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Roman Baptist: A Comparison of Two Denominations

William D. Bellavia
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William Bellavia is a man born into one faith, who chose another. In his first book, *Rebirth Pains*, he discussed the history of Christianity and its influence on the American political landscape. This book delves into and digests the two principal bodies of Christianity, Catholicism and Protestantism, using scripture to explain the origins of different traditions and practices. Bellavia then casts his vote on which church follows the codebook, or Bible, most closely.

Bellavia's style is conversational, intimate. Mixing personal anecdotes and thoughts together with direct quotes from different translations of the Bible—all thoroughly annotated—*Roman Baptist* is completely and engagingly readable. The text also sparkles with little-known facts, like why the legs of the crucified were routinely broken. But his overwhelming mission is to point out the strengths and weaknesses of the two branches of Christianity, and to set them side by side in a contest of rational interpretation.

Much like a biblical guidebook, Bellavia presents issue after issue, organized into chapters like, "Baptism," "Sin and Death," Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll," and rolls out the "rational interpretation." He then compares his interpretation of the scripture to official church dogma. Finally, he selects a winner. Concerning baptism, for example, he comes down strongly on the side of the Protestants, specifically the Baptists, of which he is a member. "Both belief and salvation," he writes, "are connected to baptism. But belief preceeds baptism and is a pre-requisite for baptism." Scripture says, *Go into all of the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; he who has disbelieved shall be condemned…* [Mark, 16:15-16, New American Standard] Bellavia reasons that since scripture doesn't say "he who was not baptized shall be condemned," the rational interpretation favors "belief" over baptism. Says Bellavia, "…it clearly places salvation at the foot of faith defining the prerequisite for salvation as faith alone!" The Catholic tradition of infant baptism is, therefore, not a true and public proclamation of faith per the words of Mark, as a baby is not capable of reason.

Sometimes, the Roman, or Catholic, wins out over Protestantism. Sometimes, as in the case of the subject of death, no denomination scores—only scripture.

Bellavia concludes *Roman Baptist* with a guide to interpreting scripture—a dead give-away to the ultimate winner in this competition. His judgments on the Catholic Church are thorough and severe. Nevertheless, Christians of all denominations will find this book an excellent source of discussion, interpretation and the information concerning "the priesthood of the believer."

HEATHER SHAW (June 28, 2007)

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