

# 70. CONDUCT

## Summary

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## 1. THE FOUR MEANINGS OF "CONDUITE"

The noun *conduite* denotes the manner in which something is done, carried out or accomplished. The verb *conduire* describes the action producing the above effects. In the Lasallian corpus, *conduite* also denotes behavior, especially of children, and personal comportment, especially of Brothers. The verb *se conduire* means to behave oneself.

Three quotations are enough to illustrate the different ways *conduite* is used:

- "God's ordinary way of dealing (*conduite*) with a soul" (MD 18,1 & 23,3).
- "Those who are responsible for the conduct (*conduite*) of others" (CL 20,152 = DA 212,0,4).
- "Show by your exterior behaviour (*conduite*) that you are happy" (MF 82,2).

These simple examples are enough to show that this word has a number of distinct meanings. The problem regarding its use in the Lasallian corpus is to decide which meaning to give to it. The meaning most often intended by De La Salle is implied. This is the meaning this article will examine, showing that it implies a certain understanding of the vocation of the Brother.

In French, especially in 17th century spiritual writings, the word *conduite* has the connotation of spir-

itual or moral guidance given by some person. And so, we read of Brother Directors who have the responsibility in the Institute "to give interior guidance to the Brothers who are under their charge" (*conduite*) (CL 25,154 = FD 1). And so, De La Salle often uses *conduite* to describe the spiritual or legal responsibility exercised by one person regarding another. For example, he sees persons in charge leading and directing other persons and being responsible for them: "St Joseph, having been commissioned by God to take care of Jesus Christ" (MF 110,1; Cf. CL 20,26 = DA 104,1,6).

The use of the noun *conduite* and the verb *conduire* in Lasallian writings reveals four levels of personal relationship:

- God leads the Brother interiorly.
- The superior directs the Brother or is in charge of him.
- The Brother gives an account of his conduct to his superior and to God.
- The Brother is responsible for his pupils and their conduct.

For De La Salle, this whole concept is vital: "I adore in all things the conduct of God in my regard" (CL 8,174).

## 2. "CONDUCT" AS A LINEAR PROCESS

It is not surprising that the Brother is the common element in the four levels indicated above: he is, after all, at the centre of the Founder's writings. What is interesting, is that both God and the superior seem to have the same status vis à vis the Brother. When the

superior directs, it is God who directs, in virtue of what the Gospel says: "Anyone who listens to you listens to me" (Lk 10,16). De La Salle applies these words to "all those who are under the direction of a superior" (MD 21,1), to "superiors" among the Broth-

ers (MF 91,1; CL 15,88 = R 11,2,29), and to "our Directors" (CL 15,51 = R 9,2,6).

What is most important, however, is that the Brother has a special role as intermediary. He is in practical terms the channel of grace from God to the children. One of the most precious aspects of "ministry", is that the action of the "minister" is characterised by the active presence of the one who "put him in charge of guiding these children" (MR 203,3). The action of grace can be illustrated in a linear fashion by the following diagram which shows how it is passed on :

God → Superior → Brother → Children

When De La Salle speaks in MR 200,1 and MR 205,2 of "the souls of the children God has entrusted to your care" (*soin*), and in MF 189,3 of "the salva-

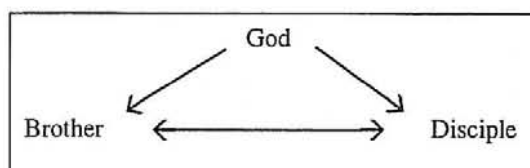
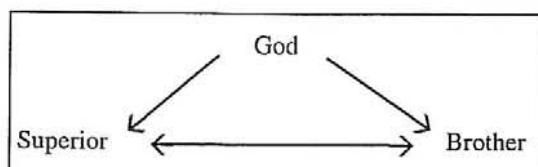
tion of those souls which are confided to your care" (*conduite*), he makes no distinction between *soin* and *conduite*.

Just as the children are in the care (*conduite*) of the Brother, the Brother himself is under the direction of God who speaks to him through his superior. In MD 21,1, the Founder refers to "those who are under the direction (*conduite*) of a superior", and in LA 33,7, he recommends to Brother Hubert : "In mental prayer, often give yourself up to God's guidance" (*conduite*). The appeal made to the Brother's will is interior : the superior must not act as a screen. In both of the above quotations, De La Salle uses *conduite* in the sense of will and direction. It is clear from the Founder's writings as a whole, that God directs the Brother through the voice of the superior, and that the Brother, in his turn, directs the pupils. This dual movement is best expressed by one or other form of the verb *conduire*.

### 3. "CONDUCT" AS A TERNARY PROCESS

The linear diagram above does not do justice to this mystery, because it does not show the transcendental characteristic of the relationship expressed by the first arrow, that is, the creative and redeeming presence of God to each of his creatures, distinct from any human intermediaries : "God is in all things and all things are nothing unless God is present in them" (CL 14,13 = EM 2,42). The superior is not always an intermediary in this relationship : "In mental prayer, often give yourself up to God's guidance" (LA 33,7). This shows that God's action is not bound by any process of transmission by intermediaries.

Children, just like the Brothers, are consecrated to the Trinity by their baptism (MD 46,3) and the Brothers' work consists in strengthening their Christian vocation. It is God whom entrusts the children to them. Jesus is the "good and sole Master" of their disciples (MF 102,2). Two other diagrams complement the first :



The value of setting things out in this way is that it shows that neither the superior, who takes the place of God (MF 91,1), nor the Brother, who takes the place of Jesus Christ (MR 195,3), should try to attract the inferior or the disciple to himself.

If the *Advice to Brothers in charge* reflects the Founder's thinking (cf. the article *Director*, § 4.2.2., in the present volume), then it illustrates well the above attitude : The superior must lay aside his own thoughts and give himself up to God's Spirit so as to act only under his direction (1,2) and "regulate his conduct according to the thinking of all his inferiors [...] in order to lead them to God" (48).

Likewise, the inferior is led by God, and the task of the superior is to facilitate this. As De La Salle says : "As the interior light of God is not sufficient to guide you safely to him [...], God has given you superiors whose duty it is to take his place in your regard,

and to guide you in the path to heaven as God himself does interiorly within you" (MF 91,1).

Meditation 33 speaks to those who have care of souls: "This varied conduct must depend on knowledge and discernment of spirits, and this grace you must beg of God [...] as being the most essential for you in the direction of those over whom you have charge" (MD 33,1). What it says is as important for superiors as for the Brothers in relation to their pupils.

The same thing is said very clearly in the medita-

tion for the 3rd Sunday in Advent: "It is the same with those who instruct others. They are but the voice that disposes hearts [...], but the one who really disposes them [...] is none other than God himself. [...] The voice is a sound that strikes the ear and conveys a message" (word) (MD 3,1). The parallel drawn between voice and word, is taken from St Augustine, and defines the real role of the Brother: "Let us humble ourselves, since we are nothing more than a voice and since, of ourselves, we are incapable of doing any good to souls" (*Id.*).

#### 4. THE "CONDUCT OF SCHOOLS" AND THE "DISCOURSE ON THE METHOD"

Any attempt to go into the connotations of the word *conduite* in the days of De La Salle would be incomplete without a reference to the metaphor proposed by Descartes. The full title of the work by Descartes, commonly known as the *Discourse on the Method* (1637), is as follows: "Discourse on the method of using [= conduct] one's reason and seeking truth in knowledge [= sciences]". Any person who was educated in 17th century France read Descartes. His work presented a psychological cosmology whose only rival was the astrological cosmology of Copernicus, written 150 years earlier.

Descartes uses the word *conduire* in his metaphor of a mental map, which will teach him how to direct his reason along the true and straight road in the search for truth. From the very first paragraph of the *Discourse*, *conduire* is accompanied by terms referring to travel, such as "way" and "path". In his interior journey in search of truth, the true road is the straight road, and any deviation from it would lead to ambiguity and error.

It is important to recall that, for Descartes, divergence and diversity are synonymous. All men are born with the same common sense, Descartes tells us, but the diversity of opinions does not come from the fact that some people are more intelligent or more reasoning than others, but from the fact that "we conduct our thoughts along different paths and do not consider the same things".

This cartesian understanding of the word *conduite* is clearly reflected in De La Salle's *Conduct of the Christian Schools*. It is enough to open this work on any page to be struck by the way in which masses of details are reduced to a homogeneous whole.

Instead of distracting the attention of the Brother in class, these details serve rather to help him to be always in synchrony with the other Brothers, to follow the same path as the other Brothers and classes, so that, should the occasion arise, another Brother can take over his class with the minimum of risk. This explains the insistence on uniformity in teaching methods (RC 7,3; CL 24,115 = CE 11; CL 15,38 = R 8,2,20; CL 25,161 = FD 1,27).

All disciplinary measures, all registers and all practical procedures have to be observed in a uniform manner so as to ensure that everything is conducted in an ordered and, consequently, correct way. In fact, the whole concept of homogeneity which presupposes simultaneous teaching is symptomatic of the climate of the times: order, harmony, symmetry, control, centralisation, absolute monarchy.

The ternary diagrams show how "theocratic" temptations can be overcome. To become a teacher the Brother must first of all become and remain a disciple: "Unless they themselves walk in the right path, those who follow them would be led astray. [...] If you wish your disciples to practise virtue, do so yourself" (MD 33,2).

## 5. GOD “CONDUCTS” US ALONG THE ROAD TO SALVATION

In De La Salle’s writings, the word *conduite* cannot be separated from the metaphor of the mental map. Its lexical satellites include such words as “road”, “path” and “way”. In their turn, these travel terms are almost always followed by words indicating a destination, so that we are always meeting such phrases as “the way of salvation or the road to heaven”.

In the *Duties of a Christian towards God*, for example, De La Salle speaks of “the path that leads us to heaven” (CL 20,413 = DA 401,2,5) and of “the hand of God [which] leads us to the path to salvation” (CL 20,322 = DA 207,5,16). It seems as if the Founder had at his disposal a ready-made and fixed formula :

Conduct + road-path-way → heaven-salvation-God

If we superimpose this linear formula on the first linear diagram spoken of earlier, we see that the element in common, that is, *conduite*, serves in De La Salle’s mind to provide a link between

- persons : God, Superior, Brother, Disciple
- means : road, path, way
- aims : heaven, salvation, God.

The very title of the *Conduct of the Christian Schools* reminds us that, as a handbook indicating the procedures to follow in order to direct (*conduire*) a school, it has to be considered as being one of the means to be used.

The Brothers, for whom it was intended, saw that, if they followed the means provided, God would at the same time lead (*conduire*) them along the path of their own salvation, and use them “to conduct and direct [the pupils] along the way of their salvation” (CL 15,71 = R 11,1,1).

### Complementary themes

Child-Pupil-Disciple  
Christian Teacher

Conduct of the Christian Schools  
Director

God’s Work  
Ministry

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