

**MORAL PHILOSOPHY, DIVINE COMMAND, AND HUMAN REASON: A THEOLOGICAL
FRAMEWORK FOR SPIRITUAL AND SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENT IN FAITH-BASED
INSTITUTIONS**

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Abstract

This study explores the integration of moral philosophy, divine command, and human reasoning as a theological framework for fostering ethical behavior, spiritual growth, and societal development in faith-based institutions, with a particular focus on Babcock and Bingham Universities. Anchored on Christian moral theology, the research adopts a qualitative design to examine how these three dimensions interact to guide conduct within academic communities. Data were collected from 370 respondents comprising students, lecturers, and non-academic staff through structured questionnaires. Results reveal that 59.5% of respondents believe lecturers teach Christian morality without reflecting it in their actions, while 51.2% attribute lapses in moral decision-making to inadequate orientation on Christian ethics. Furthermore, 70.3% identified personal temperament and character flaws as obstacles to practicing Christian moral theology, whereas 92.4% affirmed that seminars and workshops encouraging submission to divine authority can enhance ethical and spiritual commitment. These findings suggest that moral philosophy and divine command must operate synergistically, guided by human reasoning, to sustain ethical consciousness and moral integrity in institutional life. The study concludes that true moral transformation in faith-based universities depends not only on doctrinal teaching but also on consistent role modeling, spiritual mentorship, and institutional structures that reinforce moral values. It recommends an integrated approach that combines theological principles with practical ethics to nurture individuals who are intellectually sound, spiritually mature, and socially responsible, thereby contributing to holistic development and societal transformation.

Keywords: moral philosophy, divine command, human reasoning, Christian moral theology, ethical behavior, faith-based institutions, Babcock University, Bingham University, spiritual development, holistic development.

Introduction

The modern world presents a complex interplay between human reason, moral philosophy, and divine command. As societies become more diverse and morally fragmented, there is an increasing need to harmonize spiritual and rational dimensions of life. Donahue (1996) described this as humanity's moral leap, where global communication and pluralism force communities to re-evaluate moral foundations. In faith-based institutions, this tension is particularly evident as they strive to promote both intellectual excellence and moral uprightness in an environment that often separates reason from revelation.

Moral philosophy encourages the use of human reasoning to define ethical behavior, while divine command grounds morality in the authority of God. These two dimensions, when properly integrated, form the basis of Christian moral theology a discipline that unites rational reflection and divine guidance in shaping conduct. In faith-based communities, this synthesis has the potential to promote spiritual and physical development, fostering environments where individuals grow in both wisdom and virtue.

MacIntyre (2001) argued that morals are evaluated through systematic ethical reflection, implying that moral growth requires deliberate engagement with both human intellect and divine truth. When faith-based institutions neglect either aspect, they risk producing individuals who are intellectually capable but morally unstable, or spiritually devout but ethically inconsistent. The goal, therefore, is

to establish a theological framework that upholds both divine authority and human rationality in moral formation.

Faith-based institutions, such as Babcock and Bingham Universities, stand as models for how this integration can be achieved. By embracing moral philosophy, divine command, and human reason as complementary rather than opposing forces, they can contribute to the spiritual renewal and societal advancement of their communities. This study explores how such an approach can strengthen moral consciousness and foster holistic development rooted in Christian moral theology.

Statement of the Problem

Faith-based institutions are increasingly confronted with ethical inconsistencies and moral contradictions that undermine their mission of spiritual and intellectual formation. The growing tension between human reasoning, personal interest, and divine command has led to situations where moral and spiritual integrity is compromised, as seen in cases of academic dishonesty and administrative misconduct within Christian institutions. Such moral lapses highlight the absence of a coherent framework that harmonizes reason, faith, and ethical behavior in institutional life.

This problem calls for a return to the foundations of Christian moral theology, where moral philosophy, divine command, and human reasoning coexist in guiding conduct and decision-making. In institutions like Babcock and Bingham Universities, a clearer integration of these elements could strengthen moral consciousness, enhance spiritual discipline, and promote holistic development. The study therefore investigates how these theological dimensions can be effectively applied to restore moral order and foster both spiritual and societal growth within faith-based communities.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

- i. To explore how moral philosophy and divine command can be integrated to promote moral and spiritual development in academic communities.
- ii. To investigate how Christian moral theology can be applied to foster both spiritual and physical growth within faith-based institutions.
- iii. To determine how human reasoning and divine commandments can work together to sustain ethical behavior and reinforce Christian moral theology in institutional settings.

Research Questions

- i. How can moral philosophy and divine command be effectively applied to promote ethical behavior and spiritual development in faith-based institutions?
- ii. What role do human reasoning and divine commandments play in guiding ethical decision-making among students, lecturers, and staff?
- iii. What challenges hinder the consistent application of Christian moral theology for spiritual and physical development in faith-based universities?
- iv. What prospects exist for integrating moral philosophy, human reasoning, and divine command to enhance ethical conduct and holistic development in these institutions?

Literature Review

The roots of moral theology extend back to the Patristic period, where early Church scholars sought to apply Christian doctrine to the ethical and social challenges of their time. Figures such as Augustine emphasized the harmonious integration of divine command, human reasoning, and virtuous living, setting the stage for a theology that addressed both spiritual and social development (MacIntyre, 2001). Through the medieval period, moral theology expanded under thinkers like Thomas Aquinas, who articulated the interplay between natural law, moral reasoning, and divine authority, emphasizing the importance of ethical principles for both individual conduct and community welfare (Aquinas, 1947).

By the modern era, moral theology had developed into a structured discipline capable of informing decisions at both personal and institutional levels. In faith-based academic institutions, the interplay of moral philosophy, human reasoning, and divine command offers a practical framework for promoting spiritual growth, ethical decision-making, and societal development (Groome, 2011). Understanding the historical evolution of moral theology provides insight into how faith-based universities can integrate these principles to foster holistic development, harmonizing intellectual pursuit with ethical and spiritual formation (Donahue, 1996; MacIntyre, 2001).

Morality in faith-based institutions emerges from the interplay of divine command, human reasoning, and moral philosophy. Ethical behavior is understood as a response to God's guidance, informed by rational reflection and philosophical reasoning. Moral codes thus provide a framework for integrating spiritual insight with practical decision-making, allowing individuals and communities to live ethically while promoting societal and spiritual development.

Within faith-based academic communities, moral behavior is central to both personal growth and communal well-being. By harmonizing divine command with human reason, institutions can foster environments where ethical principles guide leadership, academic practices, and social interactions. This integration strengthens moral consciousness, nurtures holistic development, and ensures that faith-based institutions serve as models of ethical and spiritual excellence.

Brief History of Babcock University and Bingham University

Babcock University was established on September 17, 1959, originally as the Adventist College of West Africa (ACWA) by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, aimed at training church workers across the West African sub-region (Babcock University, 2023). The institution began awarding its first Bachelor of Arts degrees in 1966 and underwent several name changes, including Adventist Seminary of West Africa (ASWA) in 1975, during which it affiliated with Andrews University, USA, to offer undergraduate degrees (Babcock University, 2023). Full university status was granted in 1999 when the National Universities Commission issued its Certificate of Registration No. 002, with formal inauguration on June 17, 1999 (Babcock University, 2023). Located in Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Babcock University has grown to include multiple schools, a medical college, and postgraduate programmes, maintaining a strong emphasis on Christian moral and spiritual principles alongside academic excellence (Wikipedia, 2023). Its founding vision emphasizes integrating faith and learning, making it a suitable model for studies on moral theology and ethical governance.

Bingham University was founded by the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) and licensed by the National Universities Commission on January 5, 2005 (Bingham University, 2023). Named after Roland Victor Bingham, a pioneer missionary of the Sudan Interior Mission, the university reflects a commitment to Christ-centered leadership and moral education (Bingham University, 2023). Academic activities began in the 2005/2006 session at its main campus in Karu, Nasarawa State, near Abuja (Wikipedia, 2023). Bingham University was established to provide quality tertiary education while addressing moral

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore how moral philosophy, divine command, and human reasoning interact to foster ethical conduct and holistic development in faith-based universities. The qualitative approach allows for detailed understanding of the perceptions and experiences of students, lecturers, and non-academic staff regarding the application of Christian moral principles in guiding personal and institutional behavior. The study's findings aim to provide a framework for integrating theology, reasoning, and philosophy into practical ethical decision-making.

The study focuses on Babcock University, Ogun State, and Bingham University, Karu, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. These institutions were selected because they operate on Christian moral principles while facing challenges in consistently applying ethical and spiritual standards. The research area seeks to examine how the combination of moral philosophy, divine command, and human reasoning

can strengthen ethical conduct, spiritual formation, and societal development within faith-based academic communities.

The population includes students, lecturers, and non-academic staff of the two universities. The focus is on those actively involved in academic, administrative, and social activities within the universities, as they provide relevant insights into the application of moral theology, human reasoning, and divine principles in promoting holistic development.

A stratified random sample of 370 respondents was drawn from both universities, with 135 respondents from each institution, including 35 lecturers, 60 students, and 40 non-academic staff. This sampling ensures that all relevant groups are proportionally represented to provide a comprehensive perspective on the role of moral philosophy and divine guidance in ethical and societal development.

Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires distributed to the 370 respondents. The instrument focused on understanding how respondents perceive and practice moral principles derived from divine command, human reasoning, and Christian moral theology. Questionnaires were retrieved within a week for analysis.

Collected data were analyzed using nominal tabular and percentage methods. Responses were organized into tables, and percentages were calculated to provide clear insights. The analysis considered:

- Number of respondents completing the questionnaire
- Total population represented
- Percentages calculated using:

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{\text{Number of respondents}}{\text{Total number of respondents}} \times 100$$

Results

Research Question 1: How can moral philosophy and divine command be effectively applied to promote ethical behavior and spiritual development in faith-based institutions?

Table 1 – Lecturers teaching morality but not modeling it

Question	Option	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Lecturers teach Christian morality, but their actions do not demonstrate it	Agree	220	59.5
	Disagree	101	27.3
	Undecided	49	13.2
Total		370	100

59.5% agreed that ethical teachings are undermined by lecturers' behavior, showing gaps in practical moral development despite formal instruction.

Research Question 2: What role do human reasoning and divine commandments play in guiding ethical decision-making among students, lecturers, and staff?

Table 2 – Lack of orientation on Christian morality among students and lecturers

Question	Option	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Lack of orientation on Christian morality among students and lecturers aggravates lack of morality	Agree	189	51.2

Question	Option	Respondents	Percentage (%)
	Disagree	170	45.9
	Undecided	11	2.9
Total		370	100

51.2% agreed that inadequate guidance on moral theology limits ethical reasoning, demonstrating that both instruction and divine principles need reinforcement.

Research Questions 3: What challenges hinder the consistent application of Christian moral theology for spiritual and physical development in faith-based universities?

Table 4 Temperament pitfalls as a challenge to morality

Question	Option	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Temperament pitfalls cause lack of Christian morality in the University	Agree	260	70.3
	Disagree	81	21.9
	Undecided	29	7.8
Total		370	100

70.3% agreed that personal temperament and character flaws hinder the application of Christian moral theology, making it a major challenge.

Research Question 4: What prospects exist for integrating moral philosophy, human reasoning, and divine command to enhance ethical conduct and holistic development in these institutions?

Table 4 – Encouraging submission to the Lord through seminars/workshops

Question	Option	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Students, lecturers, and staff submitting themselves to the Lord via seminars/workshops will reduce ethical lapses	Agree	342	92.4
	Disagree	28	7.6
	Undecided	0	0
Total		370	100

92.4% agreed that structured spiritual guidance via seminars and workshops provides a strong opportunity for integrating moral philosophy and divine command into daily ethical practices.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study reveal important insights into the application of moral philosophy and divine command in faith-based institutions, highlighting gaps, challenges, and opportunities for ethical and spiritual development.

For Research Question 1, 59.5% of respondents agreed that lecturers teach Christian morality but fail to demonstrate it through their behavior. This suggests that while formal instruction in moral theology exists, its impact is weakened when educators do not model ethical behavior, which undermines moral development among students and staff. This aligns with studies by Lunenburg (2010) and Shapiro et al. (2015), which indicate that ethical instruction is more effective when

coupled with role modeling, as practical demonstration reinforces theoretical teachings and encourages moral behavior in learners.

Regarding Research Question 2, 51.2% of respondents agreed that a lack of orientation on Christian morality among students and lecturers aggravates ethical lapses. This finding underscores the importance of structured guidance that connects human reasoning with divine principles to promote sound ethical decision-making. Similar conclusions were drawn by Rest (1986) in his work on moral development, emphasizing that moral reasoning must be nurtured through explicit instruction and guided reflection to be internalized effectively.

For Research Question 3, 70.3% of respondents indicated that temperament pitfalls personal character flaws and attitudes hinder the consistent application of Christian moral theology. This demonstrates that individual traits significantly influence adherence to ethical norms, highlighting the challenge of translating moral principles into consistent practice. This finding resonates with Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which posits that personal characteristics, environment, and observed behavior interact to shape moral conduct, and with research by Narvaez (2010), which shows that character and temperament are key determinants of ethical behavior.

Finally, for Research Question 4, an overwhelming 92.4% of respondents agreed that seminars and workshops encouraging submission to the Lord provide strong prospects for integrating moral philosophy and divine command into daily life. This indicates that structured spiritual programs can reinforce ethical conduct and holistic development. This supports earlier findings by Kidder (2005) and Ream (2010), who argue that institutionalized moral and spiritual guidance through mentorship, seminars, or workshops enhances ethical awareness and fosters a culture of moral accountability.

Overall, these results suggest that faith-based universities have the potential to strengthen ethical and spiritual development, provided that moral teachings are consistently modeled, reinforced through orientation, and supported by structured spiritual programs that address both personal and institutional challenges.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that faith-based institutions face significant challenges in integrating moral philosophy, divine command, and human reasoning into daily governance and personal conduct. While formal instruction in Christian morality exists, its effectiveness is compromised when lecturers fail to model ethical behavior, and when students and staff lack proper orientation on moral principles. Personal temperament further complicates adherence to ethical standards. Nevertheless, structured interventions such as seminars, workshops, and spiritual programs provide promising avenues for reinforcing ethical conduct and fostering holistic development. Faith-based universities can thus strengthen their moral and spiritual impact by combining doctrinal instruction with practical role modeling and institutionalized guidance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Lecturers and staff should consistently model Christian moral behavior to reinforce ethical teachings.
2. Universities should implement structured orientation programs that integrate human reasoning and divine command to guide ethical decision-making among students and staff.
3. Character development initiatives should be introduced to address temperament-related challenges that hinder consistent moral practice.
4. Regular seminars, workshops, and spiritual retreats should be institutionalized to strengthen adherence to Christian moral theology and promote holistic development.
5. Policies should be established to integrate moral philosophy, divine command, and human reasoning into institutional governance, ensuring ethical conduct in both academic and administrative spheres.

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