

How the Larger View of Atonement Saved Us

| BY CARMEN AND YUNG LAU

Graham Maxwell provided the following statement of belief in a Loma Linda church bulletin during the 1980s:

I believe that the most important of all Christian beliefs is the one that brings joy and assurance to God's friends everywhere—the truth about our Heavenly Father that was confirmed at such cost by the life and death of His Son.

God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be—arbitrary, unforgiving and severe. Jesus said, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." God is just as loving and trustworthy as His Son, just as willing to forgive and heal. Though infinite in majesty and power, our Creator is an equally gracious Person who values nothing higher than the freedom, dignity, and individuality of His intelligent creatures—that their love, their faith, their willingness to listen and obey may be freely given. He even prefers to regard us not as servants but as friends.

This is the truth revealed through all the books of Scripture. This is the everlasting Good News that wins the trust and admiration of God's loyal children throughout the universe.

Like Abraham and Moses—the ones God spoke of as His trusted friends—God's friends today want to speak well and truly of our Heavenly Father. We covet as the highest of all commendations the words of God about Job: "He has said of Me what is right."

For a couple of multigenerational Adventists who had just graduated from Southern Missionary College in 1983, arriving in Loma Linda was a breath of fresh air. We had left a place where teachers were afraid to speak freely and where intolerance, rudeness and cruelty seemed to be winning the day. Instead, we found in Loma Linda an atmosphere of unafraid questioning and pursuit of truth no matter where it might lead.

By luck or divine design, the 1960s in Loma Linda brought together three giants, A. Graham Maxwell, Jack Provonsa, and Paul Heubach, who through their own study of the Bible and Ellen White's writings had arrived at similar understandings of atonement, salvation, and God. The basis for these views came to be known as the Larger View/Healing Model/Great Controversy view. With Loma Linda as the epicenter of these beliefs, this view has been spread worldwide by alumni and via the tape/CD ministry of Pine Knoll (pineknoll.org). One can travel all over the world and find pockets of Adventism that believe and teach this Larger View/Healing Model/Great Controversy View. Despite the critics, this model has had a place within the marketplace of Adventist ideas.

Even as the Larger View was strongly promoted, other views were examined respectfully and presented in their best light. In fact, the very foundation of the Larger View is freedom to question and look at numerous points of view. The whole Bible, all sixty-six books, and Ellen White's writings were discussed in more

**Though infinite
in majesty
and power...
our Creator
values nothing
higher than
the freedom,
dignity, and
individuality of
His intelligent
creatures.**

—Graham Maxwell

The central question was whether God could be trusted, not whether I would make it into heaven. It was really all about God.

depth than we had ever heard throughout our twelve years of Adventist education. New insights were constant, and at the end, a harmonious picture of a loving, kind, and gracious God who wanted to be our friend was evident. The central question was whether God could be trusted not whether I would make it into heaven. It was really all about God. This God-centered view made sense to us—a winsome God who desires and strives for our fearless love (a redundant phrase if there ever was one).

As we look back, it is certain that we remain within our denomination because of the concepts we learned in Loma Linda. While a large proportion, maybe even a majority, of our friends and classmates no longer consider themselves Adventists, we continue to believe in the Adventist message. Our respect and belief in the inspiration of the Bible and Ellen White is unshaken. As we have grown in our understanding of current, postmodern society, the Larger View has much to say for this generation, secular or religious.

In light of our journey we have been puzzled by recent events in the South regarding Dr. Tim Jennings, a psychiatrist who has integrated a healing model picture of God with promotion of psychological well-being. After leading a Sabbath School class at the Collegedale Church for many years (comeandrea-son.com), the class was removed from the auspices of the local congregation in 2010. Subsequently, he was prohibited from using space at the campus of Southern Adventist University. In addition, at least one of the conferences in the Southern Union has warned all of its pastors not to invite Dr. Jennings to speak in their churches.

Why? Do his critics really understand the Healing Model? Do his critics realize this view holds Ellen White's writings in the highest esteem? After the severance of ties between Jennings and the Collegedale Church, a "blue-ribbon" group gathered to examine his views. Should not that have

occurred first? Why wasn't a response from Jennings included in the final report? Was he given an opportunity? Was this recent tension in Collegedale a localized campaign based more on conflict between people with strong personalities?

Is this a regional kaffuffle or the beginning of an international movement to ostracize fellow Adventists who believe in the Larger View? Do his critics realize that to rid the church of this teaching would require alienating a large number of their fellow Adventists?

There was a time when we thought the Larger View/Healing Model/Great Controversy view was all-encompassing. Over years of reflection we realize that different models of salvation are useful to different people at different times of their lives. Surely, no earthly model or view of atonement can truly describe in full how God redeems us and draws us to him. God is far bigger than we can ever perceive with our finite thoughts. Yet, for us, this model, this view, this metaphor, remains a touchstone against which our thoughts and understandings of God are measured. Often it informs, but there are times it does not. Trust in God eases our mind and eliminates our worry about the battle for perfection. The Biblical evidence shows that he loves us unconditionally, and we can trust him to do the right thing. We believe this view has present truth for 2011. ■

Carmen and Yung Lau live in Birmingham, Alabama. Carmen helped coordinate the *Spectrum* booth at the last General Conference, an epiphanal experience for her. Yung is a pediatric cardiologist and professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.