

## Book Review of *Lepanto*..

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*Lepanto* by G.K. Chesterton, With Explanatory Notes and Commentary, Edited by Dale Ahlquist (2003), Ignatius Press, San Francisco, USA, pp.124.

Not to know Don John of Austria is proof of complete historian malpractice, of insane public relations vapidness, and of a universal crime of all educators--further proving the incompetence and malfeasance of every Western leader who does not mention Don John of Austria at least once in every public pronouncement. Don John of Austria is why we are here as we are...It could be better, but without Don John, the Islamic State would be controlling us day and night ever since the Battle of Lepanto which was fought on October 7, 1571.

"Lepanto" is a poem from pages 11 through 17 of this book--143 lines which tell why you, I and all the world have life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Absolutely astonishing. No novel or fiction ever surpasses reality--and Lepanto is pure reality. Not to know the significance of this, is ignorance and a crime of those living the freedoms of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. NOT HYPERBOLE. Sports heroes? Celebrities? Bah! One cannot find a better hero than Don John of Austria. I am embarrassed that I never mentioned him to my children or grandchildren. Where, oh where, is there a children's book about him? A movie?

After the poem, explanatory notes from pages 18 to 47 are academic jewels taken from other Chesterton writings which comprehensively detail any possible dated obscurities due to our inadequate educations. Such is not necessary, but they are intriguing and fascinating elaborations on facts about some of the words and themes in the poem. These 143 notes, one for each line in the poem give satisfying intellectual impact.

Then three commentaries follow. "The Background" by Brandon Rogers lays the political and historical chaos of western Europe and the Ottoman Empire (today's "Islamic State" in the sixteenth century)--Western politics has not improved much--corruption, selfishness, anti-Catholic bigotry, self-deluded Narcissism, and information (press & media) manipulating the people, all reign in the absence of heroic troubadours.

An old military navy man, like myself, trembles when reading the second commentary--"The Battle"--a military analysis of the 208 Christian war galleys versus over 380 Ottoman major war galleys and gun ships containing over 100,000 Janissaries and infantrymen to board the Christian galleys. It was written by Special Forces Colonel Buzz Kriesel--and I wept memories of a few military aphorisms I learned: "We've got them just where they want us"; as Virgil said: *Facilis est descendet Averni* ("Easy is the descent to hell"); then "Jesus, Savior, Pilot me./Over life's tempestuous sea./ Chart and compass come from thee./ Jesus, Savior, pilot me"; and most of all, "Grief is brief--Complete your mission." But the emphasis on the Rosary--each of the over 80,000 Christians at Lepanto had one and used it routinely--put me back as medical officer for the first fleet ballistic missile submarine in the early 1960s when we were at "battle stations

Perspective

Special Issue - 2015

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Received: August 19, 2015 | Published: October 06, 2015

missile" every 3-6 days. It was not the movie *Crimson Tide* with the dramatic hesitations to fire missiles. It was count down to "fire missile" or "bypass." If the "birds flew", we were "payback" killing 250 million Soviets because they had nuked the US. I was in missile compartment and still hold, I am sure, the world record for non-Rosary Hail Marys. To learn that October 7, the day of the Battle of Lepanto, is Our Lady of Victory Day and Feast of the Rosary ever since was a somber and grateful reminder that Hail Marys work.

A third commentary, "The Aftermath" by William Cincifi portrays the impact of the Battle of Lepanto and Don John of Austria on the world up to the present time--Words fail, once again, because Don John won the battle, but the West has forgotten it is still being warred against by the unchanged power-mad Islam which never stops metastasizing.

Then Dale Ahlquist provides (in his own words page 8), "...a piece of bosh trying to pass itself off as literary criticism, offered by this editor in an attempt to fill up some space" (a delightful epigenetic Chestertonism endemic to members of the American Chesterton Society). Regardless, the ignoring of Lepanto is explained and "troubadours" are understood among other side effects of poetry. Overall, one finds Ahlquist's "bosh" to be a paradigm for literary analysis in all education, but I digress.

The book closes with two short essays from the master himself: Chesterton's "The True Romance" about a warrior who fought at Lepanto--Cervantes and his psychological recovery: Don Quixote (an true detached alter ego for the overwhelmed "let us try anything" Don John for whom all turned out all right? Can you imagine the bewilderment of being in charge of the Christian galleys against the massed Ottomans?). The second essay is "If Don John of Austria Had Married Mary Queen of Scots" which is a draft, I think, of a historical novelette about the outcome of such a marriage. Regardless, both essays bring "Lepanto" to a pleasing factual and imaginary close.

This book is an educational masterpiece both in content and form, from poetry to history. One's education is incomplete without it.