

REASON AND REVELATION: THE COINCIDENCE OF OPPOSITES IN RAMON LLULL'S THOUGHT

Ramon Llull, the Catalanian philosopher of the XIIIth century, is, perhaps, one of the most interesting thinkers of the Middle Ages. Born and raised in Mallorca after the conquest of the island from the moors, he lived in a period of political and philosophical change. His contribution to the history of European thought is considerable and brings a varied background of ideas into the European philosophical arena.

The roots of Llull's thought are threefold: Latin, Hebrew, and Arabic, as would be characteristic of most thinkers coming from "The Spain of the three religions". The Latin base of Llull's thought is mainly Augustinian, but with a tendency to integrate a more rationalistic approach to the knowledge of God. This tendency, present in all Llull's works, is determined by his lifelong efforts to render the Christian faith intelligible to new converts and "infidels".

The Hebrew roots of Llull's works are twofold. One current comes from the Old Testament through the teachings of the church and the other through the cultural environment in which Llull lived. This influence is highly visible in the parallels found in Llull's theory of the "Attributes of God" and similar theories held by the *Sepher Yetzirah* known widely among the Catalanian Jews.

But without any doubt, the most important influence in Llull's work is the Islamic. And from the assimilation and reworking of this influence comes Llull's major contribution to European thought. Arabic neoplatonism, the concept of the "dignities" or attributes of God, and the numerical and figural demonstration of the dogmas and truths of the faith are clearly all of Arabic influence. It is also through Llull's work that the algebraic demonstrations of

logic, used by Islamic thinkers, first find their way into Latin scholastic thought.

Before proceeding to explain Llull's thought, it is important to point out that these works were not destined by him to become a philosophical corpus as such, but were an extended effort to explain all Christian truths for polemic and missionary reasons. For Llull tries to explain all dogmas, beliefs and concepts of the faith expecting that, once they are clear and reachable through reason, those who approach them and have only had an "incomplete revelation", that is to say, the Moslems and Jews, will understand the truth of the Christian faith and surrender to it. From this point of view, the similarities found in Llull's thought to the Hebrew and Islamic beliefs are even more important, since they provide the followers of those creeds with a bridge that permits a more ready comprehension and acceptance of the Christian dogmas.

As would be fitting in such a theocentric-apostolic approach to learning, Llull conceives the pursuit of truth as the pursuit of the ultimate knowledge of God. He does not search for the absolute truth or the absolute knowledge outside God, since he does not conceive a separate truth or reality outside him. God for Llull is the only force, the one and only *being*. But as an only being, God is at the same time, diverse. He is explained or accompanied by his dignities or attributes, nine in number:

1— Goodness, 2— Greatness, 3— Duration, 4— Power, 5— Wisdom, 6— Will, 7— Virtue, 8— Truth, 9— Glory¹. These dignities or attributes are not different from God, or different from each other. They all participate in the divine make-up and in each other's make-up also. They are different and equal, one and many at the same time. Since God is the only force, all else proceeds from Him, and the universe is hierarchically ordered according to the degree in which the attributes of God are present in every object. Thus these nine dignities have been bestowed upon, in different amounts, in all aspects of creation. Therefore, every aspect of the universe bears God's imprint, and has as an ultimate goal the return to its creator.

This orderly hierarchical arrangement makes the universe intelligible to the human mind and explainable through conventional logic —demonstration al methods, such as triangles, spheres, tables, etc. And, through the different combinations perceived by these reasoning tools, the human mind can learn its way to its creator and understand the divine plan. This reasoning, this insistence in the intelligibility of God's universe and its theological truths are the crux of Ramon Llull's work. For he thinks that if the universe and the Christian faith could not be adequately explained and understood, they would not be true. This accounts for Llull's constant effort to render these matters clear and to bring them into everyone's reach².

1. Ramon Llull, *Liber de ascensu et descensu intellectus* (Montpellier, 1304).

2. In the introduction of the *Liber de ascensu et descensu intellectus* Llull clearly addresses this issue and dedicates the book to those with a thirst for knowledge and a limited education.

This emphasis on reason and comprehension derives from Llull's concept of reason. Reason, according to him, proceeds from God. It is divine light and thus it can demonstrate, with figures and symbols, the mathematical truths of world, both natural and philosophical. And these truths are, in Llull's eyes, none other than the truths of the Christian faith. So here then one encounters the first case of coincidence of apparently opposite concepts in Llull: the natural world and the philosophical truths are both explained using the same logical methods and reason becomes the primary tool of the quest for God.

If the natural and philosophical truths can be explained employing the same methods, it follows then that in Llull's thought, the world is nothing more than a creation that reflects in more or less perfect ways, the dignities or attributes of God. And these degrees of reflection are carefully set forth in ascending order of perfection, from the 1— stone, 2— flame, 3— plants, 4— beast, 5— man, 6— heaven, 7— angel, and then, at the peak of his own creation, God³, the all perfect being, towards whom all other parts of the universe converge. In this hierarchical order it is easy to observe again the coincidence of opposites. The first five components of the Lullian Universe belong to the natural world, but are visualized as part of the Christian theological truths since these components reflect God in two ways. First, by the action of creation itself and secondly by bearing an imprint of the dignities of God in the make-up of the five components. Thus, the natural characteristics of the universe do not form a separate universe with a separate set of laws and rules, as later will be the case for some thinkers influenced by Averroes. Rather these natural characteristics are only a physical manifestation of the nature of God. Again, it is important to point out that Llull does not conceive the world as having separate philosophical and natural truths, but that for him they are one and the same and that any other approach to the explanation of the world is, in his eyes, a negation of the real nature of God and His creation.

The circular nature of Llull's thought now becomes clearly visible. In order to explain the universe, Llull accounts for the dignities of God imprinted in the creation. And God is also presented through his attributes and his mark on creation. Thus Llull is a "philosopher of creation", a thinker that pivots his work on the pursuit of the knowledge of God, the Creator. He considers all else invalid and unnecessary.

But Llull is only too aware of the tremendous difficulty of the acquisition of a true knowledge of God. His several reworkings of this *Artes* (general, magna ultima, etc.) and his *Trees* (of science, knowledge, morality, humanity, angelic natures, etc.) are all efforts to explain the different aspects of creation and the nature of God. It is very important to notice that in all these writings there is a constant effort to schematize and outline through figures and diagrams, the material presented for study. And this is important because it re-

3. *Liber de ascensu et descensu intellectus*.

flects Llull's idea of the acquisition of knowledge presented in the *Liber de ascensu et descensu intellectus*. Here he presents his theories of the acquired science (learning through study and effort) and the infused science. That is, the science obtained through the mystical knowledge of God.

The acquired science is basic to the knowledge of God, and typical of Llull's thought. It is ordered on an ascending scale. For the knowledge of the universe is conditioned to the knowledge of each one of the twelve elements or characteristics that are present in each one of its components. These characteristics describe all possible aspects of everything and everyone created. They are: 1— act, 2— passion, 3— action, 4— nature, 5— accident, 6— substance, 7— simplicity, 8— composition, 9— individuality, 10— species, 11— gender, 12— being⁴.

But this reasoning process, this acquired science, has to go through several steps before reaching an adequate knowledge of God and the universe. It is a hard and long process of study that ascends five steps towards knowledge. Man has to go through the sensitive, the imaginative, the doubtful, the credible and the intelligible before arriving at the truth. In other words, it is a long road to travel depending solely upon one's intellect. And if this intellect does not reach the uppermost step of the ladder of knowledge, man can be deceived into false conclusions. Here is where the infused knowledge on the mystical revelation enters the process of reasoning. Until this last step man has aided himself with many devices: symbols and figures to explain God and the universe; a hierarchical ordination to make comprehension attainable through logic; different steps to arrive at an orderly picture of the universe. But all these logical aids do not suffice in the face of the infinite grandeur of God. They fall short to reach the real nature of God's nature and that of His creation. At this point God Himself comes to aid the finite mind of man. The effort of the intellect is aided by revelation and, as predicated in the *Libre de contemplació en Déu*,⁵ the love of the Creator expands the mind of man, and through the highest combination of Reason and Revelation, man attains the highest goal: the understanding of divine love.

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4. Ibid.

5. *Libre de contemplació en Déu* (Mallorca, 1271-1276).