



Freedom from Legalism in Christ—Law and Gospel Dialectic in Luther’s Theology

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Abstract

This paper develops the concept of Christian freedom from legalism for the sake of Christ’s death on the cross. It thus deals with the entailment of Christian Freedom and the believer’s Christological attitude toward God’s laws in Scripture, particularly the Old Testament. The purpose of this paper is to bring the Christocentric reading of Scripture based on Luther’s *Sola Scriptura* principle to another related concept: Christian freedom from legalism. This matters because when we read the Scripture on a Christological basis, there is no more room for the literal requirement of biblical Laws. This is indeed what Christian freedom from legalism implies, that the living Christ takes the place of the biblical written Laws to make Christian ethics, like moral decency for a godly life, be no longer Law-based but Christ-based. However, simply ignoring the biblical text in its written form is no way, but a Christocentric interpretation is a prerequisite. The novelty of this scientific paper, therefore, lies in Christian ethics being free from biblical written laws and rules since those laws and rules are Christologically addressed so that the living Christ becomes a final standard.

Subject Areas

Philosophy, Theology

Keywords

Law, Gospel, Legalism, Freedom, Formula of Concord, Christian Ethics, Morality

1. Introduction: A Literature Review

The literature review on previous related studies on legalism to lay a foundation for this inquiry is the thesis of Harry Allotey entitled *Christian Liberty*. In this

thesis, Allotey defines Christian liberty as freedom from law which has been made possible through the finished work of Christ. He also defines legalism as the belief that salvation demands or depends upon total obedience to the letter of the law, with this letter of the law referring to obeying every instruction of laws. Allotey adds that legalism makes an unrealistic demand on people without giving them the ability to fulfill its demands. This includes the preoccupation with legal traditions as the basis for salvation [1]. According to Allotey, this legalism suffocates Christian freedom in Christ because “if keeping the law was an effective way to win God’s acceptance, then there would have been no need for Christ to come”. Here, he talks about legalism as far as it concerns salvation to say that it contradicts what Christ accomplished on the cross, salvation is by faith in Christ alone, not by merit. However, when it comes to Christian ethics, legalism is not similar to the biblical commands to honor God. Harry Allotey takes as an example for this Acts 15: 29 about Gentiles’ abstinence from things offered to idols, like blood, sexual immorality, etc. He argues this should be considered an expression of Christian liberty, but not another form of legalism as he affirms: “Biblical regulation for the sake of honoring God and others should not be confused with legalism. However, there is a need for further study on this subject, especially how it should be applied within the contemporary context.” (p. 138-139).

This study is a further follow-up of what Harry Allotey says here. It means that it is a further study of the biblical regulations to honor God, in particular, the Old Testament which is full of rules and regulations to conduct the behavior of the believers, but also the New Testament. As Allotey states, this needs a deeper analysis in today’s world, and this scholarly paper seeks to explore how they can be applied to Christians within the contemporary context of postmodernity, especially with the view that believers are freed from the laws and rules in Christ. According to Allotey, those rules and regulations must not be confused with legalism, but part of Christian freedom in Christ. This means that since this freedom exists in Christ, Christians’ behavior should not be Law-based but Christ-based. Yet, the question is: How to Christocentrically interpret those scriptural rules and regulations to make the living Christ a final Law? This is the problem this study will focus on. Because the research is based on Luther’s Law-Gospel dialectic, we thus have to start with the usage of Law according to the Lutheran Formula of Concord, the usage of the law as revealing sin.

2. The Threefold Usage of Law in the Formula of Concord

2.1. Usage of the Law as Revealing Sin

The threefold usage of law as exposed in the Book of Concord is revealing sin, establishing general moral decency in society, and providing a rule of the holy life for the regenerate [2]. The function of the law as revealing sin is in fact related to Luther’s law-gospel dialectic which renders him different from Calvin on the relation between the Old and the New Testament. According to James

Spivey, Luther “emphasized the progressive development of the Testaments sharply distinguished between the law and the Gospel.” [3]

Luther explains it as Robert Hobbs quotes:

The entire Scripture of God is divided into two parts: commandments and promises. The commandments reveal what God requires of us, but also that we cannot accomplish this, and hence bring us to despair of ourselves: so the commandments are called the Old Testament and constitute the Old Testament. To human aid, comes, however, the second part of Scripture, the promises that offer all good spiritual gifts to those who believe, although only to faith. The promises of God ...fulfill what the law prescribes, so that all things may be God’s alone... Therefore the promises of God belong to the New Testament. Indeed they are the New Testament. [4]

This law-gospel dialectic was Luther’s response to Johann Agricola, his former student. Agricola misunderstood Luther on salvation in Christ alone but not with the work of the law, he thus continued claiming that the law has no more place in the Christian life, but the preaching of the Gospel brings people to repentance [5]. In response to this misconception of law, Luther insisted on the necessity of the law as revealing sin by showing God’s requirements to humans, humans’ inability to meet those requirements, and thus the feeling of guilt leading to repentance to God. And here comes the Gospel which is the preaching of the forgiveness of sins through grace in Jesus Christ received by faith alone. On this basis, Luther viewed the Old Testament as Law and the New Testament as Gospel [6]. Yet, for Luther, Christ is the center of both the Law and Gospel [7]. He, thus, argues that the entire Scripture points to Christ alone, Christ is the center of both Testaments [8].

Another aspect of Luther’s law-gospel dialectic is perceived in Oswald Bayer’s *Contemporary Interpretation of Martin Luther’s Theology*, which is the freedom from the law for the sake of the gospel. On the basis of Luther’s work *On Freedom of a Christian* in 1520, Bayer argues that faith in Christ promises grace, righteousness, peace, and freedom, because God has made all things depend on faith, so whoever has it shall have all things and be joyful. The reason for this is that the law which commands does not provide a means to fulfill its demand, there is thus a lacuna for the way to fulfill God’s law, and therein faith enters because Christ who is present in believers by faith is the fulfillment of the commandment of the law. To interpret Luther thus, Bayer states that God alone commands and he alone also fulfills [9]. In this case, it is not surprising when Luther says, “A Christian is the most free lord of all, subject to none.” [10] By interpreting this, Luther referred to the inward man, the spiritual; here is what he explains in *The Freedom of a Christian*: “Man is composed of a twofold nature, a spiritual and a bodily. As regards the spiritual nature, which they name the soul, he is called the spiritual, inward, new man.” [11] But on the opposite, when he states that “A Christian is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone” (Bruening, p. 51), his reference is the Christians as they exist out-

wardly in this life, the bodily human. Luther refers to the inward, spiritual, and inner man newly created in Christ when he talks about Christian freedom. They are freed from the scriptural written laws and rules because it is now by faith the Master of the law that dwells in them through his Spirit to meet the requirements of the law. It does not mean that they become antinomians and careless about the Decalogue, rather they are freed from the old Decalogue in the sense of legalism to follow the new Decalogue that God has written in their heart and mind according to Jer 31: 33. This will be explained more as we proceed.

2.2. Usage of the Law as Establishing Moral Decency and Providing Holy Life for the Regenerate

This is what is stated in the Formula of Concord as the *Third Use of the Law*. It is related to the usage of law as revealing sin explained above which is also stated in the Formula of Concord. Here indeed the dissent regarding the Old Decalogue written in the Scripture referring to the Old Testament laws for the Christian lives and the New Decalogue referring to the general norm or the law of truth that God has written in the heart and mind. Here is what is written in the Formula of Concord, the Epitome version: “After they are regenerate and [much of] the flesh notwithstanding cleaves to them, they might on this account have a fixed rule according to which they are to regulate and direct their whole life, a dissension has occurred between some few theologians concerning the third use of the Law, namely, whether it is to be urged or not upon regenerate Christians. The one side has said, Yea; the other, Nay.” [12] Those two views are seen in these two scholars: Stephenson and Bloesch.

2.2.1. Scholarly Debates on Christian Morality: Lester Stephenson and Donald D. Bloesch

The first tendency is perceived, for instance, in the book *A Biblicist View of Law and Gospel* by Lester Stephenson. According to this tendency, Christians, though they are free in Christ, are still bound by the Old Decalogue in Scripture. Based on Matthew 5: 17-18, Stephenson argues that “God does not throw the Bible away after people become believers. Believers are not to act as if they can do anything they want because now they are free to live by their conscience.” According to Stephenson, when Jesus states in Matthew 5: 17 that he came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it, such fulfillment implies in two ways, first, “He perfectly fulfilled the law by living a righteous life, which is exactly what the law demanded”; and second, “His teaching fulfilled the law, He taught universal, absolute truth and goodness that elevated Old Testament principles to a higher plane.” With this tendency, as Stephenson argues, legalism is the cry of some Christians who want to disobey the biblical standard for living. The Bible, the Old and New Testaments, is the final determinant of right or wrong, but not the personal conviction. This also has something to do with justification because meeting literally the requirements of written biblical rules is to some extent salvific according to Stephenson. This is glimpsed in his explanation of the purpose

of the law in the Old Testament, as he states that “God covenanted with Israel that the law would be a source of blessing if they were obedient... The law as a covenant had blessings attached, but receiving the blessings was conditional.” Stephenson bases this view on Deut. 28: 1 says: “Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.” [13] The main problem here is the reading of the Old Testament apart from Christ, which leads to the fact that instead of pointing to Christ, God’s commandments in the Old Testament seriously take the place of Christ as God’s blessing for humanity.

The second tendency is perceived in the book by Donald G. Bloesch, *Freedom for Obedience: Evangelical Ethics in Contemporary Times*. In contrast to Stephenson, Bloesch suggests a Christian ethics that is not based on the literal requirements of the Old Testament laws, but on divine commandment in which the law and gospel are united in the voice of the living Christ who speaks to us here and now. He argues that “Divine revelation provides moral direction, but it does not yield rules that are eternal and therefore directly applicable to every situation.” Bloesch, however, does not advocate situationism as understood in contemporary ethics because he does not exactly reject the Old Testament laws, but according to his theory, the Decalogue with the Sermon on the Mount and the apostolic proclamation provide a road map and signpost for Christian living. They do so, not in a way of giving specific guidance by telling precisely what God is now requiring of Christians in a given situation, but the Spirit who guides them to the narrow gate and keeps them on the straightway (Matthew 7: 13, 14, cf. Psalm 119: 105). For Bloesch, thus, there is no eternal moral law in the sense of unchanging principles, but there is an abiding moral order, a consistent moral teaching associated with God’s revelation in the living Word of God, Jesus Christ. When it comes to criteria in ethics, Bloesch makes himself understood by saying that evangelical theology allows for the role of conscience in guiding moral action, but not an autonomous conscience (as in Kant), but a conscience illumined by the Word of God, Jesus Christ. It is related to human reason which is, for Bloesch, not annulled nor forsaken in theology, but must be converted and brought into the service of faith so that it can be an instrument in moral decision, though never be a final authority [14]. Let’s turn to Luther’s position.

2.2.2. Martin Luther on the Third Use of the Law

To discuss Luther on this subject, it is worth notifying primarily that he is Pauline but not Jamic. To better understand this, I briefly explain the difference between Paul and James regarding Christian ethical life. In Paul, Christian ethics is indicative-based, meaning, the new life in Christ is a work of God finding its origin in the death and resurrection of Christ that the Holy Spirit brings to the believers by which they can live a godly life [15]. According to Bultmann, on the basis of this indicative lies the imperative—the new life given to be continually manifested and worked out by the Christian Believers (Parsons, p. 217)—of Pau-

line ethics. Hans Hubner argues that “Bultmann went beyond the liberal view of Paul which evaluated the parenetic imperative as illogical in relation to the soteriological indicative. Paul bases the imperative precisely on the fact of justification, he derives the imperative from the indicative.” [16] This is related to the “infusion-transformation approach” by Volker Rabens in which it is expressed the Spirit as the prime and central factor in the feasibility of the Christian moral ethics [17]. It is not only in a way that the Spirit empowers the believers to overcome sin or be strengthened in times of temptation, but in the fact that the Spirit brings new life and new existence for the sake of Christ’s salvific work on the cross. This is the case of Pauline scholarship on pneumatology and ethics which is centered on the believer’s recreation accomplished by the Spirit. With this view, salvation is understood as an ontic transformation of humanity because, in Paul, the Spirit, as a heavenly substance, transforms the human beings substantially. (Raben, p. 4) Paul states in 2 Cor 5: 17 that “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, everything old passed away, everything has become new.” R. Asting thus claims, “On the basis of the fact that he receives the Holy Spirit, the Christian becomes a different person. The content of his soul is from now on divine... and the Spirit brings forth a new and divine way of life.” [18] It also can be compared to what is written in 1 John 3: 9 saying those who have been born by God have the seed of God abides in them rendering sin to be foreign to them. Paul once said: “It is not I who lives, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2: 10). Christian morality worthy of Christ’s disciple flows almost automatically with this view, though Paul still uses an imperative form to encourage Christians for a godly living. This does not advocate perfectionism since the believers live in this world full of wickedness and diverge from God. However, we hold what Luther suggests: “The old Adam in us should, by daily sorrow and repentance, be drowned and die.” [19]

When turning to James, the case is different because the difference between Paul and James in this debate is that justification in James is by faith and works, while in Paul it is by faith alone, but good work is viewed as evidence of faith, but not necessary for justification [20]. Regarding the indicative-imperative structure of Christian ethics, James is more inclined to imperative compared to Paul. Given this, Luther struggled with his epistle, and he even accused of it being an epistle of straw because of the expression, “not by faith alone” in James 2: 24 [21]. The epistle of James thus is less useful when it comes to preaching the Gospel because of his emphasis on Christian ethics without an exposition of Christ and the salvation he has accomplished. For James, Christian godly ethics is a requirement and even viewed as a condition of salvation and justification instead of flowing automatically as a result of the believer’s newness in Christ through the Spirit. To summarize the epistle of James, here is what is asserted by John Phillips:

His book is almost as remarkable for what it leaves out as for what it includes. Christ is named twice. There is no reference to the incarnation, to

the work of redemption, to the resurrection, or the Ascension. Moreover, the morality upon which James insists is not founded on Christian principles but upon Jewish legal principles. Indeed, James was not trying to write a theological treatise at all. He was making a moral appeal, demanding that Christians have a belief that behaves. [22]

The greatest weakness of James's epistle is that it insists on Christian ethics without founding it on the salvific work of Jesus Christ, as says Phillips here, Christian "morality not founded on Christian principles, but upon Jewish legal principles". What James misses is the principal factor of the feasibility of Christian moral ethics and good works: Christ and his saving activity. James thus took the Jewish legalism as the ground on which his admonition for Christian ethics stands. Unlike Paul, he lacks the indicative of Christian ethical structure.

Luther is Pauline but not Jamic, meaning, he takes Christ with his saving activity as the ground of Christian ethics and morality instead of Jewish legalism. This also means that between Stephenson and Bloesch elucidated above, Luther's position is on the side of Bloesch. Luther's Paulinity implies the passivity of believers in front of any written rules of Scripture since the new covenant promises divine law to be written in the heart and mind/conscience according to Jer 31: 33. The basis of this is Paul's subjective aspect of righteousness in which Christ is regarded as entering into the believers to transform and renew them inwardly through his Spirit [23]. Thus, this pneumatic Christ who makes his dwelling in believers' hearts and minds/consciences is the guide of their ethical life and morality. They are thence passive without forcibly meeting literally the requirements of any written rules. The rest that Paul does is to list some aspects of the fruit of the Spirit as perceived in the parenetic part of his epistles. Luther's view is derived from such Pauline pneumatological Christology according to which Christian holy living is not driven by the various laws of the scriptural texts either apodictically or casuistically because the believers are freed from them in Christ, as states Guinness, "The Gospel of Jesus is the good news of welcome, forgiveness, grace, and liberation from law and legalism." [24] This is confirmed by the Formula of Concord, in the Solid Declaration version:

And, indeed, if the believing and elect children of God were completely renewed in this life by the indwelling Spirit, so that in their nature and all its powers they were entirely free from sin, they would need no law, and hence no one to drive them either, but they would do of themselves, and altogether voluntarily, without any instruction, admonition, urging or driving of the Law, what they are in duty bound to do according to God's will; just as the sun, the moon, and all the constellations of heaven have their regular course of themselves, unobstructed, without admonition, urging, driving, force, or compulsion, according to the order of God which God once appointed for them, yea, just as the holy angels render an entirely voluntary obedience. (FC).

This does not mean that believers can do whatever they want since they are now free from the coercion of the law and legalism for the sake of Christ, but according to Luther, Christian moral decency and holy living are the necessary consequences of justification even though they are not necessary for justification. Inclination to live a godly life is present in believers through Christ who is present in faith [25]. Luther, thus, adopts the Pauline indicative-imperative structure of Christian ethics. We, now, understand Luther's position that the regenerate does not need law to conduct their ethics, but Christ. However, we need to interpret laws, regulations, and rules in the Scriptures via a Christocentric lens.

3. Christocentric Reading of the Old Testament Passages Containing God's Written Laws

We now turn to the Christocentric reading of the Old and (New) Testament Laws. It is noted primarily that what is suggested here is not Christomonism, which is the view of Christ as the sole reality, but rather Christocentrism. To develop the method, let us study Sidney Greidanus in his book: *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method*. In chapter 6 of this book, Greidanus talks about the Christocentric method of the Old Testament in which he develops the method of Redemptive-Historical Christocentric. For this, Christocentrism is the basic concept on which the Greidanus's suggestion to read and preach the Old Testament is grounded. He argues, for instance, that "The Christocentric method complements the theocentric method in interpreting the Old Testament by seeking to do justice to the fact that God's story of bringing his Kingdom on earth is centered in Christ." Because of this, his approach does not recommend preaching Christ in the Old Testament with the exclusion of the "whole counsel of God", but "to view the whole counsel of God, with all its teachings, laws, prophesies, and visions in light of Jesus Christ". (Greidanus) By doing this, the distinction between these two hermeneutical methods is a prerequisite: eisegesis, and exegesis. We need to avoid eisegesis, which means that we must not say anything through the text that the text itself does not say according to its historical context. This is what Greidanus argues: "Redemptive-historical interpretation seeks to understand an Old Testament passage first in its own historical-cultural context. Only after we have heard a passage the way Israel heard it, can we move on to understand this message in the broader contexts of the whole canon and the whole redemptive history." [26]

What is suggested therefore is not to take Christ as a starting point in interpreting the Old Testament in order to avoid eisegesis, but to interpret the Old Testament text from its own historical context and try to put the original meaning in the broader context of the redemptive history in which Jesus Christ is the center (exegesis). Once the original meaning is deposited in the broader context of the redemptive history, then it comes to its Christological meaning, and from the Christological meaning, it arrives at its contemporary meaning here and

now. This means that there are three steps for the meaning of the Old Testament texts (and also the New Testament): Original, Christological, and Contemporary here and now. Those three steps are stated by Greidanus as “the sound expository preaching”, as he says that, “the ‘Sound expository preaching’ always requires these three basic moves: from 1) determining the original meaning, to 2) the meaning in the context of the whole canon, and to 3) the application of this meaning for our hearers today.” (Greidanus) The interdependence of these three steps is the following: first, we cannot make a Christological meaning of the text without its original meaning, otherwise it would be eisegesis but not exegesis; second, we cannot make a contemporary meaning of the text here and now without its Christological meaning in the redemptive history, otherwise it would not be the living Christ who speaks to us today through the text, but just the text in the past. By this view, we need to understand that who speaks to us in our contemporary context here and now is not the text of the Bible in its original meaning, but the living Christ through the Christological meaning of the text in the redemptive history. This is the Redemptive-Historical Christocentric Method of Greidanus. This also means that Luther’s Christological approach to Scripture elucidated in the previous paper, *Sola Scriptura Unlocked*, lies in such a Redemptive-Historical context. This implies that in the Bible, it is not the text in its written form that speaks to us the will of God in different specific contexts. But the reality is that, in Scripture, the One who meets us personally through faith is the living God/Christ who was active and spoke to people in the past according to their historical contexts, and still active and speaks to us today through His Spirit according to any given context where we find ourselves.

With this view, the role the Scripture plays in believer’s life is not to impose unchanged specific rules in different specific contexts through the written texts in the past, but to build and enrich the human personal encounter with the living God grounded on the living God-Man, Jesus Christ to whom the Scripture points (John 5: 39; Luke 24: 27). Here, we must avoid the pitfall of the 20th-century dialectical theology of Karl Barth devaluing the biblical texts, as argues G. F. Nagel that “Barth’s theology is a practical devaluation of biblical watchwords.” [27] This is the view of degrading the Scripture in its written form. To avoid this pitfall, we need to turn back to Donald G. Bloesch’s *Freedom for Obedience*. As stated before, Bloesch suggests Christian ethics which is not based on the literal requirements of the Old Testament laws, but on the divine commandment in which the law and gospel are united in the voice of the living Christ who speaks to us here and now. The case here is not an appeal to contextualism, but according to Bloesch’s theory, the “Decalogue with the Sermon on the Mount and the apostolic proclamation” provide a road map and signpost for Christian living which is the immutable will of God. However, that does not yield specific rules that can be applied in different contexts, but Christ in person speaks in the depth. Christocentric reading of the Old Testament texts containing God’s unchanged written laws, therefore, depends on our reading of those texts in the re-

demptive-historical context in which Jesus Christ is the center. With this view, Christian ethics is no longer Law-based, but Christ-based. This will be explained more in the new theory of Christian ethics: *Christism* which I shortly introduce in the next chapter, but will be further developed in the next scientific paper.

4. Freedom and the Christian Living in Truth

4.1. The Entailment of the Christian Freedom as It Is Freedom to Live in Truth and Righteousness

Let us trace back to the Literature Review, *The Christian Liberty* of Harry Allotey in the Introduction. One aspect of Christian Liberty according to Allotey is that it entails another kind of enslavement because, in his view, it is freedom from the enslavement of laws and rules into the enslavement of righteousness or truth. Here is what he says:

Paul talks about two kinds of slaves: Slaves of sin and slaves of righteousness. Slaves of sin: these are people who yield their thoughts, words, and actions to Satan. They have obeyed the impulses of Satan and did it either passively or actively. The slave to sin is bound to act sinfully. The second category is the slave of righteousness. These are not sinners; they are redeemed. These are believers who submit their thoughts, words, and actions to God. They consciously seek to please God. According to this passage, Christians are slaves, although they have been set free by Christ. (p. 112).

It relates to his view about the entailment of Christian freedom as he asks what happens after a person has been set free. He answers that advocating for Christian freedom could send a wrong message of antinomianism, a false understanding of Christian liberty. This is so because Christian freedom is not a freedom to sin, but freedom to serve God without the restraints of the law. However, the extension of this serving God without the restraints of law in the explanation of Allotey leads to another kind of enslavement, the enslavement of truth or righteousness. He states, for instance, that “Christians have been set free from a legalistic orientation, conversely, Christians have also become slaves of righteousness. Believers are free from the yoke of sin and enslaved to the demands of righteousness.” (p. 2) It is evident from this that his thesis program is to try to find a way between legalism and antinomianism. However, his endeavor to do so leads to another kind of enslavement because according to his theory, Christian Freedom is not freedom at all, but a sort of change of Lordship while remaining in the state of being a slave.

This opinion of Harry Allotey is open for discussion as it states that Christian liberty is not a true liberty but a change of lordship while remaining a slave. I think that this kind of thinking is so weird and worth debating. The question is the content of Christian freedom whether it is the freedom to do one’s own will or the freedom to live under the guidance of conscience which does not always agree with human’s will. Anthony Fisher defines Christian freedom as freedom

of conscience which is freedom in truth [28]. This is why Nina Butorac says about conscience as a principle of freedom: “Conscience is a principle of freedom because it is our inherent dignity to act freely as we have been gifted by God. Since conscience is the process of discerning moral judgments (to act or not act in a given situation), that judgment must be made in freedom. A choice that is not freely made is not a choice. Our conscience can only work when we are free to decide what to do.” [29] This also can be compared to what Paul Crowther says about conscience being correlated with freedom in the metaphysical sense of the human capacity to project alternative possibilities to the present situation [30]. Based on Fisher’s assertion of Christian freedom as life in truth, this study suggests that living in accord with what is honestly and sincerely right is the true freedom. Jean Maalouf confirms: “Truth is so essential to freedom that without it there is no freedom, living free takes roots from living in truth.” [31]

This contradicts the view of Harry Allotey on Christian freedom as the enslavement of righteousness, but the reality is that to be free is to live per what is objectively right. If human’s will and desires hinder them from doing so, then they are not yet free. Truth, as says Rhonda Adams, is what we were created to live in and by, it ignites the spirit within (the inner man), with the Holy Spirit in the believers, truth is like an ignition switch [32]. Accordingly, it is evident when the Scripture says in John 8: 32: “You will know the truth, the truth will set you free.” In verse 34, that truth is referred to as the Son of God, as it is written: “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” In John 14: 6, Jesus Christ says that He is the truth. On the grounds of all these, Richard Leviton argues that:

It is Christ as Logos that awakens human cognition to a self-aware, self-referential, wakefully subjective state. In this initiation we maintain full awareness of the Ego in its activities; we do not fall asleep or go dreamy in the presence of the supersensible but apprehend its activities with a quickened daytime consciousness. The “I” remains as fully awake while penetrating the higher worlds as it does in negotiating its way through the physical world. [33]

4.2. New Alternative between Legalism and Antinomianism for Christian Ethics: The Theory of “Christism”

As stated above, for Harry Allotey, the believers are freed from legalism in Christ. However, such freedom is not freedom to sin but to serve God without restraints of the law. He perceives this to lead to a false understanding of Christian liberty into the pitfall of antinomianism, meaning, believers live with the thought of without laws. He thus views Christian freedom as not a true freedom but just a change of lordship, from law to righteousness. Nevertheless, due to Christian liberty being in Christ, the believers now live under the law of Christ, that is the law of truth which Paul refers to as the law of mind in Romans 7: 23 [34]. Based on this, I suggest another alternative in-between legalism and antinomianism,

which is *Christism*. In the area of Christian ethics, this theory views Christ as the end of law, but not only for justification as Paul states in Romans 10: 4, but also for Christian ethical and moral decisions in any given context where the believers find themselves. The reference here is the living Christ who is active and speaks to believers through His Spirit which God puts inside the humans according to Ezek. 36: 27, and this is what I call the pneumatic Christ. The principal feature of this ideology is that it suggests taking heed to the voice of Truth speaking in the depths of the human heart, mind, and conscience. This is so because, as stated in *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, “The voice of conscience speaks to human heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it, he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths.” [35] The full description of *Christism* will be further developed in the next article: “*Christism*”—*A New Theory for Christian Ethics against Legalism, Antinomianism, and Situationism*.

It is worth elucidating that the concept of *Christism* does not advocate perfectionism, but understands believers as still sinners clothed with flesh which is always against the will of God. Such understanding is related to Luther’s view of the church of Christ as simultaneously fully justified and fully sinners (*Simul Justus et Peccator*). Luther’s *Simul Justus et Peccator* maxim indicates primarily the dialectically ontological status of the church referring to the believers as righteous and sinners at the same time. By faith in Jesus Christ, they are righteous in the sight of God, yet they remain sinners insofar as they live in this world diverging from God and being still carnal inclining towards disbelief in God [36]. Jenson criticizes this by arguing that being a *peccator* is a secondary reality of the church and it is then her non-ontological status [37]. To some extent, this might be right, but it is worth remembering that what Luther says about the *peccatoriness* of the church is not the externally committed sin which may be resulted from the lack of the transformative power of God’s grace, but it is deeper than that as being grounded on the believers’ carnalness which involuntarily inclines into disbelief in God and Godless life, that is, their humanness. It is thus their ontological status insofar as they are carnal humans. The existence of the transformative divine power inside calls forth the deadendly continual struggle against such inclination of the human flesh whose law is against the law of mind according to Paul in Romans 7: 23-25. The result of this dead-end struggle is shown in the different moral qualifications of the individual believer, which Luther does not count as the ontological status of the church, but everyone is responsible for their own decisions/actions.

This idea of responsibility is crucial in Lutheran theology as stated by Erikson: “According to Lutheran theology, the Church is only a mediator between God and the individual, and each person is responsible for her/his decisions.” [38] This must not be confused with forgiveness of sin since God is not responsible for everyone’s choice though He is forgiving sin in Christ. This is why we have to

assume responsibility for our voluntary choices and decisions even though we are forgiven as soon as we repent [39]. What Barackman argues that “God will never hold us responsible for the sins that He has forgiven us and will never bring these up to condemn us” [40] might be right, but in case of voluntarily ignoring the Spirit whispering and speaking inside, it is hardly believed that forgiveness can be confused with responsibility. This can be compared to what Jesus states about blaspheming the Spirit which is not forgivable. To confirm this, the Catholic doctrine about human conscience according to the Council’s Degree on religious Freedom asserts: “In all his activity, a man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully in order that he may come to God for whom he was created.” [41] The thirteenth century theologian, Thomas Aquinas, established the authority and inviolability of conscience: “Anyone upon whom the ecclesiastical authorities, in ignorance of the true facts, impose a demand that offends against his clear conscience, should perish in excommunication rather than violate his conscience.” [42] This is indeed the case of Martin Luther in the Diet of Worms when he was requested to recant his books, but he replied: “...My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, God help me, Amen.” [43] It is thus recommended to be conscious and thoughtful of one’s own choices and decisions because before God choice/decision matters. It is also crucial to be honest with God through the personal communication with the Elder Brother, Jesus Christ, because God in Christ is communicable, reasonable, and understanding. (You can read this more on the paper: *Anthropological Christology of Edward Schillebeeckx* [44]) What ought to be avoided is ignoring Him when He echoes in the depth. It is right that we are not perfect, but we should be conscious, thoughtful, and reasonable in our behavior anyway.

5. Conclusions

Both legalism (conservatism) and antinomianism (liberalism) are two views diverging from Luther’s pure and proper theology. This is why a new angle in Luther’s theology is invented by this study which is framed in the theory called in this research as “Christism”. The invention started primarily with the exploration of the heart of Luther’s principle of Sola Scriptura on the grounds of its birth context in medieval Catholicism as I have elucidated in my previous scientific paper: *Sola Scriptura Unlocked* [45]. In his Sola Scriptura principle, Luther is clear by stating that “The Scripture is about Christ alone everywhere”. The Christocentric reading of Scripture can be conducted for all biblical passages within the redemptive-historical context whose center is Jesus Christ and His Cross. The living Christ thus can be detected in every corner of the Bible as the One who was active and spoke to the people in the past according to their historical context of the day, and still active today and speaks to us in the text of Scripture read and interpreted in the context of redemptive-history, according to any historical context where we find ourselves. In this case, it is not the texts of the Bible that speak to us, but in Scripture, the One who meets us personally

through faith is the living Son of God, Christ. There are therefore no biblical written laws to conduct Christian ethics and morals which can be trans-situational or trans-contextual, but the final law is the living Christ through His Spirit (the pneumatic Christ) who innerly speaks to guide into a divinely appropriate decision in different contexts in light of the Scriptural signposts. This means that Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the entire Scripture, he is the Master of all laws in the Bible. Christians are free from legalism and their ethics is no longer Law-based but Christ-based as Christ is alive and speaks in subconsciousness whose Voice is the voice of truth and wisdom.

The next paper is the further development of *Christism*, a new theory of Christian ethics.

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