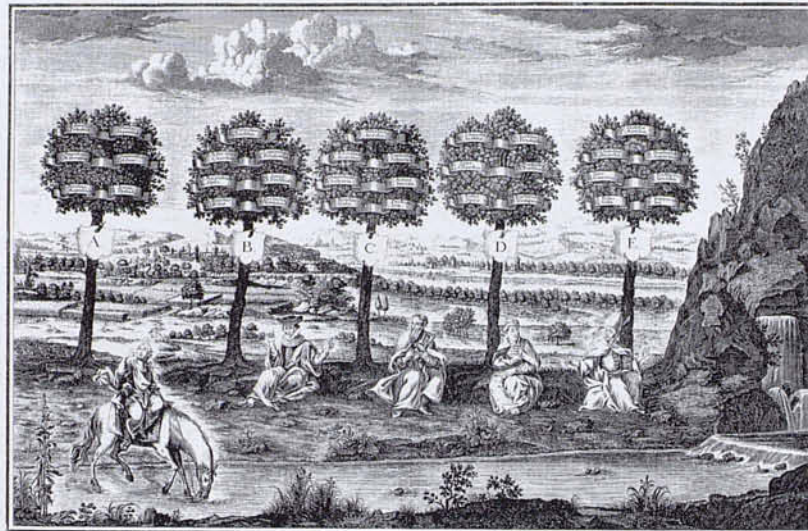


INTERCULTURAL AND INTRARELIGIOUS DIALOGUE ACCORDING TO RAMON LLULL



THE MEETING OF THE MAID INTELLIGENCE WITH THE PAGAN AND THE THREE WISE MEN. MINIATURE FROM THE *ELECTORIUM REMUNDI* (15TH CENTURY). NATIONAL LIBRARY IN PARIS

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The dialogue in the *Llibre del gentil e dels tres savis* takes place in a land which Jews, Christians and Muslims each considered their own. Ramon Llull speaks to us of the concord needed between the three most important Western powers. If we had listened to him, history would have been different. But perhaps we can still take heed today...

Leaving to one side the powerful aesthetic force of the “beautiful maiden” riding on her “handsome palfrey”, and the symbolism of the five trees and the two hundred and seventeen flowers, I shall restrict myself to commenting on his prophetic and ecumenical vision so full of lessons for our own time.

I would like *first of all* to mention his boldness in heaping praise not only on

the pagan, who is referred to as a wise man and considered good, but also on the Jew and the Saracen. They may not have the truth, but Llull has not a moment’s doubt that they have goodness. And the Mallorcan philosopher constantly repeats that you cannot have one without the other. One of his basic arguments in fact consists in the ontological correlation between “right and greatness”, “wisdom and love”, “love and perfection”. This is not, therefore, a fight between enemies. The idea is not to beat an opponent, but to convince a companion. Each of them greets the others “in his language and according to his customs”. This is more than tolerance. Ramon is telling us that all religions are good, since they produce good men and wise. The time is the end of the thirteenth century, after two

centuries of crusades! And Llull is daring enough not to condemn anyone! What’s more, not to make anyone win! The pagan converts to God, but puts off his entry into one of the three great religions. What matters is to come out of oneself (love) and worship God—that is, to enter into the Mystery and take part.

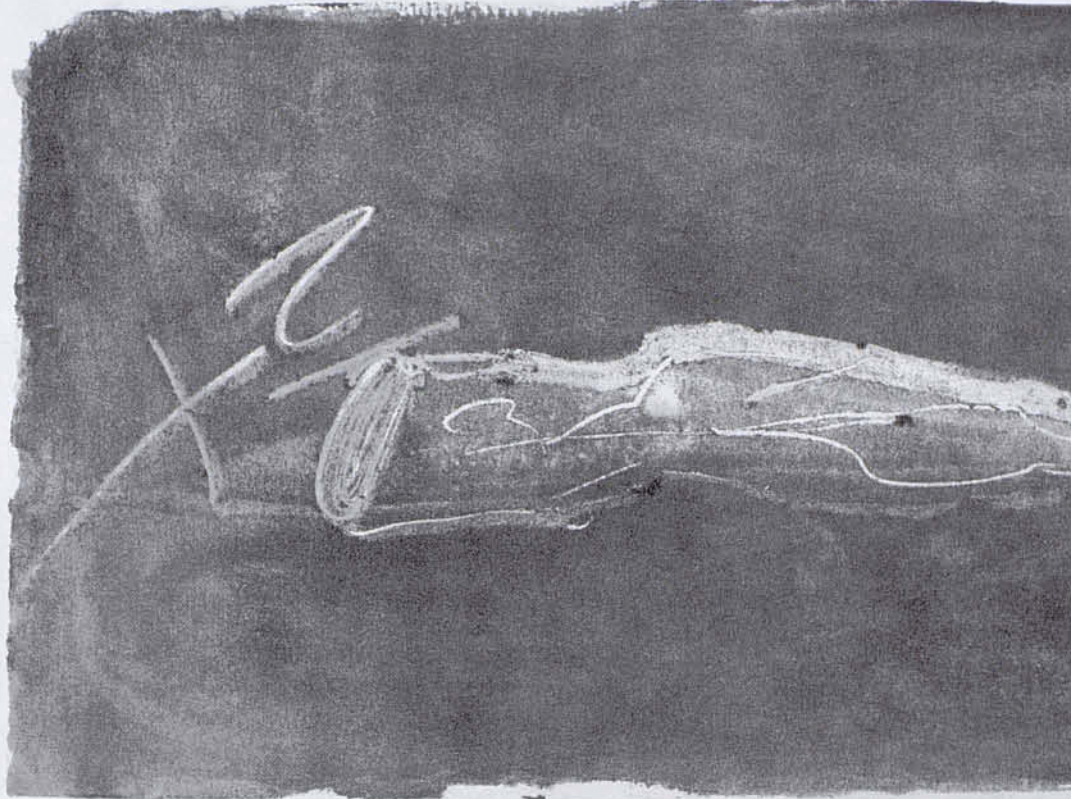
Secondly, the book shows that disagreement among men is a leading evil which must be eradicated, and this is the first task for religion. This lack of brotherhood is a religious crime and not just a political fact. Ramon is well aware that the official religions have for too long ignored harmony between men, when not in fact themselves promoting religious wars and fights.

This is the great scandal of institutionalized religion! The pagan’s “woes and tor-

the risk that this stranger might even be shocked at the small-mindedness of the established religions. The boldness of this approach is unknown even in our day. Let me emphasize that Christians and Muslims, Catholics or atheists or whoever, will never begin a fruitful dialogue if they just discuss things amongst themselves –that is, if they don't make a joint effort as reflected in the dialogue of the three wise men and the pagan. Take, for example, the issue of peace in our day. Religion is not an end in itself so much as a means.

7. The effort of religious understanding is constitutively unfinished, in-finite; it will continue as long as necessary because it is in itself the manifestation of our contingency. Perhaps this is the most important and most revealing trait. The dialogue takes place without foreseeable results and independent of human will. No-one knows what the outcome of the encounter will be; no-one knows which side the pagan will come down on. The unity of truth to which the human heart aspires is not uniformity of opinions, but perhaps their equivalence, complementarity or even polarity. Everything suggests that the pagan has found a primordial religiousness which makes him break out with the speech that so strikes “the three wise men” and which all three of them can approve without betraying their respective confessions. This speech speaks of the three theological virtues, the four cardinal virtues and the seven vices and virtues, so as to “wake the sleeping greats”, he says with clear (hidden) intentions at the end of the book.

All these traits can be summarised in one: the passage from interreligious dialogue to intra-religious dialogue; from exteriority to interiority, from the condemnation of others to the examination of one's own conscience, from the problem of political power to personal issues, from dogma to mysticism, if you prefer. Until humanity's religious problem is seen and understood as an intimate, personal problem, until religion is fathomed and discovered as a dimension of the human being –and therefore some-



FROM LLULL-TÀPIES (1973-1985). PUBLISHED BY DANIEL LELONG (PARIS) AND CARLES TACHÉ (BARCELONA)

thing affecting all of us–, until there is despair and lamenting over the human destiny we all form part of, until then we shall not be able to distinguish doctrinal disputes, political rivalries and personal ambition from the true religious act which is the common search for man's very purpose and co-operation and accomplishment of the very destiny of the universe. Religion is far more a constitutive dimension of humans than an institution.

But let's get back to the *Llibre del gentil e los tres savis*. As the reader is free to enjoy the text for himself, I shall simply retell what I think is one of the most important elements in the myth implicit in the book.

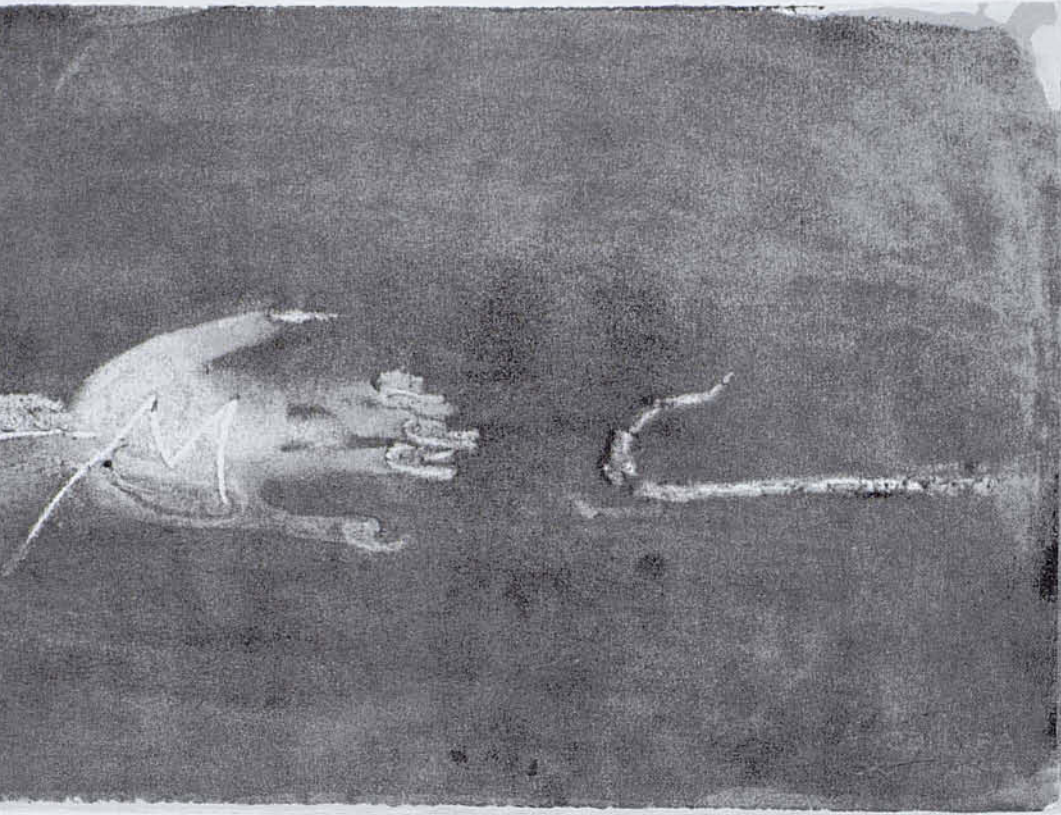
“As the infidels had long taken part”..., as we, contemporaries of this declining twentieth century, have already been well-acquainted with modern civilization for some centuries and, despite the unquestionable advantages for us (not for everyone), “having understood their false opinions and errors”, and being witnesses to the deterioration in human life and the results ensuing from the violation of nature, the acceleration of the rhythms of the cosmos, the monetization of culture, the quantification of existence; realising, also, that we have now

lost even “the words by which is best expressed” the current situation, we want to speak of a pagan –that is, of the people who make up at least 80% of the human population– and of his dialogue with “the three wise men”.

Not by “God's ordainment”, but by a particular dynamics of human history, “it happened” that on our planet there are people who weep and search without hope and without consolation. When there isn't famine, exploitation, dictatorship, torture and war, in one place, there are drugs, depression, debauchery and distress in another. These people, also, met up with the three wise men...

One knew all there was to know about *Science*. His forebears were Hebrews and Egyptians. The other said he possessed *Sentiment*. His ancestors separated from the first wise men twenty centuries ago so as to put love above all else, in the belief that God was love. The third wise man was *Will*. His origins came from the ineffectiveness of the first two when it came to putting things into practice. These three wise men have been trying to put the world to rights since ancient times.

But the pagan, the people, the man in the street, has lived –lives– joylessly, in spite of the great discoveries of Science,



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Sentiment and Will, or perhaps he has just lost hope in these supposed panaceas.

The three wise men held very beautiful dialogues and the “mass media” of the privileged were responsible for spreading their point of view with a barrage of ideologies of all sorts. They called this education, information, and even religion: “Science will save the world. Nothing can be done without Love. Ideas are useless unless they are Realised”.

Our “pagan”, who listened attentively to them, was nevertheless left perplexed. “Must we wait for the last discovery before we can be happy? Isn’t love very often counterproductive? Doesn’t pure praxis often lead to destruction and fanaticism?”

In this story we have avoided grand discussions between Science, Sentiment and Will. The whole of the history of humanity is contained in it. But neither Peace nor Concord seem to arise from it. Perhaps later understanding will be reached and the problems of the world will be solved, but while the uproar, competition and consumption continue, how many more generations will have to be sacrificed? Must we continue waiting for the future or has the time already come for us to transcend history?

The pagan –that is, the people of three quarters of the world, no longer believe in either Science, Religion or Politics. And perhaps it is time to listen to them in their pilgrimage through the forests of this world.

The people went, then, to “the great forest”, but they did not take pleasure in “the shores and springs and meadows and the many different kinds of birds in the trees that sang so sweetly”..., because almost everything was contaminated and only the rich could visit the most distant and “natural” spots. The palfrey on which the damsel Intelligence used to ride had died of starvation and from the stench of petrol and the Lady was not to be seen anywhere.

But lo and behold, our pagan, our people –so to speak–, after much walking, suffering and brooding, one day saw a damsel arrive on foot. She was middle-aged and was not “nobly dressed”, but she was “of agreeable countenance”.

“What is your name?”, they asked the damsel finally.

“My name is *Grace*”, she answered.

“And what does that mean?”, they asked her.

“That means that I am agreeable, filled with gratitude, graceful, gratifying and gratuitous. I do everything “gratis” be-

cause I like what I do, I am grateful for everything because no-one owes me anything, I find everything gratifying because I ask for nothing; they say I behave gracefully because I do not do things for any extrinsic reason, and that is why people find me agreeable, congratulate me and are grateful because I admit no form of payment; in that way, no-one can be un-grateful to me nor fall into disgrace before me.”

“And what did the people understand?” I asked intrigued.

“Personally,” said a confidant, “I understood that life is worth living in itself, that worrying over the means distracts us from the ends, that the object is joy, and that this joy surprises us when we know how to live the temporal moments (which are not outside time but are not stifled by it, either). Together we understood, also, that if our life is not freed from the exclusive weight of history, if our ideals do not overcome those of self-absorbed men enclosed in prisons they call cities, if our loves do not transcend the crust of things, we are not really living. We also understood that if we want to reduce everything to quantitative parameters, to the measure of reason and to a fleeting time through which we pass unnoticed, we shall not grasp the mystery of existence, the beauty of things, the truth of reality, and therefore we shall never achieve that well-being which surpasses all conception, the God that was the symbol of Mystery and who now perhaps takes on other Names. The solution for the world and for ourselves does not lie in the models of the Abrahamic traditions. The pagan was not convinced. Perhaps the solution does not lie anywhere because it isn’t static.

“But”, the people said, “we have not yet managed to grasp this Grace business. We heard her arriving, we felt her touch, and we were grateful. We saw once more that the world was beautiful, that everything is gratuitous, if we share it graciously. That’s why this Joy, which is another name for Grace, does not paralyze our action, but strengthens us in our delight for justice...” ■