

# **Culture in Christian Praxis: Culturally mediated Christian responses to culturally mediated human needs**

**Stuart C Bate**

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## 1. Introduction

Reflection on the role of culture in Christianity is a growing area of concern in current theological endeavour. In South Africa, however, the issue may be treated warily since in our history the use of a cultural approach to faith and life led to apartheid as a social solution to a perceived race problem. This contextual theology relied on Ethnos theory and *Volkekunde* to identify cultural groups each proposed to have a life of its own, each supposed to form a society of its own and each called to have a Christianity of its own.<sup>1</sup>

Herein lies the danger of all contextual theologies which turn in on themselves and refuse the responsibility of unity with the wider Christian community. However a valid hermeneutics of suspicion should not lead us to throw the baby out with the bath water. Culture is a necessary aspect of the human condition and in a rich and varied society like our own we do need to use the insights of cultural and social anthropology in our theological discourse. Our history should make us more sensitive to the pitfalls and such sensitivity may allow us to make a valuable contribution to the ongoing international debate.

The principal theological term that is emerging around the cultural dimension of Christianity is that of *inculturation*.

## 2. Inculturation

Inculturation is indeed a *theological* term. However it is closely linked with the anthropological term *enculturation* which refers to the process of learning one's own culture. Enculturation occurs as children grow up and develop the language, symbol structure and behaviour patterns around which human life is lived. In Anglo-American social anthropology the

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<sup>1</sup>This article is based on an address to the PhD seminar, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg in November 1999.

term socialisation is often used for the same process.<sup>2</sup>

Inculturation was originally used in an analogous sense to enculturation to describe the growth of new churches in mission areas as they grew into their own culture (Roest Crolius 1986:37). So the term is an ecclesiological one concerning the relationship of a local church and the culture of the people who make it up (:38). It has also been used to refer to the emergence of the local church in a place where the term local church is reserved to a church which is indeed local and somehow conformed to the local culture rather than being foreign in outlook, ethos and praxis (Bate 1999:266-282). The theological problematic in this ecclesiological use of the word results from the fact that new churches are necessarily founded by people from sending churches who evangelise largely using the faith expression of their own culture (Sanneh 1989:2-3; Bate 1999:274-282). And the process of becoming local is a process of culture change as the church's culture changes from that of the sending church to the culture of the local people who make it up.

Inculturation is a powerful theological term since it is not restricted to ecclesiology but can be used throughout the many theological disciplines. On a Christological level it bases itself on the life of Jesus who is incarnate into life in a Jewish culture. The paschal mystery also occurs within that same culture although the cosmic dimensions clearly transcend it. Inculturation in Christology searches for the Jesus incarnate in local cultures and the presence of the paschal mystery within local peoples (Nyamiti 1984; Bujo 1992). On the level of Biblical theology inculturation concerns itself with the culturality of the Bible. One important example of this would be the process of the Church growing into the Greek culture which is dealt with from Acts Chap 10 to 15 (Sanneh 1989: 24-28; Okure 1990).

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<sup>2</sup>I prefer to use socialisation in a more general sense to refer to the process of learning the language, social structure and behaviour patterns of any society into which one enters. Adults may also do this as they move from society to society. But enculturation is a process of growing up in one's own culture and happens to children and adolescents. It is a deeper and more powerful process than many socialisations. Enculturation as the first socialisation is where we grow into our humanity.

On a pneumatological level the focus is the presence and role of the Holy Spirit in the world: in creation, in Jesus= life and in the life of the church and today. Pneumatology is at the centre of missiology, pastoral and practical theology. In these theological disciplines, inculturation examines the culturality of Christianity in its praxis especially as manifest in *Martyria, Kerygma, Koinonia, Leiturgia* and *Diakonia*.<sup>3</sup>

This paper will focus on theology as a reflection on Christian activity. I intend to examine the proposition that Christian praxis is always in terms of culturally mediated Christian responses to culturally mediated human needs.

### **3. Culture and Christian Activity**

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<sup>3</sup>Christian praxis can be categorised into these five areas: witness in life and unto death, transmitting the word (evangelisation), community, worship and service to others. See Bate 1999: 266-267.

Firstly we affirm that culture always plays a role in mission, ministry and pastoral practice. This simple truism whilst relatively obvious has been little acknowledged in much of theological discourse. Sometimes it has been expressed as the relationship between the church and culture but there is a danger in such an approach. When looking at the role of culture in Christian praxis we must avoid reifying the terms and concepts we use. There is no such *thing* as *culture* or *church*. So looking at the relationship between them as though they were things in relationship to one another can confuse the issue. The only *things* that we are dealing with here are human beings. Our theology is always about human beings and their faith expression in life.<sup>4</sup> Since human life is always cultural so the human community which makes up the church is always cultural.<sup>5</sup> And by the same token, the faith expression of that community will be cultural.

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<sup>4</sup>St. Anselm (*cur Deus Homo* 1, II, c.11) expresses this as *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding) which remains one of the best starting points for an understanding of what theology is about.

<sup>5</sup>Here I follow Geertz (1973:33-54) who shows that our humanity and culturality are deeply intertwined and who rejects the notion of a human nature which culture just expresses

Another important step is the appropriation of an understanding of culture which can be helpful to our theological endeavour. In South Africa in particular, but in much of sub-Saharan Africa in general, we tend to have been socialised into an ethnic understanding of culture. Culture has been presented as our *ethnicity* or as our *national group*. This is largely as a result of modern<sup>6</sup> western culture and colonialism where notions of the nation state and the ethnic group were important for social understanding.<sup>7</sup> But it also finds an echo in tribal rivalry and inter-ethnic intolerance in the African context both historically and currently. A more helpful approach to culture as is one which sees it as present in every type of human community on every social level. Whenever human beings are in relationship with one another, human culture arises describing and informing that relationship. In this way I could speak of the Bate culture of my family. On the level of wider related communities one might speak of the culture of a group like the Mpondomise (whose royal clan name was Majola) (Hammond-Tooke 1993:110).<sup>8</sup> On the level of an ethnic group one could speak of Zulu culture. On the level of religious communities one could speak of Catholic culture, Evangelical culture or Hindu culture. On the level of country communities one can speak of Zambian, French or German culture. And on the level of continents one might speak of African culture, Asian Culture or European culture. In South African sport we find *Pirates* culture, *Springbok* culture and *Bafana Bafana* culture.<sup>9</sup> In other words when human beings are linked in relatedness, a culture emerges. This means that it is possible for people to participate in many different cultural matrices at the same time and whilst this was not generally the norm in the past when communities were relatively homogeneous and isolated from others, it

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<sup>6</sup>In this paper *modern* western culture is contrasted with *postmodern* western culture. The former refers to the culture of the enlightenment under the philosophies of empiricism and rationalism including the virtues of individualism, the work ethic and evolution. The latter describes the subsequent (current) period where these values and philosophies are increasingly questioned and relativity, uncertainty, emotion and transcendence are re-appropriated.

<sup>7</sup>See Sharp (1981) and Bate (1999: 235-238).

<sup>8</sup>I do not wish to enter into the difficult area of descent groups, clans, totemic groups lineages and such in Southern Africa indigenous cultures. See Hammond Tooke 1993:107-116 for a description of the anthropological issues here.

<sup>9</sup>*Pirates* are a popular soccer club. The *springboks* are the South African rugby team and *bafana bafana* is the name given to the national soccer team.

is clearly so in a world where the web of human relationships is wide as it is in the urban and global contexts where most live their human lives today.

Now culture affects many aspects of our humanity. On the level of experience, we find that our perception, our common sense, our preferences and our tastes are all influenced by it. On the epistemological level culture influences and even conditions our understanding concerning the truth about things, our explanatory models of reality as well as our epistemological systems of human reason and human judgement. This means for example that the truth of events is never the same for people inhabiting differing cultural matrices. This is why people get into disputes about all kinds of things from those as simple as penalties in soccer matches, to questions concerning the nature of sickness and healing, the meaning of a lightning strike and disputes between different political groupings. Whilst the truth of a situation is clear for one group. It is equally clearly not true for the other.

On a deeper level we find our value and belief systems. It is on this level where we make our transcendental judgements regarding the good. It is the level of our deepest beliefs which orient our life and which inform our values. The bible expresses this level as *Afaith, hope and love, these three abide* (1 Cor 13:13). Cultural anthropology shows us that on this level, too, our culturality is wound together with these beliefs and values and indeed that these beliefs and values are at the very centre of our culture.

It is usually possible for us to live with contradictions regarding epistemological truth. After all we live in a world where, for example, the truths of a tree include firewood for burning together with the conservation of natural heritage, the need for land for development and the notions of common heritage and private property.<sup>10</sup> Similarly the truths of healing and sickness include competing and contradictory truths like: medicine, ancestors, the casting out of demons, hospitals, sangomas, homeopathy and *abathandazi*.<sup>11</sup>

However it is on the deeper level of the good that communities and individuals find their synthesis and make their judgements about what truths to live by and what to let be. Culture then is a reality in human life and experience which touches all dimensions of our humanity and

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<sup>10</sup>See Zulu 1991 for the conflict around such *Atruths* and their effect on Christian praxis.

<sup>11</sup>Township healers who are consulted often on an individual basis for help with personal and family problems. See Sikosana 1995.

consequently all dimensions of Christian experience.

#### **4 Mediating Culture in Christian Praxis**

What are variously called *Amission@*, *Aministry@*, *Apractical theology@* and *Apastoral theology@* are all aspects of the praxis of the church. Because it is the praxis of a human community such praxis is always cultural. We need to recognise and understand the culturality of praxis in order to reflect on it, make judgements about it and determine new forms of it. In this way we recognise the culturality of the Christian community.

For the purposes of this article I am going to limit myself to the epistemological level: that of understanding and human knowledge about the truth of things. Epistemologically, culture can be understood as a symbol system which communicates meaning between people. When people form human communities, their shared meanings and understanding are what unite them together. These symbols are culture texts which speak to the people within the culture so that those who are within understand and those who are outside misunderstand.<sup>12</sup>

Language is the easiest example of this. I am communicating meaning to you in English and because we share a symbol system which calls this an *Aarticle@*, which I wrote on a *Acomputer@* for a *Ajournal@*, understanding and knowledge regarding the truth of things is communicated. If I were to write this in French then some of what I wish to communicate might get through but some of the truth I wish to be communicate may not be received in the way I wish.<sup>13</sup> In Zulu the problem is even more pronounced since there are no words for article, journal and computer except the borrowed English.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>For a fuller analysis of this see Schreiter 1985; Bate 1999: 248-251.

<sup>13</sup>I met up with this problem when giving a conference in Kinshasa on South African *ACoping-healing@* churches. French has no word for *ACoping@* and the translation of my article involved many emails to French speakers in France and Canada and in the end I invented the French word *Ale coping@* much to the chagrin, I suppose, of the *AAcademie@* if they ever find out.

<sup>14</sup>Most languages borrow words as new understandings from elsewhere are introduced. English is probably the most promiscuous on this level borrowing readily from wherever required. The borrowing process however represents the incorporation of some aspects of the truths of a semiotic domain from another culture. Clearly it is not as easy as this since some meanings will be altered as the new cultural domain is also fitted into the existing cultural categories.

But understanding and knowledge don't only operate on the level of spoken or written language; there are many other symbols which communicate meaning to us. Consider the many rituals of initiation or passage in our society. There are many of them. Examples include the 21st birthday, *lebollo* (Sotho-Tswana ritual initiation to manhood), baptism and *ukuhlolwa kwamantombazane* (the ritual determination of virginity of Zulu unmarried adolescent women). This latter which had been largely abandoned in urban areas is presently being reintroduced in many parts of KwaZulu-Natal as a response to the HIV-AIDS epidemic. In the area of education we find culture texts like the Matric certificate and the University degree. There are contested symbols of identity like the 'Rainbow nation', the 'African' or even 'AChristian'.

The point is that cultural mediation gives us many diverse, even opposing, truths about phenomena and human experience. The more of these we can know the better we are able to understand. Prejudice usually comes out of misunderstanding or judging only from one set of truths: those of one's own culture. Such judging is usually referred to as ethnocentrism.

If we want to focus on symbols or culture texts which form part of Christianity we could look at some general ones like 'The statue' in Catholic culture whose truth is/was an access to God for Catholics but idolatry for Protestants and superstition for secular westerners. Another interesting one is 'The Bible' which simplistically speaking is/was the only access to God in Protestant culture, the word of God for all Christians, the 'literal word of God' in fundamentalist culture, the 'interpreted word of God' in liberal Protestant culture and one of the two forms of access to God, together with tradition, in Catholic culture where the Old Testament comprises 46 and not 39 books. In secular western culture the bible is just a book whereas it is one of several holy books in Islamic culture and in Jewish culture the Old Testament only is scripture.

Another more recent example concerns the agreement on 'Salvation by Faith' between Catholics and Lutherans. This major theological source of controversy was largely resolved by moving away from the initial historico-cultural controversy of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and re-appropriating truths and values into a contemporary cultural context where the guiding value is the promotion of unity.

## **5 Two examples of the mediating role of culture in Christian praxis**

The mediating role of culture in Christian praxis demands that we carry out some form of cultural analysis both of the context where the praxis occurs and of the Christian community

whose praxis it is. The best way to illustrate the importance of such analysis in understanding how mission and ministry operates is by example. Here are two from my own research. The first is concerned with the healing ministry of the church and the second looks at the role of money in Christian mission.

### 5.1 *The healing ministry of the church*

The system of sickness and health within a human community is always cultural. This is because people=s experience of unwellness, whether in themselves or from what the community indicates to them, has to be understood.<sup>15</sup> The process of understanding usually works by means of an explanatory model which helps people to put labels on the experience of sickness or health. In this way people can identify if sickness is caused by a germ, a demon, a neurosis, an ancestor or some other factor. The labels are given by the culture and accepted by the community which shares the culture. A symbol system of understanding around one area of human life can be called a semiotic domain. It is a domain because it is a clustering of particular signs and symbols all linked with one another into some kind of coherent whole. In this case we are concerned with the semiotic domain of sickness and health.

Research conducted in the early 1990's, at the end of the struggle years leading to the birth of the new South Africa, suggest that in the South African Christian context of that time there were at least five competing semiotic domains of sickness and health.<sup>16</sup> These were:

- X Western medical model (curing disease)
- X African traditional model (restoring life by restoring relationships)
- X Psychological model (restoring sanity: a western traditional healing form)
- X Medieval model (saving the soul)
- X Neopentecostal (casting out demons of illness)
- X AIC model (casting out evil spirits through the power of God, restoring relationships and creating Zion on earth)

Healing in the church has to take into account the truths of each of these semiotic

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<sup>15</sup>There are two ways of being sick. The first is when I feel unwell myself. The second is when the community tells me that I am unwell even though I may feel fine myself.

<sup>16</sup>Clearly these are caricatures of the reality. For a more detailed analysis see Bate 1999: 294-301.

domains. People may, and indeed often do, use more than one, until they find healing. So the first step in developing a theology of healing is to examine the competing and cooperating truths of each of these semiotic domains in order to see what may be acceptably assimilated into Christian practice. This means we examine them to see which of these truths is compatible with the Christian Gospel. Only after this step has been completed can we make an informed theological judgement based on our Christian belief system expressed scripturally as faith hope and love. Such a judgement is based on our idea of the good.

The way a local church carries out its own healing ministry must also take into account how this praxis will be experienced and interpreted by people who receive it. They too may live in worlds with competing and cooperating semiotic domains of sickness and health as indicated above. It is for this reason that the truth of what we intend may not be the truth of what is received by those being ministered to.

All human needs are culturally mediated in order to become human wants. In this way culturally mediated human needs are generated as active wants by human beings: I want to be healed; we want salvation. The human need for health is thus mediated by the culture of the people in the context we are working into a series of wants regarding healing. All human needs are mediated by culture and turned into wants in this way. As the Christian community responds in a pastoral context, it must recognise the culturality of these wants and try to understand them. In this way the response in Christian praxis will be to what has been recognised as a set of culturally mediated human needs.

The response as Christian praxis is also a culturally mediated response. Our pastoral response is always mediated by our own Christian community and its own culture. This culture may contain elements common to the context where praxis is happening as well as elements particular to itself. Here we meet the issue of a local church in dialogue with its own culture. We need to be aware of the culturality of this response and we can achieve this only by an adequate understanding of the culture of the church and the way it does its praxis.

Generally we can say that if the church and the community share the same culture then the response as Christian praxis will be more effective. So the western paradigm of sickness and healing will work for western Christians in a western context. The AIC paradigm will work for AIC Christians in an AIC cultural context and the Neopentecostal paradigm will work for Neopentecostals in Neopentecostal culture. This is one of the reasons why cults and even some

churches try to keep people within the culture and community of the group and to have nothing to do with outsiders. In this way people are removed from their own context and deracinated from their own culture unless of course they are born into such a group.

Other more common problems arise when the Christian community and the local community do not share the same culture and also when the Christian community comprises communities having different cultures. The first is the case in contexts of primary evangelisation and the second is the case in global, urban and multicultural contexts. In both of these a local church needs to understand the truths of the cultural context within which it works and accept the contradictory or conflicting nature of these truths. In the case of healing this means accepting the role of germs, ancestors, evil spirits, or psychoses and developing an embracing pastoral response which takes them all into account.

In such a situation, criteria must be developed for an effective Christian response. These criteria should take into account the truths that cultural mediation of human needs reveal. They should include the acceptance of those truths which are compatible with the Gospel and which are in Union with the universal church (EA 62) to use a Catholic expression or promote church unity in Protestant parlance (WCC 1991:81-82; Lausanne 8 in Scherer & Bevans 1992:256). These are criteria from scripture and from tradition as the presence of the Holy Spirit in those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith.

An analysis should be made of the culturality of our present response followed by suggestions for the way to develop a more effective culturally mediated Christian praxis which responds not only to the culture of the Christian community making it but also to the community receiving it. Such a response represents praxis as our faith seeking understanding.

For the healing ministry I have suggested that in our African context such a praxis of healing should include medical factors, psychological factors, cultural factors, counselling, socio-political responses, confession of sin and reparation together with communal prayer for deliverance from possession and obsession (Bate 1999:314-315).

## 5.2 *Catholic Mission and Money*

### 5.2.1 Money and Enterprise as modern western culture texts

Money, finance, enterprise and resources are important cultural forms or culture texts within modern western culture. They are symbols of high value, prestige and power within this culture.

Indeed it is Marx=s thesis that they describe the underlying basis of this culture, its worldview and its value system. They create the fundamental economic semiotic domain of western society. When we look at the emergence of Christianity within the Southern African (and indeed sub-Saharan African) context we cannot avoid the fact of its linkage to this important cultural domain. Both the Dutch East India company and the British colonial endeavour committed themselves to the emerging Southern African polities for economic reasons: the Dutch for trade, the British largely for minerals.

Those settlers for whom the Catholic Mission in South Africa was originally established were here largely for financial reasons and often moved on when these reasons were no longer valid.<sup>17</sup> Modern western culture also had a Christian component although this continued to decline in influence during the modern period.

Within Christianity the cultural form Amoney@ is a far more ambiguous symbol. *Scripturally*, money is often portrayed in a negative light especially in the New Testament.

- X the love of money is the root of all evil (1Tim 6:10).
- X it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God (Luke 18,25 and synoptic equivalents).
- X May your money be lost for ever and you with it thinking that money could buy what God has given for nothing (Acts 8,18).

As well as this there is the fact that the disciple who betrayed Jesus was the one who was responsible for the finances of the group and he did so for money (Matthew 26 and parallel texts). Jesus too, early in his ministry in his most well known act of anger made a whip out of cord and drove out the money changers and people selling animals for the temple sacrifice saying Atake all this out of here and stop using my Father=s house as a market@ (John 2,16).

In the history of the Church, too, we find money and wealth playing an often disputed role. In the early middle ages the monasteries arose as centres of economic development in the social chaos of the dark ages. At the time of the reformation, the wealth of the papal and episcopal courts and the financing of projects through the Aselling@ of indulgences were some of the signs which drove the reformers to begin again with a purified Christianity.

When we come to the question of the role of money in the early missionary period in South African Catholicism a cultural analysis shows us that the missionaries were part of their own culture

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<sup>17</sup>This section is based on a forthcoming article. See Bate 2000 forthcoming.

and so tended to behave like the other settlers in their desire to both access finance and to spend it in a way which would be socially and culturally desirable. The common culture text within which this process occurred was that of the 'enterprise'. All the settlers came with the goal of setting up enterprises in the new colonies. The enterprise might be a farm or a shop or a small business. The cultural codes which delineated this culture text were largely common: access funds or capital to set up the enterprise then insert it into the society in such a way that it satisfied culturally mediated human needs within the context, then work hard.

In the context of the missionary enterprise of these years these culturally mediated pastoral responses were of three basic types:

- X the church building as a locus for fulfilling the need for worship
- X the school as a response to the culturally mediated need for education and
- X the clinic/hospital as a response to the culturally mediated need for health care.

These three 'enterprises' were particularly successful since besides responding to a genuine social need they also 'worked' in that they provided access to finance for the enterprise. Catholic mission in settler culture was thus based largely on these three enterprises. Within the settler culture, those enterprises which did not access finance in some way or other would not survive. In the church we see how these particular enterprises were built up by public subscription, donations and other sources often coming largely from the settler society itself.<sup>18</sup> In the case of the school, finance was accessed through fees and in some cases by a government grant.<sup>19</sup> In the case of the hospital and clinic, financial support was often from the government: local or regional as well as fees.<sup>20</sup>

### 5.2.2 'Money', 'Finance' and 'Poverty' in Catholic missionary culture

The Catholic culture brought by the missionaries was not just conformed to the western culture to which they belonged. It shared the biblical reserve about money as expressed above but it also comprised two other expressions which were largely counter cultural to the settler culture in Southern

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<sup>18</sup>For Cape town see Denis 1998:78; For Natal See Brain 1975:34-35;39-41; 112; for Transvaal see Brain 1991:41;56-57;66.

<sup>19</sup>For Cape Town see Denis 1998:79-80; For Natal see Brain 1975:113-116;135; For Transvaal see Brain 1991:61;84.

<sup>20</sup>For Johannesburg see Brain 1991:86-89; for Natal see Brain 1975:162; Brain 1982:28-33;35.

Africa. These were in the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church and in the value placed on poverty through the vow taken in religious life. Since missionaries were also settlers and participated largely in settler culture, they had to integrate the often contradictory codes regarding money, finance and poverty. This influenced the way money was understood in the Catholic Missionary endeavour. An example of this will help.

In western culture, ownership is determined by access to capital. So the ones who have capital are able to buy the goods and services they require and they then acquire the power of ownership over them. This is not the case in the Catholic Church. Catholic culture imposes the norm (code) that the goods and benefits of the Church are the property of the bishop.<sup>21</sup> Here was a clear setting for culture clash and we are not surprised to find it occurring. In Cape Town, for example, Bishop Griffith had to do battle with a group of Achurchwardens...who claimed for themselves the temporal administration of the church@ (Brown 1960:24). This conflict lasted for some time and it was only three years later that the bishop could report that Aalay interference in church matters@ had stopped (quoted in Denis 1998:76).<sup>22</sup>

The culture of hierarchy in Catholicism when mediated through the settler culture of the time leads us to explore the notion of the bishop as entrepreneur/businessman. As nominal owners and administrators of the property and finances of the Church, bishops looked for ways to manage and grow their assets. In this they tended to behave like any other settler entrepreneur and like all businessmen, some were successful and some were not. Bishop Allard was judged Aa shrewd buyer of property@ (Brain 1975:108). Bishop Griffiths in the Cape also seems to have been quite successful administratively since Denis (1998:85) writes AThe extension of the Vicariate was carefully planned. After Cape Town and Grahamstown, a third mission was opened in Port Elizabeth in 1840. Then followed George Town, Fort Beaufort and Somerset. In each place Griffith appointed a Priest and raised funds for the building of a church@. Systematic progress led to Simon=stown, Graaf Rienet and Uitenhage missions during the 1850's. Others were less successful and paid for it. The first Prefect Apostolic of the Transvaal, Fr Monginoux was forced to resign in 1891 as a result of Ahis

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<sup>21</sup>a simplification which will suffice for our purpose. For more detail see Bate 2000 forthcoming

<sup>22</sup>There are several other examples which could be cited In the Eastern Vicariate see (Brown 1960:120).

administrative methods@ (Brain 1991:67).<sup>23</sup>

As entrepreneurs of the Catholic faith the bishops had to enter into the semiotic domain of the western economy. Brown(1960:90) writes AA large part of the records of the Church in South Africa were concerned with money, and an ill disposed and superficial critic of it could write it off as a commercial enterprise@. But the bishops= attitudes and values regarding finance also reflect the Christian and Catholic cultural negativity about finance as shown above. ABishop Ricards and Bishop Grimley... thought of it as a nuisance and worried desperately about the losses if the enterprise failed@ (:91). Bishop Leonard was considered by some of his clergy as A too much of an accountant in his dealings with them@ (:93). And in a telling comment about the ambiguity of the symbols of Amoney@ and Aenterprise@ in the life of the Vicars Apostolic Brown (:91) writes as follows: ARicards= explanation about his methods and those of his subordinates suggest almost a feeling of guilt, as though money were an evil even if necessary.@

Perhaps the most powerful symbol within the Catholic missionary culture text Amoney@ was the religious vow of Apoverty@. The purpose of this vow in Catholic culture is to provide a workable lifestyle within which the access to wealth is undermined as a goal for life.

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<sup>23</sup>For other examples of failure see Brain 1991:118; :126.

In modern western culture, money is seen provides a means to satisfy almost all of Maslow=s hierarchy of needs: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem and even self actualisation.<sup>24</sup> In the culture of religious life it is the community which is responsible for these allowing religious to focus on the Ahigher@ and transcendent issues of self actualisation through faith in God and the *sequela Christi*. Money is then the concern of the community and not the individual. Besides this, the cultural codes surrounding this vow elevate a detachment from worldly needs to a value to be cherished. This has the effect of reducing the power of money in the life of the missionaries to that of a means to fulfil the goals of the mission only. The missionaries themselves were prepared to accept great personal privation for the sake of the mission.

Examples of the seriousness with which this vow was lived abound. An author of the time, Barbara Buchanan writes of Fr Sabon the founder of the Catholic Church in Durban: AHis self denial was so well known that to conserve his health his friends used to plot to ensure his attendance at meal times. There is an authentic story that he refused a new coat and hat, lest the splendour should be attributed to vanity and so give offence@ (in Brain 1975:176). Abbot Pfanner the founder of Mariannhill is quoted as saying: ANo missionary, be he priest or superior, should despise manual work@ (quoted in Baur 1994:194). In this regard he was critical of Protestant missionaries who Ahad all the manual work done by Africans@ (:194). The same spirit of self denial is found amongst women religious. The Holy Cross foundation in Umtata is a good example. AUntil 1891 three native huts formed their first convent. Food was scarce...There is no mention of meat...The bishop...could promise them no material assistance but told them they would have to rely, under God, on their own efforts.@ (McDonagh 1993:67-68).

We can see from these few historical examples that the importance of the role of money in the church=s mission raises a number of questions. Any Christian praxis needs to interrogate itself regarding issues like:

- X The role of money in the culture of the people.
- X the place of money in the culture of the church.
- X the role of money in the creation of culturally mediated Christian responses to

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<sup>24</sup>Maslow=s (1970) famous hierarchy of needs proposes a psychological structure of five levels of human need from the most basic (food, air and water) to the most transcendent (self-actualisation). Whilst this hierarchy may tell us something about the ontological structure of the human person in general the point we are making here is that these needs will always be articulated in terms of cultural categories.

culturally mediated human needs.

This third issue is an extremely important, yet often neglected, area for Christian theological reflection. Clearly money is important as one of the resources used in western Christian praxis. So the need for effective theological judgements which take into account both the truth of money in the different semiotic domains or cultural contexts involved as well as in the notion of the good we use in making our judgement become of paramount importance. This demands that we at least consider issues like the following:

- X what is our faith perspective regarding finance?
- X what is the role of money in the culture to which we belong?
- X what is the role of money in the culture to which we are ministering?
- X Who are the ones with access to finance and to what extent does this give people the power to construct the church in their own image?

Only in this way can we construct Christian praxis which accepts the place of cultural truths and values within. Without this consideration, these factors continue to exert power which often distorts our efforts since they remain as unreflected truths which operate without being recognised, named and acknowledged. Such unnamed and unrecognised forces influencing and controlling our actions are the stuff of demons.<sup>25</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Our culture is an essential part of our humanity. In South Africa we have been led to identify our culture with our racial or ethnic group. It is time to deconstruct this superficial understanding. All people operate within cultural matrices of symbols. Our Christian praxis is constructed out of such symbols. If we do not recognise the presence of this culturality we are destined to repeat mistakes of the past which constrained our theology and ministry into cultural categories which were imported and applied willy nilly to our context. The effectiveness of Liberation theology in Latin America was weakened to the extent it relied solely on imported western philosophies such as Marxism to establish its vision and strategy. When it succeeded it was because of the creation of Christian praxis from within the Latin American context. The subsequent incorporation of popular piety and the rise of Latin American forms of evangelicalism are good examples of this.

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<sup>25</sup>See Bate 2000 for an understanding of demons in a postmodern western consciousness as things which control, oppress or seduce us without our awareness of them.

The identification of symbols and culture texts within our human and Christian praxis is central to this process. In this article I have tried to indicate these within two very different contexts: the healing ministry in the apartheid struggle years and the role of finance in catholic praxis within a 19<sup>th</sup> century settler society. There are many such cultural contexts both within our Christian history and within our current context. It is time now to begin identifying these cultural carriers of power within the Christian community to ensure that Christian praxis may respond to human concerns in a human way. The incorporation of cultural analysis into our theologising as shown here can be an effective tool in recognising the culturality of our Christianity as part of God=s image within us. It should also help us to recognise to what extent what we do as Christians is a culturally mediated Christian praxis responding to culturally mediated human needs.

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