



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 5 | POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE FORMS OF ORDER AND DISORDER

Session Objectives

- To explore the imperfections in the ways that constructed human orders, including social and legal orders, scientific paradigms, interpretive methods, and theoretical frameworks, embody the created moral order.
- To explore how, and under what circumstances, disorder can be positive.

Reading

- Biggar, [Theology Brief sections 10-12](#)
- Halliday, [Dynamics of Disorder in Legal Change](#)
- Biggar, Postscript sections on [contemplating disorder and trauma in literature](#), [revolutionary vs organic change](#) and [moral order and adaptive change](#).
- Look through the 'Disorder' section of the [Topical Guide](#) and read one or two entries that interest you.

Questions

Q1: [Allan Bell](#) cautions that the parallels between the order in creation and orders that humans construct are imperfect, as the latter can be corrupt or just ineffectual. **Can you name some negative forms of order? How do we decide when something needs to change, or change radically?**

Leader prompts:

- Negative forms of order can include unjust political orders, institutions, or legal systems. They are structures which do not serve human flourishing, but rather codify and perpetuate some kind of wrong. Encourage participants to be specific within their context.
- Cumbersome bureaucracies or administrative processes are other kinds of orders which might be deemed to impede the goals which they are meant to address.

- Within the university, forms of order which may be subject to upheaval include scientific paradigms which have been found to be insufficient. Schools of thought, interpretive methods and theoretical frameworks are other kinds of order which might be challenged or replaced in an academic context.

Q2: [Biggar](#) states that there are limits to the ways that legal, social, and political orders are able to embody the moral order that God has embedded within creation. **Do you agree? Where do you see evidence of this?**

Leader prompts:

- The GFI scholars point to the fact that human laws can compel external behaviour but cannot change the heart; it's hard to use laws to make people act virtuously; democratic processes are limited in what they can achieve because of the need to build consensus for policies; and these political and legal processes are able to be derailed by self-interest.
- [Biggar](#) cautions that, since the moral law is given to creation as a whole, it is in principle universally discernible. 'In practice, of course, that access is hindered by the creaturely limitations of human reason and especially by its sinful distortion.' Sin corrupts our abilities to perceive what is true and good, and we are then not able to implement it.
- Human laws in democracies require consensus and thus compromise; many forms of immorality would require intrusive policing to monitor.
- [Biggar](#) describes Russia's vetoing of an intervention in Kosovo in 1999, making the subsequent action by NATO to prevent genocide 'formally illegal and morally necessary'.
- [Kong](#): 'Human order, on the other hand, be it social, political or economic, may have different roles, objectives, limits and biases. It may or may not pursue the same end and purpose as God's moral law. It may adopt or allow debatable means to achieve a good objective. Human order may pursue utilitarians or community good at the expense of individual rights. Moreover, human order may not necessarily be compatible with freedom.'
- [Kong](#): 'Human law is like a shadow of God's perfect moral law. Further, the legal system is administered by flawed human beings. And, there are areas of our lives not falling within the spheres governed by human law. ... Whereas God's morality is complete and all-encompassing, only some moral values are best achieved by legal order; others are best advanced by alternative human orders, including social, cultural or economic orders, often by a combination of these.'
- [Friedrichs](#): 'Some respected and respectable thinkers in the tradition of political realism (including Reinhold Niebuhr, a protestant theologian) have a tragic view whereby what is in line with God's order might be clear to a Christian leader's conscience yet their responsibility towards constituents in a fallen world may make acting in line with that insight not only impractical but

also unconscionable towards those very constituents whom no leader is allowed to betray. Thus, a Christian leader may be caught in a double bind: on the one hand, they believe and clearly understand God's ethical imperatives, but, on the other hand, they must understand that following these precepts may clash with the best interest of their constituents, voters and/or citizens.'

Q3: [Halliday](#) argues that disorder and disruption provide the necessary impetus to reform or improve social or legal orders: 'In research on legal change, we observe order and disorder in a dynamic tension. Studies of transnational legal orders point to facilitating circumstances and precipitating events that press individuals, or industries, or states, or international organizations to create or reform an order.' **When might disorder play a positive role? Can you think of examples from the wider world, within the academy or in your own scholarship?**

Leader prompts:

- Encourage participants to formulate some principles for determining whether disorder is helpful or unhelpful.
- Disorder can show the inadequacies or limits of the previous order, provide incentives for change, or reveal a group who aren't being served by the present order. Most successful movements for social change involve some kind of disruption (protests, strikes, etc.). A tipping point is reached, and the cost of keeping the system the same becomes greater than the cost of changing it.
- See [Halliday's](#) example of financial crises which prompted countries to reform their bankruptcy laws.
- [Bell](#) describes languages as being in continuous flux and resisting attempts to systematise or order them. He describes this disorderedness and profusion of language as contributing to its beauty.
- Within the sciences, results which cannot be explained by present theories prompts a refinement of those theories, or even a paradigm shift to a new theory.
- Disorder can also be disruptive in negative ways, of course. [Friedrichs](#) comments on the disruption to the international order caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine: 'The world is at risk of witnessing precisely such a dangerous era of high unpredictability. The world is reeling from multiple man-made and natural calamities. Trust is low and there is extraordinary susceptibility to armed conflict.'

Q4: [Biggar](#) writes, 'However, since sheer anarchy permits the strong to oppress the weak with impunity, prudence may oblige the tolerance of a regime and laws that, while unjust, are not gravely so. ... Resistance to unjust order—whether in the form of civil disobedience of the law or armed

revolt—may be morally justified, but it must avoid giving rise to sheer, anarchical disorder.’ **In what circumstances it is right or prudent to disrupt an immoral (or inefficient) order? Have you seen an example of this, whether in the academy or in the world?**

Leader prompts:

- The academics who wrote on this topic focused their attention on changes in political regimes, which is the maximal example of this idea, but encourage the participants to apply the questions more broadly.
 - Within the **sciences**, what are signs that a current paradigm needs to be revised or replaced?
 - When dealing with cumbersome administrative processes, how do you decide whether to persevere with an established procedure or build a new system from scratch? When should departments, programmes, courses be consolidated to streamline the university’s operations, and when does this do the university a disservice?
- [Aroney](#) mentions thinkers who stipulate that the rebels should have an alternative form of government ready to install before overthrowing the previous one. Your group may want to explore whether this is feasible in circumstances when authoritarians will likely seek to subvert any overseas government-in-waiting or crush any signs of domestic rival governments.
- [O’Donovan](#) gives more detail about how different Christian traditions have justified overthrowing governments throughout history.
- [Biggar](#) argues that there are times when it may be morally justifiable to overthrow a regime, but doing so would worsen the conditions in which those people live. The Arab spring and rise of ISIS may be seen as an example of post-revolutionary chaos which was worse than what preceded it.
- Has the group been impacted by theological traditions which speak to this issue, for example Catholic Social Teaching or Just war theory?
- Explore the tensions between reformation and revolution within social issues.

Q5: [Halliday](#) argues, ‘If a current legal order is held accountable to the norms of the created order, it will be subject to “prophetic criticism.” The assumptions, veneers and practices of a given legal order will be exposed, revealing its moral inadequacies and ethical shortcomings.’ He argues that mounting this kind of prophetic critique is the task of the Christian scholar, and gives an example of what it might look like within the social sciences. **What might it look like to bring a prophetic critique to your discipline or academic context? How do Jesus’ actions provide a framework for understanding the disruption our own work may bring?**

Leader prompts:

- For the first part of this question, think back to the points of tension you identified between your disciplines and the created moral order in session 2. What might it look like to disrupt your discipline at these points?
- [Bell's](#) description of Jesus' ministry disrupting the unjust power structures of his day: 'The good-news-to-the-poor which Jesus announced at the start of his mission has its repercussions for society as a whole. ... So many of Jesus' parables bespeak a radical disruption of the established order. And his deliberate and eventually deadly confrontation with the powers of his time and place initiated a transformation which was nothing short of upheaval.'
- Negative kinds of order are manifestations of the fall, and they had to be disrupted to bring redemption. Our own critique and disruption of unjust orders can be seen as a participation in Christ's work in remaking or reordering the world.
- [Hay and Menzies](#) on economics: 'The doctrine of the fall fits awkwardly with the assumption of guaranteed social harmony of the market described by Hayek. The Christian concept of economic justice requires more than just contracting in markets: it focuses attention on both the processes and outcomes of market interactions.'

Q6: The idea that human social and legal orders only reflect the moral order imperfectly suggests a need to choose our battles when trying to transform these orders. **What criteria should guide this choice?** Thinking particularly about your academic context, **how can we live well in the gap between what the moral order requires and what legal, political, or institutional orders are able to convey?**

Leader prompts:

- Some considerations might be how quickly or desperately change is needed, what is achievable (pragmatics), and what the consequences of the disruption might be.
- [Halliday](#) comments that moral theory is not enough; we need to test different policy suggestions empirically to see which will bring about the desired results.
- In a university context, this might look like making oneself aware of the limits of the institution and the places where it tends to fail to reflect the moral order. Academics might use the power they have to mitigate against these injustices or advocate for students who might otherwise fall through the cracks.

Extra Questions

- [Biggar](#) writes, 'even just laws rightly allow immoral conduct.' **How should we decide which immoralities are to be allowed?**

In Depth

- [Kong](#) discusses the limits of human social orders.
- [Mahan](#) argues that art which helps us contemplate disorder can keep us from becoming desensitised to evils, and help us empathise with those who have experienced traumatic evils.
- [Hay and Menzies](#) on ways market economies can fail to support human flourishing.
- [Aroney](#) discusses the circumstances in which rebellion may be justified.
- [Friedrichs](#) explores circumstances in which a politician's duty to their constituents might collide with the dictates of the moral order.

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