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# Shakespeare knew Bible and its great themes

I had an especially delightful evening with one of my daughters recently.

Her high school teacher had required her to memorize a passage from Shakespeare's play about Julius Caesar and recite it to the entire class. My daughter loved the way Shakespeare put words together, and so we spent much of the night reading passages to one another from Julius Caesar and some of Shakespeare's other works.

There is some evidence that Shakespeare was Catholic. If he wasn't, he should have been. He sure knew the Bible and the great themes that were developed in scripture.

For example, it appears that Shakespeare accepted the existence of purgatory. In Hamlet, the ghost says to the prince, "I am thy fathers spirit, doomed for a certain term to walk the night, And for the day confined to fast in fires, till the foul crimes done in my days of nature are burnt and purged away."

And Shakespeare acknowledges that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church, writing, "It is ill to say the gallows is built stronger than the church."

Many passages in scripture have clear parallels in Shakespeare's tragedies. For example, the Bible warns us not just to love in words but also in our deeds. Shakespeare writes in Othello, "Your words and performances are no kin together." In Macbeth, the lead character states, "Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives." On the same theme, Shakespeare writes elsewhere, "And your



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large speeches may your deeds approve."

The Bible says that "Satan masquerades as an angel of light."

Shakespeare, in a similar vein, says in Hamlet, "The devil hath power to assume a pleasing shape." People, like the devil, can be deceptive. We are told in the Book of Sirach, "With his lips an enemy speaks sweetly, but in his heart he schemes to plunge you into the abyss." Shakespeare echoes the same sentiment in Hamlet: "One may smile, and smile, and be a villain."

The Bible encourages us to be slow to speak. Shakespeare expresses the message this way: "And weigh'st thy words before thou giv'st them breath." While the Book of Wisdom says that seeing a just man reminds us of our shortcomings, Iago says of Cassio in Othello, "He hath a daily beauty in his life that makes me ugly."

For you older folks, where the Bible speaks of the prophecy that old men will one day dream dreams, Shakespeare says in King Lear that "Old fools are babes again." While it says in Ecclesiastes that it is

better to be a poor but wise youth than a foolish king who no longer knows caution, Shakespeare says in King Lear, "Thou hadst little wit in thy bald pate."

On the subject of discipline, the Bible tells us that God sends us trials and suffering out of His love for us, to help us grow in faith. Shakespeare says, in Hamlet; "I must be cruel, only to be kind." Othello states, "This sorrow's heavenly - it strikes where it doth love." Psalm 119 tells us that "it is good to be afflicted in order to learn your laws." Regan, in King Lear, says, "The injuries ... must be their schoolmasters."

With regard to the constant preaching of Jesus against the lure of material things, the character, Iago, proclaims in Othello, "Poor and content is rich, and rich enough." In another work, Shakespeare writes, "Security is mortals' chiefest enemy."

Shakespeare appears to have devotion and respect for Mary, which is expressed most strongly in Othello in words that recall the Gospel of Luke. The character Cassio says of Othello's wife, Desdemona, "Hail to thee, lady! And the grace of heaven before, behind thee, and on every hand, enwheel thee round." Later, Roderigo describes Desdemona as follows: "She's full of most blessed condition."

In our closing verse, taken from Hamlet, Shakespeare captures the reality of God's personal attention for each one of us: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will - that is most certain."