

Sacred Art Series: An Interview with William Bloomfield

Are you having a hard time finding a Christmas gift for someone on your list? Are you looking for a book that is physically beautiful but also inspiring? Then, you should checkout some products from the Sacred Art Series by Bloomfield Books. There is a very practical Rosary Flip Book to use as a devotional aid and a stunningly beautiful version of The Holy Gospels of St. Luke and St. John. I have invited the editor of the series, William Bloomfield, to tell us more about the mission of the series and some of his products. I hope you enjoy the interview. *(Use the code CATHVIEW by December 21 and get 15% off your Sacred Art Series Amazon purchase)*

1) What is the Sacred Art Series?

The Sacred Art Series is a series of books I am publishing through my newly created family business, Bloomfield Books. In its most general sense, the series aims to help families grow in holiness. More particularly, the series uses sacred art to aid families in traditional Christian devotions such as the daily reading of Scripture and the family Rosary. The first book in the Sacred Art Series was the Rosary Flip Book, which was released last Fall. The second book, The Holy Gospels of St. Luke and St. John, was released on the Feast of St. Nicholas, December 6. Other books are currently being developed.

2) What inspired you to start the series?

A confluence of several things: First, My day job is as an assistant attorney general for the Michigan Attorney General. In this capacity, in the summer of 2013, I was assigned to the team of attorneys working to preserve the art collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts during the Detroit Bankruptcy. To my shame, I realized that I had not been to the DIA since I was a kid. Later in 2013, I rectified this and again toured the museum. I was thrilled to discover their beautiful medieval and Renaissance art, which includes pieces from Caravaggio, Bartolome Esteban Murillo, Gerard David, and even Fra Angelico.

Second, I had a conversation with my oldest niece, 8 and an avid reader, and I

learned that she had already completed the Hobbit and the Narnia Chronicles and was already beginning The Lord of the Rings. This is all great; but I asked her whether she'd read the Gospels, and she had not. This got me thinking: is there a version of the Gospels that is suitable for a child? And as I began to look around, to my surprise, I realized that there was not.

Third, my wife and I received a set of old McGuffey readers from my wife's parents. We began using these with my son and I soon realized that I liked the way the books were laid out. The early books in the set-for beginning readers-used larger print and often included pictures. Gradually, as the series continued-and presumably, as the young reader's abilities developed-the books used smaller type and included more words per page. This seemed to be a winning formula.

Fourth, prayer. Not long before these discrete ideas began jostling around in my head, I attended an excellent Ignatian retreat with the religious order Miles Christi. My resolution from the retreat was a disciplined prayer life, which included regular recitation of the Rosary as I drove to and from work. One day, as I prayed, the idea formed: a book of the Gospels in a story-by-story format with large type and beautiful images of sacred art. And I was pretty sure that all that I needed was already in the public domain, and that I could self-publish using Createspace or some other print-on-demand publisher. Later, I determined to make the book truly beautiful by using a professional book printer.

3) What type artwork do you use in your publications? Why?

I don't claim to be an art historian or to have any real expertise in art, but I have always liked the beautiful churches and paintings and sculptures that I saw in Europe during my semester abroad. Beautiful art should be timeless and not subject to fads. And good art should appeal to all ages, both young and old; I've never really cared for the art in many children's books, which too often strikes me as childish. The art of the High Middle Ages and of the Renaissance met my criteria. Another advantage of art from this period, is that it has long been in the public domain. So when I began looking for art to use, I began here. I already knew of some great artists, like Michelangelo, Raphael, Caravaggio, and Fra Angelico, and I soon discovered other greats, like Titian, Duccio, Giotto, and Murillo. And as I found more and more good art, I realized that from my own schooling I knew so little, and that the Sacred Art Series would be a way of remedying this for my own children and those of others.

4) What is the Rosary Flip Book? How has it changed the way you and your family pray the rosary?

After I had essentially completed the manuscript for The Holy Gospels of St. Luke and St. John, I happened to go to New York City for a conference for work. Since some of the art from my book was located at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, my wife and I made it a point to visit the museum, which I had never been to. I was in awe to discover Fra Angelico's Crucifixion there, which I had not realized was at the Met. I also was delighted to discover a beautiful painting of the 15 Mysteries of the Rosary that had been created for a member of the Habsburg royal family. I had never seen anything like it. When I returned from the trip, I thought that the image could be used to create a devotional aid. And as my wife had given me a desktop calendar last year for Christmas, I thought this would make an excellent format.

My wife now prays at least a decade each morning with the kids as part of their homeschool routine. We also keep the 8 x 10 Rosary Flip Book displayed on our mantel throughout the day. So whether we're praying the Rosary or not, it provides an excellent reminder to pray and to meditate on the life of Christ and Mary. At work, I keep a 4 x 5 Rosary Flip book next to my computer monitor, and every day I flip to a new image. I really like it, and hope that others will to. I've also noticed that now, when I do pray the Rosary, whether I have the Rosary Flip Book at hand or not, I can easily call to mind the images for each of the mysteries, thereby aiding my prayer.

5) You have a book of the Gospels in Latin. Why Latin?

Yes, the Gospel of John is available for purchase as a softcover in Latin. Since I already had the manuscript prepared in English, it was quite easy to substitute the Latin Vulgate for the English text. So why not? My family routinely attends the Extraordinary Form of the Mass and I lead our small schola in the Latin Gregorian Chants. When I was a freshman at Steubenville, to satisfy my own curiosity regarding the liturgical changes following Vatican II, I read Sacrosanctum Concilium, Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. There I read that Latin was to be preserved in the liturgy. Well, if the Church celebrated Mass for more than a thousand years in Latin and wants Latin to be preserved, who am I to disagree? I did not learn Latin as a child, but have now done some self-study as an adult. I love the beauty of the Latin and am impressed at how succinct it is. It also strikes me that anyone that learns Latin will greatly expand their English vocabulary and improve their grammar. So I'd like to help others to discover the beauty of

Latin, and for me, one of the easiest places to read Latin is in the Gospels.

6) You have a new book coming out with the Gospels in English. What makes this book unique?

This book of the Gospels is the first to provide the actual text of the Gospels in a story-by-story format with beautiful images of sacred art. It bridges the gap between children's bibles and adult bibles. It is designed for children, but it is not childish. And I've left the entire book in the public domain, so anyone with an internet connection can freely download the text.

7) Which translation did you use?

Because the most recent English translations are copyrighted, I used the Challoner Revision of the Douay Rheims, which is in the public domain and is approved by the Church. Because this book is designed for children, I updated the text to remove most thee's, thy's, thou's and -eth endings-but the substance remains that of Douay Rheims.

8) What are some of your future projects?

I am working on a Sacred Art Series Book of Saints and on a Stations of the Cross Flip Book. I'm also considering completing a second volume of the Gospels, which would include the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark in a similar format. Whether I complete these projects will depend, in part, on the reception of the Sacred Art Series by the public.

9) What impact do you hope this series will have on the church, on individual Catholics?

I hope the Sacred Art Series will help families to grow in holiness, and ultimately, to become families of saints. More specifically, I hope children learn more about the life of Christ through the text of the Gospels and that they will absorb the teachings of the Gospels into their daily lives. I also hope that children (and their parents) will be inspired by these beautiful works of art and come to appreciate and know the works of these great artists. How tragic that I did not know of Duccio or Titian until I produced these books! May this tragedy not be repeated for the next generation of young Christians.

10) Your family members are involved in some other publications. What are they?

My sister Emily Ortega has now written two short novels for young Catholics (especially young Catholic Girls), I'm Bernadette and Christmas with Bernadette. Both are available at <https://www.bernadettebooks.com/>.

My brother Benjamin Bloomfield has edited and published A Collection of Christmas Carols, which is available here: <https://acollectionofchristmascarols.com/>.

And my brother-in-law John Joy has published a book featuring the art from Duccio's Maesta. It's available here: <https://www.createpace.com/4597030>.

All of these books are also linked from the Related Projects page at my Sacred Art Series website. See <https://www.sacredartseries.com/related-projects.html>.

Biography:

William R. Bloomfield graduated from Franciscan University of Steubenville in 2001 and Ave Maria School of Law in 2004. Following law school, he clerked for U.S. District Court Judge Lawrence Zatkoff and U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals Judge Ralph Guy. He then joined the U.S. Navy JAG Corps, where he served for 4 1/2 years, including a deployment to Iraq. For the last three years, he has worked as an assistant attorney general for the Michigan Department of Attorney General. William and his wife Anna have four children; their oldest is now six. They live in Lansing, Michigan.