

The Pauline Strategy:
An Ideological Texture Analysis of the Apostle Paul's Ministry

David Burkus
Instructor of Management
Oral Roberts University

Abstract

An ideological texture analysis of the Pauline epistles and sections of Acts reveals three parts to Paul's strategy of church globalization and how to reach the Gentiles: Jews First, Gentiles second, Decentralized networks, and adaptability of message. These three elements are employed throughout Paul's ministry and helped to spread the gospel of Jesus. In addition, they are aligned with modern literature on organizational globalization.

Shortly after the ascension of Christ, a Pharisee had a life-changing encounter along the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9). After his conversion to Christianity, Paul began a life-long quest to bring the gospel to the entirety of the known world. Paul believed that it was his calling to bring the message of the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Paul was a Jew, but also had Roman citizenship. This knowledge of Jewish history, but awareness of Roman globalization, allowed him to make a large impact on the spread of the Early Church. Through an ideological texture analysis of the Pauline epistles (with some historical details drawn from Acts), a three-point strategy for this global expansion is revealed and is aligned with modern literature on organizational globalization.

Ideological Texture

Ideological texture is the fourth of five textures according to Robbins' (1996) Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation model. Ideological texture refers to the ideologies of those involved in the text (Robbins, 1996). It is concerned with the alliance and conflicts within the language of the text as well as the way the text and its interpreters position themselves relative to other individuals and groups in that time. Within ideological texture, there are four sub-textures: individual locations of writers and readers, relation to groups, and modes of intellectual discourse.

The individual locations sub-texture is the first step toward ideological texture analysis (Robbins, 1996). It is characterized by the individuals' involved in the text responses to the world as well as the individuals' cultural location. Within the epistles, Paul's individual location is revealed by his conversionist response, which views the world as corrupt because people are corrupt (Robbins, 1996). The conversionist response seeks to transform people and, through that transformation, bring salvation. Consider his first letter to the Corinthians (15:21-22 NRSV): "For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ." Likewise, Paul's writings reveal a countercultural location relative to both the established Jewish and Roman cultures.

Relation to groups examines the groups that connect the writer and reader (Robbins, 1996). Within the Pauline epistles, Paul is head of a new corporate group. According to Robbins (1996), corporate groups are bodies of individuals with permanent existence who are joined under common principles and interests. The Early Church would eventually go on to define and

create a historical tradition, however in the initial stages of growth, it first needed to solidify its believers' relation to each other and the church as a whole under a corporate mentality. Paul would do so using a loosely connected, decentralized network.

Modes of intellectual discourse refers to the particular methods of providing commentary on texts, rituals, creeds and related beliefs (Robbins, 1996). Paul often relies on a historical discourse to appeal to multiple cultures and their traditions depending on where he is preaching or writing to. Historical discourse attempts to place Christianity among the history of the other religions in the Greco-Roman world (Robbins, 1996). This is best seen not in an epistle, but in Paul's speech to the Athenians. Paul proclaims "I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you," (Acts 17:22-23).

Discussion

Through an ideological texture analysis of the letters of Paul (with some help from the history contained in Acts), one begins to develop an idea of the strategy Paul employed to spread the gospel of Jesus globally. Specifically, Paul utilizes a three-point strategy. First, as he enters a new city he seeks to appeal to the Jews first, then the Gentiles. Second, he utilizes a decentralized, spider-plant network (Morgan, 1997) to connect the churches. Third, he adapts his message as needed to the cultures of those cities.

Jews first, then Gentiles. When Paul enters a new city, he heads first to the Jewish synagogue in that city. He preached at these synagogues and sought to convert these believers into the way of his Messiah. If this was accomplished, he had achieved a bond with locals by both heredity and ideology. These bonds would help establish him in a new city and allow him to leverage their knowledge of the city to then preach to the Gentiles. All the while, Paul maintained a separation from whole alignment with either culture, keeping in line with the countercultural response discussed above. Within a modern organizational setting, this strategy is similar to that advocated by Galbraith (2000) for organizations entering a new country. Galbraith argues that joint ventures and partnerships with local organizations are more likely to succeed, since the risks of cultural clash are limited.

Decentralized church network. The history of Paul's ministry reveals his traveling from city to city, establishing a church and then moving on. Acts 11:25-26 reads, "Then Barnabas

went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people.” Paul went to Antioch and stayed for a year to establish a church. The epistles of Paul serve as evidence of the network of churches he had established, as each letter is written to a specific church and addressed specific needs (DeSilva, 2004). These city churches would often give donations to help support the mother church in Jerusalem. This idea resembles what Morgan (1997) terms a “spider-plant” model. A spider-plant is decentralized, with a mother plant that spiders out to grow other plants. These plants are attached to the mother, but operate semi-autonomously as well.

Adapt the message. Paul was born a man of two worlds. He was raised a Pharisee, but also a Roman citizen. His high level of education and unique, dual-perspective on the known world allow him to adapt his style and message when needed. In addition to the proclamation at Athens discussed above, in 1 Corinthians 9: 19-22, Paul writes:

“For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.”

Paul adapts to the various cultural customs and traditions of the city he is in, in order to win those citizens to Christ. While the core of his message doesn't change, he delivers it differently for different people. This is a similar concept to what Zweifel (2003) terms a “global citizen” – one who respects the cultures and customs of various people and is open to doing things differently if need be. The disciples Paul developed during his ministry also represented the diverse cultures he preach to. Paul built a collaborative group as part of his mission, one that was marked by diversity, equal participations and yet shared respect and meaning (Staglich, 2001).

Conclusion

An ideological texture analysis of the Pauline epistles reveals that Paul was a man who understood the various cultures of the known world, and knew how to pass between them when needed. Utilizing a three-point strategy (Jews first, Decentralized network and Adaptability) Paul spread the gospel of Jesus across much of the known world, ultimately ending up in Rome – the center of the world (DeSilva, 2004). Even under arrest in Rome, Paul continued to write letters and support the network he developed, continuing to employ this strategy in the desire to bring Christ to all people. As a result, Christianity has grown even beyond the world Paul knew and the epistles of Paul grew to become the largest section of the Christian New Testament.

References

- DeSilva, D.A. (2004). *An introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, methods and ministry formation*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.
- Galbraith, J. (2000). *Designing the global corporation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Morgan, G. (1997). *Imaginization: New Mindsets for Seeing, Organizing, and Managing*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koeler
- Robbins, V.K. (1996). *Exploring the texture of the texts: A guide to socio-rhetorical interpretation*. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International.
- Staglich, T. (2001). *Collaborative leadership and global transformation*. Bloomington, IN: Authohouse.
- Zweifel, T. (2003). *Cultural clash: Managing the global high-performance teams*. New York: Swiss Consulting Group.