

# INTERCHANGE

For EVANGELIZATION



## Equipping the Saints: Using Scripture in Evangelization

The way Catholics understand and use Scripture impacts their efforts in evangelization. The Commission on Evangelization invited Dr. Margaret Nutting Ralph to address: How Catholic Evangelizers Should Use and Understand the Bible. She began by stating: “For people involved in evangelization, the whole topic of how Scripture is used is core.” Along with a deep love of Scripture, Dr. Ralph brings degrees in English literature and Scripture. From that unique perspective, she engaged the CoE by using a method that can help pastors and staffs equip parishioners to confidently use the Bible in the manner that the Catholic Church teaches.

The authoritative voice of the Church since 1943 (*Divino Afflante Spiritu*), has called Catholics to interpret Scripture passages in the context of the intent of the author; the context of the time and where the passage fits in the process of God’s revelation. It is difficult to resist the temptation to use Scripture passages to prove that “I am right” or to think “this passage supports what I already know.” One of the major tools in dealing with this temptation is to be conscious of the “literary form” used by various biblical writers. Some literary forms are still in use today, while others are unique to the early centuries of the Church. For instance, the way that “letters” are used today is similar to how letters were used in Paul’s time. However, today we do not use the forms and conventions used in writing apocalyptic literature. Confusion among Catholics on how to interpret the book of Revelations persists.

When teaching about using a Catholic “contextualist” approach in interpreting Scripture, she advocates using the example of how we read a newspaper. When we read front-page stories; feature articles; editorial pages; letters to the editors or the advice columns, we quickly learn which literary forms help us to be informed, persuaded, inspired, or amused. So too, because the Bible is a library of books, not chapters in one book, we need to teach parishioners to anticipate adjusting their expectations and mindset as they read different biblical literary forms.

For more information and resources see the **Resource Review** section.

### TIPS FOR UNLOCKING THE BIBLE

Where can the average Catholic go to find out the type of writing a specific book is; background on the historical events and development of the book and a general view of its themes? The introduction of each book in the Catholic Bible is a good place to start. Dr. Ralph also emphasized that the authors of the books of the Bible will generally tell the reader what kind of form is being followed. Using the same common sense we apply when we read other material, we can be alert to the cues that reveal many things about each book. For instance, Luke in Chapter 1 of his gospel tells the reader that he is an editor working with other accounts about Jesus. He is creating an “ordered account” so that the reader may realize the certainty of the teachings about Jesus. Suggestions, examples, and ways to answer questions like these are in Dr. Ralph’s book entitled: ***And God Said What?*** Λ

### 📖 MORE KEYS

Questions to encourage parishioners:

- ↔ What is the place of this passage in the larger context?
- ↔ What is the literary form the author is using?
- ↔ What are the beliefs of the author and original audience?
- ↔ What does the author intend to teach the original audience?
- ↔ How does this author’s insight fit into the process of revelation?

## MAKING THE LIVING WORD UNDERSTANDABLE: LECTIONARY AND BIBLE STUDY

While many Catholics want to study the written word, the three readings and psalm from the lectionary at Sunday Mass and the homily are the most easily accessible avenues to hearing the Living Word. Dr. Ralph pointed out:

"If all we know is "out of context" passages, then we are very vulnerable to have someone tell us "this is what this means". We do not know any better because we never read it (the passage) in context. The worship setting assumes we bring with us knowledge of the context (of the readings) just as the newspaper assumes we bring knowledge of life in our society.

As Catholics, we need to read one book at a time of the Bible – beginning on page one."

While the homilist must be careful not to violate the principles of interpreting Scripture by using texts "out of context", the place for adult Catholics to learn a contextual approach is adult education. Giving Catholics permission, the tools to explore the Bible and information on the differences between a literalist and a contextual approach to Scripture is vital in the Glenmary context.

***What opportunities do Catholics in your congregation have to grow in their ability to understand and use the Bible?***

### OPPORTUNITIES IN PARISH LIFE

- ⊕ Using Scripture at parish meetings and teaching adults to use ***lectio divina***
- ⊕ Use Echoes of Faith / Ecos de Fe (videos) with catechists and other adults
- ⊕ Help the choir reflect on the Sunday Scriptures and the background of the passages
- ⊕ A mini series on one book of the Bible
- ⊕ Distribute a handout that extends the homily as part of the bulletin
- ⊕ At parish meetings have people find passages in the Bible
- ⊕ Explain the biblical background of the prayers and images used at Mass
- ⊕ Others?

### A SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY

Dr. Margaret Nutting Ralph is the guest speaker for "Scripture Immersion Days" being offered to Glenmary clusters in coordination with their dioceses. Dr. Ralph spoke at a spring workshop, ***And God Said What*** in Bowling Green, KY which focused on helping Catholics become comfortable with a contextualist approach to Scripture.

For parishes in Eastern Kentucky, Dr. Ralph will be speaking at Morehead State University on Saturday, October 8, 2005 from 9a.m.- 3p.m. The topic: ***Will You Be Left Behind? A Catholic Perspective on the Book of Revelation.***

For more information contact Liz Dudas at [ldudas@glenmary.org](mailto:ldudas@glenmary.org)

### RESOURCE REVIEW

***And God Said What? An Introduction to Biblical Literary Forms***, Revised Ed. by Dr. Margaret Nutting Ralph, Paulist Press 2003. \$16.95  
In Scripture, we read accounts of historic events that have been interpreted by the biblical authors to communicate their religious significance. This book introduces the reader to the importance of understanding various forms of literature in the Bible: debates, infancy narratives, miracle stories, parables, allegory and more. Everyday examples that bridge modern life and Biblical texts; frequently asked questions and difficult passages are in each chapter. An excellent educational tool for adults and a resource for teachers and preachers!



"T here should be more of a crowd!"