

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. John 14:6

Perhaps I should begin with three of the institutions I have belonged to, three very important contributors to my life, three very eccentric clubs: The Roman Catholic Church, The de la Salle Christian Brothers and a bit later, IBM. Their influence on my life and values, their growth, their decline and their attempts at renewal or lack of same have some amazing similarities.

First, let's look at IBM. It had a culture all its own, unique in the world of business. In those long lost days, one of IBM's highest priorities were their employees as well as their customers. They had an "Open Door Policy" which made it virtually impossible to fire an employee, for example. That's good and bad news. The good news is that good, effective and smart-ass employees of which I was a member, are hard to fire as long as they perform well. Grudge firings were impossible. The bad news was that incompetence is hard to get rid of.

During the Great Depression, Thomas J. Watson Sr. decided that the only real difference between bankers and lathe operators was how they dressed and having a country club. He took care of both of his issues: he installed "the uniform," a suit, modest tie and sensible shoes. He also built country clubs for all IBM employees in the Poughkeepsie, Endicott area of New York, another in Long Island, another in San Jose, California and still another in England. Bowling alleys, gymnasiums, golf courses...the country club works. Free. Then he established a family environment: picnics, dinners, singing each morning from the "song book." There was a pension plan, completely IBM's gift to long time employees.

But when I joined IBM in 1964 you could basically do anything you wanted: work your way up the management ladder, research, customer services, technology management and on and on. Someone said to me just after I joined the aerospace arm of IBM, the Federal Systems Division, that if I lasted ten years in IBM I would have more in common with any IBMer in the world than I would my next door neighbor. He was right. I opted for technology consultant in several foreign countries and eventually curriculum software technologies in EduQuest, IBM's education branch of the PC development group. It was perfect for my temperament. I loved this company, bought in to everything: technology innovation, culture, management style....everything. That's the closest thing to "faith" I've ever felt in my business endeavors.

Now to most people, all this sounds ludicrous these days. While I was having a great 31 year career at IBM, things began to unravel underneath the superstructure of IBM's vast international technology and financial empire. Sometimes organizations lose focus. When they do, they can also, inadvertently, lose their way, mistaking poor judgment for "truth," eventually also lose value, refuse to see the light....and die or are forced to change.

After my international assignments and a stint with IBM's manufacturing facility in San Jose, California, IBM executive management decided, in their minds, to build a "Personal Computer" that they were building a computer that would challenge the little computers: Apple, Atari and Commodore. Not "real computers" like mainframes. Though IBM invented and owned the very best, proprietary, chip at the time (Reduced Instruction Set Chip or RISC), they decided not to use it. It might compete with their big computer cash cow, they said. IBM also had the very best operating system, used on the System 1 special purpose computer, but declined to use it for the same reason. The result? The PC management team was forced to find an alternative source: Intel, a small chip manufacturer and a nerd from Redmond, Washington named Bill Gates. The resulting machine, the PC, was, in fact, not competitive in function with its intended rivals. But it was made by IBM, the acknowledged leader of the computing world. As the PC developed over some months, the world of computing began to experiment with it in a way it never would have with the others.

The PC, sometimes denigrated as the "**P**iece of **C**rap" by rivals because of the lack of functionality compared to Apple, the cheap chip (rather than the RISC chip), went on to accidentally revolutionize the entire computing industry. Bank departments, fed up with having to punch cards, their turn in line in the mainframe center (System 360), began to buy within their own budgets, "distributed systems." A big PC became the "server" and small, cheap computers attached to the server became the "work stations." The concept caught on even though various networking protocols were used creating chaos with data that could not marry with other data.

EduQuest, our division dedicated to education, initially used "Waterloo Port", a networking package used by the Canadian university of the same name. Education led the way in distributed processing. Because of its unwillingness to react to this phenomenon they unintentionally created and didn't believe in, IBM lost their **Way**. The **Light**, mainframe computer, went out almost overnight. The real **Truth**, distributed systems even if the PC was a "**P**iece of

Crap.” changed the entire belief system of the entire world except upper IBM management.

Once upon another earlier time I was a Roman Catholic, in fact a member of the Christian Brothers in the California province that made wine. The order, founded by Jean Baptiste de la Salle in France in the seventeenth century, a religious order of men with vows whose main objective was to teach the poor children of the cities of France. He was a true visionary, an inventor of classroom pedagogical techniques and his schools were free which irritated the rich French teaching communities no end.

I started in the “Junior Novitiate” as a sophomore in high school. We prayed a lot, played sports a lot, maintained silence a lot and studied a lot. When I graduated, I entered the Novitiate, took my robe and vows and moved on to St. Mary’s College in Moraga, in the east bay area of San Francisco to get my bachelor’s degree in English Literature. We all wore black floor-length robes with a little white dickie in front.

I went to Mont la Salle primarily because of that sweet talking brother, Edward Behan. He made it seem like a spa: a swimming pool, gymnasium, lots of sports. Here was the reality: we prayed a lot, we studied a lot, we kept silence a lot, we saw our parents once a month. Yes, we played sports, were quite good actually in basketball and baseball. Several of our students would have been fine college players in a different life.

As with IBM, I have nothing bad to say about my five and one-half years with the Fratres Scholorum Christianarum that ended over fifty years. The Brothers gave me a good set of values, jump started an indifferent student. There were nineteen novices who took the robe that year. The only surviving Brother, Bede Van Duren, “Big Jim,” died some years ago. True, I was stunned when the Director told me to start thinking about a different “vocation.” But he was right. I didn’t belong there, though I tried. I am forever grateful to him for his jaundice eye. Perhaps he was right for the wrong reasons. I don’t care.

But I wonder now after all these years. They have very few newcomers, postulants, fewer novices and almost no brothers who receive final vows. I have often wondered why. The vow of chastity is probably a large contributor but is it more than that? Have they lost their original de la Salle vision? Are they teaching the poor? Have their high tuition elite schools become counter

productive to the original intent? I don't mean the surviving Brothers aren't smart, dedicated or somehow bad Brothers. Not at all. I just wonder if the order has lost it's way, lost it's light, lost it's original truth. I'm not qualified to answer those questions, but.....

I remained a Roman Catholic for some years after leaving the Brothers. I planned on getting married in the Church but the way my fiancé was treated by a local priest, Father Rose, who I thought was my friend, caused me to rethinking my decision. We were treated like the welcome we thought we were by a Methodist minister in Baltimore, planned our wedding around Christmas. Why? We were so poor we couldn't afford flowers. The minister's wife volunteered to play music. We couldn't afford to pay musicians. It was a wonderful wedding, the reception mostly prepared by our small coterie of friends, perhaps 25 school friends, work colleagues and a few of Valerie's family.

I considered having a second wedding off and on but my emotions sealed the bargain I had made with being a "former", (not "lapsed") Catholic. After our first born child was seen to be a Downs Syndrome baby, he died of croup and asphyxiation at a hospital at eight months. Several months later we again saw Father Rose tossed off a remark that just astounded my wife and I. He casually said, "Too bad your baby will never see heaven since he wasn't baptized in the Church." I almost hit him but that was, as I said, the emotional end between me and the Catholic Church.

But leaving one's lifelong beliefs can't be justified by a cruel and stupid priests. I'm sure there are plenty of cruel and stupid ministers and mullahs. After some years I came to the following conclusions:

- It was almost 300 years after the death of Jesus that he was proclaimed to be, not only a great prophet, the messiah proclaimed by scripture, but to be also God.
- The Church of the Crusades, slaughtering Jews as well as "infidels" began the slow slide from Jesus' teachings to political autrocities in the name of God.
- The Church of the Inquisition was motivated by greed, jealousy of the wealth of Jews, not religious fervor.
- Complicit acceptance of the Holocaust Jews continued the slide.

But finally a Pope dared an internal Reformation. John XXIII convened Vatican II. He picked Hans Kung, a young theologian, to be his personal theological advisor, who in turn asked a priest who also taught at the University of Tübingen named Ratzinger to join him. John XXIII had several things in mind as objectives for the Council:

- To finally reconcile with Jews
- To allow “freedom of religious belief” among Protestants
- A series of uncomfortable traditions: contraception, birth control in general, mixed marriages, abortion under certain circumstances, celibacy of the clergy, women to be in the clergy.....and so on.

When Pope John XXIII tragically died and Pope Paul VI ascended the heavenly throne, the great tragedy happened. At first in line with John’s wishes, he soon began to be seduced by the Curia until, near the end, he was going to take out the sections on reconciliation with Jews and freedom of belief for other faiths. Kung gave up any chance he ever had for advancement to bishop or cardinal by leaking this news to the Catholic press. The final documentation was forced to include these two fundamental pieces....but none of the other objectives of John XXIII were met.

The current pope, once liberal in views, has evolved into what the Curia has become: a medieval caricature, the antithesis of what the Church needs now. Where has “Blessed are the poor in spirit for they shall see the kingdom of God?” The Church here in Mexico spends not a penny on the orphanages.

Here is the bottom line for the two thousand year old institution that claims to be the “Body of Christ.”

- They are more or less indistinguishable from General Motors and IBM. They wear funnier clothes in top management, but basically they all look to the bottom line.
- Like large businesses they have messages, guidelines and absolute beliefs required for membership.
- Violation of these dogmas require dismissal

The Roman Catholic Church, let’s face it, has nothing to do with Jesus’ teachings anymore, the fundamentals of the gospels. They have lost their **way**, their **truths** are mostly irrelevant...is it really of vital importance that Mary is

was and always will be a virgin? The light is going out. Just look at the inroads the fundamental Christian movements are making in Latin America.

It will take a miraculous Reformation within the Church to right it, but miracles are not easy to come by these days. And entrenched ideologies in all phases of business, life and religions.

To conclude: Does **The Way** sound like hiding pedophilia? Does The Truth sound like using contraceptives is mortally sinful? Does The Light sound like telling a young lady, dying of cancer, that she is being punished by God for having illegitimate children?

I think not.