

Roman Catholic church could have the sacrifice of Christ credited to them. All others went to hell. Protestants tended to think of an invisible church of those (really known only to God) who have genuine, saving faith. Some, therefore, tried to organize churches where all members knew they were saved by accepting the judicial transaction Christ had made for them. Most groups assumed that if one belonged to heaven, he or she would believe the right doctrines and belong to the "correct" evangelical church. Those who thought otherwise and belonged to errant churches were probably going to hell.

New-model thinking views the church as one of the instruments of the love of God. Instead of a stockade for the saved, or an agency to save souls, the church is viewed as a royal priesthood functioning to make known the love of God,

to say "your sins are forgiven" as Jesus did, and to offer the resources of the Spirit to all who want to learn how to love and enjoy God and their neighbors.

That obviously produces a different motive for missions. Old-model missions viewed all the heathen as lost until they heard the gospel and made the right "faith decision." Christians—missionaries in particular—are to feel the burden of the millions going to hell; they should go and save any who can be

reached with the good news.

New-model evangelicals tend to appeal instead to the Great Commission at the end of Matthew's gospel. Jesus' program is to teach all nations. This means enrolling by baptism any who want to learn and training them, forming them into church families where the Spirit will teach them all that Jesus taught.

Finally, there is a subtle difference in the meaning assigned to the title, *Son of God*. Both old-model and new-model evangelicals believe that at the right time, the eternal Son or Word of God took a human body, lived among us, died, rose again, and ascended from our space-time world. Old-model theology, however, stresses that our forgiveness was not purchased until Jesus actually died on the cross. New-model evangelicals, as suggested in C. S. Lewis's *Narnia* stories, view the Son



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of God as eternally both Lion and Servant, Shepherd and Lamb. He did not become Lamb simply when he was put on the cross. His identity as Lamb was eternal in the sense that he was already absorbing our sin and its consequences from the time the first creatures were made in the image of God. That means the cross was not a judicial payment, but the visible expression in a space-time body of his eternal nature as Son.

## Changing our minds

We have looked at seven key words that have radically changed focus among new-model evangelicals. When these words are encountered in the Bible, their meaning is articulated with a different accent. Many readers of *CHRISTIANITY TODAY* will recognize that they have moved in some of these directions without being conscious of a model shift. And the old model can be modified and given qualifications for a time. But once three or four of the changes have occurred, our thinking is already organized around the new model. We may still use old-model language and assume we believe as before, but our hearts are changing our minds.

What are we to make of the new model? It does make sense of the family language of the Bible. And no one would deny that it is easier to relate to a God perceived as kindly and loving. But is new-model thinking biblical? Has it a place under the evangelical umbrella? Will it indeed, as old-model evangelicals believe, deprive our preaching of its cutting edge and dull the motive for missions? Does it provide a more helpful picture of God's good news, or is it "another gospel"?

These questions deserve debate; facing and struggling to answer them should become evangelical theology's major task. □

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## Is Sacrifice Passé?

**R**obert Brow is to be commended for thinking about the contemporary diversification—if not fragmentation—of evangelicalism. But is his analysis accurate, and does it help us "re-form" ourselves by the Word of God?

On one level, his talk of a "model" (if I rightly understand him) contains some wisdom and truth. We inevitably interpret everything, the Bible included, in terms of what we already are and know (or *think* we know!). But in an age of rising scientific determinism, we must say no less loudly that the Bible can modify, correct, and "re-form" our models. Evangelical theology denies its own formal principle—the authority of the Word of God—when it asks questions about which "model" is preferred without establishing the *grounds* of the preference, namely, which model best articulates the emphases of Scripture.

The best evangelical theologians have always been those whose commitment to the authority of Scripture is so complete that, so far as it is possible for a finite sinner, they have

tested all models, including their own, by the truth of Scripture.

This leads to the real question: Which elements of these two models best reflect the teaching of the Bible?

Take the "old-model" notion of penal, substitutionary atonement. Does it rest on so narrow a base as the Roman system of justice, as Brow suggests? What about the Old Testament, with its scapegoat, Passover lamb, and sacrificial system? If the Passover lamb was slaughtered in order to protect the first-born son, and if Christ is our Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:18–19), is not new-model evangelicalism based rather restrictively on the Incarnation at the expense of the Cross?

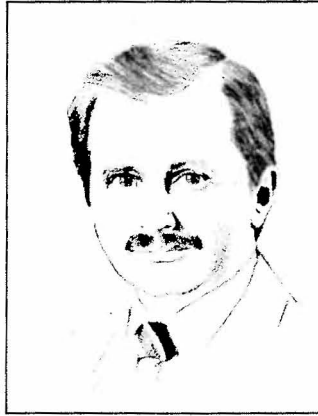
And is the wrath of God in Scripture nothing more than "bad consequences . . . experienced in the here and now"? What do we make of the fact that Jesus speaks of hell (both *hadès* and *gehenna*) far more often than all other biblical characters put together? Granting that there are countless

temporal judgments in Scripture, are there no eternal ones?

What biblical warrant is there—as opposed to warrant from C. S. Lewis, from whom I have learned much—to say that “the cross was not a judicial payment, but the visible expression in a space-time body of his eternal nature as Son”? If the Cross is *not* payment in some sense, what did it achieve? Scottish theologian James Denney answered that decades ago when he pictured a man running along Brighton pier, crying out to the world, “I love you! I love you! And I’ll prove my love for you!” With that, the man jumps off the end and drowns. Has he proved his love? Has he saved anyone? Or does his action merely prove he was demented?

If we admit that old-model evangelicalism has in some measure been hostage to antiquated notions badly in need of reformation, to what is new-model evangelicalism hostage? Has it so escaped the pressures of the present age that it alone reflects the substance of biblical truth and practice? Or has it narrowly focused on one or two genuine insights, blown them out of proportion, established a grid to eliminate other biblical truths, and trumpeted the popular themes of our age back to the world as if they were prophetic insights? How can we tell, unless we go back to Scripture?

The question “Can evangelicalism accommodate this new



D. A. Carson

model?” cannot be answered without prior agreement on what evangelicalism is. This Brow never addresses. Even within the circles of those who call themselves evangelicals, the term is used in quite different ways. It can refer to a system of beliefs based on and tested by Scripture. It can refer to the descendants of various “evangelical” movements. Or it can refer to those who are genuinely Christians, but whose beliefs sometimes diverge from what is “evangelical” in the first sense. But evangelicalism is most faithful to its own best insights when it emphasizes the authority and finality of the Bible, asking not what evangelicalism can tolerate, but what Scripture authorizes and forbids.

Evangelicalism is undergoing a “megashift”—indeed, several. But unless our scrutiny and self-examination are conducted with a profound desire to obey God as he has graciously disclosed himself to us in Scripture—and especially in the Christ of Scripture—unless we are committed to bow before all that Scripture teaches and not merely our preferred “subsets” of what it teaches, there is no hope for reformation. We will sell our evangelical birthright for a mess of populist porridge. □

By D. A. Carson, professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois.

## The Arminian Option

Robert Brow is right on a number of points. Evangelicals are experiencing the dizzy ferment of theological change they thought happened only to liberals. It is the price we pay for our success, I suppose. Once we move out of the ghetto into the limelight, the pressure to clarify our thought increases, as does the willingness (stemming from a feeling of self-confidence) to reconsider traditional opinions.

Brow is also right in observing that there is no one brand of “evangelical” theology and there never has been, despite the myth generated by neofundamentalists in North America that there is a single orthodox type. There have always been Calvinist, Lutheran, and Wesleyan hermeneutics, to name but a few, with each group reading the Scriptures in the light of their traditional convictions. Evangelicals do not interpret the Bible with complete objectivity, whatever they may think. No one does.

But has a new-model evangelical theology really come upon us without our being aware, one that has not yet been clearly articulated? Brow is onto something but needs a little help from his friends to describe the intuition more accurately. For this “new” thinking is not all that new.

The larger issue can be formulated this way: “Is God an absolute monarch who always gets his way, or a loving parent who is sensitive to our needs even when we disappoint him and frustrate some of his plans?” Old evangelical thinking liked to portray God as the all-determining power who gets glory even from the damnation of sinners, while the new thinking sees in God a compassionate lover who enters into the struggles of his creatures and does not push people around. The “new” thinking holds that God not only acts but reacts; not only influences events but is influenced

by them; not only has plans for history but is flexible enough to incorporate into his plans the decisions that human beings make.

Brow’s “new” evangelical thinking is really the old Arminian or non-Augustinian thinking. You see that in his examples—he says that hell is a fate freely chosen, for example. What is new is that the dominance of Calvinist thinking in evangelical theology is being challenged by a wave of Arminian thinking breaking on its shores. So the real issue is one of control: Will the Augustinian old guard that dominates the structure of official evangelicalism gracefully surrender some of its power to a resurgent wave of Arminian thinking? Or will it fight to retain control?

This struggle for control will coalesce around the definition of *evangelical*. With the growing prominence of non-Augustinian interpretations within the evangelical camp, how will the “powers that be” respond? Politically, evangelicals prefer democratic pluralism, but it remains to be seen if they will exhibit tolerance toward this new diversity in the forefront of their ranks. □



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