EIR Dialogue of Civilizations

Raymond Llull: A Great Voice In The Dialogue Of Religions

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Introduction

The year 2001 has been designated by the United Nations as the Year of the Dialogue Among Civilizations; precisely in this same year, forces of the geopolitical school, have redoubled their efforts to launch generalized warfare, in the form of religious war. In September 2000, Israeli leader Ariel Sharon, then in the opposition, sparked an escalation of tensions between Muslims and Jews, by demonstratively treading on Muslim holy ground, at East Jerusalem's al-Haram al-Sharif. The plan of Sharon and co-thinkers in the United States and Britain was, and remains, to trigger a holy war around Jerusalem, whose reverberations—due to the fact the city is sacred to the three Abrahamic religions—were to be felt immediately throughout the Islamic world, from North Africa, across the Middle East and Central Asia, into Asia.

In the rush of events since an attempted coup d'état was triggered on Sept. 11 against the U.S. government, and against its collaboration with Russia and other governments to stop the Mideast war-fighting, the cries for a clash of civilizations—Christianity against Islam—could be heard throughout the corridors of power and the establishment press. The "war against terrorism" launched then against the Taliban regime and al-Qaeda networks in Afghanistan, was envisioned by the clash of civilizations lobby, as the spark that would ignite the general fire.

A clash of civilizations force, from Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington, to geopolitical madman Zbigniew Brzezinski, to Henry Kissinger, and the clique of confrontationists in and around the administration—like Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, and Richard Armitage—has raised the banner of religious warfare. They have claimed that "jihad" is the ancient religious tradition of Islam, and that "crusade" is the religious tradition of Christianity. The alternative, dialogue among religions and civilizations, must now really be grasped, not as a platitude, but as history.

This idea, first introduced as a political flank by Iranian President Seyyed Mohammed Khatami in 1998 to the UN General Assembly, has been warmly embraced by Pope John Paul II, who has worked indefatigably for an ecumenical dialogue among religions. In his Jan. 1, 2001 speech on the World Day of Peace, the Pontiff called for such a dialogue, and recently, on Nov. 18, dedicated his Angelus to invite leaders of the world's religions, to convene in St. Francis' city of Assisi, for peace.

It is important that the actual history of the relations among the religions be understood, and that we recall the highest points in those relations, without which human civilization could not have advanced. Thus it is fitting, to look back in history, to earlier great thinkers, both in the Christian and Islamic cultural traditions, to trace the process of this dialogue.

The path to the 15th-Century Renaissance, and to modern civilization, passed through a society in which the greatest intellectuals and artists of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity worked together—Spain of the 8th-11th Centuries. There, in Andalusia, the greatest development of learning, urban life, and public works was produced, in a collaboration of the three monotheistic faiths; the foundation of the great cathedral-building achievements which followed in the rest of Europe, was laid.

The history of science and art in the Andalusian kingdom was described in "Andalusia: Gateway To The Golden Renaissance," *New Federalist,* Nov. 19, 2001. This article rediscovers one of the greatest philosophical heirs of those achievements, Raymond Llull (Raymundus Llullus), the 13th-Century Catalan Christian thinker whose life influenced

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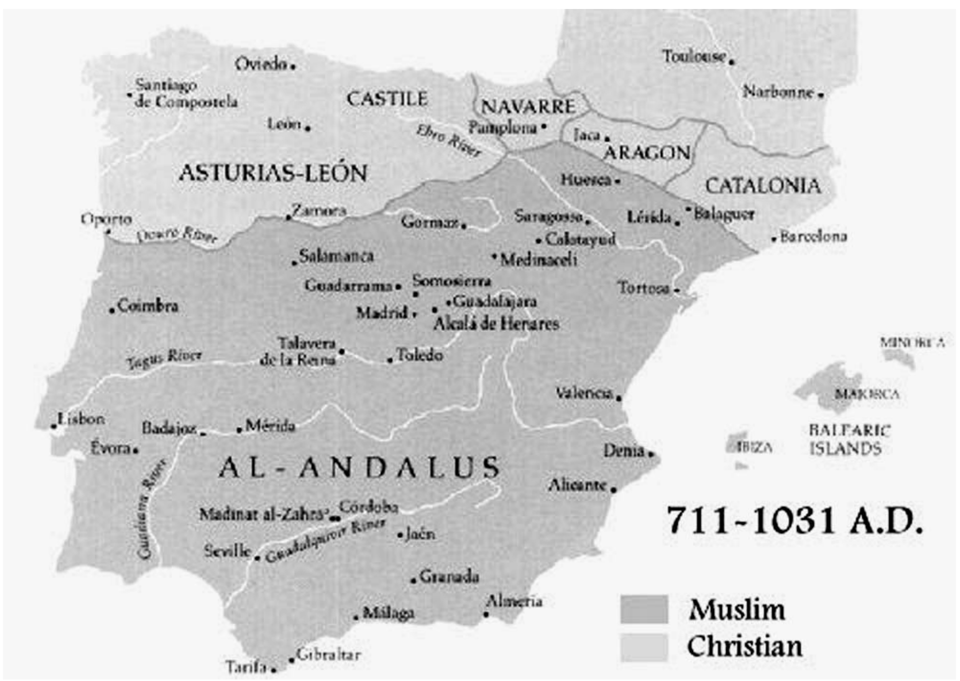

Raymond Llull, a Christian thinker of great influence within Christianity on the "dialogue of civilizations," was educated in Catalonia and on the island of Majorca in the 13th Century, in the Arabic Renaissance tradition of the great Islamic kingdom of Andalusia (711-1031 A.D.).

Nicolaus of Cusa and other great ecumenicists of Christianity.

The Andalusian Roots Of Ecumenicism

Cardinal Nicolaus of Cusa is rightly recognized as the architect of the ecumenical alliance among religions, as conceptualized in his *De Pace Fidei* (*On the Peace of Faith*) and forged, largely through his efforts, between the Eastern Orthodox and Western Roman Church during the watershed Council of Florence in 1439. Although Cusa's work constituted a historic breakthrough, laying the groundwork for successive efforts by the Roman Church to establish a dialogue with other religions, which has culminated in the efforts of Pope John Paul II, the quest for inter-religious understanding had its origins with Raymundus Llullus, a 13th-Century thinker, whose work had a most profound impact on Cusa. (The largest single collection of Llull's manuscripts is kept, in fact, in Cusa's library at Bernkastel Kues, Germany.) Aside from the historical value of Llull's contribution to Cusa's thought, it is his unique approach to the Christian-Islamic dialogue which makes Llull so vitally important today.

Llull was born in Majorca sometime between 1232 and 1235, just a few years after the island had been reconquered by Christian Catalan forces from the Arabs. Thus, although he was a Catalan Christian by birth, he grew up in an environment, at the court of Jacob II of Aragon and Catalonia, which was imbued with the culture of the Arabs, who had settled in Andalusia (Spain) in 711.

Andalusia was a remarkable chapter in European history. Indeed, it was the Golden Age for the Arabs, too, culminating in the period of Al Rahman III's reign (912-961) which saw the rapid development of an urban culture centered around learning. Andalusia, with its 30 million inhabitants (compared to Spain's 16 million today), contained hundreds of cities, which were centers of manufactures, particularly textiles, trade, and education.

Translation centers, like the famous one at Seville, arose on the model of the center at Baghdad under Harun al Rashid and al Mamun, who had established the House of Wisdom; all known works of science were translated into Arabic, engaging the talents of Christians, Jews, and Arabs. Education was not only a privilege of the elites, as public schools existed, and scholarships were available for studies at the universities, which were attached to the mosques.

The arts flourished. Principal among them was architecture, due to the ambitious city-building and public works projects of the Rahmans, but music and poetry also excelled. Ishaq, the most famous musician at Baghdad, had migrated to Andalusia, establishing a school which provided the impulse for the emergence of the troubadours and Minnesänger, in the new vernaculars of Europe.

The Idea Of Conversion By Reason

Llull grew up, therefore, in what was the most advanced general culture in Europe at the time, a fact which had a profound effect on shaping his outlook. Although slated to hold public office, as his father had done, Llull underwent a personal crisis in about his 30th year, his "conversion," which led him to abandon family and belongings, in pursuit of a life as a missionary.

Having determined to dedicate his life to converting the Muslims to Christianity, Llull appealed to the Dominican

Among Andalusia's glories was the Great Mosque of Córdoba, started in 785 by Abd al-Rahman I, which was also a center of learning and translation of Classics.

Raymond de Peñfort in Barcellona in 1265, who, he thought, would recommend Paris to him for theological studies at the Sorbonne (founded in 1253). Instead, Peñfort dissuaded Llull from the project, telling him that Paris could not provide him the knowledge he required for the task. (Llull did later go to Paris, as well as to Montpellier and Pisa, but only after he had developed his "Art," or philosophical method.)

Peñfort's advice was on the mark, and would prove to be of crucial significance. Paris was nothing but a nest of scholastics, a hub of Aristotelianism; conflicting philosophical "schools" differed essentially only in their particular reading of Aristotle. Of the Arab Muslim philosophers, Averroës reigned supreme. Averroës (Ibn Rushd) had profiled himself as the one who rescued philosophy from the ravages of al-Ghazzali, the ultra-orthodox religious tyrant of Baghdad who had declared the "destruction of philosophy," supposedly replaced by the sole authority of revelation (the Koran).

Averroës, however, in countering al-Ghazzali's approach, equally condemned "certain philosophers" whom he held to be pernicious; these were the great Platonists al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, against whom he argued in his major works by name. Thus, Averroës came to represent official Aristotelianism for the Islamic tradition. Hence, his meteoric career in Paris.

On Peñfort's prompting, Llull took up his studies in Majorca, tutored by an Arab freed slave. For ten years, Llull secluded himself with his teacher, and immersed himself in study of everything he could access through Arabic, the language he mastered as a prerequisite. What Llull studied is either identified or inferred from his own later contributions. In addition to the Greek philosophers, particularly Plato, he had the neo-Platonists, both from the Christian and Muslim traditions. Most important among the latter were al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, but he also read the works of the Andalusian mystics, like Ibn-Hazm of Cordova.

Llull translated several terms directly from Ibn-Hazm, among them "necessary proof," which referred to the Islamic theologian's notion that truth—as revealed in the Koran—could be proved, independent of the Koran's authority, through reason. The two means of proof, one by tradition, the other by reason, were known among Arabs in Llull's time as "positive science" (which Llull translated into "positive theology," or "positive science through faith"), and "science of philosophy through reason," which he refers to as "necessary reason" or "demonstrative science by intellect."

Although thoroughly steeped in the teachings of the Church fathers, Llull placed special emphasis on acquiring Islamic science, which he deemed necessary to the task he had set for himself: to convert the Muslims. In an anecdote related several times in different works by Llull, he tells the story of the Sultan of Tunis, who was being asked to convert to Christianity. The Sultan asked the learned Christian who had introduced him to the faith, why he should believe in Christianity rather than in Islam. When the Christian replied, that it was a question of "faith," the Sultan retorted: "Why should I give up my belief for another, on grounds of faith—*credere pro credere?* No," he said, "I shall believe only that which Reason tells me—*credere pro vero intelligere*."

Faith As Knowledge

Llull relates the anecdote time and again, as it embodies his own approach, rejecting outright any notion of forced conversion. He started from the assumption that the individual human mind endowed with reason could and would—upon being presented intelligibly with what he was sure was the superiority of Christian teaching—through an act of love, make the sovereign decision to embrace the faith.

Thus he sought out and addressed the most learned among

the Muslims, as his interlocutors. His way of bringing them the Christian message was to argue it philosophically, without reference to "authorities," as opposed to the scholastics. He argued according to what he termed "necessary reason" or "right reason," developed *in terms of the cultural matrix of his listener*. The reason why he believed mastery of Arabic and the Muslim philosophers to be crucial, was that he intended to make his God intelligible to Muslims by adopting the philosophical method which they acknowledged to be the means of seeking truth. Only in so proceeding, he thought, would a convert be a true believer.

That Llull failed in the task as he had defined it, that he did not convert masses to Christianity despite his repeated missions to Tunis and to other Muslim lands (he was imprisoned there in 1307), does not detract from the magnitude of his accomplishment. For, by seeking to supersede Islamic thinking from a Platonic Christian standpoint—so to speak, "from within" the matrix of the most advanced contributions made by the Arabs—he succeeded in elaborating a new philosophical method which was to bear its fruits in Cusa and, later, in Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.[1]

Dialogue, in Llull's experience, was not the exchange of positions and the ascertainment of similarities and differences; it was the process of epistemological confrontation, through which epoch-making progress in knowledge is achieved.

Through the 18th Century, when the great and seminal role of Leibniz was still universally acknowledged, histories of philosophy, like Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae,* stated as a matter of fact, that it had been Llull's work which had ushered in the new epoch leading to Leibniz.

Llull And Al-Farabi's Allah

The central question occupying Llull's energies throughout his missionary writings was the Christian Trinity, and, immediately related to it, the incarnation (the conception of Jesus Christ in Mary). How to communicate this profound concept to Muslims, who see it as a violation of the unity of God?

Llull seems to have understood the point that Lyndon LaRouche has made, that "if the concept of God is correctly understood, then the concept of the Trinity is also understood."

Among the Arab philosophers whose writings Llull had worked through, the one who explored this question most rigorously was al-Farabi (died 950). Himself steeped in Plato, the neo-Platonists, and most certainly Augustine, al-Farabi shared the conviction of the earliest Islamic philosophical school—the 9th Century Mu'tazilites in the time of the Baghdad Caliphate—that everything which is revealed in the Koran, is accessible to human reason.

The concept embedded therein—that in the mind of man, reason is coherent with the laws of the Divine, rendering it capable of grasping those laws—is what al-Farabi proved in his concept of God as the Necessary Existent.

In his "Main Questions,"[2] al-Farabi distinguished two categories of existence, that of possible existence and that of necessary existence. "If we posit that what is possible existence, is not existent, we are not therefore saying something absurd, since it cannot do without a cause; . . . If one, however, posits the necessary being as non-existent, then this is necessarily absurd; because the being of the same, has no cause, and it cannot have its being through something else. It is much more the first cause for the being of things, and necessarily its being must be the first being. One must think of it as free from any lack. Its being is therefore complete. Also, its being must be the most perfect, and free from matter, form, creation, and the final aim."

The characteristic of the Necessary Existent is that it is One, whose being comes from no other, and cannot be divided. "It is also One in the sense that its being never stems from anything outside itself, for, then, it would have its existence come from them."

Al-Farabi's Necessary Existent is "the pure good, the pure thinking, pure thought, and pure act of thinking. *All three of these are, in it, One*. It is wise, and knowing, living, almighty and willing. It has the most perfect beauty, perfection, and grace. It has the greatest joy in its own being and is therefore the first loving and the beloved. The existence of all things stems from it, and in such a manner, that it so impresses its being on things, that they thereby come into being."

Llull seized on this concept of the Necessary Existent as developed by al-Farabi, to present his proof of the Trinity. Llull began, as always, with the assertion of common principles: "Let us agree on one point." The foundation for agreement was the "attributes," or "dignities," of God.

Language Roots In Arabic

Here Llull has recourse to a particular characteristic of the Arabic language, which is built, like Sanskrit, on tri-consonantal verbal roots. Every verbal action, like "to think," or "to do good," is expressed through a cluster of three consonants, which, modulated through vowels, immediately yields corresponding forms of speech. Llull takes the 100 names of God, as enumerated by the Islamic philosophers, and develops the implications of this fact embedded in the Arabic language (and therefore in the mind). That is, that the *names* given to God, themselves—adjectives or nouns—are generated from their verbal roots where they are *actions*.

In his autobiography, he writes that the names or dignities of God stand for a trinity of actions; therefore, the Trinity:

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1. The works developing Llull's method are *Ars compendiosa inveniendi veritatem* (1273-75); *Ars demonstrativa* (1275-81); *Ars inventiva* (1289-90); *Tabula generalis* (1293); *Ars brevis, Ars generalis ultima* (1308).

2. All references to al-Farabi are from *Al-Farabi's Philosophical Treatises,* translated from Arabic by Dr. Friedrich Dieterici of Leyden in 1892, and from German into English by the author. The works quoted here are *The Intellect, The Preparation of Philosophy,* and *The First Questions*.

Llull, who took up the mission of converting Muslims by the power of Reason alone, was himself steeped in the philosophical works of Islam's great neo-Platonic scholars, such as Al-farabi and Ibn Sina.

"You do not understand, you Saracens, faithful to the faith of Mohammed, that the actions which are appropriate to divine dignities . . . are intrinsic to God and eternal. Without these actions, the dignities themselves would have been superfluous for all eternity. The actions, I say, of Goodness, are to be able to cause goodness; to be able to become Good; and to render Good; in the same way, the actions of greatness are to be able to cause greatness; to be able to become great; and to render great. And so on for all the divine dignities. . . . If we accept, as is appropriate, that the essential actions of the divine dignities or attributes are, in their equality and concordance, intrinsic and eternal, the Christians demonstrate with evidence that there exists a Trinity of persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, in one sole and unique essence and divine nature" (Llull's *Vita coaetanea,* 26).

Llull had to create new words in his native Catalan and in Latin, to express this idea (something Dante Alighieri was to imitate in forging the Italian language). But his is no linguistic ruse. What Llull discovered to be proper to human language, he recognized as corresponding to the characteristic of a universal language, reflecting universal laws, those of God. He was later to develop this further, in his theory of a universal language.

Socratic Dialogue

Like other great thinkers in the philosophical tradition of Plato, Llull used the method of Socratic dialogue to reason out fundamental Christian belief. He wrote the *Liber de Sancto Spiritu* (*Book of the Holy Spirit*) in 1273-75, which dramatizes the discussion of a Latin and a Greek scholar in the presence of a Muslim; the *Liber Tartari et Christiani* (*Book of the Tartar and the Christian*) of 1282/85; the *Disputatio fidelis et infidelis* (*Dialogue of a Believer and an Unbeliever*) of 1287-89; the *Liber de quinque sapientibus* (*Book of the Five Sages*) of 1294, which is a dialogue among a Latin, a Greek, a Nestorian, a Jacobite, and a Saracen; and the *Disputatio Raimundi et Homeni Saraceni* (*Dialogue of Raymond and a Saracen Man*), of 1308.

In his dialogue on *The Three Sages and the Pagan* (1274-76), one of his most beautiful ecumenical works, Llull develops his proof of the Trinity. Taking, again, the attributes or divine dignities, identified metaphorically in this work as flowers on a tree, his Christian sage argues thus: "In order to prove the existence of the trinity in God, we first pick the flower of Goodness [and] Greatness from the first tree, by which we will prove, according to the conditions of the five trees, that God must necessarily exist in trinity. And by proving the Trinity, we will be proving three articles, namely those of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and we will be proving how these three articles are one essence, one God. . . .

"It is clear that the greater the good, the more strongly it accords with eternity, power, wisdom, love; and the lesser the good, the closer it is to imperfection, which is contrary to perfection. Thus, if in God there exists one begetting good which is infinite goodness, greatness, eternity, power, wisdom, love, perfection; and which begets a good infinite in goodness, greatness, power, wisdom, love, perfection; and if from this begetting good and this begotten good there issues forth a good infinite in goodness, greatness, power, wisdom, love, perfection, then the flower is greater in God, than it would be if the above-mentioned things did not exist in God; . . . And since, according to the conditions of the tree, one should grant God the greatest good, therefore the Trinity, by what we have said, is demonstrable."

Llull's sage puts forward the Trinity on the *evidence of a universal characteristic of language*. God, to be Good, must necessarily be the Creator of Goodness.

The Nature of Man

The Islamic sage al-Farabi's Necessary Existent also is God the Creator, Who creates the universe as a process of self-reflection, and causes His creative power to be active in mankind. The First Intellect, or Heaven, is thus brought into

being, thus introducing multiplicity, and through it, the second, and so on through all the Heavenly spheres, which move in circular motion. Through this process, the highest form of existence, Man, is created, distinguished from all other species by virtue of the fact, "that he has a soul, from which powers emanate. Through them, the soul creates its work with bodily organs. In addition, it has another power, which is, that even without bodily organs, it can create. This power is Reason."

Al-Farabi's active or creative intellect "thinks first always [of] the most perfect of existences." Al-Farabi stressed "that man, in everything that his nature produces, is as close as possible to the active intellect" and that "thinking itself is constantly occupied with what effects the highest perfection, i.e., heavenly life." In his "Pre-Studies of Philosophy," al-Farabi identified the purpose of philosophy to be "the knowledge from the sublime Creator. . . . The activity, however, that the philosopher undertakes, is the similarity with the Creator, as far as human capabilities make this possible." And this is within the capacity of Man, because Man, as evident from the nature of his intellect, is made in the image of God, which al-Farabi, as a Muslim, explicitly states: "For thy soul comes from the being of thy Lord, thy body however from His creation."

Al-Farabi's concept of the Necessary Existent, enriched by Ibn Sina, and his treatment of the creative reason, firmly established for the Islamic tradition the philosophical proof of the existence of God, and the nature of man as created in the image of God (*imago viva Dei*). From Llull's standpoint, this also afforded him the opportunity to make the Trinity and the Incarnation intelligible to the Islamic world.

Ecumenical Dialogue In Search Of The Truth

In his masterpiece, *The Three Sages and the Pagan,* Llull opens with the drama of a pagan who, nearing death, finds himself in existential despair. He wanders from his homeland in search of solace, and ends up in a sumptuous forest, whose beauties cause him to marvel, but also, because he is without faith, to despair.

Meanwhile, three sages, a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim, set out one day from the city where they all teach, to discourse with one another on fundamental questions. They are driven in their search of truth by a common desire to find the basis for a single religion, convinced that the ordering of states and relations among them can be harmonious only if such a common ground is found. As they enter the magnificent forest, they come upon a beauteous lady seated upon a horse. She identifies herself as Intelligence, and instructs the three sages in Llull's scientific method of inquiry (his Art). This is laid out in terms of a metaphor having to do with the trees of the forest, their leaves, and flowers.

Then the sages happen upon the old pagan, weeping distraught on the ground. All three rush to provide him succor, inquiring after his pains, and offering him solace in religious faith—that which he does not have. The pagan, eager to find relief, responds with gratitude to their care, and an extraordinarily poignant drama unfolds.

Each sage is to present, in turn, the articles of his faith to the pagan, resting not on the authority of scripture, but on the "method of the trees" which the lady Intelligence had given them. After much courteous interchange, regarding the order of presentations, it is decided that, respecting the historical process, the Jew should begin, followed by the Christian, and then the Muslim.

The Jew starts, with his proof of the existence of one God, showing, by the concordances required by the flowers of the trees, that God could not be infinite, absolute good, etc. if there were more than one God. He proceeds to articulate the other points of faith, until the Christian follows.

The Christian, noting that the Jew has already provided a sufficient proof of the existence of one God, sees no need to repeat it, and proceeds, rather, to introduce those articles of faith which the Jew does not embrace: most importantly, the Trinity. This he elaborates in the way we described just above.

The pagan responds by posing questions: If God is greater by virtue of His being three in one, why not four, five or more? To which the Christian: "If in God there had been more than one begetter, one begotten, and one issue, then each begetter would not be infinite in goodness, greatness, eternity, power, wisdom, love, perfection; for it would not be sufficient unto itself, as a begetter, to beget a thing sufficient so that an infinite goodness, greatness, power, wisdom, love, perfection could be begotten; nor would each begetter and each begotten be sufficient to bestow infinite goodness, greatness, etc. on an issue from both; . . . for infinite number cannot have perfection, since increase of infinite number and perfection are in disaccord. This being the case, there would, therefore, according to the perfection of the flowers, exist imperfection in God, and the flowers would be contrary to one another, if in God there were infinite begetters, begotten, and issue."

The pagan, still unconvinced, insists that "if there were three or four or a thousand good things in God, then God's greatness would be greater than if there were only three." To which the Christian replies: "If there were more than three, none of the three would be perfect in itself, nor would it have complete goodness, greatness, eternity, etc. For just as it is not fitting for there to exist many Gods, and just as one God is sufficient for the possession of all the goodness, greatness, etc. of all of them together, and could have even more than all of them together could have; so one begetter is sufficient for the possession of all the goodness, greatness, etc., which two or more begetters might have, and even of more than they could have; . . . And the same would be the case with two or more begotten, and two or more issues."

The pagan, finally satisfied, allows the Christian to proceed in presenting the remaining articles of his faith, including the Incarnation. Again with reference to the pairs of divine dignities or attributes of God which are the flowers of the

trees, the Christian sage introduces the Incarnation. "In order to exemplify goodness as great as God's, it is only right that, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, the Son of God [should] unite human nature with Himself in the womb of our Lady Saint Mary; for to extract a good as noble as Christ's humanity from the human race, which was corrupted by sin, constitutes a greater good than all other created good." The pagan asks, "Why did not all three divine persons become incarnate? Why was the person of the Son the only one to become incarnate? . . . Why the Son and not the Holy Ghost?"

The Christian replies: "Since the Son of God was begotten, and since in taking on human flesh He begat man, therefore, with relation to creature, unity of person is more fitting between the Son of God and son of man than between man and paternity or between man and Holy Ghost, since the act of begetting fits the Son of God and the son of man."

The pagan, apparently satisfied, asks the loaded question: "Please tell me what the Jews and Saracens have to say about this article of Conception."

The Christian replies with astonishing candor: "To our great shame, we Christians are negligent about explaining and demonstrating our belief to unbelievers, and they are stubborn of heart and coarse of intellect when it comes to understanding our religion. We thus do not believe that Incarnation which they think we believe, and our belief in the Incarnation of the Son of God is different from what they imagine, and as a result we cannot agree and are opposed because of differing opinions."

The Muslim Speaks

Here Llull put his finger on his crucial hypothesis: that Christian philosophers had not adequately communicated the universal concept underlying the Incarnation of God in man, such that the "infidels" thought it to be something which it is not, and on that basis rejected it.

When it comes time for the Muslim sage to speak, he too dispenses with the proof of the existence of one God, as it has been adequately presented by the Jew and acknowledged by the Christian. The Muslim would like to present his divergence with Christianity regarding the Trinity, saying that if there were a trinity, then God "would have to be compound, and His goodness, greatness, eternity, power, wisdom, love would have to be contrary to perfection. . . ."

Now it is the pagan who interrupts. Although the Christian tries to offer his reply, the pagan tells him "it was not his turn to speak, and that he himself would answer the Saracen." His remark is unequivocal: "Surely you remember that I put that same question to the Christian. Now, from what you say and from what I heard the Christian say, I realize that the Christian believes certain things concerning the Trinity of God, which are different from what you think he believes. It therefore seems to me that you cannot agree and live beneath the same faith and belief as the Christian. But let us leave this problem and continue with your articles, for there is no need to discuss this first article any further."

The pagan realizes that on certain doctrinal questions, like that of the Trinity, no agreement can be found—not because there is no common ground for agreement, but because there is disagreement regarding what the concept is. Therefore, says the pagan, do not pursue a line of argument which, based on misconception, will only highlight apparent differences. Rather, seek the common ground of belief.

Following the Muslim's completion of his presentation, the pagan reiterates for all what the process of dialogue has unfolded, much to their amazement and admiration. Finally, the pagan stands up and renders praise, in a prayer, to God, whom he has discovered as a result of the dialogue with the sages. In moving phrases, he heaps thanks upon the three for having given him faith and hope, and kneels, kissing the ground in prayer. He stands up, is about to kneel again, in order to reveal to the three which religion he has embraced— . . . when he spies two persons he knows, pagans like himself, approaching. Although he asks the three to stay, that he may

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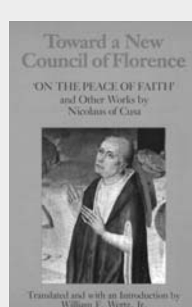

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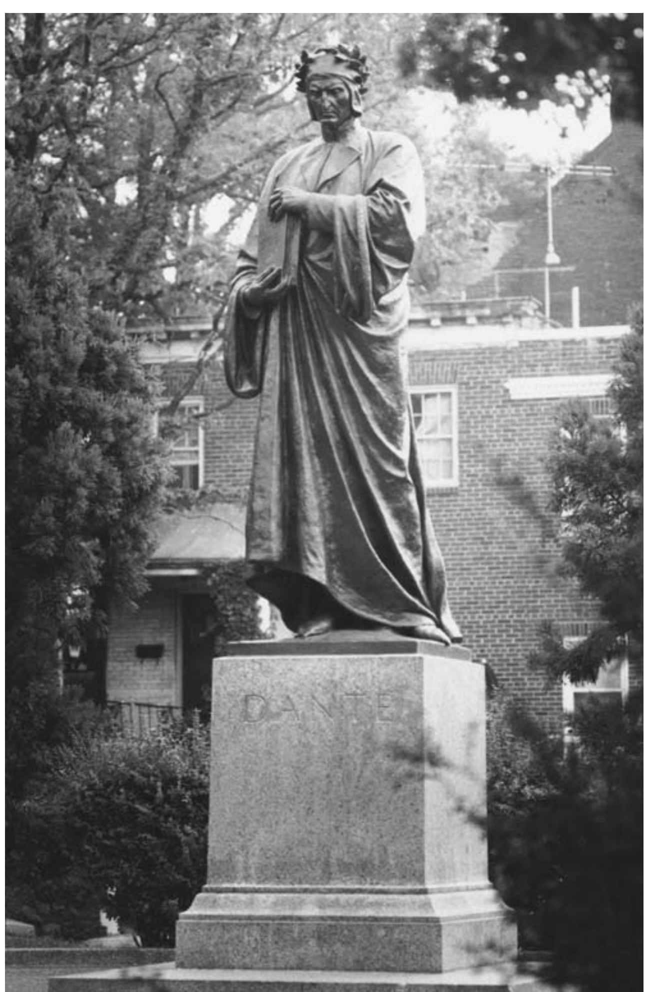
announce his faith in the presence of the two approaching pagans, all three sages decide to take leave of him. With mutual blessings, and courteous greetings, they prepare to leave.

Why, asks the pagan, will they not linger, to hear which religion he has chosen? "The three wise men answered, saying that, in order for each to be free to choose his own religion, they preferred not knowing which religion he would choose." More fundamentally, they tell him, "And all the more so since this is a question we could discuss among ourselves to see, by force of reason and by means of our intellects, which religion it must be that you will choose. And if, in front of us, you state which religion it is that you prefer, then we would not have such a good subject of discussion nor such satisfaction in discovering the truth."

Which religion did the Gentile embrace? Llull's reader must decide. As for the sages, they return slowly to the city, committed more than ever to seek the truth. Although they strive to reach an accord of one religion, so as to eliminate the causes of social discord and strife, yet, their mission is not doctrinal, but ecumenical. Llull, the author, commenting in his conclusion, reiterates that his has been the pursuit to develop a "method for enlightening clouded minds and awakening the great who sleep, and for entering in union with and getting to know strangers and friends, by asking what religion they think the pagan chose in order to find favor with God."

Although Llull was committed, as a missionary, to convert the Saracens, the message which pervades his work is one of ecumenicism, which posits a higher order conception within which the three religions, Judaism as Judaism, Christianity as Christianity, and Islam as Islam, meet.



Dante, the greatest influence upon all European Christian language and literature for centuries, lived a generation after Raymond Llull, knew his work, and was also in dialogue with the Islamic philosophical and religious heritage.

Llull And The Golden Renaissance

Llull's influence on ecumenicism was profound. Most immediately, due to his efforts, the Catalan king established a school for the training of missionaries in Majorca, called Miramare, which embodied Llull's approach. Run under the auspices of the Franciscans and endorsed by Pope John XXI (in the Papal Bull *Laudanda tuorem,* 1276), it was the first school to offer to missionaries, studies in the languages of the other religions, for their "entering into union with and getting to know strangers and friends." Llull campaigned for other such schools, through petitions to the Popes and to the Vienna Council of 1311; the canons of the council welcomed his proposals, and deliberated to establish five schools: in Rome, Bologna, Paris, Oxford, and Salamanca. These schools were to teach Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, and Greek.

It was due to such efforts that not only the philosophical works of the Arabs but also the Koran itself were actually read, and eventually translated, so that Christians, as well as Jews, could find out what Islam was.

Just as far-reaching, though not recognized, was Llull's influence on the development of the modern nation-state in Europe through the development of literate vernacular languages, one of the most fascinating aspects of Llull's work. Since he immersed himself in Arab studies for a decade, and sought to address a Muslim intelligentsia, he wrote most of his major works in Arabic, some in Catalan and only a very few (mainly translated from Arabic) in Latin. He was the first to compose works in Catalan, thus laying the groundwork for Spanish as a national language.

Llull surely recognized the fact that Islam had been facilitated in its rapid expansion across Arabia, North Africa, and the southern Mediterranean by virtue of the fact that the Koran, the revelation of the word of God for Muslims, was written in poetic Arabic; and, since there is no priesthood in Islam, every believer is expected to know the holy texts directly. Every non-Arab believer had to assimilate the language, and through it, the language culture. This meant that literacy campaigns were an integral part of Moorish social policy, providing millions of illiterates with access to science and culture. This explains, to a large extent, why the population of Andalusia was, relative to Northern Europe in the same period,

The fullest collection of Raymond Llull's works was in the library of the Christian Renaissance founder, Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (1400-65), who initiated the doctrine of state government based solely upon the common good of mankind. Cusa often cited Llull in his own works.

such a cultured population, with literacy rates above 90%, whereas elsewhere reading and writing were privileges of the clergy.

As a Catalan Christian, Llull recognized the need to forge a Catalan language of the same power as Arabic. He did so largely by using Arabic syntax and morphology to shape the new Catalan-Spanish vernacular as a literary tool.

Enlightened Christian rulers, like Alphonse the Wise in Spain and Llull's contemporary Friedrich II Hohenstaufen in Sicily, continued the process by sponsoring the efforts of philosophers, scientists, poets, and musicians who strove to translate Arab achievements into the vernacular. One of the languages, if not *the* language of the court, whether of Alphonse or of Friedrich, was Arabic, and both were committed to shaping their fledgling vernacular dialects into national tongues, on the model of the Arabic.

The greatest achievement in this regard was Dante's, which changed all of European literature for centuries afterwards, and it came as a direct result of the work done in Alphonse's court in Seville and Friedrich II's in Palermo.

In his *De vulgari eloquentia,* his seminal work on the vernaculars, Dante lamented the fact that there were other vernaculars superior to Italian; although he does not identify them, the only ones current in Europe were Hebrew and Arabic. In seeking the raw material out of which to shape Italian, he pointed to the Sicilian dialect, and to Friedrich's Palermo, as the birthplace of the Italian language. At the same time, Dante identified the Spanish poets and the Provençal troubadours, their literary relatives, as the couriers of a new poetry and language, which had been shaped on the Arabic poetic models.

Dante's teacher, Brunetto Latini, as the former relates in the *Commedia* (*Divine Comedy*), was the Florentine ambassador to the court of Alphonse, who, after spending two years in the Spanish king's rich library full of Arab works, composed the *Tesoro,* a work that for Dante represented the summation of scientific knowledge.

Influence Of Islam Upon Dante

What was Dante's relationship to Islam? The much-maligned Spanish Christian priest-scholar Miguel Asín Palacios[3] did groundbreaking work in the early years of the 20th Century on the influence of Islam, as mediated through Moorish Andalusia, upon Dante. His work provoked turmoil in the ranks of the "Dantisti" in Europe, who slandered it as an attempt to "de-Christianize" Dante, until further serious scholarship finally had to admit that Asín Palacios was right.

Asín Palacios, intent on proving an Arab influence on Dante, has shown incontrovertibly that the *leitmotif* of the Commedia, the ascension of man (Dante the pilgrim) to Paradise, springs from an episode in the life of Mohammed, barely sketched in the Koran, which was the subject of several lengthy Arabic poems. The episode in Arabic literature is known as the *Mi'ray,* which relates the ascent of Mohammed from Jerusalem to Paradise, an episode well known in Spain and Italy of the 13th Century. It was retold by Dante's teacher, Brunetto Latini, in his *Tesoro*.

That Dante was conversant with Arab philosophy is amply documented in his own words, whether in the *Convivio* or the *Divine Comedy* itself; Dante's depiction of Mohammed, consigned to the circle of the schismatics, has a wealth of detail regarding the internal factional struggle in early Islam that no one in Europe was otherwise aware of. Furthermore, Dante explicitly acknowledges his debt to great Muslim philosophers like al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, al-Fragani, Ibn 'Arabi, and many others, in his prose works. It is largely through the Arabs that Dante had access to the Platonic science of Greece.

What is important in Dante's relation to Islam is, however, not the "literary motifs" of "influences," as they might be gleaned for the purposes of "literary criticism." What is im-

3. Miguel Asín Palacios, *Escatologia musulmana en la Divina Comedia* (Madrid, 1919, reissued 1961).

Up through the 18th Century, it was acknowledged in works of history, that Raymond Llull inaugurated the era in European philosophy which led to Gottfried Wilhelm Liebniz (1646-1716), both a universal genius and a Christian ecumenicist of Eurasia as a whole.

portant is the approach Dante took to Islamic-Arab culture. His approach was very similar to that of Llull, whose works Dante also knew.

One could view the *Commedia,* in a certain sense, as Dante's dialogical response to Islam. If one thinks of the extent to which Muslim-Arab culture had penetrated Europe in the 13th Century when Dante was writing—whether negatively in the fight around Averroism in Paris, or positively in the enviable achievements of Andalusia and Palermo—it is impossible that a person like Dante would be ignorant or indifferent to its implications. There is every reason to hypothesize that Dante consciously wrote the *Commedia,* not exclusively, but also as a response—like that of Raymond Llull—to Islam.

Here was a culture, a Muslim culture, which had reached extraordinary social and cultural excellence in Spain and Southern Italy, which had been shaped by a religious world-view transmitted through the Koran, a poem in the "high" Arabic vernacular and memorized by most Muslims. Dante, in his *De vulgari eloquentia,* had made clear his intent to compose a poetic masterpiece forging an Italian vernacular national language, which will constitute the epistemological, moral, and religious basis for an Italian nation-state. What better means than to quote a motif from the Koran, elaborated in Muslim literature, depicting Mohammed's ascension, and transform it into the ascension of the Christian pilgrim Dante, to Paradise?

This is Dante's way of demonstrating (as Llull would do in another form) his belief in the greater advancement of the Christian worldview, in terms comprehensible to those shaped by the hegemonic Arab culture.

The central theme of the *Commedia* is the Trinity; not only is the entire poem trinitarian in form, but the process through which the pilgrim Dante (and thus the reader) progresses, from the intellectual-moral parameters of Hell, through Purgatory into Paradise, is the proof of the Trinity. It is through the pilgrim Dante's self-perfection process, his successive acquiring of the laws of God's universe, that he gains access to the realm of science which is Paradise. It is through this process that man proves the coherence between the mind of man and the divine ordering of creation. Dante's poem is the ultimate proof, in Christian terms, of *imago viva Dei* and of the Trinity, which is the final vision of the last canto.

The Power Of The Individual

Dante's poem had the single greatest impact on the Renaissance prior to Cusa's convening of the Council of Florence. Significantly, his poem furnished the poetical vehicle through which the Italian population not only became literate, but was educated in the fundamental concepts of Christianity. At the time of Dante, the Bible was not accessible to the population at large; yet the *Commedia* became the text which was recited and commented on in the churches of 14th- and 15th-Century Florence—in strikingly similar fashion to the manner in which the Koran was recited and commented on among the Muslims at the same time in other parts of Europe. Brunelleschi had the *Commedia* on his bedside table. Leonardo knew it by heart. Dante's work absorbed the entirety of Arab science (as he himself acknowledges), either directly or through the work of Christian Arabists such as Roger Bacon, Robert Grosseteste, and others, in perspective, physics, poetry, and music. But it did so in such a way as to celebrate the power of Christian man, made in the image of God, to acquire such knowledge.

It is this emphasis on the discrete individual as the particular image of the universal God, which pervades the explosion of creative activity in the Italian Renaissance. Here, too, it is not adventurous to hypothesize that the creative excellence particularly in the figurative arts represented an indirect response to Islam. Although the science of perspective, as Dante among many others attests, was mediated and further developed by the Arabs for Europe, yet it was the Platonic Christian Renaissance which applied that science of perspective to exalt the position of the human being in universal space.

Islam, in rejecting the depiction of the human form in art, lacked the means to make visually sensuous the notion of man in the living image of God. Christian Renaissance art seizes on this capability (which is utterly lacking in previous Byzantine art, even though it formally depicts the human figure), to render the idea of the universal through the individual.

Thus, the process which unfolded from Raymond Llull and Dante Alighieri onwards to the 15th-Century Renaissance, can well be viewed as a grand dialogue, in which the theme of the relationship between man and God was developed in a counterpoint by the Platonists of the European Islamic heritage, and their Christian humanist interlocutors. Such should be the spirit of the ecumenical dialogue today.