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Capturing Our Time for Theirs: Considerations for the Context of Our Future

Mary Catherine Fox, Ph.D., Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, Winona, MN, USA

Introduction

This article has a threefold purpose: to ignite our desire to undertake Lasallian research, to generate questions and themes about current Lasallian research, and to commit ourselves to the necessary task of Lasallian research.

The great temptation of this keynote is to discuss all the fine work that has been accomplished or is currently in process in Lasallian research across our Lasallian world, but it seems a disservice to present what is already accessible to each of us, literally at our fingertips. I will avoid discussing, for example, the *Digital Journal of Lasallian Research* or the publication *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education*, other than some references to their contents. I hope to confront the more complex, perhaps frustrating, but essential area of thinking about where we are, what we need, and what thematic sparks of Lasallian research may be ready to be fanned into flame. My hope is that these questions will light pathways to illuminate our Lasallian research journey.

Brother Michael French has stated that "a series of experiences without reflection does not help people learn". I believe this is where we find ourselves: "a series of experiences" that we are having daily in our Lasallian lives, with little to no time to reflect on them. We have a sort of Lasallian attention deficit disorder, with much to grab our attention and excitement but little time to address these elements sufficiently.

Alexis de Tocqueville, the brilliant Frenchman who spent less than ten months in the USA in 1831 observing our democracy, sensed that democracy was coming to Europe and surmised that someone needed to see "that great republic of which everyone speaks and no one knows". Upon setting foot in the United States, he noted this element of the national character (what I call a national attention deficit disorder) as *ceaseless agitation*. It served us well in building a country; it has served us well in building this Lasallian mission, but it is anathema to research.

We need to apply our fine minds to what the Institute is calling for in research and to what each of us, committed to this mission, needs to express in concrete terms. We do well to review and to revisit the General Chapters, the First International Assembly, the countless meetings, but it is time to move past their calls and to structure a research program here and now. These research priorities, while defined and requested by the center of the Institute, must emerge from our

Adapted from a keynote presentation at the first annual Symposium on Lasallian Research, Institute for Lasallian Studies at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, Minnesota, October 29, 2012. Mary Catherine Fox, Ph.D. is Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, teaches in the Lasallian Core Traditions program and works with the International Association of Lasallian Universities (IALU) Leadership program in Rome. She served as the initial chair of the Midwest District Mission and Ministry Council, and was a delegate both to the Regional Assembly (Salt Lake City, 2005) and the first International Assembly (Rome, 2006).

efforts. This is especially true given that not all the research the Institute needs is equally applicable to each of us, to our ministries, and in our lived reality.

My intention is to set a context and to provide some considerations for connection, together with questions and challenges that we face today, with the goal of moving us further along this research spectrum. The Founder was radically in tune with his time. My hope is that we will begin to structure a research legacy to show that we are radically in tune with our time.

A Brief History of the Lasallian Movement

If we have a role in the future of Lasallian research, how will we present, articulate, and own our need for the space and the time to accomplish what so urgently demands our attention? Perhaps a brief historical review of what has situated us at this moment will help us comprehend the current significance of this Lasallian research effort.

From 1680 to approximately 1984, the Brothers of the Christian Schools lived the Lasallian association for mission exclusively. Increasingly, as the years passed, the Brothers did so with the assistance of a certain number of laymen and, eventually, laywomen. The Christian Schools, which came to be known as *Brothers' Schools*, were conducted by Brothers, with help from laypeople, Sisters, and clergy when necessary. This model worked well until the late 1960s, when significant changes in the Church after Vatican II and in society at large set us on a different course. With fewer Brothers available, more laypeople entered the work of what had been *Brothers' Schools*. This new reality led to the term *Lasallian Schools* to describe the educational communities where all assumed responsibility for and worked in association to realize the Lasallian character of the school. Concurrently, structural developments for mission within the Institute came to include boards for the schools to focus on planning, construction, and development; consultants participating in District Chapters and Councils; and lay members of District Administrative teams.

The decisions of the 43rd General Chapter in 2000 affirmed and gave new impetus to the understanding of the term *Lasallian*. The Lasallian Association for Mission was emerging and evolving. The worldwide Institute situated itself within a context broader than the traditional membership of vowed Brothers. This understanding of mission is reflected in the Chapter's decisions:

- the establishment of District Mission and Ministry Councils, giving voice and vote to Brothers and other members;
- the call for the First International Assembly, held in 2006, composed of two-thirds partners and one-third Brothers;
- Regional Assemblies convened to gather information for the work of the First International Assembly;
- a marked increase in the number of formation programs and activities for everyone participating in association for the shared mission inspired by the Lasallian charism.³

Noting the vast increase in interest and passion for the Lasallian Mission, even when the number of Brothers was declining, the First International Assembly in 2006 and the 2007 General Chapter built upon this foundation of Lasallian Association for Mission with emphasis on

collaboration and new structures. Association for Mission presented the need for leadership, accompaniment, resources, and structures that would unite Brothers, affiliates, associates, lay partners, clergy, and religious Sisters in an infrastructure to allow the mission to flourish. Today we find ourselves in this milieu of association that reflects varying degrees of success in implementing and responding to these decisions and needs.

Why Lasallian research?

Why is this topic of Lasallian research exploding? As we know from our own trolling through what Lasallian work exists, the last thirty years have seen Lasallian research focus, both internally and externally, on the Institute and its history. This is important, surely, but now we need to view that history as our point of departure. Who is writing our history? What primary sources document and interpret our experiences? Fifty years from now, what will exist to tell our story? If we don't tell it, who will?

While historical research is necessary to clarify specific aspects of our work, we need to capture *our* history of the evolution and the development of the Lasallian Mission – what Brother Craig Franz, the Secretary of Secretariat for Solidarity and Development (SECOLI), calls "punctuated moments of evolution," especially regarding Lasallian partners. That half of the "together and by association" equation and its parallel movement within and at times beside the Brothers are thinly represented in research. I believe that this is one of three significant reasons why Lasallian research is now urgently needed.

Margaret Wheatley has written volumes, literally, on leadership and structures. Her work tells us, as Brother Thomas Johnson, Vicar General, emphasized in a talk to the Regional Assembly in 2005, that "... despite all the evidence that the world is radically changing, we cling to what has worked in the past." Reason number one undergirding the explosion in the topic of Lasallian research is this: we are – and continue to be – in a period of radical change in our Lasallian world.

All we need do is look at the ratio of Brothers to partners to sense the speed at which the ground beneath our feet is shifting. About 5% of those working in Lasallian ministries worldwide are vowed Brothers, a shift that demands our attention to "radical change." Brother Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, Superior General, and Brother Thomas Johnson address the issue of fewer Brothers as a reason to rejoice in the Holy Spirit's work in expanding the Lasallian mission to thousands and thousands of partners. As we have been called, so we are now chosen, Brothers and partners, to take up this charge of Lasallian research, own our history, articulate our lived experience, and capture these moments that are ours for those who will follow us in this work. Partners are not replacing vowed Brothers, nor should we, but we are a critical mass in the Lasallian mission. This is reason number two why Lasallian research is an exploding area of both interest and need: we are a critical mass.

Recently, Brother David Hawke, General Councilor for the Pacific Asian Regional Conference, emphasized the need to move forward with partners as the *main* Lasallian researchers, noting a particular need for researchers who work in English.⁶ Who are these scholar successors to the giants of Lasallian research? We are.

The Conduct of the Christian Schools was written twenty-five years after the first Christian School was established. We are nearly twenty-five years into the movement of Lasallian partners as a manifestation of "together and by association." It is time; reason number three for Lasallian research is that we have seen the future of Lasallian research, and it is us, each of us and all of us together.

I will add a word or two about the word *together*. Here in the states, our Lasallian secondary schools and our San Miguel schools have established much stronger branding, institutional linkages, and webs of significance than have our six United States Lasallian universities. School partnerships across our worldwide network are created, nurtured, and flourishing because of these linkages. At the university level, however, such linkages are rare, if not altogether non-existent. Our brand is much clearer in the Philippines and Mexico than it is in the United States, where our love of individualism bubbles up in ways of which we can be surprisingly ignorant. In his 2007 study of Lasallian universities, Brother Francis Nguyen notes our need to move from a "silo" mentality to function rather as "organizational communities." Generally, we do a fine job of linking with a local San Miguel school or twinning with a foreign school in our Institute, but among ourselves as Lasallian universities, we are all but strangers. The environment is ripe for research opportunities and collegial possibilities.

What could the Lasallian universities in the United States produce if they tackled the Lasallian research agenda in cooperation? How could each of our universities and our collective Lasallian mission be enriched by such work? How can we carve out time for this agenda? When are we going to get serious about the need for Lasallian research sabbaticals? We need to identify and encourage young scholars in these lines and raise Lasallian scholarship within our academic communities to the same stature and consideration for tenure as other disciplinary scholarship. Perhaps teams of researchers could collaborate on a particular line or research theme. Today's technology can certainly facilitate collaboration across distance and time zones.

Each year at the International Association of Lasallian Universities (IALU) Leadership Program in Rome, Italy, we witness the beginnings of such partnerships, internationally and within groups attending from United States universities. These efforts are easily lost to the demands of daily work obligations. As a means to assist these concerns, the recent suggestion of elevating IALU to the level of a secretariat in the Institute deserves serious consideration.

Lines of Lasallian Research

The new home of Lasallian Resources and Research in Rome is a beautiful, state-of-the-art facility in the lower level of the Generalate. It is a Herculean effort to move and to organize the archives and the library and to establish online access to the Lasallian Institutional Repository. Brother Diego Muñoz, Secretary for Lasallian Resources and Research, has stated that this information will be available to researchers worldwide to use and to mine. These data sets and those that exist at the Regional level are fodder for the more quantitatively leaning among us to search for patterns and trends and to find in them the wisdom to guide our future.

Brother Diego has identified several lines of Lasallian research as priorities for research projects. The first two are addressed here in a somewhat intertwined manner: Faith-Culture Dialogue and

Lasallian Historical Research: Stories in History. Brother Diego describes these two lines of research within a pluralistic world, noting that they require a thorough investigation of the "tissue of characters, trends, and relationships that came together in the life and experience of John Baptist de La Salle." What about consideration of that "tissue" in the experience of Lasallians in *our* time?

Ought we not to investigate how the movements and the leading issues in modern and postmodern society (Vatican II, civil rights, women's liberation, the hippie generation of free love, the Vietnam war, terrorism, zealous ideologies, bullying, teen suicide, relativism, consumerism) affect or condition our Lasallian Mission? Who are the figures and what are the social movements that influence our current educational context?

For the 2009 IALU Leadership Program in Rome, Brother John Cantwell assembled a graphic illustration of a time line of Saint John Baptist de La Salle's life alongside significant people who lived immediately prior to or during his lifetime. This illustration placed the Founder within his time and helped the participants understand the concurrent historical, theological, and cultural influences. What would a similar graphic look like regarding Lasallian association, partnership, and increasing lay presence in today's Lasallian schools and in the fabric of the Institute, the Mission and Ministry Councils, the District Chapters, and the Regional and International Assemblies? Who would populate this time line? What trends would dovetail with our movement through time? How might we write and publish on these areas? What would the graphic time line display for each Region of the Institute? How would gathering and presenting these microcultural visuals expand our understanding, contribute to our future, and build a layered picture of the rich, diverse, and globalized world our Institute serves?

Whom We Serve: "The New Poverties"

As we consider our history and the dialogue between faith and culture, between classical tradition and cultural vernacular, we must clearly understand whom we are serving. Our Superior General, Br. Álvaro Rodríguez Echeverría, has developed a topic dear to him, "the new poverties" that we are called to serve and to allay today. In an interview on Vatican Radio in May 2012, Br. Álvaro stated:

Beyond material poverty which is both old and new, the education action of Lasallians is turned toward poverty as solitude and abandonment, which today constitutes a real wound in our society: toward the poverty of the excluded, who live on the edges of rich and opulent cities, that is, the "failures," the migrants . . . any of whom live in hiding, victims of the culture of identity which refuses to accept what is different; toward the poverty which is without God, of those who have deliberately removed God from their lives . . . the lack of meaning in the lives of many young people. We need to help them to find the profound meaning of their lives . . . 9

The Institute needs to focus on the micro-cultures from which these poverties spring. The Institute's international response with developing countries through SECOLI is inspiring, but how do we in the first world respond to those we serve who fit the categories that Br. Álvaro describes? What about our students who, as a Philippine Brother from a very wealthy school

characterized to me many years ago, are "abandoned in comfort?" Who are they, and how are we Lasallian for them?

Micro histories of people and cultures, of experiences of people within particular cultures (those at the margins as well as those of our schools, social ministries, and universities) would lend perspective to the macro history of our Lasallian ministries and help us understand how we arrived at our moment

As we seek to understand these new poverties and the tensions we observe in serving new populations, one aspect of Br. Álvaro's interview focuses on secular culture and youth's search for meaning. We must confront what some find uncomfortable, if not downright antithetical, in tertiary education, the catechetical and evangelical dimension of our mission: concern for salvation in this world and eternal happiness in the next. Noted Catholic author Peter Steinfels has identified five key components that help transmit faith in youth from one generation to the next: intense religious and/or spiritual experiences, habits of spiritual practice, explanation and knowledge, adult models, and a network of peers. ¹⁰

So much that is excellent has been written about Lasallian spirituality, yet what is available about the relevance of Lasallian spirituality to young lives today? How is our spirituality inculcated, understood, and actualized in our curriculum, administration, and students? How do Steinfels's five elements inform our mission at each level? If we view each element through a Lasallian lens, what might we be able to contribute to the literature of spiritual development with respect to the manner in which we carry out our mission to transmit learning and values in the development of our students? How does our work affect faith transmission, spirituality, and understanding of the transcendent? Retreats, school and campus service projects, and campus ministry initiatives reach some students and provide a research track particularly focused on our Lasallian charism and mission. While not the exclusive purview of campus ministry or offices of mission, the programs and activities in these areas are points of departure for studying the impact and the operation of Lasallian mission and spirituality in our institutions and organizations.

In describing the type of items and studies that the *Digital Journal of Lasallian Research* hopes to collect for its November 2013 and May 2014 issues, Br. Diego notes:

Recognizing that we live in a pluralistic world and we have been called from the beginning of the Institute to promote dialogue on faith . . . we want to know how effectively we put this into practice in the 21^{st} century reality, what are the challenges we confront, and how do we project ourselves into the future from the diversity of educational experiences we offer?¹¹

What type of faith-culture dialogue is called for here? How might we contribute to the diversity that is the new normal for our ministries? Have we caved in to relativism in our desire to be inclusive? How does mission look in this reality?

Both the First International Assembly and the current research agenda call for work that illustrates the multicultural and multi-faith nature of our ministries. Quantitative and qualitative studies will aid our self-understanding and more completely define our contributions.

Lasallian Pedagogy

This line of thought leads to a reflection on Lasallian pedagogy. While history, faith, and cultural diversity provide enormous research needs and potential for partnerships, we still must focus research on our core competency: Lasallian pedagogy. Does such a thing exist? We believe that to be true, but what are its descriptors? What are the parameters of our unique pedagogy? As the late Brother José Cervantes observed, "It is not the same thing to teach in Quebec as in Madagascar. Lasallian pedagogy becomes international and differentiates itself each time according to culture."

We must document this local reality to lay claim to the work that we do for those who will come after us. Further, as Joan Landeros, Ph.D., of Universidad LaSalle in Mexico, an international leader in Lasallian university work, stated repeatedly and with increasing passion, "We must take advantage of our educational network. We have access to one million students. We must burst out to be connected with each other globally, to communicate what this phenomenon of effective education is in the world." ¹³

Dr. Landeros holds that we are indeed "messengers of hope" upon whom it is incumbent to "contribute in the moment," as currently there is "no voice to that labor of education." What treasure do we hold in these earthen vessels that has the potential to better the world of education in the ways our Founder did, for *our own* time? How might we share that treasure in research and scholarship that has the potential to alter the greater world of education?

We trace the genesis of the fundamental elements of Lasallian pedagogy to De La Salle's own methods, which include:

- Eliminating the elements of social class in the classroom that label students as rich or poor
- A communal sharing of food
- Students of greater ability helping students of lesser ability
- Grouping students to learn together
- Assigning students responsibilities for tasks in the classroom.

If these methods strike a chord with us, what effect might pedagogical studies on a much larger scale have? What is it about what we do at every educational level that constitutes our twenty-first-century Lasallian pedagogy?

While some fascinating work exists on Lasallian pedagogy and methodology, so much more needs to be brought to light. The sea change in our classrooms that technology has brought or demands leaves us questioning how technology improves our work, our access, our ability to teach. Does technology enhance our mission of providing a Christian and human education for the poor, or does technology separate social classes with at least as clear a demarcation, albeit in a completely different way, as what our Founder observed in seventeenth-century France? Br. Thomas Johnson recently remarked that, "De La Salle walked through poor neighborhoods each day on his way to the cathedral in Reims. These experiences affected him. What are we walking through that affects us, our understanding of mission?" 15

Experiences of Memory

AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education and Digital Journal of Lasallian Research encourage and invite our work as Lasallian scholars. The May 2013 issue of Digital Journal of Lasallian Research focuses on "Experiences of Memory, Identity and Heritage" and asks the question of researchers: How do we reread Lasallian history today? This question urges us to plug into memory and to mine it for aspects of our identity. In the keynote for the 2007 Huether Conference, Brother Frederick Mueller stated:

Just as man and woman were given power, dominion, control over creatures through naming them, we are empowered, we gain control over our own life, our own evolving story, our own growth by naming what it is that is happening to us in our growth. In the naming, our consciousness is awakened and we begin to see the patterns and movements, the plots and settings, the climaxes and denouements, the tragic flaws and moments of comic relief in our own stories.¹⁶

What do we need to be naming in our stories? How does our story influence and inform our time? How does our history play out in the myriad events of our day and our work?

The Lasallian Charism, ¹⁷ a compilation of recent Lasallian experiences of charism and mission, provides an introduction to this type of study of areas of "experiences of memory, identity, and heritage," but we must not rest here. Each of us has heard or told Lasallian stories. The individual histories and reflections of Brothers and partners are rich with possibility or as oral histories that need to be written, preserved, honored, and held as a significant portion of our own cherished texts. What are the questions that would solicit these stories in all their splendor and context?

If we focus on De La Salle's life, we can find points of coherence between our lives and his, between his story and our own. He lived life as he knew it, was changed by a chance encounter, drawn into the work of the schools (something he did not anticipate). Moved by what he observed, he trained teachers and created a stable community for those who came to call themselves Brothers. His radical conviction that the work is God's and his complete dependence on Providence allowed him to remain open to explore new possibilities. Reading these points of coherence through the lens of our own lives permits new perspectives on what it means to be Lasallian. What do we need to be exploring and articulating in our lives with regard to individual ministries, experience, and work at district, regional, and international levels of our Institute? How can we codify these elements, perhaps along these very same points of coherence, to capture our Lasallian mission as we are living it today? Where does our experience dovetail or differ with De La Salle's? These signposts can lead us to areas ripe for reflection, research, and rejuvenation in light of our lives today.

The summer 2012 issue of *De La Salle Today* reported the Institute's first-ever International Women's Symposium, hosted in Thailand by the PARC Region. With respect to experiences of memory and identity, precious little is written about women in the Lasallian mission, whether historically or currently. Brother John Crawford of La Salle University (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) is covering new ground in his published work on women in the Lasallian world. New paths of research include the women who surrounded and funded De La Salle, encouraged

him, and counseled and were counseled by him, as well as women in our ministries today. The need for this research parallels women's presence in the populations we serve and women who staff our work.

Beyond the individual case, what institutional "experiences of memory and identity" provide points of departure for investigation for our future? How might we craft such studies? Lasallian association and identity are key topics for the *Digital Journal of Lasallian Research* and the Institute. Our popular Lasallian publications do an excellent job: regional magazines, newsletters, conference summaries, and reports. What the Institute needs now is that more of us immerse ourselves in the research needs identified by the First International Assembly, now that we stand at the door of the Second International Assembly. The First Assembly emphasized the priorities of formation and association, priorities that we have experienced in myriad ways since those heady days of 2006. What we have achieved with less success is documentation recounting this living in association, this explosion of formation programs at all levels of our schools, faculties, staffs, and boards.

Our boards of trustees remain particularly untouched in research. Certainly each school's archive notes the constitution and meetings of our boards, but what of the influence that lay boards exercise? An additional intriguing subset is research concerning our own service on Lasallian ministry boards. Do these experiences serve as formative? How have boards and board service set about "patterns, movements and climaxes" in our ministries? Less is written about our governing boards and their development and evolution in exposure to, immersion in, and comprehension of our mission. What tensions are we struggling with in formation? What is working and what has failed? How are we ensuring the continuation of formation initiatives?

De La Salle followed a decision path that provides a schema for our ministerial decisions. He was moved by what he observed, which caused him to consult with long-standing friends and spiritual advisors and to be guided by the writings of Saint Paul. With prayer and reflection, De La Salle was moved to action, in his case in the field of education. How closely do we and our boards align with our Founder's means of forging ahead? Does his path offer us something we are missing?

After much study, debate, and experience with Mission and Ministry Councils, the United States/Toronto Region put forth new models of structure. Christian Brothers Conference was recrafted, and a new executive position was created as the direct result of one of those models. Structures for mission and association were a prioritized area of emphasis from the First International Assembly. This evolution is rapidly becoming history. Given our changing reality, the rapid movement that sees our present become our past ought not to surprise us, yet it raises many questions, among them:

- Where is the story of our movement toward lay voice and vote documented?
- What is working? What do we need?
- Which aspects of current management theory have something to add to or to illuminate in our continued ruminations about future structures?
- Who will succeed us?

• If we know that the days of Brother Presidents are numbered – and have ceased in two Lasallian universities – what must we do to prepare the next generation of Lasallian chief executives?

The sets and subsets of these elements in our time require discussion, definition, and documentation.

So much yet remains to be surfaced in the realm of Lasallian themes and specific research questions. Among many alternatives, I suggest a few areas of importance: succession planning in our ministries, Lasallian Volunteers and Young Lasallians movements, formation experiences such as the Lasallian Social Justice Institute, and experiments in association, such as Signum Fidei, ministry-specific mission councils, De La Salle weeks, and many more.

Out of the Box

Two other areas of what my students would term "random" lines of research that do not fit neatly into the lines briefly sketched herein are worthy of note. The first might, at a glance, seem superficial and irrelevant, but one can argue that it is central and worthy of treatment. New music and art are making their way into our Lasallian consciousness. Why not study the new depictions of De La Salle in art and in music across our world? What has brought it into being? How does Lasallian art and music influence us?

A popular example of something entirely different and its corresponding effect is the sparkling Australian DVD, *Beyond Statues and Doors*, created by Lasallian students who wanted to walk in the places De La Salle did and came to understand him and the mission better by literally placing themselves where our Founder lived.²¹ This is research of another kind that creates life and vitality for those we serve.

The last plea for research, and one this author is known to be a clarion call for, is fundraising. If we hope to continue this mission, we need to be as practical as our Founder was in financing it. Certainly, we depend on Providence and place our hope in things unseen, but we are responsible to the future. De La Salle was nothing if not practical. We must go beyond the world of foundations and grants. If we do not, we risk our future. How we endow our future – not as individual ministries but as a collective Lasallian reality – is of paramount concern. Benefactors fund multiple organizations. This is a fact. Until we are ready to articulate our case, to have trust in sharing our benefactors at a national level, and to recognize that just because someone gives to one institution or ministry does not preclude the benefactor's interest in and support of the greater Lasallian mission in our country, our region, and our world, we will not seize the moment for mission that is ours. There is clear research work to be accomplished on this point, and it is urgent.

In Closing

The final point, seemingly quite obvious, needs to be pressed. Without question, each of us accepts being called to this mission, work, ministry, and Lasallian vocation, regardless of our individual function. It is equally significant that we discern what elements of research we are

called to undertake. What attracts us? What are our Lasallian magnets? How might the topics or themes to which we are drawn inform our research paths?

In his exceptional piece, "Fidelity to the Movement of the Spirit: Criteria for Discernment," Brother Miguel Campos stresses that discernment in our Lasallian history emerges and is accomplished in collective form. Authentic discernment results from the group's introspection, conversation, and comprehension of external and internal events and forces. ²² This aspect of the Lasallian charism affirms our work together and by association and fuels our work as scholars.

In the earliest of De La Salle's letters to a Brother, dated May 15, 1701, our Founder writes, "Remembering that God is with you will help and inspire you in all that you do." A later letter instructs a Brother, "Follow the inspirations that come to you from God." These words hold special meaning for us as we set out, together and by association, on this journey to capture our time for those who will follow us.

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