

JRP's summary review of Love Wins

So: is Rob Bell a universalist?

This is what most people want to know in regard to his book; and I would argue yes he is--but he doesn't think he is. Which leads to much confusion.

Christian soteriology can be broadly divided into three categories: God persistently acts to save only some sinners from sin; God acts to save all sinners from sin but not persistently; and God acts persistently to save all sinners from sin.

Sometimes theologians, through convenience, or for rhetorical purposes, or just out of sloppiness, will speak as though the latter soteriology is true, even though when it comes down to the wire they end up denying either the original persistence or the scope of God's salvation from sin.

Rob, in LW, claims and (to some extent) defends both the persistence and the scope of God's salvation from sin, and doesn't turn around later and deny one or the other. Consequently, he falls squarely into the third category: and that's universalism.

However, he overtly tries to avoid claiming that God will certainly save all sinners from sin. This is one reason why he thinks he is not a universalist (based on some interviews promoting his book--the term itself is notably absent in the text of his book). Another reason is because he very overtly denies that everyone will be instantly saved from punishment by God after death. That's a denial of ultra-universalism, but it isn't a denial of purgatorial universalism; and much of what Rob writes indicates an expectation that hell can and will be purgatorial.

Rob's position is very close to that of C. S. Lewis (of whom he is clearly a fan): God still tries to save all sinners from sin after death; and God can be expected to succeed at this to some extent. Rob goes a subtle but crucial half-a-step farther by insisting (unlike Lewis, who expected otherwise) that God will never stop acting to save all sinners from sin.

Rob allows that some sinners may never-endingly refuse to repent of their sins. As indicated above, this is one reason why he thinks he isn't a universalist. But Rob refuses to say that some sinners certainly won't ever repent of their sins; and in any case, so long as God continues to act toward saving them from their sins, then the soteriology is still technically universalistic instead of being some variant of Arminianism (which Rob hails from) or of Calvinism.

Moreover, Rob is extremely insistent that "God gets what He wants", i.e. "Love Wins", and by this he doesn't mean God gets a

permanent stalemate for love's sake! Rather he exhorts his readers to trust that God will be victorious. Considering how often he references scripture testifying to God's ultimate victory in bringing sinners to repentance and confessional loyalty, his attempt at trying to back off in a couple of places to allow for a God/sinner stalemate seems inept (one way or another).

At any rate, Rob's opponents aren't only being unfair or inaccurate to "out" him as a universalist. The doctrinal evidence in the book adds up to that. And certainly his publishers, if not Rob himself, have teasingly marketed his work along this line. He has no one to blame but himself if opponents become annoyed at evasions from him on this topic.

He has no one to blame but himself for some other things, too. Rob is often unfair to his opposition--which naturally leads them to bleed out of their eyes in decrying him further!

For example, early in the book he strikes out at the majority teaching on hell as being "toxic" and even a crime against Jesus. Shortly afterward he wants his readers to appreciate the "deep, wide, diverse stream" of Christian orthodoxy "that's been flowing for thousands of years, carrying a staggering variety of voices, perspectives, and experiences" "in all its vibrant, diverse, messy, multivoiced complexity". This type of attitude that 'the majority is trash but we should appreciate all views for their contributions especially mine' is a worthlessly unfair double-standard, unless he actually puts his precept into practice and starts pointing out the contributions of those other people whom he decried a few pages ago. Yet, despite clearly sharing many beliefs with them, Rob practically never gives them credit as such in their areas of orthodox dialogue. Which is ironically similar to how his opponents are treating him!--which he feels so upset about.

Later in his first chapter, Rob implies that the Christian message of non-universalists is merely that there is no hope. Again, an unfair rhetorical convenience, as of course both Calvinistic and Arminianistic Christians (whether Protestant or otherwise) preach there is some hope in God for salvation from sin. This is exactly as bad, not remotely less so, as the type of straw-man burning routinely tossed off by non-universalists against seriously dogmatic Christian universalists. Sauce for their goose is sauce for his gander if Rob does it, too. "But they're doing it too!" is not a good excuse.

In his early chapters, Rob frequently makes use of a strategy of rhetorically questioning standard positions taken by his opponents, as if simply doing so without discussing any of the issues involved, automatically reveals those positions to be ridiculous and worthy of rejection. Using questions to bring out problematic details is fair enough (as far as it goes); using questions to make an argument from suspicious innuendo is

cheating (to put it bluntly)--which his opponents have rightly kvetched against afterward.

One of the most inane statements in the book also occurs in the first chapter, when Rob brings up an attempt at over-simply cutting through the knot of those questions (by someone defending non-universalism thereby): "the real issue, the one that can't be avoided, is whether a person has a 'personal relationship' with God through Jesus. [...] That's the bottom line [according to these defenders]: a personal relationship. If you don't have that, you will die apart from God and spend eternity in torment in hell."

Rob's sole reply to this? "The problem, however, is that the phrase 'personal relationship' is found nowhere in the Bible."

This is technically but worthlessly true, especially since Rob himself affirms repeatedly in LW, not only that personal relationships are found in the Bible, and that personal relationships with God are found in the Bible, but even that personal relationships with God are treated in the Bible as being extremely important and necessarily related (in one or more ways) to salvation!! The rest of his book is practically crawling with references to the importance of personal relationships, including in our salvation by God. He affirms each and every one of those propositions--when it's time to promote his idea. But if an opponent dares (not even very aptly) to bring up the concept in defense of their own idea? Well, the phrase "personal relationship" is found nowhere in the Bible. Q.E.D. then!

(The critical reader might hope that people wouldn't be impressed by such a flagrantly cheating tactic. But the critical reader should always get used to disappointment: the last time I read through the book, 890 Kindle owners had marked that precise passage.)

The first half of his book is liberally salted with headslappers of this sort. Rob spends the first half of chapter 2 complaining about a painting that used to hang on his grandmother's wall, and how it creeped him (and his sister) out as a child. Rob shows the painting for his reader's convenience; but perhaps he shouldn't have done so, because strictly speaking it would be difficult to find a painting that visually showed more hope for the broad, secure, open-gate salvation of souls out of an apparently-now-empty hell by way of the cross! Yet he's still so upset by it that he's willing to deploy Christ's warning about how it's better to be drowned than to cause a little child to stumble (though he tries to deny that he really means to apply that to this picture. The reader could be excused for thinking otherwise.)

As far as Rob's concerned, the "fundamental story" being told by the painting, is not salvation through Jesus (and the cross of

Jesus), not Christ's salvation being strong and safe and clear, not heaven's gates being open to all who come by Christ, not Christ being the only Way--not even (so far as the painting indicates, probably by accident) hell being left empty and abandoned thanks to the cross of Christ--but only that "it's happening somewhere else. Not here." (Yes, Rob complains about this picture of salvation out of hell happening somewhere other than here, while spending most of the book complaining that people don't teach post-mortem salvation including out of hell!)

Later, when he wants to complain about Christians not pursuing social justice in this life, he neglects to mention that Arm and Calv Christians both have long histories of pursuing social justice in this life. Rob spends some time (in chapter 2 and afterward) making strong points about how our attitude and what we do with our lives here and now, makes a difference in how we will be living (for better or for worse!) in the new world to come. But since all Christians teach that, the point becomes problematic when he wants to show he's doing something different. Consequently, he asks afterward when trying to contrast himself to those teachers over there who think "we're going somewhere else": "if you believe that you're going to leave and evacuate to somewhere else [his emphasis], then why do anything about this world?"

But Christian teachers don't teach we're going somewhere else, unless they're poorly educated gnat-wits who don't notice that the imagery of this world being destroyed is balanced and exceeded by promises of this world being remade. And even if they're poorly educated gnat-wits, or even if it was in fact true that we're going "somewhere else", Rob himself already explained why people going "somewhere else" could and should still be morally expected to do justice here and now!--not only because it's right to do what is morally right anyway wherever we are, but because it makes a difference now in the kind of persons we'll be later!

But since his opponents can and do easily agree with him on this, he can't just acknowledge that this would be true even if we're going somewhere else (although we're not) and even if his opponents taught we're going somewhere else (which by and large they don't). So Rob insinuates by a question that because they believe heaven will be somewhere else other than a transformed earth (which they may or may not believe) then it makes no difference whether we do justice here and now (which they definitely do not believe!)

His rhetorical construction can be over-conveniently sloppy, too. For example, early in the book (while trying to vaguely claim that just because many people before him have taught and celebrated the same thing this in itself somehow makes what he's doing "orthodox"), Rob insists that his "teaching" isn't "any kind of departure from what's been said an untold number of times". But those people who possess this thing called 'memory',

will recall that the whole point of the first part of his preface, a couple of pages previously, was that he's departing from what has been said an untold number of times and it ought to be departed from!--because that other teaching, taught by the majority to the overwhelming majority an untold number of times, is toxic and a crime against Jesus, etc.

Later in chapter 2 he overstresses his attempt at trying to show that "eon" (and its related cognates in the Bible) sometimes doesn't mean "forever"--a true and important observation, but then he states that the adjective version "is an altogether different word from 'forever.'" And then he shows what he means by an altogether different word: "Let me be clear: heaven is not forever in the way that we think of forever, as a uniform measurement of time, like days and years, marching endlessly into the future. That's not a category or concept we find in the Bible." When he tries to put it that way, he not only instantly sets himself up to be refuted by obvious counter-examples, he instantly contradicts himself and his own stressed affirmations elsewhere--even nearby in this chapter, where he insists very strongly (as well as later in his book) that God is acting to bring about a world of perfect love and justice that will, once established in the next life (however long that takes), go on forever in just the way he denies heaven means 'forever' back here: as a matter of human and natural history.

Rob ends up implying those self-refutations because he's trying to cheat on his opposition again. In order to avoid even the idea that hell might be 'forever' the way Rob himself thinks God and the life of the age to come (i.e. heaven) are 'forever', Rob ends up directly (though not explicitly) denying that God and the life of the age are forever. While also affirming that, of course, they are.

To put it mildly, he could have handled this point a lot better. But his opponents are not likely to do that work of handling it better for him. They're likely to hysterically reject his attempt, the end, period.

Despite very much good material in the book (not much of which I've mentioned yet), the first half of it is peppered by this type of cheap hucksterism. His (twice repeated) claim that he is going to talk (and has talked) about "every single verse in the Bible in which we find the actual word hell" is another example of that. (In short: no, he doesn't. But he really, really, really wants his reading audience to think he has covered everything in the Bible from which Christians throughout history have derived beliefs and doctrines about hell.) When Rob's opponents nuke him from orbit for trying to hide his non-scholarly approach from critique behind his popular audience, while he himself makes claims he expects his audience to take seriously as though he was a scholar, and even outright and intentionally misleads his audience: things like this are why.

The second half of Rob's book is much stronger, although there are plenty of good things in the first half, too (despite the occasional ineptitude and outright cheating.)

I may not like the question-spamming style of his first chapter, for example, but after a while he begins making good use of it to help get across why there has always been a lot of discussion among Christians on the issues raised by various things: starting from a question about whether there is such a thing as an "age of accountability" and the various doctrinal variants that this question leads to in trying to answer it. His development of those threads reaches practically epic levels. I especially like how he develops the point that you might have people rejecting Jesus because of how His followers lived, and how this is connected to the attempt to simply solve the prior questions by saying "all that matters is how you respond to Jesus."

Ironically, considering how he has been often painted by his opponents, Rob critiques doctrinally wimpy ways of trying to deploy that answer, emphatically emphasizing that some Jesuses (Jesuii?) should be rejected. That's a question of claims rightly or wrongly representing Jesus (and God)--thus a claim about ortho-doxy (right representation, right teaching, right praise)!

Rob throughout the book rejects the notion of earning our salvation from God by our works; and in Chapter 1 (as well as later) he goes so far as to include a challenge to treating our 'faith' as a 'work' to earn God's salvation. That may be annoying to people who preach such a thing!--but it's technically and aptly (and by cited scriptural examples from the Gospels) very correct. And yet Rob is also savvy enough to realize that the Gospels and the Epistles feature quite a few places where different criteria of 'salvation' seems to be applied. "Is it what you say, or who you are, or what you do, or what you say you're going to do, or whether you stand firm in what you say you're going to do, or who your friends are, or who you're married to, or whether you given birth to children, or what questions you are asked, or what questions you ask in return, or is it the tribe, or family, or ethnic group you're born into?" So he doesn't over-simplify his answer as if these incidents and statements don't exist.

Rob is entirely correct, and Biblically accurate, to preach (as in Chapter 2 onward) that heaven isn't only a post-mortem goal to attain to; the kingdom of God is something we ought to be also bringing about in this age right now. If we don't even try, we're like the man in the parable who buries his coin instead of going out and doing business under the sign of our Lord!

Similarly, eternal life (or 'eonian life' to transliterate it a bit more literally) is something we Christians can and should be participating in here and now. It isn't only something for us

after we've died and 'gone to heaven'. Relatedly, eonian (i.e. "eternal") life isn't primarily about living continuously forever. It's a qualitative statement first and foremost, not a quantitative one. Rob agrees that those who live a Godly life will go on living forever (after they die and are resurrected, just like those who live a life in impenitent rebellion against righteousness Himself!), but the two concepts are not the same thing.

His discussion of the Gospel incident of the wealthy young ruler coming to beg Christ to say what he should do to inherit eternal life, is pretty good, even though Rob strangely avoids mentioning the implications of Jesus substituting the following of Himself with the following of the 'first tablet' of the Ten Commandments! Rob doesn't deny that following Jesus is necessarily connected to having (and enjoying!) 'eonian life'. He affirms it plenty of other places. But it's hard (for me anyway) to avoid thinking that he avoided this important detail because he didn't want to distract readers with how important it is to follow Jesus for having eternal life!

He has a tough row to hoe in this book already, against standard reader expectations (whether religious or irreligious). I can understand him wanting to avoid adding to his problems. But by trying to avoid problems here, in this way, he only gives opponents more ammunition to hang him with (so to speak!)

Other than that, his discussion of the rich young chief features some of his best and most quotable writing in the early chapters. "That's why wealth is so dangerous: if you're not careful you can easily end up with a garage full of nouns." Awesome! And there are loads of other great things in that chapter: the faith of the thief on the cross, which is so much less than what Christian teachers often insist upon for salvation, but which Jesus accepts and immediately rewards. "According to Jesus, then, heaven is as far away as that day when heaven and earth become one again, and as close as a few hours." The comparison between the poor abandoned mother of great character in the eyes of God, faithful with what little she has been given; and the beautiful, rich, famous, talented people endlessly embroiled in scandal and controversy who waste their talents and their money. The sheep in the judgment who are surprised to find out they've been serving Jesus all along, compared to those who are sure they'll get in but are turned away by Jesus.

While he stumbles several times in Chapter 3, when trying to broaden readers' understanding of how the Bible treats 'hell', Rob does have several good points to make here, too; one of which is that we find "[W]e find in the scriptures... a more nuanced understanding that sees life and death as two ways of being alive." I like how Rob (via an example from Moses in Deuteronomy) extends the practical application to here and now, as well as in regard to what happens after our bodies die. "The

one kind of life is in vital connection with the living God, in which they experience more and more peace and wholeness. The other kind of life is less and less connected with God and contains more and more despair and destruction." He even spends much of that chapter discussing the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, as an example of what happens (even in the next life) when we get into the habit of rejecting God, including by refusing to care for those in need. The Rich Man has died, but he hasn't died the kind of death that brings life, the kind of death the gospel of God calls us to die. "He's alive in death, but in profound torment, because he's living [after death] with the realities of not properly dying the kind of death that actually leads a person into the only kind of life that's worth living." "There are individual hells, and communal, society-wide hells, and Jesus teaches us to take both seriously. There is hell now, and there is hell later, and Jesus teaches us to take both seriously."

Rob marshals an impressive list of OT references (in Chapter 3) where the point is, not necessarily that God is prophesying the restoration of slain rebels after the resurrection to come (although that, too, sometimes!), but at least that the purpose of the punishment of God is hopeful of reconciliation. And not only positively hopeful, but prophetically certain of success, too!--whether the references are read as meaning only survivors or descendents of survivors, or of those who are raised to live again in the Day of the Lord to come.

Rob's book really starts to strengthen from Chapter 4 onward, though; not least because he somehow manages to discuss the opposition with fair sympathy while also trenchantly critiquing their positions. This chapter also makes it somewhat clearer that Rob is mainly writing as an Arminian to fellow Arminians, agreeing with them about the scope of God's saving action, and insisting (in effect) 'But look, the Calvs are right about God's sovereign capabilities and persistence, too! And look what happens when we put it together!' This means it shouldn't be surprising if Calvinists attack Rob's book more gung ho than Arminians do overall. (Which by the way seems to be the case.) It isn't only that they're ignoring how much he agrees with them, specifically concerning the persistence of God to salvation (although if they're fair critics they ought to be stressing his agreement on this); it's because Rob takes the scope of God's active salvation as being obviously obvious, or at worst easily established. (Although he does take the time to make what is at least a very suggestive scriptural case for the scope of God's salvation. I especially like his references to OT scriptures affirming that God is the Father of all humanity (not merely the creator of all humanity). He doesn't only quote that famous verse from 1 Timothy 2, where God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth, as though that settles the matter.)

While Calvinist readers may complain (somewhat rightly) that Rob doesn't give enough attention (more like no attention!) to Calvinist concerns about apparent Biblical testimony that God acts to save some and not others; Calvinist readers ought to be able to jump up and down agreeing with Rob in his stress on God's competent persistence. "This God simply doesn't give up. Ever. [...] In the Bible, God is not helpless, God is not powerless, and God is not impotent."

Moving into Chapter 5, Rob critiques the vaguery (and vapidty) of the popular prevalence of the cross even in Christian culture, but adds that Christians can also become so familiar with the cross that even statements like "Jesus died on the cross for your sins" can lose their meaning--or meanings. Rob reports several ways New Testament authors described what was accomplished at the cross, and insists that all should be accepted and deployed without trying to minimize or eliminate any of them. He does tend to deny the most popular concept of vicarious penal substitution, but he does so on grounds of avoiding intentional schism between the Persons of God, i.e. on grounds of trinitarian theism doctrine (although he presents it in as non-technical a fashion as possible.) He falls a bit foul of leaning on the language of post-modernism when addressing this issue, which can understandably lead some people to think he's being merely metaphorical about the meanings of the atonement. But only if they're merely thumbing through the book and not paying sufficient attention. Ultimately, the common thread he identifies between the multiple meanings is "enemies being loved"; and that shouldn't be controversial for any Christian at all to accept.

Rob's discussion of reconciliation and atonement is strongly oriented toward peacemaking, specifically God bringing man to be at peace with God and man through Christ. While this emphasis may bother some opponents because, if accepted, it leads to a universalistic interpretation of various scriptural testimony (especially in Colossians), that's very different from having a weakly defined or non-existent notion of atonement!

Rob stresses the importance of the unity of the cross and the resurrection together, not only as historical events, but as a cosmic event that "has everything to do with how every single one of us lives every single day. It is a pattern, a rhythm, a practice, a reality rooted in the elemental realities of creation, extending to the very vitality of our soul. When we say yes to God, when we open ourselves to Jesus's living, giving act on the cross, we enter into a way of life. He is the source, the strength, the example, and the assurance that this pattern of death and rebirth is the way into the only kind of life that actually sustains and inspires." Any Calvinist or Arminian, Protestant or otherwise, ought to be able to agree with that.

What impressed me most, however, was that Rob's Chapter 7 is the key to his whole book--and this key is Jesus Christ as the life-

giving Word of God incarnate, Who acted (and Who acts) to convict people of their sin and lead them to repentance and salvation; the Word Who is the living action of God and so is God Himself; Who brings order out of chaos, indeed brings even the chaos of the universe into existence, and continues to give life to all things.

Rob testifies that God, this ultimate God, became a man, and challenges his readers as to whether they are open or closed to that.

Rob very explicitly and specifically rejects the inclusivity that thinks all religions are equally true, or that good people will get in on their own merits by having their actions measure up enough, by earning their way into the kingdom.

Instead Rob Bell insists Jesus is the only way, exclusively the only all-embracing, saving love and Way.

What Rob rejects is not the exclusivity of Christ as the only Way of salvation, but the exclusivity of Jesus acting only to save some, of being the Savior only of some, instead of being the real, true, one and only Savior of all (though especially of those who believe).

Opponents have plenty to shoot at in Rob Bell's *Love Wins*; and even plenty to shoot at worth shooting at. But fairness to the opposition cuts both ways. Readers paying attention only to reviews of his book, need to be aware when his reviewers themselves cheat against him.

Anyone who tries to paint Rob as not caring about correct doctrine (especially concerning Jesus) is flatly outright wrong. Rob strongly cares for what are and are not correct claims about Jesus--which after all is one big reason for why he is writing this book!

Anyone who claims Rob denies the necessity of a personal relationship to God through Christ for salvation, is flatly outright wrong. (Even though Rob does one asinine thing himself, in being unfair to his own opposition, which could open himself to this critique.)

Anyone who claims Rob preaches a gospel of salvation by our works, is flatly outright wrong. That includes bringing up his reference to Ghandi: I can confidently say in Rob's favor that he was only using Ghandi as a stock popular figure of a 'good non-Christian' (very briefly, at the beginning of Chapter 1) in order to introduce issues he discusses elsewhere. He makes it very clear later that he doesn't mean Ghandi (or anyone else, including any Christians!) earned their way into heaven by being 'good'. (Although, since Rob's main strategy throughout this chapter, as well as the preface to some extent, is to throw "challenging questions" at the reader, with at least some

intention of making implied arguments from suspicious innuendo along the way, he has only himself to blame if opponents totally misread his reference to Ghandi as being a typically non-Christian hidden argument to the effect that people can be good enough to earn their way into heaven without being a Christian. But they're still totally misreading it.)

Anyone who claims Rob denies the existence of heaven after death, is flatly outright wrong. They're even flatly outright wrong if they claim Rob is primarily interested in social justice for this life. He's interested in justice being accomplished, including socially, in this life and also in the next.

Anyone who claims Rob denies that 'heaven' and God continue forever, is flatly outright wrong. What Rob denies is that a particular adjective primarily means this. (He isn't very apt about how he does this sometimes, particularly when he's cheating against his opposition, which leads him to overreach ridiculously in some things he says about this topic; but that's a different kind of criticism.)

Anyone who claims (or even implies) that Rob teaches everyone will go to heaven 'regardless', is flatly outright wrong. Even as early as his chapter on heaven, Rob warns that heaven, meaning God and God's own life, brings judgment against sin. "Heaven comforts, but... heaven also confronts. Heaven, we learn, has teeth, flames, edges, and sharp points. [...] Jesus brings the man hope, but that hope bears within it judgment. [...] Jesus makes no promise that in the blink of an eye we will suddenly become totally different people who have vastly different tastes, attitudes and perspectives. Paul makes it very clear that we will have our true selves revealed and that once the sins and habits and bigotry and pride and petty jealousies are prohibited and removed, for some there simply won't be much left. 'As one escaping through the flames,' is how he put it."

And that's in his chapter on heaven! Rob puts things just as strongly, or even moreso, in his subsequent chapters (including the one on hell.) But even in his chapter on heaven he writes: "It's important to remember this the next time we hear people say they can't believe in a 'God of judgment.'

"Yes, they can.

"Often, we can think of little else... every time we stumble upon one more instance of the human heart gone wrong, we shake our fist and cry out, 'Will somebody please do something about this?'

"[...] Same with the word 'anger.' When we hear people saying they can't believe in a God who gets angry--yes, they can. How should God react to a child being forced into prostitution? How should God feel about a country starving while warlords hoard

the food supply? What kind of God wouldn't get angry at a financial scheme that robs thousands of people of their life savings?

"And that is the promise of the prophets in the age to come: God acts. Decisively. On behalf of everybody who's ever been stepped on by the machine, exploited, abused, forgotten, or mistreated. God puts an end to it. God says, 'Enough.'"

Anyone who claims Rob doesn't take hell seriously, is flatly outright wrong. He doesn't take hell hopelessly; in that sense he doesn't take hell as seriously as he takes God! Or in Biblical terms, he refuses to claim that where grace exceeds sin hyper-exceeds for not as the grace is the sin! But such a refusal is not the same as refusing to take hell seriously.

Similarly, anyone who claims Rob doesn't take sin seriously, is flatly outright wrong. He may talk more often about sins against other people, but he does talk often about such sin, and he goes on to connect such sin against other people as also being sin against God Most High--even when the people who commit the sins are 'Christian' in nominally formal terms.

Again, anyone who claims Rob is only concerned about some kind of corporate or abstract social justice, and not about personal morality, is flatly outright wrong. Rob emphasizes both. Without teaching and addressing individual concerns, the larger corporate concerns (which are comprised of individuals!) will have nothing to work with; but unless individuals put morality and understanding into practice, there is no hope of reforming the corporate behaviors of humanity. (Now or in the life to come post-mortem.)

In regard to the cross, anyone who claims Rob rejects or undermines any meaning at all for what Jesus accomplished with His death, is flatly outright wrong. Rob acknowledges multiple meanings from scriptural testimony and insists that all should be accepted and promoted. While it's understandable that opponents who accept and promote typical varieties of penal substitutionary atonement should pick on Rob for effectively denying this, they should at least mention and address the real reason why he does so: to avoid a trinitarian heresy (be that right or wrong). And they shouldn't pretend he has no notion of the atonement at all.

Most of all, anyone who claims Rob simply preaches some other God than orthodox trinitarian theism, is flatly, bluntly, wildly, unfairly and outright wrong. Rob's key chapter, on which his whole book stands or falls, preaches orthodox Christology, neither confounding the Persons of the Father and the Son (and the Spirit, although like many popular preachers Rob doesn't complexify things for readers by talking much about the Holy Spirit), nor dividing the Substance; and affirming the two natures of Christ, fully human and fully divine, acting

historically as the Son Incarnate with one will and in one person. He doesn't go into technical detail about this, but that's where he stands, and that is Who he is preaching.

Rob Bell preaches Christ, the one and only Lord Most High and Son of God; and he preaches Christ crucified: drawing all men to Himself when He is lifted up from the earth, giving His flesh as bread for the life of the world.

Rob takes Jesus Christ that seriously, and he takes salvation from sin in Jesus Christ that seriously.

And Rob's opponents, even if they believe they have to oppose him on some points, ought to take him seriously enough to recognize he takes Jesus Christ that seriously.

Rob insists (quoting from John 14 even) that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the one and only uniquely begotten Son of God, and that no man comes to the Father but through Him.

And if someone "reviewing" Rob, on video or in print or on the internet, doesn't acknowledge all this--

then that is no real review of Rob Bell at all.