

OUT OF ORDER

MARTIN MURPHY, O.P.



ORDER and intelligence are so intimately connected that one can not be found without the other. Order pervading the whole scheme of creation gives silent testimony to an ever-ordaining Intelligence without Whom there would be only chaos.

The idea of order is so fundamental to man that it scarcely needs definition. Harmony, organization, regularity, all connote the notion of order. Philosophically, a brief consideration of order shows us that it is a relation, or the relations existing between several distinct things under some one principle that unifies and governs them."¹ The example of a shelf of books is generally adduced as an illustration of order. In a shelf of books we see one book placed after another according to some scheme in the mind of the person who placed them. His intention is to have a shelf of books of some definite size and shape. This is his end. It is the first thing in his mind. Each volume is then ordered or placed beside another, and all of them contribute to the order of the whole shelf. In other words, we have an orderly shelf of books. The principle that governs the arrangement is the end or result that the person wished to attain. This was the first thing in his mind, and the last thing he accomplished through his act of placing the books. Order as it proceeds from the governing principle is defined as the *perfect adaptability of means to an end*.² Order as it exists among the books is called *order of coordination*. Each book is coordinated with the other. That order which permeates the whole shelf is known as *order of subordination*, that is, all the books are subordinated to the perfection of the whole shelf.

In this universe of ours the most evident note is order. We observe the sun, the moon, and all the heavenly bodies proceeding in their set courses in orderly fashion. The mineral kingdom is seen to be ordained to the sustenance of the vegetable kingdom which nourishes, grows and reproduces itself. The vegetable world subordinates itself to the use of the animal which lives on both the mineral and vegetable kingdoms.

¹ *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 26, a. 1 and 6.

² *II Phys.* Lect. 13.

Further study shows us that every individual in each kingdom pursues its own end which is its own perfection. All are subordinated to the perfection or harmony of the whole universe. Yet all these entities that make up such an admirable order, an order which has stirred lofty thoughts in man and inspired innumerable volumes attesting its excellence, lack intelligence. The cause disposing the means to an end, parts to the whole, ordaining the imperfect to the perfect, must be the explanation. The power of adapting means to an end lies in the one who possesses knowledge of the goal to be attained and who can order all things to that end. In short, the perfect adaptability of means to end bespeaks a governing intelligence. Since an intellect is found in nothing below man we trace this order of the universe to an intelligent cause—God. Order from the lowliest individual of the mineral kingdom to the highest angel in heaven is the stamp of God's intelligence on the universe. This is the proof for the existence of God drawn from order or design in the universe.³ It is most evident to men in general because man being an intelligent creature, the fruit of intelligence has a great appeal to him. Of course the cogency of this proof rests upon the validity of the principle of sufficient reason. Using this principle we rise from a knowledge of creatures to the knowledge of a Prime Mover, a First Cause, a Necessary Being outside the universe and containing within Himself the reason for His existence. This Being has the perfection of intelligence in its infinity. This Being is God.

In this age of specialization, individual sciences have been pursued to the exclusion of all other branches of knowledge, despite the fact that the perfection of education lies in the coordination of all the fields of knowledge in subordination to the ultimate end of knowledge—the God who created and ordered this knowledge and all of creation to His external honor and glory.⁴ Some philosophers through their dereliction of first principles which govern, unify and order thought are responsible for the unsympathetic attitude and consequent disorder in the various fields of human thought.

But why this disorder among men since man clearly understands that unless one has order in his mind nothing ordered will result from his actions? Since he perceives that order is the sign of intelligence, surely he ought to strive for order in his mental activities, which is just another way of saying that he must seek the perfection of his most excellent faculty—an orderly intellect. The answer is evident

³ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 2, a.3.

⁴ *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 21, a. 1, ad 3.

if we recall that the first one to step out of order was the first man, Adam. By his sin he lost the original order of his nature which was the subjection of body to soul, the sensitive appetites to reason and all subordinated to God.⁵ This dissolution of original justice left human nature disordered. Bereft of integrity, the senses were left rebelling against reason. Consequently the senses followed their own course to attain their own ends; reason followed its own course. Ever since the fall there has been a constant fight waged by reason to control the sensitive faculties under it. Similarly the sensitive faculties battle to overcome reason. Then too, by reason of that first sin every individual of the human race has suffered this disorder in his nature.⁶

Two exceptions are made to this discordance, the Christ who was to restore the proper order of human nature and the Mother who bore Him. Now all those incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ through the life-giving waters of Baptism are again ordained to the end for which God intended them. By one man disorder and confusion entered this world; by the God-Man harmony was brought forth from discord. But the effects of that first sin remain even after Baptism to obscure the intellect, to make the passions unruly and to incline the will to maliciousness.⁷ These effects are the wounds of our nature which we shall carry throughout life.

The sin of pride inverted man's order in such a way that now he has a tendency to ordain all his acts to himself instead of to God.⁸ Thus because of an inordinate love of self He chooses the lesser good as the greater because it is here and now the more appealing.⁹ In acting thus he strives against his own reason, for sin is nothing else than a non-conformity with right reason which is that faint glimmering of the eternal law within man. He militates against the order of society by his faults, and finally, and most importantly, he places himself out of order with God Who is his final end.¹⁰ This is not intelligence. On the other hand, ignorance has much to offer in the way of explanation of depressions, of wars, of constant intrigue among men, of why the world is in ceaseless turmoil against the proper order,—the intelligent order of man being ordained to the

⁵ *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 95, a. 1.

⁶ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 81, a. 1 and 3.

⁷ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 85, a. 3.

⁸ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 77, a. 4.

⁹ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 78, a. 1.

¹⁰ *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 87, a. 1.

good of society and society ordained to God. True, the individual is the unhappy victim of this discordance.

From this short survey it cannot be questioned that a continual fight must be made to maintain order in the faculties of man and in society in general. We are assured by true philosophy that the intellect can know truth and can order its actions under the command of the will. The sensitive faculties can be controlled and held in the subjection of reason. For concrete proof of this we need only peruse the lives of the countless men and women who have been canonized by the Catholic Church. The predominant note of their lives was order. This order testified to the intelligence in them that weighed and directed all their actions to the honor and glory of their Maker.

The struggle is *intelligence* and *order* against *ignorance* and *chaos*. Nor are we left destitute in the struggle to overcome the disorderly inclinations of our nature. Through our incorporation and confirmation in the Church we have the moral and theological virtues and the Gifts of the Holy Ghost directing us constantly toward the goal marked out by God Who points out the way by His law, and helps us along that way by His grace. Then too, we have the whole sacramental system of the Catholic Church perfectly adapted to place and to contribute to the maintenance of order in man's life.

Just as in each particular work or act which we assay there must be order that we may ascribe it as an intelligent work, so must our whole life be well-ordered that we may live an intelligent life. And an intelligent life is the life of man. With order in his life, man joins in the harmony of the universe which rises from the lowest of God's creatures up through the nine orders of Angels to the highest of the Seraphim. He too can give voice, before the Throne of God, to the eternal symphony—Holy, Holy, Holy.