

A Friendly Answer to an Honest Objection

(Is Angel Rodriguez's Critique of Legal Justification Valid?)

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Angel Rodriguez, former chair of the BRI¹, objects to the concept of legal universal justification (LUJ) on two grounds:

1. The totality of the scriptures.
2. Its impact on other teachings of the Bible.

Rodriguez's strong objection to the concept comes out clearly in the opening words of his response to a question that he understands as relating to the concept of LUJ.

The question states:

"A friend of mine tells me that all the benefits of Christ's death were given to the human race when He died. This doesn't seem biblical. Is it?"

Rodriguez opens his response by stating:

"Such an idea, called by its proponents 'legal universal justification,' is not biblical." (His full response to this question is contained in Appendix A.)

Rodriguez says, "proponents" call the concept "legal universal justification". Personally, I have been studying legal justification and its ramifications since the late 80's and I have never encountered this expression. This appears to be Rodriguez's own expression for what some have called legal justification, forensic justification², temporary universal justification³, corporate justification⁴ or corporate amnesty⁵. I know of no proponent of the concept who uses the expression, "legal universal justification". It is evident to me that Rodriguez is referring to the concept of legal justification. Therefore, my comments will assume that his critique of LUJ address this concept.

I would like to note as we begin that we have some deficits as we attempt to analyze Dr. Rodriguez's critique. The individual who has asked the question that Rodriguez is addressing got his view of this concept second hand. We do not know whom the questioner's "friend" has been listening to or studying. We should take note that we are actually hearing the description of the concept third hand. The questioner's friend heard or studied the concept. He described it to the person who asked a

¹ Biblical Research Institute, of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

² Legal justification and forensic justification are expression used by the late Robert J. Wieland.

³ "Temporary universal justification" is the expression used by Arnold Wallenkampf in his book entitled, *Justified*.

⁴ "Corporate justification" is the expression found in, *The Message of the Latter Rain*, by Duncan and Peters.

⁵ "Corporate amnesty" is the term Dr. Roy Gane uses to refer to the concept in *Forgiveness (Seven Accomplishments of Christ's Sacrifice)*, Adventist Review, June 27, 2013.

question of Dr. Rodriguez. The questioner poses the question based upon his observations of a friend's description. Finally we hear a description of the concept through Dr. Rodriguez's response to the second hand ideas expressed in the form of a question. Given the source of this description and the multiple perceptions and understandings involved in the production of the question that we see, it is not surprising that what we see appears to be a bit inaccurate.

Given our lack of information regarding who the questioner's friend has been listening to or studying, and the manner in which the question finally comes to us, we should not be surprised that there exists a degree of uncertainty and ambiguity as we attempt to understand and respond to Rodriguez's brief critique of the concept. It appears that much of the distortion is introduced by Dr. Rodriguez himself or at least he appears to agree with and emphasize the original distortions and inaccuracies that are evident in the question. We shall assume that his critique is intended to address all proponents of the concept of corporate justification. This is not stated in the critique. And once again some degree of uncertainty is unavoidable.

First of all, I find Dr. Rodriguez's stated criteria for evaluation of the concept very sound. (Other criteria may be involved but they are not stated.) To evaluate a doctrine based upon "the totality of scripture," and the perceived "impact" of the doctrine "on other teachings of the Bible," appears in my opinion to be a very good basis for the evaluation of any doctrine. However, as I look at the scriptures, I find it a profound mystery that a Bible scholar of Dr. Rodriguez's caliber concludes this doctrine "is not biblical." Does his view of LUJ represent sound biblical scholarship? Has he taken an open and honest look at the Bible evidence? Are his views truly based on scriptural exegesis, or has he in reality brought his own predetermined opinions to the review of the sacred evidence along with a foregone conclusion that he will accept nothing that disagrees with those opinions? These are important questions that must await another day.

There are a few Evangelical Bible scholars who clearly discern at least the possibility of an interpretation of scripture that can be understood in a manner that is consistent with the doctrine of LUJ. One such scholar is John Murray, Professor of Systematic Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA.

Commenting on Romans 4:25 Murray states:

Verse 25 offers two possibilities as to interpretation. The question turns on the exact force of the two expressions which are parallel to each other and are identical in the form of construction, "on account of our trespasses" and "on account of our justification". The former is related to the delivering up of Christ, his crucifixion, and gives the reason for it. The latter is related to the resurrection of Christ and gives the reason for it. Since the clauses are parallel we shall have to regard "our trespasses" as sustaining to the crucifixion of Christ the same kind of relationship as "our justification" sustains to his resurrection.⁶

These words are in exact harmony with my understanding of Romans 4:25. And these relationships lead me to conclude that the verse speaks of a phase of justification which took place independent of the faith of those who were justified. Murray continues:

On the former alternative the thought would be that Jesus was delivered up because our trespasses were placed upon him and that He was raised from the dead because we had been justified. On this view the resurrection of Jesus is regarded as the consequence of our justification and justification is conceived of as complete prior to the resurrection.⁷

⁶ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 154-155

⁷ Ibid.

This interpretation supports the interpretation that some proponents of LUJ have presented for Romans 4:25. This verse of scripture is regarded by some as clear support for the understanding that the world was justified at the death of Christ. This being true suggests there must exist a phase of justification that is independent of the faith of the subjects of the justification.

As mentioned in the reference cited above, this is one of two alternatives suggested by Murray as plausible interpretations of this verse of scripture. Murray prefers the second alternative but acknowledges the above as one possible legitimate interpretation based on the linguistics of Romans 4:25.

As we seek to confirm the validity of 1888 concepts in the writings of Evangelical scholars, we should bear in mind that we are dealing with “the third angel’s message in verity”⁸. Few outside of Adventism have understood most of these concepts. The hint of an acknowledgement of the validity of some aspects of the message is probably all that we should expect to find in their writings, especially in view of the fact that we were commanded to give this message to the world,⁹ and we have largely failed to do so.¹⁰ I have come across at least three more commentaries on Romans written by Evangelical scholars that include even stronger statements that clearly support the Jones/Waggoner understanding of justification. Those are unavailable as I write.

However, I do have access to some interesting comments on “corporate amnesty” by an excellent Bible scholar who may be familiar to you:

By winning back the dominion of Planet Earth, for humans through Christ’s sacrifice, God “was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor. 5:19, NRSV). That is, having decapitated the rebellion by destroying the right of the devil and his angels to exercise subregency over earth, God has granted corporate legal amnesty (not to be confused with legal-only justification of individuals) to human beings who rebelled against Him, and, in this sense, are forgiven as a group (Col. 2:13-15; Rom. 5:18).¹¹

In the second chapter of the first book of the Bible we find grounds for the necessity of corporate justification.

“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17).

We all know the story. Eve had a discussion with a serpent who suggested God was not being honest with her. He said in essence, God had lied to Adam and Eve because He knows that if they eat of the tree in the middle of the garden they will become as gods. So, “she took of the fruit thereof . . . and gave also to her husband, and he did eat” (Gen. 3:6).

That day both Adam and Eve were supposed to die. This is the plainest reading of a clear statement in the Word of God (Gen. 2:16-17). In fact God Himself stated that this would be the outcome. God said, “In the day that you eat thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17). The conclusion that Adam and Eve

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890.

⁹ “This is the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third angel’s message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure” (Ellen G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 1338).

¹⁰ “The light that is to lighten the whole earth with its glory was resisted, and by the action of our own brethren has been in a great degree kept away from the world” (Ellen G. White, *ibid.* 1576).

¹¹ Roy Gane, Ph.D., *Forgiveness (Seven Accomplishments of Christ’s Sacrifice)*, Adventist Review, June 27, 2013

should have died the day they partook of the forbidden fruit constitutes one of the foundational premises of *The Message of the Latter Rain* (MLR).

For those who may need a Spirit of Prophecy reference that supports this premise there are many. Here is one of several that may be cited in support of this premise:

The moment the workmanship of God refused obedience to the laws of God's kingdom, that moment he became disloyal to the government of God and he made himself entirely unworthy of all the blessings wherewith God had favored him.

This was the position of the human race after man divorced himself from God by transgression. Then he was no longer entitled to a breath of air, a ray of sunshine, or a particle of food. And the reason why man was not annihilated was because God so loved him that He made the gift of His dear Son that He should suffer the penalty of his transgression.¹²

(Several additional statements, supportive of the premise, are cited in the book and are also available in Appendix B of this document.)

True, the above statement does not say, "Adam should have died immediately." But, it does say that he was no longer "entitled to a breath of air," after he sinned. How long would Adam have lived had God not continued to give him air? Medical science says human beings can live for only minutes without air. Thus I believe it is clear that Adam would have died that day apart from the grace of God.

We may also cite scholarly supports for the understanding that Adam and Eve should have died the day they ate of the forbidden fruit.

The effect of Christ's provision for the human race to continue began at the Fall into sin (Gen. 3), long before the cross. The penalty for rebelling against God was immediate death (Gen. 2:17; compare Rom. 6:23), which He justly could have administered the same day to make humans extinct. Adam and Eve could live on only because God provided for their redemption through the future sacrifice of Christ (Gen. 3:15; 1 Peter 1:18-20; Rev. 13:8; 17:8).¹³

We, the authors of MLR, have taken the position that Adam was supposed to have died that day in the garden when he ate of the forbidden fruit. We further suggest that God did not simply overlook Adam's sin. He could not justly allow mankind to continue to live without addressing the legal consequences of the sins that would result from that decision. Adam was supposed to die that day in the garden. He transgressed a direct command of God and the penalty for transgression is eternal death (see Romans 6:23). The question is: Could God arbitrarily allow Adam to continue to live without addressing the legal ramifications of his sin? Would God be "just" if He ignored the just demands of his own law?

I believe it is also of significance that there are several places where the scriptures themselves present a broader portrayal of certain elements of salvation than appear to be acceptable to Dr. Angel Rodriguez. These I shall refer to as universal statements. Rodriguez appears to be using a modified definition of universalism as he evaluates the doctrine of LUJ. By his modified definition, Paul, and Jesus were universalists. Jesus said to Nicodemus, "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). The text continues but Dr. Rodriguez appears to consider the continuation of a presentation irrelevant to the definition of universalism. As soon as a universal aspect of the plan of redemption is articulated he as well as others I have met seem to feel the universalist label is applicable.

¹² Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, 21

¹³ Roy Gane, Ph. D., *Forgiveness (Seven Accomplishments of Christ's Sacrifice)*, Adventist Review, June 27, 2013

Jesus spoke to the people of Samaria and convinced them that He was, “indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42). This would be clear universalism by the Rodriguez’s definition. Paul wrote, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23, 24). He also wrote that Jesus “was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (Romans 4:25), He further wrote, “as through one man’s offense *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification of life” (Romans 5:8). And, “For to this *end* we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is *the* Savior of all men . . .” (1 Timothy 4:10). All of these biblical statements appear to fit squarely within the definition of universalism that Dr. Rodriguez appears to use.

I believe the point is clear. “That which proves too much proves nothing.”

We believe that there are of necessity two aspects or phases of justification. We are born into this world under the umbrella of corporate justification. Yet, we further believe that we must accept Christ by faith and experience “justification by faith,” (i.e., a transformation of heart), if we are to be eternally saved. Christ has already saved us (the human race) from the penalty of Adam’s sin. When Adam sinned in the garden, he should have died eternally, that day. This is the requirement of the law of God. “The soul that sinneth it shall die” (Eze. 18:4). “The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law” (1 Cor. 15:56). Therefore, the day Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he should have died. If Adam had died that day in the Garden of Eden we (the human race) would have died in him. But Jesus stepped in, and saved the entire human race from immediate annihilation. Therefore, it is perfectly accurate and biblical to say, the whole human race has been saved, placed under grace, and given a second probation. I must hasten to add we are not speaking here of eternal salvation. Yet, this is salvation unto temporal or probationary life.

We should also be aware that the definition of universalism that Rodriguez appears to be using condemns the Spirit of Prophecy. In the writings of Ellen White we find many statements of universal aspects of redemption. For example:

Christ was tempted by Satan in a hundredfold severer manner than was Adam, and under circumstances in every way more trying. The deceiver presented himself as an angel of light, but Christ withstood his temptations. He redeemed Adam’s disgraceful fall, and *saved the world*.¹⁴

He took in His grasp the world over which Satan claimed to preside as his lawful territory, and by His wonderful work in giving His life, *He restored the whole race of men to favor with God*.¹⁵

Jesus knows the circumstances of every soul. The greater the sinner’s guilt, the more he needs the Saviour. His heart of divine love and sympathy is drawn out most of all for the one who is

¹⁴ E. G. White, *Youth Instructor*, June 2, 1898, emphasis supplied, MLR 97

¹⁵ E. G. White, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7A 485 emphasis supplied, MLR 98

the most helplessly entangled in the snares of the enemy. With His own blood *He has signed the emancipation papers of the race.*¹⁶

A ransom has been provided at infinite cost, and it is not because there is any flaw in *the title which has been purchased for lost souls that they do not accept it*. It is not because the mercy, the grace, the love of the Father and the Son are not ample, and have not been freely bestowed, that they do not rejoice in pardoning love, but it because of their unbelief, because of their choice of the world, that they are not comforted with the grace of God.¹⁷

For every human being, Christ has paid the election price. No one need be lost. *All have been redeemed.*¹⁸

All of the above references from the Spirit of Prophecy, fit within the definition of universalism that Dr. Rodriguez appears to be using. Again, that which proves too much proves nothing.

This is a key point for understanding where the Rodriguez critique of LUJ goes astray. He states:

Since universal legal justification teaches that before the Lord all the sins of the human race have already been forgiven and the human race has been saved, as a practical matter it leaves no room for the biblical teaching of Christ's high priestly mediation before the Father (See Appendix below).

I understand Rodriguez to be saying, since everyone has been saved and all sins have been completely forgiven, what need could there possibly be for the mediation of Christ before the Father. This argument fails to understand the two phases of forgiveness and the purpose of Christ's mediation.

We would further suggest that the conclusion of this analysis fails to consider its ramifications for the justice of God, and his standing in the judgment especially when accused by Satan of injustice. The plan of redemption involves much more than the salvation of man (see Eph. 3:10). Therefore, the plan must be congruent with other boundary parameters of the great controversy. God had to address two issues when Adam sinned. He had to be fair to those who were in Adam (i.e., the human race), and He had to consider the demands of His holy law. Both of these issues appear to have been overlooked in the conclusions of Rodriguez's critique.

This reality, the universal temporal salvation accomplished by virtue of Christ's intervention in the Garden of Eden, and sacrifice later on the cross, does not suggest that all of humanity will be eternally saved. It does not demand that all of the human family will accept the gift of eternal salvation which God has given to us in Christ.¹⁹ Therefore, the necessary action taken by Christ the moment Adam sinned in the garden, although it has saved us in a temporal sense, does not suggest the notion of eternal salvation for all mankind (universalism). It is true that God intended that the process that He initiated in the Garden of Eden would be appreciated and that it should be effective for all eternity. Yet

¹⁶ E. G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, 89, emphasis supplied, MLR 98

¹⁷ E. G. White, *Signs of the Times*, June 6, 1895, emphasis supplied, MLR 98

¹⁸ E. G. White, *Seventh-day Adventists Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, 944 emphasis supplied, MLR 98

¹⁹ See John 3:16, 1 John 5:11

we must bear in mind that God never revokes our power of choice. Dr. Rodriguez appears to forget this important fact.

To conclude that God *eternally* saved the human race in the Garden of Eden when Adam sinned, necessarily involves the false concept of “once saved always saved.” We do not believe that concept is biblical, nor does anyone who is teaching LUJ to my knowledge. Therefore, the question that Angel Rodriguez interprets as a description of ramifications coming out of the concept of legal universal justification appears to miss the mark. An accurate description of the concept is not described by the question. Further, Angel Rodriguez appears to be working with some broad misconceptions of what the concept of LUJ really means. In my opinion, none of the advocates of the concept have ever denied the heavenly ministry of Christ as our high priest.

As Seventh-day Adventists we must consider the parameters of the great controversy in any attempt to answer questions such as this. The controversy is primarily over the law of God.²⁰ Satan has argued God is not just. If God ignores the requirements of the law and arbitrarily allows the human race to continue to exist after the fall, Satan’s accusation would be sustained and God would be unjust. Therefore, if God intended to allow human existence to continue, He was under an obligation to justify that decision with respect to the moral law on behalf of the entire human race, or life on this world could not be allowed to continue. God could not afford to give credence to Satan’s accusation.

Rodriguez’s response to the question posed, does not appear to have been well thought out. It appears the response does not consider “the totality of scripture.” In responding to the question, Dr. Rodriguez does not account for the “impact” of his response “on other teachings of the Bible.” First of all we note that the question which Rodriguez responds to, as it has been phrased, does not appear to accurately reflect the teaching of anyone of whom I am aware that teaches the concept of LUJ. If this question is intending to describe LUJ it is a very inaccurate description of the concept and its ramifications.

The expression, “all the benefits of Christ’s death” were given when Jesus died, goes far beyond the bounds that are intended to be communicated by the concept of LUJ. This imprecise statement implies that every member of the human family is born into the world already eternally saved and destined for heaven. Based on statements in his critique it appears that Rodriguez’s believes this is an accurate statement of the LUJ position. His response makes it clear that he regards those who teach LUJ as universalists. The evidence does not support that conclusion.

There is an individual who in our understanding teaches a concept of legal universal justification which can be interpreted as a form of universalism, Jack Sequeira. Pastor Sequeira does not actually believe that we are born saved. But there is an issue of double speak in the way he articulates the gospel. Universalism is not the meaning that he intends to convey. It is only an understanding that some derive from his presentation because of the double speak issue. Whether most realize it or not, we (the authors of MLR) believe Jack’s message and the message of the 1888 MSC are not precisely the same. Jack does believe that his message and the message that Wieland, and subsequently the 1888 MSC, have taught are identical messages. We see a very clear difference. We also believe Elder Wieland would agree with our understanding of the perceived differences.

The clearest evidence of a distinction between Sequeira’s position and the position of the 1888 MSC as well as the position presented in MLR is the stance taken on issue of condemnation. On this point, the

²⁰ See Appendix C for scriptural support of this assertion.

1888 MSC and MLR appear in some respects to be closer to teaching universalism than Jack Sequeira. The committee and MLR both teach that by his death Christ reversed what Adam did. The committee has taught:

The sacrifice of Christ has become effective for all men in that “while we were yet sinners [enemies], Christ died for us.” Therefore, whatever Adam transmitted to his posterity, Christ has canceled out. He died for the ungodly. This is the only reason human life can continue. . . . The New English Bible correctly translates Paul: “All are justified” (Romans 3:24).

(f) Therefore the gospel does not tell men that they will be justified if they do something first, even if that something is to believe. The gospel tells all men that they are already justified, legally and forensically.²¹

Several times throughout MLR it is also clearly stated or implied that we are *not* born into this world under condemnation. We are born justified, legally and forensically:

No one, therefore, is under condemnation. Corporate universal justification is effective for all. The condemnation brought upon the race in Adam has been fully reversed. All are under probationary grace.²²

The good news that “sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14) is a direct result of corporate universal justification. We have all been placed under probationary grace. If we believe that we are born under the condemnation of the law, it is difficult, if not impossible to receive victory over sin, no matter how sincerely we confess and try to forsake sin. As long as we see only one condemnation—that under which we believe we were born—we will be forever seeking to free ourselves from it. Fear will plague our minds, and sin will continue to have dominion (see Hebrews 2:14, 15).²³

We have all been saved from the first condemnation.²⁴

By the death of Christ, our condemnation has been fully reversed.²⁵

All of us are under the umbrella of corporate, universal justification. All have been redeemed from the curse of the law. This phase of justification pertains to the first condemnation, which came upon the whole human race in Adam.²⁶

This text [2 Cor. 5:19] tells us that God has refrained from imputing trespasses to the whole world. . . The first condemnation is removed, and our sins are not counted against us but against Christ, our Representative.²⁷

²¹ Robert J. Wieland, *The 1888 Message and Introduction*, Glad Tiding Publishers, 1997, p. 97

²² Duncan, Peters, *The Message of the Latter Rain*, p. 28

²³ Duncan, Peters, *The Message of the Latter Rain*, p. 28-29

²⁴ Duncan, Peters, *The Message of the Latter Rain*, p. 33

²⁵ Duncan, Peters, *The Message of the Latter Rain*, p. 58

²⁶ Duncan, Peters, *The Message of the Latter Rain*, p. 63

²⁷ Duncan, Peters, *The Message of the Latter Rain*, p. 64

Genuine sorrow can only be realized through an understanding that the condemnation has been removed at the cross, and thus we are free to serve the Lord instead of self interest.²⁸

This understanding is the element of MLR which troubled Pastor Jack Sequeira after he read it, especially the Appendix of the book which states:

We are born under grace. We are not born under condemnation.²⁹

However, the concept is taught throughout at least the first two sections of the book. Pastor Sequeira takes a more orthodox position on this question in some respects. Yet, he takes a rather unorthodox position when his full description of the plan of redemption is considered.

Sequeira believes that we are born objectively justified, but subjectively condemned. This is what we mean by “double-speak”. I have met many people who have difficulty with this language. I described this problem to Jack one time as a description of a “parallel universe” concept. In one universe we are born under condemnation and at the same time in another universe we stand justified. He seemed to agree that was a fair analogy and while he acknowledged that it is incomprehensible to the human mind, yet, he affirmed that he believes it is biblical. On another occasion when I challenged him to show me an example of the concept of objective salvation in the Bible, he pointed me to Ephesians chapter 2.

As I considered my own exegesis of that passage in a paper I had written earlier, I realized that I had given it what Sequeira would call an objective interpretation, although I never used the term “objective” in my explanation.

The challenge that Pastor Sequeira must reckon with is that one interpretation of his position concludes that he is a universalist, because of his description of what he calls objective salvation into which all mankind is born, while at the same time another interpretation of his position concludes that he is an Arminian. (See for example *Universal Legal Justification: A Failed Alternative Between Calvin and Arminius*³⁰). Sequeira strenuously denies both of these interpretations of his position. Nevertheless, there is a widespread conclusion that his description of what he calls “objective salvation” appears to be a clear example of universalism. And his description of what he calls “subjective salvation” appears to be emphatic Arminianism. I believe it is the universalist interpretation of Sequeira’s description of “objective salvation” that is most likely addressed by Angel Rodriguez’s negative comments on legal universal justification.

Personally, I do not recall Sequeira ever using the expression “legal justification” in any of his writings. He prefers the terms objective and subjective salvation. Despite the clear language differences between Jack Sequeira and the 1888 MSC many have failed to perceive the subtle differences between his understanding and the position of the 1888 MSC. Although, in the interest of fairness we acknowledge that Elder Wieland adopted some of Jack Sequeira’s terminology in at least one of his relatively recent publications, *You’ve Been Adopted*.³¹ Therefore, some may conclude that Angel Rodriguez legitimately

²⁸ Duncan, Peters, *The Message of the Latter Rain*, p. 86

²⁹ Duncan, Peters, *The Message of the Latter Rain*, p. 149

³⁰ Joseph Olstad, M.A., *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 23/1 (2012): 96-119

³¹ Robert Wieland, *You’ve Been Adopted*, Glad Tidings, 2003

assumes that he addresses both positions in one critique. We would submit that the critique may accurately describe Pastor Sequeira's understanding of objective salvation but it does not accurately describe the position of the 1888 MSC. And it also fails to touch the position presented in MLR, unless one accepts Rodriguez's modified definition of universalism.

The illustration used by Angel Rodriguez in part three of his comments on Legal Universal Justification appears to be aimed squarely at the universalist theological concept.

A Case in Point: The Mediation of Christ: One example may be enough to illustrate this last point. Since universal legal justification teaches that before the Lord all the sins of the human race have already been forgiven and the human race has been saved, as a practical matter it leaves no room for the biblical teaching of Christ's high priestly mediation before the Father. According to Paul, the death and resurrection of Christ make possible the mediation of Christ before the Father (Rom. 8:34). Mediation means that human sin and guilt are still relevant before the Lord in heaven and that it is only through Christ's work for us in the presence of the Father that we receive the benefits of His sacrificial death. The fullness of those benefits is granted only to those who believe. Guilt and sin continue to be part of the human experience in the sight of God!³²

This observation is aimed at discrediting the universalist concept of salvation. We feel that it erroneously summarizes legal justification as teaching in an unqualified manner that "the human race has been saved," although the actual proponents of the doctrine never say this, and more importantly, do not believe this. Then Rodriguez argues that "as a practical matter it leaves no room for" mediation. In other words if universalism is the correct view of the plan of redemption, what need can there be for mediation? Every possible question has already been settled.

My initial reaction to this criticism is: Any criticism of any position is only as valid as its starting premise. If the starting premise is not valid all further arguments and conclusions based on a flawed starting premise are likewise flawed and invalid. However, while the objective concept of salvation presented by Jack Sequeira can be interpreted as universalism, and we do see a problem with evident double-speak in Jack's presentation of the gospel, when the full picture of objective salvation presented by Pastor Sequeira is considered, the universalist label is not sustained.

I have met individuals who are inclined to label any articulation of any universal aspect or element of salvation as universalism. That spurious application of the label will not bear biblical investigation. The Bible articulates many universal aspects of redemption.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

We know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world (John 4:42).

We trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially those who believe (1 Tim. 4:10).

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world (1 John 4:14).

³² Angel Rodriguez, *Universal Legal Justification*, <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/theology-salvation/legal-universal-justification>

If simply stating a universal concept or a universal element of redemption makes one a proponent of the heresy of universalism, we must conclude that more than one of the Bible writers were universalists. And therefore, we should conclude universalism is actually biblical. Such a conclusion would not be based in responsible or sound reasoning. Yet I am compelled to state, that is precisely the reasoning that Angel Rodriguez employs in some his criticisms of legal universal justification.

While Angel Rodriguez alludes to some valid principles that should be employed in evaluating any doctrine, his critique of the LUJ position is not sound. That is not to say that it is of no value. We believe he has made some valuable observations of some of the methods and techniques used to convey the gospel of Jesus Christ. He has also provided opportunity for clarification of what is being taught by Jack Sequeira, the 1888 MSC and others. Sometimes, we know what we are saying, but we do not know what folk are hearing us say. Yet, we could wish that Dr. Rodriguez's critique did not use such a broad brush. There are actually three positions on LUJ. They are each distinct, and unique. They all draw upon scripture. They may all be wrong, but I believe one should give them a fair hearing. And I also believe the position presented in MLR is the strongest position of the three.

Appendix A

Legal Universal Justification

Author: Ángel Manuel Rodríguez

A friend of mine tells me that all the benefits of Christ's death were given to the human race when He died. This doesn't seem biblical. Is it?

Such an idea, called by its proponents "legal universal justification," is not biblical. Some Adventists find it attractive and embrace it without critical analysis, but this is a dangerous approach. Truth should not be determined by what seems to make sense, or by what makes us feel good, but by what we find in the Bible. The following points may help you in evaluating that teaching.

1. The Totality of Scripture: We must submit any claim of truth to the teachings of Scripture. The fact that a few texts seem to support such teachings is not enough to demonstrate the correctness of their claims. These claims have to be examined within the context of the totality of Scripture in order to clarify how the texts ought to be interpreted. Some people come up with what appears to be an original idea and proceed to look for biblical texts to support it. They bring to the text those ideas and read them into it. Their interpretation may appear to be logical and persuasive, but they are, in fact, imposing their ideas into the text. In evaluating those ideas we need to examine the biblical teaching in full, not just a few texts.

2. Impact on Other Clear Biblical Teachings: These views may appear to be innocuous, but we should examine their impact on other teachings of the Bible. If the implications of a new teaching undermine other biblical teachings, there is something wrong with its claims, despite the fact that biblical texts are used to support it. That means the texts being used should be interpreted in a different way.

3. A Case in Point: The Mediation of Christ: One example may be enough to illustrate this last point. Since universal legal justification teaches that before the Lord all the sins of the human race have already been forgiven and the human race has been saved, as a practical matter it leaves no room for the biblical teaching of Christ's high priestly mediation before the Father. According to Paul, the death and resurrection of Christ make possible the mediation of Christ before the Father (Rom. 8:34). Mediation means that human sin and guilt are still relevant before the Lord in heaven and that it is only through Christ's work for us in the presence of the Father that we receive the benefits of His sacrificial death. The fullness of those benefits is granted only to those who believe. Guilt and sin continue to be part of the human experience in the sight of God!

The role of our Mediator before the Father is an indispensable element in the plan of salvation (Heb. 7:25; 9:14). So we must ask, if it is true that in the sight of God the sin of the human race has been forgiven and humanity has already received the totality of the benefits of His death, why would John write, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One" (1 John 2:1, NIV; cf. Acts 2:38)? John went on

to suggest that the forgiveness of sin through the effectiveness of the mediation of Christ before the Father is assured because "he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2, NIV).

Christ is the mediator for anyone who wants to approach the Father to receive through Him forgiveness, justification, redemption, reconciliation, etc. The views you mentioned tend to interpret the mediation of Christ in terms of the cleansing of the human heart from sin. But the doctrine also deals with the work of Christ in heaven and the application of the benefits of His sacrifice to repentant sinners. Proponents of legal universal justification do not seem to be fully aware of its serious doctrinal and theological problems. In some cases they tend to redefine the doctrine of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

Appendix B

Ellen White on “immediate execution”

The Bible clearly says, God told Adam, “In the day that you eat of it, you will surely die.” We have taken the view that this means Adam was supposed to die on the day that he ate of the forbidden fruit. That is what the Bible clearly says.

Here are several statements from the pen of Ellen White which we believe support our interpretation of the of the biblical evidence:

Adam listened to the words of the tempter, and yielding to his insinuations, fell into sin. Why was not the death penalty at once enforced in his case?--Because a ransom was found. God's only begotten Son volunteered to take the sin of man upon Himself, and to make an atonement for the fallen race. There could have been no pardon for sin had this atonement not been made (1BC1082, RH April 23, 1901).

We believe that says what we have already noted based on the Bible evidence. Adam was supposed to die the day that he ate of the fruit.

As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour. Christ knew that He would have to suffer, yet He became man's substitute. As soon as Adam sinned, the Son of God presented Himself as surety for the human race, with just as much power to avert the doom pronounced upon the guilty as when He died upon the cross of Calvary (FLB75).

Notice the timing that is referenced in this statement. “As soon as there was sin, there was a Saviour.” What is a “Saviour”? Why was a saviour needed as soon as there was sin? The implication is clear that as soon as there was sin, there was supposed to be death.

This was the position of the human race after man divorced himself from God by transgression. Then he was no longer entitled to a breath of air, a ray of sunshine, or a particle of food. And the reason why man was not annihilated was because God so loved him that He made the gift of His dear Son that He should suffer the penalty of his transgression. Christ proposed to become man's surety and substitute, that man, through matchless grace, should have another trial--a second probation--having the experience of Adam and Eve as a warning not to transgress God's law as they did. And inasmuch as man enjoys the blessings of God in the gift of the sunshine and the gift of food, there must be on the part of man a bowing before God in thankful acknowledgment that all things come of God. Whatever is rendered back to Him is only His own who has given it (FW21, MS 36, 1890).

This is the statement used in the paper. Additional context is quoted here to make the meaning clear and certain.

The world has been committed to Christ, and through Him has come every blessing from God to the fallen race. He was the Redeemer before as after His incarnation. As soon as there was sin,

there was a Saviour. He has given light and life to all, and according to the measure of light given, each is to be judged (DA210).

This is a repetition of the thought of the quotation above.

The instant man accepted the temptations of Satan, and did the very things God had said he should not do, Christ, the Son of God, stood between the living and the dead, saying, "Let the punishment fall on Me. I will stand in man's place. He shall have another chance" (FLB75, Letter 22, Feb. 13, 1900).

Again we are given a time reference. "The instant man accepted the temptation of Satan. . ." At that instant a saviour was needed. And at that instant Christ the Son of God stood between the living and the dead.

Our Lord has said, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. . . . For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed." John 6:53-55. This is true of our physical nature. To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life. The bread we eat is the purchase of His broken body. The water we drink is bought by His spilled blood. Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and the blood of Christ. The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring (DA660).

Clearly, Christ has given life to all. There would not be life on this dark world of ours had Christ failed to step in the moment Adam sinned.

We have accepted a plain reading of Genesis 2:17. However, some Seventh-day Adventists have come up with a number justifications for saying, "It isn't so. They were not supposed to die that day." Perhaps the most persuasive justification for this attitude is yet another quotation which appears to be from Ellen White. Yet, I firmly believe that all Seventh-day Adventists must take the position that even the writings of Ellen White are subject to the Word of God. And if we find what appear to be clear contradictions of the Bible in the Spirit of Prophecy writings, we are to reject those supposed Spirit of Prophecy writings and cling to the Bible. The Spirit of Prophecy appears to say:

The warning given to our first parents—"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17)—did not imply that they were to die on the very day when they partook of the forbidden fruit (Attributed to: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 60).

What are we to do with this clear contradiction of an equally clear statement of scripture? This statement was presented to me before *The Message of the Latter Rain* was published. It represents a substantial stumbling stone to one of the fundamental premises of *The Message of the Latter Rain* (MLR). So I have had to wrestle with it and try to understand it for quite some time now. I decided that even though I did not understand this statement, we would go forward and with the publication of the book *relying on scripture*. It was not until *after* our book, MLR, was published that I encountered a plausible explanation for this statement.

Ellen White had a secretary, D. E. Robinson by name, who disagreed with some of concepts presented in her writings. And he evidently had the audacity to modify some of her words before they were published. Which writings were modified? We know that *Patriarchs and Prophets* is one of the books in which Robinson edited passages to make them more agreeable to his own personal beliefs. This passage on page 60 is not the only problematic statement in *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Another is found on page 130. And what is most disturbing about the passages that Robinson modified is he has changed

both statements in such a way as make them both conflict with the Bible evidence. Upon hearing of this interesting bit of history, my concern about whether our thesis harmonizes with all of the supposed writing of Ellen G. White, were laid to rest. I have concluded that we must do what we should always do first and foremost, believe the Bible, as Ellen White wrote, "The Bible is our only rule of faith and doctrine" (*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 127).

APPENDIX C

The Central Issue of the Great Controversy

Revelation 12:17 states the dragon is angry with those who “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” This could be considered a rather broad description yet it does help us to identify the point of controversy. Isaiah 14:13-14 reveals Satan’s thinking, while still in heaven, after the start of his disaffection. It is clear that he desired to sit in the place of God. This desire in itself was a violation of the law of God. In fact, it was in some sense a violation of every commandment of the Decalogue.

1. The first commandment states: You shall have no other gods before Me. When Satan decided that God was unfit for office, he imagined himself more fit for that office. Thus he placed self in God’s place and thus had another god before the Lord. That god was self. Thus he broke the first commandment.
2. The second commandment prohibits the making of images as objects of worship. Satan imagined that he should be the object of worship. Thus he broke the second commandment.
3. The third commandment prohibits the taking of the God’s name in vain. Satan took God’s name in vain by presenting himself as a light bearer from the throne of God while presenting false accusation against God and the government of heaven. He broke the third commandment.
4. The fourth commandment presents God as the Creator (Ex. 20:8-11), and Redeemer (Duet. 5:12-15), the One who has the right to receive worship (Rev. 14:7, 5:8-9). Satan wanted to receive worship for his self. Thus he broke the fourth commandment.
5. The fifth commandment does not appear on the surface to apply to Satan’s sin. We will examine it again a little later.
6. The sixth commandment prohibits murder. Jesus said, the devil was a “murderer from the beginning,” from the moment that he desired God’s place. Thus Lucifer broke the sixth commandment.
7. The seventh commandment prohibits adultery. Satan broke this commandment by committing spiritual adultery. He, like Israel would later be led to do, served other gods, self was his chief god, and he loved self instead of loving the true God. Thus he committed spiritual adultery and broke the seventh commandment.
8. The eighth commandment prohibits the taking of that which does not belong to one, stealing. Satan desired to steal the worship and honor which was due to God. He broke the eighth commandment.

9. The ninth commandment prohibits lying. In his accusations against God Satan had lied by accusing God of his own faults and character flaws. Thus he is the father of lies (John 8:44). He broke the ninth commandment.
10. The tenth commandment prohibits covetousness. Satan coveted the place of God, the honor of God, and the worship which is due only to God. Thus he broke the tenth commandment.

Thus we see that Lucifer, who became Satan, had broken virtually every commandment that he could break. The only commandment of which it can be argued he was innocent of breaking is the command to honor our parents, and that only because he had no physical parents. However, there is a sense in which God was his parent and he certainly did not honor God. He dishonored God by his accusations and criticisms and by his intent to take God's throne. So we conclude that before he was cast out of heaven, Lucifer/Satan broke every commandment of the law of God, to say nothing of his lawless conduct on earth.

Is it a far stretch to conclude that since Satan, as an angel of God with a higher nature than the nature of man, himself had failed to keep even one commandment of the law of God, would make the claim that God's law cannot be kept? That would be the perfect alibi. "I broke the law, but the truth is no one can keep it." This is what the Spirit of prophecy says Satan has alleged and this is what the Biblical evidence implies. It is logical to see that Satan's argument against God would be: "The law of God cannot be kept."