

SESSION 2: BOOK REVIEW WITH MARSHALL ANDERSON

Velvet Elvis, Repainting the Christian Faith

This month's Car Talk is a book review by Marshall Anderson, youth pastor at Bethel Mennonite in Inman, Kansas, and student at Hesston College. Marshall reviewed *Velvet Elvis, Repainting the Christian Church* by Rob Bell. Rob Bell is the pastor of Mars Hill Community Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which is one of the largest and fastest growing churches in America. Pastor Bell was 28 when he planted Mars Hill five years ago.

Velvet Elvis, Repainting the Christian Faith

by Rob Bell

Zondervan, copyright 2005

reviewed by Marshall Anderson

Chapter one begins with an introduction and explanation of the title. Bell was sorting through stuff in his basement and came across his Velvet Elvis painting. The part he draws attention to is the artist's signature in the bottom corner, "R." Bell hits upon the sudden realization that the "masters" don't even have to sign their whole name. But, Bell reflects, what would people have said if "R" told all other artists to stop painting because he had created the ultimate work and there was simply no need for them to continue painting? Bell makes this statement to draw a comparison to Christian and how we must continue to rethink and rework our faith and how we express it, even though every generation has its spiritual "R's."

Bell does an excellent job throughout this book of using history, both biblical and secular, to support his theories. He makes a compelling case for his argument and sums it up well with the statement, "The tradition then is painting, not making copies of the same painting over and over. The challenge is to take what was great about the old paintings and incorporate it into new paintings."

In chapter 2, Bell explores faith—the faith of Christians and the misconceptions non-Christians make about them, as well as the faith of non-Christians and other misconceptions. He explores the incredible amount of faith an atheist person must have and how everyone, like it or not, has faith in something. From that starting point, Bell dives into the truth in Christianity and the history of Christian faith all the way back to Moses. He closes this section with an explanation of how Jesus invites us to follow him—"an invitation to follow Jesus with all our doubts and questions right there with us."

The following pages focus on what many of those questions might be. Bell does a great job of guiding the reader through these questions without imposing answers.

The next section, titled "Yoke," reveals the ways we can talk to God, how that relates to the Bible, and the historical evidence in support of Bell's philosophy. Bell even does an entire section on ancient rabbis' method for communication and interpretation. Also in this chapter, Bell explores specific scripture and explains the process of "binding and loosing" and the method of weighing interpretations against the original Greek and Hebrew text.

At its core, the focus of this book is to wrestle with what to believe and applying that to our modern and post-modern context. Bell is compelling in his writing and rarely pulls punches.

In chapter 4, he shares his personal experience with ministry, faith, and his on-going struggle. Authenticity pours out of his story and Bell makes it amazingly easy for a fledgling Christian to relate with a pastor of a congregation of 30,000 members and growing.

The last several chapters embody the process of healing, growth, our culture and what it means when it all comes together. This book is a contemporary work that is revolutionary in its “old church” roots. Bell even identifies that what we perceive as new is usually not new at all, but very old and in a different package. I highly recommend this book to anyone wanting to explore faith. This isn’t merely a work for pastors or ministry students—this is foundational and an easy read for junior high and high school students. It will challenge, affirm, and uncover thought about faith in ways the reader may not have experienced before. I was invigorated by this book and found myself unable to put it down.

NOTE FROM MICHELE AND CAROL: *Michele highly recommends this book. Carol read a few pages of Marshall’s copy and immediately ordered one for herself.*