

Devil can quote Scripture, too

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 14:1, 7-14; (R1) Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29; (R2) Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24.

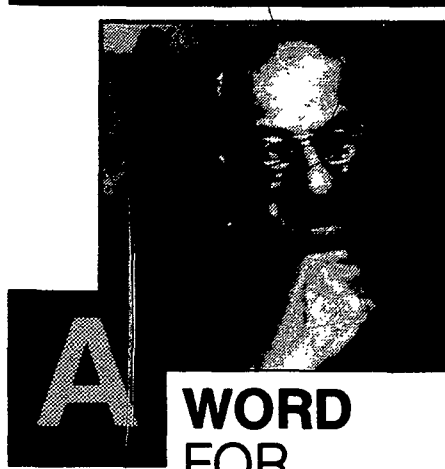
One of the Scriptures most quoted in the liturgy is the book of Sirach. Like the book of Proverbs, it is in great part a collection of sayings. Sirach wrote this book about 180 B.C. to defend the old religion of Judaism against the new influxes of Hellenism.

It is no different today. Eastern religions are proliferating in the West and many, even Catholics, are being lured to them — especially to Fundamentalism, which makes the Bible the sole rule of faith.

Sirach was disturbed by a similar trend in his own day. To Jews abandoning their faith, he said in effect, "What are you doing chasing after new ideas and abandoning the old faith? Study the generations long past and understand; has anyone ever hoped in the Lord and been disappointed?" (2:10).

Today a similar thing is happening: Catholics are abandoning their faith for the Bible alone.

"Study the generations past."



WORD FOR SUNDAY

Jesus never said, "Go write," but "Go teach." The apostles faithfully fulfilled this commission and "handed on by oral preaching, by example and by ordinances what they had received from the lips of Christ ... and from the prompting of the Holy Spirit."

The same commission was fulfilled by apostolic men "who under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit committed the message of salvation to writing" (On Divine Reve-

lation #7).

But to keep the Gospel forever whole and alive within the church, the apostles left bishops as their successors, "handing over their teaching role to them."

Like a tripod, divine revelation has three elements: the handed on apostolic preaching (tradition), the inspired writings (Scriptures), and the teaching church (magisterium).

And so Vatican II declared: "It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, sacred Scripture, and the teaching authority of the Church ... are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others ... and all ... under the action of the Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls" (idem #10).

So Sirach says even to us, "My son, conduct your affairs with humility." What is it but pride to want to shuffle off sacred tradition and the teaching authority of the church for the Bible alone? What is it but pride to want to be one's own guide in the matter of divine revelation? What is it but arrogant pride to say, "I have the Bible and the Holy Spirit; I have no other need?"

The devil can quote Scripture as he did in his tempting of Jesus.

Shakespeare wrote: "In religion/ What damned error, but some sober brow/ Will bless it, and approve it with a text,/ Hiding the grossness with fair ornament?"

I remember driving one day and listening to a tape on Mormonism. As I listened I was thinking, "How in earth did Joseph Smith ever arrive at the weird concoctions in his *Book of Mormon*? I could never have dreamt them up." Then clear as a bell, a voice within me said, "It all came from the devil."

Then I came home and was reading Father Paine's book *His Time Is Short: the Devil and His Agenda*. It seemed so much a confirmation of the voice within me. Here's what Father Paine has written: "All the cults and false religions of the world ultimately derive from the aspiration of some fallen angel to win the adoration and obedience of human beings. Sometimes as in the Hindu demonic triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, they even aspire to a kind of direct parody of the Holy Trinity" (p. 24).

How important it is that we be humble and listen to the church. Should we exalt ourselves and go on our own, we shall be humbled.

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