

# “Velvet Elvis”

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Repainting the Christian Faith

By Rob Bell

*Reviewed by Dr. David A. DeWitt*

This book seems to be a merging together of four rather recent, unorthodox ideas. These ideas come from: Ray VanderLaan and Cornelius Plantinga (who are footnoted in the book), Brian McLaren and William Webb (not mentioned in the book). VanderLaan uses speculation, guess work, and unsubstantiated scholarship to change the clear meaning of Scripture because of supposed input from Hebrew, Greek, and Roman cultures ([www.followtherabbi.com](http://www.followtherabbi.com): “To Be a Talmid,” Part 2: Jesus as a Rabbi). Plantinga defines Christian ministry as fixing the world to the point where this present physical earth, not heaven, is our eternal home (“Engaging God’s World,” p. 137). McLaren says the Gospel is not about personally receiving Christ but about joining with a church to serve the world (“Christianity Today,” Nov. 2004, p. 39). Webb believes the Bible is a progressive record of the things God taught then, but now we (and God) have moved beyond that (“Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals,” pp. 31-32). Mix these together and sprinkle in a little “new man” theology, and you have a stew which is “Velvet Elvis.”

When reading this book, the reader must be aware of poor scholarship, questionable research, and a disregard for the authors’ intended meaning of Scripture. For example, on page 164, Bell wrote, “... we rarely find these first Christians trying to prove that the resurrection actually occurred.... Everybody’s god in the first century had risen from the dead. To claim a resurrection had occurred was nothing new: Julius Caesar himself was reported to have ascended to the right hand of the gods after his death. To try to prove there was an empty tomb wouldn’t have gotten very far with the average citizen of the Roman Empire; they had heard it all before.... They understood that people are rarely persuaded by arguments but more often by experiences.... To the outside world, it was less about proving and more about inviting people to experience this community of Jesus’ followers for themselves.”

First of all, it is simply not true that Christians didn’t make a big deal out of the resurrection of Christ. They celebrated His bodily resurrection from the beginning. It was the foundation of Peter’s sermons in the first chapters of Acts. Paul called it *of first importance* (1 Corinthians 15:3). He said, *and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain* (v. 14) ... *and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins* (v. 17).

It is certainly not true that the New Testament authors didn’t think people were persuaded by arguments. [Remember, “argument” in this sense is not a fight with somebody, it’s “a reason or reasons offered for or against something” (*Webster’s New World College Dictionary*, 2002, p. 75).] All the epistles of the New Testament are arguments, the Sermon on the Mount, the Upper Room Discourse, the Olivet Discourse, and nearly all of Christ’s encounters with people were arguments (see John 20:31; Luke 1:1-4). Rarely were any “experiences” with unbelievers except for the argument itself. I cannot find one example or command in the New Testament of anyone “inviting people to experience this community of Jesus’ followers for themselves.”

It is also not true that a bodily resurrection was common to the culture. Plato's dualism and the Gnostics taught that spirit was good and body was evil. The idea of a bodily resurrection was completely contrary to the culture. It was totally unique to Christianity. The Roman Caesars may have talked about a spiritual resurrection, but their bodies were all still in the grave. To substantiate this point, Bell's footnote says: "find a book on Greek mythology and look up Dionysus." I read three different authors on Dionysus and found nothing about a bodily resurrection. Fact is, the Greeks and Romans thought the whole idea of a bodily resurrection to be "foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

Let's look at Acts 17. In verses 2-3, Luke wrote, *And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead.* It sounds to me like Paul used arguments and focused on the importance of the resurrection. The next verse says, *And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas.* It sounds to me like they joined Paul and Silas after being persuaded by their arguments about the resurrection of Christ. Later in the chapter we read, *And some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were ... saying, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus (Mars Hill), saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears ..."* (vv. 18-20). It sounds to me like the resurrection was something "new" and "strange" to the culture. At the end of Paul's sermon we read, *because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."* *Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer ..."* (vv. 31-32). It sounds to me like the focus of Paul's message was on the bodily resurrection of Christ and that was the reason they sneered at him.

## Questioning

There are many incorrect statements in the book, which taken in isolation we are tempted to agree with, until we read on and find a different meaning for his terms. Bell follows a style which *he* terms "Subversive Preaching." I want to emphasize that this is his term for it, not mine. (Type "Subversive Preaching" into your internet search engine.) This is not mentioned in the book, but I thought you should be aware of it, since it seems to dominate Bell's writing style as well. This "Subversive Preaching" style includes an emphasis on "culture," "questions," "following the rabbis," and "storytelling to communicate ... to an ever-changing culture" (Church Communication Network: "Subversive Preaching with Rob Bell, Marshall Shelley, and Mike Breaux," June 3, 2004). This communication style tempts us to read our understanding into his statements and say, "Well, there is a sense in which that's true." But as we read on, we find that he has something very different in mind.

I've heard people defend Rob Bell's approach by saying, "He's just trying to make people think." He calls it "questioning." But remember—a true teacher makes you think with things that are true. A false teacher makes you think with things that are false. A true teacher tells the truth. A false teacher questions the truth. Questioning is great if you are trying to understand the truth, but not if you are challenging the truth. Bell uses questions in much the way Satan used them in the Garden of Eden. He changes "God hath said!" into "Hath God said?"

## The Purpose

As stated in the subtitle, the purpose of the book is “Repainting the Christian Faith.” Bell puts it this way: “If you come across truth in any form, it isn’t outside your faith as a Christian” (p. 180). That’s Bell’s explanation of Jesus’ statement: *I am the way, the truth, and the life* (John 14:6). From the context, it is clear that Jesus meant He defined the way, the truth, and the life. Bell reverses Jesus’ intended meaning and essentially says whenever you find any way, truth, or life, that way, truth, or life defines Christianity. He says this “truth” is to be found, not just in nature, but in the world in general (pp. 78-80).

But James says, *You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God* (James 4:4). If truth comes from the world, we have a real problem. The world’s wisdom says God serves people (Exodus 17:1-2; James 4:3). The Bible says people are to serve God (Isaiah 60:2; Matthew 4:10; Revelation 22:3). This separates the Bible from any human wisdom. The world thinks the truth of God revealed in the Bible is foolishness, and God says the wisdom of the world is foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18-21; Romans 1:21-22). It is precisely this worldly foolishness that Bell is suggesting we use to “repaint” Christianity.

There is a sense in which we are tempted to agree that all truth is God’s truth, and true things can be found outside the Bible. But how would we know if something outside of the Bible is true if the Bible is no longer a sufficient standard for truth? Of course, factual observations can be made outside the Bible. (For example, most trees are green.) But the issue is the interpretation of those observations. (Were those trees created green for the glory of God or did they evolve that way by chance?) There can only be one true non-contradictory interpretation. That one correct interpretation is the perspective of the God of the Bible, revealed through the authors of the Bible (1 Corinthians 2:15). There can be many right applications but only one right interpretation.

Bell, however, says that, as time goes on and times change, our interpretation of the Bible should change. He even says: “Jesus took part in this process by calling people to rethink faith and the Bible ...” (p. 11).

It seems as though Bell misunderstands the basic concept of new truth. New truth is stated every day. But that in no sense negates or changes old truth. If I get up in the morning and observe that it is Wednesday and describe the day—the news, the weather, my schedule—that does not change the fact that yesterday was Tuesday. New truth does not change or contradict old truth. New truth exists any time a new condition is accurately described. But if that description contradicts an old one, then one of the statements is false. Jesus stated some new truth, but He never called people “to rethink faith and the Bible.”

Bell favors what he calls the methods of the ancient rabbis. He says, “Now the ancient rabbis understood that the Bible is open-ended and has to be interpreted” (p. 47).

Let’s look at that statement. First, Bell and his source, Ray VanderLaan (p. 189) put authority in “ancient rabbis.” These rabbis, who Bell thinks we should follow, are the

Pharisees whom Jesus called *sons of hell* (Matthew 23:15). Jesus said, *They love ... respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi. But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers* (vv. 6-8). They point out that Jesus was called a rabbi. But Jesus was called rabbi only in the general sense of teacher (John 1:38). For example, I am called a teacher, and a seminary professor is called a teacher, but that doesn't make me a seminary professor. The rabbis Bell refers to were sanctioned by the Pharisees as official teachers in the synagogues. These people hated Jesus. These rabbis also represent today's rabbinical Judaism, which is a development of Pharisaism and basically a cult off of Old Testament Judaism. Moses would have them stoned. But Rob Bell thinks we should follow them. Also, notice that he says they "understood that the Bible is open-ended." So, according to Bell, it seems the Bible has no objective, inerrant, authoritative, sufficient message. It only inspires many interpretations, being "open-ended." But when it comes to application, they call that interpretation and say it changes from rabbi to rabbi and with the development of the culture. (Notice a trend here? Argument means two different things, rabbi means two different things, interpretation means two different things....) So by ignoring the clear teaching of Christ, changing the meaning of words, imposing a supposed cultural framework on the Scripture, Bell ends up marginalizing or reversing the meaning of the biblical text (via a "Subversive Preaching" style).

## The Bible

As I mentioned above, for Bell the Bible is like his painting of Velvet Elvis. It inspires you, it is something of beauty, but it is not the last word or best word. Its authorship is irrelevant. Its inspiration is in what it does for *you*. He describes the Bible as "the most amazing, beautiful, deep, inspired, engaging collection of writings ever" (p. 42). But notice how he doesn't say the Bible is infallible, inerrant, or sufficient. He also says: "But sometimes when I hear people quote the Bible, I just want to throw up" (*Ibid.*). "Is the Bible the best God can do?" (p. 44). "... part of the problem with continually insisting that one of the absolutes of the Christian faith must be a belief that 'Scripture alone' is our guide. It sounds nice, but it is not true" (p. 67). "When people say that all we need is the Bible, it is simply not true" (p. 68). "So when we point to early lists of the canonical [New Testament] books, whether such lists come from individuals or church councils, these lists are not considered authoritative distinctions binding on us today but only as evidence that a loose consensus was developing through time among the people of God" (p. 185).

This last statement demands some clarification. What Bell is agreeing with here is blatantly false. He seems to be misinformed about the history of canonization. The reality is, there are in existence only 27 books written by apostles or prophets in the first century. These 27 are the New Testament. The statements of that fact by Athanasius in 367 and the Council of Carthage in 397 were meant to close the door on any further discussion on the subject of what is an authoritative text. In no sense was it a "loose consensus ... developing through time." (See Norman Geisler, "The Canonicity of the Bible," *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, pp. 80-85.)

## Theology

On page 26, Bell criticizes a speaker who says, "... if you deny that God created the world in six literal twenty-four-hour days, then you are denying that Jesus ever died on the

cross.” The speaker’s point was that the same Bible is the source of both. Bell says that’s the wrong way to look at theology. He says that makes theology like “Bricks.” Bell prefers to see theology as springs in “a trampoline.” They just launch you up into inspired creative thinking, but they don’t all need to be true. He explains with this example: “What if tomorrow someone digs up definitive proof that Jesus had a real, earthly, biological father named Larry, and archaeologists find Larry’s tomb and do DNA samples and prove beyond a shadow of a doubt the virgin birth was really just a bit of mythologizing the Gospel writers threw in to appeal to the followers of the Mithra and Dionysian religious cults that were hugely popular at the time of Jesus, whose gods had virgin births.” Bell’s point is that it should not affect our Christianity because “the way of Jesus” is “still the best way to live ... I’m far more interested in jumping than I am in arguing about whose trampoline is better” (p. 27).

This not only denies the sufficiency and inerrancy of the Bible, but it sounds like Hinduism (see 1 Corinthians 15:19). Apparently, for Bell it would not matter if the biblical authors lied about the virgin birth in order to get more followers.

On page 26 he goes on to say, “... the word *virgin* in the gospel of Matthew actually comes from the book of Isaiah, and then you find out that in the Hebrew language at that time, the word *virgin* could mean several things” (emphasis his).

This is part of the “Subversive Preaching” style that filters everything through the Hebrew. It also illustrates why you can’t do that. The problem is, the New Testament is written in Greek, and the Greek word used by Matthew means “virgin.” Besides that, the whole context describes how Joseph kept Mary a virgin until after the birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25). In addition, Luke gives us the angel’s explanation of the conception to Mary (Luke 1:30-35). So we can only conclude that Bell is asking us to believe that if Matthew and Luke lied to us about the virgin birth, it doesn’t matter. But then who knows what else they lied to us about—but I guess that wouldn’t matter either. If something mattered, how would you know what it was? Since the Bible is not the standard of truth, what is? Bell repeatedly tells us that truth is to be found outside the Bible, and all truth is God’s truth (see “Movement Three,” pp. 75-92). But he never tells us how to know if some idea is true. No standard is ever given to test truth. Since that standard is not the Bible, what is it? You? Me? Rob Bell?

## Universalism

Rob Bell believes that becoming a Christian is not about receiving Christ (in direct contrast to what the Bible clearly teaches in John 1:12; 3:12-18; 5:24; 8:24; 14:6; Romans 10:9-10; Titus 3:5; 1 John 5:12; Revelation 2:21; and 9:20). Bell claims that not only reconciliation but also forgiveness is “true for everybody” (p. 146). Everybody is already forgiven. He says “inviting Jesus into your heart” is “a phrase that is not found anywhere in the Bible” (p. 109).

Well, the Bible says, *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name* (John 1:12) and *that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved* (Romans 10:9). That sounds a whole lot like “inviting Jesus into your heat.” (See also Acts 8:37 and Ephesians 4:18).

Bell tells about a couple he married who “said they didn’t want any Jesus or God or Bible or religion to be talked about” in the ceremony. At the end of that chapter, Bell summarized the wedding by saying: “When they resonate with the peace and harmony of unspoiled nature ... Jesus is the life force that makes it possible. So in the deepest sense we can comprehend, my friends are resonating with Jesus, whether they acknowledge it or not” (p. 92). Bell writes: “When Jesus said, ‘No one comes to the Father except through me,’ he was saying that his way, his words, his life is our connection to how things truly are at the deepest levels of existence” (p. 83).

What Jesus said is clear. When I read Rob Bell’s explanation of it, I want to say, “Huh?”

## Faith

With respect to faith, it would appear Bell believes that Jesus is more interested in us having faith in ourselves than He is in us having faith in Christ. Peter went out to meet Jesus, who was walking on the water. When Peter started to sink, Jesus said, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” Bell then asks, “Who does Peter lose faith in?” Bell answers, “Not Jesus; Jesus is doing fine. Peter loses faith in himself. Peter loses faith that he can do what his rabbi [Jesus] is doing” (p. 133).

Obviously, from the context, Christ is referring to Peter’s doubt in Christ’s statement: “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid” and His command to “Come!” (Matthew 14:27-29). The reprimand was for Peter’s doubt in Christ.

## Salvation/Missions

Bell wants to redefine a missionary as “a tour guide.” He says, “So the issue isn’t so much taking Jesus to people who don’t have him, but going to a place and pointing out to the people there the creative, life-giving God who is already present in their midst” (p. 88).

For one thing, I wonder why anybody would be motivated to do that. But the real problem here is that this blurs the omnipresence of Christ with salvation through Christ. What people need to know is that they are lost and destined for hell because of their sins, and they need to receive Christ for salvation (Romans 3:20-25). Why do they need to know He is “already present in their midst”? True, missionaries find people who are worshipping a god something like Jesus by a different name. But those missionaries then attempt to lead those people to Christ because they are lost in their sin. As Paul said, *How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?* (Romans 10:14). In sharp contrast to that, Bell thinks we should simply tell the unbeliever that he is already forgiven. He concludes, “So this reality, this forgiveness, this reconciliation is true for everybody” (p. 146).

This liberal universalism confuses what Christ did on the cross with what is needed to become a child of God. Christ paid for the sins of the world on the cross. But that didn’t save anybody. It just made everybody savable. Salvation, forgiveness of sins, requires a personal decision to appropriate Christ’s sacrifice by personally receiving Him. It’s *as many as received Him* who become children of God (John 1:12), not those who are informed that they are already “connected to how things truly are at the deepest levels of existence.”

## Sin

Those eager to find something to agree with Bell on can always go to page 107. Here he says, “Humans are guilty because of our sin, and God is the judge who has to deal with our sin ... Enter Jesus, who dies on the cross in our place.”

Well, that sounds good. How could that possibly be a problem? But remember, for Bell, Christ’s death not only paid for our sins, it also forgave us, thus eliminating any need of repentance for salvation. Also, when we get to page 114, we learn Bell’s definition of sin. He gets it from his therapist. Apparently, this is one of those “all truth is God’s truth” things. His therapist said, “Sin.” Bell then writes, “And then he said, in what has become a pivotal moment in my journey, ‘Your job is the relentless pursuit of who God has made you to be. And anything else you do is sin and you need to repent of it.’” In the next paragraph he says, “And as this became more and more clear, I realized how less and less pleased I was with *myself*” (emphasis his). So Bell’s definition of sin is that which is contrary to “himself.” Not as in the Bible, where it is anything contrary to God (Romans 3:23). Bell’s therapist says it is violating who God made you to be. The homosexuals have got to love that. If I am a homosexual, I need to repent of anything that keeps me from being a homosexual. We might say God didn’t make us sinners, but we all seem to be that way, and such a view sure tempts us to justify a sinful tendency.

In case you think I have misread him on all this, let me give you his illustration on pages 138-39. Bell writes, “I was having lunch with a guy who was telling me about a struggle he had been having for a while. He said he knew he was a sinner and that he was fallen and that he would keep committing this one sin ... because he was a sinner ... because of what a sinner he was ... I was so depressed I wanted to bang my head on the table ... And what was so startling to me is that he said he had just become a Christian ... I wondered if becoming a Christian had made his life not better but actually worse.” On the next page, Bell says, “I can’t find one place in the teachings of Jesus, or the Bible for that matter, where we are to identify ourselves first and foremost as sinners.”

The word “sin” appears 430 times in the Bible, and even a general reading of those references sure sounds like it says we are first of all sinners and that sin separates us from God. For example, Paul, as a believer and an apostle, said, *I am of flesh sold into bondage to sin* (Romans 7:14; see also Psalms 32:3; 38:18; 51:3; 119:11; Proverbs 14:9; Luke 11:4; Romans 3:9; 1 John 1:8). What is going on in the example Bell gives, it seems, is that this new Christian is for the first time indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:12-16; 12:13) and being convicted by the Holy Spirit of his sin (John 16:8), and Rob Bell would talk him out of it. Jesus said, *Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea* (Mark 9:42). Of course, Bell believes we sin. But, as that great source of “all truth is God’s truth”—his therapist—said, sin is anything other than “the relentless pursuit of who God made you to be.” So are we to believe that this new believer, who is being convicted of his sin, is to think that his problem is that he is simply not being true to himself? After all, he just needs to remember that “all truth is God’s truth” revealed that sin is not what is contrary to God but what is contrary to himself, and that Christianity is about happiness rather than holiness!

No. Unlike Bell and his therapist, the Bible says, *repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you* (Acts 8:22). It's those who *confess our sins* who are forgiven (1 John 1:9), not those in a "relentless pursuit of who God made you to be." (See also Acts 2:38; 3:19; and 17:30.)

Many parents, whose young people are being sucked into this, think: "Well, at least my kids are involved in something about Jesus, and Paul said he would not oppose people preaching the Gospel, even if they weren't always right."

No. That is not what Paul said. Paul said he would not oppose those who *proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives* (Philippians 1:17). It was their **motives** Paul was unconcerned about, not their **message**. I am unconcerned about Rob Bell's motives. It's his message that needs to be opposed. For those with a false message, Paul said, *I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed* (Galatians 1:6-8; see also 2 Corinthians 11:10-15). When the question was about those with the same message, simply functioning in a different group, Jesus said, *Do not hinder him, for he who is not against you is for you* (Luke 9:50). But concerning those with a different message, Jesus said, *He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters* (Matthew 12:30).

## Heaven and Hell

Bell says this: "For Jesus, heaven and hell were present realities. Ways of living we can enter into here and now. He talked very little of life beyond this one ... When people use the word *hell*, what do they mean? They mean a place, an event, a situation absent of how God desires things to be. Famine, debt, oppression, loneliness, despair, death, slaughter—they are all hell on earth—For Jesus, this new kind of life in Him is not about escaping this world but about making it a better place, here and now. The goal for Jesus isn't to get into heaven. The goal is to get heaven here" (pp. 147-48, emphasis his).

I'm not sure what Jesus he is talking about, but it sure isn't the One in the Bible. (And, by the way, who cares how *people* use the word *hell*.) Jesus said, *I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Matthew 8:11-12). ... *whoever says, "You fool," shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell ... for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell*" (Matthew 5:29-30). *But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him*" (Luke 12:5). *In my Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also*" (John 14:2-3). *Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment ...* (Luke 16:22-23; see also Matthew 19:29; 25:46; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; John 3:15-18).

Eternal life in heaven or hell is not just a footnote in the New Testament. The phrase “eternal life” occurs 41 times. The apostles spoke about the destruction of this present earth and the significance of seeing heaven and hell as a non-earth afterlife. Peter wrote, *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ... But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth* (2 Peter 3:10-13). John says, *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away* (Revelation 21:1). Paul described the future of believers, saying, *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). He also wrote, *If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied* (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Does that sound like Bell’s statement: “The goal for Jesus isn’t to get into heaven. The goal is to get heaven here”? I know of not one single passage where Christ or the apostles commanded or suggested that we fix the world. Of course we should take care of the world we live in, just as we should take care of our car—but not to make it something eternally important. Of course we should have compassion for, and do everything we can for, the poor and suffering, but we should not think that it will bring heaven to earth.

## Conclusion

In this book, Rob Bell has told us about what he calls his “journey” (p. 114). He ends by saying: “I am not going to stop dreaming of a new kind of faith for the millions of us who need it” (p. 177). I suggest we tell Rob Bell that we don’t need a new kind of faith. We just need to obey the one God gave us, instead of looking for reasons not to do that. I suggest we tell him—

*If your journey ever leads you back to the Bible, let us know.*