



Global Faculty Initiative

**The Faculty Initiative
seeks to promote the integration
of Christian faith and academic disciplines
by bringing theologians into conversation with scholars
across the spectrum of faculties
in research universities
worldwide.**

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LEADER GUIDE | CREATED ORDER AND DISORDER

MODULE 6 | ORDER, SCHOLARSHIP AND THE ACADEMY

Session Objectives

- To explore how the doctrine of created order can inform the content of our scholarship.
- To explore how the requirements of the created order impact the practices of the university.

Reading

- Biggar, [Theology Brief section 13](#)
- Friedrichs, [Not the World we Ordered: International Relations and the Ukraine War](#)
- Biggar, Postscript [section](#)
- Gill, [Preview Response](#)
- Look at the [Topical Guide](#) and read one or two entries from the 'Created order and Academic practices' or 'Created Order and the Disciplines' sections.

Questions

Q1: What goods should the university promote? How can we act in ways which further these goods?

Leader prompts:

- Consulting the diagrams attached to this session may help with bringing the different functions of the university to mind.
- It may also be helpful for participants to reflect on their own time in the university (whether as a student or an academic) and consider how they have grown through it.
- Discovery of truth, knowledge of the world, knowledge of self, growth in virtue (through perseverance and the attainment of the academic virtues), exchange of ideas, friendship, empathy for others and appreciation of the ways in which they are different from us (in scholarship, particularly in the humanities and social sciences), love of neighbour by attending to that neighbour (whether as colleague or the as the subject of one's research), promoting human flourishing through research outcomes (curing diseases, addressing social problems, technological

advancement, etc), training students to be agents of flourishing in their future careers.

- Hopefully identifying these goods will motivate participants in their pursuit of them!

Q2: Imagine an optimally functioning university. **What would be essential elements of this optimal institution so that it can promote the goods discussed in the previous question? What would it take to realise elements of this ideal university order within your own context, albeit imperfectly?**

Leader prompts:

- Helpful categories to consider might be structure, characteristics, and cultural habits. Again, the diagrams of different parts of the academic life will be helpful in answering this question.
- For each domain, ask 'why is it structured this way? 'Who decides? Who benefits?'
- Some examples might include equitable admissions and hiring processes; effective and efficient administration; an engaged and diligent student body (who do not use AI to write their essays!); effective teaching which equips students for future study or work; high levels of academic virtues among the faculty; research outcomes which discern truth effectively and contribute to the common good; good work-life or study-life balance; effective pastoral care systems; fair distribution of resources; etc.

Q3: Consider all the different relationships you have within your academic life – students, administrators, colleagues, governing bodies within the university, and academic societies, funding bodies, publishers, and the public beyond it (see the diagrams which attempt to map out these relationships). **How should those relationships be ordered or conducted in order to express God's moral order within them?**

Leader prompts:

- It may be helpful to focus on one or two of the domains given in the diagrams. Consider how the academic virtues might be expressed in each.
- In some places flexibility or freedom will be appropriate, and some relationships will require a greater degree of structure.
- In some places hierarchy will be appropriate, but hierarchy should always be governed by the obligation to treat all people fraternally and as of equal value to oneself. This might be applicable when disciplining students, e.g. for academic misconduct. In other situations, hierarchy is

inappropriate.

- If, as Biggar claims, God's moral order is universal, then even if a certain behaviour is part of a university culture it may still be subject to critique.
- Having an advanced degree, a university post, a public research profile, or even just being perceived as intelligent or an authority are all things which confer status in most modern societies. We must be careful not to allow ourselves to feel or act like these things make us superior to those who do not have them. Having a high place in society does not make anyone more ontologically valuable than another person.

Q4: Biggar states that sin can corrupt our ability to pursue truth. **In what ways have you seen this happen, whether in the university or in wider academic practices? How do we guard against it?**

Leader prompts:

- This question asks participants to explore the flaws or the fallenness of the academic institution and in the scholarly enterprise.
- Biggar names insecurity, the lust to dominate or maintain social power, the desire to advance one's career as factors which can hinder the discernment of truth among academics. Sin might prompt us to inflate the significance of our findings or exclude counter-examples so our papers look more impressive. It might prompt us to resist accepting evidence which disproves our theory because we don't want to admit we were wrong. We might denigrate proponents of a rival theory, or refuse to accept when they have a valid point because we disagree with the rest of their ideas.

Q5: Biggar suggests that the created order is best discerned communally, through interdisciplinary research. He believes that the quest for truth is necessarily social. **How have you seen scholarship enriched by interdisciplinary work? In your field, how readily can you work collaboratively or incorporate insights from other disciplines? Are there benefits to our faith, or benefits our faith can bring, to interdisciplinary collaboration?**

Leader prompts:

- It may be helpful to distinguish between two different types of interdisciplinarity: those that involve a field that makes normative or moral claims, and those that do not. Interdisciplinary work between biology and theology or philosophy (which make normative claims) would be an example

of the first category, and interdisciplinary work between biology and engineering would be an example of the second.

- Some participants may reject the premise that the quest for truth is necessarily social, at least in respect to their field.
- **Halliday**: 'It is a verity of sociolegal research that good intentions don't always produce good laws, and good laws don't always result in good outcomes. A gap invariably opens up between laws-on-the-books and law-in-action. ... It appears to me that the ethicist and social scientist must be working together, as complementary disciplines. One elaborates the ideals of a Godly moral order. Legal and social science scholars on law will deploy these yardsticks to discover if laws and legal regulations, market and legal institutions, measure up to those ideals.'

Q6: **Biggar** claims that 'the manner in which Christian academics argue is quite as important, perhaps even more so, than the content of what they have to say.' He thinks that Christians have an important prophetic role to play in universities by modelling charitable discourse and disagreement. **Do you agree? What might it look like to play this role in your context?**

Leader prompts:

- Kinds of uncharitable behaviour which we might want to counter: unnecessarily aggressive questioning in seminars or oral examinations; using ad hominem, strawman, or other fallacious arguments; exhibiting cultural tribalism or polarisation; unwillingness to admit one's mistakes or to have our research challenged; cronyism and nepotism; penalising students who disagree with our positions; treating others as less important than ourselves.
- While making this point, **Biggar** writes of the need to inculcate and protect a culture of free speech, especially as it is practiced by people with whom we disagree. There might be various perspectives among participants in your group about the degree to which your context permits freedom of speech; you might also be in a context where freedom of expression is not a salient political value. You might wish to explore how these factors influence your answers to the prompts.
- **Friedrichs** models responding calmly and charitably to a challenge to his academic integrity.
- Encouraging charitable discourse might look like creating spaces where contentious topics can be discussed respectfully, as **Gill** has modelled. It might also impact our behaviour at conferences and seminars, or be something we demonstrate through our teaching. It may, on occasion, mean correcting a colleague who does not display this charitable behaviour.

Q7: **What virtues does Biggar designate as academic virtues? Are there other moral and**

intellectual virtues that you find particularly helpful for this task? How do they help us model a charitable disagreement?

Leader prompts:

- [Biggar's](#) list includes:
 - Humility – acknowledging accurately the limits of one's knowledge.
 - Docility – being teachable, or willing to admit to being wrong.
 - Patience – acknowledging that discerning truth takes time, and being gracious with those people and processes which take longer than we would like.
 - Justice – being fair in our depiction of others' views.
 - Charity – being generous in our assessment of divergent or unwelcome views; treating people with grace.
 - Courage – being willing to assert unpopular truths, or to stand up for people or perspectives which are not treated fairly.
- [Friedrichs](#) gives a worked example of how they operate in practice.
- [Wolterstorff](#) suggests that Christian scholars experience two emotions in their work: 'the emotion of awe before the intricacy and immensity of God's creation, and before the ability of human beings to understand something of that intricacy and immensity and their ability themselves to create things of supreme worth, and the emotion of *horror* when considering what human beings have done to each other, to God's creation, and to the Creator.'

Q8: Final thoughts: encourage participants to reflect on the themes of the discussion series.

In Depth

- [Wolterstorff](#) argues that awe and horror help Christian scholars to respond rightly to living in a created but fallen world.
- Working in a psychiatric context, [Peteet](#) argues for the virtue of accountability.
- [Spence](#) considers how his Christian faith impacts his role in university leadership.
- [Yeo](#) explores how practicing the academic virtues can be seen as practices of worship.
- [Roebben](#) focuses on how pedagogical humility imitates Christ's self-emptying in the incarnation.

For more information

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