Raymond Lull (1235-1315)



Raymond Lull was the first European missionary to Muslim peoples. He was a martyr in this cause. He was dragged outside the city of Bugua (now called Bejaia) in Algeria and stoned to death on June 30, 1315.

As far as we know, Raymond Lull had no successors in spirit until Henry Martyn in the early 19th century. He was a missionary after the order of Melchisedek – without ancestry and without posterity. Raymond lived at the time of the Crusades. The first Crusades had failed to achieve their objectives. It was a period of disappointment and depression as European Christianity looked at the World of Islam.

At this time God raised up Raymond Lull. Lull wrote, ***"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 a way in which Thou and Thine apostles acquired it, namely, by love and prayers and the pouring out of tears and blood."***

In about 1890 Robert Speer of the Student Volunteer Movement wrote about Raymond Lull,

"There is no more heroic figure in the history of Christendom than that of Raymond Lull – the first, and perhaps the greatest, missionary to Muslims. Of all the men of his century of whom we know, Raymond Lull was most possessed by the love and life of Christ and was most eager, accordingly, to share his possessions with the world. It is the greatness of Lull's character that he sharply rose above the world and the church of his day, anticipating by many centuries moral standards, intellectual and missionary ambitions to which we have only recently grown."

Raymond Lull's Life

He was born in Palma, Majorca in 1235. It was during the final years of the Crusader Period that started in 1095 A.D. and ended in 1291 A.D. with the Fall of Acre, thus putting an end to nearly two hundred years of Crusader presence in Palestine. It was not only the end of the Crusader Period, but the beginning of the Spanish Inquisition. Raymond was born into an aristocratic Catalonian family. His father fought in a Crusade against the Moors in Spain.

Raymond grew up in the court of King James II of Aragon. He spent many years in the court. In his twenties he was known as a brilliant, versatile scholar and philosopher. He was a skilled musician and a splendidly successful poet. He was also godless and unfaithful to his wife. He was very popular and rose, in his late twenties, to be the Senecharal (high chamberlain) to the King.

Raymond came to faith at the age of 32. While he was actually composing some amorous poem, he had a vision of Jesus Christ dying on the Cross! He says that his brain reeled and his powers of reasoning were numbed. He was disobedient to the heavenly vision. Three times the vision was repeated. In the vision he heard the voice of Jesus calling him to follow Him and finally Raymond did just that. For the rest of his life he always retained a passionate personal love for and faith in Jesus Christ.

After his vision Raymond sold all his property and gave the money to the poor. He retained a small allowance to maintain his wife and children. He was greatly influenced by Francis of Assisi, although he never became a Franciscan. Francis had gone to Egypt in 1219 to visit the Sultan in order to win him to Christ and it may have been Francis' example that led Raymond to make the decision to become a missionary to Muslims.

Not long after his conversion, Raymond went back to Majorca and started to study Arabic by buying an Arab slave boy and learning from him! There were no dictionaries Arabic/Latin at that date. By the time Raymond was 40 years old he was fluent in spoken and written Arabic. He wrote his great masterpiece – Contemplation – first in Arabic.

Three Great Goals

1. Apologetics

Raymond said, *"I came to win the Muslims, not as people often do with arms, but with words; not by force, but with reason; not in hatred, but in love".*

Raymond set about devising a philosophical system to persuade Muslims that Christianity was true. He wrote a great book called **Ars Magna**, which is a pure piece of scholastic philosophy bent to apologetics. In all he wrote about a hundred apologetic books in Arabic and Latin in his endeavour to answer Muslims' objections to Christianity and to present the truth.

He wrote almost another hundred books mainly on Christian mysticism. For a period of time he was ex-communicated by the Dominicans of the Inquisition for some of the things he wrote.

2. Missionary Training Schools

The second great goal Raymond set himself was to start missionary training schools all over Europe to prepare people to evangelise the Muslim World. He wanted his students to study theology, philosophy, Arabic language and literature and the geography of missions! He wrote a book about the geography of missions (a sort of proto-type Operation World)! Writing on this topic Raymond said, *"Knowledge of the regions of the world is strongly necessary for the republic of believers and the conversion of unbelievers, and for the withstanding of infidels and anti-Christs. The man unacquainted with geography is ignorant where he walks or wither he leads. Whether he works for the conversion of the heathen or for other interests of the church, it is indispensable that he know the religions and environment of all nations."*

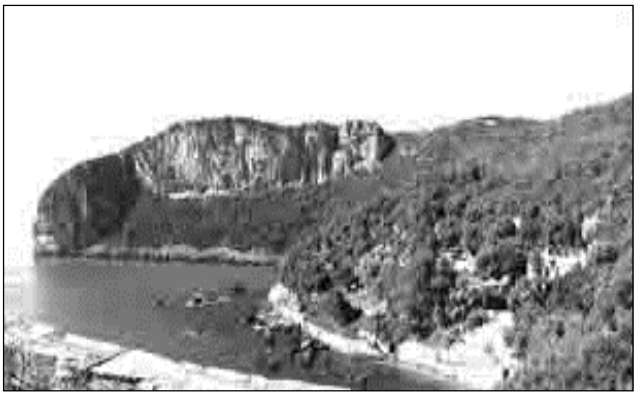
His attempts at starting these missionary training colleges failed, although he did manage to persuade some of Europe's major universities to study Arabic. Arabic departments were started in Avignon, Paris, Salamanca, Bologna and Oxford through the efforts of Raymond Lull. The translation of works by Greek philosophers from Arabic to Latin in these universities was one of the causes of the Renaissance in Europe. However, this was not the intention of Raymond Lull.

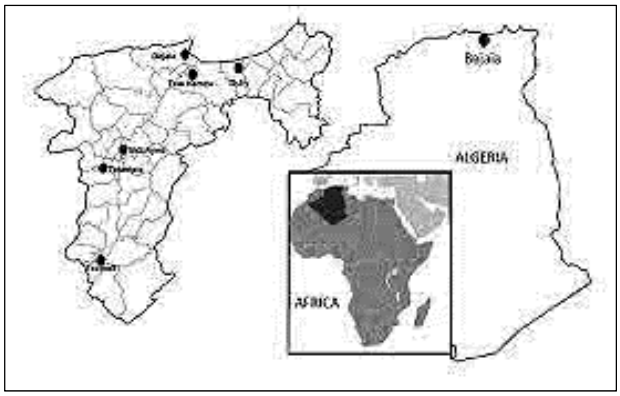
3. A Missionary in North Africa

When Raymond Lull was 56 he had another vision where the Lord told him not to preach philosophy, but Christ and not merely to encourage others to go to the Muslim World, but to go himself! In 1291, the year Acre fell and the Crusades to Palestine ended in utter failure Raymond sailed alone to Tunis in North Africa. When he arrived he invited all the sheiks and educated people in Tunis to a great public debate. He said that he had studied both sides, whether Christianity or Islam was the truth and wanted them to enter into a debate with him. They did so and they lost! As a consequence, Raymond was cast into a dungeon by order of the Sultan and sentenced to death. But he escaped!

Over the next 20 years, Raymond regularly visited North Africa. He usually used open air preaching as his method of evangelism. He was repeatedly flung into prison. He was beaten more times than the Apostle Paul! He wrote this, *"I had a wife and children. I was tolerably rich. I led a secular life. All these things I cheerfully resigned for the sake of promoting the common good and diffusing abroad the common faith. I learned Arabic. I have several times gone abroad to preach the Gospel to the Saracens. I have, for the sake of the faith, been cast into prison and scourged. I have laboured for 45 years to win over the shepherds of the church and the princes of Europe to the common good of Christendom. Now I am old and poor, but still intent on the same object. I will persevere in it till death, if the Lord permits."*

Raymond had quite a few who turned to Christ in North Africa and he used to visit them in hiding, talking and praying with them. In 1315, weary of seclusion and hiding, he went into the market place of Bugia – a small town on the coast of modern day Algeria. He had already been in prison in Bugia. Raymond began preaching. He had absolute command of the language. He pleaded with them to turn to Christ. At the command of the local ruler, the mob seized him, dragged him out of the town and stoned him to death. It was June 30, 1315.





Bejaia Beach today

Shortly before his death he wrote, *"I find scarcely anyone, O Lord, who out of love to Thee, is ready to suffer martyrdom, as Thou hast suffered for us. It appears to me agreeable to reason, if an ordinance to that effect could be obtained, that Thy monks should learn various languages that they might be able to go out and surrender their lives in love to Thee. O Lord of Glory, if that blessed day should ever be in which I might see Thy holy monks so influenced by zeal to glorify Thee, as to go to foreign lands in order to testify of Thy holy ministry, of Thy blessed incarnation and of Thy bitter sufferings that would be a glorious day: a day in which that flow of devotion would return with which the holy apostles met death for their Lord Jesus Christ."*

Robert Speer (around 1900) wrote, *"It is six centuries since Lull fell at Bugia. Is that martyrdom never to have its fruitage?"*

The Beginning of a Spiritual Movement

"In the 1980s, a truly remarkable incident took place in Bugua (now called Bejaia). On one unforgettable night – with no prior warning and for no immediately discernible reason – God sovereignly descended upon this coastal town with gracious bounty. Moving from house to house and communicating through a combination of dreams, visions and angelic visitations. He did not rest until every member of this Muslim community was properly introduced to His Only Begotten Son, Jesus. As might be expected, come daybreak, nearly every townsperson had a story to tell. As the Holy Spirit lingered and these simple citizens managed to piece together the magnitude of what had happened to them, a sense of spiritual awe settled over the entire town."

So writes George Otis in his book, **The Last of the Giants**.

From this event in Bejaia, a spiritual movement began and hundreds of thousands of Algerians, mostly from a Berber background, have come to faith in Christ in the last few decades! Surely this is the beginning of the harvest first sown by Raymond Lull in North Africa, in the Arab World and the whole of the Muslim World.

Raymond Lull's Motto

"He that loves not, lives not and he that lives by Thy life cannot die."

There is a biography of Raymond Lull, written by Samuel Zwemer, called: **Raymond Lull: The First Missionary to the Moslems** (Funk & Wagnall's, 1902) unfortunately it is out of print but you may find a copy in a library.