

Submitted to

**Synod of Bishops on the
Word of God**

October 2008

***THE BIBLE CATHOLIC:
Imbuing the Word of God into Catholic Practice***

Practical recommendations for promoting
the use of the Bible among the laity

Stanley D. Williams, Ph.D.
Archdiocese of Detroit, Michigan, USA

sdw@stanwilliams.com
<http://www.StanWilliams.com>
1-248-344-4423

Synod of Bishops on the Word of God
October 2008
Practical Considerations

***THE BIBLE CATHOLIC:
Imbuing the Word of God into Catholic Practice***

Practical Recommendations for Promoting the Use of the Bible Among the Laity

Stanley D. Williams, Ph.D.
sdw@stanwilliams.com
<http://www.StanWilliams.com>
1-248-344-4423

Call for a Post Synod Commission on the Bible in Practice

1a Outcomes of Bishop Synods are often theological in nature and not practical. This is necessary and good. But unless the truth discerned by our bishops finds a practical expression among the people, the benefit of the Synod's efforts can be lost.

1b This white paper, written to our bishops in a spirit of prayer and devotion for the Church, hopes to prompt practical outcomes from the Synod of Bishops on the Word of God, as it relates to the use of the Bible within the Church. Specifically, this paper asks for A Post-Synod Commission to explore and recommend to the worldwide Church practical solution for imbuing the Word of God into the active lives of the faithful. This paper provides fodder for such a commission.

Introduction

2a To permeate and to inspire profoundly the Word of God into the hearts and minds of every man and woman is a deep desire of the Church. She has done that in many ways over the past two millennia, principally through the proclamation of the Word during liturgical celebrations, and by preaching of the Word. But today -- after the advent of the printing press, the proliferation of Bible translations from Protestantism, the rapid spread of Bible based Evangelicalism, and the instantaneous worldwide distribution of text through the Internet -- the Church must renew its commitment to inculcate the Word of God into the daily practice of the faithful. For truly as the Church venerates the body of our Lord in the Holy Eucharist, so she has always venerated the Holy Scriptures. (cf CCC 103)

2b Evangelical Christianity has become a benchmark for inculcating the use of the Bible in the daily life of Christians. Catholics who desire to know more about the Bible often join Evangelical Bible Studies and services because their techniques at promoting the Bible are so effective. This paper, therefore, lists and briefly explains the Bible based practices and techniques used successfully by Evangelical Christianity. Evangelicals shame Catholics in their general knowledge of the Bible and their reliance on it in their daily lives for guidance. How Evangelicals came to teach their congregants about the Bible and how to use it, is no secret. Yet, these techniques are virtually absent in American Catholicism.¹

¹ I don't want to overstate the case. If only 10% of Evangelicals are significantly involved with the Bible, I suspect that the percent in Catholicism is less than 1%.

3 This document, therefore, hopes to encourage the Synod of Bishops to adopt and encourage these methodologies throughout the Church, in order to draw Catholics closer to God through his written Word. At the same time, this document has a fairly narrow constitution — that of improving the use of the Bible among lay Catholics. In keeping to that focus, it in no way intends to marginalize traditional catechetics, apologetics, prayer meetings, devotional and spiritual elements and activities, Eucharistic devotion, regular and active participation in the Sacraments or attendance at Mass. I only intend to suggest that many Evangelical practices can be adopted within a Catholic framework to improve respect for and use of the Bible.

Publications

4 The suggestions in this section fill in the gaps of Bible study aids that should be readily available to Catholic laypersons. Publishers should be encouraged to take up this task with the Church's support. All of these books exist readily in Evangelicalism and are used frequently by laypersons.

A. Personal Bible Editions that are Attractive and Practical

5 Currently there are very few Catholic editions of the Bible that could be called lifetime, personal companion editions. The Fireside Librasario Bibles are the exception. What exist in the majority are cheap paperbacks, or heavy, hard bound, academic editions, or the large family editions that cannot be used for personal study easily.

6 The Bishops should encourage Bible publishers to create editions of the Bible that are long lasting, attractive, ergonomic (leather not just hard bound bindings), filled with study aids such as abridged concordances, glossaries, and catechism references. These MUST be Bible editions that people can easily carry with them. These editions should mimic in style and content the benchmark editions published by Evangelicals.

B. Devotional, Liturgical, and Study Bible Editions/Translations

7 Currently there are various editions of the Bible that are approved by the Church. Each has its strengths and shortcomings for various purposes. But there is confusion among the laity about which versions are acceptable for different purposes, and there are no editions that are broadly promoted for devotional use.

8 The Bishops should encourage Bible publishers to create and promote different translations of the Bible especially for devotional use. In Evangelicalism, Kenneth Taylor's paraphrase of the Bible known as *The Living Bible* (Tyndale House Publishers) resulted in an explosive growth in Bible Study, simply because of the ease of understanding the translation. There is a Catholic edition of this Bible, but I think it is missing an Imprimatur. Such a translation with an Imprimatur is necessary. Tyndale House continues to make the translation available in a variety of bindings with a variety of study helps for various ages, and purposes. Such a variety creates a demand and increased interest because broader needs are met.²

9 The Bishops should also make it clear (or perhaps publishers can do this) which translations are approved for liturgical settings, study, and devotional use, and local parishes should publish in their bulletin what translations are used in their liturgies. Knowing this will make it easier to know the differences in translations, and their value in different circumstances.

² Dave Armstrong, a Catholic apologist, author, and my editor, recommends the Phillips translation. What is needed, however, is a very easy to read, devotional translation or paraphrase that is accessible and accurate.

C. Bible Translations with Devotional Study Notes

10 Currently the study notes in some Catholic Bibles (NAB) are written for academic purposes, and some orthodox Catholics complain challenge Catholic orthodoxy.

11 The Bishops should encourage publishers to develop Bibles with study notes written for devotional purposes. Such notes make the Bible more practical and encourage the reader to strive toward holiness.³

D. Children's Pictorial Bibles

12 Currently there are some pictorial Bibles for children, but the best ones are published by Evangelicals and thus exclude some books of the Bible and some stories.

13 The Bishops should encourage publishers to match Evangelical efforts but expand the editions to include the complete canon of the Bible. A graphic novel style Bible would be a huge hit and guaranteed to attract youth.

E. Bible Encouragement Aids

14 Currently within Evangelicalism there is a plethora of Bible study aids that are, for the most part, missing within Catholicism. There is also a tendency within Catholicism to focus on the life and writings of the saints, to the exception of the Bible. That is a strange phenomenon.

15 The Bishops need to encourage Bible publishers to create and market the most popular of study and devotional aids that use the Bible as a source of personal encouragement, such as Bible Promise card decks, personal Bible study guides, Bible prayers cards, Bible based tracts structured around relevant themes like discouragement, death, suffering, success; pens, pencils, note cards, calendars, etc, and Bible handbooks.

F. Bible Commentaries

16 Currently the only Catholic Bible Commentaries are written for academic study, and rarely are these found on retail Catholic store shelves.

17 The Bishops need to encourage religious publishers to produce Bible commentaries that integrate Catholic doctrine for the layperson. Several different editions would meet the needs of various uses, whether for the high school student, the businessman, housewives or dads, or the Bible teacher. Such commentaries may be single or multiple volumes and structured in the same order as the books of the Bible. Note that these are NOT commentaries on Catholic doctrinal themes, but commentaries on the books, chapters, passages, and verses of the Bible. Over 150 years ago, Adam Clarke wrote a multi-volume set that is still in print.

17A While writing this paper I've been alerted to an exciting new effort. *The Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture's* inaugural volume on The Gospel of Mark (written by Dr. Mary Healy) will come out this October, coincident with the Synod of Bishops' meeting on the Word of God. This multi-volume series "implements the theological principles for interpreting Scripture taught by Vatican II—reading Scripture in its canonical context and interpreting it in the light of Catholic tradition. These readable, informative commentaries draw on the best of contemporary Catholic biblical scholarship and are written from a standpoint of lively faith. They respond to the desire of Catholics to study the Bible in depth and in a way that integrates Scripture with Catholic doctrine, worship, and daily life."⁴

³ Notes that can be scholarly accurate, devotional, and apologetic would be the best.

⁴ <http://www.catholicscripturecommentary.com/>

G. Bible Concordances in the Back of Personal Bibles

18 Currently there are no Catholic Bible editions that contain any concordance helps. Such abridged concordances in the back of Protestant Bibles are very popular as they help the Bible reader or student find passages that apply to various topics or needs.

19 The bishops need to encourage Bible publishers to create abridged concordances for the back of their Bible editions. PLEASE! Bibles might also list on-line (Internet) concordances with instructions on how to use them for Bible Study. The electronic versions are very efficient.

H. Exhaustive Concordances

20 Currently there is no Catholic Bible concordance that is exhaustive, which is readily available for sale to the public.

21 The bishops need to encourage a Bible publisher to expand on Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, using the existing word numbering system, but including the whole canon of the Bible.

I. Electronic Editions

22 Currently the best electronic Bible editions, including those found on-line, do not include the entire canon of the Bible.

23 The bishops needs to encourage Catholic Bible publishers to provide full featured electronic Bible versions for computers and on-line use.

J. Topical Bible

24 Currently, one of the most popular Bible study aids used in Evangelicalism is *Nave's Topical Bible*.

25 The bishops need to encourage a Catholic publisher to produce a Catholic version to *Nave's Topical Bible*. Such a Bible gathers together the full text of various Bible passages under alphabetically arranged themes and topics. It is essentially a concordance with the full text written out rather than just the citation reference.

K. Language Study Aids

26 Currently, another popular group of study aids within Evangelicalism are Greek and Hebrew study aids, such as lexicons, interlinear translations, and concordances.

27 The bishops could encourage the wider publication of such study aids for use by laypersons and Bible Study leaders.

Parish Based Bible Instruction

28 There is some fear that if we give Catholic laity Bibles and encourage them to read them, all manner of error will rise to the top. Certainly that seems to be what has happened in Protestantism. ***In no way does this document suggest that Catholic Bible studies or activities should be structured like their Protestant counterparts, where, in a study for instance, participants all contribute from their personal experiences to what the biblical text means to them. These practical recommendations assume that true catholic instruction will prevents such relativism.***

Foundational to effective Parish Based Bible Instruction (PBBi) is an infrastructure that inculcates seven ideologies into the heart of every adult Catholic: Catechesis must be:

- (1) Lifelong
- (2) Convenient
- (3) Weekly
- (4) Laity-led
- (5) Practical
- (6) Free
- (7) Holiness centered.

29 These ideological criteria are discussed (under a different paradigm) in two good documents: *Summary of the National Directory for Catechesis*, from the Committee on Catechesis, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2005); and *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us: A Pastoral Plan for Adult Faith Formation in the United States*, a statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops (1999).

30 From the perspective of successful Evangelical Christian catechetical techniques the following points can be emphasized.

(a) Catechesis must be Lifelong.

31 Currently, adult Catholic catechesis is drawing additional attention through one or two small Bible study or prayer groups recently started in parishes. The prevailing attitude is not to force or pressure adults to attend, but simply make the studies or groups available. The result of this low-key, passive approach is that a study group is lucky to have 10 participate, out of an adult membership of 4,000. This participation level (1/2 of 1%) should be compared to 30-80% participation found in Evangelical settings.

32 The bishops need to encourage parish leadership to make lifelong adult catechesis the highest educational priority of their parish. The Christian life is a lifelong journey, and education and encouragement are required. That means *encouragement* for EVERY adult to participate in such groups throughout their entire life, for the sake of their sainthood. Diligence in holiness results in greater holiness. A laissez-faire attitude will result in Christ's rejection (Rev. 3: 16), which is pretty much where the American Catholic Church is today.

(b) Catechesis must be Convenient.

33 Human nature being what it is in a busy culture, catechesis must be made convenient or busy adults will not participate.

34 Bishops need to encourage parish leadership to make catechesis significantly convenient for the marginally interested adult, NOT the most convenient for the priest, the instructor, religious education director, or facility. The emphasis must be on the recipient, the student.

35 The best practice in Evangelicalism is a storied institution known as Sunday School—an educational 60-90 minutes adjacent to worship. Sunday School, thus scheduled, allows every adult who comes to worship (Mass) no excuse for not coming an hour earlier, or staying an hour later in order to attend Sunday School classes. Asking busy adults to schedule yet another period of time during the week where they must drive to a location and settle in to yet another meeting, dramatically reduces the attendance and interest.

(c) Catechesis must be weekly, year round.

36 Currently, adult catechesis is NOT weekly but held for short periods of time during the year, typically one meeting a week for 4-8 weeks at a time. This does not allow regular catechesis to become part of a family's habitual schedule, and, in fact, changing their schedule to participate in a once or twice a year six-week event, hinders attendance. It has to be like clockwork — always there.

37 The bishops must encourage weekly, regular, habit forming catechesis, which can be as valuable as Mass and the Sacraments in developing holy lives.

(d) Catechesis must be led by Laity, not just by Priests

38 Currently, catechesis is most often led by priests, religious, deacons, or formation directors with degrees from a Catholic seminary. Although at some level this is desired and necessary, the problem with this means that those with the education are the ones that benefit the most from developing the instruction, which means the common lay person is always behind in knowledge and application of that knowledge. I am not suggesting that priests should not be teaching. The point of this paper is what we need to do to get laity into the Bible.

39 The bishops must encourage laity to prepare weekly lessons for catechesis classes. This can be done under the tutelage of the full-time ministers of the parish, but the goal is to train in holiness more and more laity. Get the laity to teach, especially those with gifts of teaching. Priests need to be told to encourage and help the laity. I have been in more than one parish where, because the priest didn't want anyone else to teach, and the people were perishing.

40 The other advantage of drafting laity to teach is that it develops more leaders, or uses the latent leadership skills of laity that are otherwise applied in business or non-parish organizations. Such gifts need to be applied to building up the body of Christ.

41 Lastly, the most noticeable advantage created by getting laity to teach, is that regular laity will be able to present religious instruction more effectively because of the stories and life examples they bring to the instruction.

(e) Catechesis must be Practical.

42 Currently most Catholic catechesis is centered on learning the dogmas and doctrine of the Church. While this can be important, especially in apologetic settings, the everyday need of the adult Catholic is in the practical application of church teaching, not simply a description of what that teaching is, where it came from, and how the teaching is justified logically and Biblically. As a result it is difficult for Catholics to see practical application of teaching in their day-to-day lives. This disconnect encourages many Catholics to stop practicing their faith, and joining Evangelical institutions that provide teaching with practical outcomes.

43 The bishops need to encourage catechesis programs and focus on practical application classes, while not ignoring the doctrinal connections.⁵ That is, rather than a class on the doctrinal reasons for the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, laity would find it more helpful to understand how to represent Christ to their family, neighbor, co-worker, and

⁵ We must guard against the danger of philosophical pragmatism, which is found in many larger "emerging church" segments of Evangelicalism.

political leaders; in other words, a class on relationships. Rather than a class on what the catechism teaches about parents, it would be more helpful to know how to apply Biblical and catechism injunctions to disciplining children in the day-to-day, ins and outs of a busy household.

(f) Catechesis must be Free.

44 Currently it is astonishing to former Evangelicals that, in Catholicism, Bible Studies and a series of devotional talks sometimes cost money. This is yet another deterrent to catechesis. Sunday School programs in Evangelical churches are taught for free by volunteers out of sheer love of sharing their faith and what they've learned.

45 Bishops need to encourage parishes to encourage laity to teach for the sheer love of God, and the building up of the Church with the gifts given to them by the Holy Spirit. Catecheses should be as free as the Gospel.

(g) Catechesis must center on Holiness.

46 Currently in many Catholic education situations the emphasis is on knowledge, or the rote experience of the Sacraments.

47 Bishops need to encourage parish leaders that the emphasis must be on the conversion of hearts and holy living. Without the right disposition of mind and heart, the Sacraments, while valid, have little effect on their recipient.

48 These seven fundamentals are necessary for success in adult faith formation, as Evangelical Christianity has modeled. Here now are specific ideas about Parish Based Biblical Instruction (PBBI).

L. Systematic Bible Instruction in Parish

49 PBBI should systematically, over time, and through different tracks, with more than one topic available at any one time (just like a college curriculum), ensure that the following topics are covered at a layperson's level of understanding – with an emphasis on practical lessons for today.

- Overview of the Bible (Origin, Author, Time Period, Literature Type, Scope, Message, Chronology, Languages, Translations, Uses, References)
- The Torah
- Old Testament History
- Major Prophets
- Minor Prophets
- The Life of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels
- The Life of Christ in the Gospel of John
- Paul's Epistles
- The Book of Acts
- John's Revelation
- History of the Israelites (from Abraham to Jesus)
- Paul's Missionary Journeys
- The New Testament Church
- The Early Church Father's View of Scripture
- "Protestant Reformation" and Catholic Reformation Understanding of Scripture

M. Sunday School, Weekday Bible Studies and Midweek Prayer Service

50 Supplementary to Mass, each parish should mount a Sunday School program for all ages, run by lay volunteers, platooned with Mass services. During Mass services, there is also a coinciding running Sunday School program. Everyone is expected to attend both every Sunday. No exceptions. Families attend Sunday School and then Mass, or Mass and then Sunday School.

51 Yes, logistical concerns will cause objections. There are many different ways to structure a religious educational program. But the goal is to involve as many people as possible.

52 Weekday Bible Studies and Wednesday Night prayer services are also stalwarts of Evangelicalism, because they are opportunities for supplementary study, support, and prayer. They will not be as popular because of busy schedules, and caution must be used not to create a ghetto mentality where attendance at such activities substitutes for being salt and light in the world.

53 All of these meetings have as a practical benefit—their small size, which allows individuals in the small groups to get to know each other, through the Sunday meetings as well as at social and service gatherings the class organizes. It is in these small groups that the Church can be more fully realized in terms of support and building up one another. Without these small groups the Mass becomes one of the only places where people meet together as Christians. But because of the huge size of the Mass, few people get to know each other, enter into religious discussions and testimonies of conversions or answered prayer, or share one another's burdens. Spiritual sharing is one of the goals of these small groups. This was not always the case with Catholicism, when parishes were built within a neighborhood community and the church body was regularly together for various activities and functions. But American society today experiences a separateness and isolation that small parish support groups and classes can remedy.

54 There are variations of Sunday School programs that feature department or age group assemblies for group announcements, awards, singing, and age appropriate encouragement and teaching. For instance, if there are as many as 150 teens that gather for Sunday School classes, all the teens may gather for a short assembly in the social hall for 20 minutes of announcements about teen events, trips, attendance and memorization awards, school clubs, and singing. After the teen assembly the teens break up into age or gender appropriate classes of 12-20 each.

N. Bible Memorization Programs

55 Successful Evangelical institutions all have churchwide Bible memorization programs. The most aggressive programs result in Bible Quizzing (see section below). Depending on the age and capability, Bible memorization programs are churchwide, and systematically teach and encourage the commitment of key Bible verses, themes, and even the order of the books of the Bible or facts about Bible figures -- through contests and public award ceremonies. The programs are typically administered through the various Sunday School classes and assemblies and bulletin announcements. Only one or two persons in a large church are necessary for promoting, planning, and tracking member progress, with the assistance, of course, of the individual Sunday School teachers.

Other Activities

O. Promotion of Personal Bibles and Their Use

56 Once personal companion Bibles are readily available, the bishops need to promote their acquisition and use, both at a personal and parish levels.

P. Contests (Bible Preaching and Witnessing)

57 Throughout society contests are used to encourage progress and virtue. Within a parish, and through the auspices of individual Sunday School classes, participants can learn to preach, thus preparing them for public evangelization; and witnessing, thus preparing them for one-one-one evangelizing..

Q. Youth National & International Bible Quizzing

58 Of all the suggestions in this paper, I wish this one could have been at the top. Many Evangelical denominations are involved in Youth Bible Quizzing. There are several divisions and organizations that allow youth, ages 10-19, to compete against those in their own church, and then against other local and statewide teams, and finally compete on national and international competitions. What sets Bible quizzing apart from other intellectual quizzing activities, is that the successful Bible quizzers must also be somewhat of an athlete—requiring them not to just push a button to answer a questions, but to literally jump off chairs that are electronically wired to determine which of 6 to 10 contestants, on two or three teams, is first up and given the opportunity to answer a question for their team. The intellectual and social aspects of this “sport” result in team building virtues and a vast knowledge of the Bible. The best international quizzers will memorize entire books of the New Testament. The books and translations to be quizzed on are coordinated on an international level.

59 Bishops should commission a Catholic Bible Quiz organization. While Evangelical Bible quizzing involves thousands of youth throughout the United States and Europe, the Bibles they use, the translations, and even the questions, are embedded with Protestant theology and are not appropriate for participation by Catholics.

60 However, if Catholics mounted a successful Bible Quizzing organization there would be pressure for there to be Bible Quiz competition between all Christian Churches, and that would help to bring all Christians to use one Bible translation....at least for Bible Quizzing.

61 Bible Quizzing has significantly molded the minds of youth who have eventually trained for and become pastors and religious teachers. Catholic Bible Quizzing would be a natural channel for priestly vocations and Catholic preachers.

R. Bible Homilies and Preaching

62 Bishops need to encourage homilists to preach more directly from the Bible, holding their personal, marked-up copy in their hands, and referencing it during their homilies, getting people the in pews to look at their own Bibles, and to underline passages of significance. Indeed by design, the homily is supposed to be an explanation and exposition on the readings we just heard. By physically referencing a Bible in their hand, and encouraging the congregation to do the same, there is a literally connection that is established from the readings, through the priest or deacon, to the congregant – because of the Word of God everyone is holding, just as later in the Mass they will be holding the sacramental presence of Christ in their hands and in their mouths. And it helps if the Bible they hold is their own (not a pew Bible) so they can mark it up and take it home, and KNOW where to find that verse again, late at night, when they are worried and cannot get to sleep.

63 The bishops need to encourage preachers of the Word (both ordained and lay) to learn to preach and teach from the Word of God, as Evangelicals so successfully do.

S “Open Your Bibles Please...” in the Liturgy of the Word

64 Many of the above ideas need a beginning point. How does the Church *begin* to introduce the laity to the Bible and reading it, not just listening to a few verses on Sunday during the Liturgy of the Word, and out of context of the whole.

65 Again a default Evangelical technique is used every Sunday during worship. I have heard of some parishes that in fact do what I'm going to suggest. The bishops need to change the Liturgy of the Word in the following small way:

66 Whenever the lector or priest gets up to read Scripture they begin this way:

LECTOR or PRIEST: A reading from the Acts of the Apostles. Open your Bibles, please -- to the book of Acts, chapter 8. (pause) We will be reading from verses 26 through 40. That's Acts 8 verses 26-40. (pause while people turn to that in their Bibles.)

The principle reason for this addition is to help the laity to understand intrinsically that the few verses that are read on Sunday are part a much larger inspired work, and to put the Book into their hands, and teach them to trust it and use it. Currently, The Liturgy of the Word, is the only time when most Catholics turn to God's Word. This is the one time, therefore, where the Church can begin to model how to use God's Word, in a personal way.

67 This simple suggestion, however, has attracted a number of objections from well meaning laity and religious. The objections, listed below, appear to emendate from a desire to preserve cultural tradition, rather than embrace the communication opportunities of contemporary culture. Thus, a short rebuttal on each objection has some instructional benefit.

68 OBJECTION: "The Liturgy of the Word is supposed to be a Proclamation. You're not supposed to be reading it; you are supposed to be hearing it. Would you suggest that the congregation read along with the Eucharist prayers?"

69 REBUTTAL: For centuries congregants did not have Bibles. The only option was to hear a aural proclamation. There is nothing in Catholic doctrine that is contrary to reading the Word of God with your eyes while you also listen to it with your ears.

70 REBUTTAL: The more physical senses involved in communication, the better the message is communicated. Reading and hearing are two senses, if we include "touching" the Bible we involve three senses. If we stand during the reading of the Gospel we use our sense of balance. That's four.

71 REBUTTAL: If this objection were valid then missalettes or copies of monthly guide *The Magnificat* would not be allowed during Mass.

73 REBUTTAL: Not everyone can hear well, and some are deaf.

73 REBUTTAL: As to reading along with the Eucharist prayers, I would suggest it, for the same reasons, and have done it many times. Reading and hearing, together, compliment each other and reinforce the message.

74 OBJECTION: People will not have the same translation and they won't be able to follow the readings.

75 REBUTTAL: People can to bring the right translation to liturgy. The Church can buy Bibles for pews in the proper liturgical translation.

76 REBUTTAL: Following the vocal reading with a different translation will be only slightly different, and, in fact, doing so may add to the reader-hearer's understanding of the passage better.

77 OBJECTION: People will be reading on past the scheduled end of the reading. Some will not stop to listen to the next reading, the response, or the homily. Thus, having a Bible “takes them out of the flow of the Mass.”

78 REBUTTAL: On occasion, this may be a small price to pay if people begin to realize the value of the Word of God.

79 REBUTTAL: If this argument was valid, then we should argue to remove from the church property all stained glass, architecture features, hymnals, missalettes, banners, statuary... because people might stop listening to the Word of God, or prayers, or singing and study one of these “distractions.” Of course, all of those visual elements contribute to guiding our heart toward God when we are distracted, as all humans always will be from time to time. How wonderful to be distracted by the Word of God.

80 REBUTTAL: One of the points of this change is to get people to realize that there is a flow to the WHOLE of Scripture, and that the readings at Mass are only part of the whole. Even if a congregant never missed a Sunday or daily Mass for 3 years, not only would they never hear the entire Biblical text, but they would never hear the Bible read in context, nor would they have a sense of the historical flow of how the Bible is infallibly presented and laid out. And even if the priest or deacon are good about pointing out some of these missing nuggets of truth, there is nothing like self-discovery, or having God speak directing through his Word.

81 OBJECTION: The turning of pages will be a distraction, and waiting for people to find the passage in the Bible will distract from the natural flow of the Mass.

82 REBUTTAL: Standing, sitting, and kneeling in Mass also make noise, and can disturb the flow of the Mass for others. But they are a necessary part of worship. Besides, periods of silence are encouraged in the Mass for contemplation...in this case the contemplation of God’s Word in your hand; like the Eucharist in your hand, we are to equally venerate both.

83 OBJECTION: People will feel uncomfortable because they don’t have Bibles.

84 REBUTTAL: That is one of the points of this suggested change. The embarrassment will motivate them to buy a Bible and bring it to Mass.

85 OBJECTION: People will feel uncomfortable because they don’t know how to use a Bible or find the passages in it.

86 REBUTTAL: That is one of the points of this suggested change. The embarrassment will motivate them to learn, and get to the Bible Studies, and start memorizing, for starts, the order of the books of the Bible.

87 OBJECTION: People would learn much more if they’d just listen to tapes by Fr. Coropi or Fr. Grosech.

88 REBUTTAL: As good as they are, Fr. Coropi and Fr. Groeschel are not as good as the Word of God.

89 OBJECTION: The Mass isn’t the time for Bible Study.

90 REBUTTAL: The Liturgy of the Word and the homily are by design a form of Bible Study even as they are worship.

91 OBJECTION: The problem you seek to address can be fixed by proper training of lectors, so we can hear them.

92 REBUTTAL: The problem I seek to solve is to get people in the pews to feel comfortable with Bibles in their hands, even to be enamored with them. Training the lectors to read better won't solve the problem of Bible ignorance among the laity.

93 OBJECTION: This would be an insult to God. Why? Because we go to Mass to worship God, not for a Bible study. (from by a nun.)

94 REBUTTAL: Then we should remove The Liturgy of the Word from the Mass.

95 OBJECTION: Why would you want to bury peoples faces in the book, do you not trust what is being read to you? Do you not believe that it is God's Word according to the disciples (sic) and prophets? If Jesus is in the Word then we must believe that he is present. Jesus is standing in front of you in Word, why not look at him while he speaks?

96 REBUTTAL: I want to bury my face in the Bible BECAUSE I trust it so much, because I want to remember it and reading it while I'm hearing it will help me do that. My reading of it, while I hear it, only reinforces that I believe it is of incalculable value.

97 REBUTTAL: Jesus is not standing in from of me reading it, it's a lector, who has poor diction, doesn't know how to pronounce half the names, and who's wardrobe is distracting. It's helpful especially in such circumstances, to look at a Bible, follow along, and to "see" Jesus, as I hear his words. St. John writes:

98 In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And the Word became flesh, and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1, 14).

99 In a sense, looking at the Bible is looking directly at Jesus.

Documentary Video and Workbook Series

100 As a television and film producer I know that one of the best ways to imbue these ideas into Catholic Culture (both to the hierarchy as well as the laity) will be the production and distribution of a documentary television-DVD series, that SHOWS the successful implementation of these ideas in the lives, families, communities, and parishes where they are been successfully. That means, at times, shooting elements inside the Protestant Evangelical milieu, as well as within Catholic organizations and parishes. The goal is to demonstrate the techniques and understand how to implement them. A handbook and workbook that accompanies the series, would instruct and the guide the church for decades to come, thus changing the culture for the better.

Conclusion

101 For everyman, Christian or not, the Word of God is a “lamp for my feet, a light for my path.” If a lamp is going to light the dark path ahead of us, one has to first put in the hand, and turn it on. The ideas in this document will help Catholics do just that with the Bible, in a dramatic way. I encourage the bishops to adopt these ideas and promulgate them to the Church of the Bible, the Catholic Church.

Stanley D. Williams, Ph.D. is a Catholic writer, author, and producer. His academic research focuses on mass communication of moral messages and informal fallacies of logic. He owns two media businesses: SWC Films, a television and DVD production company (<http://www.SWCFilms.com>), and Nineveh’s Crossing, a Catholic marketing and distribution entity (<http://www.NinevehsCrossing.com>). He converted to Catholicism in 1998 after 50+ years as an Evangelical. He writes and teaches on logic, Catholic apologetics, and motion pictures. His book, *The Moral Premise: Harnessing Virtue and Vice for Box Office Success*, is used by Hollywood producers to improve the moral truth and public acceptance of motion pictures. He lives with his wife in Novi, Michigan, USA.

