

2nd July 2021

Order

**“Lo! all in silence, all in order stand,
And mighty folios first, a lordly band;
Then quartos their well-ordered ranks maintain,
And light octavos fill a spacious plain;
See yonder, ranged in more frequented rows,
A humbler band of duodecimos.”**

George Crabbe, The Library (1808)

I like the feel of George Crabbe’s library, as row upon row of books “in silence, all in order stand”. A well-ordered library makes it easier for the reader to find what they’re looking for and, indeed, gives pleasure to any visitor or browser that all is as it should be. Order matters in libraries.

Libraries can be ordered in different ways. Crabbe liked it done by size, with ranks of books of similar height. At the beginning of lockdown, I remember an interior-designer on TV suggesting that the books on the shelves behind us when we’re on a Zoom call could be arranged by colour. “It’ll look better on screen,” she remarked, “and make your style unique.”

The standard system in modern libraries is the “Dewey Decimal Classification” (DDC), first published in the US by Melvil Dewey in 1876, which allows books to be placed in their appropriate location based on subject. The DDC makes use of three-digit numbers for main classes, with fractional decimals for expansion into sub-categories. This classification system is used in over 200,000 libraries in 135 countries. Melvil Dewey clearly liked George Crabbe’s observation of books “ranged in more frequented rows” as he developed his system. Order matters in libraries.

So, here’s a question for today: are there other parts of our lives which need to be similarly ordered? I don’t mean bookshelves, or cutlery drawers, or wardrobes, or garage shelves. But what about relationships, our use of time, how we spend our money, our concern for the environment, how we care for our health, our times of reflection, silence and prayer? There won’t be a DDC or any definable system which covers *all* of these, or all of *us*, for that matter. But might we be the better for sorting this or that into some kind of order where it’s most needed?

A prayer for today

*Lord, your prophet Isaiah said: “Set your house in order”.
Please be patient with me as I begin to do that today. Amen*