



CERVANTES AND THE BIBLE

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The impeccable wisdom of the Bible, a spiritual treasure for Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, illumines not only his masterpieces and other established documents, but also shines through in the [Topography and General History of Algiers](#) (1612), published four years before the death of Cervantes, by [Friar Diego de Haedo](#), Abbot of [Frómista](#), of the Order of Saint Benedict, and edited by the first biographer of Cervantes, Doctor [Antonio de Sosa](#), a native of Córdoba, a Benedictine priest, made captive but who managed to flee Algiers on July 13, 1581, only to vanish without trace. This biblical wisdom also illuminates the excellent work, [El Quijote y la Biblia](#) (*Don Quixote and the Bible*), by [Professor Juan Antonio Monroy](#), to which Professor [Alfonso Ropero Berzosa](#) provides the Prologue.

In [Don Quixote](#), Cervantes, the de facto leader of the Algerian captives, not only confesses his religious faith ("I respect and revere, like a Catholic and faithful Christian that I am," [Don Quixote](#), I-XIX) – but, three times in the Prologue to the first part of Don Quixote, calls Holy Scripture, "divine writing." Throughout his various works, he alludes to thirty biblical characters and refers three-hundred times to the word of God, which he undoubtedly studied, while, among other things, being "an attendant in Rome" ("Dedication," [La Galatea](#)) to Italian Cardinal [Julio Acquaviva y Aragón](#) (1546-1574), legate of the pontiff, [Saint Pius V](#) (1504-1572).

Here are some worthy examples of such biblical references: "the salutation which the great Master of heaven and earth taught his disciples and chosen ones when they entered any house was to say, 'Peace be on this house'" ([Don Quixote](#), I-XXXVII). In the Gospel, we read, "And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house" (Luke 10: 5). Then, "gratitude that consists only of desire is a dead thing, as faith without works is dead" ([Don Quixote](#), I-L). In the New Testament, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:26). And, "I always pray to God to open my eyes of understanding that I might know how to serve Him" ([Don Quixote](#), II-LIV). In the New Testament, "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18).

As for the power of prayer, I believe that Cervantes, the spy of the King of the greater Spanish realm in Algiers, Mostagán, Oran and Andalusia, and a man of prayer, pleaded ceaselessly with Jehovah and the Virgin Mary: *"I believe in the Holy Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, three distinct persons, and yet all three are one true God. and that, although God is the Father, and God is the Son, and God is the Holy Spirit, they are not three distinct and separate gods, but only one true God. Finally, I believe everything that the Holy Roman Catholic Church possesses and believes, governed by the Holy Spirit and ruled by the Supreme Pontiff, vicar and viceroy of God on earth, legitimate successor of St. Peter,*

her first pastor after Jesus Christ, first and universal pastor of His Bride the Church. He told me of the greatness of the Perpetual Virgin Mary, Queen of the Heaven and Lady of the angels and of ours, Treasure of the Father, Reliquary of the Son and Love of the Holy Spirit, the refuge and shelter of sinners" ([The Persiles](#), I).

In January 1576, during his first escape from Algiers, that Hell of infidels and hotbed of spies, Cervantes traveled sixty leagues by land, according to Doctor Sosa ([Topography](#), III:103). And according to the second slave, there were, "sixty leagues, from here to Oran" ([The Treaty of Algiers](#), III). The fundamental root of his faith and his strength was to serve God and his country, and as he faced the severe tests of life, one of his constant prayers was, "I never walked with less eagerness, and, as I imagined, it was not very far to Oran! Thanks be to Thee, Divine King! O pure Virgin, I praise you! I implore you to work such strange charity that if you grant me freedom, I promise to be your slave" ([The Treaty of Algiers](#), IV).

After his failure, Cervantes returned to Algiers to face his fierce master, Dalí Mami, a renegade Greek and captain of the sea, and he prayed to the Virgin of Montserrat in this way: "Blessed and beautiful Virgin, remedy of mankind! Be the star to guide my wretched boat in this roiling sea and keep me safe from all dangers. Virgin of Monserrate, make Heaven of these harsh highlands. Rescue me, deliver me from this grief, for it is your attribute to extend the right hand to those fallen into misery. Most Blessed Mary, in this bitter moment, my body and soul I leave in your charge" ([The Treaty of Algiers](#), IV). Likewise, I must emphasize that it was in Algiers that Cervantes was the prayers – the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, the Apostles' Creed, and the Hail Holy Queen. For example, this dialogue from his play, [Los baños de Argel](#) III):

Juanico: Divine Love, by your leave, I will make amends. By my life, put aside this childish prattling, and let us go over those two prayers.

Francisquito: I have done the Hail Mary.

Juanico: And the Lord's Prayer?

Francisquito: Likewise.

Juanico: And the Creed?

Francisquito: I have through it.

Juanico: And the Hail Queen?

Francisquito: Now the Hail Mary, you see what force it has.

Cadí: Well, my son, what do you understand?

Juanico: As you see, lord, by being buffeted, my brother understands.

Carahoja: He is but a child. Each according to his age.

Cadí: And what do you do?

Juanico: I pray.

Cadí: For who?

Juanico: For myself, as I am a sinner.

Cadí: That is all well and good. What kind of prayers do you say?

Juanico: Lord, the ones I know.

Francisquito: He replied well. He prayed the Hail Mary.

Francisquito: Are you troubled already? Now, if I might add, what will you do when you hear me say the Hail Queen of Heaven? To confound you, I know well that all the four prayers are shields against your scimitars.

Also, it should be noted that there are plenty of reasons to confirm that Cervantes, his friends and writers of Algiers, met to learn from Doctor Sosa about "Divine Scripture," such as, the facts about [King Nebuchadnezzar](#), the destruction of Babylon, the holy Patriarch Noah, as well as about [Callimachus](#), [Diagoras of Melos](#), [Euhemerus of Agrigentum](#), [Epicurus](#), [Lucian](#), [Ovid](#), [Plutarch](#), and [Protagoras](#)" ([Topography](#), II, 5). And they also visited the libraries and archives of Algiers, a literary treasure, where Cervantes studied the maps for his escape to [La Montagne des Lions](#). Captain Jerónimo Ramírez, a native of [Alcalá de Henares](#), and very good friend of the hero of Algiers, declares that "*now, whenever I come here, I always find him busy with books.*" And Sosa says, "*In solitude such as this, and in an enclosure so separated from all talk and conversation in which my barbarian of a master indulges, what better occupation than reading the holy and good books?*" ([Topography](#), III: 1-2, 10-11, 15-16).

[According to the document](#) of October 21, 1580, Cervantes "was often engaged in composing verses in praise of Our Lord, His Blessed Mother, the Blessed Sacrament and other holy and devout things; and some mentioned this to Sosa and sent him these verses that he might to see for himself." Moreover, Fernando, "the Prince of the Windmills" who said: "finish our festivities, cease our rejoicing, for the comedies of the captives always end in tragedy" ([Los baños de Argel](#), III), also noted that the captives wrote and sang romances in secret. Here is an illustrative example:

Ambrose: Are there no people to hear us? Recite well, and so that all may come, let us begin sadly. We will recite that romance, Julio, which you composed, since we know it already, for we know it shortly, and it has that sad tone with which we are happy.

They sing this romance:

By the shores of the angry sea, that with its tongue and its waters, now mild, now angry, rolls into the walls of the dog Algiers. Four miserable captives, resting from work, look out to their homeland, with eyes full of longing. And to the sound of the coming and the going of the waves on the beach, with faint voices, they sing out this refrain: "How dear shall you be, O sweet Spain!"

How Heaven has contrived our fate, with our bodies in chains, and our souls in dire peril. O, would the closed cataracts of Heaven open up, and instead of water, here rained down pitch, resin, sulfur and brimstone! O, would close-girt earth open up and let loose Dathan and Abiron with much wizardry and great magic!

How dear shall you be, O sweet Spain!

Nevertheless, Sosa did speak of the church of the Christians in Algiers, a fact that often lies forgotten by the biographers of Cervantes.

This church was located near "a large bath, 70-feet long and 40-feet wide, which is divided into upper and lower levels, with many little rooms, and in the middle a cistern of pure water. Below, to one side, is the church, or oratory, of the Christians, where the Blessed Lord is distributed in high and low and with many cliques and in the middle a cistern of beautiful water, and to one side below, is the church or oratory of the Christians, where the blessed Lord is, where masses are said throughout the year, and often at holy feast-days are solemnized with well-arranged Vespers that are sung, for there is never a shortage of captive priests, and they usually exceed forty in number, of every nation and quality, and even very many good lawyers, doctors and teachers, members of religious orders and clergy, and lay people, and where they also administer some sacraments, and where the word of the Lord is sometimes preached. And, by His grace, as there is never a lack of devout Christians, there is a great concourse of them, and those can, usually on Sundays and feast-days, hear Mass there. And on Easter they are usually so many that they cannot all fit, and it is necessary sometimes for the guards of the baths, Turks and Moors, not to let anyone in who does not first pay a gratuity, from which they make great profit. This large bath is the door of Babazón to that of Babaluete, and about 400 steps lead to the door of Babazón for the west" ([Topography](#), I: 163).

Finally, based on the legal documentation and his literary testimonies, I am certain that Cervantes, defender of the Catholic faith, lived as a true and virtuous Christian because "*honor and virtues are ornaments of the soul without which the body cannot be beautiful*" ([Don Quixote](#), I-XIV).

Laus in Exclesis Deo.

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The [*image*](#) shows a portrait of Cervantes, attributed to Juan Martínez de Jáuregui y Aguilar, and painted ca. 1600.

This article was translated from the Spanish by N. Dass.

