the exact equivalent of the two. In the farewell discourse in the Gospel of St John we find these words:

> My little children,
>
> I shall not be with you much longer,
> You will look for me and, as I told the Jews,
> Where I am going you cannot come.
> I give you a new commandment: Love one another.
> Just as I have loved you
> You also must love one another.
> By this love you have for one another
> Everyone will know that you are my disciples.
>
> (John 13, 33-35.)

Shortly after this Jesus took some bread, broke it, gave it to his disciples and said: 'Take it and eat, this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and gave it to them. 'Drink all of you from this, for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is to be poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'

Here we find total and complete availability in which God offers himself to each one of us and which our Catholic tradition retains in the solemn sacrifice of the mass. Human love cannot imitate such complete giving but in all human relationships between man and man, man and woman, this is the prototype it aspires to.

# The Earthbound Pangolin

Adrian Edwards, C.S.Sp.

Having once berated (by letter) the present editor of *New Blackfriars* for feeding his readers on the ersatz provender of bloated book-reviews, I find myself involved in the same offence. My excuse is that I have rarely read a book which has aroused in me such ambivalence of reaction as Dr Mary Douglas' *Natural Symbols*.[1] My hope is that this extended reviewed will encourage other people to read this book, which it would be unjust to ignore totally, and pernicious to accept entirely. The book is of significance in both anthropology and theology; is it perhaps the turn of an intellectual tide, a theological anthropology moving in to the vacuum left by secular theology?

This, I believe, is the author's intention: to carry out a counter-revolution in the social sciences, so that anthropology and sociology,

[1] *Natural Symbols*, Explorations in Cosmology, by Mary Douglas. Barrie & Rockliff, The Cresset Press, London, 1970, 170 pp., 45s.

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whose origins were so deeply rooted in the wish of the French positivists and British agnostics to reveal and shatter the foundations of faith, will now become instruments for demasking the social causes of all religious attitudes including atheism, agnosticism and indifference, and for indicating the social patterns which favour faith in the Incarnation and the Eucharist. This intention does credit to Mrs Douglas as a Christian, and the examination of ethnographic material which it has provoked reveals her brilliance as an anthropologist. Underlying it all, however, is, I consider, an appalling error, or paradigm of errors. But let us see what she has to say.

Dr Douglas' *Purity and Danger* (1966) has already become something of a *livre clef* among really thoughtful people. Its starting point is the Levitical food taboos, which, Dr Douglas claims, are not to be explained either as rules of primitive hygiene or as a training in self-discipline, but rather as reflecting the way in which the Israelites classified species. 'Those species are unclean which are imperfect members of their class, or whose class itself confounds the general scheme of the world.' This is but the beginning of a wide-ranging discussion of the significance of the concept of pollution, set always against the contrast of form and formlessness. Its essential theme is the way in which beliefs about ritual pollution act as markers of the boundaries of social cognition. This is related to the Durkheimian view of the cognitive categories of a given culture as derivatives of the ritual activity of its society. I say 'related to', rather than 'an application of', because Dr Douglas has succeeded, it seems to me, in naturalizing Durkheim's rather neglected insight in contemporary social anthropology in such a way as to say something significant for the sociology of knowledge as a whole. At the climax of *Purity and Danger*[1] she introduces the *pangolin*, a beast which by Lele standards violates all canons of classification. Yet despite, or even because of this, the Lele regard it as a type of kingly dignity and voluntary self-sacrifice and make its ritual eating the highest act of their religion. Whence an abstraction to a more general plane: a system of thought, when confronted by what is most alien to its categories, can accept and sacralize the anomaly, accepting its disruptive force to gain from it renewal. This message is remarkably similar to that of another significant book of the last decade ,T. S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*,[2] where anomalous cases are seen as the means of disintegrating established scientific paradigms.

*Natural Symbols* does not, however, follow any further the track of the pangolin, but rather turns to further consideration of the role of ritual in establishing boundaries. Dr Douglas regards the book as being strongly marked by Professor Basil Bernstein's work in socio-

[1]Chapter 10, 'The System Shattered and Renewed'.

[2]Dr Douglas herself introduced me to this book. For an example of the influence of both T. S. Kuhn and Dr Douglas on contemporary sociology, see S. B. Barnes, 'Paradigms—scientific and social', *Man*, March, 1969, pp. 94–102.

linguistics; but to me, this influence is only notable in the discussion of the 'Bog Irishman' and his religion, much of which has already appeared in the pages of *New Blackfriars* (June, July 1968). For the Bog Irishman, material symbols and taboos guide his conduct and crystallize his beliefs, thus giving him an admirable preparation for participating in the external, objective piety of the sacraments. In contrast to this world of security based on clear boundaries and visible symbolism is the limbo of the trendy theologians, impatient of rite and sign, reducing religion to a pattern of personal relations, in which coherence will yield to a sticky mush of togetherness. Looking on this picture and on this, we are then invited to consider the social bases of ritualism and anti-ritualism. We are back looking for the Philosopher's Stone of social anthropology, a taxonomy of religions, by which ritual and belief, wherever found, can be classified within a certain limited range of categories, proposed in the hope of establishing correlations with certain forms of social structure or psycho-cultural patterns. This quest has attracted scholars since 1760, and will no doubt continue to do so for an indefinite future.

It must immediately be said that as alchemist Dr Douglas is a capable experimental chemist, that is, while no taxonomic approach seems really satisfactory, since they all reify essentially unreifiable processes,[1] hers is remarkably stimulating in encouraging comparisons between widely separated societies.

Two criteria are proposed for classifying societies, and therefore the associated religious practices: 'grid' and 'group'. 'To the extent that roles . . . are allocated on principles of sex, age, and seniority, there is a grid controlling the flow of behaviour. . . . A group must essentially have some corporate identity, some recognizable signs of inclusion and exclusion' (p. 57).

If all human societies can be classified by the interaction of these principles, then, following the universally accepted principle of social anthropology that a given religion provides a key to the social structure in which it exists, and itself reflects in various ways that social structure, we should presumably be able to set up a taxonomy of religions, by first classifying societies in this way and then reading off the necessarily associated religious practices and values. And this is what Dr Douglas tries to do.

Weak grid, weak group produces societies with little in the way of formal social structure, a lack of ritual, a vaguely benevolent attitude to the world (anchorites, hippies, pygmies). Weak grid, strong group, produces groups in which roles are ill-defined, and where there is characteristically a considerable fear of witches, who are believed to be betraying their own group to outside confederates. Strong grid, strong group produces the sort of society in which anthropologists delight: well-defined groups, distinction of roles, but just enough

[1]For a whole-hearted use of process rather than taxonomy, see *The Ritual Process*, by Victor W. Turner, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.

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marginality to give witchcraft room for a little blood-sucking.

Strong grid, weak group, finally, is a category of societies whose recognition enables Dr Douglas to write some of the most interesting pages in *Natural Symbols*. In it she includes many of the peoples of contemporary Melanesia and New Guinea, and the ancient Greeks and Teutons. In such societies there is considerable scope for manipulation and mobility, competitiveness is esteemed, and concepts such as fate and luck loom large in the theology. Not only are examples taken from a very wide range, but a more detailed examination is made of material from three peoples of the southern Sudan. An additional control is proposed by examining the correlation between spirit-possession (a phenomenon which has recently been receiving much attention from anthropologists)[1] and types of social control. Where social control is weak, body control will also be weak, hence states of trance will meet with much social tolerance.

Not surprisingly, Mrs Douglas has views of her own on social control and ritual activity. The student revolution is classified as a manifestation of rootless, formless milleniarism, to be countered by humanizing institutions, by a 'continuity with the past, benevolent forms of nepotism, irregular charity, extraordinary promotions, freedom to pioneer in the tradition of the founders' (p. 155). For the contemporary religious scene her prescription is re-ritualization and more emphasis on the body, as the primary source of religious analogy and symbolism (pp. 166-7).

*Natural Symbols* is never banal, never pompous, never timid; it is often illuminating, and frequently seminal. Yet not only is it sometimes wrong (as in renaming Benjamin Lee Whorf Christopher or in giving the title of John Middleton's *Lugbara Religion* incorrectly), but there is also in it a streak of what one must call wrong-headedness, arising ultimately from a refusal to recognize the autonomy of scholarship.[2] Mrs Douglas cheerfully breaks one of the central rules of academic writing, that it should be within a framework of values (disinterested desire of knowledge and so on) in which scholars of very different ideologies can discuss their subject without intruding the values which separate them. No doubt there is much humbug in the tradition of the academic man; but this attempt by Dr Douglas to mix literary media, blending scholarly analysis and religious exhortation will puzzle both those would have welcomed a development of *Purity and Danger* and those who would have been interested by the comments on the post-Conciliar Church which a Catholic lay-woman could make drawing on her experiences as a social anthropologist.

First, then, some criticisms from the position of technical anthro-

[1] See *Spirit Mediumship and Society in Africa*, edited by John Beattie and John Middleton, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.

[2] This is not to say Dr Douglas is dishonest; on the contrary, she parades her value judgments with blatant honesty.

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pology. The proposed social taxonomy does not satisfy; one has great difficulty in fitting the witch-perplexed peoples of central Africa into the author's category of 'strong group, weak grid'. This might perhaps be of some use in considering Siberian societies of the pre-Soviet period. No attempt is made to consider how the way in which loosely-structured societies threw up hierarchical ceremonial forms could fit in to the suggested set of categories.[1] Grid appears to be used in two surely different senses: formal definition of roles, and inequality of statuses. Nor are the criteria of group strength examined critically. Are they exclusiveness and isolation, or mutual cooperation and a sense of solidarity, or some other qualities? Controversies among anthropologists which are surely relevant to the themes treated in this book—such as the distinction between ceremonial and ritual, or the relation between the enduring social structure and the adaptable social organization—are not examined.

While Dr Douglas has an unquestionable flair for establishing correlations between particular institutions and beliefs, her talent is for classification rather than synthesis. In any human society, surely there are some areas where control is strong, others where it is weak; any culture has its clear lines and its blurred boundaries. We deal usually not with overwhelming contrasts but with matters of degree and quality, and this is surely part of the fascination of anthropology, that all over the world we find man's betwixt and betweenness, shuffling where he claims to stand firm, discriminating where he would deny drawing a line. To take one example, surely techniques of ecstasy can coexist with formal ritual in the same society—one thinks of the Hausa bori—or even in the same person? (One thinks of some of the counter-Reformation saints. Admittedly St Philip Neri used anti-ecstatic techniques, but this does not destroy the point.) One hopes that anthropologists will be sufficiently influenced by *Natural Symbols* to examine more closely the interplay of group definition, role specification, and status achievement, but as processes not as entities.

Before considering the more theological concerns of the book, I would venture some remarks on, in the widest sense, the style in which it is written. This book seems to have been written rather hurriedly, no doubt as a result of Mrs Douglas' academic and domestic preoccupations; and perhaps as a result of this, the book often seems dogmatic where the author may have intended to be tentative, and, particularly on political and religious questions, its seriousness is lacquered over by a *grand-bourgeois* irony, which may irritate or muddle many readers.

And so let us have a closer look at the 'Bog Irishman', since it is here that we begin to touch upon what I submit is her capital error.

[1]Professor Turner's approach suggests a very satisfying explanation. See *op. cit.*, p. 191 ff.

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I am not sure what Mrs Douglas means to make of this protégé. Is he simply a man of straw paraded to shame trendy theologians (whose tensions deserve surely slightly more sympathy from Dr Douglas than they receive) with his peasant piety? Or is it claimed that liturgical and associated reforms have disturbed the systems of religious cognition of Irish working-class Catholics in England, who are losing contact with their pastors through the bonfire of old symbols? Now I am all in favour of studies in depth of how Catholic groups and individuals perceive and practise their religion, and how they relate it to their experience of the world. But in fact we know so little about this problem (and 'religious sociology' as generally practised seems unlikely to give much help) that it seems rash even to begin to propose an answer, or to imagine that there could be just one answer. Had Mrs Douglas sketched out a methodology for studying this, she would have achieved a positive contact of social anthropology and catechetics. Again, I agree with Dr Douglas that a theologian and liturgical reformer should be constantly aware of the need to keep up communication with ordinary Catholics as they are now, not as, it is hoped, they will be after suitable brain-washing. But do the Bog Irish (Mrs Douglas' choice of term, not mine; one of her four grand-parents was an Irish Catholic, as was one of mine) really have such a keen sense of ritual? Irish Catholicism is surely much more oral, much less ceremonial. The most specifically Irish practices of piety such as the pilgrimages to Lough Derg and Croagh Patrick give considerable scope to individual adaptation. The exact performance of defined rites is surely more the joy of the devout Englishman, whether Anglican or Catholic.

This does, of course, raise the question of *the mesh, which the Church, as institution, needs to provide, between her members' experience of the natural and social world, and their understanding of the sacraments.* Now this is a point which Mrs Douglas sees very well, and it would be a pity if her gibes at 'modern catechetics' (curiously linked to Teilhard de Chardin) led her readers not to reflect on her essential point, namely, that *values are often more fully communicated by the 'restricted code' of symbolism than the 'elaborated code' of conceptual exposition.* Moreover, the best symbols are those which build up some total pattern of meaning, and can function at several levels. If symbols cohere to form a mesh, then the believer will be able to relate his religious practices to the rest of his social life. Buddhism operates at the village level in Ceylon and Thailand *not*, as is often claimed, by being transmuted into something entirely different from the religion of the Pali scriptures, but, as Obeyesekere and Tambiah have so brilliantly shown, by spinning a mesh of relevancies between peasant problems and the obligations of the Five Precepts.[1] Now in late Tridentine Catholicism this mesh was provided more, I think, by private

[1]See *Dialectic in Practical Religion*, edited by E. R. Leach, Cambridge Papers in Social Anthropology, C.U.P., 1968.

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devotions and practices such as the Way of the Cross, rather than by the Friday abstinence, despite the lyricism which this nostalgic memory inspires in Mrs Douglas. Why this particular mesh is now so widely felt to be unsatisfactory, and what sort (or sorts) of mesh could replace it, are questions beyond the scope of this article. However, an extension of ritualization, rather than its cutting down, would in itself be no solution, *unless the new rituals could condense secular experience into symbols capable in turn of building up into new Gestalts of meaning.*

I am even more uneasy about Dr Douglas' position on the Eucharist. She rallies eagerly enough to the support of *Mysterium Fidei*, but claims that it teaches that 'the deity is located in a specific object, place and time'. Now surely the Encyclical in no way challenges the normal teaching of theologians from St Thomas Aquinas onwards that the Eucharistic presence is a real but not a local presence. The non-local nature of the Eucharistic presence is not a matter of faith, but one would think that some rather solid theological argument is required before we throw the position of St Thomas overboard.

And this question of the Eucharistic presence obliges me to say that while Mrs Douglas can see aspects of Catholicism which are too often ignored or neglected today, her own theologizing suffers from very serious limitations. *She has very little sympathy with the prophetic and pentecostal elements in Christianity*; nor does she seem prepared to endure some of the essential tensions of Catholicism, notably that between the theology of the sacraments and the theology of the Word.[1] Surely there is inevitably a pull between the 'elaborated code' of theology and exegesis and the 'restricted code' of devotion and sacrament? If Lévi-Strauss in Ricoeur's phrase offers a dogma without kerygma, Dr Douglas proposes an almost equally unkerygmatic liturgy. Although unecumenical in outlook, what she says about Catholicism might often be said of any other highly ritualistic system. Extremes meet; and just as Dr Douglas comes close to the student revolutionaries in her evident contempt for academic detachment, so too she approaches the position of some Catholic Marxists in the way she cheerfully ignores whole vast ranges of Christian tradition that lack meaning for her. Any informed Catholic can see how the Protestant (whether liberal or fundamentalist) and Pentecostalist religions show the weaknesses which spring from mutilating the ecclesial and sacramental elements of the Catholic inheritance. *Dr Douglas offers us a theology in which the ecclesial, the formal, the liturgical are so interpreted, and inflated, as to replace the counterbalancing elements of discursive theology, biblical meditation and the unexpected*

[1]Anybody who feels this is unfair should compare what Dr Douglas has to say on ritualism with the attitude of the Epistle to the Hebrews, or, more generally, the Biblical symbolism of the Temple. cf my 'Priest and Anthropologist', *New Blackfriars*, November 1968, p. 79.

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*flowering of the charisms*. It is a sobering thought that this is very similar to our image in Protestant eyes.

What is particularly distressing is that *Natural Symbols* seems to show an actual regression in understanding compared with *Purity and Danger*. Then, at least, the pangolin could come to signify the overthrow and restoration of all values; but now the Bog Irishman is bidden to wrap himself ever more firmly in his coat of many taboos. Perhaps the pangolin would never have taken wing like T. S. Eliot's hippopotamus; but one would have liked to have seen the attempt.

On the political side of things, Dr Douglas might well make a splendid Dean of Nanterre, with her blend of courage and shrewdness. But any thorough-going attempt at reforms even within the limited range she offers 'to experiment with more flexible institutional forms and to seek to develop their ritual expression' (p. 166) must come up against the relation of the university with the total society. Are not the symbols and structures of the university bound to have a fairly high degree of consistency with the symbols and structures of the surrounding world?

Is there some connecting thread between the views which Dr Douglas has expressed on anthropology,[1] on theology, and on politics? Clearly enough there is: clarity, form, hierarchy, order, are primary values for her in all fields. It would be unprofitable to speculate on the personal background of this generalized classicism; but intellectually, the evolution of the individual may reflect the growth of a school of thought. The French pioneers of sociology and social anthropology, Saint-Simon, Comte, and Durkheim, were men who shared a common social atmosphere, and many common assumptions with the apologists of French intégriste Catholicism. Both currents of thought tended to regard societies as entities needing to be stabilized; both valued ritual as a means of maintaining social coherence and cohesion: both disliked the fluid individualism, so highly valued by English liberalism. One wonders on reading this book whether the intégriste tradition, broken among theologians by Pius XI in 1927 by the condemnation of *Action Française*, has a continuing underground life among anthropologists, and, if so, whether theologizing by anthropologists may not be almost as hazardous as theologizing by theologians.

I am not, of course, suggesting a conscious and intentional connexion. But the intégristes, whether believers (like Billot) or unbelievers (like Maurras), regarded religion and society as an essential continuum; order in one would mean order in the other. In a similar way, fledgling anthropologists are taught to see an essential cohesion and underlying harmonies between a society and its religion.

[1]It is interesting to note that V. W. Turner takes a far more sympathetic view of both Protestantism and Eastern Religion. Compare *The Ritual Process*, pp. 196–199 with *Natural Symbols*, pp. 163–165.

A Catholic anthropologist is surely particularly tempted to synthesize his or her faith and knowledge by a sacrifice of tensions.

Perhaps my making this criticism in some way obliges me to hint at the double focus of anthropology and theology which I myself seek to gain. One of the most powerful arguments for ecumenism is that it seems in the order of Providence that the fullness of Catholic doctrine can only be realized by drawing on the insights of other communities of belief. In not dissimilar fashion, the potentialities of anthropology require dialogue with other disciplines. If social anthropology is to do all it can do for the understanding of religion, is it not necessary to see the relation of rite and belief to society as one of analogy and metaphor and semantic marking (drawing therefore on linguistic theory) rather than of mirror reflection?[1] If Dr Douglas had followed this approach, she would perhaps have taken a more sympathetic view of change in the Church, since, whereas the Durkheimian tradition is primarily oriented to social stability, any linguist finds himself in considering semantics obliged to reflect on problems of the change and conservation of meaning and the techniques of translation. And this too should have relevance for the theologian as he broods on Babel and Pentecost as signs of divisive and communicative multiplicity.

If, as I suspect, Mrs Douglas is in this book showing us a life-style rather than providing us with new instruments of knowledge, yet the realm of order she proposes is very different from mere conformism. Indeed, it is one aspect of the life-style of the Church as she has existed over the centuries; but we shall better understand the Catholic Church if we think of her not only as the walled garden of beauty, order and peace, but also as Time's Andromeda, or (to draw on a more recent mythology) as Pauline of the silent films, always safe in life and virtue, but always threatened by unexpected and alarming perils, not only from the malice of enemies, or the disloyalty of friends, but rather by reason of a vocation to an adventurous kind of goodness. In the life of the individual, there are periods when accustomed voices fall silent and customary acts lose their meaning; one is alone and muddled, yet somehow one knows one can hold on, even struggle ahead a little way. Perhaps this is now the situation of the Church; and we would be lacking in the perfection of the faith if we tried to turn back to the well-ordered past.

'Severity first, then graciousness', said Kierkegaard, and this is a good motto for reviewers. Although I have used words like 'pernicious' and 'wrongheadedness', yet this is a book that deserves reading not merely for the many true things said, but also for its attempt to open up new fields of discourse. Even to have caught sight of the pangolin is a good omen.

[1]For an onslaught on the 'mirror image' view of ritual, see Peter Rigby in *Dialectic in Practical Religion, op. cit.*, p. 169.