

I have started reading Richard Rohr’s latest book entitled ‘The Wisdom Pattern: Order-Disorder-Reorder’. Richard suggests that pattern is the heartbeat of creation, governing the fortunes of everything from the smallest creature to whole ecosystems and entire universes. Take the dinosaurs for example: they flourished, surrounded by abundant foliar growth that more than matched enormous appetites; they had few predators, unless they turned on each other. But the pre-historic order in which dinosaurs thrived ended in chaos, wiped out by a cosmic collision: animal life was reordered by evolution to become far more biodiverse; smaller but far more beautiful. Then along come humans: like dinosaurs, they have insatiable appetites but no predators, unless one nation turns on others. Chaos looms for climate, reserves of some natural resources and economies, due not to a freak accident but self-inflicted. Between times, wars have disrupted peace and inflicted terrible suffering: lasting peace for all nations remains a distant prospect. Turning to the bible, we find the wisdom pattern running right through the Old Testament, which successive bouts of Order-Disorder-Reorder, having begun with the perfect order, albeit mythical, of the Garden of Eden.

We can see the pattern of Order-Disorder-Reorder in today’s scriptures, particularly that excerpt from Revelation (21v10 + 22v1-5). Indeed, the whole Book follows the wisdom pattern: it begins with order, the churches of Asia Minor going about their business in an uneasy peace, with varying degrees of enthusiasm; then we have chaotic scenes of destruction, carnage and torment before the ambiance of the Garden of Eden is restored. The promise is that the creator was not going to allow His creation to be undone in what are called ‘the end times’; peace and harmony would prevail.

Some consider the book of Revelation to be ‘God’s last message to humankind’ but it can be both far less and far more, depending on how we interpret it. For me, the Book of Revelation is an allegory of life’s purpose, born in chaotic times. Only 25 or so years before the Book was written, the inhabitants of Jerusalem experienced an onslaught that bears comparison with today’s siege of Mariupol, reminding us of the terrible wounds that humans have habitually inflicted on each other. Readers of Revelation can find hidden meanings of their own concoction but ‘last message’? To me, the notion that God stopped messaging humankind beyond the words between the bible’s covers, shrinks God down to human proportions.

Some also say, with better evidence, that with humankind’s creation of weapons of mass destruction, we are witnessing the fulfillment of Revelation’s prophecies in our time? If we are, how, where and through whom will it all end? On these points, Revelation is not explicit: it is not a blueprint. Just as the disorder at the core of the Revelation world is laced with strange creatures and settings that require interpretation, so too does the final re-ordering. A new heaven and a new earth is promised in chapter 21, with a ‘new Jerusalem’, ‘adorned like a bride’. In today’s excerpt we are told that the new city, without a temple we should note, will come down from heaven (i.e. it will be established here on earth) and all nations will come to appreciate and bask in perpetual light, emanating from the creator, side-by-side with Jesus, described figuratively as THE Lamb. What that will look like in reality and eternity is anyone’s guess. As Jesuit, Greg Boyle says:

*‘Those who know always know that they don’t know.’*

We must be prepared to live with uncertainty, rather than with the false certainty of a ‘final message’. In our Gospel (Jn 14 v23-29), John reminds us that Jesus did not strive to have the last word. He speaks with what Richard Rohr calls ‘mystical certitude’ rather than the “mouthy certitude” of a ‘last message’.

Jesus' words are utterly authoritative but also humble. He doesn't push an agenda, compel anyone to join a club, a political party, or even a religion. His message is carried in his persona: a calm, collected, divine presence. We are promised that both He and the Father "*will come to (those who love him and keep his word) and make our home with them.*" The Father, once thought to dwell in tabernacle and temple, the old order so-to-speak, dwells in us, thanks to Jesus. Jesus promises open-ended access to a compassionate creator, after His death, re-ordering our world and realigning humankind with the divine plan, after a long period of chaos.

Finally we come to that passage from Acts (16 v 9-15), describing Paul's impromptu mission to Macedonia. It provides a snapshot of the sort of thing that happens when someone is in intimate relationship with Jesus and the Father. Paul has become consumed by the need for reorder, anticipating imminent chaos. He seizes the moment and, through Lydia, the church grows a new branch. To pick up a metaphor from the Revelation text, a 'Tree of Life' takes root, as the Pauline pattern is reproduced by saints down the ages and will be in years to come. Once a figment of the imagination from Genesis, the Tree of Life grows beyond the stature of a giant Redwood, defying botanical description: it appears on both sides of a river, flowing from earth to heaven i.e., is everywhere and ever-fruitful. Healing is in its foliage, which represents the achievements of a trillion Lydias.

Today's challenge for us, as individuals, is to so re-order our lives in chaotic times as to become part of God's solution, rather than perpetuating chaos. God is speaking to us through visionaries like Richard Rohr but will the dinosaur that is the church have 'ears to hear' before disappearing in self-inflicted chaos?

*Neville*