Let's follow this line of logic. God is ordered. Therefore, Satan creates disorder and wreaks havoc where he might. The City, which seems at times to be so chaotic, violent, confused, stifled and sinful, then must be caught in the paws of the Devil (that "lion").

Hence the mission of the Church is to discern the ingredients of chaos---violence, pornography, abortion, homosexuality, illiteracy, gangs, and immigrants---and seek to straighten or stamp them out. We sent in our evangelistic posses to fix things or eliminate them by service or judgment. And if it doesn't go according to plan, we shake the dust off our feet, pray God's judgment on its excesses, and move on. Sadly, for all of our efforts and the ubiquitous presence of ministries everywhere, things seem to be getting worse. But then, those ministries don't quite "get it."

Now I have the advantage of a dissertation on this theme and so have done a lot of thinking about the assertions above. Indeed, I, for many years was captivated by such thinking. Thanks to many years of urban service, I look at the situation is a somewhat different light now.

Let me argue with the premises above.

1. Yes, I believe God is not random, but there are times when He certainly looks like He is. I believe that He stands above the principle of "order" and is not slave to it.

2. At time, I find Him a terrifying and disordering God. He tears down as well as builds. His natural creation is not particularly ordered. Just ask heaving mountains, whipping winds, and crazy jungles. Just ask my lawn if I leave it unintended for a day or two. Virgin birth, miracles, a crucifixion and resurrection don't follow any sense of order that I readily understand. Indeed, the Spirit bloweth where it listeth and we know not whence or whither is comes or goes, (nor what these archaic words mean). Anyway, it all sounds random to me.

3. And perhaps our sense of order is not His. He may be ordered, but cleverly disguises it at times. That's what we mean by sovereignty. He writes the rules, and we objectify them into what is conveniently ordered for us.

4. So too, Satan may not be the only candidate for disorder. Some disorder may be divine as when God shakes us up to humble us. Some disorder may be part of the natural cycle of things, that doesn't cycle very well. And some may be generated by a mean, nasty Beelzebub, spinning lies and webs of disordered intrigue.

5. But then, if he were really smart, he would posture as order, dressed to the hilt in sophisticated company, to get us to believe that he was the good guy, or at least, innocuous. Indeed, he might even make a good and presentable neighbor, drawing out our trust before all hell breaks loose.

6. We would then worship at the altar of "order" as our measure of what is saintly, holy and pure. Of course, cleanliness is next to godliness, and, heaven forbid, we've got to clean up our cities.

7. So then, what is our task? Genesis tells us to manage, control, cultivate, clean up, and order things, doesn't it? And so we do so with a zest. And the name of the game is "Control." Whatever it takes to move from disorder to order in the name of control is permissible. And we, evangelicals do it with relish.

8. And if normal means of control don't suffice, throw them all in jail, send them back to their miserable countries, get them saved so they won't be so irritating to our pristine lives. And along the way, it helps to demonize them, to lessen the pain of our judgment.

9. But in the so doing, could it be that we stamp out life itself, and leave ourselves the brave, new antiseptic world.
devoid of human passion and purpose and challenge, that is a shell of what God intended.

But suppose Order has supplanted God Himself. Our churches beg for order, the “Order of Worship,” the “Board of Orders and Relations”, and the Catholics even live in “Orders”. Woe betide a worship service where things get out of control. It must be Satan! Revivals services are not longer tolerated or are defanged because the craziness of past generations is unbecoming to our well tempered personalities and cultured appearances.

I confess that Walter Wink and his trilogy of the powers, along with Ricouer and Jewett and others have messed me up. Wink talks about the Myth of Domination where, to guarantee order, we must dominate. He attributes the tendency to deep mythologies that appeal to our baser instincts of control.

Perhaps there is another way. We might call it the Gospel or Good News that sees the complexities of life, strains to find meaning and purpose in the midst of the confusion as is. Something called incarnation, and community in the midst of the disorder. Could it be that the goal is not order but redemption which takes on all of God's creation, with the confusion and the crap out of which flowers may grow and lives get transformed and neighborhoods cohere? A redemption in spite of the mess, or perhaps because of the mess which turns people away from their loneliness and brokenness to transcendency and hope.

I follow my vision with two very different stories, better expressed than my feeble attempt. The first is from Robert D Lupton in his wonderful sliver of a book called, Theirs is the Kingdom.

“Mother Teresa of Grant Park”

“Mother Teresa of Grant Park”

There is a saint who lives in our neighborhood. I call her the Mother Teresa of Grant Park. She has been an inner-city missionary for nearly thirty years. She has no program, no facility, and no staff. She lives in virtual poverty. Her house blends well with the poor who are her neighbors. There are box springs and mattresses on the porch and grass growing up around the old cars in her front yard.

She goes about feeding and clothing the poor with donations from concerned people. She works all hours of the day and night. She is difficult to reach by phone, and she doesn’t give tax deductible receipts to her donors. To the consternation of her mission board, she seldom submits ministry reports (although for years she has faithfully saved all her receipts--- in a large trash bag in her living room.

The Mother Teresa of Grant Park appears to have a poorly ordered life. She doesn’t plan ahead much. She says she needs to stay free to respond to the impulse of God’s Spirit. And that she does. Through her, God works quiet miracles day after day.

I, on the other hand, love order. I am of a people who love order. I was taught long ago to appreciate a neatly made bed and a well-trimmed yard. I am passing this value on to my children. We eat our meals together when everyone is seated and after the blessing is said. A calendar attached to our refrigerator door helps us organize our family activities. Order is a fundamental goal of our household.

Order is also a fundamental tool of achievers. It enables us to control our time, our money, our efficiency. We can arrange our thoughts, build computers, and soar to the moon. If a task of humanity is to “subdue the earth,” then doubtless we achievers will provide the leadership We are quite sure that God is a God of order. Our worship style and systematic theologies are clear reflections of that.

To the poor, order is a lesser value. Most pay little attention to being on time, budgeting money, or planning ahead. They may spend their last dollar on a Coke and a bag of chips to fill them up for three hours instead of buying rice or beans to last for three days. A mother may keep her children out of school to baby sit so she can see the family's caseworker—trading the future for the present. A family seems not to mind tall grass, old tires, and Coke cans in the yard. Mealtimes is whenever people get home. They seem to react rather than to prepare. Often their faith in God appears simple, emotional, even illogical. God helps you when you’re in trouble and “whups” you when you’re bad. He’s good and does a lot of miracles.

Perhaps it cannot be otherwise when survival dominates a people’s thinking. But something disquiets me when I reflect on these poor neighbors of mine and the Mother Teresa of Grant Park. Their “disorderly” lifestyles keep them from going anywhere, from achieving, from asserting control over their futures. Unless they change, they will never be upwardly
mobile or self-sufficient. They will never be able to create successful organizations nor enjoy the finer things of life. They will remain dependent, simple, poor.

Now here’s what bothers me. Why would Christ say, “Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:2)? Could it be that our achievement values differ from the values of his kingdom? And his comments about the first being last and the last being first in that kingdom—what does that say to us well-ordered leader types? You see why it disturbs me, don’t you?"

“In Praise of Chaos” by Sean Caulfield

“Christ came to reveal the end that was contained in the beginning of creation. If there is any one thing he taught us, it is that there is no longer a justification for despair or fear in the face of chaos. The end is God, life, resurrection and union. He did not abolish the chaos or restore any impregnable system of law and order. What he did was offer us the possibility of being a new creation in the midst of chaos. In the face of sin, fear and selfishness, and in the reality of confusion and chaos, he expressed again God’s creative and explosive act of love. Creation became a new creation. Freedom became a new freedom. As the free children of God he raised us up to an altogether higher level of human existence, a level to which we could not have aspired by human powers along. Graced with his own life and Spirit, recreated anew in God’s freedom, absolved from a legalistic approach to life and God, we have been restored to the original chaos. He has offered us unheard-of possibilities. The creative providence of God has moved one more step closer to us in the abiding presence of his Spirit. It enables us to say “yes” to God. Christ has given us to Spirit which set us free within the fertile ground of chaos to become people we never imagined we could become, and to reach a destiny that transcends us.

This may threaten people of power who wish to organize life, or people who feel that others are too week or inclined to evil to be trusted. Chaos has no place in politics, civil or ecclesiastical. But we cannot batten down the hatches and ride out the storm of chaos as immobile cargo in the bark of Peter. To impose perfect order, to eliminate chaos, would be to end the dynamism of growth. It would be a tyranny that destroyed God’s creative work itself. For when God saw the end in the beginning he saw that chaos was a sort of sacrament; the visible sign of the invisible reality of God’s freedom at the core of our existence. He saw it all and it was very good.”

Conclusion:

Perhaps the city is not as evil as we thought. Perhaps within its chaos and disorder are the seeds of something redemptive stirring, that resonates with the messiness of Christ’s suffering, the spontaneity of the surprises of the Holy Spirit, and with the radical resurrection of new life emerging new out of the dust of death.