

Universal Legal Justification: A Failed Alternative Between Calvin and Arminius¹

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Abstract

The concept of universal legal justification has gained significant attention over the past few decades in Adventist soteriology. Universalizing justification without entailing universalism has been proffered as resolving the atonement debate (whether Christ's atoning death saved no one, everyone, or just some) between Arminianism and Calvinism. However, many have seen this approach as fraught with difficulties, creating more problems than it ostensibly solves. First, this paper will show that when the novel terminology of universal legal justification is swept away, it is not a genuine alternative to the Arminian vs. Calvinistic understanding of the scope of the atonement, but is in fact the Arminian position. . . with a twist. Secondly, a discussion will follow dealing with the grammatical and logical difficulties which arise from adopting universalist language to portray a soteriology that is fundamentally Arminian. Lastly, a reason will be proffered as to why this "universalist" mode of expressing the atonement may linger within Adventism for some time.

1. Introduction

The nature and scope of justification has been debated throughout the history of Christian theology.² Many sides of the debate are reflected in the different trends of Adventist soteriology as well. One particular form of the

¹ The following was presented at the Arminianism and Adventism Symposium at Andrews University in Michigan, October 2010.

² See Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

OLSTAD: UNIVERSAL LEGAL JUSTIFICATION

Adventist debate that has gained widespread attention is whether the atonement is more accurately understood by invoking a legal/forensic, objective justification that is universalized to all individuals. Though these proposals are at least two decades old, their adherents today cross international lines and seem to be numerous.³ Capitalizing on apparent universal NT expressions,⁴ proponents of ULJ⁵ argue that all humanity has achieved a justified status as a consequence of Christ's atonement at the cross.⁶ Universalism is avoided by bifurcating justification into *objective* and *subjective* categories. It is then argued that even though ULJ is classified as objective (a status accorded to all humanity that is independent of all initiatives or responses), it still must be received. This means, ". . . that although all have been legally justified in Christ's doing and dying, justification is still a gift. . . [and] Like any gift, it belongs only to those who accept it."⁷

These two propositions: (1) an irrevocable, objective, legal, justified status is predicated of all individuals (2) individuals must subjectively exercise faith in order to ultimately be saved, form the tensional parameters in which proponents of ULJ explicate their views. The conjoining of these propositions is also seen as providing an alternative to the impasse between the nature and scope of the atonement between Arminianism and Calvinism. This paper will first examine the success of that claim. Secondly, once ULJ is shown to be fundamentally Arminian, the question emerges as to whether the Arminian position is articulated better by utilizing ULJ language.⁸ Does ULJ language square with Paul's overall use

³ At the risk of being anecdotal, this was the strong impression I received from a number of students from different countries at the International Adventist Seminary in South-East Asia (AIAS).

⁴ E.g., Rom. 5:18; 2 Co. 5:18, 19; 1 Tim. 4:10; Tit. 2:11; 1 Jn. 2:2.

⁵ "Universal Legal Justification" that is both forensic and objective will subsequently be abbreviated ULJ.

⁶ The mechanism for this is the corporate solidarity of humanity assumed in the human nature of Christ which was condemned and therefore justified at the cross.

⁷ Jack Sequeira, *Beyond Belief* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1993), 55.

⁸ A good example of how this has occurred in the past is the acceptance by the Society of Evangelical Arminians of the corporate election perspective which differs from the traditional Arminian view of individual election based on foreseen faith. Both views are allowed in the SEA because they both hold to election as being conditioned on faith in

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

of “justification by faith”? This option is also not sustainable because of the logical and grammatical difficulties that arise and the biblical maneuverings that would have to be adopted to justify such a position. Lastly, some important comments by Robert Wieland will be examined that show why maintaining ULJ is considered so essential to their understanding of the atonement.

It should be noted from the outset that the focus of this paper is on why ULJ is a failed *alternative* between two competing theologies; it is not an exegetical paper showing why ULJ is a failed *system*. However, there are preliminary exegetical issues raised here that challenge the ULJ approach.

The primary exponents of ULJ are Jack Sequeira, Robert Wieland, and other members of the 1888 Message Study Committee.⁹ Since Pastor Sequeira has expounded more on this issue than Wieland, and in some sense has popularized ULJ for Adventists in general, it will be his argumentation that will be primarily considered. There are some shades of difference to how each speaks about “justification by faith” and unless otherwise noted, it will be Sequeira’s understandings that will be represented.

2. The Claim

In the introduction to his book, *Beyond Belief*, Jack Sequeira presents his solution to the competing atonement views between Calvin and Arminius:

For four hundred years, Protestant Christianity has been divided into two camps regarding salvation. The first, Calvinism, confesses that Christ actually saved human beings on the cross but that this salvation is limited only to the elect—those whom God has predetermined to be saved. The second view, Arminianism, holds that on the cross Christ obtained salvation for all humanity, but that this salvation is only a provision; a person must believe and repent for the provision to become a reality. Both

Christ. This illustrates the possibility of two ways to articulate or nuance a fundamentally Arminian view of election.

⁹ This committee began meeting as a group in 1984 and describes its purpose as “to study and learn more about the message of Righteousness by Faith which was presented by Alonzo T. Jones and Ellet J. Waggoner to the 1888 General Conference session of Seventh-day Adventists.” Over time, an official organization was born which includes a board of directors and annual meetings.

OLSTAD: UNIVERSAL LEGAL JUSTIFICATION

these views are only conditional good news. I believe that neither camp presents the full truth about salvation. I believe the Bible teaches that God actually and unconditionally saved all humanity at the cross so that we are justified and reconciled to God by that act. . . .¹⁰

Sequeira offers a similar assessment of the inadequacy of Arminianism: “. . . according to their view [Arminians], Christ did not *actually*¹¹ save anyone on the cross, but simply made provision for our salvation. Hence, for this salvation to become an actual reality, one has to meet certain conditions. . . .”¹² These conditions consist of believing, repenting, and confessing. The dilemma is thus immediately drawn—if Calvinistic, then salvation’s intent and effect is limited to a few, if Arminian, then salvation is impotent in that, though provisional for all, actually saves no one. Sequeira splits the horns of this dilemma with Christ dying at the cross *for everyone*, addressing Calvinism, and *actually saving* everyone, addressing Arminianism (of course, explicitly avoiding universalism).

On the Arminian side, Sequeira’s assessment that a provisional understanding of the atonement is inadequate is nothing new. John Owen (1616-1683), an English puritan theologian, marshaled his Reformed challenge by stating that the Arminian proposition, “Christ died for all people,” also contains within it the proposition “Christ died for nobody” in that no people are actually and effectively saved by his death.”¹³ Sequeira de facto agrees with Owen’s reasoning that if the statement, “Christ died for all people” is understood in the traditional provisional sense, one is committed to the conclusion that Christ died for no one.

For a more recent treatment, Calvinist Edwin Palmer addresses the flip side of Owen’s comment in his contention against Arminianism, “if He [Christ] died for all—then no one is lost.”¹⁴ The comments from these

¹⁰ Jack Sequeira, *Beyond Belief* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1993), 8.

¹¹ Emphasis his.

¹² Jack Sequeira, “Objective & Subjective Salvation.” Accessed 7/12/10 at <http://www.jacksequeira.org/issues02.htm>.

¹³ Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 286.

¹⁴ Edwin Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1972), 47. For an excellent discussion on resolving this apparent, and in my opinion, fairly weak argument see Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology* (IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 221-241.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Reformed scholars form the two horns of the classic dilemma¹⁵ used to challenge the Arminian position—the proposition ‘Christ died for all’ either entails universalism (Palmer) or it entails an impotent, “poverty stricken,”¹⁶ provisional atonement that saves no one (Owen).

Rather than address this challenge to provisional atonement by clarifying or nuancing the meaning of “provisional” and explaining what it does and does not entail, Sequeira consents to the basic premises of these Reformed allegations. He takes seriously the challenge that a provisional atonement translates into a “saves-no-one atonement.” He therefore invokes a universal objective salvation and a ULJ as the solution, all the while repudiating universalism. This forms the crux of his alternative to Arminianism.¹⁷

¹⁵ N.B. This is *not* the dilemma spoken of earlier that Sequeira presents. The dilemma Sequeira presented is between Calvinism and Arminianism, i.e. an atonement that saves only a few vs. an atonement that doesn’t actually save anyone. The dilemma spoken of here has both horns pointed at Arminianism.

¹⁶ Palmer, *Five Points*, 48. Palmer comments on both sides of the dilemma.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that at least two different atonement theories have been invoked to answer this Reformed contention. Going one direction Pastor Sequeira has in effect said, “This Reformed challenge is valid, therefore we need to say that Christ’s death objectively saved and justified everyone.” But in Sequeira’s view, a vicarious atonement of one person dying for all does not allow for such a conclusion. Therefore, he advocates what he calls an actual substitution theory of the atonement in which all humanity was actually corporately ‘in Christ’ so that we all died, and therefore were all justified and saved at the cross. This is why Sequeira is adamant that the Pauline “in Christ” motif is *not* reserved for believers, but applies to all individuals. John Miley, a Methodist systematic theologian, also agreed to the validity of the Reformed challenge but went the opposite direction of Sequeira for his solution. Olson explains that Miley, along with some later Arminians were convinced that the universality and conditionality of the atonement in the penal/satisfaction theory were incompatible and therefore opted for the governmental view of the atonement. Whereas Sequeira’s view of the atonement puts every individual into Christ, the governmental theory affirms that Christ did not take the actual punishment deserved by every person, “but that he experienced equivalent suffering in order to uphold God’s justice and holiness.” Whereas Sequeira takes the idea of corporate solidarity to its extreme in his theory of actual substitution, Miley and others go the opposite direction and remove the concept altogether that Christ is experiencing the personal punishment merited by individual sinners. Sequeira brings all into Christ; Miley removes all from Christ (though both maintain the concept of substitution). Neither of these reactions seems necessary and I agree with Olson that there is no reason to accept the validity of this Reformed argument in the first place. In common sense fashion, Olson simply states that, “There is no inconsistency between Christ’s representation of all in his suffering and death, and the condition that in order to benefit from

3. Analysis of the Claim

So is ULJ a legitimate alternative to the Arminian view of justification? During the first read of Sequeira's and Wieland's material it would be natural to come to that conclusion. The following citations are not standard Arminian expressions of justification or salvation and they lend plausibility that a genuine alternative between Arminius and Calvin is present: "Christ's obedience saved all humanity from second death and pronounced the verdict of justification on all mankind."¹⁸ "What God did in Christ applies to all mankind, so that in Him the whole world stands legally justified. This is the unconditional good news of the gospel."¹⁹ Wieland chimes in that the "the sacrifice of Christ on the cross accomplished for 'all men,' 'the whole world,' a *legal* justification. . . ."²⁰ Neither Arminius nor Calvin speak in these terms. Does that mean that this view of justification is a bona fide alternative?

The premise of this paper is that a genuine alternative must be based on meaning rather than on articulation. The importance of this distinction is crucial in reaching a conclusion as to the merits of ULJ as an alternative to the universal provisional atonement of Arminianism and the limited/particular atonement of Calvinism.²¹ When the fullness of the theology associated with ULJ is taken into account, it is clear that this theology is Arminian enough to simply be called Arminian and does not constitute a third option in the way that Sequeira presents. This is clearly

that representation individuals have to avail themselves of its benefits by faith." Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology* (IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 238. For Sequeira's full discussion of *actual* vs. *vicarious* atonement see his *Saviour of the World* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1996), 51-80.

¹⁸ Sequeira, as quoted by Caesar W. Mwachi, *An Evaluation of Jack Sequeira's Understanding of Justification and Sanctification in Relation to the Doctrine of Salvation in the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (2005), 25.

¹⁹ Jack Sequeira, *Beyond Belief* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1993), 170.

²⁰ Robert Wieland and Editorial Committee of the 1888 Message Study Committee, *Is Beyond Belief Beyond Belief?* (SE Paris, Ohio: 1888 Message Study Committee, no year), 73.

²¹ Though "limited atonement" falls under the rubric of Calvinism, McGrath points out that Calvin himself "did not teach limited atonement" but that Calvin's predecessor, Theodore Beza (1519-1605), "explicitly stated that Christ died only for the elect, and not for all people." McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 275. It is Beza's position that has become a hallmark of Reformed theology.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

the case when one takes into account the extensive statements by both Sequeira and Wieland that faith must be freely exercised in order to experience salvation (never with a Calvinistic backdrop of unconditional election or predestined choice). That is, in order for one to be ontologically in a saving heaven destined relationship with God,²² a *freely* exercised faith and a conversion are indispensable. One example from numerous quotes is as follows, “Only those who by faith receive God’s gift of justification will enjoy the benefits of Christ’s obedience.”²³ To put it bluntly, Sequeira and Wieland are soundly Arminian in the majority of their works. Only in a few choice phrases such as “. . . God actually and unconditionally saved all humanity at the cross. . .”²⁴ and all are “legally justified” do they seem to move decisively away from orthodox Arminianism.

The initial difficulty in reading proponents of ULJ is that they explicitly denounce Arminianism and then go on to clearly explicate their own theology in Arminian terms. The trick with sifting through the articulation of ULJ is to realize that Arminius, and Calvin for that matter, utilized no term that encompassed this novel approach which states all are legally justified and “actually” saved but not experientially or subjectively. Therefore, one must be cautious in any comparisons between the term “justification” in the expression “universal legal justification,” and the term “justification” within either a traditional Arminian or Calvinistic paradigm. It is essential to note that the Arminian understanding of the term “justification” is explicated quite well by Sequeira when he is explaining “subjective justification” or “justification by faith.” The differences arise in the discussion of “universal legal justification.” I believe it is

²² This phrase is cumbersome but necessitated by the fact that Sequeira has applied the term “actual salvation” universally, though he does not mean that all will inevitably be saved, i.e. walk through the pearly gates. In order to avoid ambiguity, this forces me to avoid the phrase “actual salvation” and to come up with creative substitutes.

²³ Jack Sequeira, *Beyond Belief* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1993), 55. Some supporting statements to this fact: “That means that the condemnation Adam brought to the entire human race at the Fall is inherited by all who are born into this world. In contrast, the justification unto life objectively obtained by Christ for the entire human race at the cross is experience [sic] only by those who believe in Him and have experienced the new birth.” Jack Sequeira, “Objective & Subjective Salvation.” Accessed 7/12/10 at <http://www.jacksequeira.org/issues02.htm>.

²⁴ Jack Sequeira, *Beyond Belief* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1993), 8.

OLSTAD: UNIVERSAL LEGAL JUSTIFICATION

unconsciously misleading of Sequeira to compare and make a contrast of his universal legal justification with the term “justification” in Arminianism, which of course will be different, not because of different understandings of the term “justification,” but because there is no analogous term in Arminianism.²⁵ But when Sequeira speaks of “subjective justification” or “justification by faith,” it is virtually identical with Arminianism.²⁶ A more appropriate comparison can be made between what Arminians would refer to as the “meritorious cause of justification” with Sequeira’s “universal legal justification.” As will be discussed later, these two respective expressions accomplish much of the same goals and have led some critics to render this entire debate as merely “semantics” or a “strife over words.”

So though Sequeira perhaps can claim that ULJ introduces a neglected dimension of justification that most of Christendom hasn’t considered, this is not sufficient to be an alternative position for two reasons. One, the utility of ULJ overlaps considerably with the Arminian understanding of the “meritorious cause of justification” which is also objective and universal. And secondly, ULJ can hardly be a full-fledged alternative because Sequeira develops what he calls “subjective” justification virtually down the identical lines as Arminian theology. Especially because the “subjective justification” of Sequeira is the only one most Christians would be *prima facie* concerned about, i.e. the justification that, if predicated of an individual, would equate to an ontologically saved condition. To illustrate the point, Christian tradition assumes that if an individual makes the *true* statement, “I am justified,” and then dies the next moment, there is no sense in which that individual could be lost. This is not the case in Sequeira’s and Wieland’s paradigm. In their paradigm, the person could be thinking of objective legal justification and still make the *true* statement, “I am justified,” and be simultaneously in a lost condition.²⁷ But one could

²⁵ The same argument can be made with the term “salvation” and whether Sequeira speaks of *objective* salvation or *subjective* salvation.

²⁶ This cannot as safely be said of Wieland’s understanding of “justification by faith” as will be discussed later.

²⁷ This is the logical outworking of adopting ULJ but not universalism. In this model, those who are ultimately lost never lose their objective justification; in other words, the status of ULJ accorded to humanity is irrevocable. This point was graciously confirmed by Sequeira in a personal email in which he stated (speaking of an individual who is lost), “The

flippantly, though reasonably ask, “Who cares about that kind of ‘justification.’ I’m interested in the ‘justification’ that actually (ontologically) saves me.” Sequeira, if I may speak for him, would then explain “subjective justification” and would sound like an orthodox Arminian, as his writings attest.²⁸

Another seeming difference between Sequeira’s ULJ theology and Arminianism concerns the concept of provision. Though Sequeira disparages the term, he uses the concept continually. Remember, in Sequeira’s claim above, he faults Arminianism for being “only conditional” good news and that though “Christ obtained salvation for all humanity. . . this salvation is only conditional” and “a person must believe and repent for the provision to become a reality.” First, to clear up the ambiguity in that last statement, it should be noted that there is nothing unreal about the provision. It is extremely doubtful that Sequeira is questioning the “reality” of the provision itself within Arminianism. What he means is that within Arminian theology, no one is deemed saved or justified unless they first do “something” like believe, repent, etc. This is a somewhat self-defeating critique because the concept and form of the word “provision” appears now and then in his quotes, e.g., “. . . when a person accepts the gospel and is united by faith to Christ, immediately all that Christ has prepared and *provided*²⁹ as humanity’s substitute is made effective for that person.”³⁰ This sounds like a solid Arminian soteriological statement. When “something” has been accomplished or made available for an individual, but that “something” is not yet effective, we say that the “something” is “provisional.” Sequeira often encloses the concept of provision in different words than traditional Arminians use, but the concept is alive and well in

legal justification that Christ obtained for him or her remains objective but is not experienced subjectively.” I appreciate his candor and theological consistency on this matter.

²⁸ This is crucial to note because much of Sequeira’s criticisms of Arminianism (e.g., seeing faith as a legalistic work, lack of assurance, etc.) apply equally to his own understanding of “subjective justification.” He obviously believes ULJ insulates him from these standard Calvinistic critiques but they plainly do not. I’m confident that if a high Calvinist analyzed Sequeira’s theology, he would deem it Arminianism *incognito*. The traditional Arminian distinction between “faith” as the instrumental cause of justification and Christ’s life and death as the meritorious cause amply answers the “faith-as-a-work” criticism and doesn’t bring with it the conceptual perplexities of ULJ.

²⁹ Emphasis mine.

³⁰ Sequeira, *Beyond Belief*, 102. Cf. 101, 111.

OLSTAD: UNIVERSAL LEGAL JUSTIFICATION

his theology. For example, an Arminian would say that someone is only saved/justified provided they exercise faith. Sequeira would disparage that view as “only” conditional good news. He would instead insist that *all* have been saved/justified, just not effectively or subjectively saved until they exercise faith. But is this really evading Arminian conditionality? There doesn’t seem to be a significant difference, when it comes to the concept of provision, between the two respective summaries:

(Arminius) Individuals begin ontologically lost until they exercise faith in the provisions of the gospel and then they are saved.

(Sequeira) Individuals begin legally justified or objectively saved but still ontologically lost until they exercise faith and then they are experientially saved.

Thinking evangelistically, how different is it to tell a soul that Christ has unconditionally saved you (à la Sequeira) but not effectually until you exercise faith, than it is to tell a soul that Christ has unconditionally provided salvation for you (à la Arminius) but you are not saved until you exercise faith.

As stated previously, Sequeira’s expositions on “justification by faith,” line up surprisingly close with orthodox Arminianism. So, once a term consistent comparison is made, there is no appreciable difference between the two and they are both provisional. For now, it appears that Sequeira has simply shifted the concept of provision from traditional terminology into specialized terminology that nuances between being justified objectively with being justified effectively. In other words, bouncing between the terms “objective” and “subjective” is a subtle way of using all that the term “provision” entails. “Provision” has simply been recast in more sophisticated terms that ostensibly avoid age long Calvinistic critiques of provisional atonement. Caesar Mwachi, who wrote a favorable MA thesis on Sequeira’s use of justification and sanctification concurs and states that, “It is not clear, then, how this understanding [Sequeira’s ULJ] opposes the idea of a conditional provision. He denies Arminian conditionality, but then appears to affirm it again.”³¹

³¹ Mwachi, *An Evaluation*, 46.

So, in conclusion as to whether ULJ is an alternative to the Arminian position, the answer is that ULJ does not produce a sufficient systemic change within a fundamentally Arminian framework to be considered a genuine alternative. Assuming this concluding assessment is accurate, the difference between Sequeira's theology of justification and Arminianism lies in ULJ as a novel and conjoining aspect to Arminianism's traditional understanding of justification. Sequeira is convinced that this understanding of justification (in connection with his atonement theory) is effective at undermining legalism and correcting the unethical view of vicarious substitution³² and therefore has encouraging missiological potential. Arminians would note that there is nothing inherent to their understanding of justification that leads to legalism³³ (despite the Calvinistic critique) or an unethical view of the atonement. Nevertheless, the question still is pertinent, "Should the traditional Arminian articulation of justification be expanded to include ULJ?" Unsurprisingly, the answer is "no." Grammar, logic, and an initial reading of Paul on the subject dictate that the traditional terms and articulation of justification be maintained.

4. Grammar and Articulation

Some reflections on grammar will be subsequently made because ULJ proponents lean heavily on the assumption that their distinction between universal legal justification and particular effective/subjective justification is biblically supported by a Pauline distinction between "justification" and "justification by faith."³⁴

Consider a few statements by Robert Wieland: ". . . there are two phases of justification: (1) forensic, or legal, made for all men,³⁵ and

³² "The Reformers, nevertheless, were ethically wrong in their definition of substitution— that the doing and dying of Christ was accepted *instead of* our doing and dying." *Beyond Belief*, 40. Sequeira instead opts for what he calls, "actual substitution" which entails a heavy emphasis on the "concept of corporate solidarity."

³³ See Olson's chapter entitled, "Myth 9: Arminian Theology Denies Justification by Grace Alone through Faith Alone" Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology* (IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 200.

³⁴ Sequeira, *Beyond Belief*, 32, cf. 43.

³⁵ Later on in the book, he has a section entitled, "There is a legal or forensic justification that applies to 'all men'" followed by these supporting verses: Jn. 1:4-9; 3:16-19; Rom. 3:23, 24; 5:6-18; 2 Co. 5:14, 15, 19; 2 Tim. 1:10.

OLSTAD: UNIVERSAL LEGAL JUSTIFICATION

accomplished entirely outside of us; and (2) an effective transformation of heart in those who believe, and thus a justification *by faith*.³⁶ “Justification *by faith* is distinct from forensic justification, though it is dependent upon it.”³⁷ Some may see in these quotes the blurring of the traditional division made between justification and sanctification. This dimension of Wieland’s understanding will be touched on in the final section of the paper. For now, it is only necessary to ponder the merit of making a distinction within the concept of justification by the addition of the prepositional phrase, “by faith.”

There are two immediate responses to Wieland’s and Sequeira’s claim that justification is to be divided as such. Both responses are based on grammatical considerations and their force is maintained by the common use of language. A perusal of the biblical passages on justification will show that this common sense approach fits with those passages.

The first response is that the formal character of a head noun, verb, or adjective is not altered by the addition of a prepositional phrase. If Paul writes of status X, and further down the line argues that X is by Y, the plainest understanding would be that Y is stating a dimension of the *cause* of X, *not* a different angle, facet, phase, or stage of X. There would be no reason, grammatically, linguistically, or logically, to think that X by itself would be anything different than the sense of X in the phrase X by Y. It is the identical term with the identical meaning. Plugging in for X, the term “justification” by itself, or any term for that matter, is no different than the “justification” in the phrase “justification by faith.” The prepositional phrase affects no formal difference in the head noun, adjective, or verb.

Though analogies all break down at some point, a quick one may be useful here. Imagine if I told a friend that I was recently hired. I could just as well have said that I was hired by filling out an application, or was hired by the human resource department, or hired by the good graces of the CEO, etc. None of these varied prepositional phrases alter the meaning or sense that is fundamental and original in the term “hired.” In other words, it is not the function of prepositional phrases, whether in Greek or English, to lend shades of meaning to the word they modify. It would be just as anomalous

³⁶ Emphasis his. Robert Wieland, *The 1888 Message* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1980), 74.

³⁷ Emphasis his. *Ibid.*, 86.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

to conclude that the word “hired” has four different distinguishable meanings/phases as it is to conclude that Paul had four different phases of “justification” in mind, when he writes “justified by faith” (Rom 5:1), or “justified. . . by. . . grace” (Rom 3:24),³⁸ or “justified by. . . blood” (Rom 5:9), or just plain “justified” (Rom 8:30). Could we add “justified by works” (James 2:21)? It is a violation of normal speech to assume that these different prepositional phrases or lack thereof provide different meanings/phases of “justification.” This point places the burden of proof squarely on the ULJ proponents to show that this common sense notion of speech is being bypassed.

In reference to Wieland’s argument, it seems highly unlikely that the presence or absence of the prepositional phrase “by faith” marks off a magnitude of difference in the meaning of justification in which without the phrase, justification means a forensic legal declaration for all humanity, and with the phrase, it means “an effective transformation of the heart” for individual believers. Regardless of how justification is defined, is it not obvious that whatever it is, it would be caused by faith? Using Wieland’s definition, i.e., a forensic legal declaration, this legal justification would therefore be instrumentally caused by faith. But instead of following the utterly logical conclusion of seeing the phrase, “by faith,” as modifying his legal declarative understanding of justification, he is forced by his theology to conclude that legal justification is *not by faith* (because it is universalized to everyone regardless of faith), and that the phrase “by faith” attached to “justification” alters it to mean a “transformation of the heart.” It is as if Wieland is using two terms, (1) justification (legal/forensic) and (2) “justificationbyfaith” (transformative). Obviously there is only one term involved, but Wieland treats “justification by faith” as if it invokes a second term. The point is that even if Paul desired to bring out different angles of “justification,” this would not be done by attaching prepositional phrases. His readers would intuitively understand the function of prepositional phrases as offering additional information as to the

³⁸ The Greek does not contain a preposition in this particular instance. The preposition in English serves as a gloss for the dative case which can semantically overlap with prepositions. This explains why, “. . . the simple dative is phasing out in Koine Greek, being replaced largely by prepositions. . . .” Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 66.

OLSTAD: UNIVERSAL LEGAL JUSTIFICATION

cause/agency/result/source/etc.³⁹ of “justification.” If Wieland were to follow this principle without modifying his theology he would immediately run into a contradiction. Plugging ULJ into the phrase “justified by faith” would then translate to “justified (universal legal justification which is not by faith) by faith.”

Sequeira also sees an important distinction between these two “applications” of justification but in a different way than Wieland:

Justification means to be declared righteous. When used in the context of the gospel the word justification is used in two ways — as an objective fact as well as a subjective experience. As an objective fact, justification is applied to the entire human race fully redeemed in Christ. [Read **Rom. 5:18**.] But since this objective justification is God’s supreme gift to mankind, the good news of the gospel, it has to be received in order to be experienced. Therefore, justification, as a subjective experience, applies only to those who have believe and obey [sic] the gospel, and are baptized into Christ. The Bible refers to this as justification by faith [**Mk. 16:15, 16; Rom. 5:1**]. This dual application of justification is also true of the word sanctification.⁴⁰

Sequeira clarifies the relationship between ULJ and “justification by faith” by saying, “When Christ died on the cross, all humanity was legally justified because all humanity died with Him there. Justification by faith is simply making that legal justification effective in the life of the believer.”⁴¹ Conditionality in the block quote above is clear and therefore serves as another reference to Sequeira’s unconfessed Arminianism. Though provision is present in the structure of Sequeira’s arguments, Arminians would take issue in the way he has chosen to *articulate* that provision, specifically with phrases such as “all humanity was legally justified,” and “. . . God actually and unconditionally saved all humanity at the cross . . .”⁴² Notice the difference in terms related to the process of salvation pictorially represented in the following illustration.

³⁹ For a quick refresher on the function of Greek prepositions see: Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 356-389.

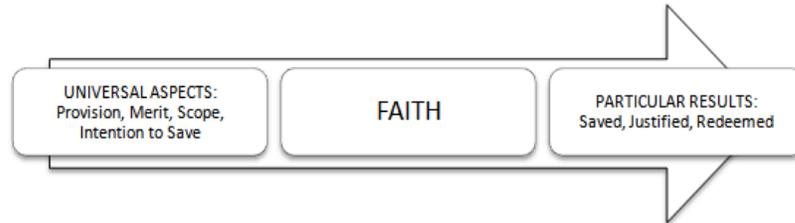
⁴⁰ Jack Sequeira, “Justification and Sanctification.” Accessed 7/12/10 at <http://www.jacksequeira.org/issues06.htm>.

⁴¹ Sequeira, *Beyond Belief*, 43.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 8.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Traditional Arminian Articulation of Universal Provisions to Particular Results



Sequeira's Articulation of Universal Provisions to Particular Results



It is clear that standard Arminian articulation has chosen to reserve terms such as “save” and “justify” to post-faith experience whereas Sequeira and ULJ proponents have not. Following a dialectic of “objective/subjective” terminology and using “by faith” to make “effective” what already is supposedly the case “objectively,” universalism is avoided and basic Arminianism is upheld.⁴³ So the question emerges again as to whether ULJ terminology should be adopted? This leads to my second response based on the intuitive grammatical use of language. Again, this notion is arrived at prior to any exegesis but I believe exegetically holds true in the Pauline epistles. The principle is as follows: Predicable propositions (X is Y) containing “justified” and “saved” should not be affirmed unless their effectiveness and ontological nature is assumed in the predication. Let’s flesh this out in a question to a ULJ proponent: If one is

⁴³ Since Pastor Sequeira is clear that he believes the “Armenian [sic] gospel. . . is anything but good news,” (<http://www.jacksequeira.org/issues01.htm>) I ask that he patiently endure his theology being characterized as such. I think the Arminianism in his theology is a good thing and therefore this is not a case of “name calling.”

OLSTAD: UNIVERSAL LEGAL JUSTIFICATION

already legally justified without faith, what purpose would there be to exercise faith? The ULJ proponent would say that one needs to exercise faith in order to make that justified status effective. But in reference to the principle under consideration, one should respond that if status is already predicated, then the status *would* be effective. The same holds true with Sequeira's most extreme statement that all were "actually saved" at the cross. If that's the case, why exercise faith? The predictable answer from ULJ theology is that faith is necessary to make effective or to receive that "actual salvation." But isn't it plain that if this predicated salvation is not effective for unbelievers, it is best not to make the predication in the first place, not to mention the added difficulty of adding the term "actual" to the mix? In other words, effectiveness is inherent in the nature of predicate statements. If quality Y is not effective for subject X, then we naturally avoid predicating Y of X. This is the natural way of communicating and this is why Arminians will most likely not be following in the terminological footsteps of Sequeira and Wieland.

When Arminians say, "Joan is saved" they don't want that proposition to elicit secondary questions or clarifications like, "Do you mean objectively or subjectively" or nuances such as, "She is justified, but not effectively." From both a practical and logical standpoint, if the pre-faith predication of universal legal justification, i.e., "I am justified," is "ineffective,"⁴⁴ "not experienced,"⁴⁵ not "reality to us,"⁴⁶ and equally made for those who are saved as well as for those who are lost, its utility as a theological construct is questionable.⁴⁷

Let's briefly review this grammar and articulation section. Both Wieland and Sequeira have invoked a ULJ that is predicated of all humanity. Because this predication of itself is divested of ontological salvation, i.e. no one who is *only* universally legally justified will walk

⁴⁴ The predication is ineffective since it is not "effective" until faith is exercised.

⁴⁵ "The legal justification effected at the cross is not something we experience. . ." Sequeira, *Beyond Belief*, 101.

⁴⁶ "The objective gospel can become a reality to us only when we experience its power in our lives." Sequeira, *Beyond Belief*, 89.

⁴⁷ ULJ does seem effective in undermining a legalistic attitude because one is deemed "already" saved and justified even before faith is exercised and therefore *a fortiori* before any works.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

through the pearly gates,⁴⁸ they have had to look for a separate biblical expression which predicates ontological salvation of individuals. They have done this in slightly different ways. Wieland's explication of "justification by faith" verges on turning that phrase into a single novel word "justificationbyfaith." In other words, "justification" spoken without the prepositional phrase satisfies the legal demands of salvation made for everyone, while "justification by faith" takes care of the heart transformation and brings about ontological salvation. We concluded that this is loading a prepositional phrase with excessive functionality. The plain use of language dictates that the definition of the term "justified" without the prepositional phrase is identical to the term within the phrase, "justified by faith." The conjoining prepositional phrase is simply stating some dimension of *how* justification (whatever the definition of "justification" may be) is coming about. As stated above, if Wieland applies the standard function of prepositional phrases to his explanations, he must modify his theology or run up on a contradiction.

Sequeira, in contrast to Wieland, makes a slightly different distinction between "justification" and "justification by faith." He has followed a more plausible line of reasoning that understands "justification by faith" as simply making effective one's previous legal justified status. This doesn't run into the same "preposition-creating-another-term" fallacy that seems apparent in Wieland's explanation. But following this tack has its own problem. The common use of predicable statements dictates that if Y is not "effective" for X, we simply don't predicate Y of X. Arminian articulation has rightly reserved predication of terms such as "justification" and "salvation" until these terms are "effective" for the individual. This understanding forms the conceptual nuts and bolts of the concept of "provision" and explains why Arminian theology feels free to vocally espouse a provisional view of the atonement.

Sequeira, on the other hand, has an aversion to both the articulation of provision and to being classified as Arminian.⁴⁹ He therefore has introduced

⁴⁸ Sequeira makes an exception to this in reference to babies, but I have unfortunately misplaced the reference.

⁴⁹ My opinion is that Pastor Sequeira has become a casualty of believing the common caricatures of Arminianism instead of the true Arminius or his theology as explicated by his ablest defenders. The following quote represents one of many that support this assessment: "Because of the assumption held by the Christian church, that all persons are born lost, we

OLSTAD: UNIVERSAL LEGAL JUSTIFICATION

a sweeping theological paradigm of objective/subjective categories which, as shown in the previous sections, is simply a novel way to explicate the concept of provision without using the term.

As a final note, it should be stated that laboring over the point of articulation and grammar is not a display of being narrow, nit-picky, or overly complicated. In fact, in this context, it is to emphasize that the most common sense, simplest, and natural understanding of the grammar involved with “justification” should be followed. In light of this, this section represents a conservative defense that attempts to show that the articulation of ULJ assumes too many exceptions to basic rules of language.

5. A Brief Note on the Logic of Paul’s Argumentation

The purpose of this paper was not to repeat exegesis⁵⁰ that shows, directly or indirectly, that Paul’s theology is not in harmony with the basic tenets of ULJ. Its purpose is to show that ULJ belongs to the broader current of Arminianism and does not represent a third option between Arminius and Calvin.⁵¹ Secondly, it attempts at filling an appreciable gap in the critiques thus far made that haven’t addressed the issues of grammar and articulation that plague ULJ. The more accurate, though cumbersome, title of this paper could be, “Universal Legal Justification: A Failed

as a church have applied the in Christ motif only to believers. Since we hold to the Armenian [sic] view of the gospel, that salvation in Christ is only provisional, we have been teaching our people that only after we have taken the initiative, by believing in Jesus Christ and repenting of our sins, that God is able to put us into Christ and save us. As mentioned in our last study, this is the main reason why so many Adventists have been robbed of the assurance of salvation” Jack Sequeira, “The In Christ Motif.” Accessed 7/12/10 at <http://www.jacksequeira.org/issues03.htm>). In contrast to this quote and others, classical Arminianism places God behind all initiatives concerning salvation through prevenient grace. For more on prevenient grace, see Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 159-178.

⁵⁰ See, for example, the treatment of Romans 5:18 in Douglas Moo, “The Epistle to the Romans,” *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996). For a more direct treatment, see Larry J. Kane, “Analysis of the Doctrine of Universal ‘Legal’ Justification,” and a handful of other related articles at <http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org/documents.htm#theology>.

⁵¹ It could be argued that there can be no third option to Arminius and Calvin in the way Sequeira makes his claim. This is the case because arguably anything that is other than an unconditional election to salvation (Calvinism) is by definition equated as Arminianism (excluding universalism which is really not an evangelical option). This does not weaken the thesis of this paper, but it makes my conclusion a bit anti-climactic.

Alternative Between Calvin and Arminius and A Failed Improvement to the Articulation of Arminianism.” Though I believe the paper thus far has attempted to fulfill those goals, an additional observation on the logic of Paul’s argumentation on justification is in order.

This observation is based on the consensus that when Paul speaks in the context of being “justified by faith” (Rom 3:28, 4:5, 5:1; Gal 2:16, 3:11) he is contrasting being justified by “works of the law.” This observation is axiomatic. Taking Sequeira’s emphasis that justification “by faith” is making effective the universal legal justification one already possess, how does this coordinate with Paul’s interlocutors who believed that justification was by “works of the law”? Did they also believe that all humanity was legally and objectively justified and that “works of the law” is what made that status effective? The force of this point is that when Paul argues one is justified “by faith” he is assuming that there is agreement with his opponents on the definition of “justification,” otherwise they would be arguing apples and oranges. The issue is *not* “what is justification?” but *how* one is justified. What use would it be for Paul to say justification is by faith, not works, if his interlocutors had a different notion of justification in mind?⁵² Given the assumption that the definition of justification must be uniform on both sides of the argument in order for the issue of “faith” and “works” to be highlighted, I find it extremely implausible that Paul’s interlocutors had the same universal/legal definition of justification that Sequeira ascribes to Paul.⁵³

6. Motives and Anticipations

To speak of another’s motives is always dangerous ground. In addition, speculations of this sort are perilously indefensible since all the person in question must say is, “You are wrong. Those were not my motives.” Discussion over. So, to begin, let us rightly and cordially assume that the

⁵² Looking at it structurally, Paul’s debate must be in the form X is by F (faith) against X is by W (works). What sense would the argument make if the structure was instead: X is by F (faith) against B is by W (works).

⁵³ This argument stands regardless of exactly what is meant by “justification” and especially the never ending controversy on what Paul precisely meant by “works of the law.” It simply argues that unless both sides had a common definition of justification, the discussion in Romans, i.e., whether justification is “by faith” or “works of the law,” could not have gotten off the ground.

OLSTAD: UNIVERSAL LEGAL JUSTIFICATION

motives of Sequeira and Wieland (and others) in propagating ULJ theology, is based on the strongest conviction that their theology is biblical. This being said, let's also recognize that theological positions (including my own) are not insusceptible to numerous other variables besides the Bible such as denominational identity, personal background, the presence of heresy (real or perceived), culture, etc. This short section seeks to show that ULJ has become a rallying point of denominational identity for segments of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and therefore I anticipate that ULJ will not soon be discarded. This prognosis is based on some fascinating lines of reasoning in a small published book by Wieland that served as an apologetic to Jack Sequeira's book, *Beyond Belief*.

Wieland begins by offering a short history:

In the 1970's Desmond Ford and Robert D. Brinsmead were prominent champions of the Reformationist view. . . they saw Waggoner as teaching Roman Catholicism because he had maintained that justification by faith makes the believer righteous, or makes him obedient to the law of God. The biblical law-court language, they insisted, required that "justification" could not make one righteous because the ancient Hebrew judge could never "make" an accused person "righteous," but only "declare" him so (Deuteronomy 25:1). They maintained that justification by faith therefore is only a legal declaration.⁵⁴

The reason Wieland is unsatisfied with the Reformationist⁵⁵ view that "justification by faith" be restricted to a legal declaration is clarified in the book a page later: "The Reformationist view insisted that any change in the believer's heart takes place not in justification by faith but in sanctification; and since sanctification is never complete in this life, the believer can never hope to overcome sin completely until glorification takes place at the second advent."⁵⁶ Wieland sees that if transformation is not maintained under "justification by faith," then hopes for complete victory over sin in this life are dashed on the incompleteness inherent in sanctification. The

⁵⁴ Wieland, *Is Beyond Belief Beyond Belief?*, 59.

⁵⁵ This and subsequent references to the "Reformationist" view should be understood as from Wieland's perspective and not necessarily that of the Reformers themselves. The Finnish school on Luther merits consideration on this point.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

popularity of the Reformationist/Ford position in the late 70's and 80's posed a serious theological threat to his transformational reading of "justification by faith."

So what is the connection of all this to universal legal justification? Notice how Wieland in the following quotes utilizes ULJ to refute the Reformationist understanding of justification (all emphasis mine).

I [Wieland]. . . began to understand that the legal justification took place at the cross, long before the sinner repents and believes. And if it took place at the cross, it must objectively apply to "all men." It follows therefore that justification by faith *must be* experiential, and *must be* a change of heart that makes the believer obedient to all the commandments of God.⁵⁷

Wanting to help my congregation at Chula Vista to realize what the issues were, I wrote a little tract giving biblical evidence that the legal justification of "declaration" took place at the cross and therefore applied objectively to "all men," and that justification by faith *had to be* the subjective experience of change of heart and reconciliation with God that produces complete obedience.⁵⁸

Basically, from Wieland's perspective, ULJ is the ideal doctrine to undermine the Reformationist view of "justification by faith" being a legal declaration. The logic is plain. If all of humanity is *already* legally justified (obviously, apart from faith), then it precludes "justification by faith" from involving a legal declaration. The only thing left for "justification by faith" to mean is a subjective transformational experience. It is this argument from elimination that ostensibly resolves the age old debate as to whether justification by faith means to "legally declare" or to "subjectively make" righteous. Wieland has posited that the "legally declared" side of salvation has been applied to all humanity *before* the exercise of faith. The "only man left standing" so to speak, is the transformational interpretation. Wieland is confident that ". . . it [universal legal justification] was called

⁵⁷ Ibid., 60-61. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 61. Emphasis mine.

OLSTAD: UNIVERSAL LEGAL JUSTIFICATION

into being to refute the Reformationist teachings of our time, which is why we have used it.”⁵⁹

It is because ULJ is understood providentially to combat an alleged heresy and preserve a distinct denominational identity vis-à-vis the rest of “Reformationist” evangelicalism, that I forecast that ULJ will be with us as a denomination for a protracted amount of time.

7. Conclusion

Sequeira and Wieland are both convinced that universal legal justification splits the horns of the Arminian/Calvinistic dilemma concerning the nature and scope of the atonement. Excerpts from their material certainly appear that they have succeeded, at least at first blush. But once the full orbed understanding of ULJ is fleshed out, it emerges as a novel term that serves as an addendum to Arminian provisionality. Sequeira and Wieland see a deficiency in the traditional Arminian method of expressing the universal aspects of the atonement⁶⁰ (which in Sequeira’s words undermines assurance, fosters legalism, and encourages ego-centrism) and therefore supplants them with ULJ and other objective categories. To avoid universalism, a sweeping paradigm of objective/subjective categories has been installed, but this too has failed to produce a systemic change in the provisional dimensions of Arminianism.

Once it was understood that ULJ is part of the larger landscape of Arminianism, it was safe to move to the issue of whether ULJ is an improvement to the traditional ways of articulating the concept of justification. The conclusion was that the bifurcation of justification which produces a significant distinction between the expression “justification” and “justification by faith” is not tenable on grammatical logical grounds. Wieland leaned heavy on the prepositional phrase “by faith” as highlighting two phases of justification, a legal universal phase and a heart transformational phase. It was determined that this violates the normal function of such grammatical phrases by allotting them excessive semantic control over the word they are modifying.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 62.

⁶⁰ Or perhaps they are unaware of the trenchant arguments of Arminianism which preclude legalism, support believer’s assurance, and reserve all initiatives of salvation as divine prerogatives of God.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Sequeira took a slightly different tack and maintained that the same phrase, i.e., “by faith,” was making effective a legal justified status that had been previously predicated of all individuals. In contrast to that approach, statements of predication, e.g., “She is justified,” or “He is saved,” have been prudently reserved by Arminians as post-faith propositions. Assuming that both Sequeira and Arminians are doing their best to sidestep the Calvinistic charge of placing merit/initiative in humanity’s exercise of faith, they each have articulated how they make this important qualification. Arminians reserve statements of predication, e.g., John is justified, until one exercises faith, but then they *clarify faith* as being a gift from God that serves as the instrumental cause (not the meritorious cause) of justification. Sequeira and friends predicate an objective justification of individuals, e.g., John is justified, but then *qualify the predication* as not being effective until faith is exercised.⁶¹ Each system, in its own way, is striving to avoid the “faith-as-a-legalistic-work” accusation. This paper deems, however, that the standard use of predication should be reserved for that which is experienced or “effective” and that there is no good reason (with an eye to Paul’s epistles) to divest predication of its natural import. This principle coincides with the natural use of language and supports the reason that Arminian/Adventist theology has defined an atonement that is universal in scope, meritorious in nature, but provisionally predicated only to those who exercise faith.

Lastly, some statements by Robert Wieland revealed that ULJ is not just some esoteric subject to keep theologians entertained at symposia. Not only does ULJ have a large popular audience, in which many have “found the assurance of salvation for the first time. . .”⁶² it has also been invoked as an effective refutation to what many consider the compromising inroads of Reformationist theology. Held in the one hand as a comforting “assurance of salvation” and in the other as a weapon against heresy, universal legal justification is not likely to be relinquished anytime soon.

⁶¹ On a reflective note, I have asked myself whether I want to be in the position of either having to clarify the nature of exercising faith in statements such as “being justified by faith,” or rather be in the position of having to qualify predicable statements such as “all humanity is legally justified.” Obviously, I choose the former.

⁶² See the back cover blurb on *Beyond Belief*.

OLSTAD: UNIVERSAL LEGAL JUSTIFICATION

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