

EXPLORING FOR A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF STRATEGY? WE HAVE NOT YET DISCOVERED A STREAM, RIVER, OR SCHOOL, BUT WE MAY HAVE FOUND THE HEADWATERS

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Dr. Leo Salgado challenges us with a new way of looking at strategy. By relying on Henry Mintzberg's ten schools, he is building on a well-recognized, long-established, albeit evolving, typology. For those not familiar with the ten schools, Dr. Salgado has provided a useful table at the end of the article. Readers may want to look at Mintzberg's 1990 article to acquaint themselves with the typology.

An additional useful and very readable article I recommend to help one fully appreciate Dr. Salgado's article, is Mintzberg and Lampels' 1999 *Sloan Management Review* article "Reflecting on the Strategy Process." Written about ten years after the original article, it provides additional thinking and refinement of the original concept. Much of my commentary is based on the 1999 article.

While many strategic scholars admire Mintzberg's wit, keen insights, and clever ways of organizing the literature, Mintzberg and his ten schools are not without critics. For example, in a 1991 critique in the *Strategic Management Journal*, Igor Ansoff (widely considered as one of the fathers of modern strategy) strongly criticized Mintzberg's ten schools on both "methodological weakness of the arguments and contradictions to factual evidence" (p. 460).

French (2009) commends Mintzberg as one of the few scholars who has effectively organized large amounts of the literature into a coherent typology. On the other hand, he criticizes the idea of ten distinct schools as being unrealistic. French contends:

Consequently it will be necessary for scholars to re-think the schools classifications and justify their models of strategic behaviour, taking into account that strategy is a modernist idea, but modernism may not present the best epistemology for the development of strategic thinking in an era where businesses are better understood as complex self-adapting systems (p. 48).

Shekar (2009) has written a more recent critique and extension of Mintzberg's ten schools typology. Shekhar critiques each of the ten schools. My point in bringing this up is that to hold out Henry Mintzberg as an expert is fine, but most of us recognize that he has both supporters and detractors. In the end, his work continues to engender the need for more work and refinement.

As far as I know, this is the first attempt to seriously examine the ten schools from the perspective of a Christian evangelical worldview. The criticisms of Mintzberg do not undermine Dr. Salgado's arguments. Rather, they support continuing efforts like his to provide new, useful, and creative insights.

Mintzberg and Lampel (1999) suggest using the metaphor of the blind men examining the elephant. This raises a critical point that supports further examination and development as reflected in Dr. Salgado's work.

We ask whether these perspectives represent fundamentally different processes of

strategy making or different *parts* of the same process. In both cases, our answer is yes. We seek to show how some recent work tends to cut across these historical perceptions—in a sense, how, cross fertilization has occurred. To academics this represents confusion and disorder, whereas to others—including ourselves—it expresses a certain welcome eclecticism, a broadening of perspectives (Mintzberg & Lampel, 1999, pp.20-21).

Much of Dr. Salgado's article focuses on the importance of worldview in the formation and implementation of strategy. In particular, he emphasizes the effect of worldview on decision-making, a key aspect of strategy. A landmark work (and a must-read for all serious strategic scholars) is Gareth Morgan's *Images of Organization* (1986). Morgan lends support to the influence worldview has on decision making and illustrates how multiple metaphors of the organization impact management scholars' views of decision making, conflict, power, and a magnitude of other management constructs. He views organizations through a lens of multiple metaphors, including the organization as a machine, a living organism, a brain, a political system, a psychic prison, a culture, and others. But in the end, Morgan doesn't argue that one metaphor is correct. Rather, he argues that managers are served well by considering many different perspectives, not just their favorite one.

Recent work on tacit knowledge and decision making has even demonstrated that much of decision making takes place below the surface and is based on hard-to-express assumptions, know-how, and wisdom (Daake, Dawley and Anthony, 2004). If that is the case, then any Christian worldview needs to consider not only explicit and expressed values, but also deeply held, intrinsic, and maybe even unexpressed views that are spiritual in nature.

Thus, Dr. Salgado is making a contribution by calling for broader thinking about how Christian principles might lead to a Christian perspective

or school of strategy. I must admit that my first reaction to Dr. Salgado's suggestion that the ten schools represent different worldviews was that it was a conceptual leap. I wonder if his assertion is unjustified, based on what Mintzberg and his colleagues say.

On the other hand, after further reflection and a conversation with another strategist, I think that he might be onto something. In their organizing framework, Mintzberg and Lampel use the following categories: Sources; Base Discipline; Champions; Intended Message; Realized Message; School Category; and Associated Homily. Again, in my opinion, there is nothing in the original typology that gives us a definitive set of worldviews for the ten schools. Yet Mintzberg and Lampel seem to be daring us to create new perspectives and insights.

In that spirit, Dr. Salgado's arguments and insights are a strong start. He raises an interesting question:

Why could strategy not include all types of action found in all these schools? The answer is that strategists begin with a problem which they interpret through their packaged set of beliefs or world views (Quine and Ullan, 1970). They cannot easily leave this web of beliefs. Solving the problem, they select only those actions that are either logically consistent or correspond with their own interpretation of what is most important about reality.

With a little stretching, perhaps one could infer aspects of a worldview from Mintzberg and Lampel's 1999 article in the summary chart categories of "Intended Message" and "Realized Message." Dr. Salgado states that Mintzberg and his colleagues "categorized these schools not so much as perspectives of one school of strategy but as distinctive core beliefs about the world and how things work, namely worldviews." He cites Cook (2000) as concluding that the concept of strategy is based on worldviews or core beliefs. At this point, I do not fundamentally disagree

with Dr. Salgado or even with Cook, but I think the work has just begun. We not only need to examine the worldview assumption, but also to examine carefully each of the ten schools from a broad strategic literature base and with a Christian perspective lens.

I now want to comment on Dr. Salgado's specific call for more Christian integration and thinking about peace as a possible new strategy school. A Christian worldview of strategy is an intriguing concept but possesses a difficult challenge. For example, there are many different viewpoints of just what "Christian" and "peace" mean. We can find vast differences in distinctions within evangelical denominations. And that is even more true in the broader mainline Christian community of Lutherans, Methodists, Catholics, Baptists, and Presbyterians. For example, for the construct of peace we will find enormous differences between Mennonites, Quakers, Baptists, Catholics, and Nazarenes. But this should not deter us.

Another example is the Christian Business Faculty Association (CBFA), which has become a premiere organization in developing theory. Members must recognize that our differences are great, and that we need additional thinking and dialogue. Overlaying our work onto the existing extant strategy literature (such as the ten schools) could provide important new insights. Dr. Salgado provides us with some fundamental thinking about how a unified, complete, redeemed reality can add to what we already know.

As I mentioned above, there are two important ways to move forward with future research and thinking on a Christian view of strategy specifically tied to Dr. Salgado's ideas. To recap, the first would be to examine each of the ten schools in light of Christian principles. But I would not limit this to such a narrow line of thinking, such as the Christian concept of peace. Dr. Salgado does face that straight on in his article and recognizes that there are other possible Christian values or constructs. Peace is but one Christian value. We have to start somewhere, however.

So secondly, to have a more comprehensive and viable "school" of Christian Strategy, we will want to consider broadening the perspective to the fruit of the Spirit identified in Galatians 5:22-23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

Developing a truly comprehensive Christian "school" of strategic thinking should be a long-term goal, but as suggested above, not limited to only one construct such as peace. Rather, it should be broader to include a more complete "fruit of the Spirit" model where we can simultaneously consider all of these interrelated constructs in a holistic manner. There may be other comprehensive "models" such as the values extolled in the Sermon on the Mount; the Ten Commandments; or the triad of faith, hope, and charity.

We will also want to engage a widespread group of scholars and practitioners from the Christian community. I suspect most evangelicals are quite ignorant of the landmark work that has come out of Catholic universities and vice versa. Many Christian scholars would ask, "What is CBFA?"

Perhaps the greatest challenge I have found as a scholar is the simultaneous tensions of trying to create a complete unified view of the world, while at the same time trying to understand that in order to understand most any construct in depth, we must to some degree study it in a disaggregated matter. In an attempt to have a unified theory of everything, we have a theory of nothing! So perhaps Dr. Salgado's approach of tackling one aspect of Christian thought, such as peace, is the only way we'll ever make any progress.

Dr. Salgado's article raises many more questions than it answers, which is almost always the case in cutting-edge thinking. This is not a criticism, but an admission of how much work has to be done before we can claim a Christian strategic school of peace or, as I continue to argue for, a more complete "fruit of the Spirit" Christian strategic worldview.

In summary, Dr. Salgado has written a very thought-provoking article. For me, though, it is a bit like opening Pandora's box—or maybe, to be a bit more Christian in thought, the Horn of Plenty. Strategy has been an incredibly productive field of research. We have learned a great deal in the last 30 to 40 years. The question now arises: Do we seek to build upon the work of others, albeit on “secular” shoulders, or do we try to create a new set of research studies and thinking that can someday be justified as a school of Christian strategy (whether that be limited to a peace school or a more general “fruit of the Spirit” school)? The answer is yes to both. We must all get to work if we ever want to claim the status of a school. In the meantime, let's continue our work in providing new Christian perspectives on the ten schools already developed.

In the end, I think it is not yet reasonable to declare a “Peace School” or a “Fruit of the Spirit School” at this point. Why? Not one of Mintzberg's schools (or if you accept Dr. Salgado's idea of a worldview) is based on a single or even a few articles. Rather, a school is based on dozens and, in some cases, hundreds of related articles. We in the Christian scholar community have not yet established a historical base of well-developed literature that would justify a school status. In fact, we are many years from that point.

With that in mind, I commend Dr. Salgado for stimulating those of us in Christian higher education to develop research and theory in this area. After all, even the mighty Mississippi starts as a small trickle at Lake Itasca in Minnesota. Although we are far from a stream, let alone a river, or in Mintzberg's scheme a “school,” with Dr. Salgado's help we may have at least found a new headwater.

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