

## DO YOU KNOW THE “CONDUCT OF SCHOOLS”?

I must admit that there is one book of the Founder’s which I dearly treasure above all else and that is “La Conduite des Ecoles”. In the following reflections I would very much like to be of some help to those who may read it, and by chance with their better wisdom and insight they may reveal the “vetera et nova” that lie jealously guarded, and for the most part, forgotten in these pages. In this introduction I simply want to dispel a misunderstanding.

### Conduct of the Christian Schools – Guide to the Christian Schools.

It is almost certain that if you were to ask many Brothers: “Have you read the “Guide” of St. John Baptist De La Salle”? they would undoubtedly confidently reply: “Yes, years ago it was read and studied in community”.

The error arises in confusing the title “Guide of the Christian Schools” edited in Paris in 1903, with that of the “Conduct of Christian Schools” whose first edition is dated Paris 1720. However, they are two completely different pedagogical works in spite of the fact that the writer of the foreword of the “Guide” states “We have adhered to the general framework of the traditional “Conduct”, a statement that has led quite a few people astray. Without claiming that this is the last word on the subject I would like to pinpoint one or two differences.

#### Conduct of 1720

#### Guide of 1903

### THE AUTHOR

La Salle together with a group of Brothers experienced in the teaching art. (Preface).

Anonymous; it lacks the richness of differing view-points which is normally associated with team work.

### THE STRUCTURE

The flow of the river of everyday school life follows its course from the first page of the first chapter: “Entering and beginning School”, to the last chapter of the first part: “On leaving the school premises and how the students should leave”, i.e. putting theory into practice.

The structure is determined by logic and theory rather than by life itself; i.e. from the abstract to the practical: though they are connected, the one follows the other.

The three parts in which the “Conduct” is divided correspond to a pedagogy as it is related to experience, day by day, moment by moment.

The four parts of the “Guide” have a scientific and systematic style, typical of a Cartesian and normative treatise.

### THE LANGUAGE

Concepts and ideas have to be “clothed” in words to enable the listener or reader to assimilate them. This “dress” in literary works is called a text, and in the “Conduct” and the “Guide” the language of the text is quite different. So disparate are they that it would be like comparing a shirt with a jacket although both are articles of clothing. Only a few pages of the “Guide” show some relationship with the “Conduct”.

## THE AIM

Where the two treatises are in accord is the essential meaning which they stress –it could not be otherwise. It is the human and Christian formation of the pupils, specifically in the Lasallian school. However, they both show evidence of the times in which they were written.

## INNER VITALITY

As I have indicated earlier the “Conduct” is a document fashioned from the quarry of life by craftsmen at the “chalk-face”. The composition of the “Conduct” came about after countless consultations between De La Salle and the oldest and most capable teachers among the Brothers of the Institute, and after several years of experience” (Preface). On the other hand the “Guide” could have been written –I don’t say it was– by some professor of pedagogy. Let us compare by means of an example or two the quite distinct thrust shown in some of these pages.

### Conduct in 1720

### Guide in 1903

Teacher and pupil advance together from the first to the last page.	Teacher and pupil work separately for most of the time.
The pupil works with the teacher in the running of the class.	The predominant role of the teacher leaves very little opportunity for the pupil to work with him.
The pupil is an active agent in his own personal education and helps his companions in theirs.	This form of education in which teacher and pupil play their conventional roles weakens the education of the child.
Continuous assessment is basic to the personal progress of the pupil and so enables him to undertake self-evaluation.	It loses the advantages of “continuity” and gives rise to individual and group competitiveness.
The education (human, intellectual, psychological and moral) of the whole person is the object of the school.	Reduced in number, in comparison with the “Conduct” they are more practical and impersonal.
The chapter on punishments – to quote one – contains a wealth of psychology and incentives of great value and profit to the pupils in showing them how to amend their ways.	More judgemental and less personal with regards to the one who corrects as to the one who receives the correction.
It is the school in action.	It’s a preparation for the school to operate.
It is the very life-blood of genuine Lasallian pedagogy.	Ordinary pedagogical principles swamp, in part, the contagious, all-embracing vitality of the Lasallian pedagogy.

## CONCLUSION

At no time have I attempted to claim that the “Conduct” is superior to the “Guide”. Every society develops and writes its own pedagogy; not for nothing do two centuries pass by. My intention has been simply to motivate the reader so that he may personally verify that the “Conduct” in its quintessence is closer to today’s pedagogy than the “Guide” of 1903; that the knowledge of the latter does not validate that of the former; and that whoever gives some thought to the “Conduct” will penetrate deeper into the rich personality of the Pedagogue from Rheims, and the worth of the creative team of Brothers with whom he worked in the composition of the treatise and on the subsequent revisions thereof.

**Br. Manuel F. Magaz.**