

RAYMOND LULL: MEDIEVAL THEOLOGIAN, PHILOSOPHER, AND MISSIONARY TO MUSLIMS

By J. Scott Bridger¹

1 Introduction

In the minds of most evangelicals, missions began with William Carey (1761-1834) and his efforts in India during the 18th and 19th centuries. Apart from this, it is supposed, very little was done to spread the message of the gospel after the first three centuries of the Christian era. Little, if anything, is known about the missionary endeavors of such men as St. Patrick in the 5th century, St. Francis of Assisi and Raymond Lull² in the 13th and 14th centuries, and Joseph Wolff, a Jewish convert and missionary to both Jews and Arabs in the 19th century. This is particularly true when considering the history of missions among Muslims. For the most part, it is assumed, Christian interaction with Islam has consisted of fleeing in the face of marauding jihadists, answering Jihad with Crusades, or, in the face of immense pressure to one's family and livelihood as a *dhimmi*,³ conversion. The fact is Christ has always

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² Raymond Lull's name appears in the literature with various spellings for both his private name (Ramon, Raymund, or Raymundo as in Spanish) and his surname (Lull, Lul, Lully, or Llull as in Catalan). Any combination of these might be encountered. For a synopsis of the history of missions in the Middle Ages see G. F. Maclear, *Apostles of Medieval Europe* (London: Macmillan, 1869).

³ The word *dhimmi* comes from the Arabic word for 'protected'. It refers to a non-Muslim (Jew, Christian, or Zoroastrian) living in lands conquered by Jihad (Islamic Crusade) during the 10 centuries after Muhammad's life. For more information see www.dhimmi.org or www.dhimmitude.org.

had his *martyrs* (i.e. witnesses) and there is much to be gained from reading the stories of individuals who risked life and limb to spread the message of the Savior who descended from heaven to offer himself as a ransom for mankind. Theirs are stories of tremendous courage and sacrifice in the face of horrendous consequences for testifying to Christ.

This paper aims to fill the gap by telling something about the life and thought of Raymond Lull. His story is in need of telling, particularly considering this current age when Islamic militancy is the norm rather than the exception and missionary endeavors among Muslims face formidable challenges, oftentimes leading to the ultimate sacrifice on the part of the missionary. Lull's life and example are amazing considering the age in which he lived. As Zwemer notes: "The only missionary spirit of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was that of the Crusaders. They took up the sword and perished by the sword. But Raymond Lull was raised up as if to prove in one startling case...what the Crusades might have become and might have done for the world, had they been fought for the cross with the weapons of Him whose last words from it were forgiveness and peace."⁴ Lull himself stated in this regard: "I see many knights going to the Holy Land beyond the seas and thinking that they can acquire it by force of arms; but in the end all are destroyed before they attain that which they think to have. Whence it seems to me that the conquest of the Holy Land ought not to be attempted except in the way in which Thou and Thine apostles acquired it, namely, by love and prayers, and the pouring out of tears and of blood."⁵

In order to tell something of Lull's life and thought, this paper will be divided into two parts. The first part will offer some of the details of Lull's background, education, and conversion. The second part will examine a few of the contours of Lull's thought as a

⁴ Samuel M. Zwemer, *Raymond Lull: First Missionary to the Moslems* (Funk and Wagnallis: New York, 1902), p. 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

theologian and philosopher, particularly as it relates to his explanation of the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation to Muslims and Jews. Much more could be said in many regards about the life and thought of Raymond Lull than will be presented here, but whatever is said must capture something of the passion which moved him to risk his life to share the message of Christ in sometimes hostile environments. This was the heartbeat of Lull, and his thought and philosophy can only be properly understood in this light. As Peers states, commenting on the various themes in one of Lull's books: 'Among the secondary themes of the *Book of Contemplation*, one stands out high above the rest: the conversion of unbelievers. So frequently does Lull return to the subject that from this book alone it would be clear that it was the ruling passion of his life.'⁶ This passion will be the primary focus of this paper.

2 Lull's Life

Raymond Lull was born in Palma, Majorca, an island off the eastern coast of Spain, in the year 1232/35.⁷ He was the son of Raymond Lull, the elder, and Elisabet d'Erill. They settled in Majorca after James I, King of Aragon, reconquered it from the Muslims in 1232.⁸ Raymond's father had served in James's army as a crusader during his campaigns against the Muslims, and after the war James honored his followers by allotting them large tracts of

⁶ E. Allison Peers, *Ramon Lull: A Biography* (London: The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1929), p. 64.

⁷ Other dates are given for his birth ranging from 1231-1236. 1235 appears to be the most cited year although a recent work calculates it as '1232 or early 1233.' See Anthony Bonner, *The Selected Works of Ramon Llull* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1985), p. 10.

⁸ Muslims ruled Majorca from 797 till 1232, except for a brief stint in 1115. There had been numerous attempts to reclaim the island but none had succeeded until James of Aragon.

land. Lull's father received such an allotment and was intent on educating his son 'with a view to obtaining a position for him in the royal court.'⁹

Lull would eventually become a tutor, and later a seneschal (i.e. an administrator or steward), for King James's children, most notably James II. However, the lifestyle of a courtier proved a snare to him. 'By his own testimony, he lived a life of utter immorality in this corrupt age. Wine, women, and song were then, as often since, the chief pleasures of kings and princes.'¹⁰

Lull was known to be a man of many talents. These included composing music and court poetry; however, the theme of his poetry was frequently 'the joys of lawless love.'¹¹ Such behavior continued unabated even after his marriage to Blanca Picany who gave him two children, Domenec and Magdalena.¹² This early life of profligacy and immorality lasted until Lull was about 32 years old.

There are various versions of his conversion story. Peers lists two and states: 'Neither is found in the contemporary biography, nor is either in any way established, but each is related by authorities sufficiently credible to make possible its truth.'¹³ The one recounted here is often given as more probable because a similar incident is told in one of Lull's works, *Felix*.¹⁴ It also contains elements consonant with the other accounts of his conversion:

Lull was one day passing the window of the house of Signora Ambrosia, the married lady whose love he vainly sought to gain. He caught a glimpse of her ivory throat and bosom. On the spot he composed and sang a song to her beauty. The lady sent for him and showed him the bosom he so much admired, eaten with hideous can-

⁹ Peers, p. 10.

¹⁰ Zwemer, p. 26.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 27-28.

¹² Bonner, p.12.

¹³ Peers, p. 17.

¹⁴ This work appears in Bonner's, *Selected Works*, p. 647.

cers! She then besought him to lead a better life. On his return home Christ appeared to him and said, 'Raymund, follow Me.' He gave up his court position, sold all his property, and withdrew to the retirement of a cell on Mount Roda [Randa]. This was about the year 1266.¹⁵

After his conversion Lull spent a period of several months in meditation and prayer eventually concluding that God had called him to preach the gospel to Muslims.¹⁶ However, he was not a trained clergyman and had a very scanty knowledge of Latin and no knowledge of Arabic. Despite this he felt what skills he did possess as a courtier could be used to persuade princes, kings, and the Pope himself, to raise funds and establish schools for teaching languages and preparing missionaries to engage in a 'spiritual crusade.' Lull desired 'to go himself to preach the Gospel in Africa, to suffer himself for the Master Who had suffered.'¹⁷

In order to prepare for such a task he spent the next nine years studying theology, philosophy, logic, medicine, and especially Arabic. To achieve the last of these tasks he purchased a Muslim slave who would teach him Arabic and something about Islam. This enabled him to engage in debates with Muslims and Jews residing in Palma. He did this under the patronage of James II, whom he had tutored in his youth. Lull would also embark on a study of the Qur'an and some of the works of Al-Ghazzali during

¹⁵ Zwemer, pp. 37-38.

¹⁶ Zwemer comments that this would be a natural conclusion for Lull: 'The islands of Majorca and Minorca had only recently been in the hands of the Saracens. His father had wielded the sword of the king of Aragon against these enemies of the Gospel; why should not the son now take up the sword of the Spirit against them? If the carnal weapons of the crusading knights had failed to conquer Jerusalem, was it not time to sound the bugle for a spiritual crusade for the conversion of the Saracen? Such were the thoughts that filled his mind.' Zwemer, p. 39.

¹⁷ Peers, p. 29.

this early period.¹⁸ The end product of all these studies was several works on logic, philosophy and other fields; however, the primary book of this early period was the *Book of Contemplation*, which was originally composed in Arabic.¹⁹ He also composed works in Latin and his native Catalan. In so doing, 'he was the first Christian writer [in the West] to compose elaborate philosophical treatises in a language other than Latin.'²⁰

The slave whom he purchased for the purpose of teaching him Arabic would eventually commit suicide after being imprisoned for blaspheming Christ and attempting to assassinate his master. This episode shook Lull to his core and led him to retreat for a time of prayer and meditation as he had nine years earlier. This time he experienced a vision of Christ who inspired him with 'the idea of using the sum of human knowledge in the composition of an "art" (that is, a method) whereby unbelievers should be confuted in argument and the truth of the Christian religion triumphantly established over all.'²¹ The title of this book, or series of books, was the *Ars Magna* or *Ars Generalis*.²² Bonner describes the scene: 'After this [the suicide of his slave], Ramon went up a certain Mountain [Mt. Randa] not far from his home, in order to contemplate God in greater tranquility. When he had been there scarcely a full week it happened that one day while he was gazing intently heavenward the Lord suddenly illuminated his mind giv-

¹⁸ Bonner lists the various works of philosophy and medicine Lull read in translation and those he probably read in Arabic. He achieved a level of proficiency in Arabic that enabled him not only to dispute philosophical and theological ideas with Muslims in that language, but also to write several works in Arabic. See Bonner, pp. 19-20.

¹⁹ Peers, pp. 45-46.

²⁰ J. N. Hillgarth, *Ramon Lull and Lullism in Fourteenth-Century France* (London: Oxford, 1971), p. 29.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Bonner points out that this book was first titled *Ars Major* but from 1294 on he used the title *Ars Generalis* to refer 'to works of the Art, or the Art itself, even though no individual work bore that title until the *Ars generalis ultima* of 1305-08.' Bonner, p. 22.

ing him the *form* and *method* for writing the aforementioned book against the errors of the unbelievers.²³ This 'aforementioned book' was initially thought to be the *Book of Contemplation*, and undoubtedly, all the seeds of Lull's thought were present in that book; however, the 'problem was how to give it all *form* and make it *demonstrable* to Muslims and Jews.'²⁴ This would be the task of his newly inspired Art. Lull was now 42 years old when he began 'the principal part of his life's work.'²⁵

Before turning to examine some of the aspects of Lull's thought and apologetic methods for approaching the doctrines of Trinity and Incarnation something should be said about the last 40 years of Lull's life after his conversion and after the nine years he spent studying. Taking note of the age in which Lull lived, embarking on a 'spiritual crusade' and convincing other Christians of the worthiness of this cause would not be an easy task. He spent many days and months traveling and teaching, seeking the support of kings and popes, to accomplish all that he had envisioned. While many of his aspirations fell on deaf ears, he did achieve certain successes. When Lull was nearly 80 years old he attended the Council of Vienne (1311-1312) and made a direct appeal to the Pope for the establishment of language schools for teaching oriental languages (Hebrew, Arabic, and Chaldean). This was fulfilled at Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Salamanca, and the Papal Court where students would learn these languages and then be sent out as missionaries.²⁶

Lull's greatest achievement however was his missionary journeys. He went on three such trips to North Africa. The first of these journeys was to Tunis where he approached the Muslim *literati* (*ulema*) and offered to become a Muslim if they could convince him of the truth of their religion. After several days of debate,

²³ Ibid., italics added.

²⁴ Ibid., italics in the original.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ See Bonner, p. 48.

many of the city's *imams* and other leaders felt threatened. This was surely due to several conversions to Christ from among their number. Therefore, they approached the Sultan and suggested Lull be imprisoned and beheaded. But after the intercession of a more congenial leader, he was released. He was sent to the port and would eventually make his way back to Europe after several covert attempts to make contact with his small circle of believers. These events most likely occurred in 1291 or 1292. Lull made two other such journeys in his life. The final one was in 1315/16. It ended in martyrdom at the hands of an angry mob when Lull was 83 years old in the city of Bougie, Algeria.²⁷ His body was eventually transported back to Palma where it still lies in the church of San Francisco.

What was Lull's approach that so threatened the Muslim doctrine of God and seemingly convinced many of the truth of the Trinity and Incarnation? In the next part we will examine some of Lull's theological and philosophical ideas as they relate to his apologetic and evangelistic methods. Specifically, the general orientation of Lull's thought, the nature of his Art, and his approach to the primary stumbling block to Muslims and Jews – the Trinity and Incarnation – will be treated. It was these two doctrines that formed the foundation of Lull's apologetic method since they were, ostensibly, the largest stumbling blocks to Muslims and Jews coming to faith. The formulation and defense of those doctrines as presented below will be taken from Lull's *Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*.²⁸ It should be kept in mind however that although Lull was a scholastic and utilized scholastic methods of dispute, his conversion experience is the key to understanding his philosophy and missionary methodology. As Zwemer summarized:

²⁷ Bonner places doubt on Lull's martyrdom seeing it as a pious myth. See Bonner, p. 52; Peers pp. 370-371.

²⁸ According to Bonner this was Lull's most important apologetic work. For the details of this work and a translation into English see Bonner, pp. 98-304.

The inner life of Lull finds its key in the story of his conversion. Incarnate Love overcame carnal love, and all of the passion and the poetry of Lull's genius bowed in submission to the cross. The vision of his youth explains the motto of his old age: 'He who loves not lives not; he who lives by the Life can not die.' The image of the suffering Savior remained for fifty years the mainspring of his being. Love for the personal Christ filled his heart, molded his mind, inspired his pen, and made his soul long for the crown of martyrdom. Long years afterward, when he sought for a reasonable proof of that greatest mystery of revelation and the greatest stumbling block for Moslems – the doctrine of the Trinity – he once more recalled the vision. His proof for the Trinity was the love of God in Christ as revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.²⁹

3 Lull's Thought

As was stated earlier, Lull's interest in the conversion of Muslims and Jews was central in his thought and the primary motivation for a number of his writings. Indeed, it was this interest that was 'partly responsible for the general attitude he adopted towards philosophy, whose ancillary relation to theology he stressed.'³⁰ Lull lived at a time when European scholastics were in the process of analyzing and synthesizing the ideas of Aristotle and Neoplatonic thinkers preserved and reintroduced to the continent by Middle Eastern Christians, especially Orthodox monks, and Muslim philosophers and commentators such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes). It was a period when the Arab-Islamic world held sway in the areas of philosophy and science. Therefore, Lull felt that if people influenced by the ideas of such philosophers were to come to faith in Christ he must himself master

²⁹ Zwemer, pp. 45-46.

³⁰ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, *Medieval Philosophy* (Doubleday: New York, 1993), p. 457.

these ideas and refute them, thereby displaying the superior nature of the Christian faith.

Motivated as he was by apostolic interests, Lull attacked those who sought to place a wall of separation between philosophy and theology. This was a hotly debated issue during his lifetime and was sparked by Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle and his followers in Christendom, the Latin Averroists, who supported what is known as the theory of 'double truth.' The theory of double truth is the idea that something might be true in philosophy and yet not true in theology (and vice versa).³¹ Lull viewed such notions as a threat to the viability of the Christian message among learned Muslims. He believed very strongly in the ability of reason to provide a rational basis for believing the deepest mysteries of the faith, a point whereon he criticized his Dominican predecessors, St. Ramon de Penyafort and Ramon Marti. They had seen a number of successes in converting the Muslims of Valencia to Christianity utilizing non-violent methods like those advocated by Lull; however, according to Lull, Marti was unsuccessful in converting the Sultan of Tunisia, al-Mustansir, because he had downplayed reason's role in demonstrating the rationality of Christianity.³² Marti had dissuaded the Sultan of the truth of Islam but was

³¹ This is somewhat of an oversimplification. Copleston states: 'This [the theory of 'double truth'] does not mean that, according to Averroes, a proposition can be true in philosophy and false in theology or *vice versa*: his theory is that one and the same truth is understood clearly in philosophy and expressed allegorically in theology. The scientific formulation of truth is achieved only in philosophy, but the same truth is expressed allegorically in theology' (Copleston, 199). The practical result of this for Averroes was a subordination of theology to philosophy, something the Islamic theologians (*mutakallimun*) rejected. Among the Latin Averroists, most notably Siger of Brabant, many did indeed hold the notion that 'a thing can be true in philosophy or according to reason and yet...its opposite can be true in theology or according to faith,' (Copleston, 436). This is the notion Lull attacked and rejected much like his counterparts in the Islamic world, the Islamic theologians.

³² For an excellent overview of mission endeavors among Muslims during this period, including their successes and failures, see, Robert I. Burns, 'Christian-

unsuccessful in convincing him (or proving to him) the truth of Christianity, leaving him in a worse state than before.³³ This was a tragedy in Lull's estimation, and one he felt could be corrected through the appropriate use of his Art. The aim of the Art was to provide 'necessary reasons' for the rationality of the Trinity and Incarnation. Copleston summarizes Lull's general attitude towards philosophy and the aim of his Art:

His interest in the conversion of the Moslems naturally led to an insistence, not only on philosophy's subordinate relation to theology, but also on reason's ability to make acceptable the dogmas of the Faith. It is in the light of this general attitude that we must understand his proposal to 'prove' the articles of faith by 'necessary reasons'. He no more proposed to rationalize (in the modern sense) the Christian mysteries than did St. Anselm or Richard of St. Victor, when they spoke of 'necessary reasons' for the Trinity, and he expressly declares that faith treats of objects which the human reason cannot understand; but he wished to show the Moslems that Christian beliefs are not contrary to reason and that reason can meet the objections adduced against them. Moreover, believing that the accusation brought against the Averroists that they held a 'double truth' theory was justified...he was concerned to show that there is no need to have recourse to any such radical separation of theology and philosophy, but that theological dogmas harmonize with reason and cannot be impugned by reason.³⁴

In order to provide these 'necessary reasons' to Muslims and Jews, Lull knew that appealing to authorities would be useless because of the differences in interpretation between Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Nevertheless, he would have to offer some sort of

Islamic Confrontation in the West: The Dream of Conversion', *The American Historical Review* 76, no. 5 (December 1971), p. 1386-1434.

³³ Aquinas wrote his *Summa Contra Gentiles* at the request of Penyafort, a request delivered by his former colleague and fellow student under Albert the Great, Ramon Marti. For the historical setting of this episode, see Bonner, pp. 94-97.

³⁴ Copleston, p. 457.

proof for the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, or at least demonstrate their reasonableness, all the while avoiding the age-old conflict between faith and reason. Lull was well aware of his susceptibility to rationalism. So to strike this delicate balance and achieve his goal, while avoiding the dangers inherent in such an endeavor, Lull opted to begin with some basic presuppositions (theological and philosophical) common to all three faiths.³⁵ Bonner explains: 'Lull begins with a series of propositions about God: God exists, He is one, He is the first cause of all things, etc. He then turns to the divine attributes commonly accepted in all three religions (though in different forms at different times)...Lull calls these attributes properties, virtues, reasons (*rationes*), or, most often, dignities.'³⁶

Lull lists five principles about God and the world which form the substructure for his system of thought:³⁷

1. God has his own substantial Goodness, Greatness, Eternity, Power, Wisdom, Will, Virtue, Truth, and Glory. (In other places he lists more than nine attributes of God, so this should not be taken as an exhaustive list.)
2. These attributes or dignities are concordant with one another, without any contrariety. This plus their substantiality in God make them convertible one with another, and thus they do not entail a plurality in the Divine Being. (This is the notion of simplicity.)
3. These dignities are real.

³⁵ Bonner notes, "In this he was helped not only by the common Semitic origin of the three religions, but also by their having undergone the same Greek (i.e., Aristotelian and Neoplatonic) influences during the Middle Ages." Bonner, p. 58, n. 23. In my use of the term 'Art' I'm referring to Lull's method in general and not to any specific work, though my presentation of Lull's defense of the Trinity and Incarnation below will draw exclusively from his *Book of the Gentile*.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 59.

³⁷ This is a modified list taken from Bonner, pp. 59-60.

4. Because they are real, the dignities are at the greatest distance from nonbeing. (This indicative of Lull's realist ontology.)
5. Each of the dignities has its effect in the world in accordance with the individual creature's capacity to receive the likeness of the first cause, and the degree of this capacity depends on the creature's concordance with the dignities.

On this accounting, Lull sees creation as having been brought about by the activity of God in accord with his attributes, a common feature of medieval thought.³⁸ Because he was a realist his arguments would have to be formulated to adapt to this underlying ontological structure. Thus, the aim of his Art was 'to make the *modus intelligendi* [the mode or manner of knowing or assenting to truth] conform as closely as possible to the *modus essendi* [the mode or manner of existing or imbibing/exuding essence].'³⁹ This was how he proposed to *demonstrate* that the Christian mysteries were a part of the structure of the universe, and these 'demonstrations' or evidences would form the substance of his 'necessary reasons.'⁴⁰ Bonner summarizes the nature of Lull's Art:

[I]f we are to understand the Art, we must realize that, as Lull himself was careful to point out, it is neither logic nor metaphysics [rather, it is both]. The best clue to its nature may be found in the word *art* itself, which was the usual scholastic translation of the Greek *tecnh*. It was thus a technique; it was not a body of doctrine, but a system...Lull presents us with a totally structured universe,

³⁸ On this point Bonner states: 'This was quite in line with the archetypal orientation of medieval thought, which tended to see the world as a theophany or manifestation of God, and which we find reflected in the frequent metaphor of the world as a book in which one can learn about God, or a mirror in which one can see His image.' Bonner, p. 61.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

the *modus essendi*, over which he lays another structure, that of the *modus intelligendi* deriving from and intimately related to the first.⁴¹

Having thus outlined the contours of Lull's thought, it behooves one to examine his arguments for the reasonableness of the Trinity and Incarnation. What follows will be primarily a presentation of his ideas with a few comments. For a fuller explication of these ideas and the influence of various medieval philosophers on Lull, a project well worth its weight in gold, one is encouraged to read the works listed in the footnotes and bibliography.

As stated earlier, Lull's work, *Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*, represents his standard apologetic approach. It was an allegorical work written in the period just after his illumination on Mt. Randa.⁴² There are four characters: a Gentile (pagan), a Jewish wise man, a Christian wise man, and a Muslim wise man. The three representatives of the monotheistic religions are friends who gather frequently to engage in discussions of religious matters. The Gentile is from a distant land and, fearing death, he decides to set out to see if there is a God and what he can know about him. Meanwhile, the three friends happen to come upon an enchanted meadow where a spring is watering five beautiful trees. Beside the spring is a beautiful lady named *Intelligence*. Upon greeting the lady they ask her to tell them the nature of the five trees and the meaning of the writing on each of their flowers.⁴³ She explains that the trees and flowers represent a combination of God's essential, uncreated virtues, the created virtues, deadly sins,

⁴¹ Ibid. Bonner, astounded at the breadth of Lull's system, goes on to state, "The resulting edifice is of the most astounding complexity and consistency...I know of no other work of the mind that so resembles a Gothic cathedral in its immensity, intricacy of design, and interrelation of parts, to say nothing of its exemplarist, analogical, and archetypal conception" (Bonner, p. 62, n. 47).

⁴² Bonner suggests a period between 1274-1276 (Bonner, pp. 99-100).

⁴³ Bonner gives an illustration of the five trees on pages 105-109.

as well as a number of conditions that govern them.⁴⁴ Furthermore, all of the conditions have an ultimate goal: to love, know, fear, and serve God. She then says, 'These conditions govern the flowers, which are the principles and doctrine to rectify the error of those who have no knowledge of God nor of His works, nor even of their own beliefs.'⁴⁵ After the lady had taken leave of the wise men, one of them said, 'Think, gentlemen, of the harm that comes from not belonging to a single sect, and of the good that would come from everyone being beneath one faith and one religion. This being the case, do you not think it would be a good idea for us to sit beneath these trees and discuss what we believe, according to what the flowers and conditions of these trees signify? And since we cannot agree by means of authorities, let us try to come to some agreement by means of demonstrative and necessary reasons.'⁴⁶ Before they could begin their discussion, the Gentile arrived on the scene, and upon their greeting him in the name of God, he asked if one of them could explain who this God is.

This is how the *Book of the Gentile* begins. Eventually, each of the three wise men has a chance to argue his case to the Gentile for believing in the truth of his respective religion. In the course of these presentations the Gentile asks questions about the nature of the doctrines being considered and each wise man replies. Lull gives ample space in this work to the beliefs of both Jews and Muslims and his depiction of those beliefs commendable. Accuracy in representing the beliefs of others was a critical issue to Lull because he saw this as one of the primary reasons Muslims and Jews reject the Trinity and Incarnation.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ See Bonner, pp. 114-115, for the specific significance of the trees and the number of flowers. What is presented here is a simple sketch of the dialogue to provide context for Lull's treatment of doctrinal issues.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Burns notes in this regard: 'Ignorance seemed to him [Lull] the main hindrance to conversion; he reported in a sermon that though he conversed widely

Speaking of God's perfections was something not uncommon during this period.⁴⁸ It is also an approach that would strike directly at the heart of what the Muslim claimed about God; that he is Greater or the Greatest (*Allah Akbar!*). Knowing this, Lull would use it as a means of establishing the *greater*-ness of God in being a trinity rather than a simple monad, and the wonder of the Incarnation. The five principles of Lull's thought outlined above will be evident in the following exchanges between the Christian and the Gentile. The format will be to present a section of the dialogue with comments interspersed therein. The Trinity will be treated first and afterwards the Incarnation since the logic of the Incarnation for Lull is rooted in the nature of God as a trinity.

4 Lull on the Trinity

The Christian in the allegory states:

In order to prove the existence of trinity in God, we first pick the flower of goodness, greatness from the first tree, by which we will prove...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.⁴⁹

In this section Lull sets out what he aims to prove. He will be discussing the three-ness of God but also his one-ness; i.e. the trinity of God.

God's goodness, greatness is either finite or infinite eternity, power, wisdom, love. Now if it is finite, it is contrary to perfection; if it is

with "eminent and scholarly Saracens," he had never met one who grasped Christian beliefs rightly. See Burns, p. 1398.

⁴⁸ One immediately thinks of Anselm's ontological argument, which Lull undoubtedly had read, as will be evident below.

⁴⁹ Bonner, p. 193.

infinite, it is in accord with perfection. And since...it is impossible for God's goodness, greatness to be contrary to perfection in eternity, power, wisdom, love, it is therefore demonstrated that God's goodness, greatness are infinite power, infinite wisdom, love, perfection.⁵⁰

Here Lull aims to appeal to one's desire to attribute to God the greater-ness in his being infinite rather than finite, etc. (i.e. the perfections of God). This is something to which a Muslim would also want to attest.

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...and which begets a good infinite in goodness, greatness...and if from this begetting good and this begotten good there issues forth a good infinite in goodness, greatness...then the flower is greater in God than it would be if the above-mentioned things did not exist in God...⁵¹

Having laid his foundation regarding the attributes and perfections of God, Lull moves to give an explanation of why it is that God is greater if he exists (and has always existed) in a state of eternal good, issued forth in his (eternal) generation of the Son and the Spirit.⁵² If this were not the case in God, Lull asks, how could he be described as good or loving? This is an argument for the Trinity that strikes at the heart of the Muslim conception of God. How can God be eternally good or loving if goodness and love are only known within the confines of a relationship? Without this eternal relationship between the Persons of the Trinity, goodness and love are rendered meaningless.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 194.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² These are known as the relations within the Godhead (paternity, filiation, spiration, and procession).

Question. The Gentile said to the Christian: 'According to what you say, it follows that God's unity would be in a state of greater goodness if there were four or five or an infinite number of those good things you mentioned, than there would be with only three...'

Solution. The Christian replied: '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...could be begotten; nor would each begetter and each begotten be sufficient to bestow infinite goodness, greatness, etc., on an issue from both, nor would all the infinite number of begetters, begotten, or issue be sufficient to have perfection of goodness...'⁵³

In this section Lull defends the Trinity in response to suggestions that if three persons are good, then four (or more) are better.

Question. The Gentile said to the Christian, 'The same must follow from God's unity; for if this unity is not sufficient in itself to be infinite in goodness, greatness, etc., without three distinct divine persons, then it contains within itself imperfection of goodness, greatness, etc.'

Solution. The Christian replied: 'That is not true, for if there existed no distinct personal properties in God, there would be in Him no activity by which, from infinite good in greatness, eternity, etc., would be engendered infinite good in greatness, eternity, etc. For if in God infinite good in greatness, eternity, etc. did not come from an infinite begetting good and infinite begotten good, the flowers of the trees would not be in a condition of perfection, and the above-mentioned activity of God's unity would be defective, which activity is infinite in goodness, greatness, etc., and which activity, along with the three distinct persons, each having its own distinct property infinite in goodness, greatness, etc., constitutes the actual divine unity, which is a single essence and at the same time a trinity of persons. And since being and so glorious an activity as that just discussed are in accord, and lack of the above-mentioned activity...and nonbeing

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 194-195.

are in accord...and since being in which there is activity for the good is in accord with greater nobility than being in which there is no activity; and since one should grant and attribute greater nobility to God's essence; therefore the fact that it necessarily follows that in God there is activity in trinity is made evident.'⁵⁴

Lull's argument in this section builds upon and expands what he stated earlier regarding the eternal generation of the Son and Spirit. He argues that goodness and greatness are only engendered through activity, and this activity constitutes the fellowship that has existed between the persons of the Trinity from all eternity. Lull is attempting to articulate something about the ontological status of the Trinity (the essence of the immanent Trinity) and the relations and activity between the persons (the notion of perichoresis). In arguing in this manner, Lull has given a rational basis for believing in the Trinity and made the case that his description of the nature of God as a trinity would be all the more greater if it existed rather than not existing. Indeed, this understanding of God's essence is greater and nobler and more perfect than if it were not the case; than if God were a simple monad.

If man is able and willing to create his own likeness, there is greater power and greater love shown in creating his own likeness than in creating something that is not of his species nor is as noble as man. Now if in God there is a God who is able and willing to beget a God similar to Himself in being God, and in being eternal and infinite in perfection, then greater power and will is shown than if He did not possess such power and will. And since the greatest power, will should be attributed to God, and since all things, according to the course of nature, like to beget their likeness in terms of species, therefore the Trinity in God is signified and revealed.

Question. The Gentile said, 'How can God make an eternal likeness to Himself if everything that is made must have a beginning?'

Solution. The Christian replied: 'Since a creature cannot exist without a beginning (otherwise it would not be a creature), therefore

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 196.

God, when it is a question of creature, can make nothing without a beginning. But since God is greater than creature, He therefore has in himself the ability to receive and carry out the act of begetting without beginning; for if He did not have it, He would not be absolutely greater in power than the highest creature.’⁵⁵

Lull’s topic in this section is, once again, the eternal generation of the Son. However, this time he utilizes the analogy of man’s generation of children. Muslims believed (and still do) that when Christians claim Jesus is the ‘Son of God’ they are indicating that he was the product of a physical union between God and Mary (making Mary the *theotokos*) and that the Trinity consists of God, Jesus and Mary. In fact, this is the view of the Qur’an:

No son did Allah beget, nor is there any god along with Him. (Q: 23:91)

And behold! Allah will say: ‘O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?’ He will say: ‘Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, thou wouldst indeed have known it. Thou knowest what is in my heart, though I know not what is in Thine. For Thou knowest in full all that is hidden. (Q: 5:116)

Therefore, to combat this misunderstanding of the Trinity, Lull’s aim was to accurately present what Christians believe and to offer an explanation and defense of why it is reasonable for them to do so.

When the Christian had proved the existence of Trinity in God...The Gentile replied: ‘There is no need for you to pick more flowers to prove the Trinity. But please tell me how these three divine persons can be a single divine essence, without its being composed of these three persons.’

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 199.

The Christian said to the Gentile: 'Composition can only exist with finite and limited things; therefore when it is a question of things infinite in goodness, greatness, eternity, etc., it cannot be. And if simplicity could not exist with reference to things infinite in goodness, greatness, eternity, etc., those things we refer to as infinite in goodness, greatness, eternity, etc., would be finite in goodness, greatness, eternity, power, etc. But since they are infinite, for this reason – that is to say, because of their infinity and infinite power – they can together constitute one simple, divine essence, without any composition.'⁵⁶

Here Lull answers charges that a trinity implies a composition in God's being by defending God's simplicity.

What is immediately evident from Lull's presentation on the Trinity is its logical consistency and affinity with the thought of other medievals such as Anselm and Aquinas. That he originally wrote it in Arabic makes it all the more phenomenal.⁵⁷ It was designed to appeal to many of the theological and philosophical notions Arabic speaking Muslims and Jews would hold in common with their Christian counterparts, all the while moving beyond a mere presentation of God as a unity and arguing for the reasonableness of God's being a trinity.

5 Lull on the Incarnation

The basis of Lull's defense of the Incarnation is that it befits a God, infinite in goodness, etc., to unite himself to man as a manifestation of that goodness.

The Christian said to the Gentile: 'God's goodness is great in eternity, power, wisdom, love, perfection. Now, 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 unite human nature with Himself in

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 213.

⁵⁷ To my knowledge, unfortunately, none of Lull's works in Arabic are extant.

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 good greater than all other created good. And if the human race did not consist of corrupted good, God's goodness would not be so greatly exemplified as it is. And since that by which God's goodness is best exemplified is in accord with being, that is incarnation, therefore in this concordance of being the above-mentioned article is exemplified, without which article the operation of God's great goodness would not be so manifestible.⁵⁸

Lull undoubtedly knew that Muslims believed in the Virgin Birth; however, while believing in Christ's miraculous birth, they really had no explanation for why God would do such a thing. They did not understand the redemptive purposes behind the Virgin Birth, neither did they understand that Christians believe the pre-existent, eternal Son of God became a man, not that a man named Jesus Christ became God.

The power, wisdom, and love of God accord with one another in perfection in three ways, that is to say, that through the power a thing can be done, through wisdom there is the knowledge to do it, and through will there is the desire to do it; and of course through perfection it should be done...Furthermore, the greatest power God can have in creature is to be able to unite that creature to Himself; and the same is true of His knowledge and His desire and His perfection. And the greatest power a creature can understand or desire for itself is that it understand and love itself for being one person with divine nature. This being the case...it is therefore clear that the Son of God became incarnate.⁵⁹

In this section Lull argues that it is within God's power to become man. Many Muslim objections to the doctrine of the Incarnation were founded upon the premise that it is unbecoming for God to become man, something with which Christians could

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 228.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 230.

agree in one sense, and that it was outside of his power to do so as a consequence of his immateriality or incorporeity. It also appears in this section that Lull was making an appeal to certain mystical trends in Islam that saw union with the divine as the ultimate goal of humanity (a notion somewhat akin to *theosis* in Eastern Orthodoxy).⁶⁰

Question. The Gentile said to the Christian: ‘Why did not all three divine persons become incarnate? Why was the person of the Son the only one to take on flesh?’

Solution. The Christian replied: ‘The better to signify how each of the three divine persons is distinct from the other, God’s great wisdom ordained that only one person should become incarnate, to avoid the appearance of confused distinctions between divine persons. And in order to show that one paternity, one filiation, and one person of the Holy Ghost is sufficient in God’s Trinity, the Son of God alone wanted to become incarnate; for if more than one person were needed for the Incarnation, greatness, perfection would not be exemplified in God.’⁶¹

Among other things, this response to the Gentile’s question would provide a basis for Lull’s reply to a frequent Muslim objection to Christian belief in the death of the God-Man on the cross: ‘If Jesus is God and he died on the cross, who was in charge of the world while he was dead?’

Question. The Gentile said, ‘Please tell me what the Jews and Saracens have to say about this article of the Conception.’

⁶⁰ For more information on Islamic mysticism see, A. J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1950); R. A. Nicholson, *Mystics of Islam* (London: Routledge, 1963); Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1975); Reuven Snir, “*Bab al Mahabba* in *al-Risala al-Qushayriyya*: Rhetorical and Thematic Structure,” *Israel Oriental Studies* (1999); ‘Tasawwuf,’ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, edited by P. Bearman et al (Brill, 2008).

⁶¹ Bonner, p. 232.

Solution. The Christian replied: '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.'⁶²

Lull's words in this section tell a lot about his apologetic method. Part of the reason Muslims and Jews do not believe in the Trinity and Incarnation is because Christians do not take time to explain these doctrines to nonbelievers. He also makes it clear that the concept Muslims have of the Incarnation, as demonstrated by the Qur'anic verses reviewed above, is not a concept that accords with Christian teaching. Again, Lull demonstrates his belief that misunderstanding is the root cause impeding Muslims and Jews from coming to Christ.

6 Conclusion

Raymond Lull was a man of immense resolve in his desire to fulfill all that God had called him to do. While most of the fruit of his labors and his call for a 'spiritual crusade' in opposition to the ongoing 'carnal crusades' would not be heeded by succeeding generations, he set a standard that many evangelicals could only dream of approaching. His arguments for the Trinity and Incarnation were designed to strike at the heart of the Muslim conception of God as a strict monad. In answering the objections raised against the Trinity and Incarnation, Lull displays his vast knowledge of both Islam and Judaism and how it is Christians can provide an accounting of Christian doctrine that demonstrates its reasonableness. He could be criticized for not taking into account other non-intellectual factors that lead to someone's conversion to

⁶² Ibid., p. 233.

Christ; nevertheless, he was a passionate defender of orthodoxy and sought with all his heart to glorify God in all he did. His life and witness are an example *par excellence* to evangelicals following in his footsteps 700 years later.

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