

## **ORDER, DISORDER, RE-ORDER**

### **ORDER & DISORDER**

A very warm welcome to those of you joining this Home Retreat, which will be in two parts, the first section today and the second section at a date to be determined. My name is Fr Christopher. A slightly different version of this retreat was given to the Ampleforth Society a few weeks ago. Those of you who have been on my retreats before will also recognise elements of a Retreat called Homeward Bound, based on Richard Rohr's book, 'Falling Upwards'.

Richard Rohr had a reflection, a few months ago on a Threesome, which he called 'Order, Disorder and Re-Order. As he said in his first reflection: 'This is the universal pattern that connects and solidifies our relationships with everything around us. The trajectory of transformation and growth, as I see the great religious and philosophical traditions charting it, uses many metaphors for this pattern. To grow toward love, union, salvation, or enlightenment, we must be moved from *Order* to *Disorder* and then ultimately to *Reorder*. In our Christian tradition we call this 'The Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ or 'The Paschal Mystery.

In this section of the retreat today, I would like to reflect with you on the two elements of Order and Disorder, which many of us are familiar with, especially during a Pandemic and following the Presidential Election in the United States, which has impinged on all of us. We can also see it in the pattern of events in the Bible, both during the Old Testament in the history of Israel, and particularly in the New Testament story of Jesus, which we call the Gospel.

To quote Richard again: 'A sense of order is the easiest and most natural way to begin; it is a needed first "container." or structure to contain an ordered existence. I cannot think of a culture in human history, before the present postmodern era, that did not value; law, tradition, custom, family loyalties, authority, boundaries, and morality of some clear sort. While these aren't perfect elements of our first container, they give us the necessary security, predictability, impulse control, and ego structure that we need, before the chaos of real life shows up. As far as I can see it, healthily conservative people tend to grow up more naturally and more happily than those who receive only freeform or build-it-yourself worldviews, from their parents and teachers.'

Rather than talk in too general terms, I want to use some of my own experience to illustrate this first-half of life journey, and the building of a first 'container', reflect a little on our current world situation, and invite you to reflect on your own story. For my own part, I emerged from a fairly strong post-war container. Although I was born abroad, it was in part of the British Empire, albeit one which was about to gain its independence. Hence, we are all born into a period of history, in our own or some other culture, which had its own peculiar character. My father was strong yet gentle; my mother was physically weak from polio, but still quite a strong character. My father had employment, my mother had some independent means, and we were not rich by today's standards, but very comfortable. We were able to obtain quite a substantial property when my parents returned to England, and I was sent to school at a place called Gilling Castle, the Preparatory school for Ampleforth College. I had been baptised into the Roman Catholic Church shortly after birth, and brought up an RC, at least to the extent of weekly Mass and monthly confession. I remained at those schools from 1955-1965. This gives you something of the style of my parent's container from which I emerged as a young man. However, bear in mind that the container my parents built was itself part of a Reordering after the Disorder of the second World War, so the patterns that we follow are all interconnected and overlapping with patterns in Society and between generations. As I relate more of my own story, reflect upon your

own, and if any of you are emerging from school or University at this moment, think of our present world situation.

There are three very basic questions which we answer for the first half of life task, when we leave home: Who am I and what makes me significant? How do I support myself? Who will accompany me? These questions are significant; and setting about answering them takes a lot of energy and planning. They can become so absorbing that this journey and its 'completion' may appear to be the only journey for one's whole life. As we shall see, there are often interruptions and upsets, but most of us maintain a focus and direction of travel which is our ordered first journey in life.

Parents and relatives provided advice, according to their own idea of 'order', for the start of my own journey after school: University (in my case a Chemical Engineering degree), a Job, Marriage, and 2.4 children, was part of the expectations of my relatives. I wanted to be a monk. The answers to my three questions would be: I would have an identity as a monk of Ampleforth with a new name, I would help in the maintenance of the monastery by engaging in its work, and I would be accompanied by my brethren. My 'Order' was established, the basic container was built – the future looked good. That was 53 years ago.

As Richard Rohr puts it – then the chaos of real life showed up. Before going on with my own experience, let us mention a Biblical example. According to St Luke and St Matthew, Jesus was born in Palestine at the time a Roman Emperor was trying to establish his own form of Order – A Census of the whole world. It caused Disorder in Palestine and forced Jesus' family to seek refuge in a cave in Bethlehem. Once Jesus was born, a form of order prevailed until Herod decided to massacre all the new-born in Bethlehem, and Disorder re-emerged. Eventually a new Order, even a Re-order took place in Nazareth for 30 years.

There was plenty of potential for Disorder in 1967 when I joined the Novitiate at Ampleforth. The 60's were literally in 'full swing', with self-expression in clothes and hair-style, challenge to authority and the sexual revolution. Vatican II had begun and ended, but the Disorder in its wake had only just begun. This Disorder penetrated the Monastery, despite the efforts of Abbot Basil Hume to bring in the new ways in an ordered fashion. The liturgical changes, not least the English throughout the liturgy, were most disturbing to some, though having not experienced the full Latin liturgy, except during part of my first year, it was, for me the new Order, while for others it was Re-Order. Perhaps provoked by the general atmosphere of questioning and challenge to authority, I experienced a serious loss of Faith during my Junior years, and I felt myself in Crisis, until, through the patient listening by one of the older brethren, I Re-Ordered my understanding of Church teaching. I transferred it from the belief of my parents and priests, more to grasping it with my own authority.

Many of you will have had a period of Disorder around that time, or else a personal crisis may have arisen though health, through a relationship going wrong, through financial disaster, or some psychological breakdown. The forms and depth of this Disorder in your life are variable beyond belief. If some form of crisis has not occurred in your past, then the present situation of uncertainty in the Coronavirus pandemic, the Political situation in the United States, and the Global Crises we are all facing, are surely enough to give us examples of Disorder. The question is – What depth of Disorder has happened or is happening?

For Disorder to be a true element of Transformation in our lives, there need to be a number of conditions. In the first place it needs to be a serious Crisis, which threatens our personal equilibrium, sense of stability and even our identity. Secondly, it makes us pause, even stop in

our tracks. Thirdly, we need to reflect and assess what this crisis is saying to us. And finally, we must learn from the crisis and embark on a new journey or pathway. This can take place on a personal level, a family level, a national level or even a global level, depending on the reach of the Crisis and Disorder.

I have certainly had a couple of crises which have stopped me in my tracks. The first made me reflect and change course. I came out of teaching in the school and went into Hospitality work, and I learned that I couldn't do too many jobs at once, or of such a variety, but I was possibly too young to change radically and embark on a different journey. The second crisis however was when I left Zimbabwe and it had threatened my stability, even my identity. As I emerged from that, a couple of years later, I realised I was on a different journey, deeper and more mature. Some of you listening will know what I mean, others will not have experienced this depth, yet, and still others may be in the middle of such a crisis and Disorder. If you are, hang in there. There are ways out and there is another journey to be made through this experience of 'death'. We will reflect upon Re-Ordering in our next Retreat and bring these two retreats to Closure. The time will be announced later.

Thank you for listening. There is a suggested Timetable with the Resources and some questions and reading offered for further reflection.

## HOME RETREAT – ORDER & DISORDER

Suggested Timetable (But do make your own)

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| 11.00         | Talk – Order & Disorder   |
| 11.30         | Read through the talk again.  |
| 11.45         | Coffee break  |
| 12.00 – 13.00 | Look at Questions 1& 2 and try to answer them.                              |
| 13.00 – 14.00 | Lunch break   |
| 14.00 – 16.00 | Siesta/Leisure/Gardening  |
| 16.00         | Tea break   |
| 16.15 – 18.00 | Read the Poem and reflect. Read Richard Rohr's article. Read Kirsten Oates. |
| 18.00         | Vespers Live stream from the Abbey  |
| 18.30         | Supper break  |
| 20.15         | Compline Live stream from the Abbey   |

1. Reflect on what you did when you left home and school – what were your plans?

Did you have a career in mind? Or did you want to explore the world? Or further your study?

Did you have a plan to finance the next stage, or did you have some idea of how your next stage might lead to financial independence?

Who did you think might accompany you? As a partner in work, or a partner for life?

What informed your boundaries? Ethical? Social? Religious? Cultural?

How would you describe the ordered ‘container’ you constructed?

2. Reflection Questions on Disorder

Have you had any experience which has knocked you sideways or knocked you flat?

Recall that experience and reflect on how you dealt with it, or how you were given the opportunity to deal with it?

Have you ever had the experience of depression, or been tempted to slide into despair?

How have friends or an expression of compassion or love helped you? Perhaps it has come to you as Forgiveness?

Have any of these experiences led you to question who you are?

We are in the middle of a Global Disorder or Crisis? What is your next step?

3. A Poem, by Thich Nhat Hanh

### Please Call Me by My True Names

Don't say that I will depart tomorrow — even today I am still arriving.

Look deeply: every second I am arriving to be a bud on a Spring branch, to be a tiny bird, with still-fragile wings, learning to sing in my new nest, to be a caterpillar in the heart of a flower, to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.

I still arrive, in order to laugh and to cry, to fear and to hope.

The rhythm of my heart is the birth and death of all that is alive.

I am the mayfly metamorphosing on the surface of the river. And I am the bird that swoops down to swallow the mayfly.

I am the frog swimming happily in the clear water of a pond. And I am the grass-snake that silently feeds itself on the frog.

I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones, my legs as thin as bamboo sticks. And I am the arms merchant, selling deadly weapons to Uganda.

I am the twelve-year-old girl, refugee on a small boat, who throws herself into the ocean after being raped by a sea pirate. And I am the pirate, my heart not yet capable of seeing and loving.

I am a member of the politburo, with plenty of power in my hands. And I am the man who has to pay his “debt of blood” to my people dying slowly in a forced-labour camp.

My joy is like Spring, so warm it makes flowers bloom all over the Earth. My pain is like a river of tears, so vast it fills the four oceans.

Please call me by my true names, so I can hear all my cries and my laughter at once, so I can see that my joy and pain are one.

Please call me by my true names, so I can wake up, and so the door of my heart can be left open, the door of compassion.

Thich Nhat Hanh

#### 4. Include and Transcend

By Richard Rohr

The human preference for binary thinking has kept us from seeing that when history evolves with a new idea, cultural mood, or consciousness, we need not (dare not, actually!) completely exclude the previous idea, mood, or consciousness. We grow best by including what was good and lasting in the previous stage and avoiding the overreaction and rebellious spirit that have characterized most revolutions up to now. This demands both humility and the capacity for non-dual thinking, qualities that are rare in most zealots, reformers, and revolutionaries. Slash-and-burn only creates a whole new set of things to correct or rebel against in the long haul. Either-or thinking creates disjunction and mistrust immediately. Both-and thinking creates continuity and trust over time. This nonviolent compromise can most simply be stated as include and transcend. It is at the core of what we mean by wisdom and by nonviolence.

As it applies here, we can trust and even need certain kinds of “disorder” to clarify what our original “order” meant, lacked, or intended. There are always a few needed correctives to every new proposition — and those correctives only appear over time and with practice. Thus, we have amendments to our original American Constitution — and now, some think that these also need to be amended. Every reform becomes its own new orthodoxy and the painful pattern of growth begins all over again. Yes, this is the rub of evolution, like the grinding of tectonic plates. If we can rightly achieve an integration of original plan plus correctives, rule plus “the exception that proves the rule,” order plus disorder, we have what I am calling reorder! And this is good — at least for a while. Reorder moves us forward in a positive way, but then sets the stage for the pattern to continue all over again. Even good reorder, in time, becomes its own faulty, yet canonized, order and its own cracks will begin to show. The need for humility and creativity never stops. This pattern must have been much easier when the human lifespan was forty years, but, at age seventy-seven, I have gone through this cycle at least four good times.

Order, by itself, normally wants to eliminate any disorder and diversity, creating a narrow and cognitive rigidity in both people and systems.

Disorder, by itself, closes us off from any primal union, meaning, and eventually even sanity in both people and systems.

Reorder, or transformation of people and systems, happens when both are seen to work together.

In my book *The Wisdom Pattern*, I shared an outline which illustrates how the great spiritualities and philosophies often taught this quite directly, but with different vocabularies, symbols, and metaphors: ·

Native peoples called it the cycle of Day ► Night ► Sunrise or Sun ► Moon ► Sun or Summer ► Fall ► Winter ► Spring.

- Scientists speak of star ► supernova explosion ► vast amounts of light and energy.
- World Mythologies present stories of Journey ► Fall ► Return to a new home.
- Religions often use some form of Birth ► Sin ► Rebirth or Law ► Failure ► Forgiveness or all is okay ► catastrophe ► hope.
- The Bible presents it as Garden of Eden ► Fall ► Paradise.
- Walter Brueggemann teaches three kinds of Psalms: Psalms of Orientation ► Psalms of Disorientation ► Psalms of New Orientation.
- There are three sections to the Hebrew Scriptures: Law ► Prophets ► Wisdom.
- Speakers and writers often refer to three steps forward and two steps backward.
- Johann Fichte (1762–1814) called it thesis ► antithesis ► synthesis.
- George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866–1949) called it Holy Affirming ► Holy Denying ► Holy Reconciling.
- Philosophy speaks of Classic or Essentialism ► Postmodern or Existentialism or Nihilism ► Process or Evolutionary Philosophy.
- Chemistry illustrates the pattern through solution ► dissolution ► resolution.
- Paul Ricœur (1913–2005) spoke of First Naïveté ► Complexity ► Second Naïveté or First Simplicity (dangerous) ► Recalibration ► Second Simplicity (enlightened).
- The Recovery movement speaks of Innocence ► Addiction ► Recovery.
- Many now just speak generally of construction ► deconstruction ► reconstruction.
- Christians call it Life ► Crucifixion ► Resurrection.

Given the prevalence of this recurring theme, it must now be considered culpable blindness that most people still consider it somewhat of a surprise, a scandal, a mystery, or something to be avoided or overcome by an easy jump from stage one (order) to stage three (reorder). This is human hubris and illusion. Progress is never a straight and uninterrupted line, but we have all been formed by the Western Philosophy of Progress that tells us it is, leaving us despairing and cynical. So, what does this demand of leaders and teachers? More than anything else, humility and creativity! These virtues offer the detachment and patience that allow history to move forward because they keep our absolutes, our certitudes, and our obstinacy out of the way. Even God submits to mercy and forgiveness toward “what used to be.” Apparently, God enjoys doing this because it never stops happening: Every original “order” (and I do think I mean “every”) learns to include an initially threatening disorder, which morphs into and creates a new reordering, and we begin all over again. . . .

## 5. The Transformative Journey

LOVE There is an Ultimate Reality (God or Love) manifest in all things. This love is the engine for and destination of our transformation.

ORDER We begin by ordering our lives around our finite self which is caught in an illusion of separateness from Love. The finite self focuses on separateness, survival, and self-sufficiency.

DISORDER An encounter with great love or great suffering exposes the limitations of the finite self and is experienced as suffering. We either consent to this experience in faith — leaving us open to the process of transformation — or return to the ordering around the finite self.

REORDER A mysterious and graced experience of God’s presence can be tasted and increasingly frees the will to be aligned with God’s will for the love and healing of the world.

### Growth and Transformation

By Kirsten Oates

At the Centre for Acton and Contemplation, we believe that growth and transformation come from more fully inhabiting all of reality—the seen and the unseen, the finite and the infinite. This diagram seeks to capture Richard Rohr’s teaching that the universal pattern of reality is captured in the gospel narratives of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. This pattern is applied to our lives, not in a linear fashion, but cyclically, and it is experienced in ways of knowing as well as not knowing, in an ever-deepening transformation into Love. Growth is nurtured by a daily practice of surrendering to God through prayer or meditation, where we can experience God's presence in our suffering and our joy. This connection to God leads us to become an active presence of love in solidarity with the suffering of the world. In our final surrender to God in death, we will know completely the reality of the seen and unseen and be fully transformed into the Love that, from the very beginning, was our destiny. . . .