in the warring countries are barely functioning while training houses for new Brothers in Europe stay empty (see *Précis of History*, pp. 139-140). Even the *Bulletin* ceases to be published and it is necessary to wait till 1921 for it to be reactivated ("six years of forced interruption ..." *Bulletin*, January 1921).

War forces the Brothers to rethink old positions. New challenges arise in the face of secularization, yet the experience of more than a decade allows the Institute to make more hazardous decisions. Thus, the Brothers will choose to maintain an apparent secularization so as to enter Germany in 1911, or Mexico in 1916 (see Bédel, 2006, p.279). Inheritors of a religious life based on a conception of retreat from the world, they will live without difficulty the dichotomy between fidelity to the intimate following of Christ and the effort of human formation and catechesis in schools. Perhaps these two elements will be strongly marked in the different representations of the Holy Founder, sometimes pious and withdrawn from the world, sometimes as undoubted teacher of children in school, even as a guide in the midst of the storm (Picture of the Chapel of Buenos Aires, reproduced several times by the *Bulletin*).

Five years after the Great War of 1914-1918, Br. Allais-Charles assumed leadership as Superior General for the period 1923-1928. In his time Brother Solomon is beatified (1926) and the causes of the Brothers Bénilde, Exupérien, Miguel and Mutien-Marie are progressing.

Thus, along with La Salle, other figures are emerging that begin to enrich the institutional iconography.

The Institute continues to expand throughout the world. With the arrival of Br. Adrien as Superior General from 1928 to 1934 the Institute begins to experience persecution again: the Mexican Revolution and the Spanish Civil War will be two of the most significant events of that period. The Brothers martyrs of Spanish lands will add their testimony of fidelity to Saint La Salle, Blessed Br. Solomon and the Venerable Brothers who are on their way to the altars.

By 1934, the Institute has 14,300 Brothers, 5,000 candidates in formation and 322,000 students on the five continents (see *Précis of History*, p.149). Br. Junien-Victor becomes Superior General from 1934-1940. In his period the Generalate is transferred to Rome. This had been a decision taken at the General Chapter of 1928, at the invitation of Pope Pius XI, but its execution had been delayed due to the world crisis (see *Bulletin*, January 1937, No. 1, p.59). The first stone is blessed on 2 March 1935 and in October 1936 the first community of Brothers is already in place. The transfer of Lembecq will be, according to testimonies collected in the General Archive, "like any move, a small fire" (AMG). The new House will collect all the iconographic and spiritual treasure inherited from past times, especially the relics of the Holy Founder on January 26, 1937.

Br. Junien-Victor dies at the beginning of World War II and Pope Pius XII appoints Br. Arèse-Casimir as Vicar General - he will be in charge of the Institute until the celebration of the 37th General Chapter. Later, Br. Athanase-Émile was elected Superior General in 1946.

During the postwar period, the Institute lives at different rates throughout the world: in Europe it is in the process of reconstruction, in America, full development. In certain regions of Asia and Africa its expansion continues. Nevertheless the Brothers will begin to feel within the Institute that the Rule belonged to a world far from the new realities to which they were called to serve in education. This upward movement will reach the 38th General Chapter of 1956.

Meanwhile, on May 15, 1950, Pope Pius XII proclaims St. John Baptist de La Salle as Celestial Patron of all educators. From November 21, 1950 to November 21, 1951, the "Lasallian Year" is celebrated, full of celebrations in honor of the Holy Founder. The *Bulletin* (year 1950, N° 120-121-122-123) gathers abundant information from all parts of the world.

### *b.8 Lasallian Studies*

Br. Athanase-Émile dies in 1952 and Br. Denis takes over as Vicar General until the 38th General Chapter of 1956, in which Br. Nicet-Joseph will be elected Superior General. It is at this General Chapter when the beginning of *Lasallian Studies* under the baton of Br. Maurice-Auguste is decided upon. However, the Italian Brothers had begun in 1935, more than twenty years earlier, the *Rivista Lasalliana* (see *Bulletin*, July 1935, pp. 293-294).

Both initiatives will have a decisive impact on the understanding of the person and the thinking of La Salle and will provide an indispensable critical support for the evolution of the Institute. This will influence the way of understanding the Founder and his context.

### *b.9 From the Second Vatican Council to the Tercentenary of the Institute*

The postwar world was not indifferent to the new challenges: society and the Church stood searching. It was about seeing things differently. Thus, the Second Vatican Council was the consequence of a theological and pastoral reflection that had been slowly established. In the Institute too the desire to look at the Founder, to understand him from within his context, was impelling a new way of being a Brother - from another perspective, from another Rule. The 39th General Chapter, celebrated between 1966 and 1967, was thus a turning point for the Institute - henceforth it would no longer be the same.

Br. Charles-Henry will be elected Superior General for the period 1966-1976. Later, Br. José Pablo will be so between 1976 and 1986. These are the difficult post-conciliar years, of profound changes in the statistics of the Institute, of ups and downs, criticisms and crisis.

Did these events have any impact on Lasallian iconography? A new sensitivity - we are launching the hypothesis - needs to see La Salle walking with others, associated with his Brothers, human and sensitive to educational realities, especially the poorest. It would be absurd to think that the research presented by Brothers Michel Sauvage, Maurice-Auguste, Miguel Campos, Jean Pungier, Léon de Marie Aroz ... would not have had an impact on the way of perceiving the Founder.

For the year 1980, during the celebration of the Tercentenary of the Institute, there becomes popular the image of La Salle taken from the painting of Giovanni Gagliardi (1901), *Prima scuola dei Fratelli a Parigi*. Between 1898 and 1906 two Italian painters, Aurelio Mariani<sup>2</sup> and Giovanni Gagliardi<sup>3</sup>, had painted a series of paintings on the life of the Holy Founder - today these paintings are in the John Paul II Room of the Generalate. These are events in the life of the Founder, which had already been the subject of very good quality engravings in Ravelet's 1888 biography. Perhaps the paintings of Mariani and Gagliardi, around the Tercentenary, were responding to the sensitivity of new generations of Lasallians.

Another portrait popularized during the Tercentenary of 1980 will be the one called "Sèvres". The *Cahiers lasalliens* 49 consecrates 14 pages to its study (cf. p.104-105; 108-119). This portrait will be used in some publications of writings on the Holy Founder of that time.

### *b.10 An agreement about non-systematized images*

In the *Archives* of Rome we do not have a complete record of all the images, pictures, stained glass work, medals, drawings, statues ... of the Holy Founder all over the world. But there is no doubt that in each country where the Brothers have settled, the iconographic lines of the late nineteenth century have been reproduced, or new ones have been created, responding to the need to inculcate Lasallian thought in each specific educational situation.

<sup>2</sup> Aurelio Mariani (1863-1939) was a pupil of the Brothers in Rome, and he learned the rudiments of painting with them, especially with Brother Labérius. Throughout his life he maintained a special affection for and closeness to the Institute (cf. Bruno, 2013, p.14).

<sup>3</sup> F. Goffredo states that Gagliardi's paintings for 1932 were in the *General Procure* in Rome (*Vita sociale*, 1932, p.136). It is not clear whether it is a matter of the *General Procure* of Italy, in one of the dependencies of the District of Rome, and not of the *General Procure* of the Institute in Paris, in the Rue de Sèvres. In any case, we do not have a record of the displacement of these paintings until their arrival at the new Generalate of Via Aurelia in 1936 in Rome.



The last General Superiors have benefited from progressive technological development: Br. José Pablo assumed the position from 1976 to 1986, Br. John Johnston from 1986 to 2000 and finally Br. Álvaro from 2000 to 2014. Advances in electronic media have fostered the popularization of the image of the Holy Founder and of the Saint Brothers of the Institute. But it still seems like it's possible to do more.

#### *b.11 Starting point for this project*

With Br. Robert Schieler as Superior General since 2014, we intend to renew Lasallian iconography, thinking that the Lasallians of the 21st century have a different sensitivity that perhaps allows us to appropriate the Holy Founder in a new way. The challenge of this project is to reread La Salle vocationally so as to question ourselves about what God is asking of us three hundred years away from the arrival of La Salle in the Father's House.

### ***C. Conclusion: memory and commitment***

... The interest for the knowledge of the Saint, in generalizing so happily, habitually obeys an appreciation and a reverence for the values he embodies and that his work promotes.

Letter of Brother José  
Pablo Basterrechea December 8, 1985, p. 24

#### *C.1 Not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith (RC 2.2)*

George Rigault, in beginning his book on *Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle* in the collection *L'Art et les Saints* (1929), states: ...« That his personality, his features would one day be available for theme and template for artists, that's certainly an ambition that remains very foreign to M. de La Salle! » (Rigault, 1929, p. 5).

Indeed, from his early biographers and from his own writings we are left with the conviction of being face to face with a man who has made a radical choice to move away from the worldly spirit to focus on God, the reason for his life. We need to contextualize La Salle in the French spirituality of the seventeenth century:

To give oneself up completely, to give oneself to Christ, to hold fast to him, his mysteries, his dispositions, his Spirit, his grace! Here we have a beautiful and profound lesson of seventeenth century French spirituality, a lesson that will be repeated tirelessly, St. John Baptist de La Salle (Herment, 1939, p. 30).

Thus, the Holy Founder wrote - together with the first Brothers - the *Common Rules*, in which he insisted on the need to acquire and live in the spirit of the Institute, which is none other than the spirit of faith: "... which should move those who compose it not to look upon anything but with the eyes of faith..." (RC 2,2). "For this purpose they will apply themselves to have great control over their senses and to use them only as needed, not wishing to use them except according to the order and the will of God" (RC 2.5). Modesty, thus, was a

fundamental element to express in daily life the spirit of an Institute committed to the values of the Gospel<sup>4</sup>.

*c.2 Sir, our very dear Father* (Blain III, CL 8, 118)

Furthermore, the first biographies of La Salle recognize the filial devotion of the Brothers to the person of their Founder and Father. Even at the most difficult time, in the absence of La Salle from Paris in 1714, the Brothers begin their letter with these words: *Sir, our very dear Father* (Blain III, CL 8, page 118).

Once the Founder dies, the Brothers are in charge of nourishing the knowledge and veneration of his person. It was evident that his holiness passed to his contemporaries. Nevertheless, the Institute will have to wait until the 19th century for the Church to recognize him as Venerable (1840), Blessed (1888) and Saint (1900).

*c.3 Why an iconography?*

Art has the mission of evoking memory, updating in new keys the mystery of the people who have preceded us. « Les évocations artistiques et les illustrations symboliques issues de la vie du saint nous ouvrent des chemins neufs pour entrer plus avant dans le mystère de son esprit et de son cœur » (Poutet 1992: 175). With these words, Brother Poutet ends his presentation of *La Salle and art*, recalling the reflection proposed by Br. José Pablo Basterrechea, Superior General, in his Circular of December 8, 1985, when he presented the iconographic research of Brothers Cornet and Rousset published in *Cahiers lasalliens* 49.

The Institute will celebrate during 2017 the Year of Lasallian Vocations. A new opportunity opens for us to invite all of you - Brothers and Lasallians - to renew our identity, from the charism that brings us together and gives meaning to the mission we carry out daily; This impulse could also become a vocational invitation explicitly addressed to young people who wish to consider the vocation of Brother of the Christian Schools as a valid option for their lives. The same holds for educators, men and women, who could find in the Lasallian experience a new perspective that would nourish their profession and turn it into an authentic life project at the service of others.

Hence the words of Br. Philippe, Superior General, who in Circular 269 of January 2, 1861 expressed his filial love for the Holy Founder in these terms:

May his image thus be not only before our eyes, but that it be above all in our hearts, or rather, let each of us be a living image of this great servant of God; then we will be brothers in the full force of the expression, then we all have only one heart and one soul, then we will actually effect a great and lasting good (Circular 269, p. 10).

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<sup>4</sup> Blain (CL8, pp. 405-406) recalls the experience of the Holy Founder in the house of one of his most devout admirers, at Calais, 1716. Realizing that behind a curtain was a draftsman, he rose from the table and left, while still manifesting his holy indignation. This account is also presented by Br. Lucard in the *Annales de l'Institut des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes* (Tome I, 330). Although it was a failed attempt, for a long time it was thought that this drawing had marked the beginning of the iconography of the Founder before his post-mortem portrait (cf. CL 49, 29).

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