

Listening a la Ignatius

By John C. Haughey

In order to elaborate on what I believe should be distinctive about a business education pursued under the name Jesuit I will take the subject in three directions. First I will encapsulate and comment on Clayton Christensen's (2010) piece in the Harvard Business Review "How Will You Measure Your Life?" because it freshens some of Ignatius of Loyola's ideas about how one goes about learning one's calling. Secondly, the interview of John Mackey (2011) in the same journal sheds light on the idea of charism as St. Paul understood it. Calling and charism are correlates. Thirdly, I want to suggest what all of this might mean for being educated in a Jesuit business school. Finally, I will tack on a post script to this piece to give it more legitimacy from the Jesuit Order than my ideas alone would have.

Before launching into the piece I anticipate most readers, given the title, will have a common sentiment and itch—that it will be "practical." This need is probably even more pronounced in business schools where 'learning to earn' is likely to be more pressing than 'learning to know.' Practicality is measurable; impracticality can be irritating. A business education's desired effect is a business career. A Jesuit business education's practical purpose is the same. A business career is aasurable thing so how would it be distinctive as Jesuit? St. Ignatius Loyola would answer this question by saying one has to learn how to shut the door on the busy things and information that pours into one's consciousness daily, hourly, minutely. Why? Because there is a deeper self than the performing self and a source of guidance that comes from within that deeper self if one knows how to enter its lair and disengage from the circumstances that keep one from attending to it. Ignatius' genius was to systematize the process of hearing one's better self and becoming disciplined enough to follow its guidance.

Differentiating one's busy, busi-ness self from this deeper interiority spells out the difference between a "Jesuit" business education and another kind. Notice the litmus test suggested here is not whether one has made the Spiritual Exercises, desirable as that might be. Rather, it is whether one is driven solely by achievements or has the experience and can undergo the discipline of what I will call "receivements" about who one is and what one might do with this self that isn't being mastered by the pushes and pulls coming from the performing self. These are two different fonts of activity.

The several verbs Ignatius employs for those making the Spiritual Exercises recommend this non-achievement posture and convey the distinctiveness this article is commending. They are: "withdraw from friends, acquaintance and many occupations," "disengage," "leave," "live in as great a degree of privacy as possible," "seek to "give one's whole attention to one single interest—i.e., the service of God and progress in this." Ignatius' experience and also mine is that "the more the soul is in solitude and seclusion, the more fit it renders itself to approach and be united with God."

Getting Below the Performing Self

Clayton Christensen is a Professor of Management at the Harvard Business School. His article "How Will You Measure Your Life?" is taken from his address to the graduating class of that institution given in the Spring and published the same year in the Harvard Business Review for July-August 2010. The class had asked for him because they obviously had "taken the measure" of him in the course of their years at the school and found him the one they needed to hear more from since a number of them were in the process of having to recalibrate the meaning of their lives in view of the straits the world of business found itself in from 2008 on. When they had entered the school in 2007 the economy was strong and

their sails were set to be blown by its winds into deep sea careers. They were virtually assured of being successful, their lives lucrative. He had a different set of principles as well as both his own experience and that of his own Harvard classmates from an earlier era. These made it obvious that the graduating class should try to see things differently.

Christensen reaches in under the hubris of dynamic capitalism and produces a very different picture of success than his hearers had presumed about the business world and themselves. His reflections are a secularized but a world view that Ignatius Loyola would have affirmed. What the two of them have in common is a high expectation and a forthrightness about religious faith. They both witness to a life measured in terms of interiority rather than business success.

It was during his stint at Oxford University as a Rhodes scholar that Christiansen was moved to distance himself from the press of achievement and learn the discipline of receivment. "I decided to spend an hour every night reading, thinking and praying about why God put me on this earth." He was very conscious of the cost of this practice to the growing professionalization of his persona. It was a very challenging commitment "because every hour spent on his life's purposes, I wasn't studying applied econometrics etc." But he stuck with his commitment then and has continued with it throughout his life. The life-long yield of this discipline has been an integration within his deeper self of purposes worthy of his humanity. "Even though I have a bunch of businesses that compete for my time, energy and talent I am trying to have a rewarding relationship with my wife, raise great kids, contribute to my community, succeed in my career, contribute to my church and so on."

What is striking about his experience and confirming of this practice of stepping back and finding his own center are his class reunions. He knew his classmates when they all had been young and in classes together and realized how they were "people who had a high need for achievement"—as did he. Consequently, whatever discretionary moments they would have had they would "allocate it to activities that yield the most tangible accomplishments...and provide the most concrete evidence that we're moving forward." He then comments that "people who are driven to excel have this unconscious propensity to underinvest in their families and overinvest in their careers." He has found his own perceptions verified in the literature he covers. As a result he generalizes: "if you study the root causes of business disasters, over and over you'll find this predisposition toward endeavors that offer immediate gratification."

Sure enough "over the years I've watched the fates of my HBS classmates from 1979 unfold: I've seen more and more of them come to our reunions unhappy, divorced and alienated from their children." This is not a judgmental attitude towards them but a sadness that they had "allocated fewer and fewer resources to the things they would have once said mattered most." Neither Christiansen nor Ignatius Loyola would see this as people doing something bad or intending to do someone else in. For Ignatius they would be instances of "an inordinate affection;"for Christiansen they have suffered from a delusional misallocation of personal resources.

The recent and ongoing recession has riveted the attention of the 2010 class at HBS and has had them listen to the experience of one of their own professors who is more interested in their being able to deepen themselves than in their knowing management theory. The world was their oyster when they began in that prestigious school. Now some of them are asking "are we even going to be able to stay in our home?" Patrick Chun who was listening to Christiansen's address confirmed his insights. You could see the shift happening at HBS. Money used to be number one in the job search...a lot of people on

campus see money differently now." They are now asking themselves "what's the minimum I need to have and what else drives my life?"

The Whole Range of Whole Foods

John Mackey, the co-founder and co-CEO of Whole Foods Market, was interviewed in the Harvard Business Review (2011) in a piece called "What Is It Only I Can Do?" Though I know nothing about his educational or religious background, I want to use the lens of charisma to interpret him and his contribution. Charisma, a term used by St. Paul often, has more to do with the source of the common good than any other category with which I am aware. "To each person a manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." (1 Cor. 12:7) Paul's vision was that every community is as good as the charisms operating in it or as impoverished as the absence of such. A charisma is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to the person for the upbuilding of the community within which she or he lives even though the ones equipped with that gift might not even see themselves in that light or their gift coming from that source.

Mackey attributes his insights into the good he has been able to do to the people he has worked with at Whole Foods for the last 30 years. He founded the company on the dare that "organic" food would become a cause and create a niche. It hadn't been when the enterprise began but has now become "something very much in the national consciousness." The good he does and promotes and manages and oversees has grown in further directions than organic food. He names this growth in several ways. He would say that "conscious capitalism" grows out of the perceptions and insights of the people he works with. It becomes a "conscious business" which seeks a higher purpose than simply the purposes other businesses have of producing products that the public will demand and to maximize profit and increase shareholder value. A higher purpose is to operate with a consciousness of the interdependence of all the stakeholders. Some of these are in his employ, some are suppliers, some are the locals who depend on the business, some are the shareholders, some are the farmers. "Conscious leadership" means that all are on board about the decisions and strategies that are communally arrived at.

Mackey was promoting these three forms of consciousness expansion at all the different stores he would visit in the chain so that there would be a "conscious culture" in their collective enterprise. Then came a further development about five years ago, once again from below not from him. (I do not read him as being self- or Whole Foods- promotional in this further extension of his and their enterprise. I am willing to stand corrected if someone could produce the correction but in lieu of such let me proceed.)

He liked the Platonic triad of the true, the good, and the beautiful and was comfortable describing their collective enterprise to those laboring in it in those grand terms. But his listeners insisted on a further descriptor: heroic. This might be a bit of a stretch but he and they have set out to change society's relation to and understanding of food in a way that is much more venturesome than simply profitability. Their purpose is a change in societal behavior. They seem to be succeeding since Wal-Mart is now "into" organic produce. There is no patent on organic food. But beyond aiming at being happy team members who produce happy customers and happy stakeholders and, in turn, happy investors, the aspiration of the laborers in Whole Foods is to be in a conscious interdependency with the well being of the local community's agriculture as well as animal welfare.

What is being embodied in Mackey is a charisma. Technically his is an extraordinary management talent. Theologically he has received a gift to grow the community's good. Mackey is the perfect example of

how non-mystical and, yes! materialistic the Spirit is and how tangible the gifts of the Spirit are meant to be for the distribution of the goods of the earth to the communities of the earth. What is being generated here through the social mediation of Mackey and his co-workers is a common good. The good is being enlarged as it evolves. But heroically, isn't that a bit much? I don't think so.

Four further extensions his gift has provided the good of the community: (1) Whole Foods is giving 5% of their net profits to the not-for-profit organizations in the communities contiguous to the local whole foods store; (2) in the last six years they have begun to focus on the developing nations "where we buy coffee and where we get our bananas from." They have now set up micro-credit lending in 23 of those countries where they are actually trading; in these places they are giving loans to those local entrepreneurs whose nascent charisms need this assistance; (3) in each of the Whole Foods stores in this country they have created what they call "a prosperity campaign" so that their customers can make small dollar-type donations at their cash registers. Consequently, they have raised "a couple of million dollars a year that we can funnel into micro-credit loans so that the customer can be engaged in this work"; (4) they have created a "Whole Planet Foundation" to extend their initiatives even further.

Why Charism?

It is too often imagined that the Spirit's gifts are reserved to those who pray. Whether Mackay prays or not is something I don't know. What I do know is that he listens. And according to his own self description he does so slowly and with some resistance from his own psyche. But listen he does and the fruits of his listening and his managerial talent are making what he hears operational. How to explain this? Natural giftedness, yes! But "grace builds on nature." Charism takes nature where it otherwise could not go. It is something to be expected, teased out, cultivated and celebrated since the fruits are abundant. The specific point here is about listening. One can listen to the Spirit speak in prayer or one can listen and hear this same source of 'otherness' come from human speech. Either way one must be prepared to transcend self concern and self interest and hear and act on what is heard.

Ignatius' experience both with "souls" and with his own spirits, the evil one and the good one, was that the more attentive one is to what is going on in one's affectivity the more likely one will hear the call of how one is to affect the community's needs as God would meet those. This is what a charism is. Again, it is a distinct gift for affecting the common good that comes from the Spirit whether it is mediated socially or interiorly. In brief, therefore, it seems to me that a business education in the Jesuit tradition would assist one in hearing the still small voice of conscience and call. God will subsequently be glorified insofar as that capacity has been heightened and strengthened in the course of one's schooling. Christensen warned the graduating class at the Harvard Business School in the speech referred to above: "if you think you'll have more time and energy to reflect later, you're nuts, because life only gets more demanding."

The Practicality of Ideals

I should be more explicit about a few of the beliefs that undergird this piece. *One* is that everyone is made in the image and likeness of God, including, of course, business students. *Two* is that God is not a Deist kind of divinity but a Parental kind who would accompany everyone every step of their sojourn. *Three* is that an education is as good as it enables one to become attentive to this accompaniment. *Four* is that this accompanying Presence is divinely patient and ever respectful of the "child's" freedom as befits and reflects the freedom of this Parent. *Five* if the child of God follows the agenda of the Divine

Parent he or she will find they are being led into a life vectored in three directions. These are "total detachment, total immersion and total cooperation."

I wouldn't have inserted these three totalistic, idealistic ideals here since they call for such a steep climb but I do so because they are what Jesuits themselves have been personally exhorted to strive for by the present General of the Jesuits, Adolfo Nicolas, (2011). The occasion for his description and exhortation has been the 20th anniversary of the death of Pedro Arrupe, a much revered former general of the Society of Jesus who is on track to beatification and eventually canonization — we hope! Since Christiansen and Mackey give every indication that they are measuring up to that climb and embodying these ideals, it should be obvious that Jesuits aren't the only ones who are called to pursue them. So those whose degrees are pursued and received from Jesuit schools should also be introduced to the climb. Whether Jesuit or non-Jesuit the education that is foundational is listening to the Spirit howsoever it should speak to one's interiority.

The reader might be puzzled about what could seem like a lacuna in this article, namely it doesn't spell out the things that are usually elaborated about what is entailed in being educated in a Jesuit or Catholic tradition. I do not go this route because, to be technical about it, I believe there is a natural catholicity in human epistemology and anthropology. Humans naturally seek to connect dots or make wholes out of disassembled parts. This characteristic of the mind is often missed if learning to gain and get overwhelms learning to hear and give.

I have written elsewhere about this way of understanding an education in catholicity and, in turn, its relation to Catholicism, in a recent volume *Where is Knowing Going* (2009) for which I received the Catholic Press Association's First Place Award for Education in 2010. I mention this here because I gave a lot of attention in that volume to examining the understanding "catholic" which is implicit in a Jesuit education. In brief, the contention is that no subject operates outside the realm of God's reach and action. But this divine action is helped by learning to be a good listener and being attentive to voices that enable one to transcend one's propensities to self-interest. God's agenda for the world of business, to use a hackneyed term for it, is "the common good."

Ignatius Loyola was interested in the heart, learning how to discern its movements. It would shiver his timbers to think of an education that flew under the banner of his name or of "Jesuit" that didn't try to have this discernment component as intrinsic to it since he knew only too well how a darkness can enter the mind and heart camouflaged as light. A whole "science" of discernment of spirits grew out of Ignatius' rules for trying to figure out which "spirit" might be moving a person to give themselves to this or to that endeavor, whether it be ad hoc or life-long. But foundational to learning this personal discernment is something very practical, namely a practice, the practice recommended by Christiansen of going apart from the hunt for achievement in order to be attuned to the receivements by which God more easily speaks to the heart.

To put this in terms of the three above mentioned "totals": total detachment is learned only in stages; total immersion is learned only in stages; total cooperation is learned only in stages. Ironically, practicality can keep one from pursuing such ideals and neglecting the practices that move one in these directions. And on the subject of impracticality, it seems like Jesus articulated the apogee of it: you will gain your life if you learn to lose it—in stages.

References

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Interview with John Mackey by Justin Fox, "What Is It That Only I Can Do," *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 2011, pp. 119-123.

Letter from Rome, February 5, 2011 from Adolfo Nicolas, S.J. to the whole Jesuit Society.
In commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the death of Fr. Arrupe".