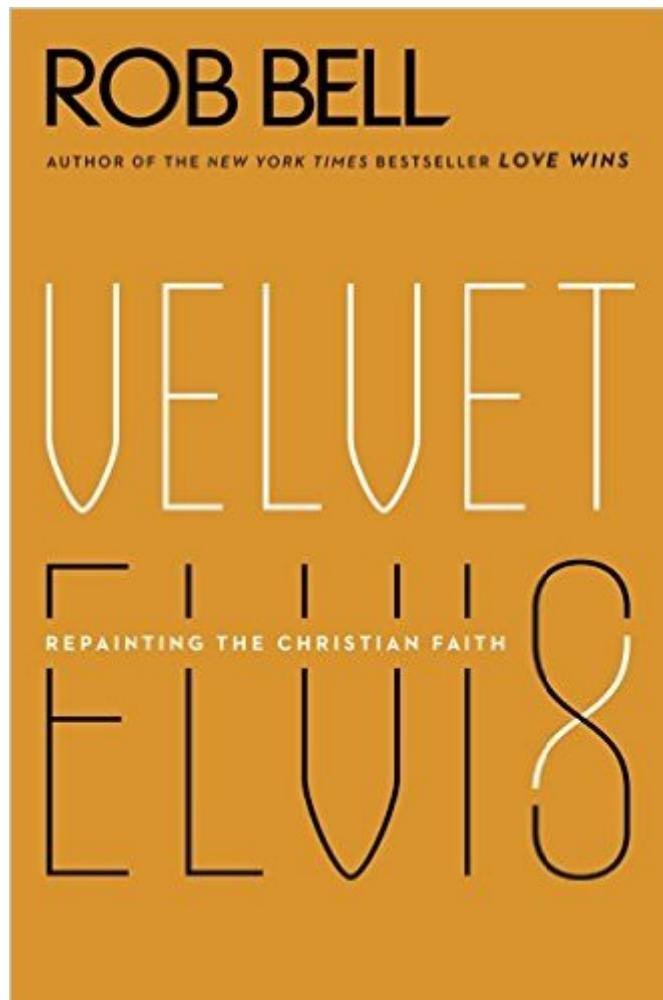


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# Velvet Elvis: Repainting The Christian Faith



## **Synopsis**

Velvet Elvis is the first book from Rob Bell, the New York Times bestselling author of Love Wins. Selected as one of 2011's most influential people by Time Magazine, pastor Bell offers original and refreshingly personal perspectives on what Christianity is truly all about in Velvet Elvis. A vibrant voice for a new generation of Christians "the most recognizable Christian leader among young adults" Rob Bell inspires readers to take a fresh look at traditional questions of faith.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

First off, I am somewhere between a 4 and a 5 (call it 9 of 10) on Velvet Elvis, though my tilt moved it up to a 5. From reading this book, I see that Rob is really trying to "jump-start" the conversation about what faith is and is not, and to help those of us in Gens Y&X - inheritors of the post-modern worldview which incubated in the 60's - see how the Jesus is just as relevant today as he was in His own time. My favorite quote: Christian is a great noun but a poor adjective. Too often, the church of the previous generation has been too accepting of mediocrity in a plethora of areas because the label "Christian" has been slapped on the package (whether it's music, media, or day-to-day programs/initiatives). While I do not agree with him on everything (I think he could have expanded on many of his ideas to give them clarity and to cut down on misunderstanding. Granted, from reading many of the other reviews, it seems some people deliberately misunderstand and take Mr. Bell's positions to illogical extremes), I believe that he is on the mark with what is required for the church to remain relevant and resonant with today's Western culture. From reading VE, I don't think he was

saying that the Bible isn't 100% true - I think he was suggesting that it is pretty arrogant of any one person to assume that they know what "100% true" is. Western thinkers, who see things in literal definitions and bullet points, have a difficult time reconciling this concept - particularly when it deals with a book (actually a collection of books) written primarily to an Eastern audience, whose world-view is shaped by experiential learning, based on what can be seen, heard and touched. For example, Westerners look at Genesis and many will insist that the story of creation HAD TO BE a literal 7-day process. The contextual view stresses the importance of "God created..." with the rest being a story of how it came about - in an experiential manner. Do I think the world was created in 7 days or that it came about via a gradual process over billions of years? I don't know, but all that matters is that God created it, and the story we have about that creation can be interpreted many ways. So, if I am inclined to believe that God may have created the world in something other than 7 literal days, and you are inclined to believe it happened in 7 literal days, does that mean that one of us doesn't believe that the Bible is 100% true? From my reading of Rob's thesis, the answer is no. Now, if taken to extremes, I agree that his thesis can be misused (and should have been more clear) if you were to say that God created it in 7 days whereas I said that Allah created it per the story in the Koran and that neither of us could know what is true - because Allah and YHWH are not one in the same and my view would say that the Bible is not true, since I would be denying the point of the Genesis story (i.e. "God created"). One of the earlier posters seemed to sum up most of the criticisms of Velvet Elvis as: \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Is anti-orthodox: 2. Is light on biblical content 3. Seems to promote Rob Bell and his church more than Jesus 4. Causes people to doubt their faith 5. Divides Christians against one another 6. Is so "hip" and "cool" that even non-Christians love it 7. Ridicules people who hold a solid view of Scripture and who seek to defend it; such people are guilty of "brickianity" in Bell-speak 8. Allows contemporary culture to interpret and set the standards for the Bible rather than letting the Bible interpret and set the standards for contemporary culture 9. Promotes (and even rewards!) a lack of critical thinking; instead it praises emotion and feelings above all else \_\_\_\_\_ While I'm not a Rob Bell "junkie" by any means, I have to say that I disagree wholeheartedly with almost every one of these arguments, as they don't really mesh with the reality of what is written, unless what Rob wrote is purposely misconstrued. "1. Is anti-orthodox" It is only anti-orthodox if you view traditions or traditional teachings not contained in the text of the Bible as "orthodox". "Binding and Loosing" is a concept that was present in the first century, and is to be done communally based on the yoke of the accepted Rabbi. This isn't unorthodox - even the first century church in Jerusalem practiced this when making their suggestions on what parts of the Torah must be obeyed by Gentiles. "2. Is light on biblical content" It is light on QUOTED Biblical content, but his

endnotes are rife with scripture, and his arguments are sound based upon his interpretation of scripture (which I, in reading his references, tend to agree with)."3. Seems to promote Rob Bell and his church more than Jesus"This seems to be a really twisted argument. Some critics say that he didn't really write enough about Mars Hill & how it started (charging false humility), whereas others say it was all about Mars Hill. From both of my readings of VE, I would say that he was pretty effective at minimizing his own "importance" and that when he used himself or Mars Hill, it was only for the purpose of laying a foundation for his stories, not to boast.The Purpose-driven Church and PDL are both widely used resources which I have found valuable, and I think that Rick Warren and Saddleback are showcased in these books far more than Rob Bell and Mars Hill in VE. If he is going to write from his heart, you can't say he can't talk about himself or his experience, or you're robbing him of the stories he needs to be able to write."4. Causes people to doubt their faith"I don't think "doubt" is the right word. I think "question" would be better, and that if you changed that word, that this would be OK. As he argues, questioning in Jesus time - and now - is a good thing, because it makes both the questioner and the questionee stronger. It is only if the "questioning" is done on the personal level and the questions are never asked that this is a problem.5. Divides Christians against one anotherChristians have been doing a fine enough job of this for centuries. If you take a stand on any issue within the church, you're pretty much guaranteeing that someone will disagree with you. Should we "be all things to all people" or should we insist that the Velvet Elvis - that is, the church of the past generation - is the only Way? Rob Bell's interpretation of scripture (100% true, though we may not know exactly what the "truth" was to the writer at the time it was written) seems much more in line with Jesus teaching than the rigid interpretation of "100% truth" many arrogant churches seem to push. It seems that Rob's interpretation should logically lead to more Christians agreeing to disagree and to debate where those disagreements occur than a rigid set of beliefs that insist their Way is the true way and all others are off the path."6. Is so "hip" and "cool" that even non-Christians love it"Isn't the Gospel supposed to be "Good news", or was I taught wrong all those years ago? Shouldn't Jesus be as relevant to people today as he was 20 years, 200 years or 2000 years ago?"7. Ridicules people who hold a solid view of Scripture and who seek to defend it; such people are guilty of "brickianity" in Bell-speak"See my comments under #5 - I don't see him as ridiculing the "brickians" as much as he is warning against this way of thought, as it seeks to put limits on God. C.S. Lewis makes this same allegorical observation in The Last Battle (book 7 of the Chronicles of Narnia) with the dwarves who can't see anyone else in "heaven" because of their closed-mindedness.The word "ridiculing" here is only applicable in that it is being used to attempt to "ridicule" Rob's view. His view is much more inclusive and in line with his Rabbis' yoke than the

"brickian" view, which is to be pitied - not ridiculed."8. Allows contemporary culture to interpret and set the standards for the Bible rather than letting the Bible interpret and set the standards for contemporary culture."Wow.I will totally agree with the argument that contemporary culture should NOT set standards for the Bible, but the Bible should set standards for those living in that culture. However, I don't think Rob Bell goes this far in Velvet Elvis, though as I stated earlier in this review, I think he could have been more clear on this point.From both of my readings of VE, my take on Bell's view is that he sees Paul's admonishment of "being all things to all people" as being a reason we need to evaluate the culture and separate that which is sin from that which is just different, and not to equate that which is different with that which is sinful (the very heart of legalism). It is the legalism of the church and the hipocrisy of those in church leadership who don't meet up to their own legalistic standards which seem most often to drive people away from the church. What Bell suggests, though, requires a great deal of discernment to avoid throwing the baby out with the bathwater - to use an applicable cliche."9. Promotes (and even rewards!) a lack of critical thinking; instead it praises emotion and feelings above all else"Once again, the books that make up the Bible were written primarily to an Hebrew audience, whose learning style was one of experience and emotion, and not to a Greek audience, which values logic over emotion and concept over experience. In Velvet Elvis, Bell stresses the Hebrew roots of Christianity, and this is one of those places where he could have talked more about a need for balancing both the Hebrew (experiential) and Greek (logical) views of our walk.All in all, this is one of the most thought-provoking books I've read in the past year (with Gladwell's "Blink" being the other).

After reading this book - in a day - I knew that if I read the .com reviews, they would be either 5 stars or 1 stars. R.Bell really goes out on a limb, and will probably be hearing from both reviewers personally. Some will think he is spreading terrible ideas, while others will think he really gets at their heart.If you read the book, and I do recommend it, you have to be prepared to be challenged. I have sat under Rob's teaching for 4 years, and every chapter's main point I have wrestled with myself already. And I do mean wrestled with. Rob seems to like to walk to the edge of the cliff (metaphorically speaking), look over, and return to safe ground. It's somewhat scary for a dogmatic like myself, but can be freeing.If you want to knee jerk react, you will have a lot to react to, but if you seek to understand the points, you will be challenged. Just because Rob takes it to the edge, does not mean he does not hold as strongly to True doctrine as Calvin, Luther, or St. Paul himself.The idea of the book is not to re-prove theological points (that's been done in thousands of other books) but to walk the reader through a movement....the whole Christian movement as well as your own

personal movement as lived out in Christ (he uses his own life experiences through out.) In the end, if you are looking for a strong systematic theology, your looking in the wrong place. If you are looking for how theology lives itself out in every day life, you may have the right book. You will have to respond, however, and my guess is you will be either a 1 star reader, or a 5....Personal note: Rob Bell has challenge me personally to seek answers to some very tough questions. For the past 4 years I have read countless original source material, studied Archeology, learned some Hebrew, read what writers and teachers were teaching that were Jesus' contemporaries to better understand why Jesus said and did certain things. All because of Rob's teaching. I have a far more complete and real relationship with the Messiah now then ever before. At one point I went up to Rob and said, "I really am upset with you...." "Why?" "Because I had it all figured out before, and then you came a long." "Do you love Jesus more now then before?" (I thought for a second) "Well, yes I do actually, quite a bit more." "Then I guess I'm doing my job."

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