

Strategic Leadership and The Great Commission:
A Social and Cultural Texture Analysis of Matthew 28:1-20

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Abstract

This paper explores the leadership and strategic nature of Jesus Christ from the text of Matthew 28:1-20. A social and cultural texture analysis of the selected passage reveals that Christ utilizes the learning school of strategy, as defined by Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel. This paper also provides insight on how leaders can apply Jesus' example in their own organizations.

Perhaps the most common view of strategy development is the image of leaders standing in front of their assembled followers and revealing a deliberate strategy for followers to implement. Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel (2005) use the analogy of a syringe, where the leader fills the syringe with strategy and injects it into the followers. However, this method of strategy is often not effective and roughly 10 percent of deliberately formulated strategies are ever implemented. A different perspective of strategy, the learning school, asserts that effective strategies emerge as individuals in the organization learn by trial and error. This paper analyzes the social and cultural texture in the final chapter of Matthew. Results of this analysis reveal Jesus engaging in an emergent strategy to redeem the world. It also provides a useful model for strategists and aspiring leaders to emulate.

Social and Cultural Texture

Social and cultural texture is one of the five textures analyzed using Robbin's (1996) Social-Rhetorical Interpretation model. The social and cultural texture of a given text concerns the nature of the text as a part of a society and culture. This texture emerges from insight into how the text views the world (specific social topics), how it shares cultural attitudes and norms (common social and cultural topics) and how it reveals the dominant cultural system (final cultural categories). Within the selected text there are various textural insights.

For the purpose of this analysis, the selected passage of text is divided into three sections:

1. The Resurrection (Matthew 28:1-10)
2. The Guard's Report (Matthew 28:1-15)
3. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

This paper analyzes each section individually, while attempting to draw from the text evidence of current leadership and strategic theories.

The Resurrection (Matthew 28:1-10)

The first section of text follows Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus as they go to the grave to anoint the body of Jesus. Instead, they find an angel who delivers to them the message that Jesus has resurrected. In the final verse of the section, the women encounter Jesus, they begin to worship him and he instructs them, saying, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me,” (Matthew 28:10 NRSV). The section contains a thaumaturgical discourse. Thaumaturgical responses focus on relief from an individual or group’s present and specific ills through a special dispensation of the divine. The women have lost someone very close to them and they are going to the grave to mourn. Instead, the women find an angel who tells them Jesus is alive and eventually they get to see the risen savior. When they eventually see Jesus, they worship him as an appeal for his relief from their sorrow (Graystone, 1984). The topic of Honor-Shame is present in this section. Robbins (1996) asserts that in the culture of this time, honor was considered a male component, with its female counterpart being shame. The women approach the grave in shame, ready to honor Jesus by anointing him even though it will make them unclean (Numbers 19:11-13). When they see Jesus they honor him by worshipping him. However, Jesus bestows honor on them by revealing himself to them. He asks them to tell the disciples where to meet him. This act also represents countercultural rhetoric, rejecting an established characteristic of the dominant culture (Robbins, 1996), which considered the role of women to be serving men as men engaged in the important work (Gower, 1987).

The Guard’s Report (Matthew 28:11-15)

The middle section of the text follows the tomb’s guards. They inform the chief priests of the empty tomb and are offered money in exchange for claiming the disciples came and stole the

body of Jesus. This text contains a Gnostic-Manipulationist discourse (Robbins, 1996). The chief priests seek to manipulate history in order to preserve their view that salvation is possible in the world through right means and techniques (which the chief priests instruct). The chief priests enter into a dyadic contract when they offer money in exchange for the guards' false report (Matthew 28:12-13). A dyadic contract is an implicit contract entered into by two parties, unenforceable but bound by honor (Robbins, 1996). The chief priests represent the dominant culture, supported by the social structure and vested with power to impose their will on others.

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

The final section of the text is known to many as the Great Commission. The disciples assemble and Jesus appears and delivers the now famous words:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

(Matthew 28:18-20)

The text contains a strong conversionist discourse, characterized by the view that the entire world is evil and in need of change and redemption (Robbins, 1996). Graystone (1984) asserts that even the disciples fell before him in an act of asking for redemption, which Jesus bestows by issuing the great commission. Jesus commands the disciples to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Hiebert (1992) emphasizes the importance of Jesus' focus on all nations. This marks a shift from Jesus as a Jewish rabbi, to Jesus as the way to redeem the entire world. If the disciples can change the people of all nations, the world can be redeemed. This is why Krentz (2004) argues that the entire text of Matthew is a missionary text.

This chapter and the entire book of Matthew end with Jesus acknowledging his dyadic personality. Robbins (1996) defines a dyadic personality as a relationship in which one person needs the other person continually. Jesus knows the disciples will still rely on him for strength, and reminds them that he is with them “always, to the end of the age,” (Matthew 28:20). The entire section of text establishes Jesus and the disciples as counterculture (Robbins, 1996), needing to enter the culture and teach it to obey Christ’s commandments.

Discussion

Through exegetical analysis it is revealed that Jesus’ strategy is to change the people of all nations through the disciples. This is corroborated in the progression of discourse and rhetoric from thaumaturgical to counterculture, to gnostic-manipulationist to conversionist rhetoric. The author reveals Jesus’ nature, the nature of the surrounding world and then the plan to change the people of the world. If the disciples can change the people of all nations, the world can be redeemed. It’s tempting to believe that this section demonstrates Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel’s (2005) syringe analogy of deliberate strategy. Krentz (2004) reveals that the setting of a mountain is one that places Jesus’ in a position of honor, as significant events appear to take place on mountains. The disciples bestow honor on Jesus and he issues several commands. This can appear as if Jesus is using the entrepreneurial school of strategy, where strategy is delivered by one central individual (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand & Lampel, 2005).

However, Jesus doesn’t deliver a complete, deliberate strategy. Instead, he issues three commands: make disciples, baptize them and teach them to obey his commandments (Matthew 28:18-20). Jesus does *not* instruct them where to go first, when to baptize, or even how to teach others the commandments. Hughes and Beatty (2005) reveal that strategic thinking isn’t just reserved for the highest position in an organization, but rather is the role of everyone in the

organization. Luke's Acts of the Apostles reveals an organization developing and refining a strategy in response to ever-changing circumstances (DeSilva, 2004). The church utilizes the learning school of strategy, where strategy emerges as organizations learn about the situation and their ability to respond to it (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand & Lampel, 2005). Jesus employed this strategy when he deliberately avoided issuing a deliberate strategy.

In their seminal work *Built to Last: Successful Secrets of Highly Visionary Companies*, Collins and Porras (1994) write:

“Imagine you met a remarkable person who could look at the sun at any time of day or night and state the exact time and date[...]This person would be an amazing time teller, and we'd probably revere that person for the ability to tell time. But wouldn't that person be even more amazing if, instead of telling the time, he or she *built a clock* that could tell the time forever, even after he or she was dead and gone?” (p. 22-23)

The authors go on to elaborate on the difference between time-tellers and clock builders; clock builders build highly visionary organizations with the means to exist long after they are gone. Through a social and cultural texture analysis of Matthew 28:1-20, Jesus is revealed as a clock builder. He includes those at all levels in his strategy to reach the world. He utilizes the learning school of strategy, issuing a few commands, and allowing the strategy to emerge from his followers. Leaders aspiring to leave a legacy can emulate the model Christ demonstrates: cast your vision and empower your followers to develop the specifics of how it will be realized.

Conclusion

The Great Commission reveals more than the mission of the church; it reveals Jesus'

strategy. While many are quick to believe that strategy is delivered from on high with specific details of implementation, Jesus utilizes a different method. A social and cultural texture analysis of Matthew 28:1-20 illustrates Jesus' utilization of the learning school of strategy. Christ involves his followers in the plan and allows them to create the specifics surrounding implementation. Further analysis of early church history would illuminate details of *how* the strategy emerged. Regardless, this passage provides a valuable example of how leaders can cast their vision and use strategy to empower their followers.

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