A Very Personal Method

Anthropological Writings Drawn from Life

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A feeling for hierarchy

To receive the Marianist Award is a great honour. For the occasion I am asked to say something about the influence of my religious faith on my work, or about the interaction of one with the other. This is perhaps a straightforward assignment for a person whose work has been involved with the direction of public affairs. But it is less easy for an anthropologist, partly because it means delving into fairly intimate thoughts as you will see, and partly because of this particular religion, the Roman Catholic faith.

I once asked Fredrik Barth, the Norwegian anthropologist and Islamicist, whether the day would come when Catholicism would be accorded by ethnographers the same benevolence as given to Judaism, Hinduism and Islam, or to African religions. He replied 'I doubt it, there is too much history.' I knew what he meant. For nearly two millennia the Roman Catholic church enjoyed the benefits of powerful imperial backing. Anthropologists can present other religions as ethnic victims of Western hegemony, and local versions of Catholicism can pass if they are practised in Latin America or other very poor countries. But otherwise it is apt to be subject to radical criticism. Thus inhibited, I thought to make it less personal, I chose the idea of hierarchy as a central theme.[1]

When I say 'hierarchy', I am remembering that the Roman Catholic Church calls herself a hierarchy. Sometimes she goes through a sectarian phase of withdrawal behind battlements, and at all times she has honoured personal ecstatic experience. But in her own estimation she is a great, inclusive, ordered hierarchy, with graded units from newly baptised parishioner to Pope. This distinctive feature contrasts with many other Christian Churches, though not with all.

Preparing for this lecture I realize that I have always been attracted to hierarchy. I have also recognized that my good feelings toward it are counter-cultural. But then, I am not defining it as a soulless bureaucracy. I see it as a spontaneously created and maintained inclusive system, organizing its internal tensions by balance and symmetry, and rich in resources for peace and reconciliation. I miss it when it is not there, and grieve when it falls into any of its besetting traps.

The bad meanings currently associated with hierarchy amount to so much prejudice in the other direction that the sinologist, Benjamin Schwartz,

declared it practically impossible for a modern scholar to understand an ancient oriental civilization.[2] I get teased for my kindly feeling for hierarchy. Friends consider that their own attitude is based on a liberal dislike of tyranny, unlike my stuffy and illiberal prejudices. It is true that I tend to smell disorder afar off and to feel baffled when my friends rejoice at the thought of things falling into chaos. My sense that authority is vulnerable and needs support appalled a young Chinese political scientist in California in the 1970s.

'Mary! How *can* you feel sorry for authority!'

The anti-hierarchical attitude is just as much a product of cultural bias as the pro-hierarchical, so culture became my abiding interest. Hierarchy is the encompassing principle of order which systematizes any field of work, whether a library, a game, an alphabet, mathematics, systematics of all kinds. What I find interesting is that there should be such strong feelings against a principle that must be present to some extent in any organization whatever. There can be human associations which are entirely haphazard and unorganized, like passengers on a bus, but the least bit of organization implies a reference to the whole, to a larger system of which the social unit is a part.

If I have to describe a hierarchical culture in a few words, I would start with what it is not. Hierarchy is *not* a vertical command structure dominated by an up-down pattern of communication. It is not a system requiring unquestioning deference to arbitrary fiats issued from above. Though that may be the current popular usage, Max Weber was on the mark when he emphasized the rational ordering and universalizing principles of bureaucracy. The glaring contrast with hierarchy is the pragmatic culture of individualism: there you do find up/down command systems, like ladders for individuals to climb on, and to jump off onto another one when it suits. Individualism has a philosophy of equality and a practice of inequality based on power and wealth. In an individualist system nothing is fixed, neither rank nor power; it is very competitive. It holds great personal sorrows (anyone may at any time be forced down, or out, according to the competition) and great joys for individual winners.

But hierarchy restricts competition, it institutes authority. Its institutions work to prevent concentrations of power. It is a positional system in which everyone has a place, every place has a prescribed trajectory of roles through time, in total the pattern of positions is coherent and the roles are coordinated. In place of the surprises and inexplicable disappointments suffered in a culture of individualism, those living in a hierarchy are exposed to the sadnesses of frustration and neglect of their talents, but at least there is a rational explanation.

My grandparents' home

Born in 1921, I first experienced hierarchy in a very modest form in my grand-parents' home. Then in my convent schooling. So used to it was I that when I left school I was at a loss to understand what was happening around me. Only after the war, when I started anthropology in 1946, did I begin to understand. Reading anthropologists' monographs, I recognized hierarchy as a control on competition in the structure of checks and balances, for example, in the Ashanti constitution, and in West African ancestral cults. When I came to do my own fieldwork in the (Belgian) Congo I was puzzled by the absence of lin-eages and ancestors. Up-down hierarchy would seem to be present at the level of family life, with the seniority and authority of the father or grandfather, but it was always modified by distancing rules that protected the junior members from possibly-tyrannous seniors. I saw varied ways of dispersing power, trying to maintain stability, principles of fairness controlling willful individuals.

Hierarchy is a pivotal issue for my understanding of social theory; at the same time my religious commitment endows the topic with passionate inter-est. For me, this is the point of interchange between religion and learning, and I should explain how my strong interest is founded in infant and early experience. We were left with my grandparents when I was five and my sister was three years old. What was called 'Sending home the children' was a nor-mal part of British colonial family life. It was backed by a theory that white children would not be able to survive the rigours of the tropics.[3] My father was in the Indian Civil Service in Burma. He got 'home leave' every three years, and my mother came back to see us every year.

Living with grandparents is living in a hierarchy. Between this middle-aged couple all the important questions have been settled long ago. There are no disputes, no bad language, no mention of money in front of the children or servants. There are little mysteries, no one knows what they do not need to know, and nothing is quite what it seems. My grandfather is the nominal head of the house, but nobody could doubt that my grandmother is the per-son really in control. Inside the house is her sphere; outside is his.

The space of the house (a bungalow in Devon) is divided according to social categories. In 1926 everyone has maids. The privacy of the maids' bed-rooms is respected; no one can penetrate into that space except the cook and the house-parlour maid. The same for the nanny's bedroom. Nor does any-one enter the grandparents' bedroom without being invited. The maid cleans the main bathroom but she does not use it, nor the cook or the nanny. The maids and the children used a little attic bathroom. These rules of respect in space did not apply to the children's bedroom or playroom; they were too young to have a person's full rights to privacy. Of course the maid went into the grown-ups' public spaces as part of her duties, but I never saw her sit on a chair in the dining room, smoking room or drawing room. Children only entered these rooms at set times and under supervision. Food was patterned

to correspond to the time of day, the day of the week, and the calendar of annual holidays. As to justice, 'No favouritism' was the general rule of impartiality, sharing was the rule of distribution, but as the elder I often got priority.

In seven years of caring for us, neither of our grandparents ever broke ranks to confide in us, one against the other, and we never told tales on each other. It was unthinkable. My first, limited, experience of hierarchy was a life organized as a system of temporal and spatial positions, held in balance by mutual respect. It was the same later, at the French convent primary school in Torquay. The sense of pattern was reassuring, given the basic insecurity of being separated from our parents. At that stage I just knew it by living it. And the life framed by hierarchical practice continued until I was 12. The experience was organized but inarticulate; the practice was not put into words. Today I am trying to articulate it.

Hierarchical principles

I now think of my early experiences of hierarchy in terms of ten principles. The five that I list here correspond quite well to my grandparent's house, but later I will need to list five more that are elaborations of these.

1. Hierarchy is a pattern of positions given in physical and social terms.

2. Competition would mess up the carefully worked out system; competition is restricted, disapproved from below as well as from above.

3. The top position is more ritual than effective, or political. Power is so diffused that the husband, chief or king has little of it. In this sense it is not what is known as patriarchal.

4. Control of information protects stability. Communication in a hierarchy is characterized by forbidden words, silences and secrets.

5. The top level of authority must never fail to respect the lowest.

In my grandmother's house these principles were learned by living according to precepts. I call it my grandmother's, not my grandfather's, house because in the domestic sphere she was supreme. My grandfather had a sphere of his own to which she had no access; he belonged to a social club (male members only) in Totnes, and was a local magistrate. He was representative of the family in external relations, paying the taxes, for example. Within the house he was a cypher, nominal head, the ritual personnage to whom deference was paid, but who had no commanding voice. Thus was the house organized by gender.

No competition was allowed between my sister and myself, for many purposes I had the formal precedence due to age, two years ahead of her. But the general rule was equality between us. We were expected to share presents. Respect for the maids by not entering their rooms and not reprimanding them except in the kitchen was a mild version of the respect for junior ranks. There was such marked asymmetry between employer and employed that the downward communication line was stronger than the upward one. If offended the maid or cook or nanny might threaten to leave, a powerful weapon indeed, and a continual subject of conversation between my grandmother and her friends.

Rules

When I was twelve, everything changed. My mother died. My father retired from Burma and set up house for us. We left our grandparents to go to live with him, a kindly stranger who had never had much to do with children. As a widower, the house was not gendered; there were no resident maids. But the dual principle of hierarchy was present in fractured form by the fact that we, the young daughters, were Catholics. My father was invincibly agnostic, but he made it his pious duty to drive us to Mass, and the three of us put flowers on my mother's grave every Sunday without fail. As to religion, we had the sectarian sense of superiority instilled by our first convent school.

At this point we went to the boarding school at Roehampton that was made infamous by the title of Antonia White's novel, *Frost in May*. It was the Sacred Heart Convent that my mother herself had gone to when she had been 'sent home', and her cousins too, also 'sent home' from the tropics. Several of the nuns had been educated there too. Dying, she formally entrusted us to their care, and they responded with every kindness. In itself this would have been enough to account for anyone's loyalty to the Faith.

The school system slotted straight on to my grandmother's hierarchy. The main differences were that meaningful spaces and times were enormously multiplied, and rules that had been implicit became explicit. An unexpected consequence was that in being articulated their ambiguities and contradictions were exposed, and begged to be exploited. For example, a rule against running in the corridors (to protect the safety of other users) was supplemented by a rule forbidding talking in the corridors (to keep down the noise level). This irksome rule could be circumvented by grabbing the person you wanted to talk with, and backing together into a doorway. The pleasures of casuistry dawned on us. We lost our innocence about rules. We discovered their facticity and their scope for interpretation: a doorway is not a corridor.

All the times of the day were announced by bells, rung by children designated for that responsible role. Formality distinguished degrees of respect,

shown in clothing. We curtseyed to Reverend Mother if we met her unexpectedly. Respect was colour coded: if we called on Reverend Mother by appointment we wore our brown gloves, which we also wore for going to chapel, or attending a class in religious doctrine. On holy days we changed our dark uniforms for white, and white gloves, of course. Like my grandmother's house, it was a dual hierarchy. Reverend Mother got this deep respect as head of the whole system; the head mistress, called the Mistress General, came second, but she was actually supreme in everything relating to the school. Normally the nuns would never reprove or humiliate each other in public. But once we saw it happen. The Mistress General found us in the refectory, evidently it was the wrong place and the wrong time. In fury she ticked off the trembling young nun who had shepherded us in there – rebuked her roundly, in front of the school! We were deeply shocked, and indignant.

It was not a competitive environment. The Head Girl was chosen by the nuns (no question of voting) from among those who most faithfully kept the rules; not the most popular, or the best scholar, still less the best at games. There was strong moral pressure against signs of personal vanity, against 'showing off'. If a child really excelled in schoolwork, she would have to be discreet about it. She would not want to be condemned as 'brainy'. We did play competitive games, hockey and netball in the winter, tennis and cricket in the summer, but not too seriously. A game was more like a choreographed performance. As for showing any satisfaction in winning, that was as disapproved as being a bad loser. I still feel shocked when cricketers or footballers appear on television, the winners openly rejoicing at the downfall of their opponents. We only played matches against other Sacred Heart Schools, who followed the same conventions.

Spatial boundaries were loaded with significance. The nuns lived in an inaccessible area called 'Community'. Outdoors too, the gardens were large, but the children could only go into specified areas. On holidays, to our great joy, we had privileged access to the school farm and a paddock-like field called 'The South of France'. The nuns were very formal in their public relations with each other. They had good reason to be reticent about their life in community: I learned some forty years later that in private they enacted the other parts of hierarchy, with moving little ceremonies in which the most senior nuns showed love and respect to the most junior novices. Incidentally, we never saw a nun eat a morsel of food, it was completely forbidden, and we used to tease them by trying to tempt them with delicious chocolates.

A typically hierarchical principle reversed the ranking of the Choir nuns and the Lay Sisters. Choir nuns were educated, most of them had Oxford degrees, and they brought an endowment with them when they entered, called a 'dowry'. The Lay Sisters had neither dowry nor education, and the religious vows they took were less binding. They didn't sing matins and evensong in choir. Theirs was the rough and necessary menial work that kept the place going. But when it came to reputation for holiness, the Lay Sisters were

streets ahead of the Choir nuns. The children eagerly sought their prayers for success in exams and for victories on the hockey field.

Sex was never mentioned. Strict rules governed our bodies. We were never seen even half-naked. We learned ingenious ways of stripping off and changing our clothes without uncovering. In Antonia White's book we read that in my mother's generation the little girls had to wear a long bathrobe in the bath, literally. We used to laugh about it, supposing that it was to prevent us from having impure thoughts if we saw our own nakedness, and not suspecting that the rule was to protect the nun in charge of the bathroom from temptation by the sight of our tender young bodies. My husband tells me that a parallel rule in the Jesuit boys' school was implemented by extraordinarily elaborate plumbing which allowed the priest in charge to regulate the taps from a central point without ever going into a bathroom: 'More hot water in No.7 please father!'

Some of us benefited from all this rule-driven organization by leaving school as young rebels, resistant to the claims of hierarchy, free to think our own thoughts. Others simply accepted the system and some, like myself, were endowed thereby with a life-time project – to make sense of it. For those of us who accepted the system, it made for a happy, sheltered adolescence. But I left school utterly unready for the hurly-burly of real life. And the unreadiness was intensifed on the educational side. The nuns were highly qualified, but they despised 'the world'. They disdained to worry about bringing the educational standards of the school beyond the requirements for passing the school-leaving certificate. Most of us passed all right, but none of us went to university – until my year when, thanks to a group of specially gifted teachers, four of us went up to Oxford together.[4]

The teaching was good in music, literature and history. It was not bad in geography, but poor in mathematics, science, and languages. Not surprisingly, it was especially good in history – every year we started again with the Tudors and covered the Reformation with gusto. They taught us to deplore the Protestant secession from Rome and to look down on the Anglican Church. The Catholic Bishops set up a certificate in Catholic Social Teaching, based on the Papal Encyclicals, *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. I loved those lessons, and wanted to pursue further the questions about social justice, the difference between the living wage and the just wage.

Theology

Theology was our best subject, it was the nuns' passion, but the School Board did not examine it – a pity, we would have gone through with flying colours. Every day we would put on our brown gloves, leave our normal classrooms and sit in the great hall in a little semi-circle of chairs around the teacher. We loved this class, inspired by the enthusiasm of our teachers. The God they

talked about was kind and loving. (We were quite surprised when we heard a Passionist Father give a retreat on Hell fire.) According to our doctrine lessons, God was reasonable and forgiving, religion was practicable.

Religion was nothing if not transcendental. When we were puzzled, as well we might be, about the Resurrection of the body, the Trinity, the Eucharist, the nuns would whip out the idea of mystery. So we got used to attributing apparent inconsistencies and even contradictions to the inherently weak powers of human understanding. How could our finite human brains encompass the design in the infinite mind of God? This led to discussions of faith, a free gift of God, and our need for the guidance of the Church inspired by the Holy Spirit. Especially dear to the nuns were the numerological mysteries: the Trinity is three persons in one, Jesus is two natures in one, Christ and the Father are two *and* one. What we absorbed well was the idea of a sacramental universe, the capacity of material things to be blessed, the union of Christ's godhead with human flesh as the greatest mystery for which our martyrs had died. The communion of saints was a wonderful cosmic exchange system across the spheres of the living and dead in which anyone might gain profit from the merits of others, and no one could suffer because of others' sins.

There was no danger of blandness. We had a lot of church history, sharpening our minds on how the famous heresies had gone astray. A certain adversarial quality endowed us with self-righteousness – not going so far as to believe that only Catholics went to heaven, but not far off. There was also a confident feminist bias. Clever, good and dedicated, the nuns believed in womanhood as a divinely given privilege, and paid special devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Women, we learned, were more spiritual, deeper in religious understanding, blessed in being able to bring forth, holy in virginity or in maternity. We were frankly a superior creation, men by comparison were coarse, lusty and materialist ... no doubt about it. They had the dignity of priesthood, we had the dignity of womanhood. This assessment of our estate must surely have contributed a sense of intellectual independence when we were later to be launched in a man's world.

Five more principles of hierarchy

1. The final balance is achieved by dividing the whole system at every level into counter-poised halves, which have their own distinctive spaces, and are expected to compete collectively within defined limits. (This is the famous historical separation and mutual dependence of the medieval Church and State, and the American constitutional Separation of Powers.)

2. Complementarity is created and imposed by balancing one half against another, at every level, and in carnivals it is shown up by regular ritual reversals.

3. A social hierarchy is like hierarchy in a mathematical sense; it is a rational organization. It uses intellectual justification worked out by equivalencies and analogies.

4. Every situation at every level is judged and justified by reference to analogies, the body is the stock example of corporate unity, and gender the favourite example of complementarity.

5. The final justification is by reference to a comprehensive, universalizing microcosm (the kingdom of God in this case).

A good test of hierarchy is the strength of the bottom-up line of communication. If that is weak the system will tend to become a tyranny ruled from above, and subject to the despot's whims. The balancing of two halves fends off that danger.

University

So there I was, confident, loyal, rebarbative in defence of my faith, but utterly unprepared for university. Arrived at Oxford I found to my chagrin that exams and hard work were necessary. It put me in some discomfort not to be able to understand the lectures, still less do the maths or statistics. I was not qualified to justify either my good opinion of myself or my loyalties. I had chosen PPE because it promised to lead into the social questions raised in the Certificate in Catholic Social Teaching. P stood for philosophy, which at that time, to my dismay, entailed symbolic logic. The second P was for Politics, a relatively soft option, but it entailed a lot of solid library work, and E, for economics, which was just beginning to move heavily into mathematics. It was not a happy time either, as Oxford in war time was running chaotically on half engines. In 1942, having achieved an undistinguished degree, I was mobilized for war service and directed into the Colonial Office where I stayed until 1946. I felt very lost, but the good side was that I met anthropologists, read their books, and decided that that was what I really wanted to do. For me there was always going to be an internal dialogue between religion and anthropology, the one illuminating the other, reciprocally.

Graduate school

After the war I went back to Oxford for graduate study in anthropology, supported by the English equivalent of a 'Veterans' grant. It was just as well that Evans-Pritchard had just taken the Chair of Social Anthropology in 1946, as he was a Catholic. In the Colonial Office I had been irritated by

anthropologists' quips, 'No anthropologist can be a sincere Catholic.' In fact the Institute of Anthropology was going to be criticized in years to come for having so many Catholics on its staff. At first it was very cosmopolitan, relatively few English among students and staff: Peristiany was Greek; Srinivas, Indian; Franz Steiner, Jewish; Issa, Egyptian Muslim; Meyer Fortes, South African Jewish. They all took religion very seriously. It was normal to have a religion. I relaxed, for the first time since leaving school, and learned to enjoy hard work for the first time ever.

I did not meet any anti-Catholic prejudice in Oxford. But Evans-Pritchard used to tell a story about Cambridge. Hutton was retiring from his Cambridge chair in Anthropology, and Evans-Pritchard and Penniman (Curator of the Pitt-Rivers Museum) were among the electors for his successor. Evans-Pritchard was determined to promote Meyer Fortes into that chair, and he prevailed on Penniman to back him. They asked Hutton whether he would be happy to be succeeded by Fortes.

'No, definitely not, he is a Jew.'

They then suggested Audrey Richards.

'No, she is a woman. No Catholics, no Jews, no women,' said Hutton emphatically.

'Who would you choose, then?' they asked him, and he named von Fürer- Haimendorf.

'But Haimendorf is a Catholic', they demurred.

'Yes, but he is Austrian, that doesn't count, it is just part of his cultural heritage.'

Apart from this legend I never heard anything anti-Catholic.

The first book I read in the Anthropology introductory course was Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. This study showed, for the first time, that witchcraft accusations did not fall randomly but were structured. Chiefs were not accused by commoners (wisely, as they would have made life difficult for their accusers). Chiefs did not accuse each other, because of a theory that witchcraft was inherited in the male line, so they would be implicating themselves. Women were not accused for another reason. In short, one theory and another narrowed the scope, and the normal pattern was for accusations to cluster in relations that were not buffered by social distance. In other words, people would accuse rivals or enemies who stood in ambiguous or confused relations with themselves and anyone they felt might have reason to dislike or resent them. Belief in witchcraft clarified behaviour and intentions.

'Unbuffered' – this suggested that the buffers which hierarchy used to separate people and places had a positive value. Forbidden words and spaces were not just absurd formalities but actually prevented people from offending each other, and actually helped to keep the peace. Or to put it differently, the rules of hierarchy are rituals of separation – the rules give their symbolic load to spaces and times. Hitherto I had known this intuitively, but had never heard it articulated. A feeling for hierarchy began to be transformed into a feeling for system! I was also reading Durkheim for the first time, and this idea of society as a system of buffered spaces made his teaching congenial to me.

Durkheim

Durkheim caused a scandal among Christians by teaching that religion is a projection of society: God is called in to ratify the form of society by punishing major breaches of the moral code, and crimes against society are automatically assimilated to crimes against God. It may not strike everyone that it was odd for a Catholic hierarchical upbringing to encourage intuitive sympathy for Durkheimian teaching. But I could never see why the idea of religion as a projection of the social organization was repugnant to Catholics.

Durkheim was bound to attract the hostility of pious Christians by announcing his sociological theory of religion from an atheist platform. His general approach went past mythology to concentrate on 'actions, rituals, works', as distinct from 'faith' and inner experience. It is very much a Catholic principle to relate religion to material existence, so it need not have been seen as anti-Christian to explain changes in religion by social influences and practical issues. Durkheim reversed the whole trend, from academic idealism to pragmatism. It may have sounded reductionist, but it didn't have to be.

I suppose that the nuns had never heard of him, their reading was very controlled. If they had, we would have expected them to back Durkheim against a spiritualizing trend that watered down the full, bold doctrine of the Incarnation as they taught it to us. They had warned us of the heresies against which Augustine had fulminated, the division between spirit and flesh. They taught us to think of religion as a total way of life, robustly material as well as robustly spiritual. Durkheim's sociological view chimed with important distinctions between white/brown gloves, places for talking and places for silence, honour for material things, food, sex, procreation, flesh, blood. Durkheim opened a path into the mysterious unities that religion evokes. I felt that Durkheim was much misunderstood and that it should be possible to sanitize his ideas and make anthropology safe for Catholics.

By the 1960s I had left Oxford and was teaching in London University. But Oxford anthropology had given me an abiding interest in the diversity of culture, always inviting the old question about why religions vary. How do

the social systems that uphold the beliefs vary? How are some hierarchical and others egalitarian? It had been explicit that religion upholds the social system of the believers, and therefore implicit that a new social movement would need to attack the beliefs of the period it was superseding. We certainly should have been ready for the anti-ritualism of the 1960s. But many of us were taken by surprise.

The Lele of the Kasai

In 1949 I went to live among the Lele in the Kasai, in the then Belgian Congo, in order to do fieldwork for my Doctor of Philosophy. Handsome, clever, imaginative, fun-loving, they were skilled craftsmen in wood and textiles. It was by studying their food taboos and rules about who could enter the forest, the abode of spirits, and at what times, that I started to think about the themes of *Purity and Danger.* Certain forest animals were associated with women, and either could not for that reason be eaten by women, or had to be reserved exclusively for women. Carnivores were sorcerers in disguise, and only certain cult initiates could safely eat them. Burrowing animals were associated with the buried ancestors whose underground habitations they shared; birds and squirrels, with God in the sky; fish, with water and fertility spirits. And so on. It was not a matter of taking one taboo at a time, and trying to understand it by itself, it was always a matter of the general pattern. Their cosmology projected the whole of their society on to designated spaces and times, using the technique of prohibitions with which I was very familiar.[5]

I have subsequently come to regard taboos as hierarchizing devices for protecting harmony in thought and order in society. But I did not see it like that at the time because the Lele were not 'hierarchical' in any conventional way; on the contrary, they were fanatically egalitarian. They never accepted authority, questioning any attempt to exert it. So the village chief was like a constitutional monarch, ceremonial only, with no functions. To make sure he would be useless, the rule was that he had to be the oldest man in the village, so bow-legged, toothless, leaning on a stick. The man who really ran the village affairs was the Village Diviner. He was to the Village Chief as the Mistress General was to the Reverend Mother at school, or as the wife to the husband in my grandmother's home. And in a typical analogical twist that emphasized their complementarity, the Lele man who held the more effective post bore the title of 'Wife-of- the-Village'.

Lele had no hierarchies of command except within the family between brothers where seniority by age gave some responsibilities and claims. Instead of an up/down vertical dimension the village structure was based on alternations of status. It was divided in half – the men built their huts in

order of age, but alternating the named age groups. The oldest married men, approximately from the age of 50 plus, lived with their wives and children together at one end, and next to them were the huts of the younger middle-aged men of 30–40. The men of the second oldest age were on the other side, the men from 40–50 years, next to whom lived the youngest married men, from 20–30. Unmarried men lived together on the outskirts. By this system, age groups adjacent in age were kept apart. The elders on each side were expected to protect and speak for the juniors living with them. A peculiar system, it was intelligible to them as alternation between the generations and was a common pattern used in other contexts. Men were allowed to be on intimate personal terms with grandsons, but taboos of mutual respect formally separated them from their sons. The same pattern was carried out in eating rules, sex rules, nakedness rules and speech rules.

What first struck me when I arrived was the absence of authority. No one could get anyone else to do anything he didn't want. It was very hard to mobilize a working party for anything except hunting. Seeing them again in the perspective of this lecture, and in the perspective of my grandmother's house and the convents, I have to recognize that their taboos and separations were techniques for dispersing power. This is what hierarchy does. For their refusal of authority they paid a big price in lack of coordination. Instead of authority they instituted a heavy encrustation of taboos as buffers separating individuals from others with whom they might be tempted to quarrel. Sadly, this did not entirely prevent feuds and disputes.

If I had been there twenty years earlier, before the last ambush of a district officer in the 1930s, I might have seen a hierarchy that worked. They had still kept the trappings, the separations of places and times, the projection of society on nature, and especially on the wild animals, so that disasters could be plausibly attributed to breach of the rules. But when I was there they had been suffering the gross change of status from free men to colonial subjects. They, who resisted one of themselves giving orders, now themselves had to obey outsiders. Essential parts of their system for living together were not working. Their society was in ruins, and their religion too, fears of sorcery were unchecked, hierarchy was a pious dream in face of the administration, the missions, taxes, labour and commerce. For the rest of my life, I have been trying to understand this experience.

University College

I stayed in the Anthropology department of University College London from 1951 until 1977. It is a wonderful place, founded on liberal principles with the special intention of breaking the hold of the Established Church of England on the universities. Its constitution ruled that no one should

be debarred from learning or teaching on account of religious dissent. So Muslims, non-conformists, free-thinkers and Catholics were free to work there. And here we go again! Wanting to make a space for free thought, they created a taboo-like prohibition: there was never to be a divinity school. It became known as the Godless University.

It used to be a very hierarchical structure, authority delegated at every level, and the up/down command structure was matched by strong down/up communications. Responsibility was clear and claims for redress of wrongs could travel easily upwards, from student to head of department, to dean, to provost. I saw it happen and credited this aspect of the system with the much easier time we had in the student riots of 1968 than the egalitarian London School of Economics.

In spite of all the legislation for tolerance, I could not but know that it was odd to be a practising Catholic (except in the departments of Italian and Medieval History). As Noel Annan has described it, the mainstream was rationalist and radical. So I did occasionally hear those old quips. Affectionately enough, Daryll Forde used to tease me: 'How can you bear the hypocrisy of being a Catholic?' A biologist with whom I made friends, when she heard I was a Catholic, exclaimed in astonishment: 'In these days! In this College! To hear a thing like that! It makes your mouth go dry!' Trained to non-confrontation I held my peace, but privately dismissed such comments as superficial.

The slightly critical atmosphere did me nothing but good. Everyone has to learn to think past the barrier of prejudice. The nuns' pride in intellectual independence was a good support.

Purity and Danger

As I learned about other religions, I came to expect that a religion suited the life of its worshippers, that the beliefs would be adjusted to the circumstances, that if there was to be a reason for local variation it was not even slightly cynical to look for the explanation in the costs and rewards of their way of life, and then to expect worshippers unscrupulously to use their particular heritage of sacred books and signs to promote their struggles with each other, often on quite secular issues. To expect them to find spiritual beings who defend them and attack their enemies, and to call in the cosmos to control each other, blaming the rigours of drought or floods on each others' sins. Seeing how religion gets put to private use prepares one for finding the face of God battered about and transformed in this way or that by religious people. The encounter with Durkheim's approach, and its elegant exposition in the fieldwork monographs of 1950s anthropologists helped me to shrug off the quips about not being able to be an anthropologist and a Catholic.

My further riposte against the then current anthropology of religion was to write a book about dirt and cleanliness. The main intention *of Purity and Danger*[6] was to join up certain threads that should never have been broken. The cut that had separated us, moderns from primitives (as we were still allowed to call those others in those days), had to be repaired. Another cut wrongly separated religious speculations in metaphysics and theology from the daily lives and practice of the worshippers. Because of my youthful experience of hierarchy as a system of marked places, and the training that focused on being in the right place at the right time, I was powerfully struck by Lord Chesterfield's definition of dirt as 'matter out of place'. It provided a rubric that included simple household rules of tidiness and cleaning, and every other kind of patterned separation and arrangement.

We had lived in highly classified worlds, as my grandmother's house or the convent school, worlds constructed from rules about placement and infringements of placing rules. After reading Durkheim and Mauss on classification, I was confident that worlds constructed by taboos would be built the same way. This was how I knew it was a mistake to treat taboo and pollution as matters to be found in exotic cultures but not in our own. Like our own taboos on talking about sex and money, I proposed that foreign taboos are rational attempts to control the flow of information and to resist challenge to a precarious view of the world.

The upheavals of the 1960s had forced some of this on our attention. We were asked vociferously to think about the pollution of rivers, the fate of the little snail darter, and meaningless rituals. At the back of these demands to care for the environment was the distress caused by the Vietnam war, which created a lively concern for injustice of all kinds, poverty, race and gender. New taboos emerged, such as polluting the pure mountain air with cigarette smoking, and old words became newly defined as incorrect. Seeing the play all round us of the very forces we had been reading about in our anthropology classics was further incentive to pursue this path of inquiry.

Cultural bias

In *Purity and Danger* I had argued that social beings have a necessary love of order, and feel universally disquieted by its absence. But here were our friends, sane people, inviting disorder, and rejecting order. In one university enraged students burned the library catalogues, in several places women threw off their restraining garments and burned them. Obviously the idea of a universal preference for order and control needed to be nuanced. 'What about artists?' Basil Bernstein expostulated, 'painters revel in dirt and disorder, they thrive in it, the only point of order they want in their world is on the canvas itself.' True, not everyone has a strong natural love of hierarchy!

This forced me to rethink my central thesis comparatively. Thanks largely to Bernstein himself I worked on a four-part model of social organizations, each in contrast with the others, and each supported by its own kind of appropriate religion or cosmology.[7] Still following faithfully the convent teaching that the Incarnation is the central Christian doctrine, I assumed, following Durkheim, that without the relevant supporting classifications and values the material aspects of an organization would not be viable, and, vice versa, without the appropriate organization, the cultural values would make no sense. Culture and society are one as are mind and brain.

The work on this fourfold model soon became a tremendously satisfying collective effort.[8] And it still is. Supported by major research of colleagues who have been working on these problems, I have been privileged to take part in a large, developing programme to address the initial questions about cultural diversity. I had originally set up a scheme displaying four different kinds of culture, each adjusted to its organizational base.

1. The first of the four cultures we have noted already at length: hierarchy is based on strongly prescribed vertical and lateral boundaries.

2. The next, individualism, is strongly based on competition, not prescription, which makes it weak on boundaries. Its principles are quite incompatible with hierarchy, but a society that can help both cultures to accommodate their aims in agonistic tension is very resilient.

3. Third, enclaves are usually splinter groups that have hived off the main-stream and tend to be egalitarian in principle. This makes them relatively unstructured except for a strong focus on the outside boundary that separates them from the rest of the world. Their rationality is concerned with the ideal just society and protest against an unjust present. The mainstream, based on the mutually antagonistic control of hierarchy and individualism, is well advised to attend to the more sensitive conscience of the enclaves in its midst.

4. The fourth is the culture of the isolates; they tend to belong to categories which are not strongly integrated into the community, often victims of policies designed to satisfy effective lobbies, and often their plight sup-plies the enclaves with ammunition against the unrighteousness of the other cultures.

This work of categorizing types of organizations with each their own appro-priate and supporting culture was feeding my long-time interest in religion. Studying their interactions seemed a good way of trying to understand the encompassing role of hierarchy, and how its failure comes about, or could be prevented. This much I understood, but I was stuck with a static model, a mere description of cultural variety, according to which cultural change

could only come from outside. I plugged on, examining details of the four particular cultures, but when it came to explaining cultural change, I had to be content with arm-waving towards external factors (like war or new economic opportunity), that could force reorganization entailing the consequent cultural shift. It was a scheme, but not a model because it had no principle of change. Fortunately, and to my great satisfaction, colleagues Michael Thompson and Aaron Wildavsky, twenty years later, dynamized it by recognizing that relations between the said four cultural types are inherently adversarial.[9] This makes it all a lot more interesting. By this means the original method of studying cultural bias was transformed into a theory of political cultures. Over the last twenty years it has produced much interesting theoretical and applied research.

It may be interesting at this point (though out of chronological order) to describe recent developments of Cultural Theory. According to the model of Michael Thompson and other colleagues in policy analysis, any community needs to represent all four cultural types, one hierarchical, one individualist, one enclavist (or protesting sectarian), and a mass of isolates. Each culture keeps the others alive by continuous criticism. At the same time, they must be in conflict because they need the same resources for completely different uses. For example, the uses of time and space in hierarchy shows its incompatibility with individualism which is more interested in efficient uses of time/space than in celebrating social distinctions. They must inevitably be at odds. The four cultures ought to be in balance; a community in which a high proportion of the population is marginalized would not be able to function democratically, and a community in which the hierarchical principle is very suppressed is in danger of being tyrannized.

The intercultural conflict is good, not bad.[10] If one of the constituent cultures in a community begins to dominate so much as to silence the others, the community will suffer. If this is right, it would apply to the body of Christian churches, and within the Catholic Church, and within any of its communities. The same applies to its relation with the other denominations. In these days, when the concept of hierarchy is so little understood, there is a danger that the unique vocation of a hierarchical church may be forgotten, which would certainly be a loss to the Christian community.

Food patterns

In 1977 I retired from University College and joined the staff of the Russell Sage Foundation in New York where my friend, Aaron Wildavsky, had just become President. Invited to head up a programme of research on Culture, I chose to limit it to studying food as an object of cultural patterning. The underlying idea was to make a contribution to the methods of studying

culture. A group of anthropologists would work together to study the way that food responds to social categories. The idea is deceptively simple, and once again derived from my childhood.

Just as space had been a clear marker of social distinctions in my grandmother's home, so was food, but much more flexibly and concisely primed for marking the calendar. You knew it was Thursday because you saw grilled liver on the dinner table, on Sunday you expected a roast, on Monday cold meat and salad; if it was lunchtime you would expect potatoes, but not if it was tea time. It puzzled me that anyone should spontaneously go to the trouble of making a highly structured meal. Would it not be more normal to be unstructured? What does 'highly structured' mean anyway?

We expected that the household in which a lot of social information could be read off the menu would turn out to be more hierarchical than the one in which there is less pattern. Jonathan Gross, in the departments of Mathematics and Statistics at Columbia University, using information theory and the idea of logical complexity, designed a programme of research for us.[11] It showed up the changes over a year in the complexity of menu ingredients according to the changes in the calendar and the guest list. It showed how to trace the breakdown of cultural coherence following migration and other social changes. It also showed that cultural complexity has nothing to do with wealth, and a lot to do with status. Most important, our research provided a measure of social integration. I doubt if this fertile idea has been further exploited.

Power

Before we had barely started this project our President, Aaron Wildavsky, who had hired nearly all of the staff, was unceremoniously fired. His dismissal after only a few months in office gave me poignant and firsthand experience of the culture of large corporations. Though they are commonly taken to be prime examples of hierarchy, their principles and practice fall plumb in the individualist sector of our model of cultural types. In a hierarchy no one can be gratuitously dismissed; in most cases office is held for an agreed fixed term or for life. This gave me more food for thought about the contrast between hierarchy and the culture of individualism.

A hierarchy installs countervailing powers: the husband balanced by the wife, the lord by the bishop, Emperor's secular power balancing Pope's spiritual authority, Registrar and Matron facing each other in the hospital. A big school may have two or more heads of houses who can combine to confront the headmaster. Industrial units may have the general manager balanced by the project manager. But the Russell Sage Foundation turned out at that period to be monolithic and arbitrary.

To make up, they gave Aaron Wildavsky what he called 'a Presidential Sabbatical'. I used to take the elevator from the 3lst floor down to his den in the basement (crude spatial symbolism), and we started to work together on risk, continuing until his untimely death in 1993.

Risk

The cultural theory of risk perception[12] which we launched depends directly on two Durkheimian insights. One was that we should not look to individual psychology for explaining the distribution of blame, but to collective bias ('social representations'). The other was how cultural bias mobilizes political forces. That is, we should study the distribution of political attitudes to the blame-attracting categories: study cultural bias, not private fear and phobia. Like broken taboos, the way that blame falls intensifies the current social conflicts.

The political movement of the 1960s was a forerunner of the revolts against globalism today. A whole generation of generous young people was fired by anger against injustice. By the mid- to late-seventies they were forming enclaves and demonstrating against nuclear and other risks that could be laid to the door of industry and government. Aaron Wildavsky was concerned because he was of the generation that in the 1950s had hoped for beneficial economic development and a happier world to be created through nuclear energy. His fellow political scientists were wondering how to explain the shift of values. Why have our values and attitudes changed? They were content to say, 'Because there has been a cultural change'. It was tautological.

Meanwhile a new academic industry of risk analysts was moving in whose psychological theories did not explain it any better. So Aaron was attracted to a method of analysing culture that linked values and beliefs tightly to organizational forms. We went a long way round the current problems in order to start building the political model called 'Cultural Theory' that I have referred to above. We were ready now to generalize the typology of cultures I had sketched in 1970 so that it could be applied to modern society.

This time I was only going back as far as Oxford and Evans-Pritchard's 1937 account of witch beliefs in the Sudan, and to Durkheim on public outrage against crime. One question was why certain risks were blown up to catastrophic proportions, while others with a higher and nearer probability of fatality (risks of road accidents, skiing, or sunburn, accidents in the home) were ignored. Crudely, people who are already angry about politics will select risks that can embarrass a political opponent. The other question was why certain categories of persons are pre-selected to be blamed for the misfortunes that befall.

I admit that the work in this period had little to do with religion. But it had a lot to do with hierarchy. We worked out ways of comparing risk

perception in each of the four cultural types, expecting hierarchy to take the longer view and to be less sensitive to personal risks and more sensitive to risks that threatened the whole system. In the 1970s to '80s the blame was falling along the lines of major social and political conflicts.

I hardly need to say that this approach was not well-received by the anti-risk lobbies, or by the categories of business, industry or government that were their targets. The first did not want to impugn their objectivity, nor the second to admit their own unpopularity. One outcome was to make me aware of blind spots and political bias in parts of the social sciences which are expected to be open-minded and objective about themselves. Which led to several little attacks I have been making against methods of inquiry which would do so much better if they took account of culture instead of trying to theorize about imaginary solipsist individuals.[13]

The Bible

When I left the Russell Sage Foundation, I was glad to be invited to Northwestern University in 1981. To be given a place in the Department of the History and Literature of Religions ought to have been a kind of 'coming home', since I had always been interested in religion, and done so little about it previously. From there I went part time to the Religion Department in Princeton. Unfortunately, an opportunity was missed in both places. In those years I was still writing on risk and secular institutions instead of working on a topic that would have linked up with my colleagues' researches on religion.

Eventually an invitation from the Presbyterian Seminary at Princeton turned me round. I had been asked as an anthropologist to talk to the students about rituals of sacrifice in the Book of Numbers. It was an eye-opener. I had never read Numbers, but once I started the real homecoming began. Full circle, I was back to the sacred spaces of the convent and the reticences of my grandmother's house – and cleanings, washings, different garments for different places, sins, and a forgiving God.

Numbers is a marvellous and difficult book. It challenged me to go back to the comparison of cultures. The early chapters of my book on Numbers[14] attempt to allocate different religious practices to each of the four cultural types we had used for thinking about risk. Hierarchists would be expected to think of sin and forgiveness differently, more forgiving than enclavist sectarians, more sacramental than individualists. Hierarchists would be more formal and ritualistic. When it comes to celebration, hierarchical religions would celebrate calendrically fixed feasts, while individualists would want to celebrate immediate and local heroic events. Enclavists would be more interested in purity of motive and purity of person, and more concerned to keep up a high boundary against outsiders.

I suggested that the priestly editors were old-style hierarchists. As such they would teach a more assimilationist and open religious doctrine than the xenophobic interpretations of their books that followed the destruction of the second temple. As I read it, the Book of Numbers carried a strong political message against Judah's appropriation of the Books of Moses, and against the exclusion of the other sons of Jacob (counted three times over) from their inheritance. Its teaching is to reconcile estranged brothers.

When I went on later, after retiring to England in 1988, to apply the same anthropological critique to Leviticus,[15] my original impression was strengthened. The accepted readings emphasize un-cleanness laws and play down God's compassion and forgiveness. Anti-priestly bias could have led later interpretors of the two priestly books to expect careless editing with needless repetition, as I have recorded in my book on Numbers. Leviticus's hierarchical love of complex analogies, its microcosmic analogy of the body and the universe, could escape the attention of enclavist or individualist readers, antique or modern. So when I came to read it as respectfully as an anthropologist would take notes of field observations, I was astonished by the elegance and high style, the superb literary skills, and by the unexpectedly benign theology of love and atonement which for me is the dominant message of Leviticus. But by now I have made it obvious that I have made not so much an anthropological reading as a reading by a Catholic anthropologist.[16]

Conclusion

I should return to the original remit and address the set topic directly. Instead I will try to say why that is impossible. It is because the religious setting of my life has been too pervasive and diffuse. This talk has been very discursive, but it had to be like this. It had to be about places, corridors, bathrooms, food, clothes and gloves, because the theme is another of the body/soul, spirit/matter, mind/brain mysteries which the nuns gave up trying to explain in words, but which as school children we learned by objects and actions. The interaction between religion as I was taught it and anthropology as I discovered it has been too continuous and intimate to be disentangled. All I can say is that for me there was always going to be an internal dialogue between religion and anthropology, each illuminating the other. There it is.

Authors referred to above:
Durkheim, E. (1912) *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (English translation). London: Macmillan.
Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (1937) *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Fardon, Richard (1999) *Mary Douglas: An Intellectual Biography*. London: Routledge.
White, Antonia (1978 [1933]) *Frost in May*. London: Virago Press.

Notes

1. I thank Richard Fardon, whose biography *Mary Douglas* (Routledge, 1999) drew together these scattered threads and convinced me that there was a central theme.
2. Schwartz, Benjamin, I. (1985) *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, Harvard University Press.
3. Indeed in that period of the 1920s, a friend, the daughter of missionaries in China, who was also sent home told me that there was a heavy toll of child mortality if they stayed with the parents.
4. Teresa Watkin, Heather Bowman, Joan Remers, and myself.
5. Douglas, Mary (1963) *The Lele of the Kasai*. London: International African Institute.
6. Douglas, Mary (1966) *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge.
7. Douglas, Mary (1970) *Natural Symbols*. New York: Pantheon Books.
8. Douglas, Mary with Baron Isherwood (1979) *The World of Goods*. New York: Basic Books (1996, Routledge paperback).
9. Thompson, M., R. Ellis and A. Wildavsky (1992) *Cultural Theory*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
10. I mention this to acknowledge the profound questions from the University of Dayton audience, and in particular this one about the tension between hierarchy and individualism from Sean Wilkinson. I hope I have incorporated answers to them in this revised version of the talk.
11. Douglas, Mary (ed.) (1984) *Food in the Social Order*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
12. Douglas, Mary, with A. Wildavsky (1986) *Risk and Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press; Douglas, Mary (1986) *Risk Acceptability According to the Social Sciences*. London: Routledge; Douglas, Mary (1992) *Risk and Blame*. London: Routledge.
13. Douglas, Mary (1986) *How Institutions Think*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press; Douglas, Mary (1996) *Thought Styles*. London: Sage; Douglas, Mary, with Steven Ney (1998) *Missing Persons*. Berkeley: University of Califonia Press.
14. Douglas, Mary (1993) *In the Wilderness: the Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (2001, paperback, Oxford University Press).
15. Douglas, Mary (1999) *Leviticus as Literature*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (2001, paperback, Oxford University Press).
16. I should put on record my deep gratitude to the Bible scholars who were so generous with their time and patience, putting up with my ignorance and encouraging me to persevere with these studies which they made more exciting for me than anything I had ever done before.