



# “CHRISTISM”—A New Theory for Christian Ethics against Legalism, Antinomianism, and Situationism

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## Abstract

This paper explores a new theory for Christian ethics: *Christism*. Contemporary Christian churches are grappling with ethical dilemmas, appearing either as extremists in upholding biblical law to govern believers’ lives or in their rejection of biblical law for believers. In contemporary context, therefore, Christianity seems to struggle with ethical challenges. There are many ethical issues for which various Christian churches adopt different approaches, some adopt a legalistic approach and are rigid in conserving the laws in the Bible to conduct the believer’s life, whereas others overemphasize the Christian freedom and imbibe the antinomian approach to argue that believers are no longer under the bondage of any laws. As briefly introduced in the previous paper, *Christism* stands in between legalism and antinomianism, but it is also in contrast to situationism. It is both anti-legalist and anti-antinomian; however, it is not identical to situationism. Unlike situationism which is ethics of agapeic love, *Christism* is ethics of truth, that is, ethics under the law of truth. This kind of new theory for Christian ethics is the innovation of this scholarly paper.

## Subject Areas

Philosophy, Theology, Ethics

## Keywords

Ethics, *Christism*, Legalism, Antinomianism, Situationism, Truth

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## 1. Introduction

Joseph F. Fletcher develops the concept of situationism in *Situation Ethics: The New Morality*. Situationism, as Fletcher describes, is in between legalism and an-

tinomianism. According to Fletcher, legalism views every ethical decision to be controlled by fixed rules and regulations in Scripture. The Bible is viewed as the final standard for any Christian ethical decisions. On the other hand, antinomianism is the view held by some Christians that for the sake of grace and salvation in Christ received through faith alone, believers are free from any Biblical laws, meaning, there are no longer rules or regulations that can be applied to them, but their ethical decision becomes a matter of intuition and erratic. Thus, in contrast to both of them, Fletcher introduces his theory of situationism, which can be referred to as the ethics of agapeic love. He bases it on the statement of Jesus Christ in the Gospels about loving others as loving oneself. Situationism therefore values agapeic love as the absolute principle to control Christian's ethical decisions. With Fletcher, there are no general ethical principles, but what matters is what seems a service of love in a given situation [1]. I will discuss this more in Critical Evaluation of Fletcher's Situationism.

Like Fletcher, this study is also against legalism and antinomianism for Christian ethics. Legalism on the one side is so conservative and rigid in maintaining the Biblical laws to conduct the believer's lives, while, on the other side, antinomianism is so liberal. However, situationism is not recommended, it seems that the greatest shortcoming of Fletcher's ethical approach is that it breaks the barriers between truth and falsity, but it is the situation that determines what is true and what is false [2]. Due to the situation, situationism dares to validate as right what is objectively wrong if in that situation agapeic love is served, which means that the reference of truth is the situation. The alternative theory of ethics introduced in this research thus suggests keeping the general principle of truth irrespective of a situation. With this view, I do not confound the validation of action or behavior as right and the acceptance of action due to a given situation. For *Christism*, these two are sharply distinct whereas they represent one thing for Fletcher's situationism. Action or behavior can be accepted due to a given situation and context, or for some reasons, but that does not necessarily mean it is right. *Christism* does not discuss acceptance since this depends on different situations, but it discusses the validation of ethics as right or wrong on the basis of objective assessment. This is so since it is firm in conserving the truth which humans can overflow but never displace. Here is the question directing this study: How can *Christism* be distinguished from legalism, antinomianism, and Fletcher's situationism? We start with ethical-soteriological legalism.

## 2. The Ethical-Soteriological Legalism

It has been discussed in the previous paper some aspects of legalism, for example in Lester Stephenson and the imperative structure of the Jamic ethics. Nevertheless, here I will explain more about the legalistic ethical concept and its danger to the Christian faith. As Demarest argues, legalism seeks literal compliance with the letter of the law while violating its inner spirit, it strives to obey in order to acquire merit. However, Christian serious regard for God's law does not consti-

tute legalism [3]. According to Kistler, one typical definition of legalism is an obsessive concern with rules, or a tendency to pay more attention to the letter of the law than the spirit of the law. Kistler gives his definition that “legalism is behavior motivated by the false notion that sinners can earn favor with God, either before or after salvation, through legal means, obedience, ritual, self-denial, or whatever” [4]. When it is stated in these definitions the spirit of the law, the meaning is its intended purpose which is distinct from its exact wordings. Neil Anderson gives an example by saying: We should not feel guilty over exceeding the speed limit when, for instance, we are transporting a dangerously ill daughter to the hospital because the spirit of the law would say that in this case, it is okay to go faster than the speed limit provided that the driver does not endanger other lives by doing so. Saving a human life is more important than rigidly keeping rules [5]. Origen argued that the letter of the law of the Bible refers to the literal, external sense of Scripture and that the spirit refers to the spiritual, internal sense of Scripture [6].

Legalism is also referred to as pharisaism because historically it was the Pharisees in the New Testament that used a legalistic approach to the Old Testament laws. The Pharisees were religious leaders of the Jews who codified the Torah into specific rules and regulations in a casuistic way. They have thus separated themselves from everyday activities to keep the Law assiduously serving as a model to the Jews. The Pharisees thus showed a high rigidity in the letters of the Law that they became ignorant of its spirit, and this caused a confrontation between them and Jesus according to the New Testament narratives. This is so because, as Cormier states, “While the scribes and Pharisees were extreme legalists in their interpretation of the Law, Jesus is the ultimate supra-legalist. He takes their legalities a step further: The Spirit of God, which gives life and meaning to the Law, transcends the letter of the Law [7].” However, despite Jesus’s emphasis on the spirit of the law instead of its letter, the primitive church in Jerusalem had a pharisaic tendency as they were referred to as Judaic Christians. This resulted basically from the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE when General Titus attacked Jerusalem and destroyed the temple resulting in Jewish nationalism being dead down. When thus the Judaic Christians spread outside Jerusalem after the war, their Judaicity was marked by keeping Jewish legalism to distinguish them from the heathens. Domer summarizes this by saying that “Up to Hadrian’s time, the legalistic tendency wherever it showed itself in Christianity, had always a certain dependence on the Jewish-Christian community at Jerusalem [8]”. Many Pauline churches were threatened by this, especially the Romans and the Galatians, and sometimes the Apostles disputed the issue.

When we are back to Kistler on what legalism does? He answers that it suggests certain behaviors which can make humans more favorable to God, and more worthy in God’s eyes. This is indeed the danger of legalism as it tends to make another element a basis of God’s favor and grace to human beings in addition to the death of Christ on the cross. This kind of legalism is referred to by Forlines as the soteriological legalism which he distinguishes from ethical legal-

ism. He argues:

I believe we should speak of two kinds of legalism. Salvation by works is soteriological legalism. The kind of legalism that seeks to express all ethical obligations in the form of laws is ethical legalism. What each form of legalism has in common is a wrong dependence upon Law. That is what makes it legalism [9].

What is perceived in the explanation of Kistler, however, is the ethical legalism that becomes a condition of salvation. It is thus a kind of ethical-soteriological legalism which is shortened by Demarest above as “to obey in order to acquire merit”. According to Kistler, such an ethical-soteriological legalism is a “terrible insult to the finished work of Christ, for it is saying that what Christ accomplished for me is not enough to receive God’s favor, but what I do myself will make up the difference” (Kistler). This is indeed the reason why Paul taught freedom from the law in Christ in his Epistles, in particular the Romans and the Galatians. His teaching on freedom in Christ, however, was abused by others about the uselessness of the law resulting in the heretics of antinomianism.

### 3. The Heretics of Antinomianism

As I stated in the paper, *Sola Scriptura Unlocked*, Luther in his emphasis on the justification by faith alone was accused of being an antinomian by his opponents. The conception of Luther this way led one of his former students to misunderstand his lecture. To clarify his point thus, Luther wrote *Against the Antinomians* in 1539 [10]. Although the term antinomian was apparently coined by Martin Luther in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of anti-law had already occurred in the primitive church as a result of Paul’s proclamation about freedom from law for the sake of Christ. For the Pauline Hellenistic Church, antinomianism is due to Paul’s emphasis on the claim “not under the law, but under grace”. The view was aroused by the gnostic libertine ethics in contrast to the gnostic asceticism. This is related to what Luthardt says that “the antinomian tendency had mainly heathen roots” [11]. Kurt Rudolph argues that in the pre-Pauline Hellenistic Church, there was the so-called “Christianization of Gnosticism” and “Gnostification of Christianity” which caused the penetration of gnostic thoughts to be unavoidable in the subsequent Hellenistic churches [12]. The gnostic libertinism which is the feeling of oneself being free to live with the pleasure of the flesh was spread in the Pauline churches against which Paul strove to fight in some of his letters. But apart from that, what Rudolph points out clearly to be against gnostic libertinism are the epistle of Jude and the seven letters to the Asia Minor churches in the book of Revelation. He states, for instance, that “The brief letter of Jude, which turns against the libertine gnostic heretics who penetrated the community and caused divisions, was written at the same time as the Pastoral Epistles...They are accused of defilement of the flesh and intemperance, even at the love feast, which indicates that they were antinomian representatives of Gnosis.” According to Rudolph, in Revelation, the group was given the name

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Nicolaitans, and they mostly prevailed in the Asia Minor Churches, the addressees of the Johannine seven letters.

Sieffert documents that in the Pauline churches, Antinomianism and Nicolaitanism went hand in hand in history, but the difference is that the latter is a more organized party. He continues explaining that the Nicolaitans were, therefore, Gentile Christian Antinomians who abused Paul's doctrine of Christian freedom [13]. Sketching the origin of Antinomian, Steele states:

After St. Paul had demonstrated the impossibility of justification by works compensative for sin, and had established the doctrine of justification through a faith in Christ which works by love and purifies the hearts, there started up a class of teachers who drew from Paul's teachings the fallacious inference that law of God is abolished in the case of the believer, who is henceforth delivered from its authority as the rule of life. Hence they became, what Luther first styled, Antinomians (Greek anti, against, and nomos, law) [14].

Because of this, Antinomianism is related to liberalism while legalism is to conservatism. Steele describes some creed of the antinomians that they believe to be justified as Christ died for them with the faith that they have always been saved. The believers thus are not bound to mourn for sin because sin had been pardoned before it was committed, and a pardoned sin is not sin; God thus does not see sin in believers. No sin can harm the believers (Steele, p. 35) [14].

Since Luther was a follower of Paul, it is evident that his teaching about the freedom of believers in Christ resulted in a misunderstanding of the law by his interpreter. According to Steve Paulson, Agricola was the first to attempt to remove the law from the pulpit. His program was to preach true repentance which he thought not going to happen by a law that frightened but rather would arise only through sympathy with Christ's suffering on the cross [15]. As previously stated, Luther's response to this was that both Law and the Gospel as divine Words which are to be uttered by the preachers because while the law wounds, the Gospel heals. According to Luther, therefore, Law and Gospel tell us what Jesus Christ's cross is, and what it did, so that it has become a preachable word of the cross to the ungodly (Paulson). We see here that Antinomianism in the Luther-Agricola debate was not identical to Nicolaitanism or gnostic libertinism in the Early Church which is in the sense of moral ethics. However, the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Antinomian movement in the English Puritan community reflected the early Nicolaitans. David Como argues that in its Anglo-American context, the term antinomian was first widely used to describe a theological protest movement that evolved at the margins of the English Puritan community in the early decade of the 17th century spearheaded by John Eaton and others. They were naturally hostile toward the role plays the Mosaic Law in salvation and in the lives of believers. They thus positioned themselves as true bearers of Luther's message of free justification by Christ alone [16]. They strictly stood against le-

galism, as Luthardt states: “Libertine Antinomianism was a reaction from a false Judaistic legality by an abuse of the Pauline preaching of the liberty of the Christian man.”

#### 4. The Critical Evaluation of Fletcher’s Situationism

As I stated in the Introduction, what is close to the ethical theory of *Christism* is Fletcher’s situationism, both are against legalism and antinomianism. However, while situationism can be referred to as the law of love in a given situation, *Christism* is the law of truth. I will elucidate this below, but first, I explain Fletcher’s situational approach as ethics of agapeic love. As previously elucidated, Fletcher’s ethical theory of situationism underestimates the general ethical principles as barriers between truth and falsity, but what determines what is right or wrong is the situation. This is what Jenson argues, “In Fletcher’s version of the doctrine, situationism asserts that apart from the agent’s intention, which must be directed by concerned love, only the features of an actual situation could determine the rightness or wrongness of any action [2].” This is indeed the reason why some of Fletcher’s opponents accused his ethical theory of being normless ethics. Waldo Beach, for instance, argues that “situation ethics proved in time to slide down a slippery slope toward the ethics of improvisation and become normless [17].” This accusation, however, is hardly convincing because the program of Fletcher does not exactly advocate ethics without norms, but values agapeic love as the highly absolute principle of ethics. That is why Geisler argues that situationism is not a completely normless ethics, but it is located between the extremes of legalism and antinomianism. The antinomians have no laws, the legalists have laws for everything, and Fletcher’s situationism has only one law [18].

When Geisler asserts that Fletcher’s situationism has only one law, that law is the law of love, the divine agapeic love. This is why situational ethics is often referred to as ethics of love as Fletcher states: “There is only one thing that is always good and right, intrinsically good regardless of the context, and that one thing is love [19].” About this, Oliphant states that:

Situationism puts people before rules, love and community before principles. Situationism does not ignore tradition but is not bound by it, if what has been said about a particular moral situation in the past is helpful at the time and assists in doing the right thing for the right reason, it should be followed if “love is best served” but rejected if it will not bring about the most loving consequence. Right actions depend on the circumstances at the time, on the consequences as far as they can be seen [20].

This is related to the four principles of situation ethics that Fletcher describes to guide the situationists to make the right decision in a unique situation: pragmatism, relativism, positivism, and personalism. When Fletcher asserts that situationism is pragmatic, he means that an ethical problem only needs a concrete

and practical response under the service of love, but not an abstract or theoretical solution. Situationism is also relativistic, meaning, it acknowledges only one absolute norm, and everything else is relative to it. This absolute norm is the agapeic love, to which everything else is relative and bound. Besides pragmatism and relativism, Fletcher characterizes situationism as positivistic which means that as ethics of love, it values more emotion rather than reason for any ethical decision. This is why positivism in situationism can also be called emotivism. The agape love is the key principle and the highest good. The fourth feature of situationism is that it is personalistic. By this, it is referred to as putting people first, in contrast to legalism putting the law first [21].

Many have criticized Fletcher's situation ethics, including the Scottish theologian, William Barclay who asserted that "if Fletcher is correct about ignoring rules, which are put in place for the protection of people and property, then every individual would have to make their own decisions on a whole range of issues. Some rules are essential, human beings need a framework of rules in order to live safely and responsibly in the world [22]." I agree with Barclay with this view, though my tendency is more on the rules or the laws of mind instead of the prescribed laws to conduct one's own life. As I said before, my severe critique of Fletcher is that he breaks down the general principle of truth which distinguishes the right and the wrong decisions or actions independently of a situation, but for him, it is the situation that determines whether an ethical decision is right or wrong. D. M Daniel confirms this saying that Fletcher goes on to say that the nature of situation ethics is anything and everything may be right or wrong according to the situation. The situation ethicists will avoid the trap into which the defenders of an intrinsic theory of value fall, as they have to condemn certain acts as intrinsically wrong even if there are circumstances that make them the appropriate means of maximizing love (Daniel, p. 16). The debate here is about situational ethics versus natural law ethics as I see that Fletcher's emotivism is in contrast to practical reason for ethical decision. Fletcher's view is almost similar to utilitarian ethics or utilitarianism in the sense of denying the general principle of truth to control the human ethical decisions, their difference is that while for Fletcher the situation is the judge of ethics, for the utilitarianists it is the end of the action. In contrast to them thus, my new approach to contemporary Christian ethics underscores the so-called "general principles of Truth" in which I will highlight that truth is objective and independent of a situation or the end of any ethical decisions. Its principle must be prioritized by all people of truth, and sometimes they are emotionless for the sake of what is true objectively and honestly. This is strictly against the positivistic feature of Fletcher's situationism. The principle of truth can be referred to as the law of truth, and this is what I refer to as the law of Christ because Christ is the Truth according to the biblical testimony. This is thus the basis of the new ethical theory of *Christism* introduced in this study. Let us delve in-depth into this in the following.

## 5. The Ethics under the Law of Christ: *Christism*

### 5.1. The Basics: “Christ Is the Living Torah”

The best place to start is to overview the theory through the freedom from the bondage of the letter of the law for the sake of Christ. With legalism, God’s law is separated from the Gospel and this leads to slavery, but in Christ, there is freedom from such a slavery. *Christism* stands firmly against legalism. Schwarz says that if the law is separated from the Gospel, it can lead to enslavement instead of liberation, but if Christ is the end of the law, there should be liberation, Christ has fulfilled for us God’s will and done justice to the law [23]. We have come to such a conclusion provided that we read and interpret God’s written laws in the Bible in the redemptive-historical context developed by Greidanus as elucidated in the previous paper: *Freedom from Legalism in Christ*. This is so because the core of redemptive history is the cross where Christ was crucified in the place of humankind, a breaker of God’s laws written in the Bible, to set them free from God’s wrath and be reconciled with God [24]. This does not mean that they become antinomians and live without law, but from now on, they are under the law of Christ their Liberator. This is what it means “Christ is the end of the law” in the context of ethics. On the basis of that assertion, there are twin pitfalls which must be avoided: legalism and antinomianism discussed above, as Demarest states: “Christian believers have been set free in Jesus Christ from compulsive legalism. They fulfill the law of Christ by the power of the Spirit out of heart gratitude to God. Likewise, respect for God’s law as interpreted by Jesus and his apostles avoids the error of antinomianism.” The Lutheran *Formula of Concord* summarizes it this way in the third use of the law:

But when man is born anew by the Spirit of God, and liberated from the Law, that is, freed from this driver, and is led by the Spirit of Christ, he lives according to the immutable will of God comprised in the Law, and so far as he is born anew, does everything from a free, cheerful spirit; and these are called not properly works of the Law, but works and fruits of the Spirit, or as St. Paul names it, the law of the mind and the Law of Christ. For such men are no more under the Law, but under grace, as St. Paul says, Rom. 8: 2 (Rom. 7: 23; 1 Cor. 9: 21).

The believers thence are justified, but not by the literal compliance with the letters of the law, rather they are justified by faith alone. Despite Lutheran doctrine of justification being more forensic (declaration of being righteous for the sake of Christ), its effective aspect (creation of a new being for those who come to faith) cannot be denied. Borysov asserts: “The doctrine of justification in Luther can be presented in terms of its forensic and effective aspects...Justification consists of both the renewal of individual’s relationship with God and a renewal nature of the human being [25].” This effective justification is grounded on the New Covenant where the law of God has been written in the human heart (or mind) according to Jer 31: 33, which says: “This is the covenant that I will make

with the house of Israel: After those days, says the Lord, I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.” According to the Lutheran tradition on the third and last use of the law, this law written in the human heart has the role of establishing moral decency and providing a rule of a holy life for the regenerate. This is indeed what Luther said: “For Christian holiness is found where the Holy Spirit gives people faith in Christ and thus sanctifies them...that is, he renews heart, soul, body, work, and conduct, inscribing the commandments of God not on tables of stone, but in the hearts of flesh [26].” Such a role, however, is not an issue demanded, but Christ through His Spirit (the pneumatic Christ) is a guarantee of the feasibility of believers’ moral decency and the holy life. This is so because what is stated in Ezek. 36: 27 is clear that God puts His Spirit inside the humans for them to be able to follow His decrees and keep His law—the law written in the heart and mind. In 1 John 3: 9, it is stated that the seed of God dwells in the regenerates in Christ rendering sin to be foreign to them, but their nature—as being a new creation in Christ according to 2 Cor 5: 17—is to live moral decency and holy life, like the nature of the sun to shine, the light to light, and the fire to heat. The pillar of the theory can be summarized by what Stockton says:

The believer is obliged to model righteousness as reflected in the person of Christ, the perfect reflection of God’s character (Matthew 5: 48; John 14: 9). The Torah was the objective standard of God’s righteousness; Christ is the subjective standard of God’s righteousness. What the Torah was to the Jews, Christ is to the believers. *Christ is the living Torah* [27].

## 5.2. Logos as Final Law for Ethics: The Voice of Conscience

As stated above, the basics of *Christism* is the freedom from the letter of the law to be under the law of the living Christ (1 Cor 9: 21). Paul also refers to this as the law of mind which is against the law of flesh (Romans 7: 23). In the ethical theory of *Christism*, Christ is the end of the law, but not only for justification as Paul states in Romans 10: 4, but also for Christian ethical and moral decisions. The reference here is the living Christ who is active and speaks to believers here and now through His Spirit whose voice is the voice of truth and wisdom because He is the Truth according to John 14:6 and God’s wisdom according to 1 Corinthians 1: 24, and this is what I call the pneumatic Christ. Here, I have to restate what has been stated in the previous paper that the principal feature of *Christism* is to suggest taking heed to the living voice of Truth speaking in the depths of the humans (heart, mind, and conscience). This is indeed the statement in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, which also has been quoted in the previous paper: “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 [28].”

This is related to the law of God written in human heart and mind as we have stated before about what is written in Jer 31: 33, and the fact of having the Spirit of God inside as a guarantee of keeping that law according to Ezek. 36: 27. That gives room to study more the voice of conscience in humans, a wee small voice whispering to righten ways [29]. In fact, human conscience plays an important role in Luther's theology, as says Baylor: "The idea of conscience is a peculiarly central one in Luther's thought [30]." We see this for instance in his famous assertion in Worms as he said that "to go against conscience is neither right nor safe". According to Antti Raunio, Luther applies conscience principally in a theological sense as a divine evaluation of the whole person and his action. He also recognizes evaluating conscience in the philosophical sense as an estimation of the moral goodness of human deeds. With the word conscience, Raunio continues by saying that Luther is referring to the conclusion of a practical inference, then conscience is a suggestion of what to do in a given situation [31]. Raunio's affirmation of Luther's theological sense of conscience as a divine evaluation of the person's acts is rooted in Luther's own thought because Luther asserts conscience as the location of the human being's relationship with God [32]. It is thus evident when Luther said: "Christ and my conscience must become one body [33]." It is an act of faith that detects the presence of Christ in human conscience, and thus it is faith that makes Christ and conscience into one body [34].

This is related to the overall New Covenantal Theology with all its aspects, we have quoted for instance Jer 31: 33 in which it is stated the New Covenant promise: the act of writing down in the heart (and mind) the laws of God. In Ezek. 36: 24 - 27, it is stated: God would give a new heart to his people and enter his Spirit within them. In Joel 3: 1 it is stated: God pouring out his Spirit to all flesh. In the New Testament, there is the fulfillment of those promises, John 3: 6 says those who are born by Spirit are spirits, they are seeds of God according to 1 John 3: 9; they are spiritual bodies according to 1 Cor 15: 44, a new creation in Christ according to 2 Cor 5: 17. And by living the new covenant, Gal 2: 20 claims that it is not they who live but Christ lives in them, and where Christ lives, reign the fruit of the Spirit recorded in Gal 5: 22. What is meant by all these is the presence of the living Christ within the believers' hearts and minds, and speaks through his Spirit in their depth to orient their choices into a godly Christian living.

To compare this to the Christian freedom from the law for the sake of the Gospel according to Luther's theology, it is evident that Christian ethical decision is not driven by any letters of Biblical law, but the final law is the pneumatic Christ who is active and speaking here and now as truth and wisdom. The letters of the law in Scripture remain light as the Psalmist says, or a signpost for the immutable will of God as Bloesch argues, but do not yield specific rules to be strictly applied in different specific contexts whenever and wherever. This is so for in Christ, believers live under the spirit of the law, but not the letters of law (Cf. Rom 7: 6). This is emphasized below about the law imprinted in mind by

explaining Romans 2: 14 - 15:

Romans 2: 14 - 15 had long been regarded as the locus classicus for a biblical account of the natural law as something that did not need to be revealed to Gentiles because it was written on their hearts, with the testimony of conscience bearing witness to that fact. Luther in his lectures on Romans did not hesitate to identify the law written on the heart with the natural law of nature is imprinted on their minds, while their conscience bears witness to them [35] (p. 158).

It is asserted here that not only the believers, but all people are stated to have laws imprinted in their minds. It is thus seemingly pointing to the common sense and the Law of Truth referring to “Logic as the science of truth” [36] as Gottlob Frege argues: “It falls to logic to discern the laws of truth” [37]. The term Logic, however, is derived from the Greek word Logos [38] which is used in the Johannine prologue to point to Christ who is the Truth (John 14: 6). By coming to the Law of Truth here and Logic as a science of Truth according to Frege, the discussion moves from a proper theology to philosophical theology, knowing that Logos is an interface or common ground between philosophy and theology. The details about this will be explored in the next article: *The Johannine Logos and the Fregean Logic*, but now I proceed to the four basic characteristics of the ethical theory of *Christism*.

### 5.3. The Four Basic Characteristics of *Christism*

#### 5.3.1. Objectivism

The four basic characteristics of *Christism* are the following: Objectivism, Deviationism, Honesty, and Responsibility. I will elucidate them one by one, foremost, by objectivism, I refer to Christ as the Truth according to the Johannine Gospel, and this Truth is no other truth, but the objective Truth. The basis of the view is what I stated above about Logic as a Science of Truth according to Gottlob Frege which is grounded on the Logos Theology knowing that Logic is a derivative of Logos, and Logos is used in the Johannine prologue to refer to Christ. You can read more about my Logos Theology in the next article: *From Johannine Logos to Fregean Logic*, but for now, I just explain the so-called “objective truth” and its probable identification with the living Christ. First of all, we need to define what is objective truth, and how it is different from subjective truth. Here is what Rutherford explains:

To be objective is to be neutral, to be free from bias: if truth is objective and is attained through objective thinking, it is the exact same no matter who is thinking of it. No matter who runs the test, not only should the results be the same but their interpretation as well. “Is”, for example, “a rock red” if no one observes that it is red? If so, then “the rock is red” is objective truth; but if “the rock is red” is only true when someone observes that it is red, then it is subjective truth [39].

In my study of Logos as an interface between philosophy and Theology, this is indeed the concept of Frege when he refers to Logic as a Science of Truth. Frege does not mention Logos, but by studying his Logic with bearing in mind Logos as Logic's derivation, we can have some points to be connected. We can imagine, for instance, the following claims and think how they can be related to one another: In John 1: 1 - 2, Logos refers to Christ, and in 14: 6, Christ is identified as the Truth; Logos is a derivation of Logic, and in Fregean philosophy, Logic is the Science of Truth. This Truth is the objective truth as Englebretsen argues: "For Frege, if logic is to be a fully general science, then it must be seen as a science of objective truths, independent both of subject matter and opinion [40]." Accordingly, the law of Christ refers to the law of truth, the objective truth, and as such it is the law of correct reasoning (The Logic). Hudson explains this, saying: "The Laws of correct reasoning are as immutable as the law of gravity; and, properly applied, are as certain and exact in their results as a law of mathematics. They are the natural laws of the human intellect; they are inherent in its nature and constitution [41]." For Frege, the laws of Logic are the laws of truth, the boundary stones set in an eternal foundation, which our thought can overflow, but never displace [42].

### 5.3.2. Deviationism

The second feature of *Christism* is Deviationism, by this, I mean that the theory does not advocate perfectionism, but there are particular situations or various reasons in which human beings fall short of the general principle of Truth, that is, fail to live according to correct reasoning because of a particular situation or for a reason. This is fairly similar to Fletcher's situationism, but the difference is that in Fletcher, there are no laws of correct reasoning or the law of truth to determine the rightness or the wrongness of ethical decisions, but the judge is the situation. This is indeed my critique of Fletcher's approach as I have explained above. In contrast to Fletcher, therefore, I say that it is okay to behave not in accord with the general principles of Truth if the situation requires it; however, this does not mean that the behavior is right because it fits the situation and maximizes agapeic love. This means that any actions that are discord with the logical Truth and correct reasoning are wrong regardless of being relevant to a particular situation. Let us analyze an example of Fletcher's situation ethics, we choose the one about altruistic adultery. As Geisler reports, once Fletcher was asked whether adultery is wrong or not; and he answered: "I don't know. Maybe. Give me a case." According to Geisler, Fletcher himself provided a case where he thinks adultery can be right if agapeic love is served. The case was the altruistic adultery in which Fletcher told a story: There was a German woman, mother of two kids, who was arrested by the Russians at the end of World War Two. The rules of the Ukrainian prison camp allowed her released and back to Germany to join her family for one condition that she be pregnant. So, she asked a friendly camp guard to impregnate her, and he accepted. After being pregnant, she was

released and sent back to Germany and joined her family. When her family heard the history, they were happy, and they even called the newborn baby the liberator (Geisler, p. 42) [18].

My concern here is not whether the action of this woman is acceptable or unacceptable, but whether it is right or wrong from an objective assessment. For Fletcher, it is morally right as it is the most loving ethical decision regarding the situation that the woman to be reunited with her family. But, I say that it is wrong because it is a deviation from the general principle of truth when we talk about the ethics of marriage. However, due to the situation, the action can be acceptable, but that acceptability does not mean that it is right, it remains wrong, and as such it is a deviation. Here, I remember what Frege stated before—about the laws of truth as “the boundary stones set in an eternal foundation, which our thought can overflow, but never displace”—to say that we must not make as right what is viewed as objectively wrong even though the acts might be acceptable due to a particular situation or for some reasons.

### 5.3.3. Honesty

The deviationism is related to the third characteristic of *Christism*: Honesty. The basis of this is primarily the recognition of the wrongness of an action as being not in accord with the general principle of truth even though it can be accepted due to a situation. Thus, in case of deviationism, the voice of the objective truth strikes the consciousness which has something to do with Logos/Logic where both philosophy and theology intersect as previously stated. This leads us to study Christology in philosophical theology. Since the treatise is ethics, I choose the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant in which Kant says that the figure of Christ is the Personified Idea of Good Principle [43].

#### 1) Christ as the prototype of perfect morality in the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant

Foremost, there are two views of Kant that I criticize. The first is that of Jürgen Moltmann when he says that in Kant’s ethical exposition, the eternal Logos was replaced by the idea of mankind in its morally complete perfection [44]. I think that with this view, Moltmann violates the Kantian transcendental philosophical program in the direction of immanence. According to Kant, the Personified Idea is not man’s idea, but God’s Idea, the divine Reason, but has his seat in human reasoning as the pure Reason [45]. The second is that of Hans Küng stating that the Personified Idea in Kant differs from the historical person of Jesus [46]. I think what Hans Küng says here is a threat to Kant’s view of the embodiment of the Personified Idea in the historical Person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and his recognition of His death on the cross even though it is just symbolic-moral significance in his view. Instead of Kung, therefore, I prefer to agree with Michalson saying: “Kant’s chief example is Jesus, understood as the personified idea of the good principle, that is, the historical embodiment of a moral disposition wholly pleasing to God [47] (p. 67).” According to Stucken-berg, Kant called Christ the idea of moral perfection which is the prototype of

perfect purity. He came down to us from heaven, namely, that it became incarnate [48]. He continuously manifests in human reasoning and conscience as the pure Reason [49]. This means that since Kant does not separate the spiritual Christ and the human Jesus, his Christology can be to some extent Chalcedonic, though his understanding of Christ is exclusively in the realm of morality.

To better understand Kant in this context, let me go in-depth into his moral philosophy. First of all, the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant is ambiguous, that is, open to different interpretations depending upon the point of view of the interpreters either theological or philosophical. Kant is not categorized as a theologian but a philosopher, but the transcendentalism of his philosophy opens a door for theology in his philosophical thinking. Kant's transcendentalism which is philosophically recognized is the point where he is mostly misunderstood by many, but it is also the basic point for my study of his thinking. *The Transcendental Turn*, a book edited by Sebastian Gardner and Matthew Grist takes Kantian transcendentalism as the turning point in the history of Western philosophy as the editors note:

Kant's influence on the history of philosophy is vast and protean. The transcendental turn denotes one of its most important forms, centered on the notion that Kant's deepest insight should not be identified with any specific epistemological or metaphysical doctrine, but rather concerns the fundamental standpoint and terms of reference of philosophical enquiry. To take the transcendental turn is not to endorse any of Kant's specific teachings, but to accept that the Copernican revolution announced in the Preface of the *Critique of Pure Reason* sets philosophy on a new footing and constitutes the proper starting point of philosophical reflection [50].

M. J. Ziccardi, in *Immanuel Kant: A Guide to Transcendental Idealism*, defines Kantian transcendentalism arguing that Kant's "transcendental idealism deals with what it is within ourselves that enables us to make objective sense of a world." According to Ziccardi, by the concept of transcendence, Kant recognizes that what goes on in the human mind is more than mere subjective psychology [51]. Even though I try to discover Christ in Kant's philosophical thinking, I do not want to exaggerate, but the ambiguity of his thoughts opens various interpretations to come to the intended discovery. It is stated above Michalson saying that Kant's chief example is Jesus, understood as the personified idea of the good principle, that is, the historical embodiment of a moral disposition wholly pleasing to God. And Stuckenberg argues that Kant calls Christ the idea of moral perfection which is the prototype of perfect purity. However, Kant's transcendental concept puts a question on whether the figure of Jesus Christ recognized in his philosophy as the Personified Idea of the Good Principle is just a prototype of perfect morality or it could be something more. This leads us to study Kant's Supreme Principle of Morality and his conception of the Categorical Imperative. About this, Kerstein reports Kant stating that: "If there is a supreme principle of morality, then it is the Categorical Imperative [52]." This is to say

that both refer to one thing. Kerstein cites the four basic characteristics of the Supreme Principle of Morality: practical, absolutely necessary, binding on all moral agents, and serving as the supreme norm for the moral evaluation of action. Kant in “*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*” writes that Christ as the ideal of moral perfection and prototype of perfect morality is a priori, connects inseparably with the notion of free will, and lies in reason and guides ourselves by examples [53]. This understanding of Kant is also perceived in Grenz and Olson in *20<sup>th</sup> Century Theology* as they say that: “the ‘divine voice’ universally heard by autonomous human reason is a voice from within the self. It does not comprise a word from the transcendent ‘beyond’. In the case of Kant’s proposal, the transcendent God is easily lost in the voice of the categorical imperative found in the depths of human ‘practical reason’ [54].” My problem with what Grenz and Olson state here is that they say, “divine voice inside does not comprise a word from the transcendent ‘beyond’” and “the transcendent God is easily lost in the voice of the categorical imperative”. I think that these assertions are threats to the universality and objectivity of Kant’s Categorical Imperative and even his transcendentalism, about this, H. J. Paton states:

A man is morally good, not as seeking to satisfy his own desires or to attain his own happiness, but as seeking to obey a law valid for all men and to follow an objective standard not determined by his own desires. Because of the obstacles due to our impulses and desires, this law appears to us as a law that we ought to obey for its own sake, and so is what Kant calls a Categorical Imperative [55].

It is thus glimpsed behind what Kant refers to as the Supreme Principle of Morality or the Categorical Imperative the universal Reason or the Cosmic Logos pointing to Christ as the Logos of the world. By studying Kant’s transcendentalism, it can probably be stated that his thinking is philosophical in form and appearance, but theological/Christological in content.

## **2) Divine operation in the human faculty of reasoning**

Kant’s Christology, which can be summarized as the Son of God disguised in human reason as the objective practical Reason, is perceived in Indian Philosophy as P. T. Raju explains in *Religion and Intellectual Values in Indian Thought*. Raju explains that from the time of the Upanishads, Indian thinkers demarcated the different stages of man’s inward being and discovered three stages: mind, ego, and reason. Human reason is special because it is part of Cosmic Reason (Logos). It is different from the human ego in the sense that while the ego is particular, reason is universal. It is beyond the ego, deeper and higher, it interrelates the several results from the universal point of view, not from the point of the particular ego. The ego rises to the level of reason in the process and loses its particularity. Reason is always objective, universal, and cosmic in its processes and nature, it does not get involved in egocentricity. But reason commits mistakes when the ego intrudes into its universality [56]. This can be related to the assertion of Paul in Colossians 1: 15 that Christ is the “image of the invisible

God”, and Genesis 1: 27 asserts that it is according to this “image” that human beings were created [57]. What Raju states that man’s reason is really part of the Cosmic Reason (Logos) is confirmed by E. M. Wood arguing that “human reason partakes of the universal Logos, it is effectively one with the cosmic or divine Logos” [58]. This is to say that the voice that operates in the human faculty of reason guiding into an objective truth (and practical wisdom) has something to do with the Logos of God referring to the person of Jesus Christ according to the Johannine prologue.

I call this phenomenon: “Transcendent Rational Theology”, which is sharply distinct from “Immanent Rational Theology” (Cf. transcendent idealism of Kant and Hegel versus immanent rationalism of Rene Descartes and John Locke in the history of Western philosophy). Both are rational as taking place in the human faculty of reason, but while immanent rational theology refers to the human endeavor to grasp the truth about God by reason, transcendent rational theology refers to the transcendent God operating in human reasoning through his Logos. This is a revelation that takes place in human reasoning which is received through faith. This is what Henry Blunt says: “The spiritual enlightenment of the understanding and the conscience proceeds from the indwelling of Christ, the true Light which lightens every man (John 1: 9) [59].” With this Transcendent Rational Theology, both faith and reason never contradict each other, but associate. In this context indeed, Arthur C. A. Hall defines faith as reason illuminated by the Spirit of God, he says that faith reveals to us that reason alone could never guess, or faith makes certain what reason made very probable. Faith and reason can never contradict each other because reason and conscience are God’s voice in the human soul, and God never contradicts Himself [60]. In deviationism, therefore, His voice echoes in the depth, and it is nothing else than the voice of the divine Logos through His Spirit. When such voice whispering, as a situation requires making an objectively wrong ethical decision, it is suggested to be honest, admitting the wrongness of the decision and, if possible, explaining the situation. This is suggested because of the belief that the One who speaks inwardly is an independent Person, not part of our intrinsic human nature, but coming in us from beyond as the transcendent God who is, in Christ, communicable, reasonable, and understanding. In philosophical perspective, this can be related to the Platonic scholarship about the theory of knowledge in which Plato says that to know is to apprehend the truth [61], and according to Samuel Smiles, for Plato, this truth associates with honesty. To interpret Plato’s theory, Smiles argues: “Honesty and truthfulness go well together, honesty is truth, and truth is honesty, honesty is the plainest and humblest manifestation of the principle of truth [62].” The truth here is the Logos as confirmed in the Neo-Platonic tradition that: “Logos is truth in the sense that it directs the soul or the partial intellect into the realm of truth [63].” Transcendent Rational Theology advocates a personal relationship with God which implies an intellectual activity that needs a reason, but not the reason intruded by ego, but rather, as F. S. Billings states, reason illuminated by the Spirit of God (the divine Logos) [64]. It is rec-

commended not to ignore Him when He crosses our mind, but we can communicate with Him and be honest. This is the difference between *Christism* and Fletcher's situationism. The general principle of truth must be accepted as right, but if a deviation is necessary due to the situation or for a reason, we have to be honest with the personified Logos in our personal relationship with Him (you can read more about this in the paper: *Anthropological Christology of Edward Schillebeeckx*) [65]. Being honest, however, does not release us from being responsible for our decisions, but it is wise to do so if we think that we do not have a choice due to a situation or for a particular reason, and the forgiveness of sins is God's prerogative alone in Christ.

#### 5.3.4. Responsibility

In philosophy and theology, the question of responsibility in the area of ethics has long been debated by various thinkers, and the centers of the debate are Moral Responsibility and Free will. However, since *Christism* is a Christian theory of ethics, I leave the philosophical debate and go on to the theological one by discussing the dialectic of the bondage of the will and Christian freedom in Luther's theology. The first thing that is worth mentioning with Luther's view on the bondage of the will is that it is not in the area of ethics but in salvation. Introducing Luther and Erasmus's debate on the battle over Free will, J. D. Tracy argues: "In the history of the European Reformation, few issues were as important as the one debated by Erasmus and Luther: Are human beings capable of contributing to their own salvation by what they choose to do or not to do [66]?" The background of this is believed to be the Augustine's doctrine on the original sin as Herman Westerink argues: "Augustine defines original sin in term of concupiscence, referring to sinful desires that distort man's natural inclination to the good. He rejects the semi-Pelagian view in which human beings are thought to be capable of controlling sin and cooperating in salvation. We notice that Luther follows Augustine, notably in his denial of free will [67]." This is to say that Luther's view on the bondage of the will is in the area of salvation, but not ethics, and as such, it should not be abused by stating that believers are fleshy humans and that their will is still bound by sinful nature resulting in moral decadence. In the area of moral ethics, Luther is best understood by his doctrine of Christian freedom rather than the bondage of the will. This means that those who are set free in Christ are truly free as Jesus says, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8: 36).

Nevertheless, to understand the Lutheran position on free will in the context of morality, let us study Phillip Melanchthon in the Augsburg Confession. According to Terence Irwin, Melanchthon recognizes three types of freedom: 1) Power over external actions; it depends on our choice whether we act one way or the other. 2) Contingency of our actions in relation to external causes, both natural and divine. 3) Independence of will from the passions [68]. Irwin argues that according to Melanchthon, believers have the first sort of freedom, he says that they can experience it in their actions. But they lack the second and the

third because, for the second, there is nothing contingent in relation to the will of God; and for the third, it is so essential for the truth of the Scholastic claims that the Lutherans reject. However, in my view, the first and third types of freedom can be further explored together through Luther's viewpoint. When Luther says that the will is not free but bound when talking about inward passions, I think that he means something deeper, like the original sin or the old Adam. To better understand this, let us turn back to Westerink. He elucidates the debate between Luther and the Scholastic theologians, particularly Thomas Aquinas, about original sin. Westerink explains that both Luther and Aquinas made use of Augustine in their interpretation of the original sin. But while Thomist Augustinian theology was more Aristotelian, Luther made it more Biblical and purified it from what he called redundant philosophical speculation. The Aristotelian interpretation of Augustine results in Thomist original sin as the privation of original justice, which means that evil is defined as not having an essence of its own, but the absence of good. For Luther, however, it is more than that, at the bottom, it is a propensity toward evil, evil exists on its own and lies in the human heart (Cf. Jer 17: 9 - 10) [69].

However, for those who are in Christ, the Second Adam (1 Cor 15: 45), a new Adam is born which results in the coexistence of the fleshy old Adam and the spiritual new Adam in believers. There is thus a battle between the two as Paul says in Galatians 5: 17. Luther argues: "Every Christian has a twofold nature, we are at once body and soul, flesh and spirit, sinner and saint, outer man, and inner man. These two men in the same man contradict each other and remain perennially at war [70] (p. 160)." In this battle, the spiritual new Adam is victorious due to the power of Christ's resurrection, as Schulz claims by taking Paul as an example:

Paul may have been a poor, miserable sinner before receiving the Spirit of Christ, but by the power of Christ's resurrection, he walked victoriously over his sinful nature. Jesus set him free. This is true for all who come to Christ and are born again of his Spirit, who then lives within us [71].

This victory over the fleshy old Adam (sinful nature) results in the freedom of Christians in their external actions as Melancthon states in the first type of freedom above. This freedom causes Christians' ethical decisions to be volitive instead of impulsive because they are now with a clear consciousness. In this case, we can talk about volitionism or the volitionist theory of responsibility which, according to Beeghly, states that one is morally responsible for one's own actions that are the product of his/her volitions [72]. Aku Visala argues that this moral responsibility is a psychological phenomenon that consists of various attitudes like blame, a host of moral judgments about culpability, resentment, and also asking for forgiveness [73].

This concept of responsibility is supported by Lutheran theology as Visala states that: "The Lutheran theological tradition has with free will and moral responsibility." In the previous paper: *Freedom from Legalism in Christ* [74], I quoted Lise Eriksson's claim: "According to Lutheran theology, the Church is

only a mediator between God and the individual, and each person is responsible for her/his decisions [75].”

## 6. Conclusion

Contemporary Christian churches are struggling with ethical issues and look like they are extremists in conserving the biblical law to conduct a believer’s life or in rejecting the biblical law for the believers. Those who are extremists in keeping the written law are the legalists, and their problem is the misunderstanding of Christ’s salvation grounded on his death on the cross which is liberation from the yoke of the law. The counterpart is those who are extremists in discarding the written law, they are the antinomians who abuse the Christian freedom from law to argue that believers are free to do whatever they want. However, neither legalism nor antinomianism is the relevant ethics for Christians in the contemporary context of postmodernity. The context of today requires another theoretical approach to address Christian ethics. There have already been many attempts to do so, including situationism developed by Joseph Fletcher in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Fletcher’s observation, his theory stands in between legalism and antinomianism. But, when narrowly studied, it also has certain limitations which are open for discussion. Fletcher’s approach enhances situations as a reference to truth, which means that truth does not exist in itself, but is determined by situation. In contrast to this, a new theoretical approach to address Christian ethics in the contemporary context is innovated by this research, which is called *Christism*. Unlike truth in Fletcher which does not exist by itself but is situational, truth in *Christism* exists by itself and is personified. It is the Logos which the Gospel of John points to the person of Christ, and as Logos, his law is the Logic, the law of truth referring to correct reasoning based on objective assessment. As a theory of ethics, *Christism* has four characteristics: Objectivism, Deviationism, Honesty, and Responsibility.

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The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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