

GRASSROOTS ANALYSIS: THE EMPHASIS ON CULTURE

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Is it possible to do good social analysis without doing serious cultural analysis? This is the way I would phrase a very practical question that has arisen for me in many years of experience of working with popular movements for change in the United States and, over the past decade, in Africa and most specifically in Zambia.

This practical question is related directly to the important issues raised by Georges De Schrivjer in his essay, *The Paradigm Shift in Third World Theologies of Liberation: From Socio-Economic Analysis to Cultural Analysis: Assessment and Status of the Question*.¹ De Schrivjer traces the shift to culture in both the writings of Latin American liberation theologians and in the nuancing of the evangelisation and liberation themes enunciated at the Medellin (1968), Puebla (1979) and Santo Domingo (1992) conferences.

From my own experience, I find most interesting the question De Schrivjer raises at the end of his essay about the significance of the shift to culture in the activities of new social movements. He asks:

Could it be that the discourse about unjust structures has been, in a sense, too abstract? Is not the cultural emphasis, especially when shouldered by the new social movements, a fresh way of tackling structural questions, a way that is more understandable to common people?²

Involvement with movements of what De Schrivjer calls "common people" -- grassroot communities -- has sharpened my own appreciation of the cultural emphasis. I therefore want to focus my attention here on the role and use of cultural analysis in movements that involve local efforts for justice and peace, development, ecology, women's concerns, and religious inculturation. My intention will be to demonstrate how cultural analysis has both the potential and the reality of making a significant contribution to "liberation" in Africa.

But before moving into my "analysis of analysis" of the cultural emphasis at the grassroots level in Africa, let me describe what I mean by "culture." Other essays in this volume offer definitions of culture that I certainly can agree with. But I find particularly helpful a description expressed in poetic form by a young Zambian Jesuit friend of mine.

AFRICAN CULTURE

African culture: tell us, who are you?

I am the pattern of values and meanings
expressed through images and symbols.

I am the dance, and the song, and the drum,
I am the food and the manner of eating it.
I am the dress and the way of dressing.
I am the art in all its forms.
I am the music.
I am the ceremonies and the rituals.

Oh, let me tell you, if I were to tell you
 everything about myself,
 you would not have enough paper and ink
 to describe me.
 For I am life, the way of life.
 And one can understand life well by living it.

I want to add, though, that
 I am identity.
 A person is what he or she is because of me.
 It is I who gives meaning to life.
 Those who do not possess me are doomed.
 Faceless, a nameless shadow.
 Like a dead piece of wood floating on a river,
 tossed about aimlessly, without a destination,
 following the rhythm of waves.

I am unity.
 I gather people.
 Bring them close to each other.
 Give them a sense of belonging,
 a reason to live, a reason to die.
 A common vision of the world,
 a similar destiny,
 for live cannot be lived in isolation.

I am not the only culture that exists.
 There are many others, uncountable,
 like the cattle of the Ila and the Tonga people.
 I have met most of these cultures.
 For me the first meeting
 has not been very pleasant.
 I was looked down upon,
 nearly all my qualities spat on.

"If you want to merit the name culture,"
 so I was told,
 "reshape, redefine, better still, abandon,
 what makes you what you are,
 and adopt our qualities."

I felt oppressed; it was very unfair, unjust.
 I cried, but there was no one to help me.
 I had no strength to fight back.
 Unwillingly, I submitted.
 But inside me, I kindled a flame of hope.
 Someday, I said to myself,
 I will be myself again.

Things are better now;
 other cultures have started

slowly to recognise me.
 They realise that I have something to offer.
 I who was crippled have started to walk again.
 My legs are still numb,
 I have not been able to make great strides.
 But I know that I will make them soon.

When the sun has risen,
 no one can force it back to its rising place.

Joachim Pelekamoyo Nthawie, S.J.³

I. A SHIFT IN MY ORIENTATION

By way of introduction, I can be very specific in indicating the explicit expression of this shift to culture in my own involvement in programmes of conscientisation for faith and justice in the work for social change. Two moments accounted for this orientation in the decade proceeding my move to Africa.

A. Intellectual Moment

First, there was an *intellectual* moment. Here I acknowledge the insight and emphasis of my colleague for many years at the Center of Concern in Washington DC, Joe Holland. Writing in the "Preface" of the revised and enlarged edition (1983) of the very popular book we co-authored in 1980, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, Holland emphasised: "It is this question of culture, and within it religion, which reveals, I believe, the most radical dimension of our social crisis."⁴ Noting that our book focused primarily on economics and politics, he stated that there was a need to search for "a deeper cultural key" to understanding both the roots and the transformation of industrial capitalism.⁵

This intellectual search was not a denial that culture arises from and is shaped by the surrounding economic and political context, for culture cannot be understood except as embodied in such a context. "Culture is never an angelic spirit floating above society."⁶ On the other hand, Holland emphasised, culture is not the prisoner of its context, nor does it merely reflect economic drives and political forces and provide only an ideological justification for social structures. "Certainly culture often functions in the mode of legitimation, but it can also be the point of critique and creativity."⁷

Holland applied his cultural analysis in a variety of ways, especially developing Gibson Winter's discussion of "root metaphors" that shape civilisations.⁸ Winter sees as the foundation of modern industrial civilisation the "mechanistic" root metaphor, a force both in economics and politics that tends as a machine to convert people into objects and destroys both humanity and nature in its all-consuming drive that dissolves our spiritual depths. Over against this, Winter proposes an "artistic" root metaphor that sees society as a work of art, "flowing from the creativity of rooted communities in solidarity with each other." This would have implications, Holland felt, for the strategies developed to bring about social change.

In the context of social movements of Left and Right in the United States of America, Holland offered a critique of the Left's failure to take seriously the deep cultural symbols of the people, leaving these symbols to fall into the manipulating hands of the Right. Examples of such symbols were *flag*, *faith* and *family* (nation, religion and kinship). He felt that the Left

in the United States had not adequately grasped the creative role of these collective symbols in the process of social change and had let them become culturally conservative reinforcements of a status quo of exclusion and oppression.⁹

This intellectual appreciation of the importance of paying attention to culture meant that the Center of Concern's workshops on social analysis always took seriously the cultural dimensions of situations. In the "Practical Methodology" offered in the 1983 edition of *Social Analysis*, I suggested that the following question should be asked when analysing the important influences on a particular situation: "What are the major *cultural* structures which determine how society organizes *meaning*? E.g., religion; symbols, myths, dreams; art, music, folk-lore; lifestyle, traditions."¹⁰ Right from the outset, therefore, the element of cultural analysis was to be considered essential in the approaches that the Center of Concern took in promoting social analysis.

B. Experiential Moment

Second, there occurred an *experiential* moment that both gave impetus to the intellectual insight and also reinforced my understanding of it. This was the experience of attempting grass-root programmes of social analysis in the Philippines and in Africa. In 1980, I spent a month giving a series of workshops in the Philippines, based on the first draft of the book written by Joe Holland and me. The participants in the programme were mostly groups of church workers and students. Just a few weeks before I arrived, the Philippines Bishops Conference had issued an order that no more "social analysis workshops" were to be conducted under church auspices. This was certainly a challenge to the programme prepared for my visit. I therefore conducted a month of "social discernment workshops." In good Jesuit fashion, I was able to work with the same topics, but under different names!

Why had there been this reaction of the Bishops of the Philippines to the approach of "social analysis"? I was told that they feared that the approach being taken in much of the work of social analysis was primarily Marxist-inspired, or at least strongly Marxist-influenced, and therefore played into the hands of communist movements. During the especially-tense times of the early years of the Marcos dictatorship, charges that social analysis programmes were Marxist or communist were dangerous charges indeed. The officials of the church felt that no chances were to be taken.

Having only recently arrived, I was of course not competent to judge the validity of the charges. But in many of the analytical approaches that I experienced being used in the Philippines (and elsewhere) at that time, I did find a disconcerting over-emphasis upon purely economic factors in explaining the constitution and dynamics of the local society. I recall asking a young student participating in one of my workshops about the cultural background to one problem that we were studying, something relating to family influences in politics. He dismissed the question with the sentiment that all such influences were simply economic and had no basis in popular culture. After all, culture was only a determined supra-structure and not a dynamic element on its own in shaping society. An older woman in the group smiled and commented that the student must have forgotten his up-bringing, ignored the stories and songs he would have heard at home, and swallowed too easily a foreign-imported explanation of reality. The culture of family relationships in the Philippines was too real, too strong, to be dismissed with a simple economic explanation.

Whatever the relevance of my question about culture and politics, and the ensuing discussion about economic influences, the fact was becoming clear to me that a social

analysis that ignored cultural dimensions was not too helpful in explaining the Filipino reality, or, for that matter, any other social reality. Having lived for a year in Latin America in the mid-1970's, I knew the power of popular religiosity to shape perspectives and inspire actions. Moreover, I appreciated the faith of the small Christian communities and the vision of the theology of liberation. I saw that these elements in society and in the church were also present, in varying degrees, in the Philippines. I realised that only a cultural analysis could get at the underlying dynamics shaping social movements in such settings.

This experience of the necessity of cultural analysis (certainly not *replacing* socio-economic analysis, nor merely *supplementing* it, but actually *deepening* it) was reinforced during another month's tour of workshops on social analysis, this time in Africa. I came to Zambia and Zimbabwe in 1982 for programmes with church workers, students, laity leadership, and members of religious congregations (many of them expatriates). What struck me -- and would, of course, return to strike me more forcefully when I came back to Africa a few years later to become a full-time resident and not simply a visitor -- was the fact that culture was not simply the *content* of analysis but also the *context* and the *method*. What do I mean?

As will be developed further in this essay when I review my recent work with social movements in Africa, the *content* of good social analysis must include the cultural traditions, structures, events, history, personalities, etc., of the people and their society. I experienced in Africa that these cultural elements deserve treatment on their own right, not as mere "supra-structures" based on economic foundations. But I also experienced in the workshops in Zambia and Zimbabwe in 1982 that culture was the *context* and the *method* of good analysis in the sense that the analytical framework was more than an intellectual exercise or rational explication of the reality being examined. The framework itself was influenced by song, drama, art, story-telling, religious celebration -- all significant cultural elements. This meant necessarily that a cultural methodology had to be employed: artistic expression of the social reality had to be given equal weight with reasoned dissection.

II. ANALYSIS WITHIN THE PASTORAL CIRCLE

These two moments described above have influenced my own understanding of the importance of a shift to culture and shaped my practical approach to doing social analysis. While I might be reluctant to give the intellectual and experiential moments shaping my own orientation the name of a "paradigm shift," I do see the importance of what De Schrijver refers to as a "change or complementarity in method."¹¹ Cultural sciences are indeed as essential as socio-economic approaches in understanding the reality we confront.

A. Approaches and Aims

How and where one situates the task of social analysis is, of course, very relevant to our discussion here, as is the motivation for undertaking the project. I see that there can be three approaches to analysis:

1. *Pastoral tool* for use at the grass roots, for example with local development groups, justice and peace committees, student groups, small Christian communities, etc. Here the aim of the analysis is to organise a local and immediate response to some pressing social issue. For example, a group might be involved in dealing with the problems of

voter apathy, or wages paid to domestic workers, or provision of services by a local council.

2. *Academic tool* for a research project carried out on a large topic, with or without the aim of any action to be taken or any response to be made. Such analysis is often carried out by professional social scientists associated with academic institutions who do “field research” through on-site visits but who do not actually live in the midst of the reality being analysed. For example, a research team might study the transition to multi-party democracies in Africa, or the increasing growth of Islam, or the macro-economic consequences of privatisation.
3. *Organisational tool* for studying major issues affecting institutions and societies at national or international levels, with the aim of providing guidelines for possible large-scale activities. United Nations’ studies, government reports, and church surveys would be instances of this approach. For example, analysts might look at the global impact of neo-liberal economics, or the root causes of the rising numbers of refugees, or the process and progress of inculturation in the African context.

Although I personally have been engaged in many analysis projects utilizing the approaches of the *academic* and *organisational* tools, my primary work in recent years has been with the *pastoral* tool. That is, my engagement is with local popular movements and my focus is on moving toward some response to a pressing problem. For this reason, the social analysis I am most engaged with now has been located within the “Pastoral Circle.”

B. Moments of Interpretation

The “Pastoral Circle” is the name given by Joe Holland and me in our book, *Social Analysis*, to describe a methodological approach that emphasises the relationship between reflection and action.¹² The approach relates to what authors like Paulo Friere refer to as “*praxis*” (reflection based on experience, and experience based on reflection) or liberation theologians such as Juan Luis Segundo call the “hermeneutic circle” (new questions raised to older explanations because of contact with new situations). The place of social analysis within the Circle can be seen by noting the four moments of interpretation that arise out of basic questioning a reality:

1. **Contact:** *What is happening here?* This is the moment of gathering *data* through insertion in the reality, touching it by gathering objective observations and subjective feelings.
2. **Analysis:** *Why is it happening?* This is the moment of explanation through *analysis* of the reality, probing the causes, connections and consequences of the reality. Again and again, the question “why” is asked.
3. **Reflection:** *How do we evaluate it?* This is the moment of discerning the *meaning* of the reality in light of our values, faith perspectives, community norms, etc.
4. **Response:** *How do we respond to it?* This is the moment of *action* through planning, deciding and evaluating in order to effect change in the reality.

(By way of an aside at this point, it can be seen how culture plays an important role not only in analysis but also in the other three moments of the Pastoral Circle. Thus

subjective feelings are powerfully revealed in story-telling, values are uncovered through the traditional wisdom of proverbs, and customs of respect and deference influence certain styles of response.)

The reason for emphasising that the social analysis is always set within the Pastoral Circle is to stress that it is done in vital contact with reality (not abstracted or purely academic), amidst explicit value reflections (not "value-free" or non-committal), and oriented towards action (not speculative or non-pragmatic). The analysis as a pastoral tool is not done on its own. Its location within the Pastoral Circle marks the method and the operation of the analysis that is undertaken and the result and outcome that is desired.

III. Culture and Popular Movements

My own understanding of the importance in Africa of cultural analysis, particularly among some popular movements, comes from my participation in various local programmes, mostly associated with development and justice and peace groups. In the examples that follow, I will note how the emphasis on culture provides the movements with deeper insights than would be available if only socio-economic analysis were relied on.

A. Culture and Development

Surely one of the most damaging consequences of the Western-inspired "developmentalism" (over-emphasis on economic growth models) propagated in the poor countries of the South has been the down-playing of culture as a major shaper of societal relationships and progress. Frequently, culture was not even seen by outsiders; it was ignored or unrecognised as a significant reality to be dealt with. The World Bank and other major Western development agencies rarely included an anthropologist on their planning teams. When acknowledged, culture was more often than not seen as a *hindrance* to economic development, as a "backward" influence that had to be overcome if true "progress" was to be achieved within a given society. Ways had to be found to go around the local cultural influences if certain externally-sponsored development projects were to be successful.

Examples of the effects of this mentality abound in the stories told about "failed" development projects. For instance, the outside development worker arrives in a village and finds the women spending hours each day around a communal water stand pipe, waiting for their turn to draw water in buckets and carry it back home. The worker (usually a man) estimates the economic inefficiencies of time lost in such activity and decides that the women need water pipes brought directly into their houses (huts) so that they will not need to gather at the village centre to draw water. He leaves the village satisfied with "progress" when each house has its own tap. He returns to visit some months later, only to be disappointed to find the village unity destroyed and an alarming rise in family problems (marriage break-ups, difficulties with children, etc.). What he had failed to take into account in his *economic* analysis of water-gathering were the *cultural* advantages of providing space and time for women to share important local news, discuss mutual problems, and offer each other practical advice and commitments to help.

To counter this narrow economic focus, a development education programme (DEP) approach is being used in many parts of Africa. The approach I am familiar with in Zambia uses the *Training for Transformation* manuals based upon Paulo Friere's methodology of conscientisation.¹³ It emphasises participation by the local communities in identifying

projects, planning and deciding, engaging in action, and evaluation. For example, the DEP team that I was part of as a field worker in the Diocese of Monze, 1989-1990, would not go into a village to do something for the people but to empower the people to do something for themselves. "Integral," "participative," "self-reliant" and "sustainable" were the key words we used to describe our approach.

I remember one workshop in a village where we asked the people to talk about the cultural traditions that they found positive (helpful) and negative (restraining) in the efforts being made to achieve the integral, participative, self-reliant and sustainable development they wanted in their area. (One obvious challenge was to put all these nice English words into ciTonga, the local language!) This stimulated a lively conversation where positive elements of sharing and solidarity were recalled as central to community development, and traditions of care for widows and orphans were seen as instilling social responsibilities in the whole village. But negative elements also were noted, such as the exclusion of women and young people from decision-making processes, and the influence of witchcraft on the spread of fears and suspicions. The analysis that we did in that workshop enabled us to reinforce the positive elements in our training programmes and try to lessen the impact of the negative elements.

Another example of cultural analysis that for me opened up new economic understandings was a look at the role of extended families. The extended family system in Africa is a significant cultural pattern that has a very large impact on development. The family should not be -- and in Africa, is not -- seen simply as an economic unit, a mode of production and reproduction. A whole complex set of relationships of meanings, values, expectations, norms, etc., are central to the life and activity of families. In other words, culture plays a significant role.

An example of this significance can be seen in the organisation and operation of what Goran Hyden has called the "economy of affection."¹⁴ Looking particularly at Eastern Africa, he has explored the economic relations that arise from the extended family operating in a subsistence environment. The "economy of affection" does not of itself involve fond emotions, but "denotes a network of support, communications and interaction among structurally defined groups connected by blood, kin, community and other affinities, for example, religion."¹⁵ Certain economic decisions are made precisely to preserve both for individuals and for the community the "safety net" of the extended family. There are also, of course, corresponding political and social decisions, affecting who makes decisions, what levels of social interchanges take place, etc. Some decisions that go against the "logic" of the "economy of capitalism" or the "economy of socialism" are very congruent with the "economy of affection." For instance, disposition of property is neither a "private" affair (capitalistic) nor a matter of state management (socialistic). Property exchanges are viewed as good or bad in light of their impact on strengthening or weakening the extended family. Here culture and economy come very close together.

On two occasions, I found some activity very difficult to appreciate until a cultural analysis opened up the picture for me. First, the diocesan development programme that I worked for ran a two-year course in carpentry for youth chosen by their local villages. At the conclusion of the course, the young carpenter the young would have saved enough money to purchase a set of tools with which, once back in the village, he could earn a good living. But visiting the village six months later, one was disappointed to find the would-be carpenter sitting idle, having sold off his tools to get money for his nephew's school fees and for funeral expenses for a recently-deceased relative in the village. Within a capitalist or socialist economic structure, the young carpenter would be judged to have sacrificed his

future. But within the “economy of affection,” he had in fact guaranteed his future. This was so because whenever difficult times might come, as surely they would, he had maintained both in symbolic gestures and in real life the bonds of affection. Second, a young friend of mine lost his very good job because of some fraudulent actions involving small amounts of money. When I asked him why he had taken such a great risk, he answered that pressures from the extended family for assistance were simply too strong to resist if he hoped to remain in the good graces of that family.¹⁶

2. Culture and Environmental Concerns

At the time of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992), the DEP focused attention on some of Zambia’s serious ecological challenges such as deforestation, pollution and poaching. As part of an effort to strengthen community responses by recovering traditional sources of ecological respect, I was involved with a programme of cultural analysis of attitudes toward natural environment. In a workshop setting, we asked participants to recall stories, myths, proverbs, taboos, etc., that spoke of their relationships to nature. Many creation myths were recounted, as well as many instructions on appropriate or inappropriate attitudes and actions toward nature.

Analysing this data, we discovered grounds for the validity, indeed the necessity, of these traditional instructions. The analytical process of continual asking “why” uncovered important reasons. Elders in the workshop were able to explain to younger members some of these reasons by reflecting on their significance in the light of current concerns about the environment. For instance:

- Certain trees were not to be cut down since they were considered sacred. In fact, the trees grew over water sources such as springs, both marking them and sustaining them.
- The local chief would determine each year where wild fruit could be picked, because by tradition all the fruits belonged to him. This allowed for a wise pattern of crop rotation, conserving fragile plant life.
- No one was allowed to hunt for game alone but only in a designated village group, lest the spirits of the animals would attack him. Such a custom assured that all the wild animals killed did in fact benefit the whole village.
- There were cultural taboos against urinating or defecating close to huts in a village; if persons violated these taboos, evil spirits would fall upon them. Thus basic sanitary hygiene was promoted to keep the locality clean and healthy.

This process of analysis should not be viewed strictly as a “demythologising” of culture, but rather as a recognition of the wisdom and strength of the culture. Cultural analysis, done largely through story-telling, uncovered many profound reasons for the traditional wisdom. And in a setting of use of the “Pastoral Circle,” this analytical process could lead to more effective responses to meeting ecological concerns.

Another example of cultural analysis that has implications for environmental concerns is the work promoted by a network of scholars from both Third World and First World settings who are interested so-called “Indigenous Knowledge” (IK). In epistemological terms, IK is contrasted with Western “scientific knowledge” in that it is knowledge based more on the belief and customs of local communities than on the empirical data gathering

and logical deductions of formal scientific methodology. Especially in dealing with issues of the environment, it is important to pay attention to IK, indeed more so than in the past. Focus on culture, then, is central to IK considerations about sustainable development, agriculture, local participation, etc.

3. Culture and Women

As in true in most any place today, the status and role of women in society (and in the church) is a critically important issue, not just for women but for men, indeed for the whole of a well-ordered society. But equality of women and men is often viewed by many in Africa -- both women and men -- as strictly a Western idea and not at all in line with African culture. It is certainly true that women hold a subservient role and in many circumstances are mistreated, exploited and underdeveloped. For instance, there are alarming statistics about the decline in enrolment of girl children in schools. With the imposition of school fees as a result of the IMF-imposed austerity programmes of structural adjustment, parents tend to see the best investment to be in boys who one day will get a job. The cultural expectation is simply that girls will "only get married."

Women by and large work much harder than men -- longer hours, double jobs (outside work place and work at home). And expectations that this should be accepted as normal are deep in the culture. I commented once to a Zambian man that I was surprised and disturbed to see a largely pregnant woman walking along the road with a small baby on her back and another child clutching her right hand, carrying on her head one piece of luggage and in her left hand another, while her husband walked leisurely behind her carrying only a walking stick. I was told -- with almost a straight face! -- that the man was protecting his wife from any lions they might encounter. The fact that there had been no lions in this particular region for decades did not distract from the cultural imperative that men do not carry their wife's luggage in public, let alone look after children.

A particularly disturbing phenomenon present among many tribes in Zambia and elsewhere in Africa is "property grabbing" or the "stripping" inflicted upon widows after the death of their husband. The husband's family descends upon the home of the sister-in-law, and takes away everything, even basic necessities like cooking utensils or school books for the children. This is done in the name of the cultural tradition of "inheritance" whereby the widow, children and all possessions belong to the husband's family. Civil legislation now makes possible the drawing up of wills to protect the widow and children, but implementation of this protection is often extremely difficult for reasons of ignorance, expense, or fear or retaliation (witchcraft).

Local justice and peace groups in Zambia, along with development groups, have taken up the issue of women's rights. They have found that a particularly helpful approach is to do a cultural analysis looking at the deeper reasons for discrimination against women. Often the causes of this discrimination today are distortions of past efforts at protection. For example, the "looking out for the lions" explanation may in fact have been valid at one time -- an instance of the orderly division of labour. More interesting and relevant is the recognition that the tradition of "inheritance" assured that the widow and children were in fact looked after by the husband's family. Care was taken that the woman was not left isolated on her own, subject to economic and social hardships. But the practice today of "stripping" -- prevalent and intensified in harsh economic situations and circumstances of weakened cultural respect -- does just the opposite from protection!

By asking again and again the “why” question, other insights come from cultural analysis of women’s status and role in society today. These insights contribute to the promotion of greater justice for the whole of society.

4. Culture and Church

The issue of “inculturation” is too large for this short essay to take up, and is referred to in other essays in this volume. But this challenge for the task of evangelisation by the church in Africa does indeed relate to the local use of cultural analysis that I have been discussing here. The central theme of the African Synod (1994) was inculturation.¹⁷ An “inculturated faith” is one that is authentically Christian and genuinely African. It is a faith wherein one “feels at home” -- not only in liturgical expression but also in credal symbols, theological categories, authority legitimation, instructional procedures, canonical legislation, etc.

Two analytical points seem to me to be very important in going about the process of inculturation. These points are “analytical” in the sense of going deeper into issues, their causes, connections and consequences. And both points lend themselves to discussions at grass-root levels. For at least the past twenty years, the pastoral strategy of the church in East Africa has been the building up of the small Christian communities (SCCs), the “church in the neighbourhood.”¹⁸ Within these SCCs, a cultural analysis of local situations can go on that facilitates both deeper understanding of the faith and more authentic inculturation of its basics.

The first point to note is the necessity of submitting to critical analysis even the most basic (1) faith expressions offered by non-African Christianity and (2) cultural expressions esteemed by Africans. This means asking again and again the “why” question. Done in a group discussion process among ordinary Christians, some very interesting observations come out. There is usually the recognition that much that we take for granted as being “essentials” or “the way things are done” are as a matter of fact simply an accepted cultural way of doing things in Europe or North America or Africa but unrelated to any “Gospel imperative” or essential truth of our faith.

I recall an early experience of mine in Zambia that illustrates this. I was feeling puzzled why people remained sitting during the reading of the Gospel at Mass. Why did they fail to show respect by standing, the kind of respectful gesture I had grown up with in my own country? I was told by a Zambian that in their culture, respect was shown by taking a lower place when an elder or important person was speaking. One did not show respect by standing but by sitting. I came to appreciate that the value of respect is expressed in different ways in different cultures. This is indeed a very simple lesson, but one with profound consequences in efforts to inculturate the faith.

Moreover, the analytical questioning process must also be brought to bear on elements of African Traditional Religion that need to be explained and evaluated in the light of shared community norms. For example, cultural analysis needs to examine the proverbs, myths, dreams, visions, etc., that express the religious wisdom of the people. During one workshop with community development workers, we explored the significance of traditional “rain shrine” ceremonies and the lessons that could be learned for today’s experience of droughts and subsequent famine among the people.

A second point is the need to recognise that *inculturation* and *liberation* must go hand-in-hand. Jean-Marc Ela has frequently called attention to the fact that commitment to an inculturation that does not include genuine liberation can be only an antiquarianism, an escapist fascination with folklore.

A church that seeks to say something to today's African cannot content itself with an authentically African liturgy, catechetics, and theology. The modes of expression of the faith have sense and meaning only if the church is deeply involved in the battles being waged by human beings against conditions that stifle their human liberty. The participation of the church in these battles, then, becomes the necessary condition for any liturgy, any catechesis, any theology in Africa. It is in the vital experience of the communities and of their striving for life, liberty, and justice, that any reference to Jesus and his mission -- a mission of the liberation of the oppressed -- will find genuine sense and meaning.¹⁹

But liberation in Africa must address not only politico-socio-economic realities that are oppressive and unjust. It must also address the cultural oppression that is the historical legacy of colonialism and the contemporary consequence of globalisation. Western media pervades local settings with foreign values of individualism, consumerism, sexual license, etc. Foreign imports are often considered of greater value than local products, both in material goods and in cultural expressions. Several African scholars have spoken of "anthropological poverty" as being the most serious impoverishment experienced on the continent. This is the depersonalisation of the African, a result of racist interpretations of psychology, religion and history. Cultural analysis opens up this reality and enables the church to more effectively engage in a truly liberative evangelisation.

IV. CONCLUSION: RELEVANCE TO AFRICAN LIBERATION THEOLOGY

To repeat again the point made at the opening of this essay, my intention here has been to demonstrate how cultural analysis has both the potential and the reality of making a significant contribution to the "liberation" of Africa today. I have tried to do this by describing how cultural analysis is utilised in many of the social movements that involve people at the local level in the process of change. Speaking from my own experience of some of these movements of justice and peace, development, ecology, women's concerns, and inculturation with the church, I believe that several conclusions can be drawn such as:

1. Cultural considerations can never be absent from any good analysis being done of the African situation. Despite the influence of the dominant neo-liberal economic environment with the consequent prominence of the "culture of the market," an environment fostered by the Structural Adjustment Programmes spreading across the Continent, deep cultural realities are still in place and are influential.
2. Cultural considerations affect not only the content of good analysis in Africa but also the methodology. Socio-economic analysis relies heavily on social science methodologies of questionnaires, comparative studies, computer examinations, etc. While of course not ignoring these helps to understanding, cultural analysis also utilises story-telling, drama, art, music, proverbs, etc., to go deeper into the realities being studied.
3. Cultural considerations are particularly relevant and important when participating in social movements that are directed toward change at the local level. This does not mean

ignoring structural issues of a more economic or political character, but supplementing analysis of these with an emphasis on culture that speaks more to people at the grass roots.

Finally, it is appropriate to leave it to theologians to draw conclusions about the implications of all this for African liberation theology. But certainly it should be obvious that in a church that takes seriously the agenda of the African Synod, grassroots analysis will necessarily put an emphasis on culture that will shape the integral evangelisation task of the coming years. And central to that evangelisation, of course, will be the project of liberation.

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 ENDNOTES

¹ Georges De Schrijver, *The Paradigm Shift in Third World Theologies of Liberation: From Socio-Economic Analysis to Cultural Analysis: Assessment and Status of the Question*. Preprint. (Leuven: Bibliotheek van de Faculteit Godgeleerdheid, 1966).

² *Ibid.*, p. 82.

³ This poem was composed during a grassroots workshop exploring culture and development. The Ila and the Tonga are two tribes in the southern part of Zambia, well-known for their prowess in cattle-rearing. The poem was first published in the *Bulletin of the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection* (No. 14, October 1992), pp. 13-14.

⁴ Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, S.J., *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, Revised and Enlarged Edition (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, and Washington DC: Center of Concern, 1983), p. xii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. xvi-xvii

⁹ See Joe Holland, *Flag, Faith and Family: Rooting the American Left in Everyday Symbols*. Chicago: New Patriotic Alliance, 1979.

¹⁰ *Social Analysis*, p. 99.

¹¹ *Paradigm Shift*, p. 31.

¹² See *Social Analysis*, pp. 7-9. For a more detailed explanation of the Pastoral Circle and its use in a variety of settings, see my article, "The Pastoral Circle: Background and Use," in ...

¹³ See Anne Hope and Sally Timmel, *Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers*. Revised edition; three volumes (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1995).

¹⁴ See Goran Hyden, *No Shortcuts to Progress: African Development Management in Perspective* (London: Heinemann, 1983), pp. 8-16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁶ One of the most significant efforts at utilising cultural analysis to deepen the understanding of the successes and failures of development is found in the work of Thierry Verhelst, *No Life Without Roots: Culture and Development*, translated by Bob Cumming (London: Zed Books, 1990). Verhelst has organised a group of scholars from around the world, "The South-North Network Cultures and Development," that is involved in research, training, community organising and advocacy, and publishes a bi-lingual journal three times a year, *Cultures and Development: Quid Pro Quo*. One significant collaborator in this effort, a pioneer in the effort to bring cultural concerns

to the forefront of development, is Denis Goulet of the University of Notre Dame in the United States of America. See his *The Cruel Choice* (New York: Atheneum, 1971).

¹⁷ An excellent overview of the Synod preparations, event and conclusions can be found in the essays presented in Africa Faith and Justice Network, *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995). This volume also contains the Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 1995.

¹⁸ See Rodrigo Mejia, S.J., *The Church in the Neighbourhood* (Nairobi: Daughters of St. Paul, 1990).

¹⁹ Jean-Marc Ela, *African Cry*. Translated by Robert R. Barr. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), p. 132.

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